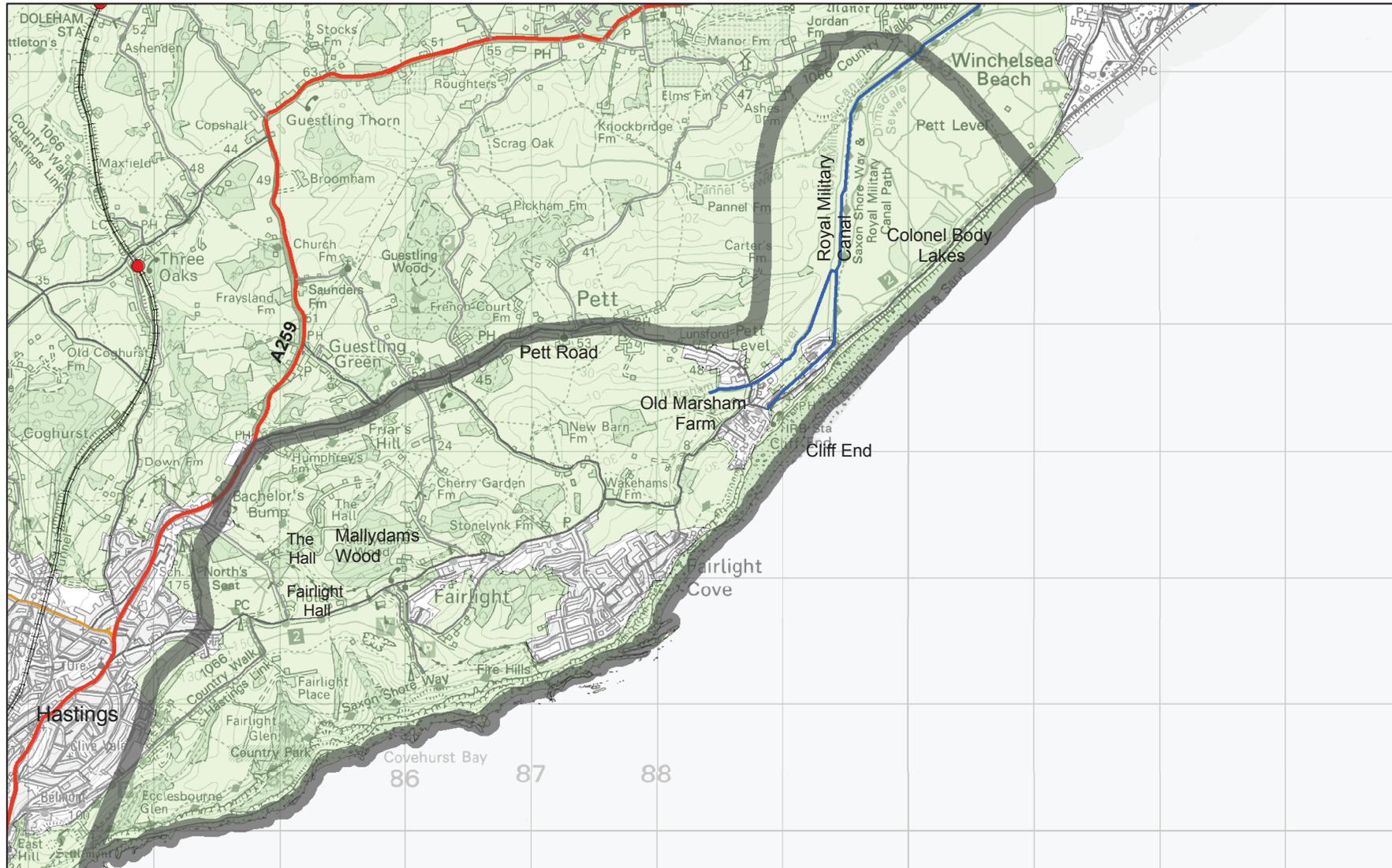


# High Wealden Coast

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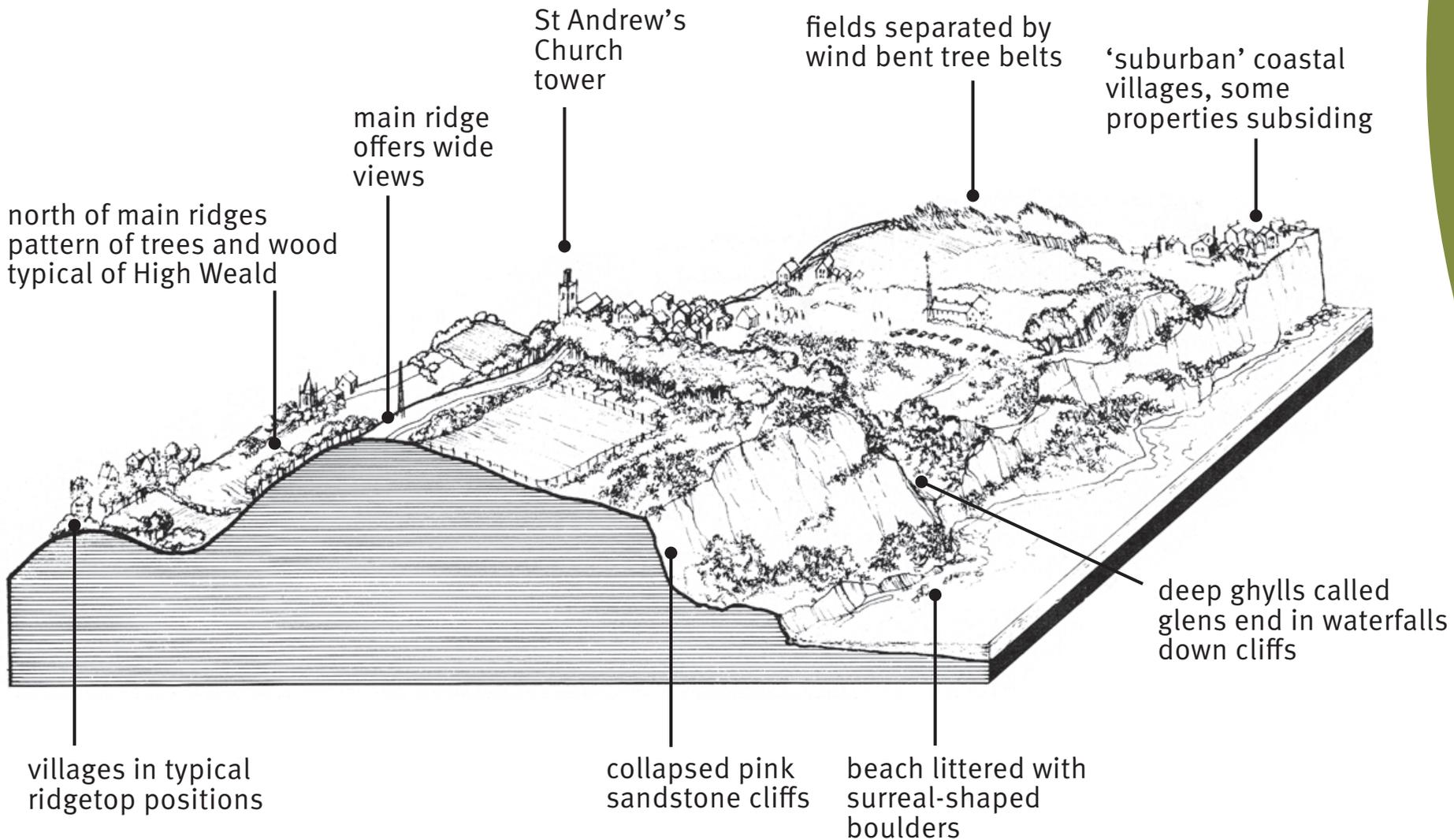


12 High Wealden Coast Landscape Character Area

High Weald AONB

0 0.4 0.8 1.8 2.4 3.2 Kilometers

# High Wealden Coast



# High Wealden Coast

## Contents

- A. Landscape Description
- B. Landscape Evaluation
- C. Vision and Strategy
- D. Guidelines for Managing Change

### A Landscape Description

#### Key Landscape Characteristics

- The Hastings to Battle Ridge reaches the sea to form a distinctly unique coastline.
- Terraced, crumbling cliffs of soft pink sandstone where the geology of the High Weald meets the sea. Varying ages of cliff falls, some of which are still bare earth and others with established woodland.
- Hastings Country Park with internationally important wildlife designations.
- Deep ghylls, locally known as ‘glens’, which fall steeply to the sea and where the associated streams and springs form frequent muddy waterfalls.
- Scrubby heathland and wind sculpted trees growing on the coastal terraces of slumped cliffs.
- Two distinct glens in the cliffs:
  - o Fairlight Glen is deep and sheltered and supports woodland with oak trees up to 30 metres tall
  - o Ecclesbourne Glen has more scrubby vegetation and trees stunted by the prevailing wind.
- Wind swept cliff top fields bounded by wind sculpted hedges and tree belts.
- On the sheltered north side of the main ridge the patchwork of fields and woods is typical of the High Weald landscape.
- The urban fringes of Hastings, including the dominating masts at North Seat, form the western boundary to the area.
- The main ridge running inland between Batchelor’s Bump and Cliff End offers long views across the Brede Valley to the north and Winchelsea, Rye, Dungeness, and on a clear day the coast of France.
- The A259 between Hastings and Rye follows the ridge and forms the boundary on the North West side of the area. Pett Road follows the continuation of the ridge to Cliff End.
- The windy and often narrow Fairlight Road crosses the area on the central ridge.
- Winding and very narrow sunken country lanes with steep gradients run between the ridge top roads.
- Virtually continuous ribbon development along Pett Road from Hastings to Cliff End.
- The Royal Military Canal and associated Pett Levels.
- Colonel Body Memorial Lakes popular with wildfowl and bird watchers.
- The historic ridge top villages of Pett and Fairlight, the latter with a prominent church tower.
- The relatively modern suburban settlement at Fairlight Cove where properties close to the cliff edge have subsided into the sea.

# High Wealden Coast

- The beach at the base of the cliffs which is difficult and hazardous to access due to continuing subsidence.
- Scattered historic farmsteads and interesting older country house estates at Fairlight Hall and The Hall.
- Scattered areas of semi-natural ancient woodland, the largest being Mallydams Wood.
- Traditional building materials are, as for most of the High Weald, red brick and tiles and, in this area, sandstone in conjunction with brick. White weatherboarding is also characteristic of the eastern High Weald and oak timber frames.
- The main amenity tree species in the area are oak, sweet chestnut, ash and sycamore. Coastal influences restrict species variety with much sycamore in coastal woods and some oak woods with sweet chestnut coppice inland.

## Cultural Interests

The cliff exposures are of international significance as the best place to examine the geology of the Weald.

Hastings Country Park is a Local Nature Reserve, Special Area of Conservation and Site of Special Scientific Interest. Access to the Country Park from Hastings is via East Hill, the site of an historic vanished settlement.

The RSPCA rescue centre at Mallydams Wood is a well-known rescue and training centre for wildlife and in particular sea birds and seals.

Smuggling originated in the area due to taxes and restrictions on the export of wool and other goods. The Sussex coast was ideally placed as drop off point for contraband and the Fairlight coast was known for this. Smugglers met at 'The Whippings', the high cliff near Ecclesbourne and 'The Marrow-bone Gap' near Fairlight and Dripping Well in Fairlight. Hastings Museum and Art Gallery hold a variety of prints illustrating these meeting places.

Fairlight Hall is a Victorian Gothic mansion designed by the architect of Hyde Park Gardens, John Crake. The mansion was once owned by wealthy philanthropic mill owner James Roberts and was the location for the 1949 film *Fall of the House of Usher* directed by George Ivan Barnett.

St Andrew's Church (built 1845) has a tall tower and beacon turret, and can be seen for some distance around. The church is one of three in the United Benefice of Fairlight, Guestling and Pett. Richard D'Oyly Carte, founder of the **Savoy Theatre**, **Savoy Hotel**, and **D'Oyly Carte Opera Company**, which produced the **Gilbert and Sullivan** light operas, is buried in the churchyard. So also are Sir James Roberts of **Saltaire** and his wife.

# High Wealden Coast

**Table 1 Key positive Landscape Attributes**

- The Hastings to Battle Ridge reaches the sea to form a distinctly unique coastline.
- Terraced, crumbling cliffs of soft pink sandstone where the geology of the High Weald meets the sea.
- Deep ghylls, locally known as 'glens', which fall steeply to the sea where the associated streams and springs form frequent muddy waterfalls.
- Two distinct glens in the cliffs:
  - o Fairlight Glen is deep and sheltered and supports woodland with oak trees up to 30 metres tall
  - o Ecclesbourne Glen has more scrubby vegetation and trees stunted by the prevailing wind.
- Wind swept cliff top fields bounded by wind sculpted hedges and tree belts.
- On the sheltered north side of the main ridge the patchwork of fields and woods is typical of the High Weald landscape.
- The main ridge running inland between Batchelor's Bump and Cliff End offers long views across the Brede Valley to the north and Winchelsea, Rye, Dungeness, and the coast of France on a clear day.
- Winding and very narrow sunken country lanes with steep gradients run between the ridge top roads.
- The historic ridge top villages of Pett and Fairlight, the latter with a prominent church tower.

- Scattered historic farmsteads and interesting older country house estates at Fairlight Hall and The Hall.
- Scattered areas of semi-natural ancient woodland, the largest being Mallydams Wood.
- The Royal Military Canal and associated Pett Levels.
- Colonel Body Memorial Lakes popular with wildfowl and bird watchers.

# High Wealden Coast

## B Landscape Evaluation

### Table 2 Current Condition

This is a largely unspoilt and tranquil rural landscape with few intrusive features. The landscape is in generally good condition and well managed as farmland with a strong historic structure. As with most of the High Weald landscape the historic field patterns of small fields and significant hedgerows remain intact. There has been some fragmentation of this by removal and decay of hedges around the urban fringes of Hastings and Fairlight Cove. The coastal areas are subject to natural change due to marine erosion.

### Forces for Change impacting on positive attributes

#### Past / Current forces for change

- Recreational pressure at Hastings Country Park is causing erosion of footpaths.
- Creeping suburbanisation and cumulative changes in the rural landscape which are not in sympathy with local distinctiveness or vernacular architecture.
- Ribbon development creeping along the country lanes and expanding into larger developments around the village of Pett and at Cliff End.
- Erosion at Fairlight Cove causing the dereliction of built features down the cliff terraces which cannot be recovered and create eyesores when viewed from the beach.
- Expansion of the settlement at Fairlight Cove onto green field sites.
- Expansion of caravan and mobile home parks in Hastings Country Park at Ecclesbourne Glen and Rocklands Lane.
- A Nitrate Vulnerable Zone covers much of the area and a Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative extends across the eastern part of the area.
- Some loss of hedgerows to more intensive arable farming in parts of the area, particularly to the south of Pett Road.
- Changes in the types and frequency of grazing animals in the countryside impacts on character as they are a characteristic feature. Lack of grazing can give an unmanaged appearance to the landscape and reduce the biodiversity value.

# High Wealden Coast

- Loss of traditional woodland management and cessation of coppicing.
- About 70% of the area is covered by Agricultural Environment Schemes including the Country Park, National Trust owned land at Old Marsham/Fairlight Farms and farmland to the south of Pett village.
- Woodland grant schemes cover the ghyll woodlands in the country park and woodland at Old Marsham Farm.
- Intrusive modern farm buildings.
- Increasing traffic on the B roads which cross the area and rat running on rural lanes.

## Future Forces for Change

- The need to provide local housing in the villages, especially around Fairlight Cove.
- Demands for traffic calming and road improvements which could introduce increasing urban clutter to rural roads, villages and lanes.
- Continued agricultural change due to changing markets, economic pressures and response to climate change.
- Redevelopment pressures for existing farmsteads for residential or business uses and particularly tourism.
- The spread of small agricultural holdings, hobby farming, paddocks, farm shops and allotments for local food production.
- Pressure for locating renewable energy facilities for solar, wind and bio energy, including off shore wind facilities.
- Pests and diseases of trees which could impact significantly on the mature tree stock. E.g. phytophthora of alder and Ash dieback.
- Pressure for the expansion of existing and provision of new caravan and camping facilities.
- Continuing coastal erosion damaging recreational facilities, houses and coastal access.

# High Wealden Coast

**Table 3 Potential Impacts of Climate Change**

- Potential changes in woodland / tree species composition and accelerated growth of species such as birch.
- Changes in native ground flora and other native vegetation which produce distinctive seasonal displays.
- Increased prevalence of pests and diseases due to warmer weather e.g. Ash Dieback and Oak Processionary Moth.
- Changes in precipitation and temperatures will change the types of crops that farmers grow.
- Potential impact on the viability of grazing sheep, dairy and beef.
- Increased temperatures and a decline in precipitation levels may dry out wetland habitats and ponds and alter stream flows.
- Accelerated coastal erosion due to high rainfall and storm events.

# High Wealden Coast

## C Vision and Strategy

### Table 4 Vision

A dramatic and varied coastline with a hinterland of rich and intricate unspoilt High Wealden Countryside. Locally remote and tranquil areas combined with high quality visitor and recreational opportunities. A thriving rural economy which maximises the opportunities offered by the unique surrounding landscape.

As noted in the current Landscape Character Guidance – A Landscape Strategy identifies *“what change if any is desirable for any landscape character area as a whole?”*

### Landscape change and adaptation to meet the strategy requires:

1. Planning for the enhancement of the Romney Marsh Area Biodiversity Opportunity Area, which encompasses Wealden Coast, improving habitat continuity.
2. Protect and manage existing habitats and in particular the woodland, heath and grassland of the glens and Country Park, to restore habitat linkages and continuity.
3. Encourage positive management through coppicing of the ancient woodlands.
4. Conserve and strengthen the pattern of hedges, copses and shaws in the inland areas.
5. Plan for the creation of multifunctional green infrastructure to maximise the opportunities for biodiversity and recreation offered by the cliffs, coast, hedges and woodland.
6. Consider the potential to plan for recreational access in this character area identifying areas where public access can be encouraged whilst protecting other areas where wildlife conservation is the priority.
7. Integrate proposed and existing development into the landscape through planting of tree features and woodland to define the boundaries with the countryside. With particular emphasis on edges of development in Fairlight Cove, the Hastings fringes and mobile home parks.
8. Ensure that the design and layout of new development respects the character and form of the landscape and existing settlements.
9. Control the spread of suburbanisation by minimising clutter of signage and other urban features in lanes and villages.
10. Consider traffic management measures on the lanes, together with off road recreational routes to reduce the conflict with walkers, cyclists and horses.
11. Conserve the setting of historic buildings and landscape features.
12. Consider appropriate species for new plantings to maintain landscape character and biodiversity but also adaptation to climate change influences.

# High Wealden Coast

## D Guidelines for Managing Change

### Development considerations for housing and other development

Proposals need to have regard for the current High Weald Management Plan:

<http://www.highweald.org/downloads/publications/high-weald-aonb-management-plan-documents/1475-high-weald-management-plan-3rd-edition-2014-2019/file.html>

The main pressures for development in this character area will be to accommodate housing for the rural populations in the rural settlements of Pett and Fairlight. Pressures for the expansion of Hastings may impact on the part of the character area which borders the town. The priority will be to identify opportunities to enhance the degraded and poorly managed parts of the character area on the Hastings urban fringes.

Tourism is an important source of income to this area and there is likely to be increasing demand for accommodation in bed and breakfast, caravan and camp sites. The modern trend for luxury and exotic camping (glamping) could put pressure on the woodlands. There will be demand for new facilities and to improve or expand existing, some of these putting pressure on the local landscape. Any new development should respect the key positive attributes in the landscape outlined in Table 1 above.

Proposed development should consider opportunities for proactively meeting the Landscape Change Strategy aims for this Landscape Character Area as set out in 1-12 above.

# High Wealden Coast

Table 5

Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p><b>Countryside and Farmland</b> Farm environment plans relating to much of the farm lands including organic farming.</p> <p>Pressure for farm diversification and development of hobby farms, solar arrays, wind farms, waste recycling operations etc.</p> <p>Recreational activities in Hastings Country Park and on the coastal footpath routes conflicting with agricultural land management.</p> <p>Expansion of camping and caravan sites as well as other holiday related development such as ‘Glamping’.</p> <p>Land falling out of positive management and dereliction of farm buildings.</p> <p>Loss of traditional pasture and heathland.</p> <p>A Nitrate Vulnerable Zone designated across most of the area.</p> <p>Deterioration of by ways and lanes due to erosion of un-surfaced routes by horses, bikes and 4 wheel drives.</p> <p>Damage to verges on narrow country lanes caused by increasing size of farm vehicles and passing traffic.</p>	<p><b>Countryside and Farmland</b> Encourage establishment of more farm conservation schemes to conserve the landscape structure of hedges, shaws and woodland.</p> <p>Conserve hedges, trees and small woods. Maintain the mixed farmed character of the area.</p> <p>Protect and manage historic field patterns and conserve boundary features.</p> <p>Conserve and enhance byways and rural lanes.</p> <p>Use tree and woodland planting to screen intrusive farm buildings and caravan sites.</p> <p>Enhance the biodiversity value of pasture and arable field edges.</p> <p>Plan for and manage changes which may occur in the landscape due to changes in farm management brought about by economic influences and climate change.</p> <p>Reduce the risk and incidence of soil erosion by encouraging the restoration of arable land to pasture.</p> <p>Apply best land management practices to prevent soil and fertiliser run off, thereby protecting surface and ground water.</p>	<p><b>Provisioning services</b> Water availability Food production</p> <p><b>Regulating services</b> (water purification, air quality maintenance and climate regulation) Water quality and protected aquifers. Regulating water flow and preventing flooding Soil conservation and erosion control Habitat and species resilience to climate change Carbon sequestration. Areas of peat in the stream valleys, hedges, trees and grassland regulate air quality by absorbing and retaining CO<sub>2</sub>.</p> <p><b>Cultural Services</b> Sense of Place and local distinctiveness. Source of Inspiration Sense of History Tranquillity Biodiversity</p>

# High Wealden Coast

Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p>Overstocking and arable production on some soils can result in soil erosion and reduce soil quality.</p> <p>Loss of farmed land due to continuing coastal erosion.</p>	<p>Reduce the risk and incidence of soil erosion by encouraging the restoration of arable land to pasture.</p> <p>Apply best land management practices to prevent soil and fertiliser run off, thereby protecting surface and ground water.</p>	
<p><b>Trees and Woodland</b></p> <p>Woods and tree belts are not in positive management.</p> <p>Traditional management has stopped as it is not commercially viable e.g. coppicing of sweet chestnut in oak woodlands.</p> <p>Tree diseases</p> <p>Invasive species competing with native flora and fauna e.g. Spanish Bluebell, Rhododendron, Japanese knotweed.</p> <p>Extensive areas of woodland are already in woodland grant schemes.</p> <p>Pressure for inappropriate recreational use in woodland such as ‘glamping’ and trials bikes.</p>	<p><b>Trees and Woodland</b></p> <p>Actively manage trees and woodland through coppicing of sweet chestnut and replanting to create a diverse age structure.</p> <p>Plant new small woods and tree belts to screen urban edges and caravan sites and where this is appropriate habitat creation.</p> <p>Consider the need to adapt to changes enforced by climate change, such as specific tree diseases and possible adaptation in species selection.</p> <p>Plant trees and woodland to contain existing and new built development.</p>	<p><b>Provisioning</b></p> <p>Fuel (woodfuel for local communities from woodland management)</p> <p><b>Regulating</b></p> <p>Carbon sequestration, woodland absorbs and holds CO<sub>2</sub>.</p> <p>Habitat and species resilience to climate change</p> <p><b>Cultural</b></p> <p>Tranquillity</p> <p>Sense of Place and local distinctiveness</p> <p>Cultural heritage (traditional woodland management)</p> <p>Biodiversity</p>

# High Wealden Coast

Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p><b>Other Key Habitats</b> Deterioration and loss of habitats :</p> <p><b>Water and wet meadows</b> Loss of streamside vegetation.</p> <p>Deterioration of water quality in streams, ditches and ponds.</p> <p>Invasive species of plants and animals which compete with native flora and fauna.</p> <p>A Nitrate Vulnerable Zone designated across most of the area.</p> <p><b>Meadows</b> Financial and viable farming constraints affecting the continued management of meadows reducing the biodiversity value.</p> <p>Improvements to Grassland and meadows reducing species richness.</p> <p>Loss of meadows to arable farming.</p> <p><b>Glens and ghylls</b> The unique and fragile habitats in these areas are particularly vulnerable to climate change and accelerated coastal/cliff erosion.</p> <p>Recreational access can exacerbate erosion and habitat damage.</p>	<p><b>Other key Habitats</b> Encourage management of river and stream channels.</p> <p>Conservation and re-creation of meadow/pasture habitats.</p> <p>Agri-environment schemes to maximise biodiversity and encourage the retention of grazing.</p> <p>Encourage measures to improve water quality.</p> <p>Continue schemes to encourage farmers to minimise the use of chemicals and fertilizers.</p> <p>Monitoring and management of these habitats to facilitate adaptation to coastal change through managed retreat.</p> <p>Continued education and management of public access to protect sensitive areas and habitats.</p>	<p><b>Provisioning</b> Nature's larder of free berries and herbs.</p> <p>Conservation of insect pollinators for pollination of crops.</p> <p><b>Regulating</b> Habitat and species resilience to climate change.</p> <p>Water quality and protected aquifers.</p> <p><b>Cultural</b> Appreciation of nature</p> <p>Educational value</p> <p>Biodiversity</p>

# High Wealden Coast

Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p><b>Recreation, Green Infrastructure (GI) and ANGS (glossary)</b></p> <p>Pressure on bridleways and byways as multi use, including cycling and 4 wheel drives increasing erosion.</p> <p>Pressure on sensitive ghyll woodland habitats.</p> <p>Lack of funding to manage and enhance GI for improved access.</p> <p>Need for better recreational linkages and improved sustainable transport corridors.</p> <p>Extensive footpath network including the Country Park and Coastal Access route.</p> <p>Need for improved access to natural green space for all users both close to homes and in the wider countryside.</p> <p>Existing access to extensive areas of woodland, notably Mallydams.</p> <p>Gentrification</p> <p>Loss of tranquillity due to more cars and access.</p>	<p><b>Recreation, Green Infrastructure and ANGS</b></p> <p>Where appropriate develop Green Infrastructure Strategies based on the county wide GI mapping.</p> <p>Plan for and manage recreational pressure on the countryside which could be affected by the increase in population in surrounding town of Hastings as well as the seasonal holiday makers.</p> <p>Maximise opportunities for access away from sensitive habitats.</p> <p>Maximise opportunities provided by the coast for access and recreation.</p> <p>Consider opportunities to create new green corridors and improve existing as safe ideally motorised traffic free recreational routes.</p> <p>Consider the opportunities and constraints for recreational use of the beaches due to cliff erosion and poor access.</p>	<p><b>Provisioning</b></p> <p>Protected farmland</p> <p><b>Regulating</b></p> <p>Habitat and species resilience to climate change</p> <p>Water quality and protected aquifers.</p> <p>Regulating water flow and preventing flooding</p> <p>Carbon sequestration</p> <p><b>Cultural</b></p> <p>Recreation</p> <p>Heritage assets and cultural heritage</p> <p>Inspirational</p> <p>Tranquility</p> <p>Biodiversity</p>

# High Wealden Coast

Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p><b>Horse Keeping ('horsiculture') and small holdings</b> This tends to be an issue around the villages and urban fringe.</p> <p>Deterioration of the character and quality of the landscape and loss of local distinctiveness.</p> <p>Can detract from historic field pattern where fences replace hedges.</p> <p>Can cause soil erosion.</p>	<p><b>Horse Keeping ('horsiculture') and small holdings</b> Enhance the condition of areas of horsiculture and small holdings through the restoration of an intact, well managed hedgerow or ditch network and retaining a diverse grass sward by preventing overgrazing.</p> <p>Encourage local food production and allotment provision in areas where this will not detract from local landscape character.</p>	<p><b>Provisioning</b> Grazing Food production</p> <p><b>Regulating</b> Habitat and species resilience to climate change</p> <p><b>Cultural</b> Recreation Heritage assets Sense of Place and local distinctiveness Biodiversity</p>
<p><b>The character of the villages</b></p> <p>Gentrification</p> <p>Urbanisation</p> <p>Development pressures</p> <p>Gradual loss and deterioration of Heritage features.</p> <p>Fast traffic on rural lanes</p> <p>Visitor pressure and cars detracting from local character and distinctiveness of the area in general.</p>	<p><b>Protect and Enhance the character of the villages</b> Encourage the production of Neighbourhood Plans which incorporate village design guides.</p> <p>Plan for new development in the villages to ensure it is designed to a high standard to reflect local character and sense of place.</p> <p>Establish defined development edges to villages with new tree planting.</p> <p>Prepare village design guides and tree conservation plans.</p> <p>Consider traffic management on rural lanes.</p>	<p><b>Provisioning</b> Local amenities and facilities.</p> <p><b>Regulating</b> Use of sustainable materials Habitat and species resilience to climate change Water quality and protected aquifers. Regulating water flow and preventing flooding</p> <p><b>Cultural</b> Sense of Place and local distinctiveness Heritage assets Biodiversity</p>

# High Wealden Coast

Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p><b>Flood management and SUDS schemes?</b> Flash floods and run off.</p> <p>Flooding of properties in low lying areas by river and ground water.</p>	<p><b>Flood management and SUDS schemes?</b> Plan for flood management by conserving and enhancing the flood plains and managing water levels in ditches and drains.</p> <p>Encourage the design of sensitive flood defence schemes which conserve and enhance the landscape and habitats</p> <p>Conserve and enhance existing man made and natural drainage features.</p> <p>Maximise opportunities for the creation of SUDs schemes which contribute to local amenity and habitat creation.</p>	<p><b>Provisioning</b> Water conservation</p> <p><b>Regulating</b> Flood control</p> <p>Protection of aquifers</p> <p><b>Cultural</b> Heritage assets</p> <p>Sense of Place and local distinctiveness</p> <p>Tranquillity</p> <p>Amenity and recreation</p> <p>Biodiversity</p>

# High Wealden Coast

## Glossary

(also refer to the full version in the County Landscape Assessment).

**ANGS:** Accessible Natural Green Space **Natural England – Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt)**

**Assart:** Field created from the clearance of woodland

**Enclosure:** The separation of land from the common by fence or private use.

**GI or Green Infrastructure:** Multifunctional green areas which provide areas for recreation, wildlife, water supply catchment, flood relief, food or timber production.

**Glamping:** New types of camp sites with permanent tent features in yurts, teepees, vintage caravans, timber pods etc. Woodlands are popular locations for these.

**Local Nature Reserve:** Local Nature Reserve (or LNR) is a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, and amended by Schedule 11 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, by principal local authorities.

**Ramsar** sites are wetlands of international importance for biodiversity designated under the Ramsar Convention.

**SNCI or Local Site:** a Site of Nature Conservation Importance.

**SSSI:** A national designation for Site of Special Scientific Interest, these may be of biodiversity or geological significance or both.