

Overall Character of the South Downs

Described by Rudyard Kipling as the 'blunt, bow-headed, whale-backed downs', the South Downs are cherished for their 'boundless' open landscape of rolling chalk downland. They have unique wildlife habitats and offer long sweeping views over the surrounding countryside. The South Downs' long thin chalk ridge spans Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex and has been designated as a National Park. In West Sussex the chalk ridge rises gently from the flat South Coast Plain and falls away as a dramatic steep north facing scarp which drops abruptly into the gentle rolling landscape of the Wealden Greensand. It is this contrast with the surrounding landscape which gives the Downs their grandeur.

The distinctive character of the Downs has been formed by a combination of the millennia of human intervention and the qualities of the underlying geology. Historically the Downs were widely grazed by large flocks of sheep vital to a sheep-and-corn system of farming where the sheep's dung was used to manure the impoverished soils to enable the cultivation of corn crops. Traditional sheep breeds included the 'Improved Southdowns' and the 'Old Downland'. By the end of the nineteenth century the character of the South Downs had hardly altered for more than a millennium. New farming methods and chemical fertilisers put an end to this sheep-corn symbiotic relationship.

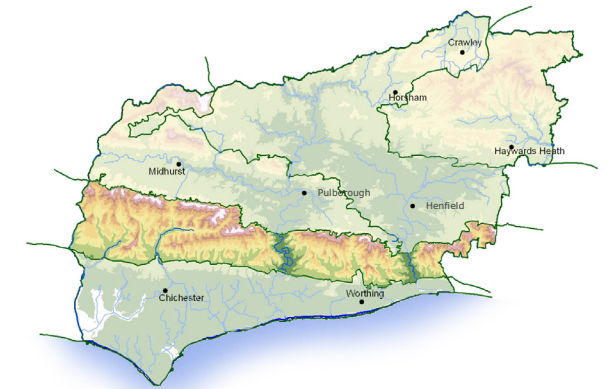
Today the West Sussex South Downs has a divided character. In the east the chalk landscape is predominantly arable or grazed rounded ridges cut through in places by rivers from the Low Weald and carved with sinuous dry valleys. To the west the landscape becomes more wooded and enclosed by a combination of coniferous plantation and broadleaved woodland; particularly distinctive are the high beech forests, coppice woodland, hanger woodland on the escarpments and the yew groves of Kingley Vale.



Beech woodland on the shallow chalk soils

THE WEST SUSSEX LANDSCAPE Character Guidelines

Local Distinctiveness The South Downs 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.



South Downs Way looking west



Cissbury Ring - Iron Age hill-fort, 300BC



Species rich chalk downland

Key Landscape Characteristics

Protect, conserve and enhance:

- Panoramic views from the Downs over surrounding landscapes
- Sense of remoteness and tranquillity
- Steep escarpment and smooth, gently rolling landform cut through by dry valleys
- Open nature of the lower valley slopes
- Existing woodland areas including ridge top woodlands and hanger woodland
- Beech woodland and distinctive beech and yew hangers; good forest design
- The distinctive character of the valuable chalk grassland
- Hedgerows and the hedgerow network
- Water meadows and gently meandering streams and rivers
- Pattern and character of small winding rural roads, good rights of way network
- Designed landscapes and views to them

Historic landscape

Protect, conserve and enhance:

- Archaeological monuments and their setting including hill forts, barrows and cross dykes
- Distinctive historic field patterns
- Assart woodland and fields
- Strip-lynchet, cultivation terraces
- Trackways, steep winding tracks up the downland escarpments (bostals) and Roman roads
- South Downs Way
- Lime works, remnants of cement industry?
- Windmills
- Historic parkscapes
- Veteran trees
- Character and setting of historic villages and farmsteads

Biodiversity

Protect, conserve and enhance the nature conservation value of:

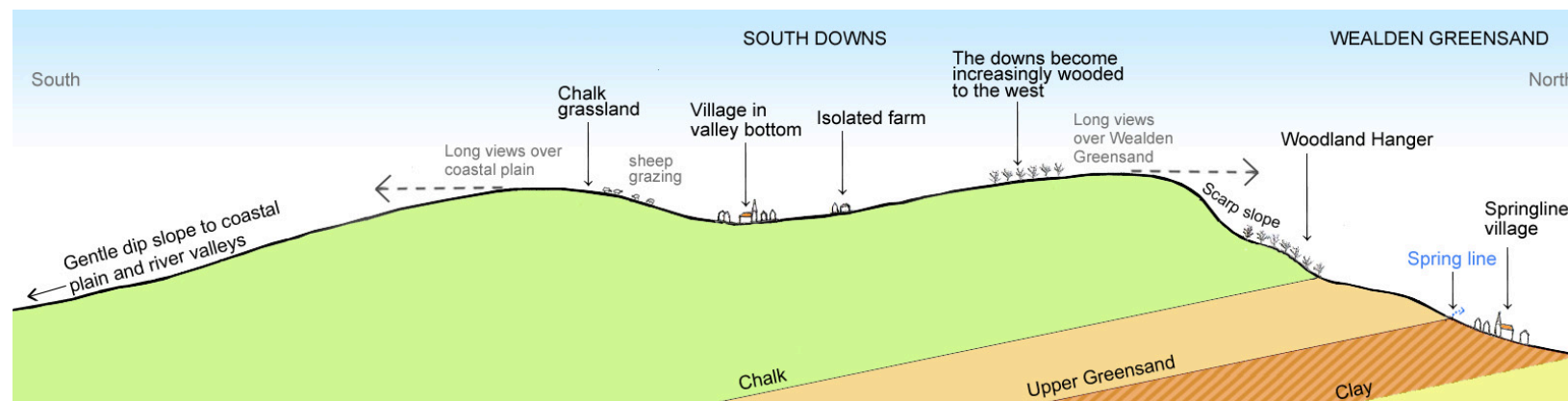
- Chalk grassland
- Many large ancient woodlands including ancient yew woodland at Kingley Vale (SSSI)
- Alder and willow wet woodland
- Unimproved grassland
- Flood meadows, wet grassland, freshwater marsh and reedbeds
- Dewponds
- Intermittent (winterbourne) streams with watermeadows in the valleys
- Species rich path and roadside verges and ditches
- Chalk pits and quarries
- The unique characteristics of historic buildings that provide habitats for wildlife e.g. bat roosts and nest sites for barn owls and swifts



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



Isolated farm in valley bottom



Indicative cross section of the South Downs showing geology and key landscape features

Key Settlement Characteristics

Overall existing pattern

The settlement pattern in the South Downs is strongly rooted in its agrarian past. The low density of scattered villages, hamlets and farmsteads principally lie in the valleys of the chalk downland. Settlements broadly fit into two categories: small nucleated settlements of Saxon or early medieval origin with associated small landholdings or as isolated flint built farmsteads of medieval or 18th-19th century origin located in areas of recent enclosure. Many villages and hamlets have single or multiple farms at their core and are set within a landscape smoothed by millennia of cultivation with remnants here and there of once common sheep grazed slopes and hill tops. 18th century estates, grand country houses and designed parkland landscapes have distinct visual influences on the area, and result, in part, from the varying landscape based leisure pursuits (e.g. hunting) that the Downs had to offer.

Maintain, protect and enhance where possible:

- The sense of remoteness resulting from the existing low density of dispersed settlements linked by a sparse network of small rural roads
- The scale, vernacular style, massing and materials of rural buildings
- Existing grand country houses set within parkland landscapes while avoiding erosion of rural character, use and pattern of the landscape.
- Conservation areas, listed buildings and their settings
- Green open spaces, green networks and vegetation within, at entrances and abounding settlements, encouraging the use of native plant species
- Rural character of the local road network through sensitive and appropriate design and signage



Early Norman church in the hamlet of Upwaltham

Singleton village along the valley bottom showing 'soft' irregular boundary edge

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: in valleys and often alongside streams
Distribution: scattered and infrequent
Origin: early medieval
Circulation pattern: nucleated, often with sharp bends and crossroads
Pattern: hierarchy of buildings with church as the largest at the core of the historic village
Open spaces: private gardens; occasional small greens, sometimes with a pond; large verges; and occasional playing fields/cricket grounds on the edge of villages, occasionally with a historic feature e.g. a well
Edge character: soft irregular edges created by gardens with few long straight lines except in places where they are bounded by estate walls.



Farmstead in village core



Parish boundary stone

Hamlets

Location: in valleys and often alongside streams
Distribution: scattered and infrequent
Origin: medieval
Circulation pattern: nucleated
Pattern: hierarchy of buildings with church or farm as the largest; small clusters of houses often around a farm and church, usually with single depth plots
Open spaces: private gardens, occasional small greens sometimes with a pond
Edge character: soft irregular edges created by gardens with few long straight lines

Farmsteads

Location: isolated or in villages and hamlets along the valley bottoms and coombes, sometimes reached by long chalky tracks
Distribution: scattered and infrequent
Origin: medieval or 18th-19th century
Pattern: loose courtyard plans with two or three detached working farm buildings standing around a yard area, some multi-yard plans. Large barns, often aisled and with two or three threshing barns; some outlying field barns.
Materials: flint and cobbles, flint and brick, timber-framing, brick, straw thatch, plain clay tiles
Relationship to landscape: often sheds and barns bound the road; occasionally the open side of the yard faces the street allowing glimpses into the yard. Occasionally high flint walls surround large farmsteads
Notable livestock breeds: historically the sheep varieties in the east were: 'Improved Southdowns'; and in the west: 'Old Downland'

Dwellings

Character: often irregularly arranged, small plots normally with a mix of detached and semi-detached with some terraces (often associated with estates); small front gardens
Relationship to road: facing the road occasionally with some side on
Size: typically two storey small scale cottages
Walls: red brick; timber-framing; flint with brick quoins (corner stones) and dressings; plain clay tile; flint galleting is a particularly distinctive feature, hung tile less evident.
Roof: clay tile or slate, straw thatch, chimneys are bold in older buildings
Enclosure: hedges – typically hawthorn, yew, beech, hornbeam, privet, box, mixed native hedge; timber picket fences and gates; flint walls, some with brick coping; post and rail fencing; chestnut paling; hazel hurdles

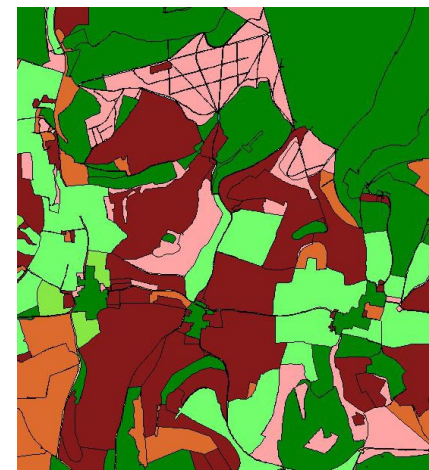


High quality social housing at Singleton using traditional materials and vernacular style

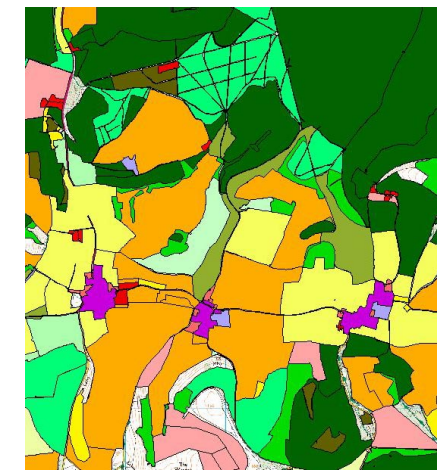


Downland Gridshell, Weald & Downland Museum, Singleton. The building relates to the rolling downland and is designed to evoke the timber framed building tradition

Historic Landscape Character Analysis (HLCA): The Age of the South Downs Landscape



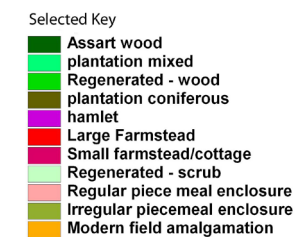
Map from the HLCA showing the age/period that the existing landscape has originated from



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



Aerial photograph of corresponding area



The HLCA can be used to interpret how the landscape has changed due to human intervention over many historical periods. In the South Downs there are many examples of existing medieval landscapes such as unimproved chalk downland, assart woodland and field patterns.

These maps of the East Dean area are for illustrative purposes only, for further 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



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