Overall Character of the High Weald

The High Weald is essentially a medieval landscape of rolling hills, networks of woodlands and shaws, irregular-shaped assart fields, remnant open heaths and ancient routeways. It is a complex sandstone and heavy clay landscape with a combination of ridges and deep steep sided valleys known as ghylls, drained by sinuous streams. The large area to the north of this character area is a wooded, confined pastoral landscape, locally secluded and tranquil with a high proportion of ancient woodland and occurrences of geologically important rock exposures. The ancient byways and trackways are distinctive features in the landscape; their use dates back to the medieval period when farmers would drive their pigs up to the woodlands to feed them on acorns and to gather wood for fuel and building materials (examples of transhumance and the practice of pannage). The forest plateau is undulating with a greater proportion of plantation mixed woodland and 20th century development. The Ouse valley is gently sloping with higher fertility, a less wooded character and with a greater proportion of arable farmland and large modern fields.

Early-purple orchid

The wooded High Weald

Ouse Valley Viaduct, 1841

Ghyll stream

Key Landscape Characteristics

Protect, conserve, and enhance:
- The tranquil, intimate and enclosed rural character of the area
- The qualities of fine long views from ridges
- Exposures of sandstone
- The network of ancient woodland including larger deciduous woodlands, ghyll woodlands and shaws
- Mixed woodlands on the plateau replacing coniferous over time
- Areas of heathland
- The qualities of the River Ouse, its valley bottom and lower sides with medium-large scale field patterns of wet meadows and pastures bounded by hedges with trees
- The fine grain and irregular pattern of assart fields [around 0.4Ha. /1 acre]
- Shaws enclosing fields and linking into, and integrating settlement
- The dense network of hedgerows, restoring where necessary, retaining the oak standards and other hedgerow trees
- Network and character of sinuous un-kerbed deep lanes, ancient droveways, greenways, tracks and footpaths
- Mill sites and ponds, hammer ponds, ornamental lakes and ponds
- Narrow field entrances and traditional gates
- Designed landscapes associated with large country houses and their settings, avoiding the spread of invasive species such as rhododendron
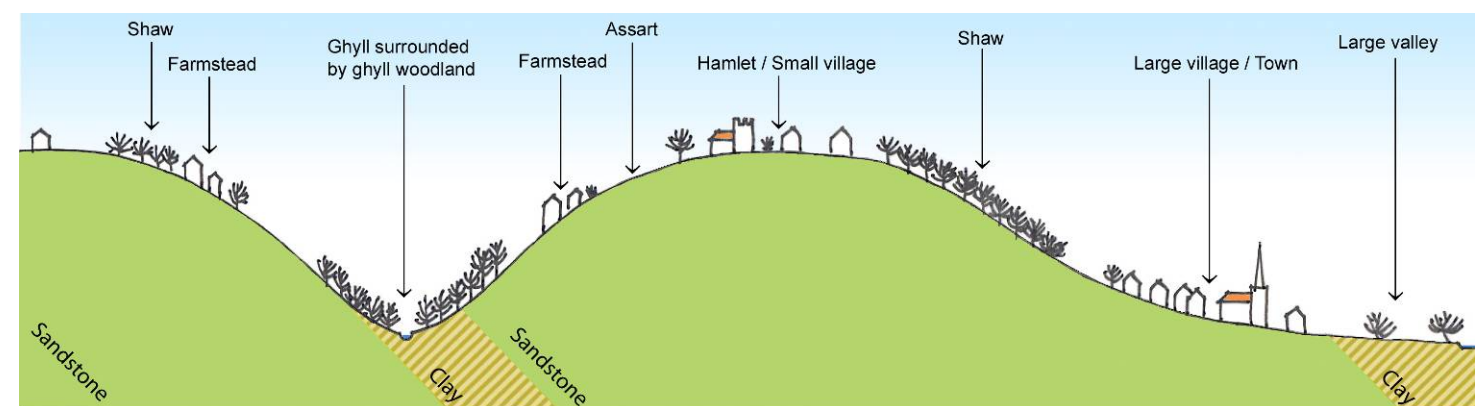
Buchan Park

Historic landscape

Protect, conserve, and enhance:
- Landscape essentially medieval in origin
- The persistence of ancient woodland and the persistence and pattern of assarts and shaws from medieval period (12th-14th century)
- The patterns of dens (wood pastures) and droves (transhumance routes) which define the scale and grain of the High Weald
- Prehistoric rock shelters
- Ancient routes including prehistoric ridgeway and Roman road
- Iron Age remains e.g. hillforts (rare)
- Iron industry remains (from prehistoric, Roman and medieval period) including strings of hammer, furnace ponds, pond bays, furnace remains, forge sites
- Medieval moated sites
- Historic mills, weirs and bridges
- Historic farmsteads and parkscapes
- Veteran trees
- Designed landscapes and country homes including Standen, Wakehurst Place and Nymans
- Bluebell railway – Horstead Keynes station
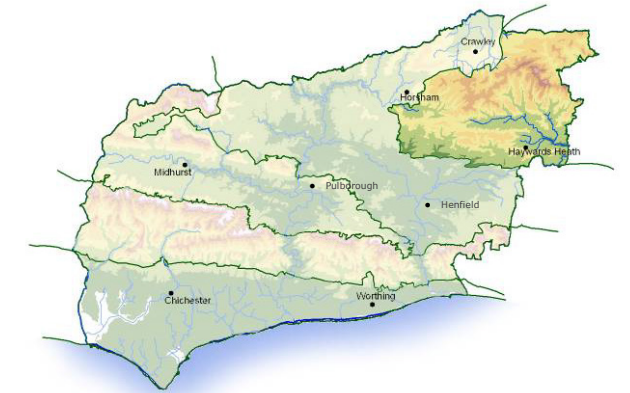
Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Protect, conserve and enhance the nature conservation value of:
- Diverse natural history
- Ancient woodland
- Coppice with standard woodland including oak-ash with hornbeam and hazel, beech and sweet chestnut
- Unimproved and semi-improved pastures and wet meadows
- Wet and dry acid heathland expanding through management where possible
- Freshwater marshes and wetlands
- Rivers, species rich ghylls and ditches
- Networks of species-rich hedgerows
- Geologically important rock exposures
- Sandrock communities
- Reservoirs, valley ponds, hammerponds, fish and ornamental ponds, field ponds and their margins
- The unique characteristics of historic buildings that provide habitats for wildlife
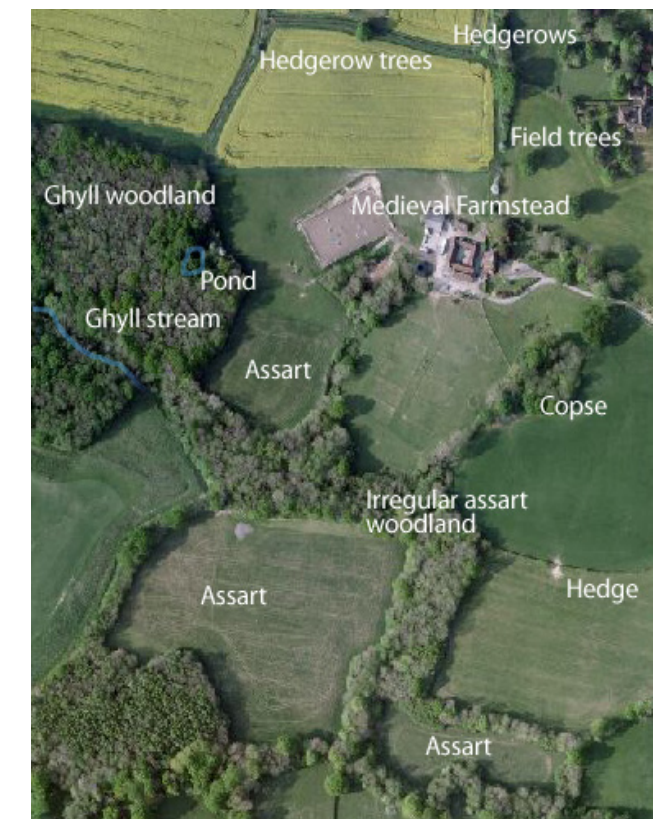
Local Distinctiveness
The High Weald Character Area

Local Distinctiveness is the essence of what makes a place special to us. It is what makes somewhere unique, a combination of the cultural landscape, wildlife, archaeology, history, geology, topography, traditions, buildings, materials, and crafts.

It is important to consider local distinctiveness within plans, policies and developments incorporating distinctive qualities and reflecting the county's sense of place.

Hedgerows
Hedgerow trees
Field trees
Ghyll woodland
Medieval Farmstead
Pond
Ghyll stream
Assart
Copse
Irregular assart woodland
Assart
Hedge
Assart

Medieval hamlet with key landscape features

'The Cultural Landscape is held together by the commonplace and the rare, the ordinary and the spectacular' (Common Ground)

Shaw
Farmstead
Ghyll surrounded by ghyll woodland
Assart
Farmstead
Hamlet / Small village
Shaw
Large village / Town
Large valley
Sandstone
Clay
Sandstone
Clay

Indicative cross section of the High Weald showing geology and key landscape features

west sussex county council

HW I

Key Settlement Characteristics

Overall existing pattern

In the High Weald the historic settlement pattern is formed of dispersed large and small farmsteads at a fine grain associated with small land holdings of woodland and pastures (dens and assarts). Hamlets sometimes arise from an aggregation of farms with additional houses for workers. Villages were formed subsequently in late medieval times based on the need to trade but are less characteristic of the High Weald. Large houses and associated parks and gardens are a feature of the 19th and 20th centuries. Larger settlements are located away from the steeper topography avoiding valley bottoms and were planned from medieval times.

Maintain, protect and enhance where possible:

- The existing dispersed pattern of farmsteads related to the agricultural/woodland use of land on ridges and valley sides avoiding valley bottoms.
- The scale, vernacular style, massing and materials of rural buildings and their cartilage boundaries.
- Larger settlements on gentle ridges or gentle valley edges ensuring that they are integrated into the landscape and screened, allowing views out where the existing pattern allows.
- Existing country houses and their settings while avoiding further erosion of the rural character, use and pattern of the landscape
- Conservation areas, listed buildings and their settings
- Rural character of the local road network through sensitive and appropriate design and signage

Chestnut hurdle making from

A working landscape - Cattle grazing

Typical Patterns of settlement are described below
[Note that the patterns are not exhaustive and further research should be carried out in relation to each site]

Villages

Location: on ridges, often between major ghylls such as at Ardingly and West Hoathly
Distribution: widespread and rare
Origin: late medieval – usually market or some early industrial trade
Circulation Pattern: linear, sometimes with sharp bends, cross roads, back lanes in larger settlements and dead ends leading to large houses or churches
Pattern: hierarchy of buildings with church at historic core; usually single depth plots
Open spaces: usually limited to gardens of properties. Occasional large verges and rare greens
Edge Character: soft edge formed by gardens, usually complex and indented, lacking long straight lines, running into woodland and shaws

Ardingly Primary School, barn conversion

Hamlets

Location: on ridges such as at Waringlid to Turners Hill
Distribution: widespread and rare
Origin: late medieval
Circulation Pattern: linear
Pattern: hierarchy of buildings with farm as largest. Fine grain, usually single depth plots. Frontage continuous, including semi-detached or detached cottages. Buildings normally face front. Small front gardens and variable rear gardens
Open spaces: usually limited to gardens of properties. Occasional large verges and rare greens
Edge Character: soft edge formed by gardens, usually complex, lacking in long straight lines, abutting shaws in places. Sometimes large houses in extensive grounds/parkland subsequently sited adjacent

Farmsteads

Location: ridges and slopes avoiding valley bottoms
Distribution: larger farmsteads widespread and common, some widespread smaller farmsteads
Origin: medieval, 20th Century
Pattern: larger farms – loose courtyards, some with timber framed barn, cattle shelters, cart and storage sheds. Large farmhouse separate with separate access. Smaller farms - dispersed pattern with small house and small associated outbuildings
Materials: stone and red brick, some timber framed, weather boarding
Relationship to Landscape: blank face of sheds and barns to roads often; farmhouse enjoying view; associated trees and shaws

Dwellings

Character: small plots normally with mix of detached, semi-detached, some terraces – often associated with estates on the fringes of the area. Frontage continuous in centre of larger settlements and broken into semi-detached or detached elsewhere. Small front gardens except in large village centres where there are none
Relationship to road: facing the front of the plot normally with some side on
Size: normally 2 story small scale cottages, rarely some with third storey in attic (such as in large settlements)
Walls: multi/red brick, decorative red clay tile hung first floor with brick, timber frame, Wealden stone in places (usually ashlar) – Cuckfield stone or Ardingly sandstone
Roof: plain clay or with Horsham stone (rare)
Enclosure: hedges – hawthorn, privet, yew, beech in places; timber picket fence and gates; Wealden stone walls, some with brick coping

Hoathly Hill Woodchip Boiler House. This is a community commissioned project which addresses sustainability issues. This fun yet understated timber structure relates well with its context and function

Historic Landscape Character Analysis (HLCA): The Age of the High Weald Landscape

Map from the HLCA showing the age/period that the existing landscape has originated from

Map of the same area showing historic land use type

Aerial photograph of corresponding area

Key
- Early Medieval (AD 410- 1065)
- Medieval (AD 1066- 1499)
- Conservation Area (AD 1500- 1599)
- Late Post-Medieval (AD 1600- AD 1799)
- Early Modern (AD 1800- AD 1913)
- Early 20th century (AD 1914- AD 1945)
- Late 20th century (AD 1845- Present)

Selected Key
- Assart wood
- plantation mixed
- Ghyll (gill)
- Cohesive Assart
- Aggregate Assart
- Market Village
- Market Town
- hamlet
- Large Farmstead
- Small farmstead/cottage
- Post-medieval designed park
- Fishponds
- Mill ponds

The HLCA can interpret how the landscape has changed due to human intervention over many historical periods. In the High Weald large areas of medieval landscape are intact.

These maps of the Cuckfield area are for illustrative purposes only, for information on the HLCA: *www.westsussex.gov.uk/character*

Palette and Materials – *Please note this guidance does not aim to inhibit innovative design or sustainable solutions*

Plain tile hung cottage with hedge

Decorative tile hung cottage

Decorative tile hung cottage

Tile hung cottage with hedge on stone wall

Brick cottage with brick and stone wall

Stone cottage on green

'Wealden' stone dwelling in village

Stone farm out building

Domestic picket fencing

Hardwood post and rail fencing

Estate fencing

Laid hawthorn hedge

Chestnut paling

Hardwood signpost

Village sign

Hardwood seat on stone paving

Timber bus shelter

Red/multi brick pavers

Rural angled kerb