

Overall Character

The course of the River Rother follows a narrow valley, which is flanked by the broader slopes of the vale of the Rother Farmlands, from the Hampshire border to the Arun Valley. Willow and alder trees overhang much of the river’s length with a patchwork of traditional watermeadows, pasture and hedgerows forming the valley floor. Narrow strips of woodland occur on the moderate and steep valley slopes. Small stone built villages and hamlets lie above the floodplain and at bridging points, while the market towns of Petworth and Midhurst form the major settlements.

Key Characteristics

- Incised, narrow valley within Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- Fast west to east flowing river.
- Hidden river alignment with willow and alder trees overhanging for much of its length.
- Patchwork of traditional watermeadows and pastures with patterns of small, irregular fields and curving, narrow strips of woodland on the edges of the floodplain.
- Hump backed medieval brick and sandstone bridges at bridging points.
- Small stone-built villages and hamlets at bridging points.
- Busy minor roads and deep cut lanes.
- Narrow floodplain used for cattle pasture.
- Dense hedgerows surround the meadows and pasture.
- Glimpses through the trees of small medieval churches complete the impression of a secluded rural landscape.



Rother Valley

Wealden Greensand

The area covered by the Sheet is derived from:

Rother Valley (O1) Landscape Character Area defined in the unpublished **West Sussex Landscape Character Assessment** (November 2003).



Historic Features

- Important sequence of medieval stone bridges, such as Durford, Haben, Trotton, Iping, Woolbeding and Fittleworth bridges - these are all Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs).
- Patterns of small irregular assarts.
- Stone buildings in villages and hamlets.
- St Ann's Hill Motte and Bailey Castle (SAM) at Midhurst.
- Watermills.
- Woolbeding House (SAM) and remains of Cowdray - a fortified medieval house (SAM).
- Selhan Motte (SAM).
- Durford Abbey (SAM).

Biodiversity

- The Rother Valley is a rich habitat for wildlife; much of it is included within the River Rother Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI).
- The River Rother is important for wildlife, including dragonflies and fish. Otters are occasionally reported.
- Bordering alder carr woodland and remnants of river valley meadow and marsh.
- Ancient woodland on the steep valley slopes, such as Woolbeding Wood (SNCI) and Butchers Land Copse (SNCI).
- Unimproved, species-rich pasture.

Change - Key Issues

- Increasing traffic pressure, including size and weight of HGVs, on bridges and narrow roads.
- Lack of connectivity between the floodplain and the river.
- Change in farming practices and localised abandonment of farmland.
- Increased areas of horse grazing.
- Increasing pressure for engineered flood defences.
- Visual intrusion from sewerage works.
- Water extraction works.
- Nursery plantations on slopes.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Key sensitivities are:

- Cumulative impact on landscape character of small developments and land use change.
- Loss of historic features including small field patterns and water meadows.
- Cumulative damage to historic stone bridges due to increased HGV traffic.
- Management of the alder carr woodland and unimproved pasture.
- Loss of hedgerows and woodland on valley sides.
- Changes to the profile of the river bed and the natural course of the river.
- Introduction of unsympathetic flood defences.
- Changes to the land drainage and river flow affecting the pattern of marsh, alder carr woodland and floodplain meadows.



Remains of Cowdray House



River Rother at Ambersham



Medieval stone bridge at Stedham

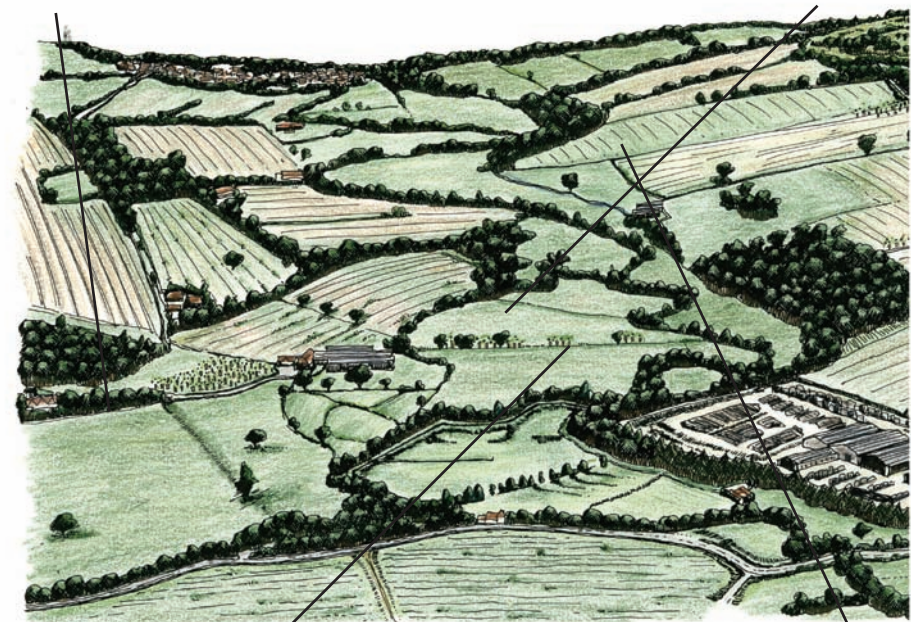


Meadow on River Rother flood plain

Land Management Guidelines

Plant woodland belts around farm buildings

Maintain the open floodplains and conserve the meadow and pasture



Conserve, manage and extend hedgerows on the valley floor

Conserve and manage the alder carr woodland

Conserve the rural secluded character of the valley.

- Maintain historic character including historic stone bridges, small field patterns and water meadows.
- Plant and extend small woods and tree belts on the lower slopes, whilst maintaining an overall sense of openness.
- Maintain, enhance and extend the river valley meadows, promoting the use of current Stewardship schemes or equivalent.
- Encourage traditional management of flood meadows and ditches.
- Conserve and manage grassland for species-richness.
- Conserve, manage and extend hedgerows on the valley floor.
- Conserve and manage the alder carr woodland.
- Screen water extraction works along the river.
- Promote natural watercourse management avoiding the introduction of engineered flood defences.
- Reduce the intensity, extent and impact of horse grazing.
- Conserve the character of the deep cut wooded lanes.
- Avoid the introduction of suburban styles and materials.
- Promote reduction in HGV traffic and seek to restrict the weight allowance on historic bridges.
- Plant woodland belts around unsightly village fringes and farm buildings.
- Encourage tree planting around the fringes of market towns Midhurst and Petworth.

The Guidelines should be read in conjunction with:

- County-wide Landscape Guidelines set out in *A Strategy for the West Sussex Landscape* (October 2005) published by West Sussex County Council.
- Objectives and actions contained in the *South Downs Management Plan* (October 2007) published by the South Downs Joint Committee.