

Overall Character of the Low Weald

The wooded and watery Low Weald has been described as a quintessentially medieval landscape. The Low Weald lies north of the Wealden greensand forming a horseshoe shape around the High Weald. It is a low-lying gently undulating landscape of clay vales and gentle ridges of limestone and sandstone. The landscape is small-scale, intimate and tranquil with a medieval pattern of small irregular pasture fields enclosed by a strong network of shaws and tall thick species rich hedgerows. Mature hedge and field trees (typically oak) are a common feature of this landscape with oak-hazel and hornbeam coppice occurring as a traditional and ancient stand type, often carpeted with swathes of bluebells in Spring. This intricate pattern was gradually formed over the ages by piecemeal woodland clearance which began in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Low Weald typically has an abundance of ponds, including numerous field corner ponds. The land is drained by many small stream valleys and dissected by rivers which are often accompanied by low-lying meadows with alder and willow wet woodland.



Hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees



The well wooded field pattern of the Low Weald



Church at Wisborough Green

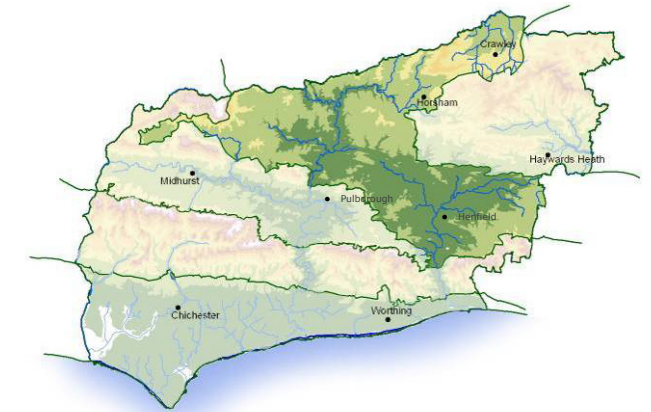


Hammer pond, Knepp Estate - Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI)

THE WEST SUSSEX LANDSCAPE Character Guidelines

Local Distinctiveness

The Low 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.

Key Landscape Characteristics

Protect, conserve and enhance:

- The qualities of fine long views to and from ridges and scarp slopes
- Small-scale, intimate and pastoral character of the landscape
- The small irregular fields
- Shaws enclosing fields and shaws linking into and integrating settlement
- Species rich grassland
- Ancient woodland
- The strong network of hedgerows, shaws and hedgerow trees including chestnut and hazel coppice woodland
- The rivers and streams with associated meadows and wet woodland
- The natural character of watercourses
- Field trees (e.g. oak) linking copses and waterside trees
- The network and character of narrow rural un-kerbed lanes, ancient droveways, and associated linear fields, green lanes, broad trackways, verges, and footpaths
- Fruit growing on lighter soils
- Mill sites and ponds, hammer ponds, ornamental lakes and ponds
- Narrow field entrances and traditional gates

Historic landscape

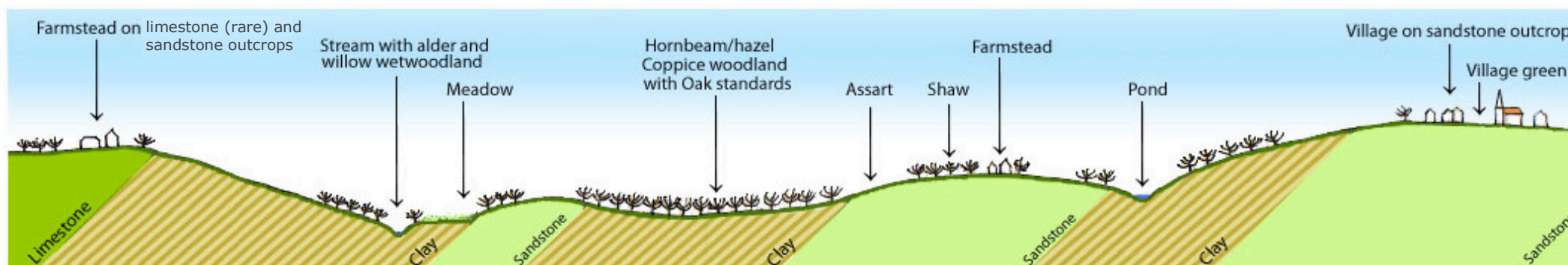
Protect, conserve and enhance:

- Historic pattern of assarts, earthworks, small scale field patterns including irregular field patterns and radiating field patterns around settlements
- Historic parkland and veteran trees
- Common land
- Ancient routes including Roman roads, droveways and associated linear fields
- Canal
- Water and wind mills, hammer ponds
- Relics of the Wealden Iron Industry
- Glassworks, 'Ironstone' works, brickworks, lime kilns
- Medieval moated sites
- Stone and brick bridges
- Historic buildings - churches, farmsteads, manor houses, country houses

Biodiversity

Protect, conserve and enhance the nature conservation value of:

- Ancient and semi-natural broadleaved woodland
- Small valleyside broadleaved woodland, ancient woodland
- Wet woodland including willow and alder carr
- Coppice
- Unimproved and semi-improved pastures, wet grassland and meadow
- Hedgerows, mature hedgerow trees, field corner copses and isolated trees in fields
- Rivers, streams and rich marginal vegetation along riverbanks, watercourses, ditches, watermeadows, marsh and reed beds
- Ponds, field ponds, lakes and their margins
- Mill ponds, hammer ponds and ornamental lakes
- The unique characteristics of historic buildings that provide habitats for wildlife



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



Medieval hamlet of Lurgashall in relation to key landscape features

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

Key Settlement Characteristics

Overall existing pattern

Permanent settlement and farming in the Low Weald occurred much earlier than in the neighbouring High Weald but even to this day maintains its overriding rural and intimate character created by its 'hand-made' medieval landscape features. There is a historic settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads and hamlets often strung along lanes or clustered around the edges of commons. There is a high density of dispersed farms of medieval origin, generally isolated and associated with small land holdings of woodland and assarts. From late medieval times larger settlements formed by gradual development around the edges of commons resulted in the formation of many village greens. Settlement tends to be concentrated on the higher, drier limestone and sandstone ridges, avoiding the clay vales. These are linked by a complex network of rural lanes, some sunken, and ancient drove roads along which early settlers would drive their pigs to nourish them on the acorns of the High Weald. Large houses and associated designed parks and gardens date from around the 18th-20th century.

Maintain, protect, and enhance where possible:

- The existing dispersed pattern of farmsteads related to the agricultural/woodland use of land on higher and drier outcrops of limestone or sandstone.
- The scale, vernacular style, massing and materials of rural buildings and their curtilage boundaries.
- The integration into the landscape and screening of larger settlements allowing views out where the existing pattern allows.
- Existing country houses and their settings while avoiding further erosion of the rural 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



Village Greens are a typical feature in the Low Weald

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 of sandstone, spring-line
Distribution: widespread and rare
Origin: late medieval – usually market villages
Circulation Pattern: linear – sometimes with sharp bends, cross roads, back lanes in larger settlements lead to large houses or church
Pattern: hierarchy of buildings with church at the historic core. Usually single depth plots
Open spaces: village greens, large verges, private gardens, occasional ponds
Edge Character: soft edge formed by gardens, usually complex, irregular and indented lacking long straight lines, running into woodland and shaws



Village pond at Wisborough Green

Hamlets

Location: on ridges of limestone or sandstone
Distribution: widespread and rare
Origin: medieval
Circulation Pattern: linear
Pattern: hierarchy of buildings with farm as the largest. Usually single depth plots
Open spaces: gardens, large verges, greens, occasional ponds
Edge Character: soft edge formed by gardens, usually complex lacking long straight lines, abutting shaws in places

Farmsteads

Location: on higher and drier outcrops of limestone or sandstone
Distribution: widespread and common
Origin: medieval, 18th-19th century
Pattern: loose courtyard plans with some regular court yard plans concentrated in the area immediately west of the High Weald. Dispersed plans with clusters of buildings. Timber framed farm houses, granaries, shelter sheds and cow houses
Materials: timber framing, bricks from local clays, sandstone, weather board or plain clay tile cladding, locally made Horsham stone slates (rare) straw thatch (rare)
Relationship to landscape: blank elevations of barns face the roads. Farmsteads are set within a medieval landscape pattern of fields and woodland

Dwellings

Character: small plots normally with a mix of detached, semi detached. Frontages continuous in centre of larger settlements and broken into semi-detached elsewhere. Small front gardens except in large village centres where there are none
Relationship to road: usually facing the front of the plot with some side on
Size: normally two storey small scale cottages, rarely some with third storey in attics (such as in larger settlements)
Walls: multi/red brick, local Wealden clay red brick, tile hung first floor with brick, timber framing, Wealden stone in places
Roof: plain clay tiles, Horsham stone slates (rare), straw thatch (rare)
Enclosure: hedges – typically hawthorn, yew, privet, beech, hornbeam, box, mixed native hedge; timber picket fences and gates, chestnut paling, Wealden sandstone walls some with brick coping

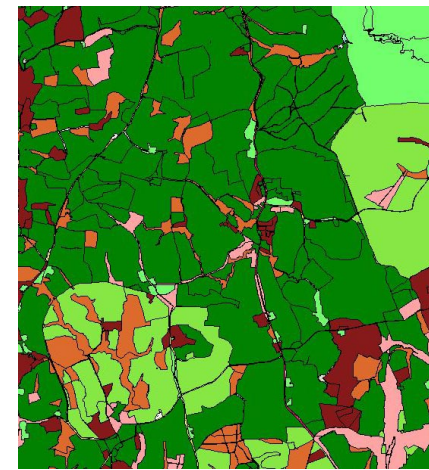


Warnham development – sympathetic use of materials, palette and design details

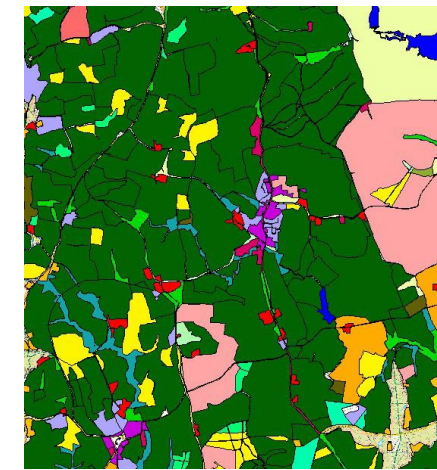


Contemporary timber bus shelter

Historical Landscape Character Analysis (HLCA): The Age of the Low Weald Landscape



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



Map of the same area showing the existing historic land use type



Aerial photograph of corresponding area

Key

Dark Green	Early Medieval (AD 410- 1065)
Light Green	Medieval (AD 1066- 1499)
Yellow-Green	Early Post-Medieval (AD 1500- 1599)
Yellow	Late Post-Medieval (AD 1600- AD 1799)
Orange	Early Modern (AD 1800- AD 1913)
Red	Early 20th century (AD 1914- AD 1945)
Dark Red	Late 20th century (AD 1845- Present)

Selected Key

Dark Green	Assart wood
Light Green	plantation mixed
Yellow-Green	Regenerated - wood
Yellow	Ghyll (gill)
Orange	hamlet
Red	Large Farmstead
Dark Red	Small farmstead/cottage
Light Green	Post-medieval designed park
Yellow	Regular piece meal enclosure
Orange	Irregular piecemeal enclosure
Red	Fishponds
Dark Red	plantation broadleaved,
Dark Red	Modern field amalgamation

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

These maps of the Northchapel 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



Tile hung cottage with stone wall



Timber framed house



Sandstone with slate roof



Weather boarded barn



Tile hung cottage



Horsham stone roof



Sandstone barn with clay tile roof



Brick cottage with hedge



Sandstone wall



Estate railing



Laid hawthorn hedge



Hardwood post & rail fencing



Domestic picket fence



Chestnut paling



Timber bus shelter



Village sign



Rural angled kerb



Timber bench



Fingerpost sign



Stone paving

Further information: West Sussex County Council – West Sussex Character Project www.westsussex.gov.uk/character; Natural England – National Character Areas www.naturalengland.org.uk; South Downs National Park www.southdowns.gov.uk; English Heritage – Historic Landscape Character www.english-heritage.org.uk; Sussex Archaeological Society www.sussexpast.co.uk; Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre <http://sxbr.org.uk>; Common Ground www.commonground.org.uk. Email: environment.heritage@westsussex.gov.uk