

Overall Character

Within the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), this Character Area in the north west of the county is part of the much bigger complex of wooded sandstone hills and valleys of the Lower Greensand at the Western edge of the Weald, stretching north into Surrey (The Surrey Hills).

The undulating dip-slope of these wooded ridges rises steadily to the north of the Rother Valley before dropping away abruptly at a steep, deeply indented escarpment which curves around to the north, enclosing the Milland and Fernhurst Basins. The escarpment is cut by deep, sometimes ravine-like stream valleys. The area is heavily wooded throughout with extensive conifer plantations, mixed woodlands and ancient broadleaved woodlands, which include oak-birch-chestnut mixes, distinctive stands of beech, and chestnut and hazel coppice. The settlement pattern comprises scattered, isolated farms and smallholdings, together with small groups of cottages linked by often deeply-sunken narrow, twisting lanes. Whilst there is some localised suburban development along the main roads, the Character Area retains a remote, tranquil quality.

Key Characteristics

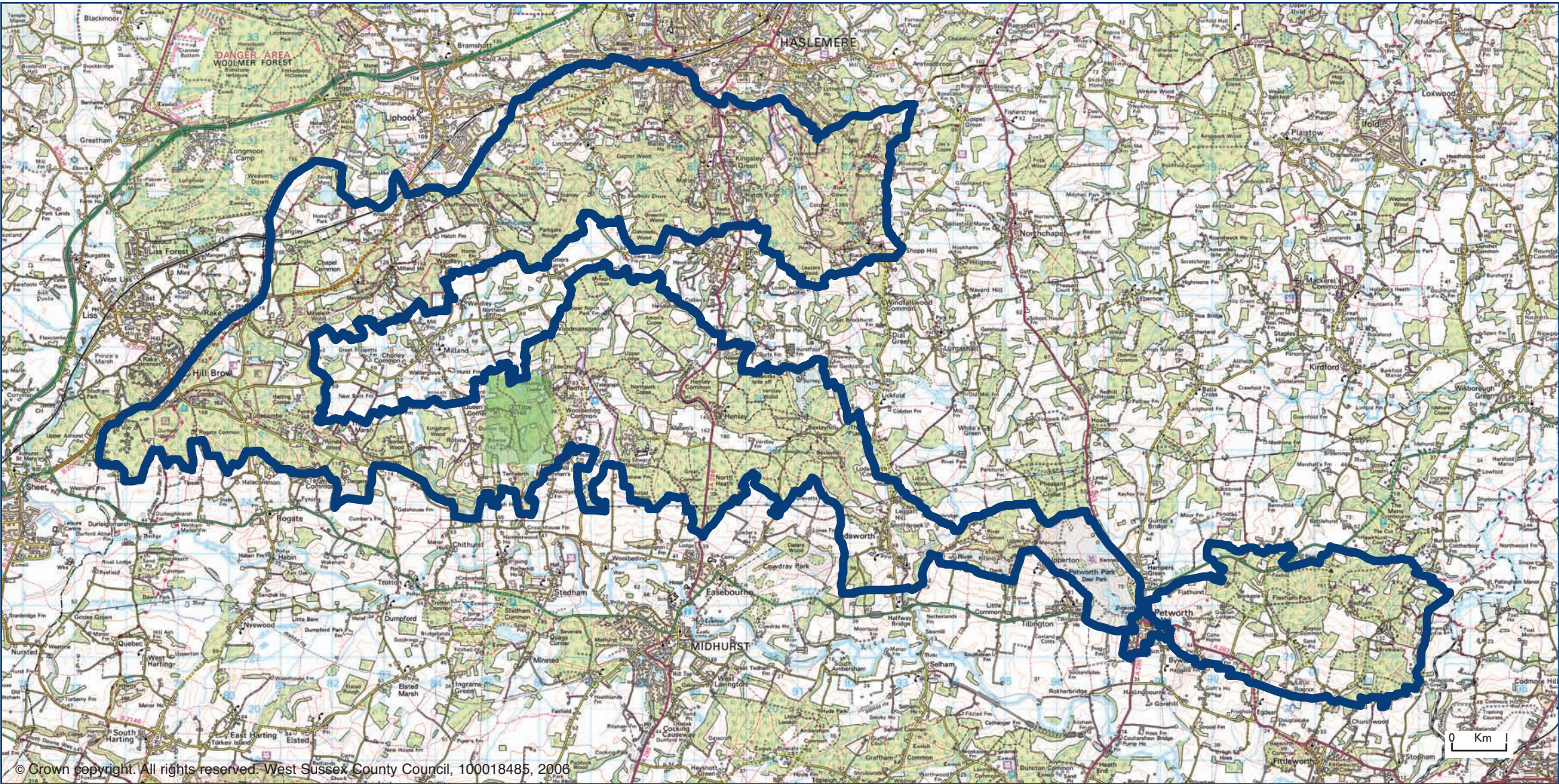
- Prominent, wooded sandstone ridges and plateaux.
- Steep, horseshoe-shaped escarpment enclosing the Milland and Fernhurst Basins.
- Dense woodland cover with coniferous forestry and chestnut on higher slopes.
- Amongst the woodland are areas of fragmented heathland.
- Pasture and rough grazing in clearings and at the woodland edges.
- Hidden valleys and streams in deep gullies within the upper catchments.
- Narrow, twisting, often deeply-sunken lanes.
- Scattered, isolated farmsteads and small groups of cottages.
- Localised linear, suburban development along roads.
- Highly enclosed, secluded landscape, but with some long views across the basins.
- Historic parkscapes.
- Small horse paddocks and small ponds.

North Western Ridges

Wealden Greensand

The area covered by the Sheet is derived from:

North Western Ridges (J1) Landscape Character Area defined in the unpublished **West Sussex Landscape Character Assessment** (November 2003).



Historic Features

- Hammerponds in the valleys and the remains of iron workings and lime kilns.
- Ancient woodland tracks and lanes.
- Wood pasture.
- Small irregular assarts.
- Historic parkland such as at Petworth, Hollycombe and Blackdown Park.
- Hammer Wood Hill Fort (Iron Age), a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM).
- Shulbrede Augustinian Priory.
- Section of the Chichester to Silchester Roman Road.
- Medieval and earlier field system seen at Shimmings Valley, Petworth.

Biodiversity

- Significant woodland, (oak, birch and sweet chestnut woodlands and beech hangers), interspersed with remnant heathland provides a varied habitat.
- A large proportion of the woodlands are ancient, such as North Park Copse Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Rake Hanger (SSSI) and Durford Wood Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI).
- Hedgebanks and hedges.
- Heathland areas of international importance - Woolbeding and Pound Commons (SSSI), Chapel Common (SSSI) and Lynchmere Common Local Nature Reserve (LNR).
- Small streams with wet meadow fragments and alder carr woodland add to the diversity.
- The small streams in the upper catchments improve the connectivity with woodlands and neighbouring catchments enabling the migration of wildlife.
- Patches of acid grassland.

Change - Key Issues

- Poor woodland management leading to an even-aged structure.
- Loss of heathland due to scrub, woodland and rhododendron invasion.
- Ancient woodland plant communities gradually dying out under conifer plantations.
- Decline in traditional woodland management techniques, such as coppicing.
- Increasing traffic and suburbanisation along some roads.
- Neglect of some parkland landscape.
- Increasing pressure from a wide variety of recreational activities.
- Gradual loss of locally distinctive building styles and materials.
- Expansion of horse paddocks.
- Silt and sand run off from steep agricultural fields resulting in loss of top soil and siltation issues in the Rother Valley.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Key sensitivities are:

- Long views from high ground have a high sensitivity to the impact of new urban development, modern farm buildings, masts and pylons and new roads.
- Loss of woodland along ridge slopes and ridge tops.
- Heathland remnants and significant areas of rich woodland biodiversity are vulnerable to loss and change.
- Erosion of narrow country lanes.
- Loss of parkland features such as specimen trees and tree belts.
- Cumulative impact of small scale change.



Historic parkland - Petworth



Wooded heath - Black Down

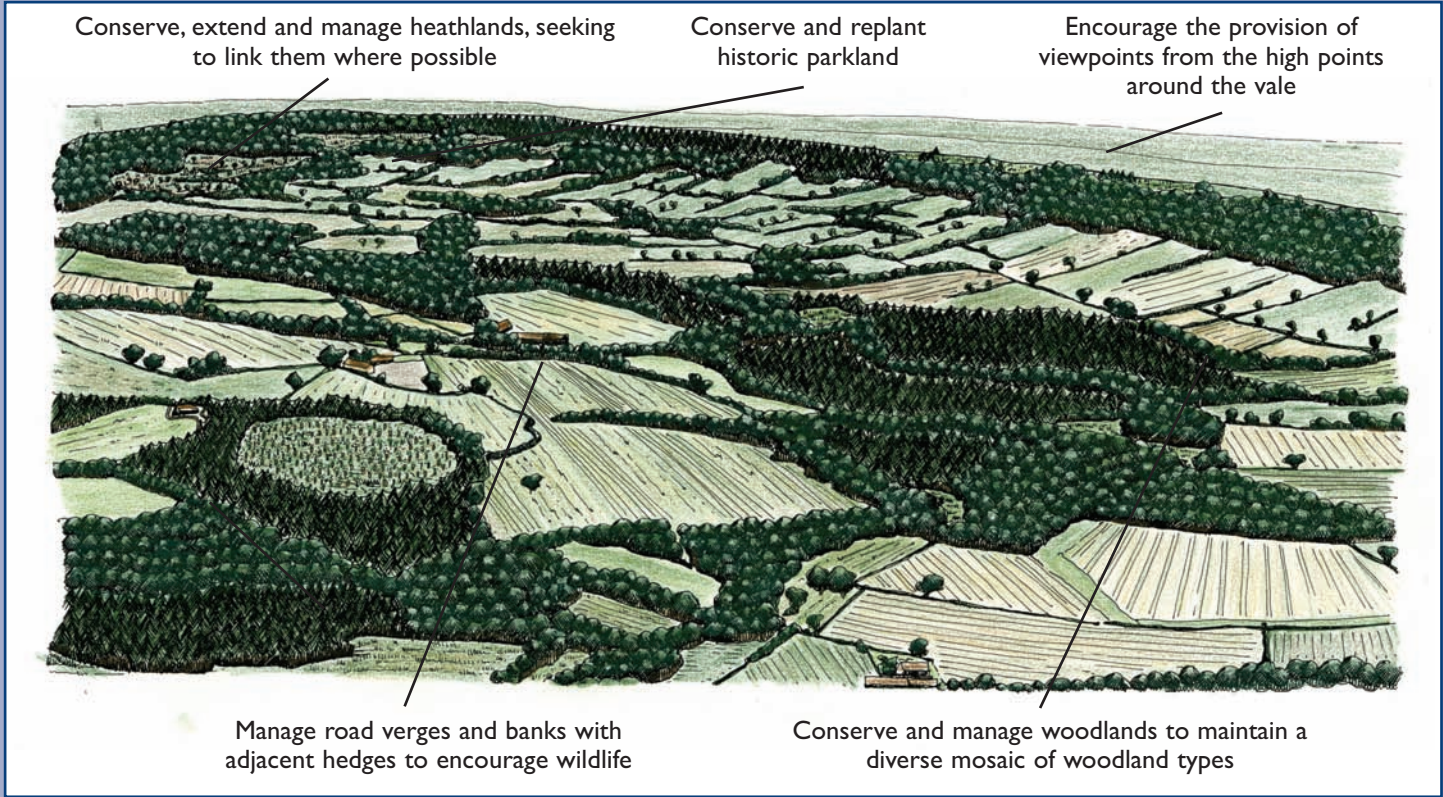


View towards Kingsley Green



Heath - Black Down

Land Management Guidelines



Conserve the remote and tranquil character of the area.

- Conserve and manage woodlands to maintain a diverse mosaic of woodland types, including coppice, hangers and mixed broadleaved woodland.
- Maintain historic character including features such as hammerponds, minepits, patterns of small irregular fields, wood pasture and historic parkland.
- Conserve and replant historic parkland and garden features such as avenues and designed vistas, parkland trees and estate boundary features.
- Plant new woodlands, trees belts and hedgerow trees to closely reflect the landform, using new planting to strengthen and link existing woodland and hedgerows.
- Encourage the sympathetic design of felling and replanting forests in higher slopes, avoiding hard straight woodland edges.
- Encourage tree planting of shelterbelts and hedgerows on field boundaries, especially horse paddocks.
- Manage road verges and banks with adjacent hedges to encourage wildlife. Conserve the special character of the deeply sunken lanes.
- Conserve, extend and manage heathlands, seeking to link them where possible.
- Prevent loss of acidic grassland.
- Conserve and manage meadows adjacent to streams.
- Encourage the retention of debris dams and avoid dredging streams.
- Maintain and manage ponds and their margins for their landscape diversity and nature conservation value.
- Promote the use of current Stewardship schemes or equivalent.
- Conserve traditional stone and wealden cottages, villages and greens.
- Ensure any development respects historic settlement pattern and form, and building materials.
- Conserve and enhance tree cover on approaches to villages.
- Consider the cumulative impact on landscape character of small developments and land use change.
- Ensure that any new development has a minimum impact on long and other significant views and is integrated within the landscape, paying particular attention to the siting of telecommunication masts.
- Encourage the provision of viewpoints from the high points around the vale.

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.