

Overall Character

Heavily-afforested, dissected plateau landscape enclosing a post-medieval rural landscape cut from the forest. Includes the western end of the High Weald Forest Ridge within West Sussex and the ridge and valley landscape of St Leonards Forest. Adjoins Crawley, Horsham and the M23 Motorway.

Key Characteristics

- Densely wooded, confined, dissected plateau landscape with extensive coniferous and mixed afforestation within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- The Worth forests mark the plateau-like western end of the High Weald Forest Ridge, drained by the Rivers Mole and Ouse.
- Drained by the River Arun, St Leonards Forest is a unique High Wealden wooded and pastoral landscape of long, parallel ridges and steep-sided narrow valleys.
- Long views over the Low Weald to the downs, but fewer long views north.
- Large, regularly-enclosed and some smaller, irregular, assart fields within a woodland setting comprising an arable and pastoral landscape enclosed by shaws, hedgerows (including tall hedges) and fencing.
- Despite the closeness of large towns and roads, a secluded, tranquil nature exists in many parts of the forests.
- Clearance and re-planting of large tracts of ancient woodland.
- Heathland remnants and significant areas of rich woodland biodiversity.
- Network of ridge-top roads and lanes, driveways, tracks and footpaths.
- Sparse, dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets, farmsteads and ridgetop development, mainly in St Leonards Forest.
- Adjoins Crawley to the north and Horsham to the east.
- Bounded by A and B roads, some busy, and crossed from north to south by the A23 Trunk Road and by the M23 Motorway at Tilgate Park.
- The London to Brighton Railway Line crosses the area via the Balcombe Tunnel.
- Secluded mill sites, sizeable hammerponds and ornamental lakes and ponds.
- Varied traditional rural buildings built with diverse materials including timber-framing, Horsham Stone roofing, Wealden stone and varieties of local brick and tile-hanging.
- Designed landscapes and exotic treescaping including rhododendron hedgerows.
- Country parks at Buchan and Tilgate and golf courses.

High Weald Forests

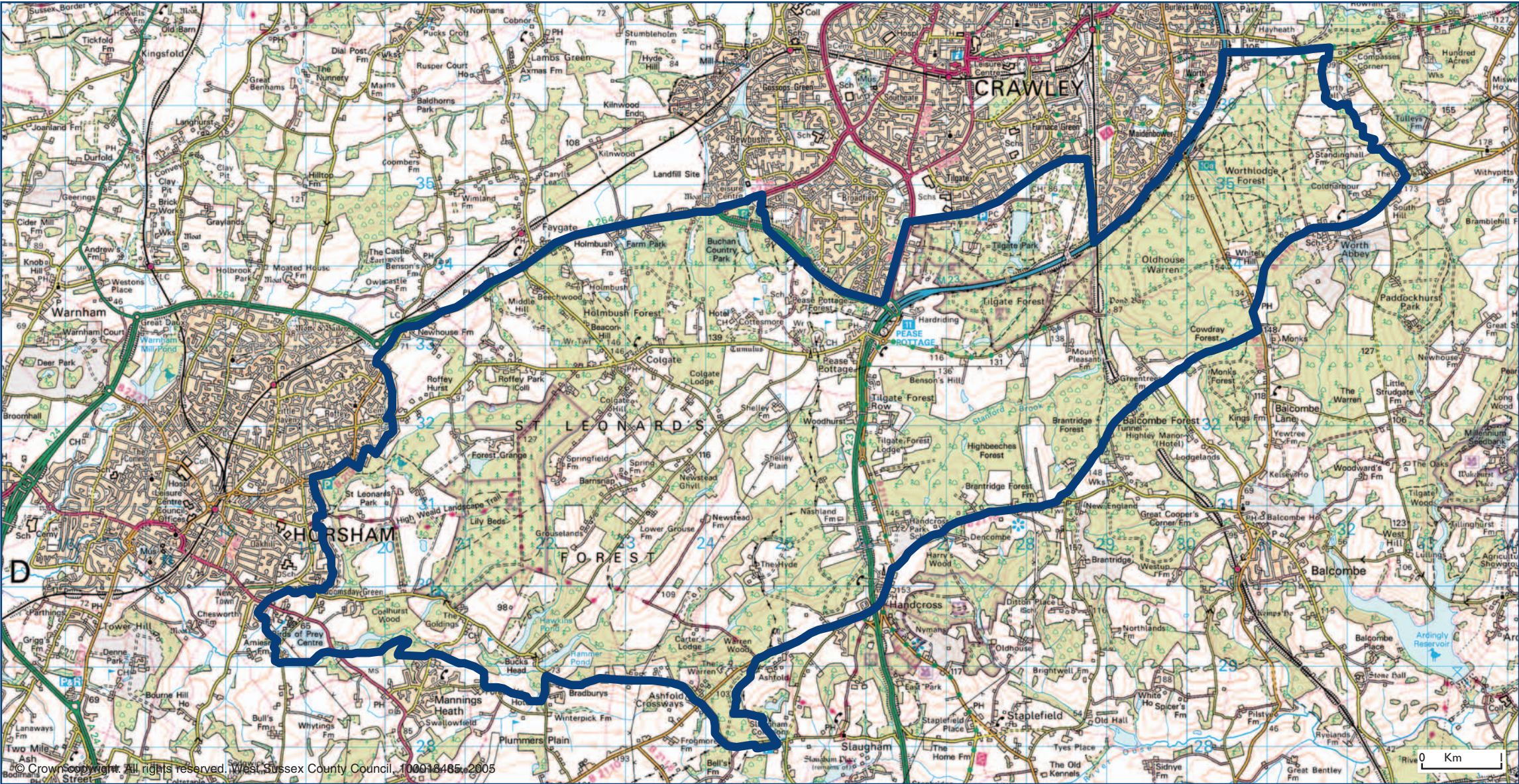
High Weald

The area covered by the Sheet includes:

The Worth Forest (Area 8) Landscape Character Area in Mid Sussex District.

The St Leonards Forest (Area 11) defined in the unpublished **Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment** (October 2003).

The Tilgate Forest Landscape Character Area and a small part of St Leonards Forest at Pease Pottage (yet to be included in a Borough Assessment) in Crawley Borough.



Historic Features

- Ancient routeways and droves.
- Post-medieval assart landscape reclaimed from hunting forest.
- Extensive ancient woodland sites, mainly replanted.
- Old commercial rabbit warrens (‘pillow mounds’).
- Important Wealden iron hammerponds, pond bays and mill sites.

Biodiversity

- Species-rich gill and semi-natural woodlands.
- Variety of woodland tree species including beech and oak-birch.
- Local areas of self-seeded Scots pine.
- Remnant hornbeam coppice.
- Remnant and dormant wet and dry acid heathland.
- Rare and uncommon woodland plant communities.
- Lakes and hammerponds.

Change - Key Issues

- Decline in traditional woodland management techniques such as coppicing.
- Extensive planting of coniferous forest on former ancient woodland.
- Spread of invasive introduced species, particularly rhododendron.
- Reduction of heathland to a few pockets due to cessation of grazing management and subsequent woodland invasion and woodland replanting.
- Continuing field amalgamation with hedgerow loss and the ageing and loss of hedgerow and field trees.
- Continuing pressures for urban development on the northern fringes of the area and an attendant increase in the pervasiveness of traffic movement and noise.
- Visual impact of pylon lines and development including ridgetop properties, modern farm buildings, horse riding centres and paddocks.
- Increasing pressures for a variety of recreational activities.
- Perceived increased traffic levels on small rural lanes with consequent demands for road improvements.
- Gradual loss of locally distinctive building styles and materials.
- Gradual suburbanisation of the landscape including the widespread use of exotic tree and shrub species.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

- Woodland and forest cover limits the visual sensitivity of the landscape and confers a sense of intimacy, seclusion and tranquillity.
- Unobtrusive settlement pattern in most parts.
- Large blocks of assart pastures on the ridges and valley sides impart breadth and depth to the scenic quality to the landscape.
- Heathland remnants and significant areas of rich woodland biodiversity are vulnerable to loss and change.
- Network of lanes, droveways, tracks and footpaths provides a rich terrain for horse-riding, cycling and walking and for the appreciation of nature.
- The few long views from open ground have a high sensitivity to the impact of new urban development, modern farm buildings, masts and pylons and new roads.
- Settlement pattern currently sits well within the rural landscape although there is a danger of the cumulative visual impact of buildings and other structures.



Worth Forest



St Leonards Forest

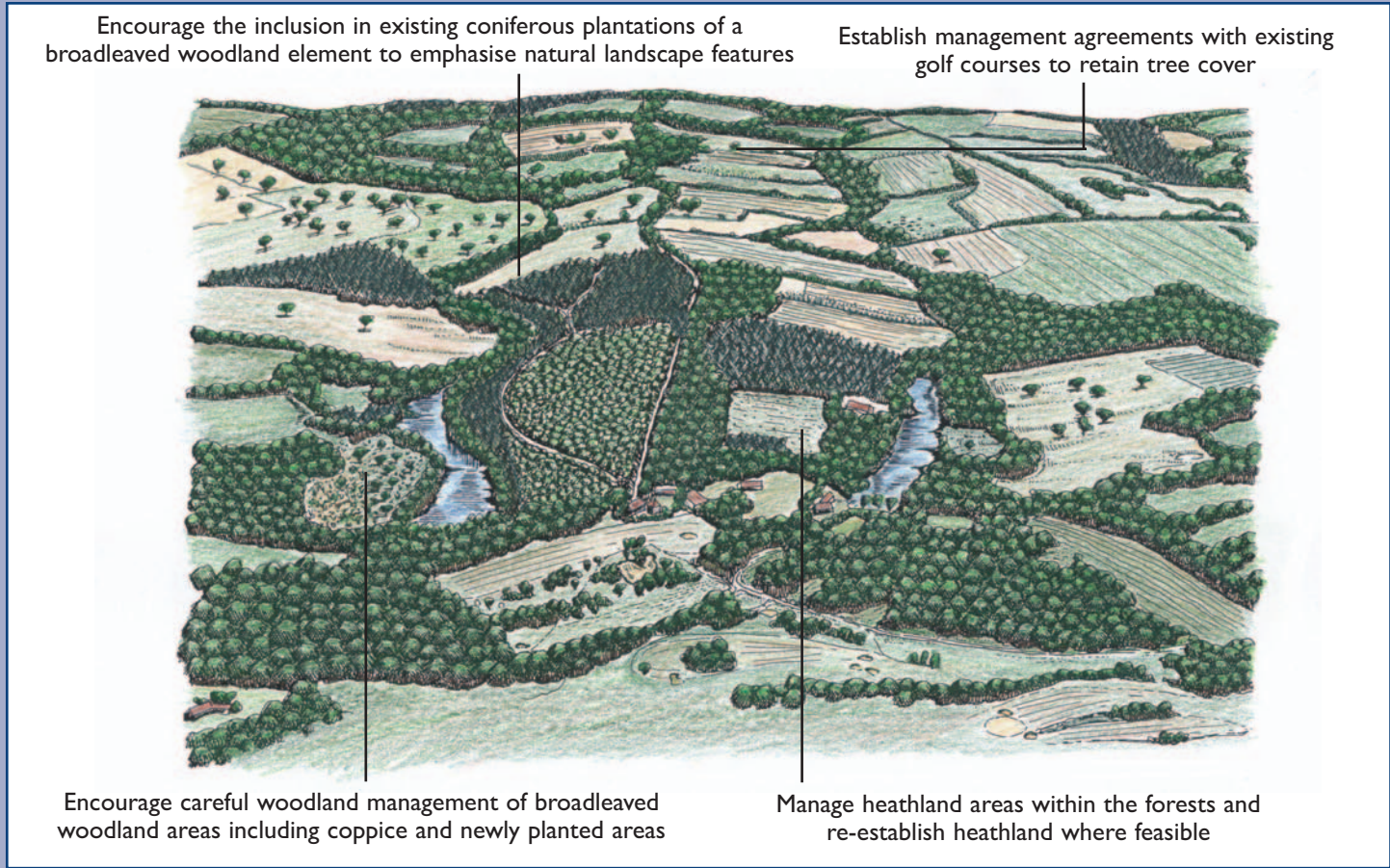


Cowdray Forest, Balcombe



St Leonards Forest

Land Management Guidelines



Conserve and enhance the secluded, tranquil nature of the forests and the agricultural landscape, and the unobtrusive settlement pattern throughout the area.

- Conserve the forests and their seclusion for scenic, nature conservation and recreational purposes, plan for long-term woodland regeneration, and promote a diverse mosaic of woodland types.
- Reduce the impact of forestry where possible by encouraging sensitive forestry practice including small-scale felling rotation, and incorporating mixed species.
- Maintain and restore the historic pattern and fabric of the agricultural landscape.
- Protect existing views and resist further infill within, and extension of, roadside development patterns, paying particular attention to the siting of telecommunications masts.
- Increase tree cover around agricultural, ridgetop and other development and maintain and extend woodland cover on the rural urban fringe including within the Horsham-Crawley corridor.
- Conserve and replant single oaks in fields and hedgerows to maintain succession.
- Conserve, strengthen and manage existing hedgerows (including tall hedges) and hedgerow trees and replant hedgerows where they have been lost.
- Conserve woodland biodiversity and the landscape of the gills including wet woodland, protecting rare and uncommon woodland plant communities associated with them.
- Enhance the biodiversity of woodland rides and glades and reduce rhododendron invasion and bracken cover.
- Conserve and manage remnant open heathland by preventing the encroachment of scrub and create new, interconnected heathlands.
- Maintain and manage all lakes and ponds and their margins for their landscape diversity and nature conservation value.
- Protect the tranquil and historic character of rural lanes and manage road verges to enhance their nature conservation value.
- Reduce the visual impact of golf courses, and stabling and grazing for horses.
- Minimise the effects of adverse incremental change by seeking new development of high quality that sits well within the landscape and reflects local distinctiveness.

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 *High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004* (Adopted March 2004) published by the High Weald AONB Joint Management Committee.