

Overall Character

This character area extends between Amberley and Steyning at the foot of the adjacent chalk escarpment. Its landscape often appears diminished and intricate in scale when set against the bold chalk ridge above. The field and vegetation patterns, lying over sandstone and clay, are complex. Large, straight-edged arable fields contrast with a pattern of smaller, irregular pastures and arable fields, and narrow linear woodlands near the streams, creating sudden transitions. The A24 trunk road crosses the area north to south and the A283 follows part of the northern boundary. Despite this, and the presence of the line of towns and villages of Amberley, Storrington, Washington and Steyning, much of the area retains a secluded and tranquil character.

Key Characteristics

- Rolling relief of low ridges and vales.
- Dramatic views of the chalk escarpment to the south and glimpsed views of settlements through woodland and trees.
- Large straight edged arable fields on upper slopes.
- Mixed farmland with fields of varied shapes and sizes on lower slopes.
- Narrow linear woodlands often near the streams, interlaced with a varied pattern of hedgerows.
- Numerous streams define field boundaries.
- Density of copses, streamside woodlands and hedgerow trees increase towards the edges of settlements and lower slopes.
- Picturesque, traditional spring-line villages and settlements.
- Small settlement pattern often clustered or centred on manor houses, churches or mills, with a strong historic character and few suburban influences.
- Varied building materials including flint, brick, local sandstone (of the Upper Greensand) coloured blue or weathered rusty yellow (Amberley blue), some chalk (called 'clunch' locally), and half timber.
- Managed parkland and estate landscapes.
- Narrow winding lanes mainly crossing north to south, connecting settlements with the Downs. Lanes rise towards the scarp slope, often with dramatic views of scarp slope.
- Lanes sometimes sunken and enclosed by hedgebanks.

Sheet WG8

Central Scarp Footslopes

Wealden Greensand

The area covered by the Sheet is derived from:

The Harting to Steyning Scarp Footslopes (G1) Landscape Character Area as defined in the unpublished **West Sussex Landscape Character Assessment** (November 2003).



Historic Features

- Castle and gardens at Amberley.
- Roman remains such as Roman Villas at Rackham and Wiston.
- Historic spring-line villages and hamlets.
- Medieval churches at Amberley, Sullington and Washington.
- Wiston House and Wiston Park. Historic parklands at Rowdell.
- Irregular and regular field patterns, the result of post-medieval and Parliamentary enclosure.
- Mills at Sullington and Steyning.
- Old tracks running north-south, including chalk road at Storrington.

Biodiversity

- Despite a variety of habitats, biodiversity is reduced by some large areas of intensive arable farmland.
- Some clay woodlands and coppice of oak with ash, hazel, and field maple.
- Ancient woodland mainly at Copyhold Wood and Paygate Copse.
- Sunken lanes with high banks rich in ferns and mosses.
- Spring fed rivers with associated woodland.
- Ponds and vegetation around springs.
- Unimproved chalk grassland. Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) at Steyning Coombe and Steyning Pond Hill.
- Other sites of national and local importance include a section of the Amberley Mount to Sullington Hill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Wiston Pond (SNCI).
- Occasional roadside commons of unimproved grassland. Notable Road Verges at Parham Post Road and Washington Roundabout.
- Extensive hedgerow linkage but with significant gaps.

Change - Key Issues

- Continuing hedgerow removal due to modern farming methods and management.
- Decline in the number and condition of hedgerow oaks.
- Localised increases in horse-grazed areas with fragmentation into horse paddocks.
- Modern farm buildings.
- Important to maintain ecological connectivity between the Downland and the Weald.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Key sensitivities are:

- Changes in farming practices leading to changes in field size and/or loss of hedgerows.
- Inappropriate design and scale of development affecting long views, and open views to scarp slope.
- Changes to the scattered low key settlement pattern or small scale incremental development in villages and hamlets bringing in urban and suburban features and materials.
- Loss of wider visual unity of historic parkland landscapes due to development or fragmentation of larger estates.
- Inappropriate design and scale of road improvements. Roads are rural in character, often leading onto trackways and byways.
- Loss of rural quality of rights of way network of tracks and byways, through inappropriate development.



Views towards Storrington



Picturesque villages - Amberley



Large, straight edged arable fields - Rackham



Amberley Castle

Land Management Guidelines

Conserve and maintain the open character of the scarp footslopes and views to scarp slope

Encourage the planting of appropriate tree groups around farm buildings



Maintain the historic character of the area, including small-scale field patterns, historic parklands, sunken lanes and hedgebanks

Maintain and restore hedgerows, especially in arable farmland

Conserve and maintain the open character of the scarp footslopes and views to scarp slope.

- Conserve the largely secluded, tranquil character of the area.
- Maintain the historic character of the area, including small-scale field patterns, historic parkland, sunken lanes and hedgebanks.
- Maintain and restore hedgerows, especially in arable farmland.
- Conserve and manage distinctive habitats including coppice woodlands, streamside woodlands, and vegetation around springs, ponds and small marshes.
- Restore linear woodland across arable farmland to link with existing woodlands.
- Aim to create good linkages via trees, woodland and hedgerows across land parcels.
- Encourage the planting of tree groups around farm buildings and single oak trees in arable fields.
- Encourage restoration of arable to pasture in areas with former parkland trees.
- Seek to reduce the extent, intensity and impact of horse-grazing.
- Conserve and enhance the character and setting of small villages and farmsteads.
- Consider the cumulative impact on landscape character of small developments and land use change. Avoid the introduction of suburban styles and materials.
- Ensure any new development is well integrated into the wider landscape. Use small woodland and new hedgerow planting as appropriate.
- Conserve, manage and restore the historic parkland landscapes at Wiston.
- Plant thick hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree belts in the southern fringes of Storrington to screen the area and link up with hanger woodlands where appropriate.
- Manage road verges to promote nature conservation importance.
- Conserve and enhance rights of way network.

The Guidelines should be read in conjunction with:

- County-wide Landscape Guidelines set out in *A Strategy for the West Sussex Landscape* (November 2005) published by West Sussex County Council.
- Objectives and actions contained in the *Interim South Downs Management Plan* (March 2004) published by the Sussex Downs Conservation Board.