

# Overall Character of the Wealden Greensand

The majority of the Wealden Greensand landscape character area lies within the boundaries of the South Downs National Park. It is essentially a medieval landscape with a small scale, intimate and mysterious character which is in striking contrast to the openness of the rolling chalk hills of the neighbouring South Downs. Its varied and complex landscape is comprised of a combination of clays, sand and sandstones which have produced an undulating topography of scarp and dip slopes, well wooded with ancient mixed woodland of oak, ash, hazel, field maple and birch. Distinctive steep woodland hangers, open heathland vibrantly coloured in summer, small pastures, irregular fields defined by hedgerows, low ridges and narrow vales drained by streams and rivers are all distinctive features of this character area. It is a popular area for horse breeding with a number of stud farms breeding polo ponies and thoroughbreds. Many narrow winding lanes are distinctively deeply sunken lined with trees whose exposed twisting roots grip chunks of sandstone. These lanes evolved before road surfacing and were eroded through the ages by weathering and the passage of foot, hoof and trotter as farmers drove their pigs up to the High Weald's woodlands to feed them on the abundance of acorns (examples of transhumance and the practice of pannage). To the north there are dramatic views from the top of the wooded sandstone ridges. These ridges rise steeply from the Rother Valley and drop away in a dramatic curved escarpment that is deeply carved by stream valleys.



Sunken lane with exposed sandstone – Elsted



Long views uncompromised by visible major development



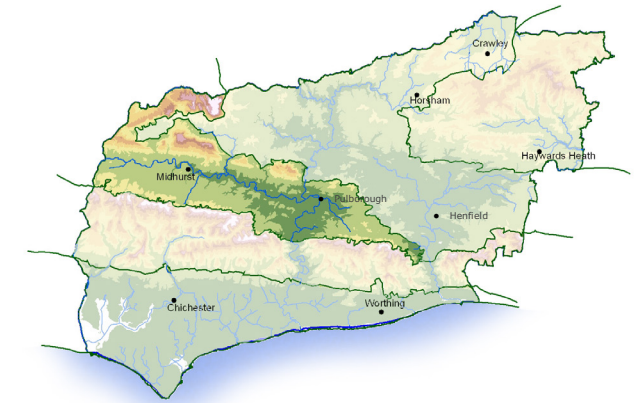
Watermills are associated with the River Rother and the spring-line



Heather in flower at Iping Common

# THE WEST SUSSEX LANDSCAPE Character Guidelines

## Local Distinctiveness Wealden Greensand 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 tranquil, secluded, highly enclosed, rural character of the area
- Quality of long fine views from ridge and of the chalk escarpment
- The network of woodland including hanger and linear woodland
- The irregular pattern of small scale fields
- The network of hedgerows, retaining hedgerow trees
- The character of deep, narrow sunken lanes and other country lanes
- Single trees in fields e.g. oaks
- Rivers, streams and adjacent meadows
- Mill sites, ponds
- Orchards and vineyards
- The potential for the restoration of mineral working to heathland



Designed parkscape of Petworth Park



Vineyard

## Historic landscape

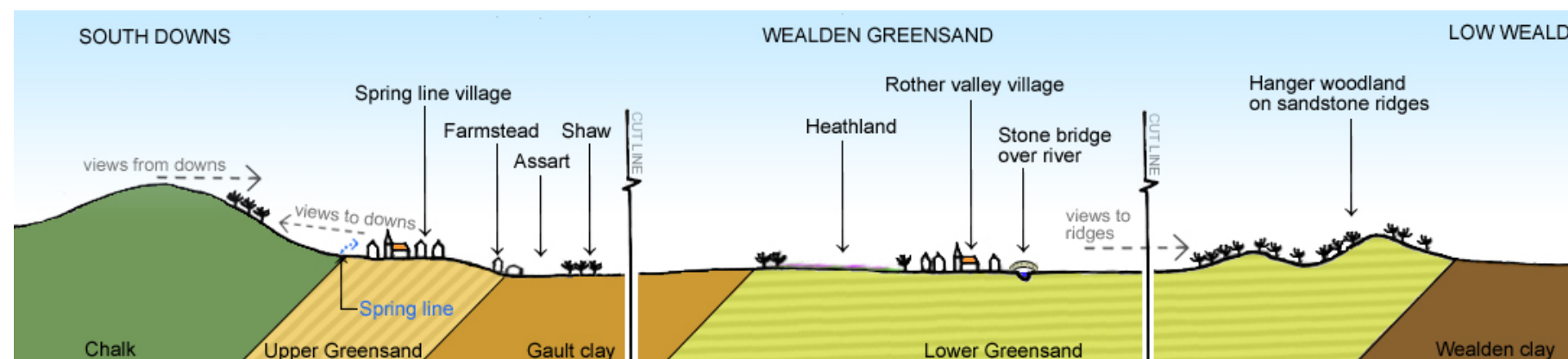
Protect, conserve and enhance:

- Bronze Age bowl barrows
- Iron Age remains e.g. hill forts
- Historic/medieval patterns of small irregular assart fields and assart woodland
- Wood pasture
- Historic parkland
- Veteran trees
- Sunken lanes
- Ancient (woodland) tracks and lanes and Roman roads
- Wind and water mills, mill ponds, hammerponds
- Relics of the Wealden Iron Industry
- Lime kilns
- Roman settlement
- (medieval) stone bridges
- Historic buildings – churches, priories, castles, moated sites

## Biodiversity

Protect, conserve and enhance the nature conservation value of:

- The overall varied nature of the landscape which gives rise to a diverse range of habitats supporting a wide range of species
- Ancient woodland
- Clay and sandstone woodlands of oak with ash, hazel, birch and field maple
- Dry and wet heathland
- Acid grassland
- Unimproved meadows
- Water meadows
- Hedges, hedgerows and hedge banks
- Rivers and streams with alder carr woodland and remnants of river valley meadow and marsh including wet grazing marsh
- Ponds, springs, streams, ditches and rich marginal vegetation
- Sunken lanes with hedge banks rich in ferns and mosses
- Species rich roadside verges and commons
- The unique characteristics of historic buildings that provide habitats for wildlife



Indicative cross section of the Wealden Greensand showing geology and key landscape features



Rother valley village of Stedham showing relationship to key landscape elements

'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

The historic settlement pattern is predominantly small scattered villages, hamlets and isolated farmsteads connected by winding narrow rural lanes and associated with a small scale and varied landscape pattern. The dispersed medieval farmsteads of the Wealden Greensand are associated with small and irregular assart fields formed by wood clearing. Medieval stone bridges are distinctive features of many of the villages.

To the south, where the impermeable gault clay meets the permeable chalk, hundreds of clear springs burst forth, known as the 'spring-line'. This spring-line has given rise to a line of settlements nestled at the foot of the north scarp of the downs which, in the past, utilised the springs' energy to drive their water mills.

Features of the 19th and 20th centuries are the large houses and associated parks and gardens. The wooded character of the Wealden Greensand has provided a backdrop for designers such as Capability Brown at his designed parkland at Petworth.



Spring-line villages at the base of the scarp slope of the downs

## Maintain, protect and enhance where possible:

- The existing dispersed pattern of farmsteads related to the agricultural/woodland use of land
- The scale, vernacular style, massing and materials of rural buildings and their boundaries.
- Larger settlements integrated into the landscape, screening where necessary, 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



Stopham bridge on the River Rother



Stedham Mill pond

**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:** predominantly along the valley edges or along the spring line at the foot of the scarp slope of the downs

**Distribution:** widespread and common

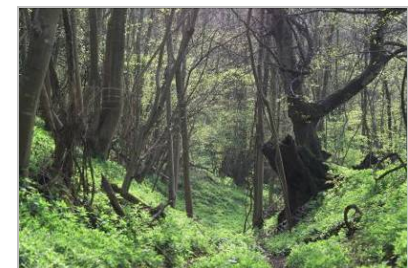
**Origin:** early medieval and medieval market villages

**Circulation Pattern:** nucleated, often with sharp bends, sometimes with dead end lanes leading to a large house, church or mill

**Pattern:** hierarchy of buildings with church as the largest; usually single depth plots

**Open spaces:** private gardens; occasional village greens and large verges

**Edge Character:** soft irregular edges created by gardens with few long straight lines



Drove road



Local Chestnut coppice used for chestnut paling

## Hamlets

**Location:** along the valley edges or along the spring line at the foot of the scarp slope of the downs

**Distribution:** widespread and common

**Origin:** early medieval, medieval

**Circulation Pattern:** nucleated,

**Pattern:** hierarchy of buildings with church or farm as the largest (at the core); usually with single depth plots

**Open spaces:** private gardens; occasional large verges

**Edge Character:** soft irregular edges created by gardens with few long straight lines

## Farmsteads

**Location:** along the valley edges or along the spring line at the foot of the scarp slope of the downs

**Distribution:** widespread and common

**Origin:** medieval, 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century

**Pattern:** regular courtyard plans, some dispersed plan farmsteads. Regular L-plan and U-plan ranges are a common feature

**Materials:** sandstone, weatherboard, plain clay tile

**Relationship to Landscape:** associated with small, irregular fields of medieval origin created by assarting, or more regular medium-sized fields created by enclosure between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century

## 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:** facing the front of the plot normally with some side on

**Size:** normally 2 storey small scale cottages, rarely some with third storey in roof (such as in large settlements)

**Walls:** local Greensand stone - central and eastern areas: harder and darker greensand used; In west: Malmstone (soft creamy coloured greensand). Flint in areas adjacent to the chalk downs, flint galleting, some timber frame, tile hung, clunch, brick, ironstone, shingle (rare)

**Roof:** plain clay tile, slate or Horsham stone (rare), some straw thatch in western area

**Enclosure:** hedges - typically hawthorn, yew, beech, hornbeam, privet, box, mixed native hedge; cleft or riven chestnut post and rail fencing, timber picket fencing; sandstone walls, some with half round sandstone coping

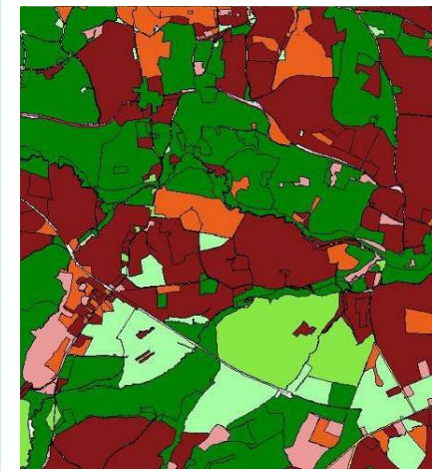


Recent development in Midhurst using locally distinctive materials

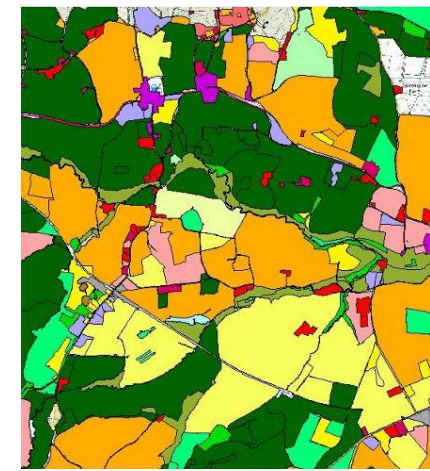


New village store at Lodsworth using locally produced materials including wood shingles

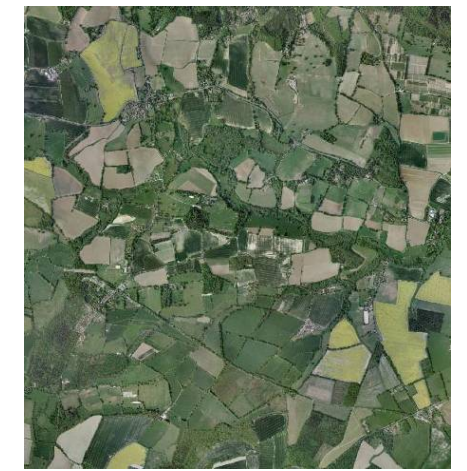
# Historic Landscape Character Analysis (HLCA): The Age of the Wealden Greensand Landscape



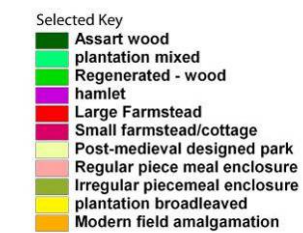
Map from the HLCA showing the age/period that the existing landscape has originated from



Map of the same area showing existing historical land use type



Aerial photograph of corresponding area



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

These maps of the Trotton area are for illustrative purposes only, for information on the HLCA: [www.westsussex.gov.uk/character](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/character)

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



Sandstone cottage with clay tiles end



Tile hung, timber framed house



Cowdray Estate colours



Sandstone cottage with slate roof



Shingled gable



Brick & timber framing with brick nogging



'Eco building' in woodland constructed from locally produced materials



Pale Sandstone 'clunch' barn



Weather boarding on barn



Ironstone galleting in sandstone wall



Rural angled kerb (granite)



Hardwood rural post and rail fencing



Domestic picket fencing



Sandstone wall with hedge



Laid hawthorn hedge



Village sign



Fingerpost sign



Timber bus shelter



Hardwood bench



Sandstone paving



Estate railing



Chestnut paling

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