

The Landscape Assessment of Kent

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Front cover photograph courtesy of Jason Mitchell

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kentish landscape has evolved over many hundreds of years. It has been created by the interaction of the natural environment and human activities, in particular the combination of physical, biological and cultural influences. Physical influences such as geology and landform, together with the overlying pattern of settlement and land use are key determinants of landscape character.

The Landscape Assessment of Kent is a landscape character based study that draws together existing landscape character assessments of the county and updates them to conform to the current guidance. Additional work on the condition and sensitivity of the Kent landscape has been used to formulate character-based strategies to ensure the continued distinctiveness of the Kent landscape. It is intended that the Landscape Assessment of Kent will be used in a variety of forward planning strategies, in land management schemes and in planning control.

The objective is to ensure that decisions on the rural landscape are underpinned by a robust and widely accepted assessment of the landscape character. The challenge is to find ways of identifying the important characteristics of the landscape that assist the process of accommodating change, where this is both desirable and practicable, whilst maintaining the links with the past and the natural environment. There is a need to retain pattern and diversity in the landscape to ensure that character and local distinctiveness are maintained. This is not necessarily about keeping the landscape as it is but is more about preventing everywhere becoming the same. In addition we need to ensure that landscapes are visually satisfying and give enjoyment to those who visit them and those who live and work in them.

In recent years landscape characterisation has increased in importance as a tool for countryside planning policy. National policy guidance within Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7) promotes the character approach in order to offer more tailored guidance for the whole of the countryside, including less popular and damaged landscapes.

The Kent and Medway Structure Plan provides the strategic planning framework, guiding decisions on development, transport and environmental matters over the next 20 years. Guidelines as a supplement to policies on landscape character within the Structure Plan have been developed in Supplementary Planning Guidance for Landscape Character.

The Landscape Assessment of Kent has been written up as two page reports for each character area providing a description of the landscape and a landscape 'vision' or 'strategy' that directly reflects the condition and sensitivity of the area.

It offers a broad-brush, strategic approach and is written with the intention that detailed local studies should be undertaken to assess site specific proposals. Local landscape assessments undertaken at a district scale or for specific sites and areas can focus on a greater level of detail and therefore give more targeted information. Other guidance on landscape character is available in Village and Parish Design Statements and, within Areas of Outstanding Beauty (AONB), in AONB Design Guides.

What information would you like to access?

1.0 An introduction to the Landscape Assessment of Kent

2.0 Kent Character Area Map

To view the location of each character area in Kent go to the map. Click on the name of the character area for a link to the report card containing the landscape description.

3.0 Kent Character Area Reports

To view the description of the character area and a summary of the actions, click on the report card you would like to view in this list.

4.0 District Map

To view a map of Kent Character Areas in relation to District boundaries, click here.

5.0 Natural Area Map

To view a map of Kent Character Areas in relation to Natural Areas, click here.

6.0 How we produced the Landscape Assessment of Kent

For more information on the methodologies used to complete the Landscape Assessment of Kent, click here.

7.0 Glossary of Terms

8.0 List of Abbreviations

9.0 Other useful published information

10.0 Where to go for further information

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Kentish landscape has evolved over many hundreds of years. It has been created by the interaction of the natural environment and human activities, in particular the combination of physical, biological and cultural influences. Physical influences such as geology and landform, together with the overlying pattern of settlement and land use are key determinants of landscape character.

The Landscape Assessment of Kent is a landscape character based study that draws together existing landscape character assessments of the county. It also updates these to conform to the current guidance using judgments based on condition and sensitivity to promote a vision for each area.

The objective is to ensure that decisions on the rural landscape are underpinned by a robust and widely accepted assessment of the landscape character. The challenge is to find ways of identifying the important characteristics of the landscape that assist the process of accommodating change, where this is both desirable and practicable, whilst maintaining the links with the past and the natural environment. There is a need to retain pattern and diversity in the landscape to ensure that character and local distinctiveness are maintained. This is not necessarily about keeping the landscape as it is but is more about preventing everywhere becoming the same. In addition we need to ensure that landscapes are visually satisfying and give enjoyment to those who visit them and those who live and work in them.

Many of the judgments regarding landscapes are subjective, which means that they are open to equally valid but different individual interpretations. The process of landscape assessment has to resolve this matter and has evolved so that current practice is now based on a logical and well thought out procedure. This procedure breaks down the analysis into the component parts that collectively make up the landscape as we know it. It is a logical process that enables decisions to be revisited over time as well as enabling different assessors to understand and contribute to the decisions reached.

In recent years landscape characterisation has increased in importance as a tool for countryside planning policy. National policy guidance within Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7) promotes the character approach in order to offer more tailored guidance for the whole of the countryside, including less popular and damaged landscapes.

1.1 DEVELOPING THE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT OF KENT

1.1.1 Landscape Character

Local character areas have previously been identified across the county. These are described in the following reports that are collectively referred to as the Landscape Assessment of Kent.

- The High Weald (1994)
- The Kent Downs (1995)
- Thames Gateway, Eastern Swale Marshes and Eastern Fruit Belt (1995)
- The Low Weald Landscape Assessment & Guidelines (1997)
- The Greensand Belt Landscape Assessment & Guidelines (1998)

- North West Kent Landscape Assessment & Guidelines (1998)
- North East Kent Landscape Assessment & Guidelines (1998)
- Romney Marsh Landscape Assessment & Guidelines (1998)

These studies were undertaken over a number of years whilst landscape assessment methodologies were developing and therefore there is a need to bring them together on the same basis and update them to conform to the current landscape assessment guidance. The character area boundaries were revisited and minor amendments have been made to the boundaries to align them with features on the ground. These minor revisions, along with the condition and sensitivity study described below, were subject to a consultation with district councils in September 2000.

This document repeats the landscape character descriptions in the above documents so that the whole county can be viewed in a consistent format in one report. Some minor editing has been undertaken to obtain consistency throughout the document and to update development proposals, such as the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, that were referred to as proposed or under construction in the original texts and are now built.

1.1.2 Landscape Condition and Sensitivity

The condition and sensitivity study of the Kent landscape aims to formulate character-based strategies to ensure the continued distinctiveness of the Kent landscape. It is written with the intention of the specific landscape aims being used in a variety of forward planning strategies, in land management schemes and in planning control.

Field Evaluation Sheets have been used to analyse the component factors of the landscape to reach a series of decisions on the:

- visual unity
- ecological integrity
- condition of heritage features
- cultural integrity
- contribution of built form
- time-depth and distinctiveness of features
- visibility

This information has been written up as a summary of issues for all character areas and includes a landscape 'vision' or 'strategy' that directly reflects the condition and sensitivity of the area. These reports are supplementary to existing landscape character descriptions.

The conclusions reached for each of the character areas are expressed using a matrix that encompasses Condition and Sensitivity, generating a broad indication of what the strategy for the area might be. The detail of the draft strategies has been formulated by cross-referencing

- existing character information
- the findings of the field evaluation sheets (i.e. - what exactly is in poor condition or is highly sensitive?, what can be enhanced or created or conserved to ensure a distinctive landscape?)
- existing biodiversity targets
- strategies of adjacent areas

- historic landscape character information

This systematic process of evaluation not only clarifies how judgements have been made, it also allows re-interrogation of the decisions as they are being made, and subsequent updating if the landscape changes. Guidelines are offered which are locally appropriate to the character area and respond to the generic strategies that have been identified. Many of these strategies are not likely to be within the remit of the Local Authority to implement directly as they are not responsible for managing the land in most cases. Such references have been included with a view to influencing opinions, generating support and guiding policy.

1.1.3 Other Initiatives/datasets/studies

A number of other County Council projects and initiatives have informed this project:

- Kent Historic Landscape Characterisation Study
- Kent Habitat Capability Study
- Kent Habitat Survey 2003
- Kent Lifescapes Information System

Since completion of the Landscape Assessment of Kent, Kent County Council has subscribed to the Living Landscapes Project. The aim of this project is to identify homogenous landscape description units (LDUs) based on national datasets for natural and cultural attributes. These LDUs provide a further layer of landscape data that is complementary to the landscape character areas. In many instances a character area will be an amalgam of a number of LDUs, on others the LDUs will be divided into a number of character areas. This reflects changes in local cultural and visual attributes that would not be reflected in national datasets. These LDUs are being used to identify biodiversity opportunities.

In the next few years the Kent & Medway Structure Plan will provide the strategic planning framework, guiding decisions on development, transport and environmental matters across Kent and Medway. Once adopted it is anticipated Plan policies will promote the use of character assessment. Supplementary Planning Guidance will provide recommended guidelines to support the use of the landscape character policies.

1.1.4 Relationship to District Level Assessment

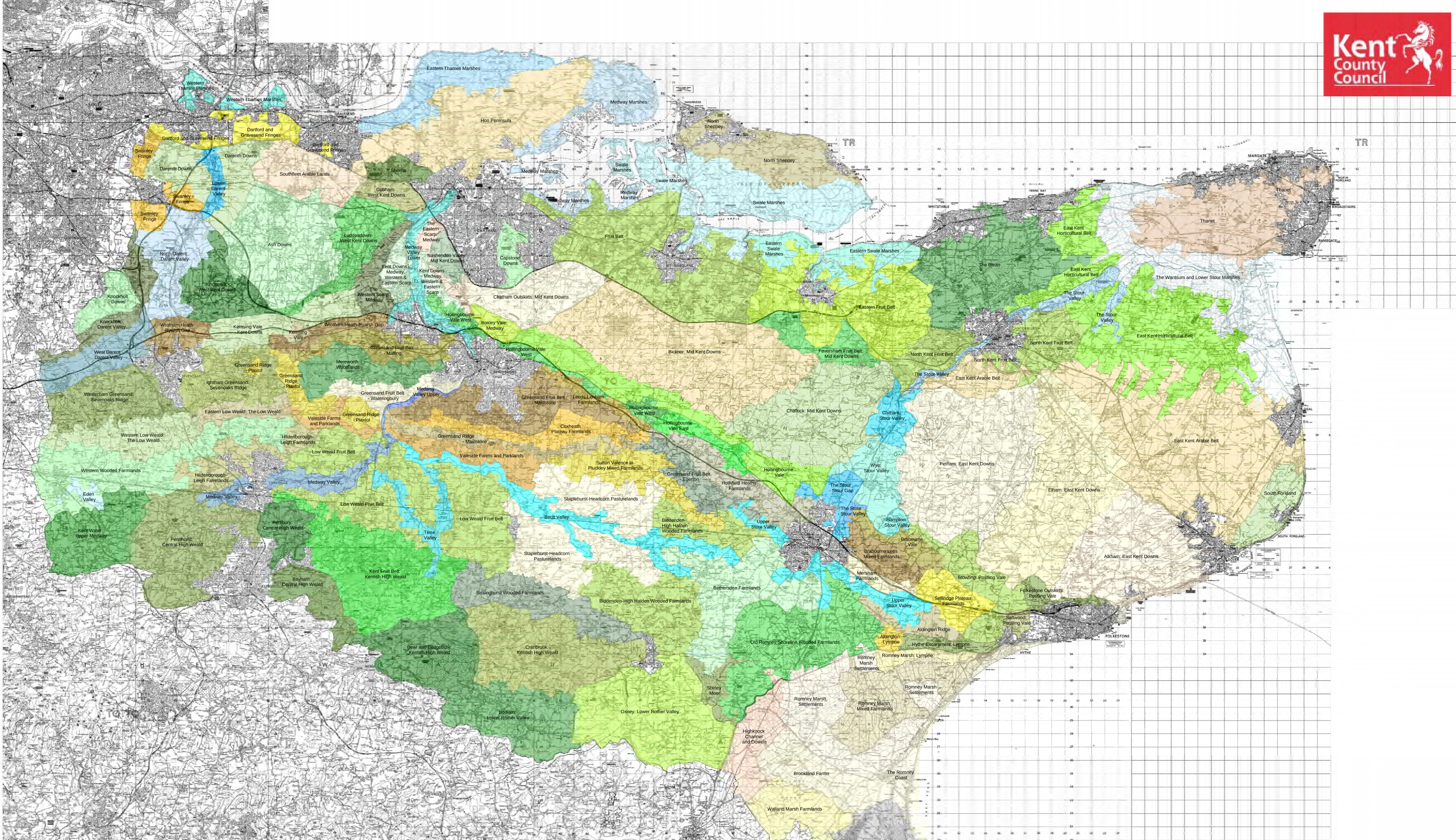
It should be noted the countywide studies offer a broad-brush, strategic approach and are written with the intention that detailed local studies should be undertaken to assess site specific proposals.

This broad-brush approach means that judgements made on individual areas will not necessarily focus on detail. For example, a character area may have pockets that are in better or worse condition, or higher or lower sensitivity. Judgements are therefore a summary of the overall picture.

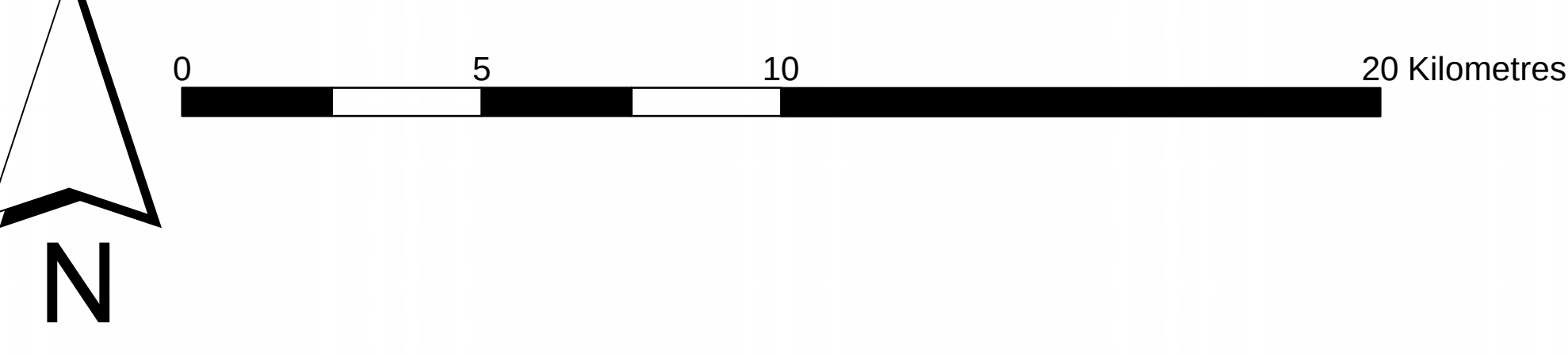
Local landscape assessments undertaken at a district scale or for specific sites and areas can focus on a greater level of detail and therefore give more targeted information. Other

guidance on landscape character is available in Village and Parish Design Statements and, within Areas of Outstanding Beauty (AONB), in AONB Design Guides.

Generally, for development proposals, the most detailed / local landscape assessment should be referred to in the first instance. For example for a site specific proposal a district/unitary level assessment should be used, if this is not available then the countywide study will offer guidance. Conversely, when developing land based strategies at a regional scale a top down approach may be more appropriate.

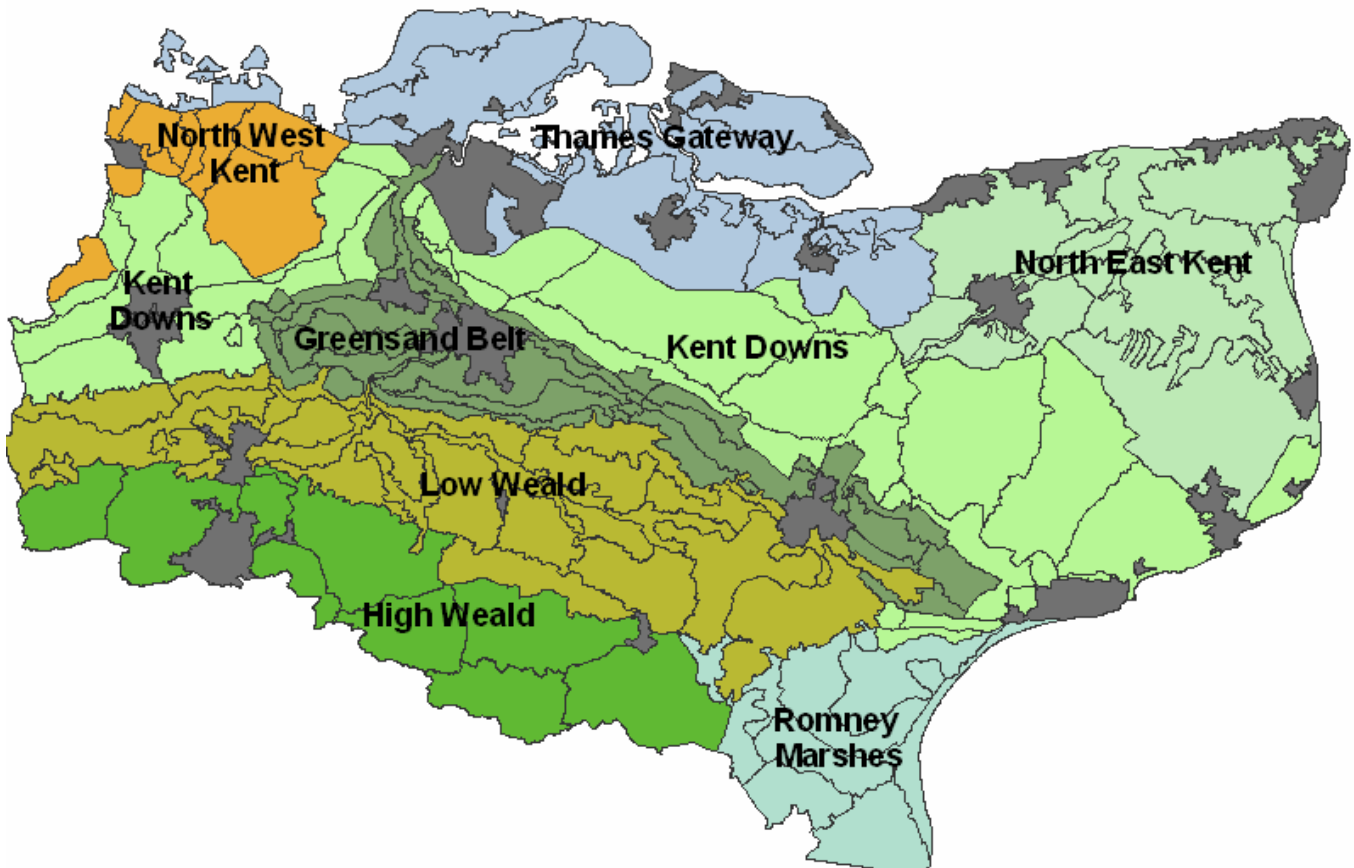


Kent Character Area Map



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3.0 KENT CHARACTER AREA REPORTS



Click on the map for a list of the Kent character area reports in this area

A full list of the Kent Character Areas is provided below. Click on the character area name to go straight to the report for that area. Each report is presented as two pages. The first page describes the character of the area. The second page summarises the condition and sensitivity of the area and offers guidance on what actions would be appropriate to protect and enhance the landscape character.

Click on the location map on the first page of the report to access the full Kent Character Area Map. Alternatively the reports can be accessed by going to the Kent Character Area Map and clicking on the appropriate area.

3.0 KENT CHARACTER AREA REPORTS

North West Kent

- Ash Downs
- Darenth Downs
- Knockholt Downs
- Lower Darent Valley
- Southfleet Arable Lands
- Swanley Fringe

Thames Gateway

- Capstone Downs
- Dartford and Gravesend Fringes
- Eastern Thames Marshes
- Fruit Belt
- Hoo Peninsula
- Medway Marshes
- North Sheppey
- Shorne
- Swale Marshes
- Western Thames Marshes
- Eastern Fruit Belt
- Eastern Swale Marshes

North East Kent

- East Kent Arable Belt
- East Kent Horticultural Belt
- North Kent Fruit Belt
- Thanet
- The Blean
- The Stour Valley
- The Wantsum and Lower Stour Marshes

Kent Downs AONB

- Aldington: Lympne
- Alkham: East Kent Downs
- Bicknor: Mid Kent Downs
- Boxley Vale: Medway
- Challock: Mid Kent Downs
- Chatham Outskirts: Mid Kent Downs
- Chilham: Stour Valley
- Cobham: West Kent Downs
- Eastern Low Weald: The Low Weald
- Elham: East Kent Downs
- Faversham Fruit Belt: Mid Kent Downs
- Folkestone Outskirts: Postling Vale
- Hampton: Stour Valley
- Hollingbourne Vale
- Hythe Escarpment: Lympne
- Ightham Greensand: Sevenoaks Ridge
- Kemsing Vale - Kent Downs AONB
- Kingsdown: West Kent Downs
- Knockholt: Darent Valley
- Luddesdown: West Kent Downs
- Nashenden Valley: Mid Kent Downs
- North Darent: Darent Valley
- Petham: East Kent Downs
- Romney Marsh: Lympne
- Saltwood: Postling Vale
- South Foreland
- Stowting: Postling Vale
- The Eastern Scarp: Medway
- The Western Scarp: Medway
- West Darent: Darent Valley
- Westerham Greensand: Sevenoaks Ridge
- Western Low Weald: The Low Weald
- Wye: Stour Valley

3.0 KENT CHARACTER AREA REPORTS

Greensand Belt

- Aldington Ridge
- Brabourne Lees Mixed Farmland
- Brabourne Vale
- Coxheath Plateau Farmlands
- Greensand Fruit Belt - Egerton
- Greensand Fruit Belt - Maidstone
- Greensand Fruit Belt - Malling
- Greensand Fruit Belt - Watlingbury
- Greensand Ridge - Maidstone
- Greensand Ridge - Plaxtol
- Hollingbourne Vale East
- Hollingbourne Vale West
- Hothfield Heathy Farmlands
- Kemsing Vale
- Kent Downs: Medway, Western & Eastern Scarp
- Leeds-Lenham Farmland
- Medway Valley Upper
- Medway Valley Lower
- Mereworth Woodlands
- Mersham Farmlands
- Sellindge Plateau Farmlands
- The Stour - Stour Gap
- The Stour - Stour Valley
- Wrotham Heath-Ryarsh Gap

Low Weald

- Bethersden Farmlands
- Beult Valley
- Biddenden-High Halden Wooded Farmlands
- Eden Valley
- Hildenborough-Leigh Farmlands
- Low Weald Fruit Belt

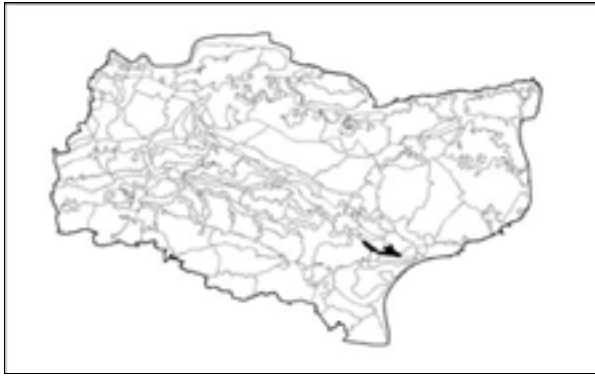
- Medway Valley
- Old Romney Shoreline Wooded Farmlands
- Sissinghurst Wooded Farmlands
- Staplehurst-Headcorn Pasturelands
- Sutton Valence to Pluckley Mixed Farmlands
- Teise Valley
- Upper Stour Valley
- Valeside Farms and Parkland
- Western Wooded Farmlands

High Weald AONB

- Bayham: Central High Weald
- Bewl and Bedgebury: Kentish High Weald
- Bodiam: Lower Rother Valley
- Cranbrook: Kentish High Weald
- Kent Fruit Belt: Kentish High Weald
- Kent Water: Upper Medway
- Oxney: Lower Rother Valley
- Pembury: Central High Weald
- Penshurst: Central High Weald

Romney Marsh

- Brookland Farms
- Dungeness Shingle
- Highknock Channel And Dowels
- Romney Marsh Mixed Farmlands
- Romney Marsh Settlements
- Shirley Moor
- The Romney Coast
- Walland Marsh Farmlands



High up on the Hythe Beds the Aldington Ridge stands out above the plain of the Low Weald. The good quality loam soils are generally well-drained and support a mixed land use ranging from large arable fields east of Aldington to the pastures north of the B2067 from Court-at-Street to Upper Otterpool. Along the edge of the ridge south-west of Aldington are distinctive irregular pastures developed on former landslips, that are characteristic of this junction between the Hythe Beds and the Atherfield Clay below.

Although essentially a rural landscape the settlements at Lympe and that north of Port Lympe introduce discordant elements in the landscape, their siting appearing unrelated to topography or other natural features. These developments grew up in association with the wartime airfield, however, sited to take advantage of the elevated position of this hinterland to the historic Old Romney Shoreline. This airfield is now closed, which also explains why the land locally appears disturbed where much of the fabric has been demolished. The village of Aldington too has spread haphazardly down its Roman road giving little sense of structure. It retains dramatic views over the Low Weald, however.

Court-at-Street is an attractive village, however, on the edge of the North Downs AONB. To the south there are fantastic views glimpsed through the often wooded AONB to Romney Marsh below.

Along the B2067 in the vicinity of this village are bushy hazel hedges but locally these have been lost giving a gappy appearance. North of the B2067 the land falls away more gradually to the Sellindge plateau with the North Downs framing the views beyond.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Raised landscape with steep slopes down to neighbouring character areas. Good quality loam soils. Mixed, generally open farmland. Landslips in association with the underlying clays. Dramatic views to the Low Weald, Romney Marsh and the Downs.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The ridgeline landscape is strongly unified with few visual detractors. Built form has a moderate positive impact - large farmsteads and houses are interspersed with 20th century linear development. Ecological interest is weak due to sparse woodland cover and intensive arable use over large areas.

Sensitivity

There is an ancient time depth to the area which is influenced by the isolated ridgeline farms, the ridgeline road, and the occurrence of some remaining pastures and small copses. Historic features such as hedgerow and field boundaries do not contribute greatly to the local distinctiveness. Ragstone farm buildings constitute a unique element in this landscape which adds to the strong continuity. Tree cover is limited and visibility is high within this area.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore the frequency of woodland areas to the lower slopes of the ridgeline.
Restore a smaller scale, but more open landscape by removing field boundary divisions.
Conserve the open settings of the farmsteads.
Conserve the infrequency of built form and conserve open views.
Conserve the open nature of the field system.
Conserve and restore small woodland areas.
Restore ecological interest by the sensitive management and restoration of small pastoral grasslands.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Moderate.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Conserve and restore small woodlands.
Restore open areas of farmland.
Conserve the infrequency and scale of built form.
Restore the ecological interest of pastoral land.

[previous <<](#)



ALDINGTON

In the extreme west of this area, the underlying sandstones gradually give way to the heavy Weald Clay, resulting in softer, more rounded slopes. This change is also reflected in the high proportion of deciduous, ancient woodland, most of which was formerly coppiced, which dominates the scarp at Aldington. The gentle topography of the lower slopes, however, allows some arable cultivation and as a result the wild, bleak appearance of the eastern sections is lost. The loss is reinforced by the elements of suburbanisation associated with the substantial properties which are scattered across the area, overlooking the magnificent views.

LYMPNE

Aldington lies within the larger character area of Lympe.

The most southerly part of the AONB extends from Hythe west to Aldington. The character area includes part of the Hythe escarpment, which overlooks Romney Marsh. Until the early Middle Ages, this scarp formed the edge of a large, marshy lagoon. Gradually, however, the lagoon was reclaimed, through a combination of the natural accumulation of silt and shingle, the construction of sea defences and sustained drainage. The resulting land now forms one of the most fertile areas of Kent, with a particularly long growing season.

Most of the Hythe escarpment is the eroded face of the greensands and in particular of the calcareous Kentish ragstone. Over the centuries the surface has gradually slipped to form a steep, uneven slope, enclosing the northern edge of the marsh. The vulnerability of the coast to attack has left a legacy of old military defences scattered across the area, from the tumbled walls of the Roman fort of Lemanis, to the 19th century Royal Military Canal at the foot of the escarpment and the last of the Second World War 'Sound Mirrors' behind Burmarsh, 'listening' for approaching aircraft.

The scarp is highly visible from the flat marsh, forming a long hillside of rough grassland, dotted with scrub. Several large deciduous woodlands break up the sweep of the landform, being more characteristic in the west around Aldington. Between these woodlands there are spectacular views across Romney Marsh and the English Channel.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rounded slopes
Deciduous woodland dominates the scarp.
Gentle lower slopes with arable cultivation.
Large properties with views over the marsh

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a strongly unified, simple landscape with very few visual detractors, dominated by heavily-wooded ridges. Broadleaf woodland and managed coppice provide widespread semi-natural habitats. The limited number of secreted residential properties overlooking the marsh have a positive impact on the area. This area functions well - it is ecologically robust and has a clear cultural focus. It is considered to be in a very good condition.

Sensitivity

Although on a dominant scarp landscape, views are well enclosed by woodland, therefore the visibility is limited to 'moderate' within the area itself. There are open views over the adjacent marsh from points at the top of the ridge. The sensitivity of the area remains high due to the very strong time depth of the woodland and steep, wooded lanes. Other characteristic elements are more recent, such as the ridgeline residential development.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the limited influence of built development within the area and in views of the scarp
Conserve the wooded, narrow characteristics of highways
Conserve the scale and unity of broadleaf woodland coverage over the area

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity

High.

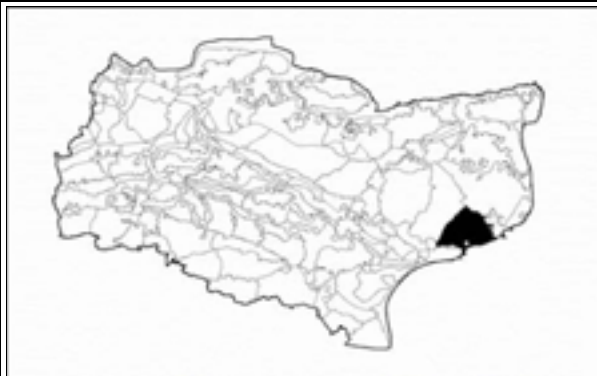
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the scale of woodland coverage
Conserve the limited influence of built development
Conserve the key characteristics of highways

[previous <<](#)



ALKHAM

This area is dominated by the long ridges and isolated valleys, which feed into the Dour Valley. Near the coast, the ridges become increasingly narrower and the valleys closer. There are fewer woodlands here than in the west, and most occur on the steep valley slopes, where cultivation has been uneconomic. Many, therefore, are very old and of high nature conservation value. Few are actively managed. Much of the hedgerow network on the plateau, which was largely a 19th century creation, is being replaced by post and wire fence, so that gradually the former unenclosed landscape is being unintentionally recreated. The decaying hedges, derelict buildings and abandoned farm machinery which also occur in this are further signs of a landscape under economic stress.

The coastal downs of the Dover-Folkestone Heritage Coast form a dramatic landscape of open, cliff-top fields, exposed chalk cliffs and tumbled, scrub-covered rock-falls along the under cliff. The austerity of the cliff-top landscape is emphasised by the scarcity of trees and hedges. Only small pockets of scrub or tattered strips of remnant hedge fleck the smooth sweep of the landform. The beauty of this landscape lies in its simplicity and drama and the sense of "wilderness" which it offers.

EAST KENT DOWNS

Alkham lies within the larger character area of the East Kent Downs.

This is a remote, peaceful area of downland, which ends in the dramatic white cliffs of Dover. Above the southern scarp, the broad back of the chalk hills is furrowed by a series of long, narrow, parallel valleys running north east. In these dry valleys, the valley bottom streams or nailbournes are underground, only flowing at the surface occasionally, during very wet winters.

The western valley systems are branching and intricate. The steep, rounded slopes are crossed by thick shaws or overgrown hedges, often swathed in the white seed-heads of wild clematis. Large arable fields on the ridge-top plateau are visually contained by long strips of deciduous, ancient woodland along the valley sides or ridge-top conifer forests, west of Elham. Towards the coast, however, the landscape becomes more exposed. There is less woodland and the strongly linear pattern of parallel ridges and valleys is more distinct.

The countryside here is criss-crossed by a maze of tiny, sunken, one-track lanes. Houses are widely scattered and many villages, traditionally built of local flint, brick and tile, are still little more than a church, a manor and a pair of farm cottages - an important characteristic of this landscape. However, this area is best known, not for its beautiful dry valleys or remote churches, but for its long association with the defence of the realm The "White Cliffs of Dover" and the widely scattered military remains, such as pill-boxes and gun-emplacements, still exert a strong cultural influence on the landscape.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Long ridges and isolated valleys, formerly an ancient unenclosed landscape. Some woodland of high nature conservation value on steeper valley slopes. Coastal downs, open hill-top fields, wild with pockets of scrub.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The open, mainly pastoral landscape has a coherent pattern of elements but has some visual detractors in the form of recent ridge-top settlements and the motorway corridor. Woodland cover is intermittent, but there are some patches with high nature conservation interest. Open pasture is interrupted by post and wire fencing.

The condition of this area is affected by the negative impact of 20th century farmsteads, residential areas and the linear development of villages along access roads. However, the extant open hill-top fields and pockets of scrub and naturalistic vegetation restore an element of functional integrity to the area.

Sensitivity

Indistinct remnant historic field boundaries overlie the ancient characteristics of the open, pastoral landscape. This area has intermittent tree cover and scrub which often limits views. Woodland cover in general, and much of the built form, is not of distinctive character, but the inherent pattern of open, coastal downs and isolated valleys contribute to a moderate sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the distinctive qualities of small woodlands and open, pastoral hilltops, creating and conserving grasslands to enhance the ecological integrity of the area. Conserve the isolation of undeveloped valleys and the isolated farmsteads within. Create a new pattern for development of existing settlements along existing access routes in the lower valleys. Create a design code for farmsteads to distinguish form and function of local farm development.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

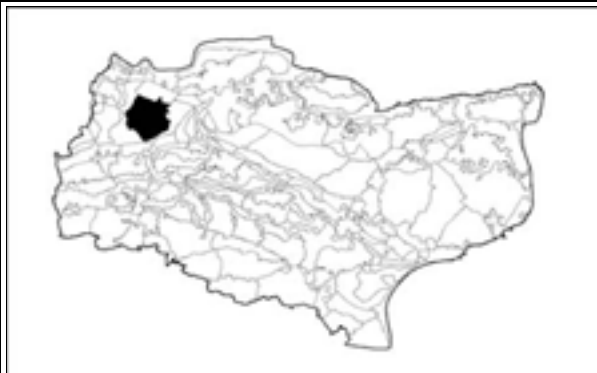
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND CREATE.

Conserve unimproved grasslands and pastures
Conserve and create open grassland areas
Conserve existing woodlands
Create woodland on steeper valley slopes
Create design code for farmsteads

[previous <<](#)



A mix of deep, dry valleys with wooded ridges and broad plateau tops, containing a mix of small villages and larger 20th century settlement, this landscape extends broadly from the A20 to the A227 in the east, and north past Horton Wood to the London to Chatham railway line, incorporating the settlements of Meopham and Longfield.

The land use is a mix of grassland with extensive arable farmland, notably on the plateau tops where larger machinery can be used and the hedgerows have been removed. Along the winding lane network the bushy hedgerows are largely intact which, with the remaining woodlands, helps retain the sense of this being an enclosed Downland landscape.

The fragmented pattern of small woodlands includes Horton Wood near Fawkham Green, an ancient woodland developed on the Clay-with-flints above the dry valley floor. Hartley Wood is also an ancient mixed broadleaf woodland, formally managed as coppice with standards and with old woodbanks.

Amongst this pattern of undulating landform and enclosing trees and hedgerows are contained many scattered farmsteads, villages and larger, more recent settlements such as New Ash Green and Hartley. Further away from the main roads such as the A20, in narrow wooded lanes, such as Scratcher's Lane, the effects of the concentration of this settlement can be seen in the erosion of the lane edges and the presence of scattered litter in the woodlands.

At New Ash Green, although the settlement is well-screened by the remaining woodland, the intensity of traffic has led to carriageway problems and pedestrian erosion of woodland edges. The village centre itself is developing a muddled appearance with some of the distinctive exposed aggregate surfacing replaced with bland concrete pavers. The village green too is disjointed by unsympathetic choices of brick.

Between New Ash Green and Longfield the mix of housing styles and eroded hedgerows, fences and lanes gives a more chaotic element to the landscape. From New Ash Green to Hartley and Longfield the lanes have become more degraded, being used for short-cuts. Occasional unsightly uses, such as car-breakers, are frequent but incongruous elements in the landscape.

In contrast to these 20th century settlements, the remaining historic villages are dispersed on the flat dip slope of the Downs, cut by its dry valleys. Fairseat is an attractive flint, brick and clapboard village. Stansted too, which is further down the same dry valley, is in a dramatic wooded setting enclosed by the steeply sloping valley sides.

Frequently, the winding lanes are closely wooded or enclosed with high bushy hedgerows containing Old Man's Beard, and a profusion of holly and hazel, hawthorn and field maple.

Further east, Meopham Green clusters around an historic core, a pre-Domesday settlement, birth-place of an Archbishop of Canterbury and the famous John Tradescant, traveller and collector, notably of plants overseas. The land use is a mix of grazing and arable fields, which after cultivation exposes the flinty soils. The fields are framed with attractive shaws and hangers of beech on the low ridge tops. As the land rises towards the scarp, nearer to the A20, the landscape flattens and opens out and there are occasional tremendous views north to the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

A pleasant mix of deep, dry pastoral valleys enclosed by wooded ridges and species rich hedgerows, with broad plateau tops beyond.
Small valley-bottom villages and large 20th century settlements on plateau.
A winding network of narrow, historic lanes often eroded by traffic

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The pattern of landscape elements is coherent and in most cases reflects the underlying landform. Some visual detractors such as commercial buildings and unsympathetic land uses intrude into some of the views. The high ecological value of the area in general, supported by the wooded network on ridges and shaws, is reduced by the intensity of arable cultivations on the plateau. The condition of heritage features such as field boundaries and vernacular buildings is good, however, much recent isolated development using unsympathetic materials has a negative impact. Overall, the area is considered to be in good condition.

Sensitivity

The characteristic features of this landscape are strongly represented and portray both an historic and ancient time-depth. Recent development of urban areas has a localised effect; the area retains local distinctiveness and a strong sense of continuity. The existing highways and the evidence of vernacular materials (such as flint) in historic buildings, in particular, enhance the sense of place. Visibility is moderate due to the intermittent tree cover. The area is considered to be of high sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the small scale of the agricultural use of the valley slopes, retaining hedged enclosure and applying long-term management plans for this purpose.
Conserve the wooded edge to the arable plateau which encloses the landscape and contains the wider views.
Conserve and enhance the use of vernacular materials and the scale of historic built form.
Resist the intrusion of large-scale buildings or groups of buildings into the view.
Conserve the settlement pattern with isolated, small villages on valley bottoms and hamlets on the plateau.
Conserve the dominance of the broadleaf woodland in the landscape.

CONTEXT

Regional: North West Kent

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity High.

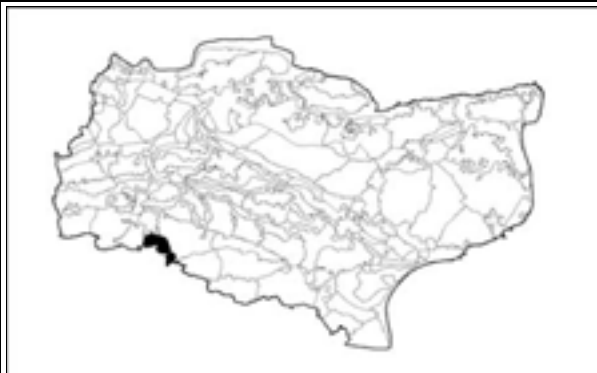
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve broadleaf woodland cover
Conserve small scale field pattern on valley sides
Conserve wooded edges to arable plateau
Conserve the impact of vernacular materials and the historic scale of built form
Conserve the enclosure of settlements within wooded areas
Conserve original highway characteristics

[previous <<](#)



BAYHAM

The traditional pattern of Wealden land use is still to be found in this area. On the shallower slopes, sheep graze the pastures, whilst the steeper hill-sides are clothed by large areas of deciduous woodland. In these woods, when the winter trees are bare, the whine of chainsaws and the acrid smell of wood smoke give away the presence of small gangs of coppice-workers cutting out the young poles to be used for fencing or firewood. The short cycle of cutting and regrowth, taking place in the sweet chestnut stands perhaps every 15 - 20 years, changes the appearance of this area from year to year, so that the open glade of one spring becomes the dense thicket of the next. Constant throughout the seasons, however, are the tall oaks and Scots Pines, which remain unharvested between the coppice-stools. Below the woodlands, in the Teise valley, lies Bayham Park, originally designed by Humphrey Repton. Within this landscape, the ruined walls of Bayham Abbey rear up from the flat valley bottom like an ancient skeleton washed clean by the nearby river.

Most of the farms here have oast-houses, a reminder of the wide-spread hop-gardens in the 19th century, none of which now remain. Today, ease of access to Tunbridge Wells has seen most of these farms and oast-houses climb the social ladder under the influence of non-agricultural wealth and the release from the necessity of farming.

Throughout this area, tiny roads squeeze between small fields and thick hedges, and secretive green lanes entice the passer-by onto a maze of sunken footpaths and almost forgotten tracks.

CENTRAL HIGH WEALD

Bayham lies within the larger character area of the Central High Weald.

The Central High Weald surrounds Tunbridge Wells, which exerts a strong influence on the neighbouring countryside. It extends south to Crowborough, west to Chiddingstone and east to Pembury and Bayham.

This is the landscape of the great estates, such as Penshurst Place, where dignified expanses of parkland impart a genteel appearance to the countryside. Much of this landscape can be seen from the Mark Cross to Tunbridge Wells ridge, from where the overall impression is of large commercial woodlands and unintensive pastures, interspersed with sweeps of parkland and occasional orchards. Along the northern reaches of the Medway valley beyond Penshurst, the woodlands are replaced by wide arable fields, whilst the steep valleys around Speldhurst and Bidborough are a patchwork of tiny meadows and strips of ghyll woodland.

Despite the peaceful, timeless quality of this landscape, this was an industrial district in the later Middle Ages, with major iron-workings at Eridge Park and Bayham and, in the 19th century, paper mills at Chafford. Many of the houses, especially those belonging to the large estates, are built of local sandstone, whilst the farms which nestle into the valley slopes off the ridge are frequently of warm red brick and tile, sometimes partially timber-framed. Many of these farmsteads are actually a group of several buildings, including barns and cottages, where several farm workers' families would have lived. In the 18th and 19th centuries, when hops became widely used in beer, almost every farm in this area had a hop garden. Nowadays they have almost all gone, but the red-tiled, white-cowled oast-houses still haunt the farmyards and in springtime, wavering, green arms of naturalised hops still reach up from the hedges, as if searching for the long-lost hop-poles.

Tunbridge Wells, founded in 1606 around one of the local iron-rich springs, has gradually influenced the character of this part of the High Weald. As wealth and employment have been created, so the pressure on this landscape has increased. Developers are eager to build on the surrounding fields, commuters use the tiny lanes to avoid the busy main roads and the local population find recreation and escape amongst the gentle slopes of this area.

Tunbridge Wells lies on a ridge. Around the edges of this ridge, especially at Speldhurst and Bayham, steep ghylls descend into the more open, rolling valleys of the River Medway and River Teise. In the north beyond Penshurst, the landscape flattens out towards the valley of the River Eden.

[next >>](#)

BAYHAM: CENTRAL HIGH WEALD

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rolling hills and ridges. Large areas of deciduous woodland on hillsides. Chestnut coppice with pine and oak standards. Farmsteads, oasts, narrow small roads, fields, thick hedgerows.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

Landscape features are intact and clearly reflect the landform in this landscape. There are very few significant visual detractors amongst the rolling hills and ridges. The large areas of deciduous woodland, which include standard trees, are linked to tall hedgerows and wooded ghylls, and therefore provide a very strong ecological network. Farmed areas are generally non-intensive and pastoral, and therefore contribute to the ecological strength of the area. The condition of heritage features is very good, woodland and thick hedgerow are widespread, although slightly vulnerable to over-maturity. Overall, the landscape is in very good condition.

Sensitivity

The ridged landform is very apparent in the landscape, but is generally dominated by the dense enclosure of the tree cover. Visibility is low. Unique landscape features associated with the Bayhall and Bayham Estates give the area a very strong sense of place. The highways and woodlands have an ancient time-depth. Other characteristics associated with land use and built development tend to be historic in character; the infrequent oasts and brick farmhouses are a distinctive historic element. Due to the low visibility of the area, the sensitivity of the landscape is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the extent and diversity of tree cover, reinforcing woodland on denuded hilltops. Reinforce the incidence of standard trees - oak, ash and beech - within managed woodland, coppice and hedgerows. Conserve the estate parkland features such as open grasslands and mature standard trees. Conserve the infrequency of built development, ensuring that the woodlands and pastures retain their distinctive tranquillity and isolation.

CONTEXT

Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very Strong.

Sensitivity

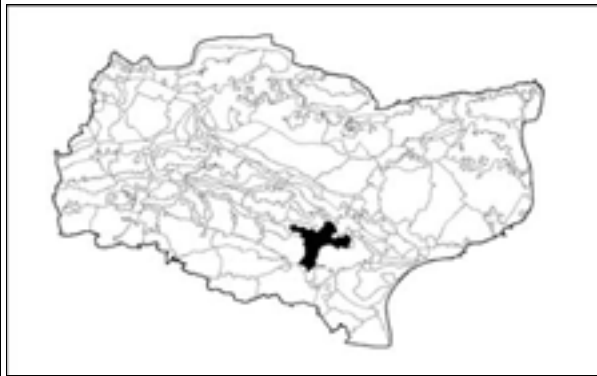
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Very Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Reinforce tree cover, ensuring the long-term incidence of standard trees within the woodland. Conserve and manage parkland, maintaining the proportion of mature standard trees. Conserve the infrequency of built development.

[previous <<](#)



This is a varied landscape extending from the rise at Bethersden, through flat farmland to Great Chart and east to Kingsnorth, extending south through more varied landform to Woodchurch on the edge of Shirley Moor. The grey, shelly Paludrina Limestone, that forms the resistant strata of the Bethersden rise, has been used in the past for church building, notably the tower of Bethersden church itself.

Ancient settlement in this landscape is evidenced by the line of the Roman road to Tenterden that crosses near Shirkoak and the vernacular village centres of Bethersden and Kingsnorth. There is also dull 20th century development, however, in association with these villages, for example.

Although around Bethersden and Woodchurch, the typical Wealden pattern of small fields and bushy hedgerows remains, where the land is flatter, from Great Chart, around Stubb's Cross and across to Kingsnorth, this has broken down with fields enlarged and hedgerows removed to allow mechanisation for arable farming. Where this has occurred a smooth, simple landscape has resulted, often with the garish hues and pungent odour of oilseed rape dominating in summer.

Enclosure is provided at the perimeter of the character area by the large blocks of woodland of the Old Romney Shoreline landscape that enclose these farmlands to the south.

Here there is a definite sense of being on a plateau and of height, and then suddenly the ground plunges away towards Woodchurch with long views to Great Heron Wood and the Isle of Oxney.

The farmlands along the B2067 form an enclosing, undulating backdrop to the flat, remote expanse of Shirley Moor, the scene punctuated rarely by vernacular farmsteads or small settlements. Woodchurch itself, with its mix of brick and white weatherboard buildings and the conspicuous church of All Saints provides a historic landmark for many miles for what is, in part, a seemingly unpopulated character area.

Population pressure is focused on the flatter lands to the north where both agricultural intensification and expansion of Ashford, notably through proposals for Chilmington Green and Park Farm are changing the established rural landscape patterns to one that is both less varied and less tranquil.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, open arable landscape.
More intimate undulating landscape of mixed farming towards Shirley Moor.
Remote, unpopulated feel.
Pastures.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a coherent pattern of small and medium-scale field patterns which reflect the landform. Some hedgerow boundaries are in decline, but there are some strong wooded edges. Woodland clusters, pastures and minor water courses provide a network of semi-natural habitats within variable intensities of pasture and arable farmland. The ecological integrity is therefore moderate. Rural heritage features, with the exception of hedgerows, are in good condition; woodland cover and wide-verged roads are regular features. Vernacular buildings, such as small barns and oasts, are much in evidence. Culturally, the area retains a remote, rural atmosphere. The condition of the area is considered to be very good.

Sensitivity

The landscape has a consistently historic time depth in which most of the key characteristics (farms, woodlands, pastures) have a sense of mutual continuity, i.e. they have evolved either together or in a sympathetic manner to each other. Visibility is moderate. Sensitivity is also considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the areas of small scale field patterns and reinforce the less intensive use of these.
Reinforce wooded edges around settlements and around arable fields.
Conserve the remote and rural atmosphere of settlements.
Conserve the wide verges and hedged boundaries along highways.
Reinforce the occurrence of standard trees (characteristically oaks) in hedgerows, and generally at key points in the landscape by long term management and replanting.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity

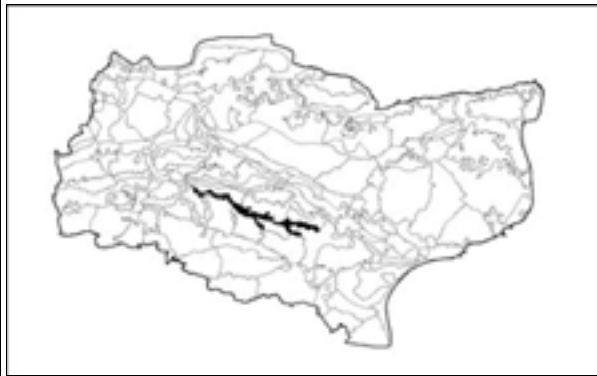
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve and reinforce woodland cover
Reinforce the wooded setting of farmsteads and settlements
Conserve highway characteristics - wide verges and hedges
Reinforce standard trees

[previous <<](#)



This long, narrow character area extends from close to the river's two sources near Bethersden and Pluckley station to the junction with the River Medway at Yalding. The incised river channel of the Beult meanders through a floodplain fringed with well-vegetated banks and distinctive lines of willow or edged with woodland copses enclosing small pastures. Intermittently, weirs contribute to alternating pools and sections of fast flow in the channel, but generally the flow in the river is slow reflecting the low fall from Smarden to the junction with the Medway at Yalding. The upper reaches near Bethersden are distinguished by the frequency of small field ponds and the isolated feel of the landscape.

In its western reaches arable cultivation extends into this narrow river corridor from the wider floodplain beyond blurring the boundary between the poorly drained alluvial soils and the river brickearths that surround them. This effect is accentuated by some loss of hedgerows and riverside vegetation. Despite this, the river Beult from Smarden to Yalding has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its diverse clay-river fauna and flora. Indeed, the bankside vegetation is often the only visual clue to the course of the river and gives variety to the narrow channel and thence to the broader floodplain.

The landscape of arable fields is also one of sparse human activity, the presence of several large oasts at the margins of the valley being a reminder of the once busy landscape of the hop gardens in the recent past. Settlement is scattered, rarely occurring on the river alluviums themselves apart from infrequent farmsteads and manors. The river is often crossed, however, by historic bridges, many of medieval origin. In particular, those of the historic villages of Yalding and Smarden, form attractive crossing points, with the Greensand ridge providing a dramatic backdrop at Yalding to the seven-arched medieval bridge. The rich patterns of the Greensand orchards are also visible from Rabbit's Cross and Stile Bridge.

Smarden forms a picturesque feature at the tranquil eastern end of this character area being composed of many vernacular brick and tile or weather-boarded houses. The village, whose name means 'butter valley and pasture', clusters around the church of 13th century origins, set above the reach of the Beult's floodwaters.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, low-lying land around incised river channel. Rural open landscape of mixed farming. Small slow flowing river of high ecological value. Sparse but historic settlement. Many historic bridging points. Frequent small ponds in upper floodplain.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The Beult river itself is of high ecological value, however, in visual terms, the area is incoherent as a river valley with much intensive, open cultivated farmland and little apparent riparian vegetation. Historic bridging points are visually unremarkable. Although the area retains tranquillity and inaccessibility and has few visual detractors, the floodplain has lost the diversity of features. Built development has a coherent pattern on the edge of the floodplain, but generally has a moderately negative impact on the area.

Sensitivity

This flat area has intermittent groups of trees which give a moderate visibility throughout the valley. Historic features such as ditches and mature tree groups within the farmland are no longer distinctive visual features - ditches do not appear to exhibit noticeable marginal or wetland vegetation although there are more characteristic willow and poplar on the river itself. The ditches along the highway contribute to some local distinctiveness.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Although tranquil and rural, the specific natural attributes of the river valley are not fully realised, despite the ecological value of the river. The historic characteristics have also diminished in importance in the landscape. A new emphasis on the natural characteristics and form of the wider river floodplain would re-introduce sustainable distinctive features compatible with the changing land use. This involves the sensitive management of some existing agricultural land.

The creation of a wider landscape corridor would re-introduce landscape features of ecological interest to include open shallow banks and willow/black poplar groups. The characteristics of field and roadside drainage ditches could be augmented by encouraging marginal grasses and wetland flora.

The significance and appeal of the bridging points may be enhanced by appropriate detailing and treatment of the immediate river banks.

The upper edge of the floodplain may be delineated by the creation of small woodland blocks.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements: Incoherent.

Detracting features: Few.

Visual Unity: Coherent.

Cultural integrity: Poor.

Ecological integrity: Moderate.

Functional Integrity: Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

Distinctiveness: Indistinct.

Continuity: Historic.

Sense of Place: Weak.

Landform: Insignificant.

Extent of tree cover: Open.

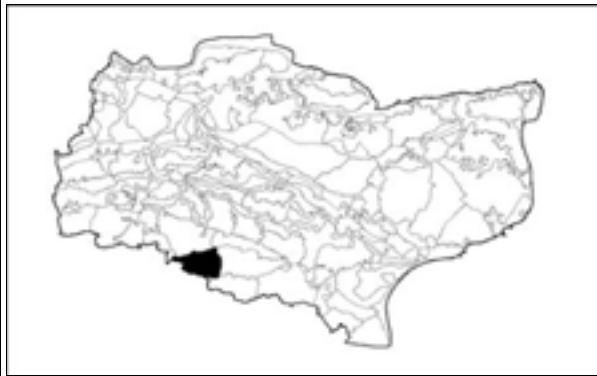
Visibility: Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create a riparian corridor with some open bankside and some intermittent woody riparian vegetation. Create distinctive flora communities in ditches along the highway, in ponds, wet field boundaries and other wetland habitats such as riverbanks by sensitive management techniques. Create interest at bridging points by revising bridging details to appropriate characteristics and form, by group plantings of willow and black poplar where appropriate and by enhancing open views of the immediate water course. Create a wider riparian corridor by encouraging the non-intensive management of ditches and grasslands and by allowing occasional areas of regeneration of woody species. Create small woodlands at the upper edge of the floodplain and large pastoral enclosures in the existing open fields

[previous <<](#)



BEWL AND BEDGEBURY

The upper tributaries of the River Bewl were dammed and flooded in 1975 thus creating the largest artificial area of water in the south-east. The steep ghylls, which are so characteristic of the High Weald, have become narrow bays and inlets, separated from each other by rolling arable ridges, edged with occasional hedgerow trees and small deciduous woodlands.

To the north and east, expanses of coniferous forest rise up beyond the water's edge. Despite its scale, Bewl Water is surprisingly well hidden from the surrounding countryside. Lying in an elevated 'basin', between Wadhurst, Ticehurst and Lamberhurst, brief glimpses are occasionally possible from the enclosing ridges but it is only at close quarters that its full scale can be appreciated.

This huge stretch of water catches the endless changes of light and weather which sweep across the Weald, reflecting steel-grey clouds and vivid orange sunsets. There is room here for sailing dinghies to flicker over the waves without disrupting the solitude of fisherman and bird-watchers, whilst in summer the wide, glittering views provide a retreat for those who simply wish to sit and contemplate.

The mixed woodlands to the north-east of Bewl Water wrap round the Flimwell ridge to Bedgebury Forest. Straddling the watershed between the Teise and the Rother, this vast conifer plantation is interspersed, as so often in the High Weald, with feathery veins of birch, which flush to a delicate green in spring. Despite the roar of traffic on the main roads between Cranbrook, Hawkhurst, Flimwell and Lamberhurst, this is a peaceful area, where the sheer scale of water and forest is able to contain the intrusion of these roads within the landscape.

KENTISH HIGH WEALD

Bewl and Bedgebury lie within the larger character area of the Kentish High Weald.

The Kentish High Weald stretches from Pembury to Rolvenden, including Lamberhurst, Bewl Water and Bedgebury Forest. This landscape has a general north easterly orientation and, from the higher land between Pembury and Lamberhurst, around the southern edge of Bewl Water and between Goudhurst and Benenden, long views stretch out over the Kent Weald towards the North Downs. Kent is known as the Garden of England and the Kentish High Weald plays an important part in this tradition. This is a richly textured landscape, where the angular patterns of the orchard and hop garden contrast with smooth sweeps of arable or intensively grazed pasture. Despite a continuing decline in fruit cultivation, this area still owes its gardenesque feel to the abundant orchards and hop gardens. Once, however, this landscape was famous, not for its fruit but its cloth. Flemish weavers, settling here in the 14th century, built up a thriving woollen industry centred on Cranbrook. Until the 17th century, this industry remained a major source of employment and wealth accumulated by the wool merchants is evident from the substantial medieval houses in the town.

This tapestry of land uses is set within a framework of dense shaws, thick hedges and stretches of broad-leaved woodland, some of which are still coppiced. The large conifer forests at Bedgebury, Hemsted and around Bewl Water, uphold the tradition of commercial timber production in the High Weald, their expanses of deep green enriching the countryside during the winter. This is a well-settled area, where it is rare to be out of sight of farmstead or cottage. Oasthouses dot the landscape, some tiled and some asphalted, and in the east windmills form occasional local landmarks. Many of the villages are of picture-postcard quality, their rose-covered cottages clustering around a pond or tiny green, the local pub sharing its tourist trade with the stone-built church beyond. Nevertheless, this charming image conceals a landscape under pressure, as agriculture becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

Several minor ridges, running north-west from Pembury and south-east to Tenterden, define this area. The River Teise cuts through these ridges at Lamberhurst and Goudhurst, whilst to the south Bewl Water is enclosed by gentle ridges. In the fruit belt around Matfield there are a number of small ghylls, whilst the ground gradually becomes flatter and more open towards Cranbrook.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Peaceful rolling ridges.
Well hidden Bewl Water reservoir in elevated basin.
Large coniferous plantations and mixed woodland.
Intrusion of A21

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a strongly unified landscape in which there are few visual detractors and in which the landform and landscape pattern are unified. The large areas of deciduous woodland, coppice and thick shaws form a very strong ecological network. Tree cover is extensive and the wooded edges to small scale fields are generally good. Other features include estate parkland and conifer plantations. The scattered network of small villages, some enlarged, have a high positive impact and contribute to the very strong functional integrity of the area. The condition of the area is considered to be very good.

Sensitivity

The ridged landscape is a dominant part of the area, but visibility is moderate due to the enclosure of the extensive woodlands. There is a strong continuity to the landscape which contributes to the strong sense of place, and it is considered to be highly sensitive.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the frequency and density of woodland cover on the ridges and slopes. Ensure that appropriate species are used for replanting.
Encourage the retention of small scale pastoral clearings and the low-intensity agricultural use of these clearings and other enclosed areas.
Conserve the narrow form of lanes; protect wooded edges to vehicular routes and replant where these have been lost.
Conserve the characteristics of thick shaws/hedgerows by replanting with appropriate species and maintaining the level of vegetative enclosure to field systems and settlements, and on steep slopes.
Conserve the scattered and isolated nature of the network of villages and hamlets.

CONTEXT

Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very Strong.

Sensitivity

High.

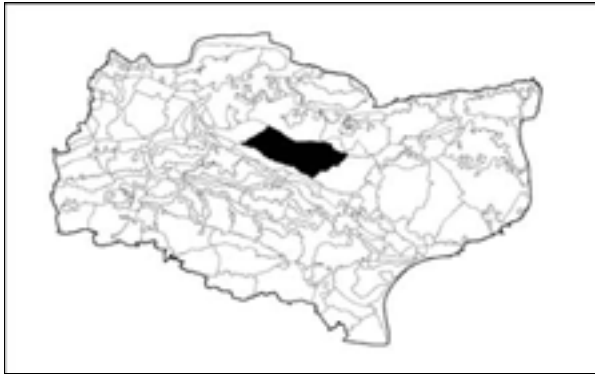
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve woodland and wooded areas.
Conserve the small scale and pattern of scattered settlement.
Conserve the wooded and narrow characteristics of existing highways
Conserve the small scale and low intensity use of pastoral clearings

[previous <<](#)



BICKNOR

This landscape has a pattern of wide, arable fields contained by dense belts of woodland, which run along the upper slopes of the dry valleys. A network of small, often sunken, single-track lanes connects tiny, scattered villages, giving a timeless, 'well-settled' feel to the landscape. Tile-hung oast-houses are a common feature and there are a number of pockets of historical parkland. Orchards and hop gardens, along the northern edge, mark the gradual transition from the Downs to the fruit belt, and there are fine views across to the Swale estuary.

MID KENT DOWNS

Bicknor lies within the larger character area of the Mid Kent Downs.

The long spine of the Kent Downs in this area stretches from Chatham in the west to the Stour Valley in the east. Although there are local variations in the appearance of the landscape, there is a strong underlying pattern to the landform, which imparts an overall character to the region. Throughout the length of the chalk ridge a series of narrow, steep-sided dry valleys carve their way down the gentle northern dip-slope of the Downs to the flatter land of the North Kent Fruit Belt, around Sittingbourne and Faversham.

The historical poverty of this area resulted largely from the stiff clay-with-flints soils, which overlie the solid chalk. Despite their striking, rich-red colour, these soils are relatively poor and difficult to cultivate, especially as they occur on the exposed upper plateau of the Downs. Edward Hasted, writing in 1798, consistently describes the area in terms such as "an unpleasant dreary country, the soil of which is very poor, being chalky, and much covered with flint-stones". In his day the land was used widely for sheep grazing, interspersed by arable on the lower slopes and large blocks of woodland. Today appreciation of the landscape has changed and the remote, undeveloped ridges and valleys, which resulted from the historical poverty of the soils, are considered one of the most beautiful features of the AONB. Although mechanised farming over the last hundred years has seen an increase in the area of arable land, much of the original ancient woodland survives, walling in the arable plateau and enclosing the rounded, valley bottoms.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Chalk ridge with wide arable fields contained by dense belts of woodland. Views across Swale estuary.
Small sunken lanes, scattered villages.
Historic parkland, hops and orchards.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a coherent, sparsely settled area with arable farmland and woodland which reflect the chalk and clay soils of the plateau. Dry valleys are a particular feature of the landform. There are a few visual detractors some due to unsympathetic management of agricultural land such as dead trees and scraps of hedgerow. Suburban influences to small settlements and pylons through the open fields also detract from the view. Built development is infrequent, but is considered to have a moderate impact on the area. The dense woodland belts generally follow the upper slopes of the dry valleys and provide clusters of semi-natural habitats, but there is no corresponding habitat network through the large arable areas. The ecological interest of the area is therefore moderate.

Sensitivity

Ancient woodland is a characteristic feature although the form of the woodland varies from broadleaf to plantation conifer to chestnut coppice. The historic features of tall hedges and standard trees are indistinct, and wooded edges are often pushed back to the horizon. Vernacular styles and flint are not strongly represented, although oast houses are common in some areas towards the north. More recent ridgeline residential development is indistinct in style and form. Roads follow ridgeline and cross-contour tracks, and contribute to the time depth of the area. This area has a very varied time depth which ranges from the ancient emphasis of mature broadleaf woodland to isolated and indistinctive development with little time depth.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The dense belts of woodland are a characteristic feature. They reinforce the pattern of the landform and provide some large-scale enclosure, reducing the potential scale of the current arable fields on the plateau. The emphasis of the belts of broadleaf woodland may be reinforced by replanting where woodland blocks have become fragmented and creating new woodland on open ridges, to follow contours. New woodland edges may also be created to absorb and integrate the edges of the more recent settlements, linked into highway hedgerow where appropriate. Highways are also a characteristic feature. Their narrow form and cross-contour or ridgeline alignment should be recognised and retained. Sympathetic traffic management may be applied to arrest the wear on verges and allow space for new roadside hedgerows. The retention and acceptable form of roadside hedgerows is also dependent on cultivation techniques which allow margins for the hedgerow's root system. The opening up of the arable plateau may be halted by the reintroduction of roadside hedgerows and shaws, commencing at the peripheries of the plateau, leading out from existing woodland.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

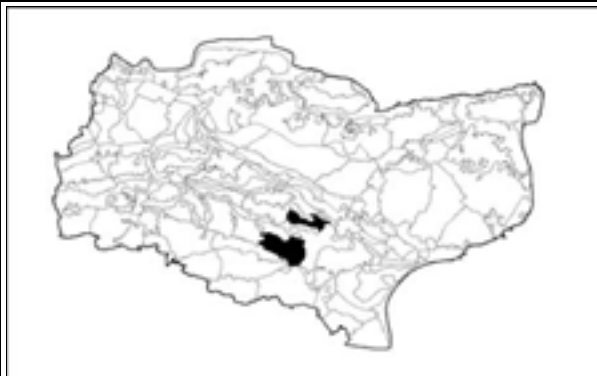
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE AND REINFORCE.

Reinforce the broadleaf woodland cover
Create broadleaf woodland to ridgetops where these are open
Create wooded edges to settlements
Reinforce the ancient characteristics of highways of narrow carriageways and hedged boundaries

[previous <<](#)



Although similar in character to the Staplehurst-Headcorn Pasturelands, this area is distinguished by its more varied topography and frequency of small woodlands such as Pond Wood near High Halden. Generally these woods are concentrated on the hilltops with more open arable fields on the south east slopes.

This higher, undulating land on which, for instance, High Halden with its distinctive church and the vernacular village of Frittenden are set, is on the edge of the High Weald. This elevation generally provides attractive views over either the rest of the Low Weald, or the higher ridges of the High Weald to the south. The historic village of Biddenden is sited on flatter land and here the views are back to the Greensand ridge.

The traditional pattern of small woodlands and hedged fields reflects the poor soils that led to isolation and lack of settlement until relatively recent times. Here too are found the scattering of field ponds, so characteristic of the Staplehurst-Headcorn Pasturelands, indicative of the wet clays below. Hedgerow and field oaks are not as extensive as elsewhere in the Low Weald and some have been lost through conversion of pasture to arable. Those that remain are sometimes gappy or poorly managed. Ribbon development along the few major roads, notably along the A28 and A262 at High Halden has also broken down this pattern locally, although the structure of small woodlands that remain and the undulating landform help to contain this intrusion.

Where conversion to arable has taken place, the result is large arable fields with often fragmented unmanaged remaining hedgerows. The more monochromatic greens of improved pasture and arable crops contribute to a decrease in the visual variety of the scene. Close to High Halden, where there are increased population and traffic levels, there are some problems with rubbish in the laneside ditches, perhaps related to overuse.

The local character is also changed, as elsewhere in the Low Weald, by the conversion of redundant barns and oasts to dwellings, which saves the fabric of the building but can have a suburbanising effect in the detail used.

[next >>](#)

BIDDENDEN-HIGH HALDEN WOODED FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat undulating topography with views over Low Weald. Frequent small woodlands and field ponds. Small to medium scale pattern of fields, small woodlands and hedgerows with standard oaks.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape with few detracting elements. Small to medium sized fields with clipped hedges, ditches and standard oaks combine with pasture, wet meadows, remnant orchards, frequent small woodlands and ponds to create a feeling of tranquillity and remoteness, enclosed but with a feeling of space. The few detracting elements include pony paddocks and the intrusion of alien conifer boundaries to some gardens. There is a strong ecological and cultural integrity from the well-developed networks of woodlands, streams, ponds and pasture. The large woodland blocks are generally mature oaks and over-mature hornbeam coppice, field boundaries are also over-mature and their clearance is starting to be an issue. Built development generally has a positive impact with scattered farms and manors but with some 20th century farmhouses and linear residential development.

Sensitivity

The landscape has a strong character with the hornbeam coppice and hornbeam hedges as the most distinctive elements of an ancient or historic time depth. Other elements such as woodland, pasture and ponds, traditional orchards and hop gardens, built environment are generally rated as characteristic and historic. Landform is relatively insignificant with intermittent tree cover combining to create a relatively low visibility rating and therefore a moderate sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve and reinforce the distinctive but over-mature hornbeam coppice through appropriate management and through encouraging the planting of new woodlands extensions. Conserve woodlands through appropriate management to ensure their long term survival. Reinforce hedgerows by gapping up, and conserve them by ensuring appropriate regular maintenance. Use hornbeam where this is locally distinctive. Conserve and retain ponds. Plant new oak standards to ensure continuity of tree cover before senescent specimens die.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very Strong.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

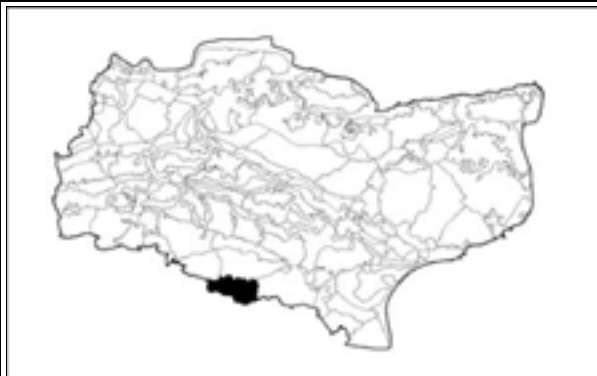
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve, extend and manage hornbeam coppice
Conserve woodlands
Conserve the ancient woodland and hedges
Reinforce hedgerows and improve management
Conserve historic buildings
Conserve the character of farms through restoration, design and screening
Protect standard oaks and instigate replanting

[previous <<](#)



BODIAM

Few castles can be more outwardly perfect than Bodiam. Sitting solidly on the northern bank of the Rother, halfway between Robertsbridge and Newenden, it still dominates the river valley, as it has for the last six hundred years. The castle marks the point where the Rother valley begins to lose its wild, marshy appearance and is gradually enclosed by increasingly wooded ridges. Narrow lanes wander across the upper slopes between high hedges and unmanaged shaws and the intimate topography of the High Weald begins to reassert itself.

Nevertheless, this is still a large scale landscape, where big arable fields are surrounded by overgrown hedges and wide views open out from the ridges. Despite the network of drainage ditches, extensive flooding can occur during the winter, and the valley floor becomes a great sheet of brown water, reflecting the bleak, grey skies overhead. There is a thicker scattering of trees and scrub on this floodplain, than in the valleys of Brede, which reduces the open aspect of the landscape. The hop gardens and orchards, however, with their distinctive shelterbelt hedges, have declined. Once they were a major feature of the area. This leaves a landscape which lacks the cohesion of the smaller scale farmland of the High Weald, without taking on the great open horizons of the lower river levels.

LOWER ROTHER VALLEY

Bodiam lies within the Lower Rother Valley character area.

The Lower Rother Valley runs east from Robertsbridge to Rye, stretching as far north as Tenterden and as far south as Peasmarsh. The Rother was one of the most important rivers in the High Weald, and still dominates the eastern end of the AONB.

This area has historically been subject to alternate flooding and silting and the river has changed its course several times over the centuries. During the Roman occupation, tidal estuary and mudflats extended far up the valley and the Isle of Oxney was a true island. The ancient sea cliffs at Rye, Playden and Oxney are a constant reminder that here, as in Brede, the shape and role of this landscape has changed dramatically over time. The river levels are drained by a network of small ditches and flecked by patches of scrub and stunted trees. Although the Brede and Rother valley floors contain most of the best agricultural land in the AONB, the intensively farmed, arable fields are still interspersed with considerable areas of sheep grazed pasture. The gentle open slopes which rise up onto the enclosing ridges support a network of large, regular fields, surrounded either by overgrown hedgerows closely trimmed, gappy hedges and sporadic trees. Both the river levels and the valley slopes have a bleak, wind-swept feel, despite the intensive agriculture.

Further west, around Bodiam and Sandhurst, the valleys close in. Despite the large fields, there are more small woodlands and thicker hedges, although many are unmanaged and in decline. The terracotta coloured soils of the Hexden valley still support occasional orchards and most of the red-brick or timber framed farms have a pair of redundant oasthouses. In the villages, such as Northiam and Sandhurst, weatherboarding is common, whilst very occasionally a thatched cottage can still be found, a reminder of the days when reeds from the river-levels were a valued roofing material.

The Lower Rother Valley is a wide, flat bottomed valley, whose rolling valley slopes are drained by small ghylls. At the mouth of the valley, where it opens onto Walland Marsh in the east, the Isle of Oxney forms a gentle mound on the flat levels, around which the River Rother and the Reading Sewer flow.

[next >>](#)

BODIAM: LOWER ROTHER VALLEY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Large scale landscape, wide views. Valley floodplain meets low wooded ridges. High hedges, unmanaged shaws, some trees and scrub on valley floor.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This flat floodplain with water margin trees of willow and alder and gently undulating surroundings with wooded ridges and copses, has a unified pattern of elements. Agriculture is mainly arable, often with a large field pattern but with some pasture enclosed by overgrown hedgerows with mature oaks. Ditches, orchards and hop gardens contribute to the diversity of the landscape. There are few visual detractors, mostly confined to commercial developments on main roads. The ecological integrity is strong with well developed networks of wildlife corridors, and a moderate intensity of land use. The linear villages and scattered historic farmsteads (often regularly sited on distinct ridgeline roads) are of predominantly red brick, tile hung or weather boarded construction. The imposing stone built Bodiam Castle is an important heritage site, and other buildings generally have a positive impact on the landscape. The landscape is in very good condition.

Sensitivity

Sense of place is well developed with many characteristic features being well expressed. Bodiam Castle is a unique heritage feature and much of the landscape is at least historic, with some areas of ancient woodland. The landform is an apparent element, and the intermittent tree cover means that the visibility of the landscape is moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the network of small ridge-top woodlands and copses through appropriate management, especially to ensure the full wildlife potential.
Ensure continuity of specimen standard oaks, through allowing new hedgerow trees to grow up and by planting.
Conserve the pattern of hedgerows and ensure that hedgerows are appropriately managed and maintained to ensure their continuity and to maximise their potential as a wildlife habitat.
Conserve ditches and streams and ensure their sensitive management to encourage wildlife.
Conserve the historic vernacular buildings and ensure that new buildings and additions are sympathetic to the existing character.
Conserve the distinctive waterside willows and alders by appropriate pollarding and ensuring that bankside clearance is sensitive to wildlife and landscape impacts.

CONTEXT

Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very Strong.

Sensitivity

High.

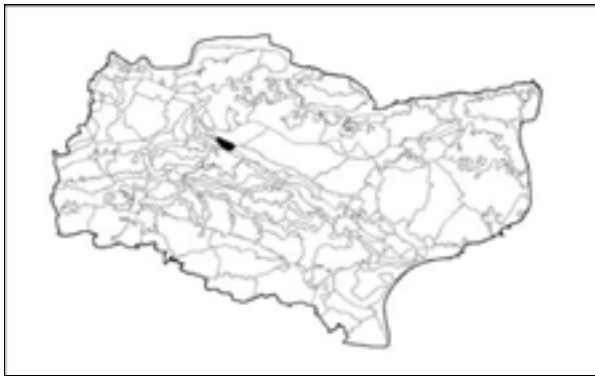
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve small ridge top woods and copses
Conserve hedgerow trees by planting and allowing new trees to grow up
Conserve and maintain the pattern of hedgerows
Conserve ditches and streams for wildlife
Conserve historic vernacular buildings
Conserve waterside willows and alders

[previous <<](#)



BOXLEY VALE

The Boxley Vale lies between the chalk scarp and the northern edge of Maidstone in a narrow wedge of land almost encircled by major roads. Nevertheless this is an attractive and anciently settled area of countryside. The scarp woodlands, although storm-damaged, have a significant amount of yew and some box, whose dark, evergreen foliage is particularly prominent in winter. To the west the traditional large fields of the scarp foot are in evidence and considerable hedgerow loss has occurred, but east of Boxley a series of small, hedge lined fields are interspersed by attractive parkland. The striking stone walls around the site of the medieval abbey at Boxley in the west add to the strong, historic feel of the landscape.

MEDWAY

The Boxley Vale lies within the larger character area of Medway within the Kent Downs AONB.

The Medway Valley, running between Maidstone and Rochester, divides the AONB into two sections. In common with the other river valleys crossing the Downs, this was one of the earliest areas of permanent settlement in Kent. The long history of human activity in this area is illustrated by the group of pre-historic sites, such as Kits Coty standing stones, which form the most important group of megalithic monuments east of the Berkshire Downs. There are several Roman sites here and the ancient trackway, now known as the Pilgrim's Way, passes through this area.

The AONB covers the scarp and the scarp foot within the Medway Valley character, but excludes the industrial valley bottom. Despite the urban developments, however, the Medway Valley provides an important rural buffer between the Medway towns and Maidstone.

The steep scarp slopes, which enclose the river valley, rise sharply up behind rolling, intensively cultivated fields. There has never been a strong hedgerow network on the lower part of the scarp foot and the few hedges that do exist are mostly narrow and gappy. It is characteristic, however, to find thicker, overgrown hedges surrounding the fields on the upper slopes above which swathes of dense, mixed woodland dominate the skyline, separating the valley and the Downs. These woodlands, and the mosaic of unimproved grassland and scrub associated with them, are of national nature conservation importance, both for their flora and fauna.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Lower slopes of scarp encircled by major roads.
Scarp woodlands with dark yew and box.
Large traditional fields with loss of hedges. Small hedgeline fields and parkland around Boxley.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The coherent landscape of arable fields and shaws at the foot of the scarp is interrupted by small scale built elements, loss of hedgerow and the large scale of the rail link. The ecological interest is based within small copses and shaws, now fragmented and considered to be weak. Built form has a high positive impact; vernacular materials, recognisable settlement patterns and estate buildings all contribute to this effect. The vegetative features of tree cover, field boundaries and estate planting are variable in their condition and considered to be very vulnerable to change. The overall area is considered to be in poor condition.

Sensitivity

The high visibility of this landscape area results in it being highly sensitive. It has a moderate sense of place influenced by characteristic vegetation and settlement, and a few locally distinct features, including the Boxley Abbey ragstone barn.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore cross-contour shaws to augment the areas of semi-natural habitat.
Restore the ecological interest within selected arable areas by targeting localised areas for habitat management.
Restore hedgerow and encourage hedgerow management along highways.
Restore small woodland areas to include distinct species mix, such as yew, field maple, and other appropriate species.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

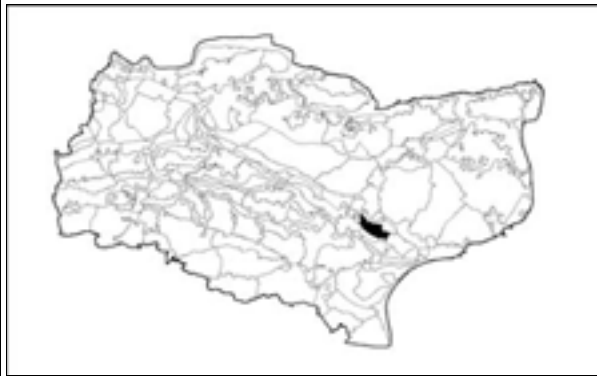
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE.

Restore small woodland clusters
Restore wooded shaws
Restore hedgerow along highways
Restore unintensified or habitat-sensitive management to selected networks of arable areas.

[previous <<](#)

BRABOURNE LEES MIXED FARMLAND



On the Folkestone and the Sandgate Beds to the east of Ashford, these gently undulating mixed farmlands extend from the outskirts of the town at Willesborough Lees to the small settlement of Lilyvale. The character area is bounded to the south by the M20 motorway.

The topography is varied ranging from the lower and flatter lands close to Ashford and the Great Stour to the undulating landscape at Hatch Park and the knoll at Brabourne Lees. The soils are generally fine and loamy but those over the sandy Folkestone Beds are better drained and of higher quality whilst the Sandgate Beds can give rise to seasonal waterlogging because of the clay beds within them.

Woodlands are locally characteristic of the landscape notably around Hatch Park, although much of this is managed for coppice. At Flowergarden Wood the acid soils have given rise to a characteristic ground flora consisting of heath bedstraw, tormentil and foxglove under a canopy of sessile oak and birch.

Also interesting are the remnants of a rich valley bog which can be found at the adjoining Willesborough Lees. This is a landscape of damp rough grazing land surrounding the marsh with its marsh violets, purple moor grass and unusual sedges and bog mosses. These Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) are close by the eastern outskirts of Ashford so may come under increasing pressure for recreation. At Hatch Park a large part of the south of the parkland has been lost to arable since the 1960s.

This part of the park also suffers immensely from the presence of the M20 especially from traffic noise which can be very dominant. The north of the park is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and has many old pollards of historic and conservation interest despite losses due to the 1997 storm. Much of the grassland has been invaded by bracken and ragwort. From this higher part there are tremendous views to the North Downs to the north. Much of the surrounding woodland is chestnut coppice or is being interplanted with conifers.

To the east Brabourne Lees sits on a rise above the surrounding countryside. To the north-west the landscape is quite open with many hedges removed. The village itself sits up quite noticeably in the landscape.

[next >>](#)

BRABOURNE LEES MIXED FARMLAND

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gentle undulating landscape with fine loamy soils locally subjected to waterlogging. Medium-sized woodlands locally important. Mixed farmlands. Remnant heathy habitats such as valley bogs, acid grasslands and woodlands.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape in which historic farmlands and woodlands co-exist with wetlands and grasslands on an undulating landform. There are very few visual detractors and the ecological integrity of the area is very strong, due to the diverse network of woods, pastures and wetland.

Built form, which includes estate cottages, has a positive impact on the landscape. Formerly widespread hedged field boundaries are mature and declining. The area is considered to be in very good condition.

Sensitivity

This is an historic landscape with the notable exception of the ancient parkland at Hatch Park. The key elements combine to give a characteristic landscape, although the heathy habitats within the deer park are considered to be rare. A strong sense of place is derived from the very varied characteristic features which include oak standards, willow and ash on stream lines, strong and varied patches of woodland, estate planting and localised detail in farm cottages. Views are intermittent over an unremarkable landform, therefore visibility is low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the frequency, scale and diversity of the woodland.
Conserve the small scale of the rural landscape.
Reinforce the elements of ancient parkland by long-term management.
Reinforce hedged field boundaries by appropriate management and replanting.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity Moderate.

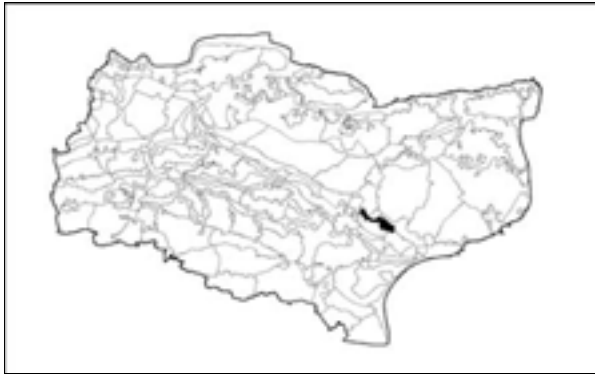
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve woodland
Conserve small scale field patterns
Reinforce ancient parkland
Reinforce hedgerows

[previous <<](#)



This long narrow, gently sloping character area lies on the Gault Clays east of Ashford and forms a continuation of the Hampton and Wye character areas described in The Kent Downs Landscape. The landscape is contained by the Great Stour's alluvial valley, west of Naccolt and to the north-east by the AONB boundary.

Characterised by clayey or loamy soils subject to waterlogging the traditional crops of the area are winter cereals and short term grasslands. Small woodlands and larger plantations are also locally characteristic and with the sometime bushy hedgerows, give parts of the area a feel similar to the Low Weald. Settlement is restricted to farmsteads and small hamlets.

The land between Naccolt and Nackholt Wood is significantly wet, necessitating a series of dykes and drains to allow its use as pasture. It is significant that this area has remained under grass whilst over the past thirty years the better drained land round about has been converted to arable. Further east beyond Fords Water, the landscape becomes more open with a mix of pasture and arable.

The most significant woodlands are those north of Naccolt Farm that form a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). These include Nackholt, Foreland and Hampton Woods. Although managed in very different ways, all these woods retain many of the features of very damp ancient woods, with oak standards and mixed coppice of hornbeam, ash, field maple, hazel and alder. Also present is a rich ground flora and many species of butterfly and moth. Elsewhere these woods have been replanted with conifers, poplars or chestnut coppice.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gentle sloping landform with poor quality soils subject to waterlogging
Mixed farmland including a large percentage of grassland
Small copses and larger woodlands locally, of high nature conservation value

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This area includes some woodland clusters of high nature conservation value and also some more intensive arable farmland. Heritage features are distinctive and in good condition. The large patches of woodland are a strong element. Notable features include distinctive red brick farmsteads. Generally, built development has a moderate positive impact. There are very few detractors in this rural landscape. The landscape pattern is occasionally interrupted by the decline in field boundaries.

Sensitivity

Visibility is very low throughout the enclosed but unremarkable landform. A strong sense of place is derived from historic landscape elements and from a greater time depth associated with the woodland. This landscape has a range of distinctive features from pollard ash to mature hedgerow standards, wide road verges and long-roofed barns. It is considered to be of moderate sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the existing woodland cover and reinforce the use of broadleaf species at key locations.
Reinforce semi-natural habitats between woodlands.
Identify and reinforce the ecological interest of wetland corridors.
Reinforce distinctive features such as pollard ash and standards in hedgerows.
Reinforce the wide verges and hedged boundaries of highways by ensuring their reinstatement as part of engineering works.
Conserve the isolation and characteristics of historic farmsteads.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	<u>CONSERVE & REINFORCE</u>	CONSERVE
		CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
		CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity Moderate.

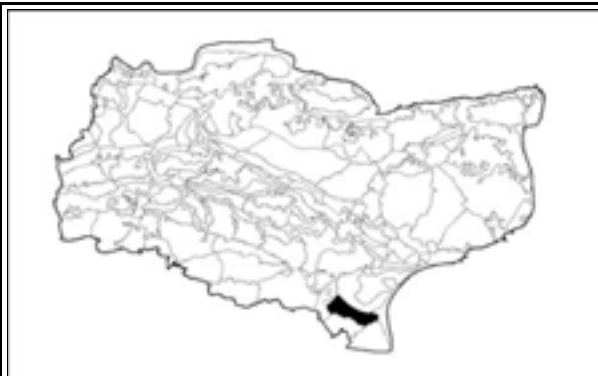
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve and reinforce broadleaf woodlands
Reinforce wetland habitats
Reinforce mature standards in hedgerows
Conserve historic farmsteads and their settings

[previous <<](#)



A small parcel of farmland, to the southwest of the Rhee Wall, is contained by the Rhee and the old sea walls from Lydd to Snargate. This is an area of older marshland that was re-inned after the inundations of the 13th century storms, and is characterised by the long, narrow regular fields around the village of Brookland and the sequential road system.

The Rhee Wall follows a straight, engineered line, but the old sea wall meanders along its length, indicating that it was the sum of many separate enclosures against the sea.

The farmland is flat and open, but with earth embankments in evidence. Pastures appear to lie in flat depressions between the embankments. The Appledore, Denge Ness and Romney Branch Railway was built through here in the early 19th century, entailing further embanking. The line now serves the power station.

Settlement consists of scattered farms which are more concentrated around the main village of Brookland. It is a relatively closely settled area of marsh farmland which is rural in character and is showing signs of gentrification. Some enlarged, renovated old farmhouses have a more residential use, using small pastures for horse grazing.

Utilitarian, concrete buildings, which date from the last World War, can be seen throughout the area, some used as farm buildings, some now derelict.

Brookland's small stone church has the distinction of a separate steeple, faced with timber shingles and built on the ground next to the church.

Dwellings and farms are also centred along the sea wall such as Baynham Farm, or sit just behind the wall, sheltered from the coastal influences, such as Hook House and Midley Cottages. A 15th century public house still exists on the wall, although now only on a minor road, it must once have been on the major route encircling the inned farmland, with great views to the sea over the tidal saltmarsh.

Parish boundaries reflect the re-inning of the land as they pass straight across the Rhee Wall, encompassing long, regular parcels of land in the Brookland Farmlands, but maintaining their church buildings on the north side of the Rhee. The ruins of Midley Chapel can be seen near Hawthorn Corner.

Much of the land is classified as Grade 1 agricultural, with very large fields nearer to Lydd. Current land use, however, is variable; the patchwork effect of cereals is interspersed with vegetable crops, turf cultivation, and cattle and sheep rearing. Sheepfolds are frequently seen, especially near the sea wall; and some are in use. The drainage ditches are less in evidence, being generally fewer in number on this part of the marsh, but are intensively scoured.

Unusually in the marsh, some views are filtered by tall, mature vegetation which grows on the embankments. Around Brookland, mixed hawthorn and willow hedgerows enclose the narrow lanes which run along the top of the banks. These are windblown and contoured by the elements, but there are also some mature trees which foster a smaller scale, more rural influence in the landscape. There are dense scrub and mature trees around many parts of the old sea wall, especially around Hook House, which has a very settled atmosphere.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Well-settled farmland with scattered farms, rural and historically rich. Flat, open, large embankments, historical sea defences and sunken pastures.
WWII buildings now used for farm buildings, some derelict.
Wide views from top of sea wall

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

A flat, open landscape, relatively few intermittent trees and a strong visual unity. Wide views from the visually prominent sea wall. Historically a well-settled area, clusters of farmsteads, some scattered farms and dwellings on the edges of dykes and sandy banks. Brookland is fringed with large massed willows, mostly brick built vernacular, with a distinctive stone church and separate timber steeple. New build housing and village enlargement is of unremarkable design and detracts from the townscape. Some WWII buildings converted to farmsteads, but others are derelict. Other scattered or clustered farmsteads are brick vernacular or unremarkable contemporary buildings. The pattern of ditches and hedges between arable fields and pastures is strong with relatively few detracting features. Hedgerows are often unmanaged and in decline, and some dykes are scoured of vegetation. The land is intensively farmed and mature trees and well vegetated ditches are fragmented, providing limited ecological interest. The willows and poplars are vulnerable because there are few young trees in the structure.

Sensitivity

The dominant flat, open landscape, with intermittent tree cover, has a high visibility with an historic time depth, but the landscape is becoming indistinct through the loss of pollarded poplars and willows, the decline in hedgerows and the loss of ditch side and aquatic vegetation and the presence of unremarkable new buildings. This creates a weak sense of place.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Encourage the conservation of the existing ecologically interesting areas of aquatic vegetation, ponds, hedgerows, trees and pastures through appropriate management. Reinforce the network of hedgerows and ditches to link with and extend existing ecologically interesting areas through appropriate management and replanting. Around Brookland, encourage the intensive planting of characteristic willows and poplars and create new, well-vegetated dykes to reinforce the village edge and create a more distinctive sense of place. Conserve the remote feel of isolated or scattered farmsteads and encourage sensitive design and siting of new farm buildings to contribute to the landscape.

CONTEXT

Regional: Romney Marsh

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

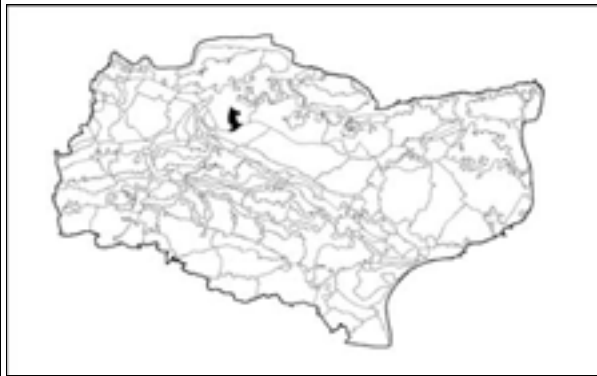
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve ponds, hedgerows, trees and pastures. Reinforce hedgerows and ditches. At Brookland, encourage willows and poplars and dykes to reinforce the village edge. Conserve the remote feel and sensitive design of farmsteads.

[previous <<](#)



This narrow finger of North Downs landscape falls into two distinct landscapes. Firstly, the dramatic scarp and valley forms to the north. Secondly, rolling open plateau landscape in the centre and to the south. Remnant chalk grassland on the steepest slopes to the north lead into small fields of arable and pasture then ever larger arable units in the southernmost section. Blocks of deciduous woodland are a distinct feature throughout this Local character area providing much needed containment for the open arable landscape to the south. There is a significant lack of development within the area itself but extensive urban areas are located on all but the southern boundary, this area is distinctly rural in character. However, there are definite indications of the development pressures these urban areas are putting upon this valuable and vulnerable landscape.

The alternating bands of chalk and head deposits in the northern part of this character area create a dramatic incised landscape comprising a series of ridges and valleys. The southern and central plateau is formed from clay with flints creating a softer more rolling landscape. Two of the valleys, demarcated by Shawstead Road and Lidsing Road, extend further to the south and bound this central plateau.

Land cover to some extent is governed by landform in that on the steeper scarp slopes, where true chalk soils occur, are predominantly rough pasture with encroaching scrub vegetation. Remnant chalk grassland is the natural landcover for the chalk scarps and would have been a more prevalent at one time. On the shallower slopes and the plateau landform, with its covering of clay with flints, deciduous woodland blocks of mixed species introduce variety in the form of colour and texture. Land use would have been predominantly pasture but arable cultivation has on the whole replaced this on all but the steepest slopes. The decline of grazing of these steeper slopes is resulting in invasion by chalkland scrub. These changing land use patterns threaten the unique landscape and wildlife value of these open chalk grasslands.

Amenity and other urban land uses are beginning to encroach on this character area, as well as fringe influences such as horse pasture in combination with the encroaching development of Hempstead on the eastern edge.

The majority of the existing woodland is listed on the Ancient Woodland Inventory. These mixed deciduous woodlands have considerable ecological value that is not always reflected by official designation. Darland Bank is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) with key habitats of grassland, woodland and scrub. South Wood is a candidate for LNR designation and is already designated as a SNCI for grassland as well as woodland. Ambley, Hook and Holt Woods are designated as SNCIs. Also of significant ecological value are the areas of remnant chalk grassland. However, these are in decline and are threatened by invasion of scrub vegetation.

The landscape is perhaps best remembered for its association with Dickens who set several works in and around the towns of Chatham and Rochester.

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Steep ridges and valleys with open plateau to south.
Woodland and pasture-scrub invasion. Remnant chalk grassland.
Arable cultivation on plateau.
Urban context and encroachment of urban edge.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The open valley with wooded tops to the surrounding ridges is usually coherent but has many visual detractors in the form of urban and industrial development and busy traffic routes. Built development has a high negative impact on the open view. Fragments of hedged field boundaries are very occasionally visible within the areas of intense arable cultivation. Semi natural habitats are limited to wooded areas on the hilltops, often close to urban areas. The ecological integrity of the area is therefore considered to be weak and the overall condition of the landscape is very poor.

Sensitivity

There are a reasonable proportion of recent features in the landscape, including conifer shelter belts and industrial-type buildings. The roads have adopted more recent characteristics and the heritage features, such as field boundaries, have become indistinct. The wooded ridges are one of the strongest characteristic features in the view. Visibility is high as the views are open over the discernible landform. The landscape is highly sensitive due to the visibility of the marked landform.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore cultural and visual integrity to the area by recreating a continuous wooded edge to the ridge tops, to follow contours and minor valleys.
Restore the ecological interest to selected areas of open grassland by conservation management.
Restore hedged boundaries to the road network.
Restore the rural view by using broadleaf woodland and shaws as screening for industrial buildings.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity High.

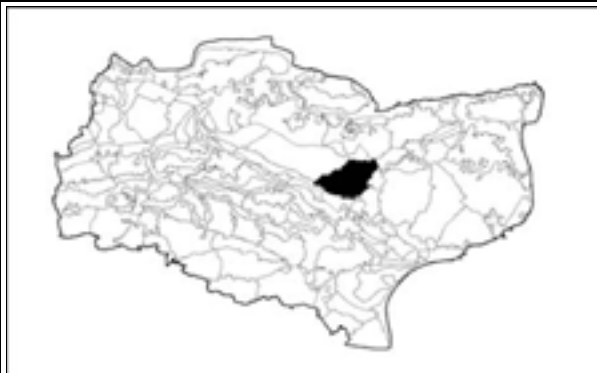
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE.

Restore the wooded edge to ridge tops where it is currently eroded
Restore selected areas of species-rich chalk grassland
Restore hedged boundaries to roads and other highways

[previous <<](#)



CHALLOCK

To the east of Doddington, the open arable plateaux take on an increasingly important role in shaping the character of the landscape. Many of the fields have no clear boundaries between them, forming instead great sweeps of cultivation, through which the tiny lanes pass almost unnoticed. This sense of exposure, however, produces an airy, invigorating landscape, where large flocks of plovers wheel overhead and there are long, northern views. In the south east, the huge expanse of Challock Forest, still managed largely as coppice, blankets the slopes above the Stour Valley. Between Challock and Perry Hill there is a distinctive pattern of trimmed hedges and hedgerow trees, interspersed by small orchards.

MID KENT DOWNS

Challock lies within the larger character area of the Mid Kent Downs.

The long spine of the Kent Downs in this area stretches from Chatham in the west to the Stour Valley in the east. Although there are local variations in the appearance of the landscape, there is a strong underlying pattern to the landform, which imparts an overall character to the region. Throughout the length of the chalk ridge a series of narrow, steep-sided dry valleys carve their way down the gentle northern dip-slope of the Downs to the flatter land of the North Kent Fruit Belt, around Sittingbourne and Faversham.

The historical poverty of this area resulted largely from the stiff clay-with-flints soils, which overlie the solid chalk. Despite their striking, rich-red colour, these soils are relatively poor and difficult to cultivate, especially as they occur on the exposed upper plateaux of the Downs. Edward Hasted, writing in 1798, consistently describes the area in terms such as "an unpleasant dreary country, the soil of which is very poor, being chalky, and much covered with flint-stones". In his day the land was used widely for sheep grazing, interspersed by arable on the lower slopes and large blocks of woodland. Today appreciation of the landscape of the Downs has changed and the remote, undeveloped ridges and valleys, which resulted from the historical poverty of the soils, are considered one of the most beautiful features of the AONB. Although mechanised farming over the last hundred years has seen an increase in the area of arable land, much of the original ancient woodland survives, walling in the arable plateaux and enclosing the rounded, valley bottoms.

[next >>](#)

CHALLOCK: MID KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Open arable plateau, sweeping landform with few boundaries and long views, large coppice wood at Challock Forest.
Orchards and trimmed hedgerows between Perry Hill and Challock.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape with a coherent pattern of landform and elements and few detracting features. It has a moderate ecological interest based on coppice, plantation woodland and pasture which are found around relatively reduced areas of interest in the open arable fields. Heritage features are in variable condition. Woodlands occur in large blocks but there is much single-age plantation; woody shaws have declined and the remaining fragments are considered to be vulnerable. Built form is of mixed quality but includes vernacular detail and isolated settlements, and has a moderate positive impact. The condition of the area is considered to be good.

Sensitivity

Key characteristics of the landscape, such as shaws and field boundary hedges, are now in serious decline. The form of many of the roads is no longer apparent as they have been widened. Traditional orchards have also declined. Woodland cover remains a characteristic feature with a strong time depth. Settlement does not contribute to a strong sense of place, despite occasional vernacular building. The landform here is apparent and views are intermittent, giving a moderate visibility. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve large areas of woodland cover, ensuring that the appropriate species are used, using mixed broadleaf species as visual buffers to plantation woodland.
Conserve and manage beech stands and ensure the continuation of these landscape features by replanting them.
Reinforce woodland edges and shaws by replanting.
Reinforce the visual distinction of existing settlement.
Reinforce the settings of vernacular building.
Reinforce ecological interest by the management of selected grasslands and arable fields.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

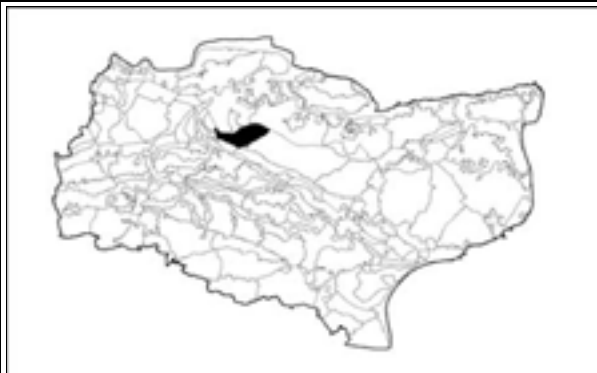
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve broadleaf woodland
Reinforce woodland edges
Reinforce shaws and beech stands
Reinforce the localised and characteristic design and pattern of settlements.
Reinforce ecological interest of grasslands and arable fields

[previous <<](#)



CHATHAM OUTSKIRTS

This landscape is a mosaic of deciduous woodland, large arable plateau and steep, rolling valleys, which support a patchwork of small pastures, neglected grassland and scrub. A number of mainly derelict orchards dot the slopes, set within a matrix of overgrown hedges and small, scrubby shaws. Fruit cultivation used to be widespread in this area. The arable plateau are intensively farmed, with few hedges, and are contained in the distance by belts of woodland.

There is a strong urban-edge influence in this area, characterised by dereliction, dumping and high security fences. Many of the hedges are in poor condition and the woodlands are scrubby and largely unmanaged.

MID KENT DOWNS

the Chatham Outskirts lie within the larger character area of the Mid Kent Downs.

The long spine of the Kent Downs in this area stretches from Chatham in the west to the Stour Valley in the east. Although there are local variations in the appearance of the landscape, there is a strong underlying pattern to the landform, which imparts an overall character to the region. Throughout the length of the chalk ridge a series of narrow, steep-sided dry valleys carve their way down the gentle northern dip-slope of the Downs to the flatter land of the north Kent fruit belt, around Sittingbourne and Faversham.

The historical poverty of this area resulted from the stiff clay-with-flints soils, which overlie the solid chalk. Despite their striking, rich-red colour, these soils are relatively poor and difficult to cultivate, especially as they occur on the exposed upper plateau of the Downs. Edward Hasted, writing in 1798, consistently describes the area in terms such as "an unpleasant dreary country, the soil of which is very poor, being chalky, and much covered with flint-stones". In his day the land was used widely for sheep grazing, interspersed by arable on the lower slopes and large blocks of woodland. Today appreciation of the landscape has changed and the remote, undeveloped ridges and valleys, which resulted from the historical poverty of the soils, are considered one of the most beautiful features of the AONB. Although mechanised farming over the last hundred years has seen an increase of arable land, much of the original ancient woodland survives, walling in the arable plateau and enclosing the rounded, valley bottoms.

[next >>](#)

CHATHAM OUTSKIRTS: MID KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Large arable plateau and steep, rolling valleys, scarp slopes.
Patchwork of small pastures, grass and scrub.
Derelict orchards, few hedges.
Urban-edge influence. Long views to the industrial edge.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a large scale landscape with a coherent pattern, but there are many detracting features which are associated with unsympathetic land uses. Large blocks of woodland are interspersed with areas of intense arable cultivation - the latter reduces the ecological interest of the landscape area. There is a strong influence from the urban edge. The cultural integrity and the condition of heritage features is poor. Built form has a negative impact on the view.

Sensitivity

The sense of place within this landscape is strong. Key characteristics such as cross-contour and ridgeline roads, and beech/yew woodland, contribute to the strong sense of place, and also have a very strong time depth. Settlement and built form, however, do not greatly contribute to local distinctiveness.
The plateau itself has an insignificant landform, but this area also includes some of the top of the scarp and some of the steeper sided valleys. The landform is therefore considered to be apparent in the view. Enclosure by woodland is intermittent: the sensitivity of the landscape is therefore high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

A smaller scale landscape may be restored around settlements where this is appropriate to agricultural use. This may be achieved by planting hedgerow to enclose highways, fields and settlements, and by ensuring that fields are small scale. Encourage mixed agricultural use of the farmland.
Restore broadleaf wooded areas and copses on ridgelines.
Restore woodland links into the large arable areas, forming a network with the existing woodland cover on the scarp.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

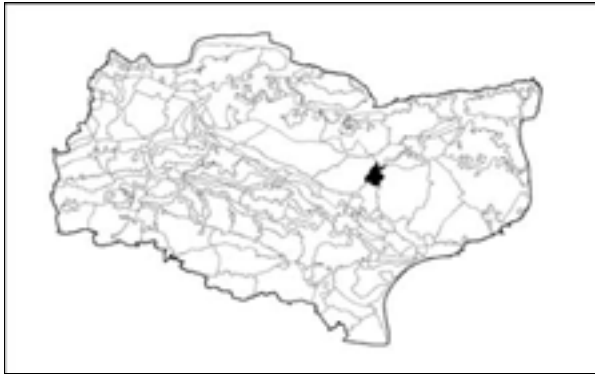
Sensitivity	High.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE.

Restore woodland links from the ridge into the large arable areas.
Restore hedgerow along selected highways and around settlements.
Restore areas of broadleaf woodland.
Restore a smaller-scale framework to the landscape around settlements.

[previous <<](#)



CHILHAM

North of Bilting, the Stour Valley becomes increasingly enclosed. The rolling sides of the valley support large arable fields in the east, while sweeps of parkland belonging to Godmersham Park and Chilham Castle cover most of the western slopes. On either side of the valley, dense woodland dominate the skyline and a number of substantial shaws and plantations on the lower slopes reflect the importance of game cover in this area. On the valley bottom, the river is picked out in places by waterside alders and occasional willows. The railway line is obscured for much of its length by trees.

STOUR VALLEY

Chilham lies within the larger character area of the Stour Valley within the Kent Downs AONB.

The Great Stour is the most easterly of the three rivers cutting through the Downs. Like the Darent and the Medway, it too provided an early access route into the heart of Kent and formed an ancient focus for settlement. Today the Stour Valley is highly valued for the quality of its landscape, especially by the considerable numbers of walkers who follow the Stour Valley Walk or the North Downs Way National Trail.

Despite its proximity to both Canterbury and Ashford, the Stour Valley retains a strong rural identity. Enclosed by steep scarps on both sides, with dense woodlands on the upper slopes, the valley is dominated by intensively farmed arable fields interspersed by broad sweeps of mature parkland. Unusually, there are no electricity pylons cluttering the views across the valley. North of Bilting, the river flows through a narrow, pastoral floodplain, dotted with trees such as willow and alder and drained by small ditches. To the south around Wye, however, the floodplain widens out and the pastures along the immediate riverside are surrounded by intensively cultivated arable fields on the rich, well-drained brickearth soils. The field pattern is picked out by a network of narrow, trimmed hedges and lines of mature trees, such as poplars.

On the valley sides, many of the arable fields are surrounded by thick shaws and dense, overgrown hedges which extend down from the woodlands on the upper slopes. Hedgerow trees, in particular oak and ash, are frequent and much of the woodland along the east side of the valley is of national importance for its plant, insect and other animal communities.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gentle, enclosed valley sides, wooded skyline. Sinuous riverside pastures, sweeping parkland. Shaws, game cover plantations and riverside trees on valley bottom. Chalk scarp to NE.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The area incorporates the river valley and upper floodplain which have a unified pattern of elements and some small scale visual detractors associated with remnant fruit growing and the management of landscape features. Estate houses, historic farmsteads and local building materials (including flint) have a positive impact on the area. Rural heritage features of woodland and hedgerow are considered to be poor, but the diversity of the land use and the strong ecological corridor of the river itself result in a strong ecological base.

Sensitivity

This area has a characteristic historic time depth. It includes notable features such as the parkland at Godmersham. Vegetative features within the river valley tend to be recent, such as poplar plantations, or contribute little to the local sense of place, such as hedgerow and remnant orchards. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve and reinforce the distinction between valley floor and the upper floodplain by conserving managed hedged boundaries on the higher land, and the copse/pasture/arable pattern on the valley floor.
Conserve and reinforce historic parkland features.
Reinforce the river corridor with selected areas of riparian vegetation and plantations.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements: Unified.

Detracting features: Some.

Visual Unity: Unified.

Cultural integrity: Poor.

Ecological integrity: Coherent.

Functional Integrity: Coherent.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

Distinctiveness: Characteristic.

Continuity: Historic.

Sense of Place: Moderate.

Landform: Apparent.

Extent of tree cover: Intermittent.

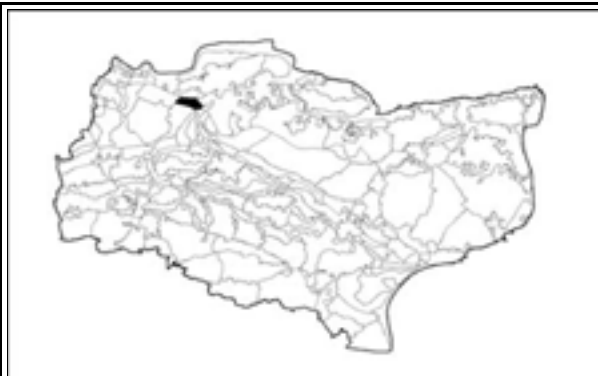
Visibility: Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve and reinforce small scale woodland plantation and riparian vegetation on the valley floor
Conserve historic parkland
Reinforce hedgerows and field patterns in the upper valley

[previous <<](#)



COBHAM

In the north around Cobham, the character of the landscape begins to change. The dominance of farmland gives way to parkland and extensive mixed woodlands around Cobham Hall. These in turn give way to the actively worked coppice woodlands of Shorne Wood and the heathy vegetation which reflects a local change in the underlying geology.

The character of Cobham Park is threatened by the gradual decay of existing ornamental tree features and the ploughing up of areas of the parkland. Other activities, such as landfill and golf, further damage the integrity of the parkland, which relies on the belt of trees along its northern boundary to screen it from the busy A2 trunk road and the CTRL.

WEST KENT DOWNS

Cobham lies within the larger character area of the West Kent Downs.

The south-facing, chalk scarp between the Medway and the Darent provides a strong visual boundary, dividing the Kemsing Vale from the deep, dry valleys and wooded plateau of the West Kent Downs. This sense of separation is increased by the extensive tracts of ecologically valuable deciduous woodlands along the top of the scarp.

Woodland is very significant in this landscape, providing an important backdrop for the rolling landform, the network of small country lanes, the scattered settlements and the extensive valley pastures. In the east, around Luddesdown, the fields are contained by thick walls of woodland, and strips of remnant coppice, or shaws, occur frequently along the steeper valley sides. Hidden away among the trees are several medieval buildings, such as Luddesdown Court, constructed from the local Kentish ragstone, while the villages of Vigo and West Kingsdown are set deep in the woodlands themselves.

The clay-with-flints soil on the plateau and ridge tops is reflected in the pasture and woodland dominating these areas; in the valleys, the extent of the finer silt soils is reflected by the predominance of arable cultivation. The downland becomes increasingly open in the north, where the intimate character of the scarp top gives way to a large-scale landscape of intensively farmed, rolling valleys and large blocks of deciduous woodland. West of Rochester, the mature woodlands and historic parkland of Cobham Hall are severed from the deciduous coppice woodlands of Shorne Wood Country Park by the busy A2 trunk road and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL).

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Large-scale open scarp-top landscape.
Intensively farmed rolling, coppice woodland and historic parkland, some fruit growing.
Landfill, golf course and A2 sever the character area.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This landscape area has a coherent pattern of elements which relate to the scarp-top landform. There are some visual detractors such as the trunk road and approaches, Channel Tunnel Rail Link, and recent fringe residential development. There are strong, extensive clusters of ecological interest associated with the woodland, but this is countered by the weak ecological interest of the open landscape which has intensive open arable and amenity uses such as the golf course. The condition of rural heritage features such as tree cover is good, and appears to be well-managed within the parkland setting. Field boundaries are in poor condition. In general, the built form of estate houses and small village settlements have a positive impact on the landscape and the cultural integrity is strong. The area is considered to be in good condition.

Sensitivity

Visibility is low due to the unremarkable landform and the intermittent tree cover. Historic features are characteristic of the landscape, such as woodland, parkland and vernacular building styles. The estate parkland and estate management of the area influences the distinctive character and gives an historic time-depth. Highways and field boundaries do not currently contribute significantly to local distinctiveness; this is due to the modification of many of the existing roads, and to the recent use of post and wire field boundaries within the parkland. Shelterbelts do not tend to be a widespread feature. The sensitivity of this area is therefore considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve and reinforce the parkland character of the area, emphasizing and co-ordinating the localised features (fencing, highways, rural buildings) associated with the management of a central estate.
Conserve and reinforce woodland cover, extending woodland planting to existing open areas to the west of Cobham village.
Reinforce the rural characteristics of the local highways, using hedgerow enclosure to enhance narrow, winding routes. Hedgerow may also be reinstated within the smaller-scale fruit-growing areas around villages.
Vernacular detail is a noticeable feature and should be conserved and reinforced in any new development.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

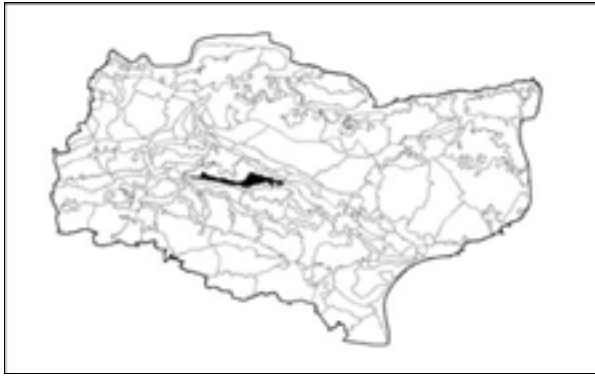
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Reinforce the parkland features and encourage management which enhances the parkland characteristics
Conserve and manage parkland trees and woodland cover
Reinforce the rural highway characteristics
Reinforce the hedgerow enclosure of agricultural land
Conserve and reinforce the use of vernacular detail

[previous <<](#)

COXHEATH PLATEAU FARMLANDS



This landscape is composed of the flat to gently sloping land of medium to poor quality soils associated with the head drift deposits on the dip slope of the Hythe Beds. It is a narrow character area from Quarry Wood in the west to Fairbourne and Platt's Heath in the east. It is in part densely wooded with chestnut coppice or plantation as found at Abbey Wood or the pure stands of chestnut coppice seen near Boughton Malherbe. This wooded landscape is similar to the Mereworth Woodlands in this latter respect.

Although their extent would have been much greater in the past, these woodlands are now fragmented into small to medium sized blocks and the rest of the land farmed or developed, mainly this century, for housing.

The farmlands are a mix of arable crops such as cereals and rape, with residual orchards and some pasture including paddocks for grazing horses.

The large scale rape fields are replacing the traditional smaller, grid-like pattern of orchards surrounded by their bushy hedgerows or shelterbelts. Fortunately, many of the roadside hedges remain to give some structure to the landscape that has been lost with the tall orchard trees. These hedgerows and the dense coppice woodlands also help to contain the substantial 20th century village settlements of Coxheath, Boughton Monchelsea, Langley Heath and Kingswood, especially from views to the south, that have grown up on this flat accessible land close to Maidstone.

Very strikingly the B2163 follows the ridge top in a near straight line east to west. A feature of much of this road is the intermittent housing, garden centres, leisure facilities and horse paddocks, most of which has sprung up this century, which gives the roadside an irregular appearance. Scattered housing has also grown up along Gravelly Bottom Road on plots through Abbey Wood.

North of the B2163, however, several narrow enclosed rural lanes link this road to the Medway and Loose valleys through the Maidstone Fruit Belt. They are under pressure from commuter traffic at certain times of the day and exhibit signs of erosion.

To the south the woodlands merge into the steeply sloping land of the Maidstone Ridge with its orchards and parklands and occasional nut platt. A feature are the narrow, steep, shady lanes running off at right angles at regular intervals, following the old drove roads into the Weald.

[next >>](#)

COXHEATH PLATEAU FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Sloping landscape with poor quality soils. Medium sized coppice woodlands with plantation. Mixed farmlands including residual orchards. Expanded 20th century villages

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This area, which is defined by the clear, ridgeline road through the centre, reflects the underlying soil conditions and ancient settlement influences in the existing diverse agricultural and settlement patterns. There are some visual detractors due to commercial and linear 20th century built development which interrupt the overall visual unity. An intensity of land use is developing, and tree cover is variable, being limited to large coppice plantations to the south of the ridge-top. Hedged field boundaries appear to be strong and functioning with the current land use. The extent of semi-natural habitats is limited. Built development has a high negative impact on the landscape, and the condition of the landscape is considered to be poor.

Sensitivity

Intermittent enclosure, created by tall hedgerow and occasional coppice woodlands, reduces the visibility over the unremarkable landform. Landscape features have an historic time-depth, but with many recent urban influences. The ridgeline road is a characteristic feature, but is not considered to have rare or unique distinctions.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The present function of the landscape is divided between agricultural and urban elements. It is therefore desirable to create new features which reflect the inherent character and the new uses of the landscape.
Create an urban edge using managed fruit growing area characteristics where these adjoin other fruit belt areas, such as tall hedges.
Create new woodland in small blocks. This may be away from the main built development, but within the farmland, linked to existing coppice, to augment the ecological interest.
Create new characteristics which reflect the significance of the ridgeline road, such as the continuation of wooded edges, managed verges, tree lines in urban areas, or other linear features which continue through urban and rural areas alike.
Encourage the reinstatement of managed fruit farming on the slopes towards the fruit belt.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

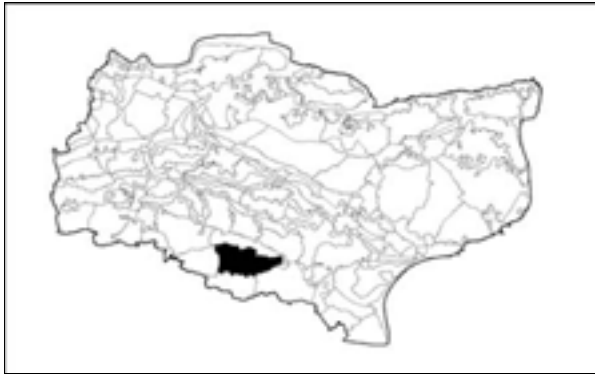
Sensitivity	Very Low.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create small patches of broadleaf woodland and manage these in order to enhance the ecological interest.
Create urban edges with managed features associated with agricultural enclosure.
Reflect the significance of the ridgeline road in landscape features

[previous <<](#)



CRANBROOK

The characteristic charm of this area is in the jumble of little lane and strips of coppice woodland, interspersed with roughly grazed meadows and small orchards. Many of the fields in the south and west are fringed by overgrown hedges, whose branches are laden in the spring with white may-blossom, whilst clumps of cow parsley lean out of the verges into the roads. In the east, towards Rolvenden, extensive views south over the Rother valley open up, whilst to the north the land becomes flatter and the horizon is confined by the dense sweep of Hemsted Forest. There are extensive arable fields here with occasional hedgerow trees, whilst the skyline is dominated near Rolvenden by West Cross windmill.

Although there are some elegant areas of parkland, such as Hole Park, near Benenden, and a considerable number of pony paddocks, this area nevertheless retains a strong agricultural tradition. Hops are still grown here and there are large orchards where in winter, twisted black-barked apple trees crouch over the land like enormous spiders. Between these orchards, warehouses and occasional conifer windbreaks dispel any illusions that this is a purely ornamental landscape.

KENTISH HIGH WEALD

Cranbrook is part of the larger character area of the Kentish High Weald.

The Kentish High Weald stretches from Pembury to Rolvenden, including Lamberhurst, Bewl Water and Bedgebury Forest. This landscape has a general north easterly orientation and, from the higher land between Pembury and Lamberhurst, around the southern edge of Bewl Water and between Goudhurst and Benenden, long views stretch out over the Kent Weald towards the North Downs. Kent is known as the Garden of England and the Kentish High Weald plays an important part in this tradition. This is a richly textured landscape, where the angular patterns of the orchard and hop garden contrast with smooth sweeps of arable or intensively grazed pasture. Despite a continuing decline in fruit cultivation, this area still owes its gardenesque feel to the abundant orchards and hop gardens. Once, however, this landscape was famous, not for its fruit but its cloth. Flemish weavers, settling here in the 14th century, built up a thriving woollen industry centred on Cranbrook. Until the 17th century, this industry remained a major source of employment and wealth accumulated by the wool merchants is evident from the substantial medieval houses in the town.

This tapestry of land uses is set within a framework of dense shaws, thick hedges and stretches of broad-leaved woodland, some of which are still coppiced. The large conifer forests at Bedgebury, Hemsted and around Bewl Water, uphold the tradition of commercial timber production in the High Weald, their expanses of deep green enriching the countryside during the winter. This is a well-settled area, where it is rare to be out of sight of farmstead or cottage. Oasthouses dot the landscape, some tiled and some asphalted, and in the east windmills form occasional local landmarks. Many of the villages are of picture-postcard quality, their rose-covered cottages clustering around a pond or tiny green, the local pub sharing its tourist trade with the stone-built church beyond. Nevertheless, this charming image conceals a landscape under pressure, as agriculture becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

Several minor ridges, running north-west from Pembury and south-east to Tenterden, define this area. The River Teise cuts through these ridges at Lamberhurst and Goudhurst, whilst to the south Bewl Water is enclosed by gentle ridges. In the fruit belt around Matfield there are a number of small ghylls, whilst the ground gradually becomes flatter and more open towards Cranbrook.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating gentle ridges, a jumble of small scale fields with strips of coppice, overgrown hedges.
Meadows, hops and small orchards, arable fields around Rolvenden. Strong agricultural tradition. Farm buildings and warehouses.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The small-scale rural landscape retains a coherent pattern of varied farming uses and displays the area's formerly strong farming tradition. Recent diversification of farms and farm buildings, and scattered suburban development have introduced some visually detracting forms into the landscape.

Functionally, the area performs relatively well - heritage landscape and built features are widespread and have a positive impact, although woodland and hedgerow are declining as their role in the farmed landscape becomes less important. The remaining ecological bases are found in a weak network of plantation woods, broadleaf copses and streams, further weakened by the development of some larger arable areas.

The condition of this area is considered to be good.

Sensitivity

This well-settled area has some unique historic features associated with historic settlement and the built form. One key characteristic of the historic rural landscape is the hedgerow and shelterbelt pattern, with mature standards; this is considered to be vulnerable or already indistinct in some areas as the small-scale and the variety of the landscape use changes. Wide-verged highways are another characteristic feature which contribute to a moderate sense of place. The landform is a relatively insignificant part of the perception of this landscape and views are partially enclosed by blocks of woodland and some hedgerow. Visibility is therefore low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Reinforce the rural heritage features, defining the areas which have small-scale rural uses and encouraging the management and replanting of hedgerow, shelterbelts and small broadleaf copses, and narrow strips of woodland in these areas. Within these features reinforce the ecological interest by sensitive management of woodland and understorey and cultivation techniques which respect the growing conditions of hedges and other peripheral habitats. Identify those areas of arable cultivation which may be appropriate for less intensive use and the subsequent encouragement of arable-land habitats.
Reinforce the variety of landscape cover and the small-scale of land use parcels.
Reinforce the highway characteristics of narrow lanes with wide verges, and the hedgerow enclosure of these roads.

CONTEXT

Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

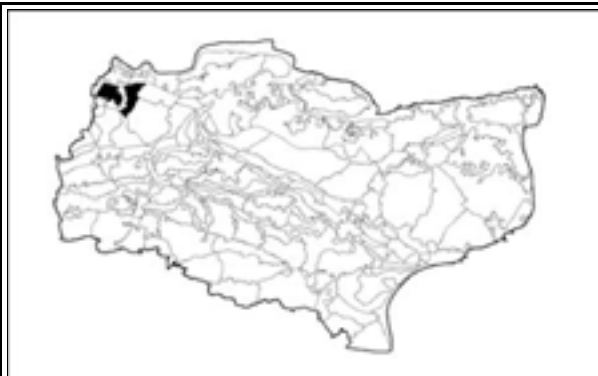
Sensitivity	Low.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

REINFORCE.

Reinforce the small-scale enclosure where it is appropriate to the land use
Reinforce ecological bases by the replanting and management of hedges, woodland and copses
Reinforce the ecological interest in arable areas
Reinforce highway characteristics

[previous <<](#)



Over time, the erosional cutting power of the River Darent has created a broad but steep-sided valley carved out of the chalk. Unlike the more intimate, enclosed valley bottom in which the river meanders over its flat alluvial bed, and the wooded ridge and valley landscapes of the Ash and Knockholt Downs, the chalk slopes have a smooth open, arable character more reminiscent of the North Kent Agricultural Belt.

This landscape extends from Horton Kirby and South Darent to the Ash Downs in the east and from the A225 up to Farningham Wood, Hextable and Wilmington. Farningham and Joydens Wood and Swanley form part of a separate character area developed on the sands, gravels and clays of the Tertiary deposits.

Whilst being mainly an agricultural landscape with few settlements, the landscape is far from tranquil and is often marred by discordant elements. These include the busy M20/A20 corridor that marks the southern boundary, the A2(T) that crosses to the north, and the M25 and A225 that cut through the middle of the character area.

The few lanes that cross this open landscape into the valley bottom are marred by eroded edges and gappy hedgerows, and often give vistas past pylons or to the built or damaged landscapes of Kent Thames-side.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Smooth, open arable landscape on the chalk.
Crossed by major transport routes.
Scattered settlement.
Long views to the Kent Thames Gateway.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The landscape pattern remains coherent but many of the landscape elements are skeletal or redundant in use. The open, arable farmland is quiet, denuded of the more vulnerable heritage features such as hedged field boundaries. There are many detracting features: the urban edge intrudes into most views and the landscape pattern is subject to major interruptions from motorway transport routes. Suburban land uses and neglected land around settlements are also common detractors. The extent of woodland cover is insignificant except that it marks the tops of hills in isolated clumps; the unusual characteristics of some acid woodland upgrades the ecological interest of the area, which is otherwise intensively cultivated in areas of agricultural land use. Culturally, the enlarged, suburban development of formerly ancient and historical settlements have a high negative impact on the landscape.

Sensitivity

This area is considered to be of moderate sensitivity. The rounded, chalk landform is apparent in views of the landscape and visibility is high due to the openness of the countryside. Historic and ancient landscape features such as boundaries and woodlands are weak and indistinct. Some remnant hedges exist by the roadside, although the regenerative elm within these is known to be very vulnerable. There is very little sense of local distinctiveness or continuity of time in the current landscape elements.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create positive landscape features that are appropriate to the evolving land uses. This may include the creation of a cohesive urban edge which incorporates suburban land uses and appropriate pools of sustainable vegetation. Within agricultural land, field patterns should be created based on the cultural need and actual use of the land, but ecological interest may be augmented by the encouragement of less intensive cultivation techniques. Broader woodland cover may be restored on hill-tops, reflecting either the acid soils or chalk, depending on localised conditions. Wooded shaws may also be reintroduced, linked to wooded tops, following depressions in the chalk landscape, ideally in association with the less intensive areas of arable cultivation.
Restore the historical features of the road pattern, recreating banked and hedged boundaries which link with vegetation on the new urban edge and the augmented wooded hilltops.
Create major new woodland links and habitats along the motorway corridor.

CONTEXT

Regional: North West Kent

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

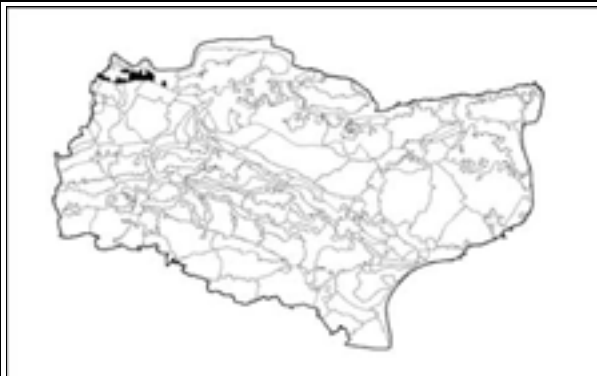
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create an edge to the urban area
Create field patterns based on the integrity of current use and in response to the landform and soils
Restore woodland on tops of hills and in depressions on the chalk slopes
Create areas of acid woodland
Restore road pattern and features
Create new ecologically rich vegetative cover/woodland adjacent to motorway corridor
Restore ecological interest in the arable areas

[previous <<](#)

DARTFORD AND GRAVESEND FRINGES



These are essentially pockets of land that have become isolated from the wider countryside to the south by the A2 and which are now sandwiched between the road and the extensive urban edges of Dartford and Gravesend and have become influenced, to varying degrees, by urban fringe land uses and features. Although the land uses vary, these areas have in common the A2 route corridor which forms the southern boundary, containment by hard urban edges on all other boundaries and strong urban influences both within and/or on their peripheries.

The underlying geology is predominantly Thanet Beds, chalk and London Clay. The chalk results in the most distinct landform with strongly rolling forms (e.g. Fleet Downs) and prominent scarps (e.g. on the southern edges of Swanscombe). Large-scale chalk quarries are a dramatic and prominent feature of the landscape to the south of Swanscombe. The Thanet Beds and London Clay result in a softer undulating landscape.

This area has lost most of its former agricultural uses, woodland and orchards. Although a relatively small tract of land, compared to some of the other character areas in the study, its fragmented nature and the varying pressures and needs of the adjoining urban areas has resulted in a varied pattern of landcover. This is composed of isolated pockets of arable farmland, that seem somewhat incongruous in their built settings; woodland, Darenth Wood in particular is a significant landscape feature; heathland, Dartford Heath is the most significant tract; amenity grassland, i.e. golf courses and sports fields; working landscapes, e.g. mineral workings disused and extant, resulting in complete destruction of landcover and landscape structure; restored landfill sites e.g. at Ebbsfleet and Stone; industrial uses, including refuse and recycling; and retail use e.g. plant nurseries.

Dartford Heath is designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) with key habitats of woodland, heathland and scrub. Darenth Wood and part of Ladies Wood are of high nature conservation value (designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and listed in the Ancient Woodland Inventory, together with Parkhill Wood). Ebbsfleet Marshes is a Local Nature Reserve and a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) with key habitats of open water, marsh, grassland and scrub. Other valuable landscape and ecological features include scrub vegetation on scarps along the southern edge of Swanscombe and regeneration of grassland, scrub and woodland in chalk quarries.

This area possesses one of the highest densities of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic finds in Kent as well as a high concentration of Roman finds. The oldest human remains in Britain were found near Swanscombe. In the 17th century Daniel Defoe noted the quarrying of chalk in this area. The quarries around Northfleet were first worked in 1834. A prominent historical feature is the fourteenth century Stone Castle which is constructed of flint.

Each isolated pocket of landscape within this character area has its own discrete character but all fall generally into the transitional, 'fringe' categories because of the pervasive influences of the urban or suburban context within which they are located. They are distinguished partly by land use differences but, at times, it is the degree and type of management imposed which is more influential on character. This ranges from intensively managed grassland, e.g. golf courses, to semi-natural heathland with minimum intervention.

[next >>](#)

DARTFORD AND GRAVESEND FRINGES

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Contained by A2 and urban edges.
Some semi-natural heathland and woodland.
Some farmland with remnant hedgerows and trees.
Heritage features associated with remnant chalk farmland are limited - some redundant hedges remain.
The tightly-knit residential development is of mixed age and has a high negative impact on the area. Other, more recent features associated with land use include the planting and earthworks of reclaimed quarries, which are in variable condition. Overall, the landscape is considered to be in very poor condition.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This area is intensely physically fragmented, and the relationship between landform and landscape elements is obscured by urban development and the transport corridor. Semi-natural habitats such as Dartford Heath and exposed chalk faces (quarries) provide ecological interest, but these are few and specialised and do not form a coherent network. Heritage features associated with remnant chalk farmland are limited - some redundant hedges remain. The tightly-knit residential development is of mixed age and has a high negative impact on the area. Other, more recent features associated with land use include the planting and earthworks of reclaimed quarries, which are in variable condition. Overall, the landscape is considered to be in very poor condition.

Sensitivity

Visibility is moderate as the landform is unremarkable but views are generally unenclosed. There is very little continuity of time-depth in the landscape - historic cores to settlements are no longer apparent and very little characteristic farmland remains, most of which has only remnant hedgerow and tree cover. The lack of distinctive features which could be associated with the current dominant elements of the landscape, such as road networks and urban development, devalues the sense of place. Because the sense of place is weak, the sensitivity of the area is considered to be low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

In order to regain its functional integrity, this area requires the evolution of new landscape features which will enhance the underlying landform and respect the current use of the land. Fragmented pockets of open land, reclaimed quarries and transport corridors may be linked to create a new landscape framework for amenity use and to recreate semi-natural habitats, such as acid scrub, where these are appropriate to the surrounding land use.

It is important to define the boundaries between the urban edge and the open farmland. The slopes of the chalk as they overlook the river estuary can also be enhanced by vegetation and new development patterns which follow the landform - in particular by the re-introduction of dense regenerative vegetation on the ridge.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

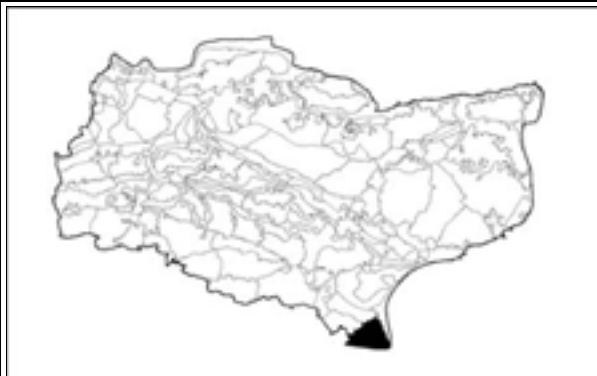
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Very Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create a new landscape framework to the existing and reclaimed farmland
Create an edge to existing urban areas
Create semi-natural habitats such as acid woodland and scrub
Create areas for amenity uses
Create cohesive landscape elements which enhance the nature of the underlying landform and embrace the urban nature of the area.
Create links between existing natural habitats into developed areas.

[previous <<](#)



'Dungeness is a magical location. When you visit, tread softly, for many choose to live here for the solitude and silence.....' preface to 'Derek Jarman's Garden'.

Dungeness is now a National Nature Reserve. The surface shingle stretches along the coastline from Greatstone-on-Sea to the point of Dungeness, and west beyond the county boundary. Inland it is evident as far as Lydd.

Towards the coast, the deep shingle covers the land exclusively with thin acid soils hidden between stones. Long, domed corrugations of grey-yellow shingle run successively inland from the coast, marking the edges of fossil shorelines with banks of flints, up to 30 metre wide and running the length of the foreland. Inland, nearer to Lydd in the area known as Denge Marsh, the ploughed farmland and pasture becomes increasingly soil-based, strewn with the rounded flints.

The dominant landscape element here is the unique landform and its coastal and climatic influences. Views are significant towards inland features such as Lydd Church. The tip of the cusped foreland is marked by the power station and the two lighthouses.

This area can feel hostile due to the overpowering effect of the unusual vast stone beaches and extreme weather. It can also be exhilarating and breathtakingly desolate. The intense light is reflected on the stone and colours change from dramatic 'seaside' bleached orange with bright blue sky, to complete grey skies, mist and grey stone in unfavourable weather conditions.

There is no tall tree cover. Scrub vegetation such as broom, holly, blackthorn, blackberry and the smaller woodsage grows on the stone ridges. The pale grey foliage of willow scrub grows in pits or around excavations. The windswept shapes of the woody scrub reflect the extreme climate. The most strikingly characteristic plant is sea kale which has a rounded and compact form and bright green summer foliage, contrasting greatly with the stone.

Herbaceous vegetation on the shingle is seasonally colourful and varied, supporting numerous and rare invertebrates like the Sussex Emerald and white-spot moth. These unique habitats have been extended to include those of the wet gravel pits, which also attract a variety of seabirds, migrants, waders and shingle-nesting species of birds. The area of pure shingle, including the wet pits, is designated as a Special Protection Area (for birdlife) and is now a candidate Special Area of Conservation (for wild flora and fauna habitats). The coastal zone is proposed as a candidate Ramsar Site, of international importance for birdlife.

The promontory is an internationally important landfall for migrating birds and provides special habitats for shingle-nesting species such as common terns. In general, birds are an integral part of the landscape, especially the gulls with their sudden, piercing cries.

Settlement was traditionally extremely scarce, limited to scattered weather-boarded fishermen's huts and a few isolated farmhouses on Denge Marsh. Boats drawn up on the beach, near the huts, are an extremely picturesque feature. Today, some holiday camps along the coast encroach on the shingle.

The celebrated garden of Prospect Cottage, a former fisherman's hut, can be found among the miscellany of huts, shanties and old railway carriages that are scattered on the shingle at the edge of the Ness. There are no visible boundaries between the huts.

Concentrated at the point of the Ness is a cluster of large, in cohesive, specialised buildings including the power station, the coastguard building and the 1904 and 1960 lighthouses. The narrow lines of the eccentric miniature railway run across the shingle, terminating at the 1904 lighthouse.

The coastline to the south of these buildings is artificially maintained by shingle-feeding; replacing shingle which is constantly eroded by the sea. This arrests the dynamic system of coastal erosion and deposition, preventing the power station from being engulfed by the sea.

The deep bed of rounded flints is also a valuable aquifer and can be likened to a giant sponge, holding large volumes of good quality fresh water. It is an essential domestic supply for the Folkestone area, but is currently a subject of concern due to the falling water levels.

The centre of the character area is marked by vast areas of disturbed shingle, security fencing and flooded mineral workings which have destroyed the original landform and habitats, but have created new ones. The disturbed shingle around current gravel extraction works is being contoured to ameliorate the ravaged landscape.

The open space which characterises Dungeness has been exploited for uses such as Lydd Airport and the Lydd military firing ranges. The latter is discernable by the peripheral security fencing and the sounds of activities within. Dark silhouettes of the unique colony of stunted and wind-shaped hollies can be seen through the fencing.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Dominant landform, flat with microrelief of long shingle ridges. Remote, exposed coastal location, constant wind or breeze, extremes of climate. Specialized vegetation. Big skies and atmospheric quality of light. Few roads, very inaccessible. Scarce settlement, unusual buildings, few boundaries to dwellings.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

Landform and landscape elements are strongly unified in this unique coastal landscape. However, there are many visual detractors of large-scale gravel extraction, security fencing, transmission towers and the power station. The unique and diverse semi-natural habitats of shingle, tidal, salt and freshwater areas provide almost total coverage of the area. The condition of heritage features is variable - stunted hollies and willow carr are unique, but the hollies are mature and felt to be vulnerable. Built form includes localised structures such as the lighthouse and fishermen's huts, and also large corporate buildings and small scale temporary buildings. These have an overall negative impact on the large scale landscape.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of this area is considered to be very high due to the high visibility over the dominant landform, and the many unique features. The cluster of defence installations, power station and holiday properties on the spit, specialised coastal and shingle-based vegetation, all contribute to a very strong sense of place.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

This area has a strong sense of place, but is in a moderate condition due to the condition of heritage features and the impact of visual detractors. Conserve the unique features and restore open views where possible. Reduce small scale landscape clutter such as fencing, signs and temporary buildings. Restore the minimal impact of highways and access roads by using sensitive highway details and materials.

CONTEXT

Regional: Romney Marsh

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Coherent.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

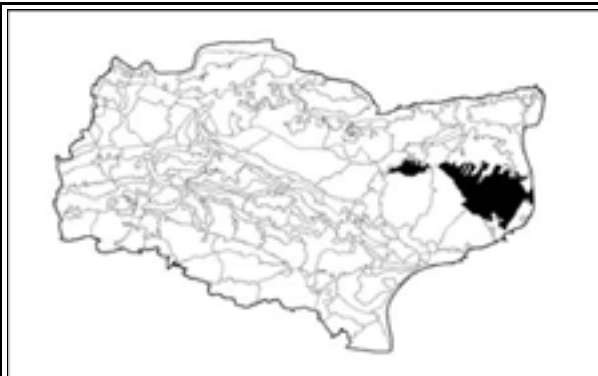
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Very Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Conserve and restore open views
Conserve all wildlife habitats
Restore simple views by removing landscape clutter
Restore simplistic highway characteristics

[previous <<](#)



The East Kent Arable Belt is a large character area situated on the chalk downs outside the AONB to the south-east of Canterbury. It stretches from Bekesbourne in the west, north to Eastry and south to Sibertswold and Whitfield, bounded in the south by the Kent Downs AONB boundary, and to the east by the outskirts of Deal. The land rises from 20 metres at its junction with the lower, flatter Tertiary Beds up to 120 metres in the south-east as it bounds the AONB, not in an even manner but, as elsewhere in the Downs, in a distinct series of dry valleys. The soils are generally well-drained chalky, loamy soils over the chalk, being variously shallow or deep soils in places. Traditionally these good quality soils of the open downs and valleys supported winter cereals, or cereal and grassland in rotation and occasional horticultural crops. Otherwise, fine soils, sometimes flinty, over clay with slight seasonal waterlogging are found associated with the clay with flints in the south and south-east of the character area. Cereals, permanent grassland and deciduous woodland are all traditional on these poorer quality soils of the higher ridges.

Typical of the open downs country is the ploughed landscape of the Adisham Downs which gives long, rural views. This picture is repeated throughout this character area, being most extreme in the far east of the Downs, on Sutton Downs, for instance, where the open, remote, rural landscape, whilst simple, can be awesome. Less extreme are the open landscapes south of Northbourne with its empty, winding lanes, quiet but for the wind and the skylarks. South of Eastry too are wide views but with blocks of woodland and hedgerows scattered in them, providing greater visual interest and variety. The narrow network of winding lanes, so characteristic of the Downs, must have arisen from the trodden paths that led between one pasture or farmstead and another, either in pre-Norman times or after the Conquest. When they joined up to form major roadways they continued to follow their original sinuous pattern. Occasionally, as at Betteshanger, they follow a Roman road or prehistoric trackway. The dualling of the A256 near Betteshanger has now severed the Roman road there, as the creation of the estate in a previous century had already started to do. Betteshanger is one of many old parklands in this part of the Downs that provide distinctive features within the otherwise open landscape.

Betteshanger Park was once a sub-manor of nearby Northbourne Court. The new park may date from the rebuilding of the house in 1733 but it was Lord Northbourne who invited George Devey to enlarge the existing house and create the rambling mansion now used as a school. Many of the parkland trees survive although the playing fields now occupy the parkland grazing land, and much of the parkland to the east of the Roman Road has been ploughed up. The higher ground on all sides is thickly wooded and includes such species as Scot's pine, larch, yew and Holm oak. It is very wooded around Betteshanger with one boundary of the estate being marked by a spectacular avenue of Holm oaks. The parkland at Fredville is very handsome; a secluded park near Snowdown Colliery with a drive leading through beech clumps and chestnuts to the wilderness on the top of the hill and then through pastures to a thatched lodge cottage in the south. Although set in a generally arable landscape, this encompasses a mix of large and smaller fields divided by hedgerows and shaws, through which the winding lanes meander. The estate itself is in part wooded.

Another group of parks is scattered across the Downs east of the A2, many of which were visited by Jane Austen in the 18th century. The best example is perhaps Goodnestone; a neat estate village developed around a medieval core and standing at the gates of Goodnestone Park. The house is predominantly 18th century but with additions set amongst terraced gardens. A similar pattern of mansion and church and cul-de sac is found at Knowlton, but here there is no village, just a cluster of farm buildings and estate cottages. The gardens here were laid out by Sir Reginald Blomfield, set amongst parkland, broadleaf and mixed woodland. The use of pine trees planted along field boundaries seems to have been a fairly common feature of this and many other estates. Many of these estates became marked by the colliery winding gear of the Kent coalfields through the early and middle 20th century, the earliest pit being sunk in 1896. At Tilmanstone, the mine was set amongst the parkland and woodlands of Dane Court. The 18th century house is hidden by woodland with pastures to the north but to the south the parkland has not survived. The partly walled form of Waldershare Park, between Eythorne and the recently dualled A256 likely to be a survivor of one of the fourteen deer parks in the county and covers more than 500 acres. It was established in its current form in the early 18th century with a house to a design by Inigo Jones. Waldershare means literally, 'a share of the forest', with the boundary of the three sharing parishes meeting in the park.

Many place-names in the Downs date from the 13th century, and those incorporating 'Wald' are particularly common in east Kent. This includes Walderchain, Womenswold ('the woodland of the estate of Wingham'), Sibertswold as well as Waldershare, Waltham, Ringwold, East Studdal, West Studdal, and Waddling Wood. These all bear evidence of present or past extensive woodland. Altogether place names with 'wood' in them, in various local forms, appear fifteen times in this small stretch of the east Kent Downs. Taken with the surviving woodland in this part of the Downs and the AONB, they contribute to the theory of one great forest at one time that stretched from above Wye to the outskirts of Deal and the cliffs above Dover. Although substantially removed many hundreds of years ago, the extent of woodland and parkland has declined in this part of Kent, as elsewhere, over the last 30 years. In the 1960s there were some large blocks of broadleaf woodland at Betteshanger, as at Eastry Woods, in association with coniferous and mixed woodland. By this current decade, the woodland and parkland had been fragmented, partly due to 1987 storm damage, notably at Fredville Park and Waldershare.

Although a large percentage of the countryside here was arable by the 1960s, there was a substantial scattering of pasture at Knowlton Court, Nonington and north-west of Adisham. By the 1990's some of the large areas of pasture had been fragmented but in contrast other larger blocks had been created, as at Uffington Court. The orchards which developed around Malmains Farm, Eythorne and Ratling Court have now been removed. The pattern of historic small villages, such as Barrestone, Ratling, Frogham and Eythorne has been changed by the additions of the colliery villages at Aylesham and Elvington. The small, dispersed settlements with the older houses built in brick and tile or occasionally stone or knapped flints, contrast strangely with the bleak and regular forms of the mining villages.

The dramatic steep slopes of the Lydden Valley (north-west of Dover) are a classic grazed landform which is characteristic of the adjacent downland in the 'East Kent Downs' character area of the Kent Downs AONB. This isolated area is dominated by a long, steep scarp and narrow valley, but is excluded from the AONB which follows the boundary of the railways line.

[next >>](#)

EAST KENT ARABLE BELT

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Open, rolling landform with large arable fields and well-wooded hilltops. Simple pattern to the landscape.
Narrow, winding lanes and dispersed settlement.
Parkland trees and 18th century estate villages.
Pine trees on field boundaries.
Disused collieries, and associated colliery villages.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a simple, unified landscape with long views and relatively few detracting features - some of which are associated with the former collieries and the redevelopment of colliery sites. The area also comprises the gently rolling dip slope of the North Downs to the south of Canterbury. Large blocks of broadleaf woodland, grassland and frequent copses provide a strong ecological framework for the large arable fields. To the south of Canterbury, remnant shelterbelts are apparent in the large arable fields. Estate landscapes contribute some localised detail, such as conifer and parkland trees. These provide a more recent historical dimension which are in accord with the large scale of the rural and natural elements. This area is considered to be in good condition.

Sensitivity

The intermittent views within the rolling landscape contribute to a high sensitivity, despite the presence of large, occasional blocks of woodland. It is the ancient nature of the tranquil landscape, overlain with parkland features such as avenues of holm oak, which makes this a very distinct and unique landscape, sensitive to change. The large scale of the landform, and the tiny scattered hamlets where flint is much in evidence as a building material, link with more recent historical changes such as the Light Railway and the colliery buildings which are now an intrinsic part of the area's character.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the large scale and manage the woodlands to promote wildlife interest.
Upgrade the ecological value of some of the arable land by reverting selected areas to grasslands.
Conserve the tranquillity and remote quality of the area.
Restore and reinforce ancient features which are part of the woodland character. Manage the historic estate and parkland, re-creating the occurrences of features such as avenues to a similar frequency and using elements of estate design in new development.
Conserve and interpret the heritage of colliery sites
Conserve the remote settings of small hamlets and villages.

CONTEXT

Regional: North East Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

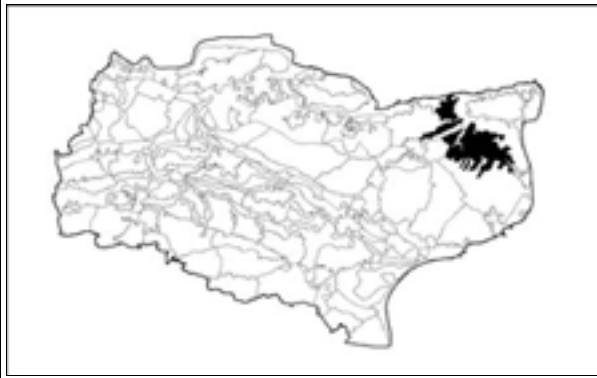
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve large blocks of broadleaf woodland, allowing no fragmentation of woodland areas.
Reinforce the ancient characteristics of the woodland
Conserve tranquil, open views across the rural landscape
Conserve pastures and unimproved grasslands, linking with other such areas on adjacent Downs
Conserve and reinforce the characteristics of narrow roads
Conserve features associated with historic parkland
Conserve remote village settings
Conserve historic colliery sites

[previous <<](#)

EAST KENT HORTICULTURAL BELT



This generally flat, farmed character area is derived from the Tertiary Beds, most notably the Thanet Beds in east Kent that overlie the chalk. This is a mixed landscape that fringes the chalk lands on their northern boundary east of Herne Bay, around Maypole, Hersden, Stodmarsh, Wingham, Ash and Woodnesborough. The belt ranges from three to seven kilometres wide and corresponds approximately to the 10-40m contours.

The Tertiary Beds are fine-grained grey and brown sands with local silty clays. Elsewhere, Head Brickearths, derived from loamy parent-rock such as the Thanet and Sandgate Beds, and also from Aeolian origins, are found extensively in association with the Thanet Beds around Wickhambreaux, Wingham Green, Littlebourne and Patixbourne, corresponding to many of the former fruit-growing areas. Extensive deposits of Head Brickearths are found north of Ash, around Knowlton, and at Worth.

These drifts have produced deep silty soils, often affected with groundwater. Areas of waterlogging occur south of Wingham and Ash. Those soils with groundwater problems traditionally support cereals, potatoes and field vegetables. Significant areas of orchard and horticultural crops occur on the better drained, higher grade soils at East Stourmouth, Preston, Elmstone, Westmarsh, Upper Goldstone and Perry and to the east at Woodnesborough.

Market gardening was first brought to the Sandwich area in Kent by the Flemish in Tudor times, and there are still farmhouses of Dutch style to be seen.

A very small pocket of hops can still be found south-east of Shatterling, but this is now a rare feature of this landscape. Some of the orchards north of Ash are now being grubbed up and the growers are diversifying, for example into viticulture; changing the character of the countryside in this area.

Otherwise the area is mainly large-scale arable with limited grassland around Richborough, Wingham, Stodmarsh, Upstreet, Maypole and Ford south-east of Hunters Forstal. In the 1960s there was a greater scattering of pasture and a wider spread of orchard. It is now mostly an open landscape which slopes gently down to the adjacent marshland and the river valley of the Stour. Views are often very long, for instance from the Roman road at Hersden across to Thanet, and from Grove Hill across to Stodmarsh and the Stour valley.

Many of the villages such as Chislet, Stodmarsh, Upstreet, Wingham, Wickhambreaux, and Ickham are of historic interest, as are the bigger settlements such as Ash and Sandwich. Wingham was formerly a small market town with houses dating from the 13th century. It is a simple one-street town, lacking a wide market place or a square.

Settlements are often found on the boundaries of parishes, indicating shared, or intercommonable pasture within formerly wooded country. Examples of this are at Twitham, which runs across the parishes of Wingham and Goodnestone. The borough and manor of Tickenhurst (the young goats wood) was situated partly in Heronden in Eastry and partly in Hammill in Woodnesborough, divided between two parishes.

Between Wingham and Ash is an enclosed and secluded landscape with occasional fruit and even hops scattered among the arable fields. A small-scale agricultural landscape persists around small hamlets with hedged lanes, shelterbelts and a narrow twisting road network.

The landscape is increasingly open east of Ash with long views to Richborough Power Station. The few undulations disappear, field boundaries are less in evidence, and the landscape becomes increasingly level as it grades towards the Wantsum and Lower Stour Marshes.

Small pockets of industry do occur such as the proposed business use for the old Chislet and Betteshanger Collieries.

[next >>](#)

EAST KENT HORTICULTURAL BELT

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Enclosed by hedgerows and shelterbelts, medium scale, gradually sloping or flat. Some contained, small-scale landscapes in the central area. Long views from higher ground. Coastal and marsh edges. Diverse agriculture with vineyards, soft fruit, orchards and glasshouses. Small isolated linear villages, some piecemeal development along roads based on original small hamlets or farms. Isolated, square, buff-coloured farm cottages. Very narrow winding roads following the field and drainage pattern. Regimented, intensive feel to the farmland. Some blocks of unmanaged land, particularly towards the marginal wetlands.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The landscape pattern continues to reflect small-scale fields of mixed use, enclosed by shelterbelts. Although increasing arable cultivation is now opening up the landscape, there are few detracting features. The area is known for ancient and historic settlement sites, but this element is not apparent in the existing small farming hamlets. The intensive agricultural and horticultural use of the farmland, in addition to limited natural habitats and some loss of vegetative field boundaries means that the ecological value is weak.

Sensitivity

The small scale farming pattern and small hamlets retain some historic elements, but there is little visual reinforcement of the area's former ancient settlement pattern or the marginal land on the edge of the former sea channel. The mix of building styles and the variability and complexity of land use tend to dilute the sense of place. The landscape is open, with very little tree cover - middle distance views are common, with some longer views reaching over the edge of the marsh.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a new landscape pattern to embrace the evolving intensified and fragmented land use.
Create nuclei of distinctive small-scale landscape within the more open farmland.
Reinforce the historic enclosure and drainage pattern by managing existing shelterbelts and enhancing drainage channels and wetland.
Ensure that new shelterbelts/hedges are of sympathetic species.
Reinforce the character of the marsh-edge, creating wetland areas.

CONTEXT

Regional: North East Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

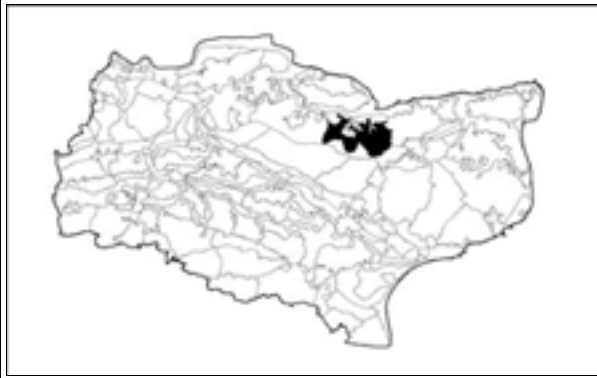
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE AND REINFORCE.

Create nuclei of small-scale landscapes within the area
Reinforce drainage patterns and shelterbelts as functional and visual elements within the landscape
Create an edge to the marsh areas by encouraging the development of wetland areas

[previous <<](#)



This character area is part of the wider landscape of the North Kent Fruit Belt, which runs in a broad band between Gillingham and Whitstable and occupies land between the coastal marshes and the chalk landscapes of the North Downs. This is a predominantly rural, agricultural landscape characterised by a complex and highly structured landscape pattern of orchards, shelterbelts (particularly belts of poplar and alder), fields of arable, pasture and horticultural crops, and blocks of woodland. Apart from the urban area of Faversham, the area contains only small, scattered villages and farm complex which contribute to its quiet, rural character and landscape diversity. Similarly, much of the road network is rural in character but the M2, A299, and A2 have a localised urbanising effect.

Along the coastal belt, the low-lying alluvial plain upon which the marshes have developed, is framed and punctuated by outcrops of London Clay, brick earths and gravel. These create elevated landform features of hills and ridges, such as Norman's Hill, Graveney Hill, Cleve Hill and Horse Hill and also form the rising ground of the marshes, hinterland. The reduced susceptibility to flooding and more freely-drained and fertile soils, has encouraged the development of the rich pattern of orchards and productive farmland on this higher ground. Almost all of the land above five metre contour has thus been intensively cultivated, although some pockets of permanent grassland do still remain. The elevated landform has also provided a safer location for settlement and all of the study area's scattered farms and villages occupy this higher ground.

Southwards from the coastal plain, the ground rises gently along the junction of the Upper Chalk of the Kent Downs and the clays and sands of the Thanet Formation. Along this transition from the west of the area, the subtle relief is punctuated by a number of small valley forms which are only minor features in the landscape. To the south-east, however, landform becomes noticeably more complex, forming a series of hills and valleys, and reflects a more mixed geological formation of clays, sands, gravels and chalk.

Landcover is dominated by a richly varied pattern of agricultural land uses. Orchards are the most distinctive feature of the landscape and are still widespread, although there is evidence of some decline around Elverton. Mixed in amongst them are fields of pasture, arable and horticultural crops, all of which are typically defined by strong hedgerows or tall shelterbelts, within which alder and poplar are the distinctive species. Woodland generally occurs as scattered small stands within the mosaic of orchards and farmland but towards the eastern end of the study area, develops into extensive areas of predominantly semi-natural broadleaved woodland.

In general, the intensively farmed landscape of the Fruit Belt has comparatively few features of specific wildlife value. However, the fragments of woodland that occur within it, and particularly the extensive semi-natural broadleaved woodlands to the east (parts of which are designated as SSSI or SNCI) are of nature conservation importance. In addition, the strong structure of hedgerows, trees and shelterbelts that characterise the fruit belt is of some value to wildlife as cover, feeding and breeding habitat, despite its predominantly non-native character.

Evidence of prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and Medieval remains suggest that the area has had a long history of settlement. A particular concentration of Roman Villas, cemeteries and artefacts have been recorded around Buckland and Deerton Street and around Faversham, Ospringe and Oare. Many of the existing settlements are likely to have been in existence in Saxon times, including Faversham itself, but much of the visible archaeological evidence relates to buildings with medieval origins, such as the manor houses and churches at Teynham Street, Graveney, Goodnestone, Oare, Ewell, Hernhill, Norton and Provender. Recorded post-medieval historical features include the oasthouse at Boughton Field, the mid 19th century tower at Holly Hill and the beacon and telegraph station at Beacon Hill.

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rural character, sense of remoteness and privacy.
Enclosed and diverse.
Strong woodland blocks.
Orchards and hops, shelterbelts. Large pockets of open farmland. Undulating landform.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The landscape is coherent as a mixed farming landscape, but has lost the diversity of form associated with widespread fruit growing, and has a degraded aspect, resulting from detracting features such as post and wire fencing, redundant hedged field boundaries and dead elms. Small pockets of woodland within large areas of intensively farmed arable land represent weak clusters of ecological value. The cultural integrity of the area, however, is variable - the remote, rural character and large farmsteads remain as important features, although field boundaries and shelterbelts are declining due to the change in land use.

Sensitivity

The large farmsteads and cluster villages are characteristic of this area, but do not reflect a strong time-depth in their materials or scale. Natural elements within the landscape such as field boundaries and woodlands are no longer distinctive, and the use of species such as alder and poplar in the remaining shelterbelts also reduces the historic value. Visibility is moderate as, although the landscape is relatively open, the landform is not a dominant feature in the view. The sensitivity of the area is therefore considered to be low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a new landscape pattern which responds to the large-scale of the current land use. Within this new framework, enhance the existing tranquil areas and create new large blocks of woodland which follow the undulating landform, encompassing arable and other cultivated areas.
Create woodland enclosure on the existing open arable areas and shelter-belt - type demarcation for rural lanes.
Create areas of less intensive cultivation.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway (Swale)

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

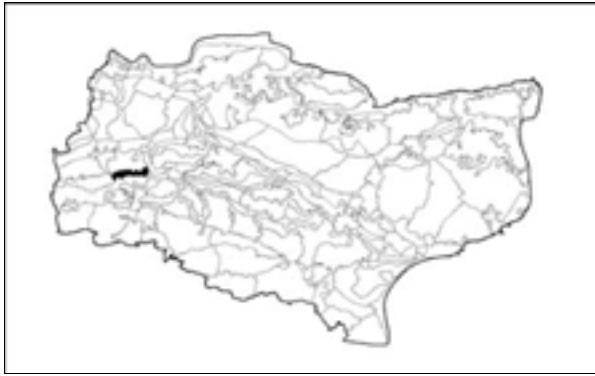
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Large blocks of woodland to reflect the landform
Enclosure for rural lanes
Areas of less intensive cultivation
Tranquil areas

[previous <<](#)



EASTERN LOW WEALD

The clay vale of the Low Weald stretches along the foot of the escarpment from Riverhill to Shipbourne. As it does so, the scarp relaxes into a series of gentle, rounded slopes, among which the medieval manor of Ightham Mote, built of local timber and ragstone, lies concealed. There are very few trimmed hedges in this area but recent tree planting along the field edges around Fairlawne has imposed a strong, ornamental pattern into the agricultural landscape, complementing the more formal parkland nearby. Thick shaws of mature, deciduous trees are also prominent, the heavy Wealden clay favouring oak. In contrast with the wooded ridge, woodland occurs in small, discrete blocks, often associated with sporting uses or streams and ponds.

THE LOW WEALD

The Eastern Low Weald lies within the larger Low Weald character area of the Kent Downs AONB.

The clay vale of the Low Weald meets the scarp of the Greensand Ridge between Crockham Hill in the west and Ivy Hatch in the east. Small springs, seeping out from between the upper layers of greensand, have cut a series of deep furrows into this scarp, before draining eventually into the flat Eden Valley in the south.

In contrast with the wooded greensand, the heavy, wet clay favours grassland and the emphasis here is on intensively grazed fields, separated by shaws. Between these woods, piecemeal hedgerow removal has left a considerable number of former hedgerow trees isolated in fields abutted by fences. However, the increasing number of horses kept in this area is reintroducing smaller fields into the landscape, but these paddocks are usually bounded by temporary fences, rather than new hedges. The clays of the Low Weald were traditionally used to construct the timber-framed buildings so typical of this area. Nevertheless, the underlying sandstones were also widely used and combinations of these materials are not unusual.

[next >>](#)

EASTERN LOW WEALD: THE LOW WEALD

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gentle, rounded slopes of the clay vale. Thick shaws, discrete blocks of deciduous woodland, much mature oak. Formal parkland with strong ornamental pattern

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a strongly unified landscape in which the location and nature of scattered farmsteads, estate houses and farming villages reflect the landform and the pattern of land use, from the undulating scarp-base to more open arable fields on the flatter land. There is a strong network of field boundaries and small woodlands, also linked with streams and pastures; this diversity of semi-natural habitats provides a robust ecological network throughout much of the area. There are very few detracting features in the landscape - some senescent oaks and over-mature parkland trees are detractors. Otherwise, built development has a high positive impact, and includes historic and vernacular building, much use of ragstone and hung tiled facing, cottages with low sloping roofs and large Georgian/Victorian frontages to some houses. The rural heritage features of tree-cover and internal hedged field boundaries are also in good condition. Overall, the area is considered to be in very good condition.

Sensitivity

The landform is apparent within intermittent views over the landscape; visibility is therefore moderate. The landscape pattern, based on the historic farmsteads and estate parkland, has a very strong historic influence which is evident in the built-form, the irregular small and medium scale field boundaries, the hedged highways and the relationship of the land use to the settlement patterns. Highways have a more ancient influence, and there are notable common and green areas thought to be of more ancient origin, but the majority of elements are characteristically historic. This area is considered to be of moderate sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Reinforce the hedgerow network by replanting and ensuring that long-term management plans are in place to safeguard the existing small - medium scale of the enclosures. Maintain and reinforce pastoral and top-fruit land use. Reinforce the diverse use of the woodlands such as game cover, recreation, timber production, and conserve the emphasis on broadleaf cover. Reinforce the estate parkland by promoting programmes of estate tree-planting and reinforcing boundary features of ragstone walls and hedgerows with mature trees. Reinforce the instance of mature trees in all hedgerows by initiating tree-planting schemes within farmland and along highways. Conserve the isolation of historic farmsteads by conserving the rural and tranquil setting of settlements. Conserve the characteristics of the narrow roads and reinforce the occurrence of mature standards along the roadside. Conserve the settings of greens and commons.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very Strong.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

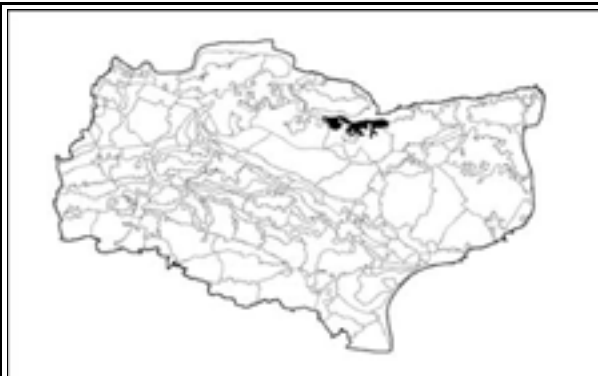
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve broadleaf woodland
Conserve the frequency of tree cover
Reinforce the diversity of woodland use
Conserve and reinforce estate parkland - including tree cover and boundary features
Reinforce mature standards within farmland and along roads
Conserve the rural setting of settlements, and the setting of greens and commons

[previous <<](#)

EASTERN SWALE MARSHES



This area forms part of the extensive complex of coastal marshes that flanks the Swale Estuary along its southern and northern shores. Although rather less extensive than the marshes across the estuary on the Isle of Sheppey, the Eastern Swale Marshes nevertheless possess many of the same defining characteristics, such as open, flat grazing land with broad skies, few landscape features and a strong sense of remoteness, wildness and exposure.

These qualities are particularly distinct on the outer parts of the marshes where they are most remote from human influences and are closely related to the wilder landscapes of the inter-tidal zone. Inland, however, the edge of the marsh is typically defined by a sharp contrast in land use, between the open grazing land of the marshes and the complex landscape of orchards, pastures, shelterbelts and copses that characterise the fruit belt. Such pleasing and distinctive contrasts occur to a lesser extent in the Western Swale Marshes but are absent from the Isle of Sheppey, where there is typically a more gradual transition from open marshland to open arable farmland.

Landform and geology have a profound influence on the character of the marshes which, having been formed from marine alluvial deposits, have a distinctively flat relief. However, localised outcrops of London Clay produce distinctive landform features of ridges and hills (e.g.. Norman's, Cleve, Graveney and Horse Hills) which have a prominence out of proportion to their modest relief. These hills are actually located within the Fruit Belt character area but have a strong influence on the character of the marshes.

Construction of the sea wall at the outermost edge of the marshes has reduced the extent of semi-natural saltmarsh vegetation to just a narrow strip along the sides of Faversham Creek and a couple of small areas beyond the sea wall at Uplees and Nagden Marshes. Enclosure from the sea has created extensive areas of traditional grazing marsh characterised by rough grassland and patterned by a complex system of natural and man-made drainage dykes, pools and fleets which supply freshwater for stock and often support reeds and emergent vegetation. Unlike the marshes to the north of the estuary, the Eastern Swale Marshes remain predominantly under grazing management and have not been extensively ploughed and cultivated although quite extensive areas of grassland have been improved by applications of fertiliser and drainage, such as at Graveney Marshes.

Apart from some notable blocks of woodland on the enclosed marshes near Graveney, tree cover is very limited and the landscape is generally devoid of features, placing greater emphasis on the presence of grazing animals and wildfowl. However, the close proximity of the Fruit-Belt, with its strong structure of orchards, shelterbelts and copses, provides some shelter and tree cover along the inner edges of the marshes at Teynham Level and Graveney Marshes. To the north of Faversham, mineral extraction has consumed part of the former marshland at Ham Marshes, adjacent to Oare Creek, and has created areas of open water and developing wetland habitats. Further inland alongside Faversham Creek, land use is mixed and includes areas of industry, housing, allotments and riverside open space.

The nature conservation importance of the inter-tidal habitats and grazing marshes of the Swale Estuary is recognised by various national and international designations. Thus, a large part of the study area is included within a much larger, internationally important Special Protection Area (SPA)/Ramsar site and also within the national designation of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These designations cover most of the remaining areas of unimproved grazing marsh and the inter-tidal habitats of the estuary and its tidal creeks, parts of which are managed as a nature reserve by the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation. Some smaller pockets of reclaimed marshland to the east of Graveney are noted for their local wildlife value and designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI).

These habitats are important for their flora, which contain some nationally scarce plant species, for their invertebrate populations and, most importantly, for their value for birds, supporting significant numbers of breeding, wintering and migrating wildfowl and waders. The dykes, areas of open water and seasonally flooded grassland add to the value of these areas for birds and other fauna.

The Swale Marshes have been reclaimed and used for sheep grazing since at least the medieval period when, as a result of a high incidence of flooding in the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries, the system of sea walls was built to protect the land. New defences were constructed between 1570 and 1630 and these boundaries still establish the seaward boundary of the marshes. Fishing was also an important activity in coastal settlements such as Oare and Luddenham from at least the medieval period.

The most prominent historical evidence, however, relates to industrial activities on the marshes. Evidence of medieval salt workings can be seen in the form of low mounds on Graveney Marshes while the remains of late 18th century gunpowder factories survive on the low-lying creekside areas near Oare. Remains of 19th and early 20th century windmills also survive in this area.

[next >>](#)

EASTERN SWALE MARSHES

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Remote, wild and exposed.
Broad skies. Pervasive influence of sea and sky. Creeks, ditches, sea walls. Grazing marsh, wild birds and grazing animals.
Creekside townscape and waterside buildings.
Poorly managed fences. Intrusion of power lines

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The landscape has a unified pattern of elements in which visual detractors such as post and wire fencing and transmission towers are highly visible. Caravan plots are also visual detractors in some areas. The strong network of ditches and creeks defines areas of grazing marsh, and the overall ecological interest is therefore strong. The infrequent settlement has a moderately positive impact on the area. The heritage feature of the ditches varies and may respond to appropriate management in some instances. The condition of the area is considered to be very good.

Sensitivity

Whilst visibility is very high, and obviously results in the high sensitivity of the landscape, the sense of place is considered to be moderate. Settlement patterns are characteristic but the built form is largely indistinct. The general landscape pattern based on the sea defence and drainage network has a characteristically historic depth.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the remote quality of the landscape and isolated settlements.
Conserve the ecological interest by the sensitive management of the ditch network and the grasslands.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway (Swale)

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

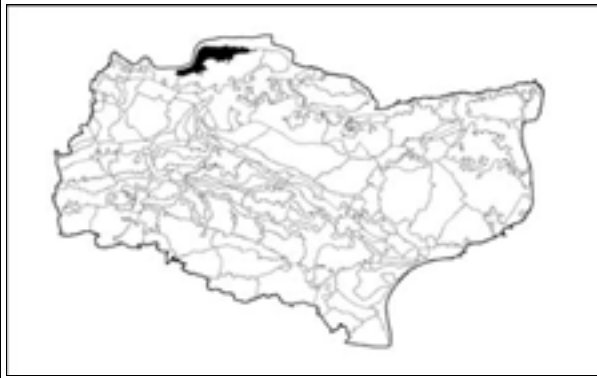
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the remote quality of the area
Conserve ditches, creeks and grasslands and encourage the diversity of wildlife species by sensitive land management.

[previous <<](#)

EASTERN THAMES MARSHES



The Eastern Thames Marshes character area takes in all the lower-lying land along the northern coast of the Hoo Peninsula between the edge of Gravesend in the west and Allhallows in the east. This zone encompasses a mix of traditional grazing marsh, marshland converted to arable production, and areas dominated by mineral workings. Its particular character, however, is significantly influenced by its aspect over the Thames Estuary towards the heavily industrialised Canvey Island, with its refinery complex and port facilities. This contrasts with the generally quieter views observed from similar areas of marsh to the south.

In common with all areas of marshland, landform and geology are responsible for the very distinctive low-lying and flat character of the landscape which has developed on marine alluvium. In addition, the extraction of underlying chalk in the Cliffe area has had a significant impact on landscape character in this local area.

There has been a significant decline in the area of traditional grazing marsh over the past forty years, largely due to conversion to arable production. This has been most acute at the eastern end of the marshes. Mineral extraction around the Cliffe area has also consumed substantial areas of former marshland, replacing it with a landscape of lakes and wetlands. Extensive grazing marshes do still survive, however, at Cliffe and Shorne Marshes. Towards the edge of Gravesend, non-agricultural land uses appear, including a rifle-range, and there is an increased incidence of urban/industrial features, such as overhead power lines and railway lines.

The landscape and nature conservation significance of the Thames Marshes is widely recognised and the entire extent of this character area is included within one or more landscape or nature conservation designation (SPA, Ramsar, ESA). The most valuable areas of grazing marsh are managed by nature conservation organisations (RSPB) to maintain and enhance their value for wetland birds while the ESA designation extends across arable areas in order that opportunities for reversion to marshland can be encouraged through this mechanism.

There is evidence that this landscape has been settled since the Mesolithic period. However, most finds date from Roman times when salt panning and pottery were the main industries. The quarries at Cliffe and Higham reflect the former defensive importance of this area.

Culturally the Eastern Thames Marshes have an association with Charles Dickens who lived on their fringes. Also his well known work 'Great Expectations' is set here.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Remote, wild, remote and quiet. Influence of sea and sky.
Creeks, dykes, marsh and patches of scrub, extensive areas of cultivated marsh, a simple landscape. Overhead power lines.
Wild birds and grazing animals

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a coherent landscape which is considered to be in moderate condition. The ditches, marshland, creeks and grasslands provide a strong ecological network. However, the heritage elements, such as ditches, are in varying condition. There are many visual detractors which range from small structures on the marsh (tipping, post and wire, bird hides) to urban and industrial developments. Built development has a high negative impact on the area.

Sensitivity

The time depth to this landscape is extremely varied. The historic ditches and grasslands are characteristic, but there are also more recent elements such as military and industrial installations which could be considered unique, and lines of ancient tradeways which skirt the marshes. The flat landscape is the dominant element of the open view, and therefore the landscape sensitivity is very high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the historic ditch and sea defence pattern, using sensitive management to realise the full ecological potential of wetlands and grasslands.
Restore the sensitive management of grasslands, encouraging the re-establishment of grazing marshland and unimproved grasslands.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Coherent.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

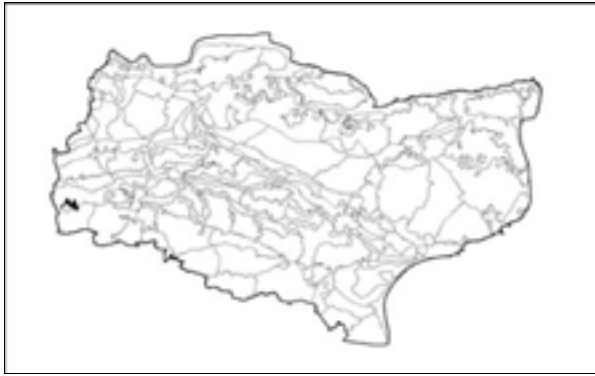
Sensitivity	Very High.
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Conserve marsh, grassland and wetland habitats
Restore unimproved and grazing marsh

[previous <<](#)



A landscape of flat pasture land and more open arable cultivation, extending from Edenbridge to Penshurst station, and crossed by the meandering River Eden and its many small streams. The valley is generally unwooded, and in many places the riparian vegetation has been removed leaving little clue to the river's presence. Some hedgerows and hedgerow trees remain but these can be infrequent. Despite this the air is filled with birdsong.

Attractive groups of vernacular farm buildings, of weatherboard and brick are scattered in the landscape, and historic farmsteads of Hall House origin, such as Delaware Farm, are also characteristic. Although there is now sometimes split ownership between houses and their land, the farming patterns are generally intact and the split has not affected the appearance of the landscape so far. The historic park of Hever Castle lies at the boundary of this character area with the neighbouring High Weald.

The London to Uckfield railway lines cross the character area east of Edenbridge, contributing to that village's expansion into a small town. The Redhill to Ashford line crosses north of the valley and has contributed to development between the Redhill line and the B2027 at Bough Beech. Proposals to widen the track may cause intrusion in the rural landscape and attract development.

The development at Church Street, Hever and Lingfield Roads in Edenbridge are very dominant in the river valley. Elsewhere, attractive views from the valley floor often extend to the wooded High Weald beyond which folds round and encloses the landscape to the south.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, open, mixed farmland. Seasonally flooded and crossed by many small streams. Scarce settlement apart from historic farmsteads. Views and enclosure provided by the High Weald.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This area is coherent as a fluvial wetland - streams and wetland are apparent in many views - although there are detracting features such as unsympathetic highway and water management details, industrial-type farm buildings, senescent oaks and denuded hedgerows. Former infrequent settlement patterns have been superseded by some industrial development on the open land and there is now a confusion of landscape elements although the wetland, streams and ditches provide strong ecological corridors.

Sensitivity

There are infrequent farms and mills located adjacent to the wetland and streams. These are not a strong feature of the present landscape. The lack of dense riparian vegetation contributes to the loss of distinctiveness, although there is some intermittent vegetation and this does reduce the views. The landscape is noticeably flat within this small character area.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a strong river corridor by the management of water levels and wetlands, and by the planting and management of riparian vegetation along water courses.
Create wetland/riparian edges to existing industrial developments.
Create appropriate and distinctive engineering details for water management systems, highways and bridges.
Reinforce the historic elements such as the settlement pattern which adheres to the wetland edge, restricting development within the fluvial zone.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Moderate.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Coherent.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Low.

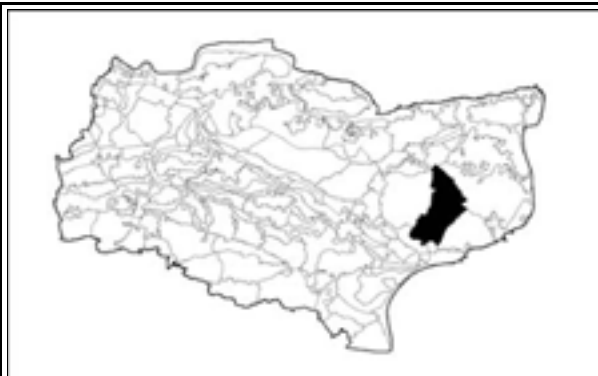
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE AND REINFORCE.

Create a vegetated riparian corridor
Create natural wetlands
Ensure that appropriate and locally distinctive details are created in response to water management and highway design, bridges or other such necessary engineering works
Reinforce the historic settlement pattern

[previous <<](#)



ELHAM

This area is transitional landscape between the remote, enclosed countryside east of the Stour Valley and the exposed, severe ridge and valleys between Folkestone and Dover. The Elham Valley carves its way through the centre of this area, in a wide attractive sweep, up to Barham and Patrixbourne. To the west lies a heavily wooded plateau, where expanses of conifer plantations are interspersed with remnants of deciduous, ancient woodland, still concealing the ancient double banks, which once formed the boundary of Elham Park. This is one of the most densely wooded ridges of the AONB.

To the east, the landscape is predominantly large, intensively cultivated arable plateau. Woodlands are fewer and much smaller, frequently on the steep valley sides. Although there has been extensive loss of hedgerows, this area still has a high proportion of hedgerow trees and botanically rich hedges, usually near the village. The less exposed, northern slopes around Denton are still dotted with pockets of historic parkland and orchards, while the scattered dwellings and straight road at Swingfield Minnis and Rhodes Minnis are indications of former commons, now farmland.

EAST KENT DOWNS

Elham lies within the larger character area of the East Kent Downs.

This is a remote, peaceful area of downland, which ends in the dramatic white cliffs of Dover. Above the southern scarp, the broad back of the chalk hills is furrowed by a series of long narrow, parallel valleys running north east. In these dry valleys, the valley bottom streams or nailbournes are underground, only flowing at the surface occasionally, during very wet winters.

The western valley systems are branching and intricate. The steep, rounded slopes are crossed by thick shaws or overgrown hedges, often swathed in the white seed-heads of wild clematis. Large arable fields on the ridge-top plateau are visually contained by long strips of deciduous, ancient woodland along the valley sides or ridge-top conifer forests, west of Elham. Towards the coast, however, the landscape becomes more exposed. There is less woodland and the strongly linear pattern of parallel ridges and valleys is more distinct.

The countryside here is criss-crossed by a maze of tiny, sunken, one-track lanes. Houses are widely scattered and many villages, traditionally built of local flint, brick and tile, are still little more than a church, a manor and a pair of farm cottages - an important characteristic of this landscape. However, this area is best known, not for its beautiful dry valleys or remote churches, but for its long association with the defence of the realm The "White Cliffs of Dover" and the widely scattered military remains, such as pill-boxes and gun-emplacements, still exert a strong cultural influence on the landscape.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

A transitional, large-scale landscape. Densely wooded ridges to the west with conifer plantations and ancient woodland. Intensively cultivated plateau to east with small woodlands on the valley sides. Hedgerow trees and scattered dwellings

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a large-scale, coherent landscape with few visual detractors. Woodland cover is modified to include some large areas of conifer plantation and some woodland edges have been eroded adjacent to arable fields. Built form includes vernacular detail, e.g. flint churches, and recent farmsteads; it has a moderate positive impact. This is not generally a hedged landscape, although there are some areas where there are remnant hedges, some of them single species. Chalk grasslands, pasture and broadleaf woodland provide a moderate base for semi-natural habitats within the arable fields. This area is considered to be in good condition.

Sensitivity

The rolling downland is the dominant visual element. Views are intermittent between wooded areas. Visibility is therefore high. Narrow roads linking ridgeline farmsteads evoke the greatest time depth. Settlements, buildings and hedgerows are more historic in influence. Woodland areas are ancient but have a high proportion of recent plantation species.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve woodland areas and extend these to enhance woodland edges, shaws and to define arable fields and pastures. Conserve areas of broadleaf woodland and encourage the planting of broadleaf edges to new and existing plantation areas. Existing open grasslands should be conserved and managed in order to conserve a diversity of chalk grassland species. The potential of the area to support new diverse grassland sites should be explored. Conserve the isolation of farmsteads, resisting additional development. Encourage the continuation and development of vernacular building styles and materials. Conserve locally distinct buildings and their settings. Conserve open views.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity High.

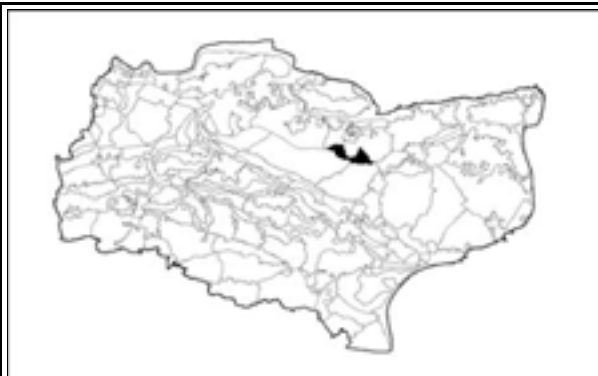
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve broadleaf woodland
Encourage the planting of broadleaf edges to plantation areas
Conserve woodland edges which follow natural contours and define fields
Conserve the influence of vernacular building styles
Conserve and manage chalk grasslands
Conserve open views

[previous <<](#)



FAVERSHAM FRUIT BELT

The character of the fruit belt is strongly evident along the northern edge of the Downs in this area. There are frequent hop gardens and orchards here, sheltered from wind by lines of tall, regular alder or poplar trees, which create an unusual and highly distinctive landscape of small, square, outdoor 'rooms'. It is these distinctive landscapes that give Kent its reputation as the Garden of England. In contrast, the intensively cultivated arable fields which surround the orchards are rolling and open, with few hedges and only infrequent blocks of woodland. In the south an outcrop of acidic sandstone has given rise to the steep pine and bracken-clad slopes of Perry Hill, which stands out from the gently undulating farmland.

MID KENT DOWNS

The Faversham Fruit Belt lies within the larger character area of the Mid Kent Downs.

The long spine of the Kent Downs in this area from Chatham in the west to the Stour Valley in the east. Although there are local variations in the appearance of the landscape, there is a strong underlying pattern to the landform, which imparts an overall character to the region. Throughout the length of the chalk ridge a series of narrow, steep-sided dry valleys carve their way down the gentle northern dip-slope of the Downs to the flatter land of the North Kent Fruit Belt, around Sittingbourne and Faversham.

The historical poverty of this area resulted largely from the stiff clay-with-flints soils, which overlie the solid chalk. Despite their striking, rich-red colour, these soils are relatively poor and difficult to cultivate, especially as they occur on the exposed upper plateau of the Downs. Edward Hasted, writing in 1798, consistently describes the area in terms such as "an unpleasant dreary country, the soil of which is very poor, being chalky, and much covered with flint-stones". In his day the land was used widely for sheep grazing, interspersed by arable on the lower slopes and large blocks of woodland. Today appreciation of the landscape has changed and the remote, undeveloped ridges and valleys, which resulted from the historical poverty of the soils, are considered one of the most beautiful features of the AONB. Although mechanised farming over the last hundred years has seen an increase in the area of arable land, much of the original ancient woodland survives, walling in the arable plateau and enclosing the rounded, valley bottoms

[next >>](#)

FAVERSHAM FRUIT BELT: MID KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gentle slopes and undulating farmland.
Hop gardens, orchards and tall shelterbelts.
Rolling, open arable fields, little woodland.
Pine-clad feature of Perry Hill.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is an intensive arable and fruit-growing area on gently undulating land, which reflects the structure of a formerly important fruit-farming landscape. It retains a rural and managed appearance, but is losing structure and scale as the emphasis on fruit disappears. Flint churches and large oast complexes are distinguishing features but the effect of these features is becoming diminished by the visibility of the urban edge. The networks of managed hedgerows and shelterbelts are decreasing and therefore the opportunity for ecological interest is currently slight.

Sensitivity

Distinguishing features are comparatively recent, such as alder and poplar shelterbelts and large farmsteads. Although settlement patterns and highways are historic in location, the time-depth element of the landscape has become weak. Tree cover is generally sparse, and visibility is moderate in the undulating landscape.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a network of small woodlands to enclose existing land parcels and to create a basis of natural habitats.
Create an urban edge using the new woodland network and regenerated shelterbelts - also extended to highways leading from the urban edge.
Create edges to highways.
Create pockets of enclosed farming landscape (fruit stock or diversified land use) with shelterbelts and review the trend towards arable cultivation, containing the effects of this within small-scale fruit growing or wooded corridors.
Remove gappy and redundant hedgerows.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

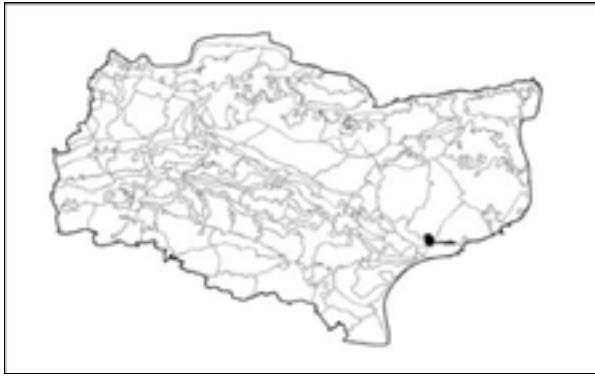
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create simple, managed farming areas which are enclosed by other land uses such as woodland
Create a new woodland network to reduce the scale of the landscape in the view
Encourage the creation of foci of managed farmed landscapes which are suitable for a diverse and changing agricultural use
Create distinctive and recognisable boundaries to the junction of arable and urban areas, creating new and sustainable features which provide resources for the urban population

[previous <<](#)



FOLKESTONE OUTSKIRTS

The downland here is folded into a series of steep, enclosed coombes and prominent hills, dominating the outskirts of the town. The extraordinary conical shapes of Sugarloaf Hill and Summerhouse Hill and the skyline earthworks of Castle Hill are key local landmarks. The new Channel Tunnel Terminal and the M20/A20 motorway lie along the boundary of the AONB, at the foot of the scarp and have a major impact on the landscape. Views from the scarp are now dominated by these developments and Folkestone has been severed from the AONB and its villages by the transport corridor. Although there is gradual decline in the traditional structure of hedges and shaws, there is scope to reverse this trend.

POSTLING VALE

The area described as Folkestone Outskirts lies within the larger character area of the Postling Vale.

Folkestone lies at the most easterly end of the Greensand Belt, on a narrow tongue of land contained by the Downs in the north and the flat expanse of Romney Marsh in the south. These physical constraints have resulted in a considerable amount of activity and development being confined within a small area, on the very edge of the Kent Downs AONB.

The landscape here is dominated by major roads and by the new Channel Tunnel Terminal, all of which are situated on the edge of the AONB between north Folkestone and the Downs. These landscape developments are set against the dramatic backdrop of the steep scarp, which supports botanically rich chalk grassland. A series of remote coombes in the scarp towards Etchinghill overlook the now rare coppiced ash woodland of Asholt Wood. Scrub extends up some of the lower slopes and thick hedges draw attention to the route of the Pilgrim's Way along the scarp foot. Beyond this, the landscape is gently undulating, with large fields and substantial blocks of woodland.

Further south, around the outskirts of Hythe, this open, large-scale landscape gives way to a more intimate countryside of steep stream valleys, small woodlands and pasture. In the west, around Pedlinge, tracts of mixed woodland enclose flat arable fields, which form the edge of a larger area of intensively cultivated farmland, extending beyond the AONB.

[next >>](#)

FOLKESTONE OUTSKIRTS: POSTLING VALE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Steep coombes and prominent hills.
M20 and Channel Tunnel terminal dominate the southern boundary.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The agricultural land use of this area is relatively intense. Small blocks of woodland and downland form minor clusters of semi-natural habitats and the ecological interest of the area is considered to be moderate. Rural heritage features such as field boundaries and woodland are in variable condition. Field boundaries in particular are vulnerable and in decline. Recent settlements are limited, but have a moderate negative impact on the view. The functional integrity of this landscape is very weak as the inherent ecological potential and cultural heritage have become obscured. Visually, the landscape pattern is coherent; visual detractors are mainly inappropriate fencing and overhead cabling.

Sensitivity

The steep coombes and prominent hills are the dominant element in the landscape. Views are generally open and the visibility is very high. Of the ancient landscape features of open grassland and woodland, the open grassland no longer contributes to local distinctiveness. Other characteristics have less time depth and are historic (hedgerows) or more recent (built form). In general, the local sense of place is weak and the sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore areas of ecologically rich grasslands.
Restore woodland cover in existing steep coombes, using these to link existing woodland into a wider network.
Create landscape settings for the recent form of settlements using woodland and shaws.
Create open fields where hedgerows are gappy and redundant, creating a clear definition within the landscape.
Create design codes for built form and highway details to promote local distinctiveness.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

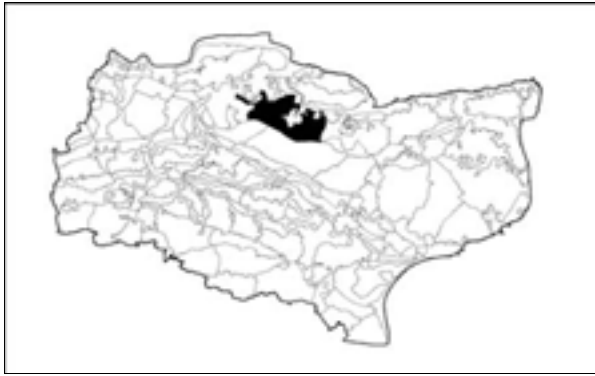
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore ecologically-rich grassland habitats
Restore woodland links on steep contours
Create settlement edges and distinctive features to new and recent settlement
Create new areas of more open landscape where hedgerows are in decline, encouraging the creation of small areas of woodland to reduce the scale of the open areas.

[previous <<](#)



This is predominantly a rural, agricultural landscape characterised by a complex landscape pattern of orchards, shelterbelts, fields of arable and pasture and horticultural crops, and divided by small blocks of woodland. Apart from the large urban area of Sittingbourne, the area contains only small, scattered villages and farm complexes which contribute to its rural character and landscape diversity. The A2 and A249 route corridors, and associated ribbon development, run through the area and have a localised urbanising effect. To the south of the A2 the gently rolling landform is punctuated by two valley systems running north south through the landscape. These main valleys are reflected by minor valley forms to the north-west and south-east creating distinct features in the landscape. To the north of the A2 the landform becomes flatter as it approaches the Swale and Medway Marshes and loses some of its distinctiveness.

In general terms geology can be divided into two distinct types. To the north of the A2, London Clay and Head Brick Earth predominate with pockets of Thanet Beds and River Gravel creating a consistently flatter landform. To the south of the A2, linear pockets of chalk divide areas of clay with flint, Thanet Beds, Head Brick Earth and Head Deposits. This more complex geology is reflected in the more varied relief.

Land cover is dominated by a richly varied pattern of agricultural land uses. Orchards are the most distinctive feature of the landscape and are still widespread across this area. Mixed in amongst them are fields of pasture, arable and horticultural crops, all of which are typically defined by strong hedgerows or shelterbelts, mainly of poplar. The complexity of this land use mix varies across the area, however, and some areas (notably to the north-west and south-west of Sittingbourne) are now more typically open arable farmland. In contrast to areas further south, woodlands are not a significant landcover element, but small blocks occur in a scattered distribution across the area. Small settlements and farm complexes add to the varied landcover. The extensive urban area of Sittingbourne, transport corridors and associated ribbon development and suburban land uses have a distinctly localised influence on the generally rural character of the area.

Woodlands, often with a coppice understorey, are the main natural ecological resource within this intensively managed landscape. Hawes Wood, Rook Wood, Yaugher Woods and Fox Burrow Woods are listed in the Ancient Woodland Inventory. Other elements potentially of ecological and wildlife value are the shelterbelts, which are a more consistent framework of wildlife corridors than the often patchy hedgerow cover, and regenerating woodland and wetland habitats in the disused quarries to the south-east and north-east of Sittingbourne.

A notable feature in this landscape is the Roman Road Watling Street, now the A2. This transportation corridor has attracted development to it over the course of history. The fruit orchards have been a distinctive feature of this landscape since the 18th century.

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rural/agricultural landscape. Complex fruit, hops, pastoral and arable divided by small woodlands.
Small scattered villages and farms. Rolling landscape with distinct valleys.
Large pockets of flat, open farmland, especially in coastal areas. The M2 & A2-ribbon development and urban features.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The inherent richness and complexity of this rolling landscape has developed a new emphasis towards a larger scale more open, landscape. Some blocks of intensive fruit growing also contribute to the larger scale. Isolated shelterbelts typify the incoherent landscape pattern which has many detracting suburban and industrial influences, and main transport corridors. Isolated remnants of old orchard can be found within the character area. The woodland cover is limited, and where there are shelterbelts, these are often single species; the ecological integrity of the area is considered to be weak. The stunted form of coastal woodland is distinctive due to the climatic conditions. Overall, the condition is poor.

Sensitivity

This is landscape of varied continuity, influenced by historic settlement and communication routes but with strong influences from the recent past to the current day. Highways retain historic characteristics such as narrow hedgeline roads, following ancient routes (e.g. Watling Street). The historic fruit growing patterns are characteristic in some areas, but dwarf root stock and single species shelterbelts have a more recent form. The area's hedgerow and mature tree stock has suffered greatly from the demise of the elm. Settlement too has many influences. Apart from occasional flint churches, landscape features are not thought to be highly distinctive in the locality. Visibility is moderate as the rolling landform is apparent, but views are contained by intermittent tree cover. The overall sensitivity is considered to be low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The creation of semi-natural habitats would enhance the ecological bases. These may also be used to enhance the relief of the natural landform and to create a more distinctive land pattern. Use the developing suburban edges of settlement to create new frameworks and enhance the definition of the change in land use with woodland blocks, and shelterbelts where appropriate. Identify unmanaged areas of coastal ridge for woodland replanting. The cultural heritage of the area may be enhanced by the creation of new settings for heritage buildings in the landscape. The creation of traditional orchards may be used as cosmetic or suburban features in this way.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity Low.

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

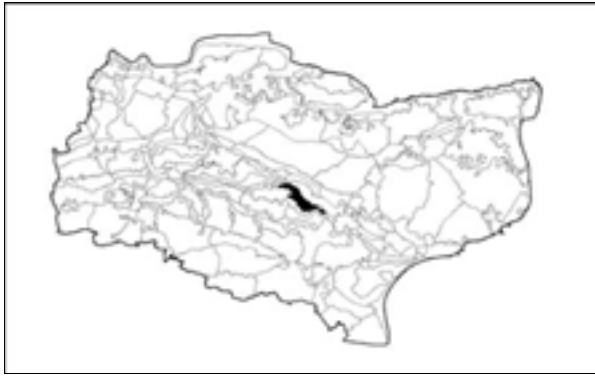
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create ecological interest by planting broadleaf woodland on steeper valley sides and on ridges overlooking the coastal plain
Create an urban edge, using woodland blocks and the retention of shelterbelts where appropriate.
Create small scale enclosure to the coastal ridge with diverse species broadleaf woodland
Create significant rural cultural features by the enhancement of the setting of large oasts
Create mature standard tree cover at nodes such as road junctions, in hedgerow and at settlement edges

[previous <<](#)

GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - EGERTON



This small character area begins near the headwaters of the River Great Stour close to Chilston Park and extends south east to Little Chart Forstal close to where the river emerges briefly into the Low Weald before cutting back at right angles into the Greensand Belt on its journey to the sea.

Similar to the other fruit belt areas, the hard sandy limestones and soft sands of the Hythe Beds produce fine well-drained loams on the gently undulating Greensand dip-slope. The landscape is one of mixed orchards and shelterbelts, arable and parklands with pockets of pasture and woodlands such as the acid broadleaves of Little Chart Woods with its chestnut coppice and birch. The alluvial valley of the Great Stour gives rise to poorer quality soils.

The south-west boundary of the character area is formed by the scarp face of the Greensand ridge. West of Pluckley dramatic views can be gained from the ridge over the Weald below, notably near Egerton House, where the sense of leafy openness is enormous. The 'Greensand Way' long distance footpath follows the ridge, passing through hilltop villages.

Buildings of ragstone and brick including vernacular farmsteads, oasts and villages are linked by narrow, winding, often enclosed lanes.

In the past small scale development has spread along the Greensand ridge, particularly at Pluckley, impacting on the view from the Low Weald below. The confines of the village are now contained. Egerton continues to expand to the south-east, however, beyond its vernacular centre.

The M20 impinges on the north-east boundary of the character area, at the edge of Chilston Park, Lenham and Charing Heaths. Here some large open arable fields allow extensive, bland views of the motorway and full impact to its sound. These views are contained to the north by the dramatic scarp of the Downs.

[next >>](#)

GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - EGERTON

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gentle undulating landform and well-drained loams.
Mixed farmland including orchards and residual shelterbelts.
Steeply sloping Greensand scarp with expansive views over the Low Weald. Vernacular buildings of ragstone and brick.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This landscape is generally intact with few visual detractors. Vernacular buildings have a positive impact on the area. Heritage landscape features such as tree cover and hedgerow are frequent and varied, although they are mature and becoming redundant in some arable areas. Agricultural use of the land is small-scale but some of this is under more intensive arable cultivation, thus reducing the ecological interest.

Sensitivity

This is an historic landscape which has distinctively characteristic features. It is felt that some of the ragstone farms and vernacular buildings are unique in their local distinctiveness. Visibility is moderate due to the intermittent enclosure of the apparent landform. The sensitivity of the area is therefore high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the small scale of the landscape pattern.
Conserve woodland cover and its diversity by appropriate management.
Encourage the diversity of land use between woodland, fruit and arable.
Conserve the hedged boundaries and narrow, winding routes of narrow roads.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity High.

Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

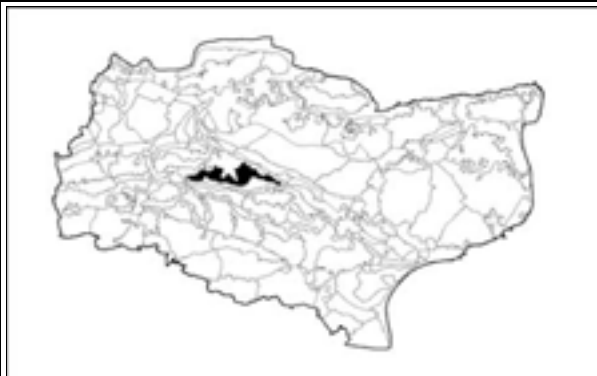
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the diversity and small scale of agricultural use
Conserve woodland cover and the diversity of broadleaf species
Conserve hedgerows
Conserve the narrow, winding routes of narrow roads

[previous <<](#)

GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - MAIDSTONE



This is a continuation of the Fruit Belt landscape but south and east of Maidstone where most of the orchards are concentrated. The land is generally flat but descends into the steep valleys of the Medway and its tributaries the Len and the Loose. If anything distinguishes this character area from the others in the Fruit Belt it is this dissection of the landscape by these two streams. The resultant valleys form contained, rural landscapes outside the urban boundary. This is important because, perhaps more than the other fruit-growing areas, the encroaching suburbs of Maidstone continue to have an impact eastwards particularly at Park Wood.

The landscape is generally a varied and pleasant mix of winding lanes and mixed farmlands with a high percentage of fruit, scattered small woodlands and grasslands interspersed with larger arable fields. Orchards and hops used to be more frequent but now the landholdings are fragmented and much of the land use converted to arable. The architecture is distinguished by the many ragstone buildings and walls, the varied construction of the many oasts and attractive village centres such as West and East Farleigh, Dean Street, Otham and Leeds. Timber spile cross-driven fencing is a typical detail, as it is in other fruit belt regions.

Between and around these settlements a scattering of 20th century hamlets and isolated development has sprung up that adds an element of disorder in the landscape but the overall effect remains balanced and peaceful.

A feature of the landscape are the long views, either across the Medway to the farmlands on the north-west bank or north-east to the Downs. The Medway views are damaged by the suburban impact of Barming. From the Leeds area, the M20 earthworks stand out starkly behind Leeds Castle. Whilst planting may screen the vehicles in due course, the noise will still penetrate. The countryside in this area is also under pressure from the proposed Leeds-Langley bypass.

[next >>](#)

GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - MAIDSTONE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Mixed farmland deeply dissected by the Medway and its tributaries. Residual orchards and shelterbelts. Ragstone buildings and walls in villages, farmsteads and oasts.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

Elements in this landscape are strongly unified, appear well managed and have a function in the current cultural use of the land. Arable fields are relatively limited and the area benefits from the varied relief caused by the Medway tributaries.

The intensity of fruit-growing reduces the ecological interest within the fields. Shelterbelts are often single species and narrow in form, and the extent of the coppice woodland is limited. Historic farming settlements are frequent and have a positive impact on the view; there is much evidence of vernacular style including oasts and the use of ragstone. The urban edge is the most frequent detracting element but is considered to be a minor detractor in the well-settled view. The overall condition of this area is good.

Sensitivity

There is a strong sense of historic continuity in the landscape. However, recent features such as poplar and alder shelterbelts are not incongruous as they reinforce the current well-managed aspect of the area. Estate planting is the exception to this and is a minor feature, becoming an indistinct part of the historic pattern. Views are intermittent over the incised landscape; the visibility and sensitivity of the area are considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

One of the strongest positive elements in the landscape is the built form and its relationship within the landscape - this should be reinforced by ensuring the use and development of localised detail and materials in all types of built form, including agricultural buildings and by conserving the settings and scale of existing groups of buildings. The well-managed and compartmentalised aspect of the agricultural land should be conserved, and these elements used to define the urban edge.

Reinforce ecological bases within existing woodland and in the river valleys by the encouragement of diverse species and replanting.

Encourage the continuation of pockets of fruit-growing.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

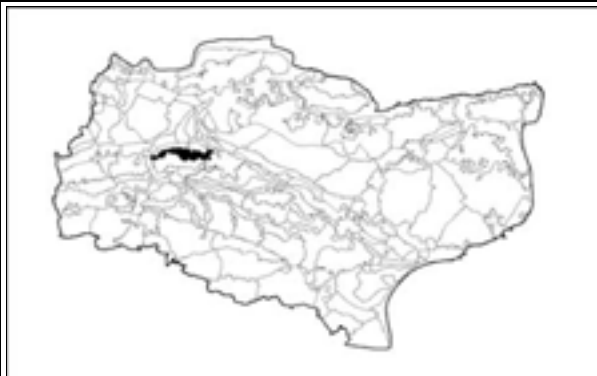
CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Reinforce the positive impact of vernacular built form in scale and detail. Encourage the use of local detail in agricultural buildings.

Reinforce ecological bases within the existing woodland by sensitive management, and in particular in the valleys of the Medway tributaries. Conserve vernacular built form, well-managed orchard enclosures.

Encourage the continuation of fruit-growing.

[previous <<](#)



This flat to gently undulating landscape of mixed farmland is dominated by orchards, of mainly dwarf stock, with their characteristic shelterbelts, replaced in places with horticultural crops such as runner beans and mixed with arable. It extends from Crouch, high above the secluded Bourne Valley, between the wooded flanks of the Wrotham Heath Gap and the expanses of the Mereworth Woodlands to the western outskirts of Maidstone. Its extent is determined by the good quality soils of the sandy limestones of the Hythe Beds.

Occasional traditional orchards survive intact or remain but abandoned to scrub, a reminder of the changes that have occurred to this land use in the past thirty years. In places these decaying older orchards have been sub-divided by post and wire, as at Mill Street, to allow the grazing of ponies, an increasing demand at the urban fringes. Evidence of orchard removal can be seen close to East Malling and Ditton where the tall shelterbelts are still intact but the trees have been replaced with arable crops. A third or more of the orchards may have been lost in this area over the past thirty years.

The landscape is interspersed with small broadleaf copses and larger clumps particularly on the fringes of the Mereworth Wood complex which frames the landscape to the south. It is generally a medium scale landscape, enclosed at a local level by the shelterbelts and remaining hedges. Long views can be glimpsed in places, however, to the Downs and the Vale of Holmesdale to the north.

The adjacent villages of Offham, with its medieval quintain, West Malling, much of which is a Conservation Area, and the greatly expanded East Malling are distributed evenly in the landscape. The mainly 20th century settlements of Leybourne, Larkfield and Ditton, however, press on the northern boundary. To the south, pressure on its rural nature comes from the proposed dualling of the West Malling by-pass, the A228, and the new settlement at Kings Hill. The remaining Fruit Belt is being squeezed between these two pincers of built-up land. The landscape is affected by mineral extraction at Hermitage Farm Quarry.

At quarries which have ceased to work the stone, such as Offham Quarry, activities continue with domestic refuse infill.

[next >>](#)

GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - MALLING

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat to gentle undulating landscape on good quality loams. Mixed farmlands including orchards. Residual tall hedgerows and shelterbelts associated with the fruit. Long views to the Kent Downs.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

A coherent pattern of elements with shelterbelts and tall hedges. Vernacular materials are in evidence in buildings in the landscape. Some detracting features interrupt views; the intrusive urban edge of new developments, many on the edge of existing villages, and the associated suburbanisation of rural lanes. Land use around settlements is fragmented. Many fruit farms are now converted to intensive fruit and arable, and pony paddocks occur regularly. Industrial farm buildings are in evidence. There is some loss of shelterbelts/hedges where there are paddocks and arable crops, also many hedges are poorly maintained and appear to be redundant.

Sensitivity

An historic, rural fruit farming landscape with historic village cores, ragstone churches, cottages, farmsteads, walls and oasts. Some minor estate landscape. The unremarkable landform is gently undulating with frequent patches of tree cover which contain the immediate views although the Downs form a backdrop to views to the north.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Contain the suburban influence by reinforcing the urban edge with characteristic landscape elements; such as small-scale areas of tree-cover or a network of shelterbelts. Explore the diversification of fruit growing to encourage the retention and replanting of the shelterbelt framework.

Maintain the hedgerows and create heathland for the purpose of extending the ecological bases.

Ensure that farm buildings and new development respect the (small) scale of the existing built form. The visual influence of new road junctions and new housing access should not extend into the rural landscape

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Very Low.

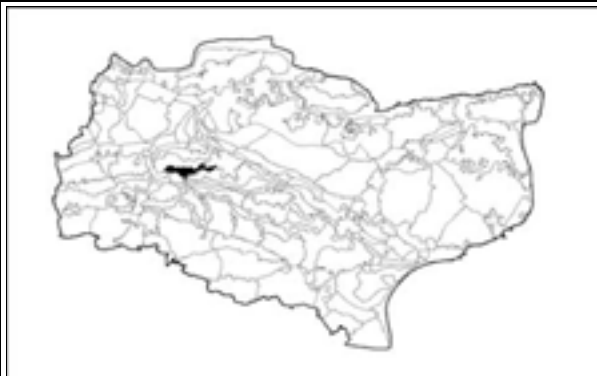
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create a new urban edge to contain developments
Create ecological and wildlife interest
Strengthen boundaries within the rural landscape
Create highway design which reflects the rural nature of the area

[previous <<](#)



This pleasant landscape to the south of Mereworth Woods is similar in its character to the Malling Belt to the north, but includes the steep north-western bank of the River Medway. As with the Malling area, the landscape is distinguished by the varied presence of orchards and hops. These crops are again planted to take advantage of the good quality loams of the Hythe dipslope.

The orchards are concentrated more locally here and are found in particular on the slopes around East Barming and Wateringbury. In the recent past this distribution was much more widespread, with up to forty percent of the area under orchards or hops. Much of the rest of the area is now under arable crops which has led to a much more open landscape. Abandoned traditional orchards can be found among the well-managed new ones, or their ghosts be glimpsed among the remnant shelterbelts. Despite this, most of the area remains a pleasant patchwork of farmland.

Much of the character area is framed to the north by the extensive woodlands of Mereworth and Oaken Wood. To the south the remnants of the ancient deer park of Mereworth Castle provide a dramatic setting to the 18th century classical building. A number of large houses were sited on these prosperous, mainly south-facing slopes near the Medway.

Vernacular buildings of ragstone, plain or patterned brickwork are features of this landscape. The centre of Wateringbury, in particular, is composed of these local materials, but many individual farmsteads and oasts are a pleasant meld of fabrics too. This continuity of materials helps to unify the landscape but the more recent use of modern products, such as sand-lime bricks at Barming, is diluting this individuality. Further suburbanisation along the A26 occurs in the form of the use of conifer hedges, car sales units, scruffy lay-bys and farm shops between Wateringbury and Barming.

Pressure is still being exerted at the fringes of Maidstone, notably in the suburbs such as Barming, at Oakwood Park and Hospital, for further residential development. Increasing traffic levels, along the A26 in particular, are affecting the character of the village centres, such as Wateringbury and Mereworth.

[next >>](#)

GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - WATERINGBURY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gently undulating landscape deeply incised by the river Medway. Good quality loam soils. Residual shelterbelts, hops and shelterbelts. Ragstone buildings. Large houses.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The enclosure and regular down-slope patchwork of fruit and hop-growing is extant in patches. The south-facing slope of the area is defined by woodland at the top. There is a varied and irregular land use pattern over other areas which have lost an intensity of agricultural use, possibly due to the influence of residential land use. Vernacular buildings are of interest and include large oasts and much use of ragstone. Estate farm buildings are also significant, but 20th century linear development has obscured the definition of villages and the rural nature of the landscape.

Sensitivity

Views are intermittently enclosed by shelterbelts and small copses on the sloping land. Visibility is therefore considered to be moderate. Towards the east of the character area, the historic characteristics of the fruit-belt and estate farmsteads are becoming indistinct as the emphasis on the land use changes. Well-used roads have also lost distinctively close, tall hedged boundaries and are more likely to have more recent treatment of wide verges and ornamental hedges. The sensitivity of this area is considered to be low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Reinforce the physical extents of rural areas between historic settlements by creating shelterbelts and hedgerow to emphasize the boundaries of built areas.
Reinforce the existing, regular down-slope field pattern by encouraging the replanting of hedges in the down-slope pattern.
Encourage the maintenance of the clipped, well managed field boundaries
Create pockets of traditional orchards on unmanaged land around residential development.
Create broadleaf woodland linked to the wooded ridge and define existing open farmland with wooded edges.
Create and maintain occasional visual openings into the rural landscape from the highway.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Low.

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

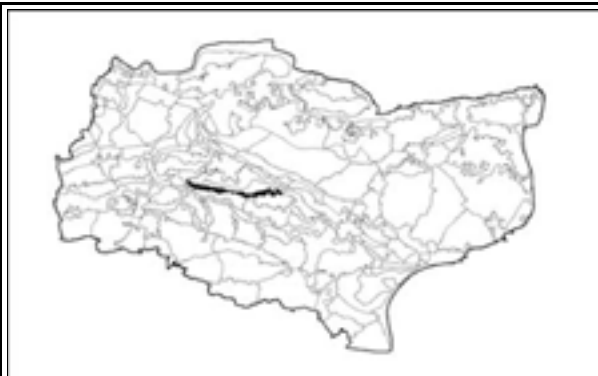
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE AND REINFORCE.

Create woodland linked with existing wooded ridge
Create traditional orchard features in suburban land
Encourage the appropriate maintenance and replanting of hedges
Define the rural areas with strong shelterbelt or woodland

[previous <<](#)

GREENSAND RIDGE - MAIDSTONE



Forming a longer and narrower, and in places steeper ridgeline, the scarp face south of Maidstone starts gently at the Medway Valley at Watlingbury, and rises up above Yalding, Hunton, and Linton, forming the setting for Sutton Valence and ending south of Platt's Heath in the east.

Generally the Maidstone Ridge is both a more wooded slope and one still characterised by orchards particularly north of Yalding, Hunton, Linton and around Sutton Valence. The woodlands are usually coppiced chestnut forming a continuation of the fragmented belt that marks the drift deposits of the Coxheath Plateau Farmlands on the dip slope of the Greensand.

The ridgeline is marked strikingly by a most regular network of narrow winding lanes that runs at right angles between the B2163 on the Plateau Farmlands, down the steepest, shortest route of the scarp face. This is very indicative of old 'drove' roads, the roads used for moving stock from the higher, drier lands to the wet Wealden vale in the summer months. Unlike wheeled carts, stock could follow a much steeper route.

Again the ridge is marked by large parklands, such as Linton and Boughton Monchelsea that cross-over the boundary between the Low Weald and the Greensand Belt, gaining both hunting and grazing land in the clay vale and drier pasture and good views from the ridge.

[next >>](#)

GREENSAND RIDGE - MAIDSTONE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Steep south-facing slopes. Residual orchards and nut plats. Scattered historic settlement. Extensive views overlooking the Low Weald. Historic parklands. Narrow winding lanes.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The fruit-growing around which much of this landscape has developed is not currently a strong use, with the exception of an intensive fruit area to the west of Linton. The uniformity of landscape features is therefore occasionally interrupted although there are few visual detractors and the landscape remains coherent. Ecological bases tend to be weak - woodland cover is very limited and there is little opportunity for other semi-natural habitats. The eye is often drawn towards estate houses which crest the ridge and overlook the Low Weald - these and the ridgeline hamlets which display distinctive vernacular materials augment the positive impact of built development. Rural heritage features of parkland and enclosed fields are in a variable condition. The overall condition is moderate.

Sensitivity

The steep slope of the Greensand Ridge is the dominant aspect of the landscape view, despite the enclosure by intermittent tree cover and some shelterbelts. It is also highly visible from the Low Weald. The sense of place is moderate; there is a loss of distinction of wooded areas and hedged field boundaries in the more open, parkland areas, but the characteristic ancient form of the cross-contour roads, small settlements of historic origin, and influences of ancient and historic parkland, remain a strong feature.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Due to the high visibility and sensitivity of the ridge landform, the conservation and restoration of a uniform landscape pattern is the most appropriate strategy for the management of the landscape.

Within the estate parkland and farmland, the restoration of woodland shaws and estate boundaries would contribute to the restoration of some distinctiveness.

It would be desirable to restore a variety of fruit growing within tall/hedged or shelterbelt enclosed fields, dependent on farming trends. The restoration of cross-contour hedges down the steep ridge is perhaps the most important feature - hedges along cross-contour roads fulfill this to some extent.

The characteristics of cross-contour roads; narrow and hedge-lined with occasional long views from the top of the ridge, should be conserved.

The conservation of small historic hamlets (with much ragstone in evidence) is also desirable.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Restore the uniformity to the landscape pattern

Restore shaws to enclose open fields.

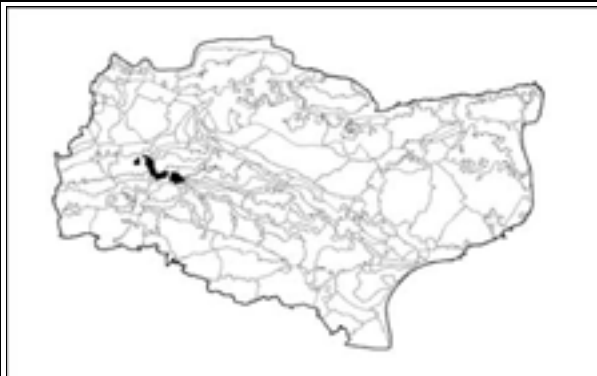
Restore estate parkland and farmland woods and boundaries

Restore some cross-contour hedged/shelterbelt enclosure to farmland

Conserve historic hamlets

Conserve the characteristics of cross-contour roads

[previous <<](#)



Generally, this landscape is composed of the steeply sloping scarp face of the Hythe Beds, extending from the deeply etched valley of the Bourne and the hamlet of Claygate Cross in the west to the orchard-covered slopes above Grafty Green in the east. Geographically it can be divided into two areas; the Maidstone Ridge and the Plaxtol Ridge, the latter incorporating a separate area around the village of Ightham. Each area has slightly varying characteristics.

Both Plaxtol and the Maidstone Ridge are a pleasant mix of open arable fields, intensively managed orchards with a patchwork of sheep-grazed pastures, hops and woodland adding variety to the scene. Perhaps the most striking landscape characteristic of the ridgeline over most of its extent are the many recognised Historic Parks and Gardens. These are situated to take advantage of the dramatic and extensive views over the Low Weald, which appears far below the ridgeline. These parks often extended into the Low Weald itself, to take advantage of the grazing and woodlands there.

A substantial part of this character area has been recognised as a Special Landscape Area. At a detailed level the two sub-areas exhibit some differences in character relating notably in relation to land use.

The Plaxtol Ridge lies between the Bourne Valley, west of Mereworth Woods and the more urbanised setting of Nettlestead above the Medway. The picturesque village of Ightham lies on undulating ground to the north side of the ridge, surrounded with woodland and fruit-growing farms. The historic moated house of Ightham Mote is situated to the south of the village at the head of the Bourne stream.

The land use has changed in thirty years with a reduction in the amount of grazing land and a decrease in the area under orchard. Unique to the ridge outside the Kent Downs AONB the Plaxtol Ridge has some very distinctive nut platts that add interest and variety to the overall scene, but these are limited in extent. There is little industrialisation or suburbanisation, however, apart from that around Nettlestead and isolated, now redundant buildings such as those in Basted and Plaxtol Spoute. The road links of the A26 and Seven Mile Lane do intrude on the area's tranquillity to the east.

The few settlements are generally scattered and small, such as those at Claygate Cross, Crouch and West Peckham, composed of old vernacular farmsteads, oasts and houses of ragstone or brick, with a few 20th century additions clustered at their edges. Many of the settlements are designated as Conservation Areas, such as parts of West Peckham and Roughways, which, with the Ancient Monuments such as Old Soar Manor, are indicative of the historic settlement of this area.

Of the historic parks in this area, Mereworth Castle and Oxonhoath, two old deer parks, stand out. Roydon's Hall extends from the Greensand into the Low Weald. Above Oxonhoath, the most striking views can be had from Swanton and Gover Hill giving long views to the south. The effect is accentuated by the dark masses of Mereworth Woods which form an enclosing backdrop to much of the character area to the north.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Steep south-facing slopes. Residual orchards and nut plats. Scattered historic settlement. Extensive views overlooking the Low Weald. Historic parklands. Narrow winding lanes.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There is a strong, managed hedgerow and shelterbelt pattern which is very evident on the south-facing scarp slope. Tall hedges and shelterbelts enclose narrow roads and small, regular fields. It is a unified landscape, currently with a diversity of crops and shelterbelt species, but still with many orchards and soft fruit. Parkland and ragstone hamlets are regular elements in the landscape. The hedge network covers much of the area, but the use of coniferous species within the hedges, and the intensity of cultivation - some shifting to arable on the lower slopes - means that the ecological value is reduced.

Sensitivity

This landscape has a strong historic - and in parts ancient - time depth with small scale enclosed fields and frequent parkland. There are areas with a long history of woodland cover suggesting an ancient quality. Ridge-line roads follow ancient trackways and steep, well-enclosed cross-contour roads follow former drove roads. Vernacular details and materials are a strong feature in built forms, such as ragstone churches, cottages and walls. The tall hedgerows and shelterbelts give intermittent enclosure on the dominant scarp slope, and this means that visibility is fairly high. There are many viewpoints giving long views over the Low Weald.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the hedgerow pattern and scale of the enclosed landscape, encouraging the use of non-coniferous species in replanting works. Ensure that the land use within the landscape pattern is conducive to the maintenance of the hedgerows. Conserve and manage areas of ancient woodland. Conserve the parkland by managing existing mature trees and features such as avenues and boundary structures or boundary planting. Formulate long-term management plans to include the replanting and maintenance of characteristic tree groups and other features. Maintain strong boundaries to the parkland. Conserve the narrow, enclosed nature of the roads with managed, native hedgerow species. Conserve the small scale nature of settlements, located at the base of slopes and within gentle undulations.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Very High.

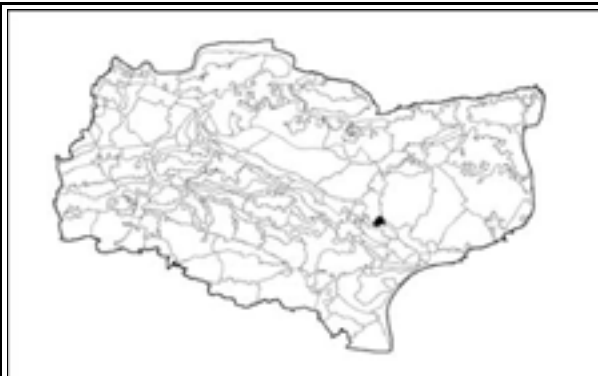
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the hedgerow pattern and range of native hedgerow species
Conserve the scale and vernacular detail of settlements
Conserve parkland
Conserve ancient woodland
Conserve narrow, enclosed roads

[previous <<](#)



HAMPTON

This small corner of the Stour Valley reflects a change in the soils. Brook, with its 13th century church and barn, is one of very few villages built on the sticky gault clay. The land here is gently undulating, irrigated by several scarp-foot spring and there is a considerable amount of woodland, much of it of high nature conservation value. In the north east, the wooded scarp encloses the rich chalk grasslands of the Devil's Kneading Trough Coomb and forms a dramatic backdrop to the gentle farmland below.

Although the field pattern is more irregular and the fields generally smaller than around Wye, most of the land is still intensively cultivated or given over to set-aside. Many former hedges are now only straggling lines of overgrown thorn to have been removed altogether and pockets of damp pasture are ungrazed and neglected.

STOUR VALLEY

Hampton lies within the larger Stour Valley character area of the Kent Downs AONB.

The Great Stour is the most easterly of the three rivers cutting through the Downs. Like the Darent and the Medway, it too provided an early access route into the heart of Kent and formed an ancient focus for settlement. Today the Stour Valley is highly valued for the quality of its landscape, especially by the considerable numbers of walkers who follow the Stour Valley Walk or the North Downs Way National Trail.

Despite its proximity to both Canterbury and Ashford, the Stour Valley retains a strong rural identity. Enclosed by steep scarps on both sides, with dense woodlands on the upper slopes, the valley is dominated by intensively farmed arable fields interspersed by broad sweeps of mature parkland. Unusually, there are no electricity pylons cluttering the views across the valley. North of Bilting, the river flows through narrow, pastoral floodplain, dotted with trees such as willow and alder and drained by small ditches. To the south around Wye, however, the floodplain widens out and the pastures along the immediate riverside are surrounded by intensively cultivated arable fields on the rich, well-drained brick-earth soils. The field pattern is picked out by a network of narrow, trimmed hedges and lines of mature trees, such as poplars.

On the valley sides, many of the arable fields are surrounded by thick shaws or dense, overgrown hedges which extend down from the woodlands on the upper slopes. Hedgerow trees, in particular oak and ash, are frequent and much of the woodland along the east side of the valley is of national importance for its plant, insect and other animal communities.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Backdrop of wooded scarp and rich chalk grassland. Gently undulating gault clay, considerable woodland. Irregular fields, intensively cultivated, former hedgerows largely removed.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape with a coherent pattern of irregular fields and woodland on the gault clay. There are few visual detractors. There is a strong ecological network of small woodlands, shaws and some pastures, now opening out for arable use in some areas. The rural features of historic settlement and farming settlements are in good condition. However, the important hedgerow network is becoming gappy.

Sensitivity

The high sensitivity of the area is due to a strong sense of place, influenced by the woodland characteristics and the small scale of the historic farmland and the characteristic diversity of hedge and woodland species. Visibility is moderate as views are intermittent over the apparent landform.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the remote quality of the landscape. Maintain the existing hedgerow network by applying long term management plans including the replanting of characteristic species (clematis, viburnums, etc.) and encouraging appropriate maintenance techniques within the countryside. Conserve the frequency and broadleaf characteristics of woodland, ensuring that areas of ancient woodland are recognised and conserved with appropriate management techniques. Conserve the setting of historic hamlets and farmsteads.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve and manage broadleaf woodland and ancient woodland
Conserve and manage hedgerows
Conserve the remote setting of historic settlements

[previous <<](#)

HIGHKNOCK CHANNEL AND DOWELS



To the south and east of Appledore are two areas which are the most recently reclaimed farmlands and which exhibit the most strong wetland characteristics of the whole region.

The Highknock Channel is a meandering natural watercourse which runs through a low-lying fluvial plain with the parallel courses of the Royal Military Canal and the Five Watering Sewer. It is the tamed and rationalised floodplain of the Rother with wide, embanked drainage channels and farmland in depressions between. Despite this, it has a very marshy quality due to the reedy nature of the grasslands.

The Dowels is a neighbouring area between Fairfield and Kenardington, underlain with peat which occurs very near the surface and which is known to be shrinking. It is visibly very low lying and often waterlogged, with pools of standing water in the fields. In times of high rainfall, regular patches of pasture appear like pillows floating in watery margins. Sheep fencing is angled down at the edges to meet the water. Most views of the area look down from the embanked roads which surround the area.

Both character areas are mainly unsettled with few roads. A few large farm buildings are located on the flood defence wall between Fairfield and Appledore, and on the Rhee Wall between Appledore and Snargate. The main Ashford to Hastings Railway runs across on its own grassy embankment and is often unnoticeable in the general melee of earth banks and grasses, except when a train is in view.

The largest areas of permanent pasture within the Marsh are to be found on the Dowels, which is characterised by acid soils and is subject to too much waterlogging to be cultivated for arable use. The Highknock Channel too is pastoral, especially near Guldeford Lane Corner, with close cropped grassland and ragged clumps of rushy grasses in small depressions. These pastures are very open, fenced by the watercourses and by a dilapidated mix of timber, wire, steel and plastic. Amorphous hawthorn scrub is dotted along the embankments. Corrugated sheds in the middle of pastures serve as contemporary shepherds' huts.

The main water channels are generally flanked by cultivated farmland where turf growing is becoming a major land use. The strict uniformity of turf fields is at variance with the characteristic pastoral grassland, and may contribute in the long term to the depletion of the rich soils.

Arguably, the most evocative view of the Marsh is that of Fairfield Church, standing completely alone, both pasture and sheep immediately around its walls. There is no woody vegetation and the views are open. It is a very distinctive landscape with a strong cultural identity and is highly sensitive to any change.

[next >>](#)

HIGHKNOCK CHANNEL AND DOWELS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Unenclosed, wide views, open landscape. Reedy floodplain, raised water channels and grassy embankments, wide drainage ditches. Monotone of grasses, little seasonal variation. Pastoral, ragged grasses and untidy agricultural furniture. Sheep and cattle. A very few large farms with historical locations, no other settlement.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The flat, open landscape has a unified pattern of elements with some visual detractors associated with agricultural storage buildings and transmission towers. The extent of wetland and grassland habitats is modified by some intensive arable use of the land. This is not a settled area, although recent farm structures have a moderate negative impact on the view. The heritage features of the drainage ditches and the tree-lined canal are generally good. There are pieces of remnant timber sheep fencing scattered over the area.

Sensitivity

The dominant landform and open views combine with a moderate sense of place, resulting in a sensitive landscape. 'The Dowels' is mainly made up of older marshland areas, the 'Highknock Channel' of more recent enclosures, but with some older smaller and regular enclosures. This is an historic reclaimed landscape with unique and rare features and is therefore of very high sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve open views and reduce the impact of structures in the landscape.
Conserve the grassland and wetland habitats by the sensitive management of water levels, distribution and quality of water and agricultural management.
Encourage the conservation and adaptation of traditional sheep fencing details.
Conserve and enhance the impact of historic sea defences, embankments such as the Rhee Wall, water courses and the canal.

CONTEXT

Regional: Romney Marsh

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

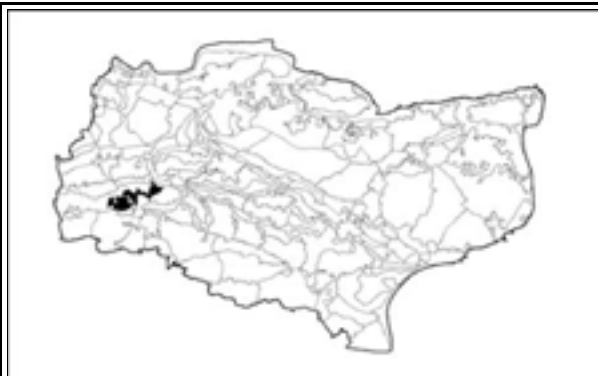
Sensitivity	Very High.
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve saltmarsh and unimproved grasslands
Conserve the impact of historic features such as the Rhee Wall and the canal, and other water courses
Conserve open views
Conserve wetlands by the sensitive management of water

[previous <<](#)



A flat or gently undulating mixed, farmed landscape between 30 and 50 metres above sea level, developed in part on the valley alluviums and head deposits. This area differs from the Western Woodland Farmlands in its flatter topography and the reduced frequency of woodlands, although locally they do occur.

Although much of the area around the Hilden Brook is still secluded and pleasant pasture, near Leigh many of the internal field boundaries have been removed to allow enlargement for arable use. This and the lower woodland cover results in a more open landscape with few isolated field trees and broadleaf shaws remaining. Enclosure remains through the mixed woodlands at the edge of the Hall Place estate. Leigh and Hall Place provide an attractive and historic feature in the landscape on the boundary with the High Weald character area.

The new pattern of cultivation does not respect the tradition of small-scale pastoral farming on these poorly drained soils, a tradition surviving at the Old Barn Pastures Site of Nature Conservation (SNCI), north-east of Leigh. The arable fields give a monochromatic but bright green carpet to the landscape in early spring that contrasts with the muted colours of the traditional pastures. Visual unity is still provided, however, by shaws and hedgerows where they remain, but where they have been lost the landscape is open and can appear bleak, especially in winter.

Shaws and ponds were once much more frequent in the landscape.

The transport routes of the A21 and the railway line from Sevenoaks to Tonbridge cut through this landscape, both being visible on embankments as they cross the traditionally wet landscapes north of the Medway. The well-established suburb of Hildenborough also fragments the character area leaving the pastures of the Hilden Valley as an important green wedge.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat or undulating mixed farmland.
Open landscape with residual hedgerows, shaws, and frequent woodlands.
Urban influences from the suburbs of Tonbridge and Hildenborough, and the A21 and Sevenoaks to Tonbridge railway.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

An unremarkable landform supports a mixed farming landscape with weak elements of wetland, small-medium scale field pattern and infrequent patches of woodland. It is a fragmented landscape, barely coherent, with visual detractors evident in the open landscape. The stronger elements in the view are those associated with urban land-cover such as residential fringe, amenity golf courses and transport routes. Semi-natural habitats of woodland and streams are also fragmented and not clearly defined. The rural management of hedgerows and enclosures is in decline. This area is considered to be in poor condition.

Sensitivity

The rural and natural features of this historic landscape are becoming indistinct. Scattered, small farmsteads are often dwarfed by unsympathetic buildings, urban land uses and urban growth. Hedgerow enclosure of the field system has declined into fragmented lines of trees and large, open fields, with the exception of roadside hedges. The historic pattern of assarts and medieval fields is currently being opened out to create larger agricultural parcels. Visibility is low due to the intermittent vegetation and unremarkable landform.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

A new landscape framework should aim to address the current weak ecological value of the area by creating new habitats. Identify marginal land in and around water courses and create riparian landscape and wetlands around natural drainage within the lower contours.
Create a new landscape pattern to the urban edge, including new woodland blocks. This may be centered on new settlement edges and the minor road network.
Create new vegetative corridors and enclosures along existing roads, adapting their design to an agreed management approach for the area.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Very Low.

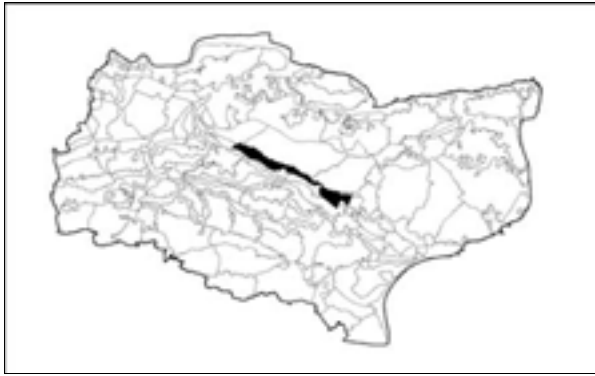
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create riparian landscape around natural drainage channels
Create a consistent feature of standard trees throughout the landscape, using these as elements in new edges to urban areas and along highways
Create an edge to urban areas

[previous <<](#)



The steep scarp of the Downs, between Boxley and the Stour Valley, overlooks a wide, rolling landscape of mixed farmland. The Greensand Ridge to the south, although less prominent here than near Sevenoaks, forms a gentle rise before the flat, low-lying countryside associated with the River Beult and the Low Weald.

The scarp in this area of the AONB is predominantly grassland, although some parts around Thurnham have been ploughed as a result of arable cultivation in the recent past. This has exposed the highly visible white chalk beneath the shallow, unstable soils. In contrast to the dense woodlands above Boxley, there is only an intermittent fringe of woodland along the scarp top and some scattered trees along field boundaries.

The southern boundary of the AONB extends across the fertile strip of land along the scarp foot. The continual down-wash of soil from the scarp, combined with the sheltered aspect of the resulting fields, produces a belt of very productive agricultural land. For most of its length, the extent of this fertile strip is clearly evident from the single width and uniformity of the large intensively cultivated fields which divide it up. Beyond this strip, the fields are often smaller and more irregular, with more trees and woodland scattered between them.

The agricultural value of the scarp foot has long been recognised and exploited. The Ordnance Survey maps of the late 19th century show a pattern of large, regular fields similar to that of today. In recent years, however, some parts of the scarp foot have been denuded even of the few trees and hedges which formerly occurred there. This has produced vast arable 'prairies', that in places sweep up over the scarp onto the downland plateaux. The scale of these 'prairies' is inappropriate to the character of the surrounding landscape.

The scarp foot is also characterised by the string of old-established villages, such as Hollingbourne, which have grown up along the line of springs that seep out from the lower levels of the chalk. Hollingbourne Manor is a good example of Elizabethan brickwork. A number of historic parks adjoin the Pilgrim's Way and the Greenway ancient roads which pass through the area, usually marked out by thick hedges along each side.

The scarp is crossed by a considerable number of roads and footpaths, while for most of its length the North Downs Way runs along the top of the scarp and the Pilgrim's Way runs along the bottom. Its open nature, and the wide views it offers, mean that this stretch of landscape is particularly sensitive to development. The existing road and railway network, along the southern boundary, already has a considerable impact on the views and quiet enjoyment of this part of the AONB.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rolling landscape of mixed farmland overlooked by yew-dominated scarp.
Thick hedges along Pilgrim's Way. Large, scarp-foot arable fields.
Historic springline villages.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The pattern of elements on the chalk scarp is coherent, but the usual unity is interrupted by the denudation of the plateau and the intense decline of shaws and cross-contour hedges. Fragments of hedgerows add to the visual detractors within the landscape which include quarries and some ridgeline buildings. Small clusters of scrub and trees provide the only opportunity for semi-natural habitats within the arable landscape, and therefore the ecological integrity of the area is weak. Built development is generally unremarkable and there are few notable heritage features with the exception of the Pilgrim's Way. This area is considered to be in poor condition.

Sensitivity

The large arable pattern has an historic time depth. The more ancient qualities of a heavily wooded upper scarp have been eroded. Characteristic features include the hedges along some roads and the Pilgrim's Way, but there are few other features which contribute to local distinctiveness. The sense of place is weak. Recent built form is apparent in the landscape. The landform itself is the dominant feature in the unenclosed landscape, and visibility is therefore very high. The landscape is considered to be of moderate sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The restoration of heritage features and ecological interest is required to upgrade the condition of the landscape, at the same time respecting the fertility of the soil and its use for arable cultivation. Distinct features may be restored or created to augment the local sense of place. The characteristic feature of beech avenues may be restored to enhance the cross-contour road. Regenerative woody vegetation would be appropriate to mark the base of the steeper slopes. Species-rich chalk grassland is appropriate to the upper slopes. Existing open arable may then be defined by occasional shaws which link the limited area of woody scrub on the upper edge and the hedged Pilgrim's Way at the base. The emphasis on the spring line settlement should be restored and the effect of existing ridgeline development mitigated.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

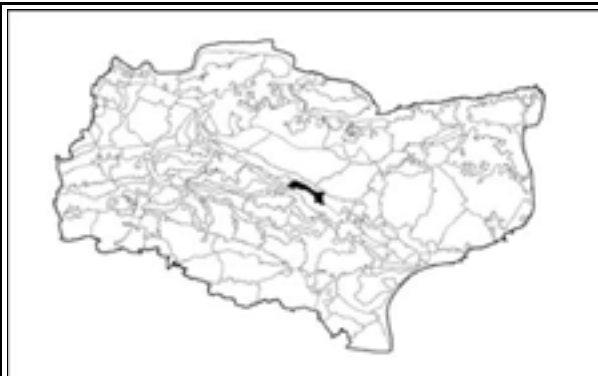
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore thick, well managed hedgerows to highways.
Replant the characteristic features of beech avenues on cross-contour roads.
Restore occasional woodland shaws.
Create key areas of chalk grassland on the upper scarp.
Create scrub woodland to mark the transition from arable to grassland.
Reduce the visibility and impact of recent built form.

[previous <<](#)



Hollingbourne Vale East continues this distinctive rural character area from Hollingbourne Vale West on the Gault Clay of a gently undulating agricultural landscape punctuated by small woodlands and scattered settlement developed on the heavy clay soils. This eastern part of the vale forms part of the catchment of the Great Stour, which rises near Lenham and drains eastwards rather than west to the Len and the Medway.

Just east of Lenham the landscape is unusually open, this characteristic extending up into the grazing land of the chalk scarp face above East Lenham and New Shelf Farm. The land here straddles the difficult to work clay soils with the more easily cultivated soils of the scarp foot that have long been worked on a large scale. Further cultivation to improve pastures and the intensification of arable utilising huge machines, however, has encouraged a bleak pattern of few trees or hedgerows. The Downs remain enclosing the landscape to the north but the lack of trees and hedgerows allows sight of the M20 and Channel Tunnel Rail Link to the south. This enlarged transport corridor, exploiting the stable substrates beneath the clay, has a profound effect on the tranquillity of the vale on its northern boundary.

Mineral extraction is also locally a feature of this area, with Lenham Forstal pit an active mineral site and Brett Gravels extracting near Charing.

Towards Charing the landscape becomes more varied with a mix of sheep-grazed pasture and arable fields divided by gappy hedgerows with scattered trees. Small broadleaf copses become more frequent once again, and the enclosure of the Downs is emphasised by extensive scarp-face woodlands.

Charing and Lenham are both ancient villages that have developed at the scarp foot due to the line of springs that seep out from the junction of the chalk with the clay. The source of the Great Stour is found in this area at Tanyard Farm pond.

The outskirts of Lenham have now crept down the A20 towards Charing and need restraint on the eastern boundary to conserve the essentially rural character of the village. Elsewhere, on the clay, settlement is limited to scattered farmsteads, often vernacular in construction and of ancient origin.

South of Charing a pocket of this traditional character area remains between the motorway and the railway. Further eastwards the landscape becomes more remote with a rich and varied pattern of grassland, hay crops and arable fields.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gently undulating landscape on heavy clay soils. Small streams draining east to Great Stour. Mixed farmland of small sheep-grazed pasture and larger arable fields. Locally extensive loss of hedgerows and woodland to allow exploitation of good quality soils at scarp foot. Scarp foot villages. Chalk scarp dominating views to north.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The extensive loss of hedgerow and shaws in this large-scale arable landscape has resulted in an incoherent landscape, void of features, which no longer reflects the landform. There are some visual detractors associated with the trunk road, and a few due to unsympathetic farm buildings. The ecological interest is weak - there are a few small patches of wetland, some generative vegetation on the railway embankment and fragments of hedgerow. The condition of the landscape is considered to be very poor.

Sensitivity

There are few distinguishing features in the landscape which contribute to a local sense of place. The gently undulating landform is unremarkable within the area, although bounded by the chalk scarp to the north. Visibility is therefore moderate over the open landscape. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create regenerative woodland to the scarp-side of large arable fields and, whilst maintaining the large scale of farmland, reintroduce cross-contour shaws to link with existing streams. Create new corridors of riparian vegetation. Create a design code to ensure that agricultural buildings contribute to the open view and respect the scale of historic farm buildings.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

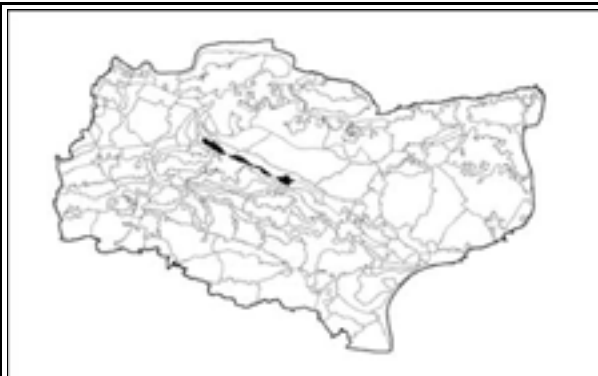
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create ecological interest by the sensitive management of some arable and pastoral farmland
Reintroduce shaws and riparian vegetation around streams
Create regenerative woodlands
Create a local design code for agricultural buildings

[previous <<](#)



This character area is created essentially on the Gault Clay vale running beneath the Downs. It is generally sandwiched between the M20 and the railway east of Maidstone, from Newnham Court Farm to the watershed between the Medway and the Great Stour at Leadingcross Green. Also included is a small area on the chalk excluded from the AONB, north of the railway line, roughly from Harrietsham to Lenham. This area forms an extension to the character area described as 'Hollingbourne' in the AONB study, The Kent Downs Landscape.

The Gault is composed of stiff grey-blue clays which expand on wetting, these shrinkable qualities making settlement infrequent. The soils of this area are seasonally waterlogged clayey loams of mixed quality where traditionally winter cereals and short term grasslands were found. Since the 1960's more grassland has been grown, mainly improved pastures but the construction of the motorway has contributed to loss of agricultural land, woodland and tranquillity.

Small broadleaf woodlands and irregular fields are typical of this character area. The ancient mixed broad-leaved woodlands of Honeyhills Wood north of Bearsted are a well preserved, if unmanaged, example. Areas of hornbeam, oak, ash, field maple and hazel coppice, create a closed canopy on this damp clay soil with a rich shrub layer of woodland hawthorn, guelder rose and holly. Bluebells are locally abundant, clothing the ground with a blue mist in spring. Horish Wood to the west is similar but with damper species such as downy birch and willow. Warren Wood, part of the Leeds Castle Estate is a very rich relict ancient woodland of pedunculate oak with hornbeam, hazel and ash coppice and a varied ground flora.

All three woodlands have been bisected by the M20 and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link at the edge of this character area where it joins the more free-draining Folkestone Beds.

Eythorne Street with its vernacular centre is one of the few villages in this character area, nestling at the foot of the Downs.

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating landscape on wet clay soils. Small broadleaf woodlands and irregular pastures. Infrequent settlement. Small streams (the head waters of the river Len) draining west to Maidstone. Chalk scarp dominating views to north

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There is a sound basis for ecological interest in the frequent woodland and streams; however, the spread of semi-natural habitats and the visual unity of the landscape are interrupted by rail and road transport corridors. Other visual detractors include industrial and suburban development. The cultural integrity of rural features is variable - tree cover appears widespread and there are some strong wooded edges, but hedgerows are in decline. Farmhouses and historic buildings are mixed with more recent built form to give a moderate positive impact. The condition of the area is considered to be poor.

Sensitivity

There is an historic time depth to the landscape with woodlands, historic settlements and hedged field boundaries all contributing to the sense of place. This is modified in some areas by more recent development, such as the widening of roads. The landform is apparent in the view and occasionally has localised dramatic relief. Views are intermittently enclosed by woodland and therefore the visibility is moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore rural views by controlling the visibility of detracting features.
Restore wooded edges where these have been eroded by development.
Create a dense woodland framework for transport corridors.
Create edges to settlements and new rural features to distinguish highways and the approaches to settlements.
Restore enclosure to highways.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

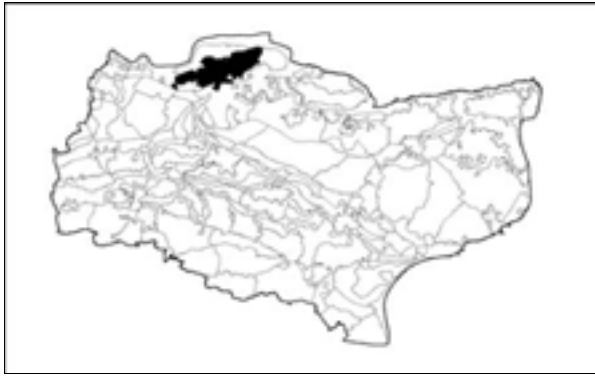
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore wooded edges
Control the impact of visual detractors
Create new rural highway features and restore enclosure to highways
Create a woodland framework to transport corridors

[previous <<](#)



The Hoo Peninsula is a discrete tract of landscape lying between the Thames and Medway estuaries and bounded at its western end by the urban edge of Gravesend and the North Downs at Shorne. Land uses are generally typical of other parts of the North Kent Agricultural Belt but a distinctive character results from its relative geographical isolation and the pervading influence of the coast and sea. The extensive coastal marshes and significant industrial landmarks of Grain and Kingsnorth are also influences on the character of this otherwise predominantly agricultural area.

Above the flat low-lying alluvial marshes to north and south, the undulating form of the Tertiary Beds is marked by a series of more prominent landform features. Within the central part of the peninsula, an outcrop of London Clay gives rise to an elevated complex of hills and valleys at Chattenden, which has a distinctive character of its own and creates a visual barrier between north and south. Other prominent features include Beacon Hill (also on the London Clay) the slopes of which drop steeply to the Medway Estuary on its southern side, and Northward Hill, which overlies the Thanet Sands and forms a prominent hill along the northern coastline.

Farmland is the predominant landcover but its character varies quite markedly. At the eastern end of the peninsula, the landscape is dominated by large-scale arable cultivation, largely devoid of trees or hedgerows. In contrast, Chattenden Ridge and other prominent hills are clothed in broadleaved woodland mixed with areas of pasture. To the west of the ridge, the farmed landscape has a more traditional pattern of orchards, shelterbelts, hedgerows and mixed cropping. However, the effects of Dutch Elm disease and the progressive loss of orchards are changing the landscape to a more simple, open character. This is more marked at the far west of the zone where open arable farmland once again becomes the predominant landcover type.

Settlement comprises scattered farms, small, rural villages (with some more recent extensions) and the larger settlement of Hoo St. Werburgh. The army barracks at Chattenden have a distinctive campus style character. Industrial land uses lie mainly within adjacent marshland areas and have significant influence on landscape character.

Apart from the fringing marshes (see Eastern Thames Marshes and Medway Marshes), the most important features of nature conservation importance within the peninsula are areas of broadleaved woodland. The wooded ridges of Chattenden, Northward Hill, Beacon Hill and Tower Hill are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, while other smaller fragments of woodland associated with these areas and near Fenn Street, are of county significance.

The Hoo Peninsula is best remembered as the home of Charles Dickens, at Gadshill. 'Great Expectations' was also set here. The River Medway and Upnor Castle were subjects of Turner's paintings and engravings in the 19th century. Notable buildings are Cooling Castle and Cliffe Church both dating from the 14th century. Cliffe Church was the setting for the opening scenes of Dickens' 'Great Expectations'.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Prominent hills and low-lying alluvial marshes.
Flat/undulating farmland. Decline in orchards and mixed farmland with shelterbelts.
Intensive, open farmed arable land. Intrusive influence of industrial development.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There is very little coherent landscape pattern here. Visual detractors in the landscape occur on a large scale (industrial horizon) and detailed scale (industrial farm buildings). Isolated patches of woodland provide clusters of semi-natural habitat, but there is very little opportunity for ecological interest within the open arable fields. The occasional large brick farmhouse and the nature of the alluvial marshland augments the cultural and functional integrity of the area, but overall it is considered to be weak.

Sensitivity

The historic framework to this landscape is mainly indistinct. The highways retain some characteristic features. Brick farmsteads, and isolated development associated with the railways contribute to local distinctiveness in a minor capacity. The sense of place is considered to be weak.
The contrast of the low hills against the surrounding marshland is an apparent feature in the open view. Views are long and visibility is high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore pockets of small scale farmland in the area and, where it is appropriate, around existing settlement.
New landscape elements may need to be created around new settlements, using characteristic elements adapted to developing uses of the land - to include large-scale agriculture, transport and residential uses.
Create new ecological bases within the farmland which may also act as recreational resources for residential areas.
Create woodland links within the farmland in order to develop wider networks with the existing hilltop woodland areas.
Restore the integrity of the coastal fringe by linking the remaining undeveloped flatlands together, finding design opportunities within the peripheral built areas to reflect the ecological and visual qualities of the surrounding marshland.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

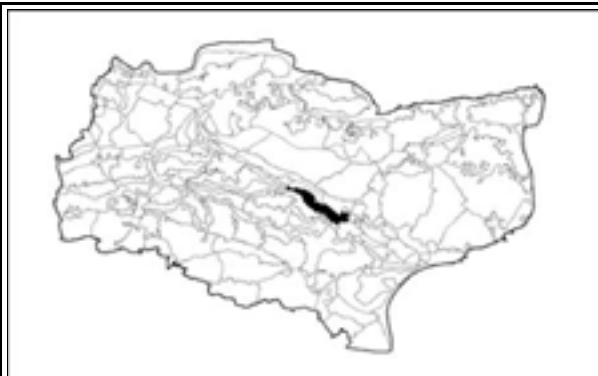
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create new ecological/recreational resources such as regenerative woodland in farmland
Restore small pockets of heritage landscape around existing settlement
Restore the physical coherence of the coastal marshland

[previous <<](#)



The heathy farmlands extend over an undulating landscape from Sandway eastwards to the outskirts of Ashford, and are formed on a mixed geology of the Folkestone beds, the underlying Sandgate Beds and the alluvial deposits of the Great Stour. Unlike the Leeds-Lenham farmland, it is the headwaters of the Great Stour that cut into the landscape, draining to the east.

It differs from the landscape to the south in the inferior quality of the soils, these being generally poor and acid or subjected to seasonal waterlogging. This has led to a greater frequency of grassland and cereals, similar to the Leeds-Lenham farmlands. On soils of better quality, mainly south of the motorway, a greater frequency of arable crops are grown in a more open landscape.

Settlement is scattered in villages such as Lenham and Charing Heaths, Tutt Hill and Hothfield, where 20th century development has enlarged but not overwhelmed the vernacular centres. Little Chart is a fine and seemingly secluded example. These villages are connected by a winding network of tranquil lanes, often crossing north-east to south-west as in the Weald- the pattern of the old 'drove' roads which were used to take swine to the summer grazing in the wooded Weald.

A particular feature of the area are the historic parklands, including Chilston Park, Hothfield Place and Godinton. Chilston, that straddles the headwaters of the Stour, was described by John Evelyn in the 17th century as "..... a sweetly watered place." He considered it one of the finest parks in England. Now its northern part is severed by the M20, with its trees dying. Hothfield has lost part of its parkland character to cultivation and its mature trees are also declining. There is evidence that other parks existed in this area as well, possibly becoming disused as deer parks in Tudor times.

Whilst extensive broadleaf woodlands are not a feature of the landscape, small copses and plantations of chestnut coppice do occur for example at Hurst Wood and near Calehill House. Larger-scale woodland can be found, however, at Ashford Warren, Hothfield Common and Hothfield Lake.

The most distinctive feature of this south east area is the heathland of Hothfield Common, a valley bog enclosed by birches formed at the junction of the sandstones and the clayey Sandgate Beds. This is just a small remnant of the once far greater extent of heathland that extended in the Greensand Belt in the past, as evidenced by many of the place names such as Lenham and Charing Heath and Hothfield.

This farmed landscape is divided for much of its length by the A20 or the M20, the latter crossing under the railway at Tutt Hill to avoid the Gault Clays. Whilst not highly visible in much of this undulating landscape, it is audible for many miles and intrudes on the tranquillity of the small lanes. This transport intrusion is compounded by the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

Ashford Warren, the golf course and the coppice woodlands south of the M20, help contain the western outskirts of Ashford at the current time. Considerable residential development is proposed to the north-west of the town, however, at Potter's Corner, Hoad's Wood and around Goats Lees that could have a tremendous impact on this end of the character area, and the nature of Ashford itself.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating landscape of mixed farmlands. Heathland or heath characteristics on the Folkestone Beds. Historic Parkland.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This landscape has a coherent pattern of small scale mixed use with notable heathy characteristics influenced by the sandy soils. The scale and pattern of the area is interrupted by motorway and rail link routes and by unsympathetic land uses and quarries. There are clusters of semi-natural habitats of high ecological importance, which include wetland, heathland and small pastures; there are also areas of intensive arable cultivation. Built development has a moderate positive impact, but landscape heritage features of woodland and field enclosures are poor.

Sensitivity

There is a moderate sense of place, in many cases influenced by the heathland and parkland features. The time depth is mainly historic, although historic rural elements of woodland and field enclosures no longer contribute greatly to the local distinctiveness. Recent visibility is low as tree cover is intermittent over an unremarkable landform. The sensitivity of the landscape is therefore low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create woodland and regenerative scrub framework to transport routes, encouraging appropriate heathy species.
Create a code of use and design for neglected land and for agricultural buildings.
Link clusters of ecological importance to create semi-natural habitat frameworks.
Create vegetative edges to enlarged settlements.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Low.

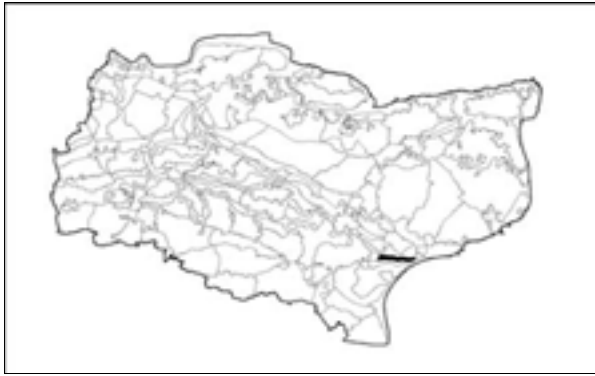
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create acid woodland and scrub framework to transport routes.
Create distinctive design elements for agricultural buildings and neglected land.
Create habitat networks around existing areas of ecological importance.
Create urban edges.
Create heathland where appropriate.

[previous <<](#)



HYTHE ESCARPMENT

The Hythe escarpment, unlike the chalk face of the Downs, is furrowed throughout its length by small streams, which emerge from the sandstone, high up on the hillside and run down into Royal Military Canal. To the east of the Port Lympne Wildlife Sanctuary, most of the scarp face is botanically rich rough grassland, with a considerable amount of scrub encroaching up the slopes. The sparse vegetation and the pitted, unstable soils produce a bleak, wild landscape, reflecting its exposed location. To the west, however, it becomes shallower. Remnant hedgerows are still evident across the slope, while bright green fields of improved grassland jar with the softer, seasonally changing colours of the rough pasture. Many of the buildings, including Lympne Castle, are built in the local ragstone.

The simplicity and integrity of this landscape and its high visibility from much of Romney Marsh mean that any developments or changes which take place on its slopes will have major effects not only on the immediate landscape but also on the wider setting of Romney Marsh.

LYMPNE

The Hythe Escarpment forms part of the larger character area of Lympne.

The most southerly part of the AONB extends from Hythe west to Aldington. The character area includes part of the Hythe escarpment, which overlooks Romney Marsh. Until the early Middle Ages, this scarp formed the edge of a large, marshy lagoon. Gradually, however, the lagoon was reclaimed, through a combination of the natural accumulation of silt and shingle, the construction of sea defences and sustained drainage. The resulting land now forms one of the most fertile areas in Kent, with a particularly long growing season.

Most of the Hythe escarpment is the eroded face of the greensands and in particular of the calcareous Kentish ragstone. Over the centuries the surface has gradually slipped to form a steep, uneven slope, enclosing the northern edge of the marsh. The vulnerability of the coast to attack has left a legacy of old military defences scattered across the area, from the tumbled walls of the Roman fort of Lemanis, to the 19th century Royal Military Canal at the foot of the escarpment and the last of the Second World War 'Sound Mirrors' behind Burmarsh, 'listening' for approaching aircraft.

The scarp is highly visible from the flat marsh, forming a long hillside of rough grassland, dotted with scrub. Several large deciduous woodlands break up the sweep of the landform, being more characteristic in the west around Aldington. Between these woodlands, there are spectacular views across Romney Marsh and the English Channel.

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Sandstone scarp with rough grassland.
Remnant hedgerows.
Unimproved agricultural grasslands
Scrub at base of slopes

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is not an entirely traditional landscape; the view of agricultural grasslands is occasionally interrupted by wire fencing and inappropriate planting. Prominent castles and extensive houses have a high positive impact on the area. Inaccessibility is also a strong element of this landscape. Rough pastures on the scarp and the strong corridor of the canal and ditches at the base of the scarp provide much ecological interest within the more sterile improved grasslands. The condition of this area is considered to be good.

Sensitivity

The scarp is a dominant landform, particularly as it looks over the wide expanse of coastal marsh. The limited tree cover does not curtail the high visibility within and around the landscape.
There are notable unique ancient and historic sites within this landscape. Historic farmsteads also follow a distinct pattern on the strong landform, contributing to the strong sense of place. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be very high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the setting of ancient/historic sites and monuments by ensuring long views to sites, but retaining the element of inaccessibility.
Ensure the sensitive management of rough and pastoral grasslands in key areas.
Conserve the woodland cover to the ridge tops, and links with small copses on the scarp.
Conserve the network of drainage courses feeding the canal, using sensitive management to realise the full ecological potential.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Very High.

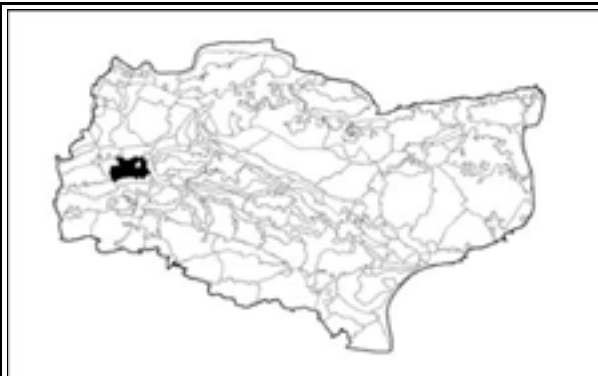
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Very Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve wooded top to the scarp
Conserve rough and pastoral grasslands
Conserve the canal, wetlands and drainage courses
Conserve open views to/from sites and monuments

[previous <<](#)



IGHTHAM GREENSAND

East of Sevenoaks the Greensand Ridge retains its densely wooded appearance, but gradually descends from the heights of Toy Hill and Goathurst Common towards the lower land around Ightham. Small irregular pastures nestle between the trees, and the lanes wind through dense strands of conifers and birch. The steep, wooded scarp softens out into a series of gentle slopes in the east, opening up the landscape and signalling a change in land use.

South east of Ivy Hatch, a slight variation in soil encourages fruit growing, giving rise to a richly patterned landscape of intensively cultivated apple and pear orchards. Towering between them, rows of poplars or alders provide shelter from wind and frost and turn tiny country lanes into deep enclosed corridors. In a few remaining pockets, occasional cobnut groves or platts still remain, their gnarled, twiggy trunks contrasting with the near well-ordered rows of apple and pear trees elsewhere.

Along the eastern boundary of Sevenoaks, the sweeps of pasture between heathy woodland in the historic parkland of Knole House, form the largest and most important area of unimproved acid grassland in Kent. The mix of oak, beech and sweet chestnut woodlands continues beyond the park as far as Seal Chart.

SEVENOAKS RIDGE

Ightham Greensand lies within the larger character area of Sevenoaks Ridge.

The ridge around Sevenoaks is the product of the underlying acidic sandstone, which in the south rises up off the clay vale of the Low Weald in a steep, tree-covered scarp between Crockham Hill and Shipbourne. Offering panoramic views towards the High Weald and Tonbridge, the Greensand Belt reaches over 245 metres at Toys Hill, while its gentle northern slopes are scored by a series of deeply cut valleys. Much of the ridge is covered by dense, mixed woodland, producing an intimate, secretive landscape, shaded by swathes of beech, and conifer forest. The poor soils of the sandstone, however, discouraged early settlers and, while the river valleys and fertile vales of Kent had been settled for centuries, this area remained dense forest interspersed with occasional summer pastures until the tenth and eleventh centuries. Today, the dominant characteristics of this landscape are still the thick woodland and heathy commons, within which small pockets of farmland lie.

The acid greensand provides a variety of sandstones, which have been quarried since pre-Roman times. This abundance of stone has given rise to an alternative name for the area - the Chartland. Chart derives from the Scandinavian kart, meaning stony ground and still occurs in several place names, such as Brasted Chart. Historically, these stones were widely used for construction and can still be seen in buildings around Sevenoaks.

[next >>](#)

IGHTHAM GREENSAND: SEVENOAKS RIDGE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Densely wooded greensand ridge. Small irregular pastures. Heathy woodland and pasture around Knole. Unimproved acid grasslands. Conifer and birch stands. Gentler slopes with ordered rows of fruit growing and shelter belts towards the east. Heavily enclosed narrow lanes.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape with few visual detractors. The variety of tree cover, hedgerow and parkland provides a strong ecological base. Acid grasslands occur, which are rare in Kent. Woodlands are varied and well-managed, but do not constitute an intensive use of the land. Heritage features such as sunken lanes and vernacular buildings are an important and characteristic part of the landscape and have a positive impact on the area. This area is considered to be strongly unified.

Sensitivity

This is an historic landscape with notable ancient landmarks and characteristic historic settlements. The woodland and parkland reinforces the very strong time depth. Rare acid grassland is also associated with the grazing management of the ancient parkland. Vernacular materials are widespread and distinctive. Views of expanded historic villages are contained by woodland. Visibility is generally low as the widespread tree cover encloses most views. Although the sense of place is very strong, the sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate due to the low visibility.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the rare and ancient elements which are highly characteristic of this landscape area and are also ecologically significant such as the ancient parkland, heathy woodland and acid grasslands. The management and replanting of heathy woodland plant communities should be encouraged. Similarly, the management and retention of the dense hedgerows along narrow, vergeless lanes should be encouraged. Small hamlets and villages, and farmed areas are visually contained, and often entirely screened. This containment should be reinforced by characteristic woodland and hedgerows, of appropriate and characteristic species. The woodland edge within most views is a feature which visually reinforces the high proportion of woodland in the area, and is therefore important to conserve. The use of vernacular materials, scale and form, should be reinforced.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very Strong.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

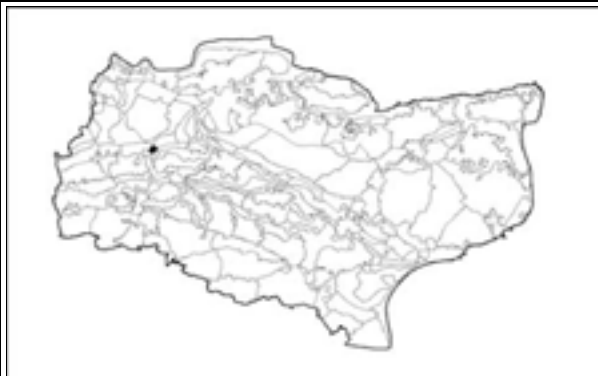
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve acid grasslands
Reinforce heathy woodland
Reinforce the enclosure of roads with dense hedgerow, no verges
Conserve parkland and ancient landmarks and land patterns
Conserve the visual isolation of hamlets and settlements
Reinforce the small-scale and enclosure of other land uses within the woodland.
Reinforce the use of vernacular materials

[previous <<](#)



This small undulating character area forms an extension to that already described in The Kent Downs Landscape (Kemsing Vale - Kent Downs AONB). The landscape is developed on the stiff clays of the Gault which have generally discouraged settlement but have encouraged a patchwork of small woodlands and pastures and larger arable fields on its loamy clay soils. Within this character area these are centred on Wrotham Park and Park Farm. This land was almost certainly part of a medieval deer park which was no longer used as a deer park by the 16th century, but retained the word 'park' in many of the named features.

The character area is virtually enclosed by motorways with the M26 running through the south of the area and the M20 to the north. Despite its agricultural land use, therefore, it is far from tranquil.

South of the M26 extraction for clay and sand takes place.

Visually the landscape is dominated by the chalk scarp to the north with the scar of Wrotham Hill standing out.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating landscape on wet stiff clays. Patchwork of small woodlands, pasture and larger arable fields. Infrequent settlement. Chalk scarp dominates to the north. Enclosure by motorways.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The visual unity of the landscape is interrupted by the visual and aural impact of the motorway. To either side of this intrusive corridor, the irregular pattern of the wooded edge and pastures remain strong. The hedgerow pattern is extant, but hedges are often over-mature and in poor condition.

Sensitivity

Historic landscape features are characteristic of this area. It is considered that there are no outstandingly unique landscape influences. Recent, indistinct elements such as large agricultural buildings, motorway planting and road junctions are becoming more widespread. The landform is apparent in the landscape, and views are enclosed intermittently by small copses. The sensitivity of the area is therefore low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The patchwork of small woodlands and pastures may be extended to integrate the motorway into the surrounding landscape, creating a new landscape element, but ensuring that the corridor has some lateral links with existing features. Reinforce the impact of the wooded edge. New ecological bases may be developed by the sensitive management of existing and new pastures. Where it is in a manageable context, existing hedgerow should be reinforced by replanting or re-laying the plant stock. The estate-farm elements such as trackways, boundary features, drives, mature ornamental planting may be reinforced. Encourage the development of sympathetic farm buildings

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

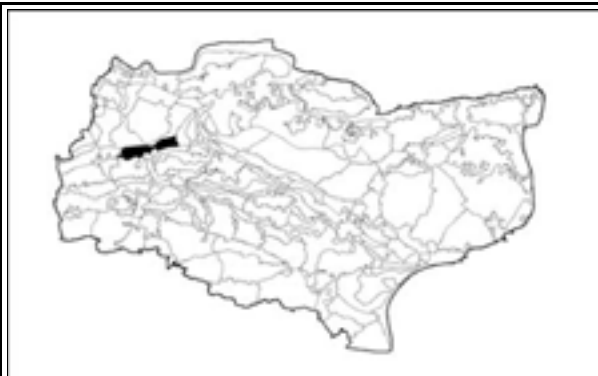
Sensitivity	Low.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

REINFORCE.

Create a patchwork of small woodlands and pastures around the motorway corridor
Reinforce the existing woodland edge
Create new ecological interest by the sensitive management of new and existing pastures
Reinforce existing hedgerow
Reinforce the estate-farm features within the landscape
Create sympathetic designs for farm buildings

[previous <<](#)



The Kemsing scarp offers spectacular views south across the vale to the Greensand Ridge. The scarp in this area is steep and narrow, with an almost continuous blanket of woodland along the top. These woods are dominated by beech, yew and whitebeam, interspersed in places by extensive tracts of rough, unimproved chalk grassland. Much of the woodland and grassland is of national nature conservation importance, supporting a wide variety of scarce flora and fauna. This pattern of wood, scrub and rough grass gives the slopes a strong untamed and natural quality, which contrasts with the tidy, square fields of the vale.

The large, intensively cultivated arable fields of the scarp foot are visually prominent here, surrounded by narrow, trimmed hedges. Along the northern boundary of these fields, the thick overgrown hedges of the Pilgrim's Way stand out, often festooned with swatches of white Old Man's Beard (*Clematis vitalba*). In contrast, the gault clay vale to the south supports a rich patchwork of mixed farmland. Individual mature trees are very important in this landscape, giving scale and interest to the otherwise flat countryside. Many now stand isolated, like parkland trees left behind after hedges have been removed to enlarge fields.

Despite the apparently dense woodland on the scarp, many trees here were lost in the 1987 storm. On the vale itself, the characteristic field pattern is threatened by gradual decay or piecemeal removal of hedges and hedgerow trees. This affects not just the pattern of the landscape, but also its ability to absorb the considerable visual impacts of the M26 and M20 motorways, which pass through the area. Quarries in this area can have similar impacts, as the landform and sparse vegetation provide little natural screening.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Steep scarp with continuously wooded top.
Patchwork of woodland and chalk grassland on slopes.
Large scarp-foot arable fields with trimmed hedges and isolated mature hedgerow trees.
Visual impact of M20/M26.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There is a simple, unified landscape pattern which relates directly to the landform, accentuating the base of the scarp slope. Urban development and transport routes detract from the view, but the visual unity of the area remains strong. Built development has a positive impact, mainly due to the historic farms and estate houses which have a definite settlement pattern along the base of the slopes. Intense arable cultivation at the foot of the scarp reduces the ecological interest in the area, although there are small patches of woodland and grassland. It is the cultural strength and clarity of this landscape which has a positive effect on the area and is a deciding factor in its good condition.

Sensitivity

The high visibility of the steep scarp augments the sensitivity of the landscape. There is an ancient time-depth associated with highways and the Pilgrim's Way, but the historic settlement and farming pattern is more characteristic. It is also felt that the occurrence and nature of the estate houses and farmsteads is a unique feature. The natural heritage of woodland and parkland is becoming indistinct - mature vegetation is vulnerable as a feature due to lack of replanting. Overall, the sense of place is moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the historic nature of the settlement pattern and the grand isolation of farmsteads, ensuring that historic estate features such as avenues, entrances and estate boundaries are perpetuated. Encourage the managed, rural character of estate farmland.
Conserve the openness and large scale of the arable landscape.
Conserve and enhance all existing woodland blocks and shaws.
Conserve the characteristics of ancient highways, maintaining their narrow form and clipped, hedgerow enclosure.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

Condition				
	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	<u>CONSERVE</u>
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
		poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Very High.

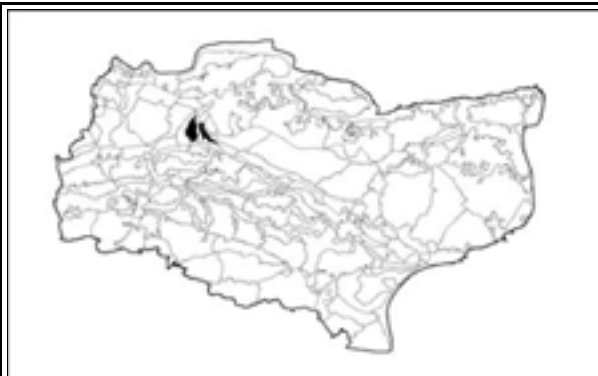
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve existing woodland and shaws
Conserve characteristics of narrow highways with trimmed hedges
Conserve the isolated nature of estate houses
Conserve the open, large scale of the landscape and views

[previous <<](#)



Either side of the Lower Medway Valley, the river corridor is bordered by the lower slopes of the Kent Downs. Gently sloping chalk is overlain by head brickearths which are more widespread on the eastern side of the river. These character areas form an extension to that already described in the Kent Downs Landscape assessment.

The Kent Downs AONB (Medway Valley character area) covers the scarp and scarp foot of the chalk hills. However, it excludes the areas described here, which are the flatter areas bordering the river, having a concentration of industrial and urban developments.

Light, chalky soils washed down from the scarp slopes have resulted in arable land of high fertility and intensive cultivation. Some of the earliest permanent settlements in Kent were to be found here, and there is evidence of prehistoric sites, ancient trackways and later Roman settlement. Riverside settlements were often the landing stages for ferries across the river. Later development around these villages has taken the form of ribbon development, based on paper-making and other industry in the area. Villages have been severed by road improvements and railway lines.

On the western slopes, where the land is still in agricultural use, the open fields have a very sparse hedgerow network which strengthens towards the wooded hilltops in the AONB. Much of the landscape however has been transformed by chalk quarrying. The white scars of former chalk pits are slowly being colonised with scrubby growth, but a wet pit near Halling holds startlingly blue water at the base of the steep, white chalk faces. Large cement works with tall chimneys already dominate this side of the river and there are plans to extend the existing quarry and works at Holborough.

The eastern slopes are also marked by former chalk quarrying. Scrub vegetation and rough grassland are recurring features of the landscape, especially around the old quarries and the marshy edges of the river. The landscape is open, with large fields and few hedgerows, but is overlooked by the dense woodland of the AONB on the tops of the Downs. This side of the valley is relatively quiet, bypassed by the major through roads in the area, but is subject to pressure for housing development.

[next >>](#)

KENT DOWNS - MEDWAY, WESTERN & EASTERN SCARP

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gently undulating arable farmland. Sparse, remnant hedges leading up to wooded ridges. Open and wild on eastern slopes with wide views. Quarries

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is an incoherent landscape in which features do not readily reflect or enhance the landform. There are many visual detractors in landscape views; these include large-scale detractors such as quarry faces and ridge-line housing. Ecological bases are likely to be of most interest in the woodland on ridges and on the quarry face, but these are limited and isolated and do not form a strong network of semi-natural habitat. In addition, the eastern scarp has much intensive arable coverage. The condition of heritage features is poor - hedgerows are fragmented and tree cover is very limited. Characteristic historic settlement on the river, and notable ferry crossing points are mostly overwhelmed by 19th and 20th century development. Built development is frequent in the view and has a high negative impact.

The area is considered to be in very poor condition.

Sensitivity

The Medway valley has a significant landform as a whole. However, the lower slopes of the western and eastern scarp described here have an unremarkable landform when considered in isolation. It is an open landscape, and visibility is considered to be moderate. The inherent historic landscape features are now indistinct: hedged field boundaries and woodland are very limited. Settlements tend to be predominantly recent in character although the sites themselves are ancient and historic. A few historic buildings are in evidence. The sensitivity of this area is low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a landscape framework to provide an urban edge and peripheral enclosure to the arable fields and other farmland.
Encourage a more diverse agricultural use of the land and encourage less intensive use of arable fields. Create shaws or wide hedgerows as enclosure and to provide a network of semi-natural habitats.
Create small areas of regenerative woodland to provide intermittent tree cover and enhance the ecological interest of the area.
Create landscape features which enhance and recognise the ancient highway routes at the upper edge of the floodplain, ensuring that urban development on the waterfront is limited to specific historic nodes and that large open areas remain between the river and the highway. Use woodland and wooded shaws to create an urban edge to existing development.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Poor.

Pattern of elements: Incoherent.

Detracting features: Many.

Visual Unity: Significantly Interrupted.

Cultural integrity: Poor.

Ecological integrity: Weak.

Functional Integrity: Very Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

Distinctiveness: Indistinct.

Continuity: Historic.

Sense of Place: Weak.

Landform: Insignificant.

Extent of tree cover: Open.

Visibility: Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

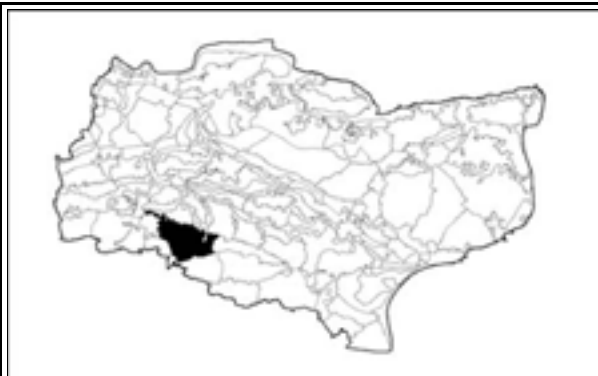
Create ecological interest within the farmland by diverse cropping and areas of less intensive cultivation.

Create enclosure for urban areas using characteristic woodland

Create coherent land patterns - define farmland, urban areas and small blocks of woodland

Enhance existing historic and ancient features based on historic settlement, ferry points, and ancient highways

[previous <<](#)



KENT FRUIT BELT

In this intimate, densely settled area, small lanes twist through a seemingly endless maze of high hedges and tidy orchards. During the summer, when the fruit trees are in leaf, there is a sense of being submerged in this landscape. The valleys and ridges to the north-west, around Matfield and Brenchley, are small and gentle, rarely offering long views out, so that the occasional open fields between the orchards seem to provide a breathing space and a slight sense of relief.

Intensive fruit cultivation gives way to large arable fields along the Teise Valley, between Lamberhurst and Horsmonden. These fields are backed by extensive tracts of mixed woodland, in which a certain amount of coppicing takes place. The fairy-tale manor house of Scotney Castle lies hidden beside the River Bewl, which feeds into the Teise through a landscape of open, tree-lined pastures. Around Goudhurst and Spelmunden, regimented ranks of hop poles cast harsh shadows in the winter sunlight. In summer they disappear under a mass of coarse leaves and clinging tendrils, which snake out along the overhead wires to intertwine with each other.

The intensity of cultivation in this area has resulted in a thick scattering of houses along the lanes, from tile-hung cottage to twentieth century bungalow. Oasthouses and packing sheds serve as a reminder that this has always been, and remains, a working landscape. In spring, a closer look at the apparently timeless fields of apple-blossom reveals that the flowers are emerging from trees festooned with the latest technology, where artificial 'spiders webs' are wrapped around the trees to prevent bird damage.

KENTISH HIGH WEALD

The Kent Fruit Belt is part of the larger character area of the Kentish High Weald.

The Kentish High Weald stretches from Pembury to Rolvenden, including Lamberhurst, Bewl Water and Bedgebury Forest. This landscape has a general north easterly orientation and, from the higher land between Pembury and Lamberhurst, around the southern edge of Bewl Water and between Goudhurst and Benenden, long views stretch out over the Kent Weald towards the North Downs. Kent is known as the Garden of England and the Kentish High Weald plays an important part in this tradition. This is a richly textured landscape, where the angular patterns of the orchard and hop garden contrast with smooth sweeps of arable or intensively grazed pasture. Despite a continuing decline in fruit cultivation, this area still owes its gardenesque feel to the abundant orchards and hop gardens. Once, however, this landscape was famous, not for its fruit but its cloth. Flemish weavers, settling here in the 14th century, built up a thriving woollen industry centred on Cranbrook. Until the 17th century, this industry remained a major source of employment and wealth accumulated by the wool merchants is evident from the substantial medieval houses in the town.

This tapestry of land uses is set within a framework of dense shaws, thick hedges and stretches of broad-leaved woodland, some of which are still coppiced. The large conifer forests at Bedgebury, Hemsted and around Bewl Water, uphold the tradition of commercial timber production in the High Weald, their expanses of deep green enriching the countryside during the winter. This is a well-settled area, where it is rare to be out of sight of farmstead or cottage. Oasthouses dot the landscape, some tiled and some asphalted, and in the east windmills form occasional local landmarks. Many of the villages are of picture-postcard quality, their rose-covered cottages clustering around a pond or tiny green, the local pub sharing its tourist trade with the stone-built church beyond. Nevertheless, this charming image conceals a landscape under pressure, as agriculture becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

Several minor ridges, running north-west from Pembury and south-east to Tenterden, define this area. The River Teise cuts through these ridges at Lamberhurst and Goudhurst, whilst to the south Bewl Water is enclosed by gentle ridges. In the fruit belt around Matfield there are a number of small ghylls, whilst the ground gradually becomes flatter and more open towards Cranbrook.

[next >>](#)

KENT FRUIT BELT: KENTISH HIGH WEALD

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Small-scale intimate enclosed valleys and ridges.
Small scale orchards and high hedges. Some hops.
Mixed woodland, intensive cultivation. Small lanes, many small villages and dense settlements.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The uniformity of the small-scale landscape pattern is interrupted by the significant decline in orchards. The rural landscape elements reflect the underlying landform. The pattern of elements within the area is considered to be coherent and there are few visual detractors. The patchwork of small woodlands, hedges and streams provide a moderate ecological base as their value is modified by areas of open arable fields. The functional integrity of the area varies; built development has strongly vernacular appeal, but the small scale of the rural landscape is vulnerable to changes in land use. The farming basis of this landscape is not robust. However, this is a largely unified landscape and the condition is considered to be high.

Sensitivity

Although there are ancient overtones of woodland and routes of highways, the time-depth of the area is mostly historic. The small-scale and variety of rural land use is characteristic along with scattered small-scale built development. In some areas, the characteristic scale has been lost due to the decline in field boundaries and loss of woodland. There is a moderate sense of place which is due to the significance of the historic landscape features. The enclosed valleys and ridges are apparent and views are intermittently enclosed by shelterbelts and small areas of woodland. Visibility throughout the area is therefore moderate. The sensitivity of the landscape is moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the historic features such as small, scattered rural settlements with characteristic vernacular detail, and a consistent coverage of small-scale enclosure - hedgerow, shelterbelts and small woodlands on the ridged landscape. Historic features are common in this landscape, and it is this attribute (the consistency of these coherent features) which should be reinforced. The use of appropriate broadleaf species in woodlands and hedgerow, both in amenity and farmland planting is declining and should be reinforced to sustain the local distinctiveness. The decline in the importance of fruit growing has contributed, amongst other causes, to the loss of wildlife habitats. The ecological interest of the area may be reinforced by the sensitive management of woodland and the reinstatement of wooded ghylls.

CONTEXT

Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

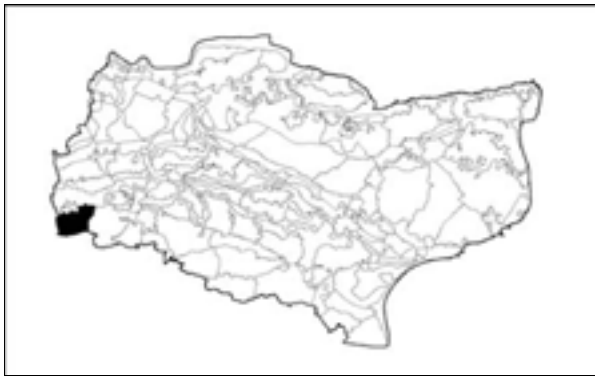
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve and reinforce woodland
Conserve and reinforce broadleaf hedgerow
Reinforce the small-scale of land use
Reinforce the use of vernacular materials

[previous <<](#)



KENT WATER

The gentle valley of the Kent Water meets the river Medway between Blackham and Fordcombe. To the north of this valley, the landscape is dominated by Dry Hill, which rises to 172m, topped by the ancient ramparts of an Iron Age hill fort. Dry Hill lies in the centre of a remarkably secluded pocket of the High Weald, where public access is by foot only, and many of the farmsteads lie far off the roads. The lower slopes of the hill are fissured with little ghylls, which drain either south into the Kent Water or north into the River Eden.

Many of these ghylls support strips of once coppiced woodland, where starry clusters of white wild garlic flowers smother the stream banks in early May, filling the air with the pungent scent of onions.

Elsewhere, large irregular blocks of woodland clothe the hill-sides. Some of these woods are abandoned coppice, whilst others are a tangle of conifer plantations and naturalised rhododendron. In winter the footpaths through these woods are a quagmire of thick, black leaf-moulded and slippery clay, picking their way through shallow pits that are so frequent as to suggest that these woods were once war-torn minefields. In fact they were originally surface pits for iron extraction. The iron industry was a major presence in this area, with big forges at Scarletts Farm and Cowden.

Tucked away between these woods, on the upper slopes of Dry Hill, is an area of orchards and soft fruit, protected from the wind by distinctive rows of Lombardy poplars. This was once an area of considerable hop and fruit production and occasional oast-houses still dot the landscape. The warm red local brick has long been used here, and there are a considerable number of half timbered, half brick-built houses constructed during the urban expansion which occurred with the coming of the railways, in the nineteenth century.

North-east of Mark Beech the land begins to flatten out. Substantial coniferous and deciduous woodlands occur in a sweep from Chiddingstone Hoath to Hever, interspersed with large arable fields, which stretch between trimmed hedges or narrow shaws, as if hinting at the approaching boundary with the Low Weald and the flat Eden valley.

UPPER MEDWAY

Kent Water lies within the larger character area of the Upper Medway. The Upper Medway straddles the Kent and East Sussex Border. Therefore some of the areas in the character area description below are outside of the study boundary. The condition and sensitivity assessment refers only to the Kent area.

This area covers the gentle folds of the Upper Medway valley, from Weir Wood Reservoir in the west along the northern edge of Ashdown Forest to Chiddingstone and Groombridge in the east.

The gentle topography of these valleys and the flatter, rolling land to the north around Markbeech, made this area easier to farm than the steep sandstone ridges and valleys, which characterise other parts of the High Weald. This has resulted in a landscape of relatively little woodland, dominated by mixed agriculture, where the fields are frequently bounded by narrow hedges or post and wire fence and dotted with hedgerow trees. Only in the west, around Ashurst Wood and Forest Row, does the typical High Weald landscape of deep ghyll and ridge reassert itself, where small, less intensively grazed fields are hidden between larger woodlands.

This part of the AONB bears considerable evidence of the long history of man in the High Weald. West of Dormansland, the ancient hill-fort of Dry Hill offers magnificent views of the surrounding countryside, whilst the Roman highway from London to Lewes passes between Marsh Green and Holtye. The iron industry which flourished here can be traced from the redundant hammer ponds and substantial medieval houses built with the ensuing wealth, such as Gravetye Manor.

Extensive cultivation of hops and fruit until the early part of this century has left a legacy of occasional orchards and a variety of oasthouses. The proximity of East Grinstead and its railway station have encouraged people to move out into the neighbouring countryside, causing many farms to be split up and the outbuildings to be gentrified into houses. This has increased commuter traffic on the roads, whilst urban-edge land uses, such as golf courses, steal out to the very edge of the AONB.

This area comprises a series of parallel ridges and valleys running east to west, whose watercourses combine to form the upper reaches of the River Medway. This river has a narrow floodplain, extending as far as Upper Hartfield. In the north, the gently rolling landscape gradually flattens out towards Hever Castle and the River Eden.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Hills with wooded ghylls at base. Secluded, limited access. Isolated farmsteads. Coppice, naturalised rhododendron and conifer plantations. Orchards and soft fruit in sheltered areas. C19th urban developments near railways.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape with a strong and varied relief and intact landscape features. There are a few visual detractors. The ecological interest of the area is moderate: the strong woody network and small pastures give way to a more open arable landscape on the more gentle slopes. The condition of heritage features is good; the small irregular pastures are enclosed by dense woodland and hedges, wooded shaws and wooded edges are widespread and actively managed. Built form has a strong vernacular emphasis and has a positive impact on the landscape. The condition of this landscape is considered to be very high.

Sensitivity

The landform is apparent in the landscape view, but not dominant. Tree cover is intermittent and overall visibility is moderate. There is a very strong sense of place underpinned by ancient land patterns and historic parkland features and buildings. The local vernacular use of Bargate stone is a unique feature. Due to the time-depth of landscape features, the area has a high sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the small scale and irregular pattern of pastoral clearings.
Conserve the density of woodland cover, ensuring with long term management plans that large mature specimen oak and ash remain as characteristic features within the woodland.
Conserve the dominance of vernacular detail.
Conserve the small scale and infrequent, isolated nature of settlement
Conserve hedged field enclosures in the lower fields.

CONTEXT

Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity High.

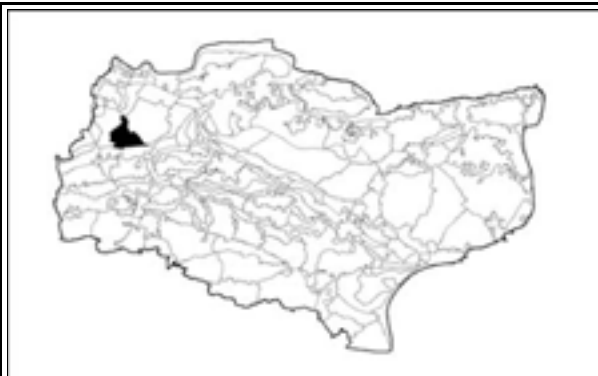
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve vernacular detail in built form
Conserve settlement patterns
Conserve woodland
Conserve hedgerow enclosures

[previous <<](#)



KINGSDOWN

Kingsdown takes its name from having been part of a large pre-Norman Conquest royal estate, centred on the Darent Valley. In Kent "-down" or "-dun" implied thickly forested hills, indicating that at this time the area was heavily wooded. Today the southern part of this area still contains a considerable amount of formerly coppiced, mixed woodland and Scots pine, interspersed by small, irregular pastures and thick hedges. This results in an enclosed, intimate landscape, which succeeds in absorbing much of the bungalow development that has spread through the area. In the north, however, most of the former woodland has been lost, revealing rolling sweeps of downland and the chalky white soils of intensive arable cultivation.

There is considerable pressure in this area from suburbanisation. Many properties have long back gardens, which extend up the valley side or into the surrounding trees, resulting in a landscape of tiny smallholdings, horse pasture and "gardened" woodland. This has introduced a wide and disparate range of fences, sheds and ornamental conifers into the landscape, giving an inappropriate urban-edge feel to the area, reinforced by recreation developments, such as golf courses and caravan parks.

WEST KENT DOWNS

Kingsdown lies within the larger character area of the West Kent Downs.

The south-facing, chalk scarp between the Medway and the Darent provides a strong visual boundary, dividing the Kemsing Vale from the deep, dry valleys and wooded plateau of the West Kent Downs. This sense of separation is increased by the extensive tracts of ecologically valuable deciduous woodlands along the top of the scarp.

Woodland is very significant in this landscape, providing an important backdrop for the rolling landform, the network of small country lanes, the scattered settlements and the extensive valley pastures. In the east, around Luddesdown, the fields are contained by thick 'walls' of woodland, and strips of remnant coppice, or shaws, occur frequently along the steeper valley sides. Hidden away among the trees are several medieval buildings, such as Luddesdown Court, constructed from the local Kentish ragstone, while the villages of Vigo and West Kingsdown are set deep in the woodlands themselves.

The clay-with-flints soil on the plateau and ridge tops is reflected in the pasture and woodland dominating these areas; in the valleys, the extent of the finer silt soils is reflected by the predominance of arable cultivation. The downland becomes increasingly open in the north, where the intimate character of the scarp top gives way to a large-scale landscape of intensively farmed, rolling valleys and large blocks of deciduous woodland. West of Rochester, the mature woodlands and historic parkland of Cobham Hall are severed from the deciduous coppice woodlands of Shorne Wood Country Park by the busy A2 trunk road.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rolling downland.
Intensive arable cultivation in north with open fields of chalky-white soils.
Enclosed, irregular pastures in south, thick coppice and mixed woodland.
Suburbanisation, horseyculture and smallholdings.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This area of the Downs is considered to be in good condition, despite the detracting features associated with some amenity uses of the land and 20th century linear residential development of existing hamlets. The strong ecological value of the woodland and hedgerow network is reduced by the negative influence of the intensive arable cultivation in the north of the area, and is therefore considered to be moderate. However, in many areas, the landscape pattern is very strong and there is a maturity to the dense enclosures and other features, indicating the high functional and cultural integrity of the land use.

Sensitivity

The rolling landform is a dominant element in the view; but the tall, frequent enclosure reduces the visibility within the dominant landform to moderate.

20th century additions to the landscape, such as new housing and golf courses have added elements that do not contribute to the local distinctiveness. However, the historic and ancient landscape patterns remain the dominant elements in the wider countryside, and the sense of place and sensitivity remain strong.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The dominance of broadleaf woodland in the area should be conserved. Conserve woodland as an edge to residential developments.
Small-scale pastures and enclosures to be retained, and the use of small enclosed parcels of land to be monitored.
Conserve the isolated nature of historic hamlets or cottages.
Conserve roadside hedges, ensuring that they are consistently managed as tall hedges with standards
Conserve the broad mix of species within hedgerow and woodland

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Good.

Pattern of elements: Unified.

Detracting features: Some.

Visual Unity: Unified.

Cultural integrity: Good.

Ecological integrity: Moderate.

Functional Integrity: Strong.

Sensitivity High.

Distinctiveness: Characteristic.

Continuity: Ancient.

Sense of Place: Strong.

Landform: Dominant.

Extent of tree cover: Enclosed.

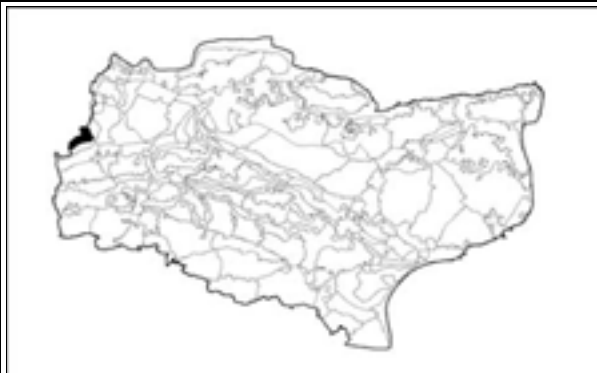
Visibility: Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve woodland
Conserve and manage tall hedges on roadside
Conserve the range of species in woodland and hedgerow
Conserve pastures and irregular field patterns
Conserve historic, isolated settlement

[previous <<](#)



This is an intimate, enclosed landscape of ridges and dry valleys extending north-west from the scarp within the West Darent character area of the Kent Downs AONB.

Although densely settled, the undulating topography and extensive network of lacy woodlands often conceal the suburban dwellings that have straggled down the country lanes earlier this century. Suburbanisation is often intensified, however, by the presence of pavements on the lanes, conifer hedges and brick walls around gardens, the latter often accessed through elaborate entrance gates into the larger properties.

The ridge-top broadleaf woodlands and remnant shaws enclose small grazed fields, particularly in or close to the dry valleys that dissect the landscape to the north. The hedgerows and fields are often distinguished by large, mature oaks and beech, which may mark lines of old hedgerows or shaws. The views north and west over the valleys to the wooded ridges of Bromley give an impression of an enclosed and seemingly sparsely populated landscape which is deceptive. On the flatter, plateau areas between the dry valleys and the scarp top, the land is often cultivated in larger, open fields.

Between the suburban housing are the vernacular centres of what were once smaller villages such as Halstead and Knockholt itself. Here the older buildings are characteristically brick or flint.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating topography of ridges and dry valleys. A network of fragmented broadleaf woodland and shaws on the ridge tops enclosing pastures in the valleys.
More open arable landscapes on the plateau areas.
Characteristic flint and brick buildings forming the cores to the suburbanised villages.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The pattern of broadleaf woodland and enclosed valleys is interrupted by individual clearance for residential development, and is becoming incoherent along developed roads. New housing has a moderately negative impact due to the density of development in comparison to the formerly isolated small-scale settlements. Tree cover, however, is still widespread, although over-mature in some areas, and the ecological value remains high.

Sensitivity

This area retains small amounts of ancient woodland. It is the enclosed nature of the remaining narrow lanes, often cross-contour, which exemplify the historic and rural character of the area. Views are relatively enclosed throughout the ridged landscape and more open farmland is fringed with wooded edges. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Woodland remains a characteristic feature although this is a perception of an area which is otherwise well developed. Existing woodland should be conserved to retain the effect of enclosure, new woodland should be created as a setting for residential development, and to enhance wood cover around open arable areas in the north. It is important that new woodland has a function and that the common boundary between woodland and housing is manageable. The dominance of existing broadleaf species - beech, oak and chestnut coppice - should be conserved in large woodlands.
All the characteristics of the narrow, cross contour roads should be conserved.
Existing parkland characteristics with ornamental planting could be recreated to enhance residential settings.
Create design codes for development which reflect the distinctive nature of the area.

CONTEXT

Regional: North West Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

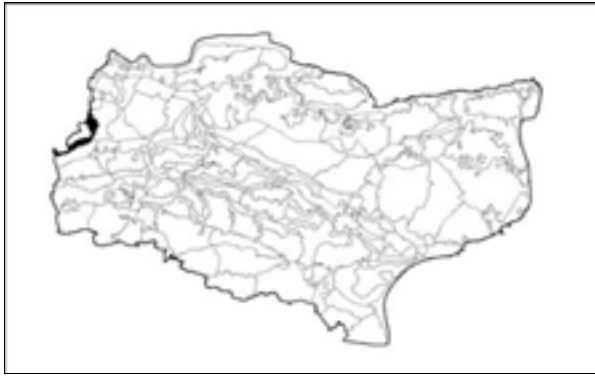
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND CREATE.

Conserve the dominance of the woodland cover.
Conserve existing and create new woodland
Conserve the occurrence of dominant woodland species such as oak and beech
Conserve narrow roads and their enclosure/wood banks
Create distinctive design elements for housing and new boundaries within woodland.
Create formal parkland features within residential areas
Create appropriate and manageable woodland boundaries to the common boundary between existing woodland and housing

[previous <<](#)



KNOCKHOLT

The dense woodlands along the top of the western escarpment conceal a small-scale landscape of mixed farming and deciduous coppice woodlands, which stretches north towards Bromley. Several dry valleys, extending out of the AONB, give the countryside a gently rolling character. It is a densely settled area, where overgrown hedges and hedgerow trees are interspersed by ornamental conifers, concealing an increasing amount of pony paddock fencing and suburbanisation.

The M25 motorway, although hidden in cutting for most of its length, exerts considerable influence on the landscape through the background roar of traffic and the physical barrier it forms between the Knockholt area and the Darent Valley itself. The proximity of Bromley and outer London also imposes pressure on the agricultural fabric of the area, resulting in the loss of land from commercial farming to provide extended gardens and hobby farms for the commuter population.

DARENT VALLEY

Knockholt lies within the larger character area of the Darent Valley.

The Darent is the most westerly of the three rivers cutting through the Kent Downs and is strongly contained throughout its extent in the AONB by steep, often wood-topped, scarps and by the Greensand Ridge to the south. It has been called one of the earliest cradles of English settlement in Kent, and its long history of habitation and passage has clearly shaped its present character. There is a rich legacy of Roman remains, including Lullingstone Roman Villa, and several historic tracks run through the valley. In fact its peaceful, rural character today belies a busier and more industrial past. By the time of the Norman Conquest, the natural course of the river had already been diverted to power watermills, a tradition which continued until the beginning of the 20th century. Today only converted mill-houses and occasional ditches remain to indicate the former nature of the valley.

The name 'Darent' comes from the Celtic for 'oak river' and the river still meanders for much of its length through a narrow, tree-lined corridor. From Westerham, it flows east through the wide, clay vale between the chalk and the greensand, before swinging north at Sevenoaks to cut through the Downs. Once, it supported an extensive area of seasonally flooding water -meadows, but over abstraction of river water, changes in farming practice and gravel excavation have virtually eradicated such features and much of the floodplain is now arable. North of Shoreham the chalk scarps widen out, supporting large, undivided arable fields which reveal the open, curving back of the chalk downs.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Small scale-gently rolling with dry valleys.
Mixed farming and deciduous coppice woodland.
Settlement associated with railway.
Suburban planting and paddocks.
M25 physically dominant and noisy.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This area is considered to have a unified pattern of elements with some detractors; mainly that of the motorway which is physically very dominant. Dense, varied woodland and rough pastures provide a very strong ecological resource. The cultural aspect of the area is slightly reduced by the effect of more recent residential development of poor or indistinct design which is found throughout.

Sensitivity

The dry valleys are a dominant landform element of the area, but views are well-enclosed by the widespread woodland. Much of the woodland is recognised as ancient woodland, and the incidence of mature standards, including those within coppice-managed woods, affirm the historical nature of the natural features. In addition, the small, isolated farms indicate a strong time-depth. The sensitivity of this area is therefore high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the woodland element and the continuity of this dominant land use. The characteristic detail of the woodland is very important, such as the mature beech, oak plantations, and the variety associated with coppice management of some densely wooded areas. The infrequency of the small-scale farms is also an important feature to conserve, in addition to the small, enclosed pastures. Small details such as wood banks and passing places are also important.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very Strong.

Sensitivity

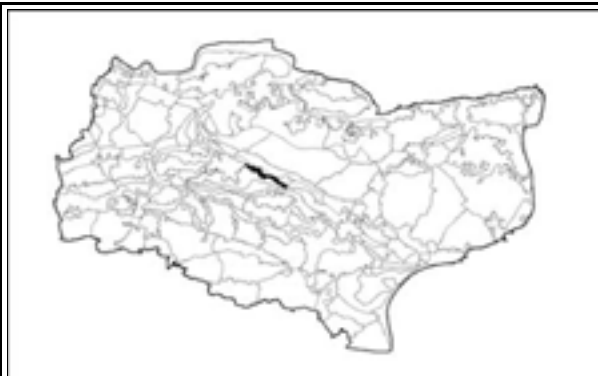
Sensitivity	High.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the dense woodland cover
Conserve narrow roads and details
Conserve isolation of farming settlements

[previous <<](#)



This is generally an undulating rural landscape of narrow lanes of mixed farmland of medium sized arable fields and pastures and small copses developed on the well-drained sands and loams of the Folkestone Beds. It includes slivers of land to the north of Maidstone at Sandling, including Cuckoo Wood, and further east around Newnham Court Farm. Along the streamlines to the south through Vinter's Park and along the railway line the soft Folkestone Beds have been eroded away to expose the harder Hythe Beds below.

East of Bearsted this character area includes a narrow belt of mixed farmland as far east as Sandway. The landscape is distinguished from its neighbours to the south by a higher percentage of pasture and few if any orchards due to the poorer quality of the sandy soils. Traditionally cereals, potatoes and field vegetables would have been grown as well as extensive pasture.

The soils give rise to distinctive flora such as woodrush, broom, foxglove and creeping hair-grass in Pope's Wood. At Leeds Castle sessile oak is dominant on the acid, sandy soils with the pedunculate oak found on the wetter Gault. The farmlands at Leeds Castle exploit the generally good, loamy soils of the Hythe Beds with the poorer quality sandy soils being under woodland or forming the ancient deer park. The geological boundary runs roughly along the line of the Len.

Leeds Castle forms just one of many fine parklands that exploit the free-draining loams of the Folkestone Beds, where enhanced by marshy alluvial streams feeding the river Len.

Settlement consists of scattered farmsteads working the thin soils, although there is also a long tradition of extraction for the fine sands and several sand pits are found close to Charing. More recently, however, the rural and tranquil nature of the area has been shattered by the alignment of the M20 and Channel Tunnel Rail Link which cuts through the north of the character area. A single carriageway by-pass is also proposed for the villages of Leeds and Langley Heath which may affect the western end.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating farmland development on well-drained sandy loams. Small copses with heathy characteristics. Historic parklands. Mineral extraction. Transport corridor.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The small scale landscape pattern, which has areas of dramatic local relief, is fragmented by the CTRL. Road and rail transport corridors and areas of mineral extraction produce many large scale visual detractors. The visual unity of the area is significantly interrupted. Networks of semi-natural habitats are also physically fragmented - the remaining pockets of woodland and mature trees are vulnerable. Heritage hedgerows are widespread, but many are unmanaged and appear redundant. Built form has a moderate positive impact on the landscape and includes some vernacular housing, but some hamlets are now isolated by the transport corridors. The condition of the area is very poor.

Sensitivity

The inherent landscape characteristics are mainly historic, with more ancient overtones of woodland and highways. The effect of fringe development and physical fragmentation of the area has resulted in the loss of many of the distinguishing features, in particular highways and woodlands. The land form is apparent and views are intermittent. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a coherent framework for transport corridors using small scale copses and parkland features.
Create new settings for fragmented and isolated settlements so that they develop a new focus and identity, using small woodland and small scale land use with much enclosure by trees and hedgerows.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Significantly Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

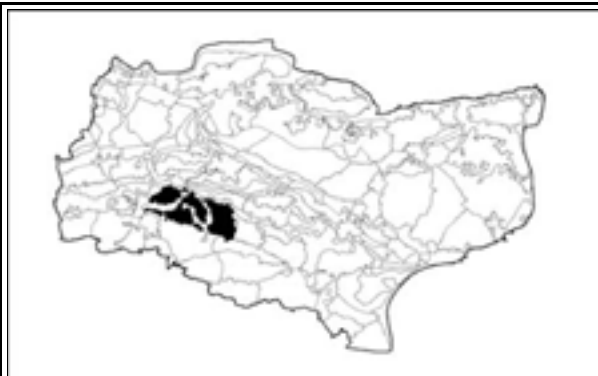
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create a coherent framework for isolated hamlets
Create a coherent framework for the transport corridor
Create a network of semi-natural woodland and heathland habitats

[previous <<](#)

LOW WEALD FRUIT BELT



Forming a large part of the flattest land of the Low Weald and extending over the freer-draining river brickearths outside the river valleys, the Fruit Belt stretches from Tonbridge in the west to Staplehurst in the east. This is a flat or gently undulating landscape of predominantly dwarf fruit trees, extensive open arable fields, with hops and pasture locally important. The roadsides are intermittently characterised by tall well-managed poplar windbreaks, but are replaced locally by dark, gloomy conifers.

Ponds are locally frequent, as at the Hale Street ponds and pasture SNCI, and around Laddingford the winding lanes have wide verges with ditches reflecting the wet nature of this stream-side settlement. In fact, much of the land at the confluence of the Medway with its tributaries is subject to infrequent flooding.

Traditionally, however, orchards and hops were widespread as the soils are well drained. These crops were most prosperous in the late 19th century, the 20th century seeing a conversion of orchards and hop gardens to horticultural and arable crops. This has been due in the main to the susceptibility of traditional hop varieties to disease and an increase in competition from growers overseas for both hops and the fruit market. In part, however, it is the result of the post-war development of disease resistant strains of hop that have a greater 'bittering' capacity and greater cropping rates on the dwarf top-fruit varieties, both requiring fewer hectares of these crops to be grown. This change of land use has had the effect of blurring the boundaries with the adjoining Medway Valley character area.

Where the shelterbelt or hedgerow network is intact it produces a small-scale landscape with a strong visual unity and pleasant sense of enclosure, but where this has been removed or replaced with conifers, the unity is fragmented.

Locally, as the ground rises and undulates towards the High Weald, small woodland copses of oak standards with coppice, carpeted in spring with shady bluebells increase the intimacy of the scale.

Where extensive large open arable fields occur, a simple unity is re-established, but it is at the cost of variety, colour and features in the landscape. The conifer hedges are particularly alien, dark and monochromatic in the almost flat rural landscape.

Frequent and often large groups of oasts, such as the Whitbread Hop Farm at Beltring, form strong features in the landscape although others have been swallowed up in bland 20th century suburbanisation, for instance around East Peckham. These oasts have usually been converted for housing or occasionally are used for storage. Scattered hamlets are also characteristic here as elsewhere in the Low Weald.

The somewhat unkempt edges of East Peckham, Hadlow, Golden Green, Marden and Paddock Wood and the railway also encroach into the farmland scene, the latter encouraging built expansion in the past, notably at Staplehurst.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat or gently undulating mixed, farmed landscape of dwarf fruit trees, arable, hops and pasture. Remnant alder or poplar windbreaks. Broad-verged lanes with ditches. Frequent groups of oasts.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The elements of the landscape - the flat fields, large hedges and shelterbelts as field boundaries, and ditches within the fields and along roads, frequent oasts and farmsteads - are coherent as a well-managed mixed fruit-farming/pastoral landscape with historical context. The variety of landcover which formerly included a large proportion of hops and traditional fruit trees, is diminishing. There are some open, arable areas, particularly around floodplains, which are on a larger scale than the fruit enclosures. Within this changing landscape, the ecological corridors of floodplains and streams are becoming isolated, although there is much evidence of water-logging and the presence of natural drainage. Remnant mature oaks punctuate the landscape, many stagheaded or senescent. Visual detractors include the suburban influence of recent development, in particular around Paddock Wood, and the railway line.

Sensitivity

This area has a strong sense of place which reflects historic land use and the natural conditions. The many oasts and farmsteads add to the historic character. Mature oaks in the hedgerows and small broadleaf copses give a more intense time-depth and an intermittent tree cover over the relatively flat landscape. This intermittent enclosure on the relatively flat landform means that the sensitivity of the area is low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the tranquil, rural settlements and their agricultural setting which is small-medium scale, of intermittent enclosure, well-managed, with the interest of a rich and productive land. New agricultural uses for the farmland should be explored.
Reinforce the suggestion of a more ancient time-depth by managing and replanting mature tree stock within a proportion of the hedges.
Reinforce the natural potential of the area by identifying main watercourses and ditches and managing them to enhance the wildlife interest. Management techniques such as seasonal cutting and piecemeal clearance could extend to the wide roadside verges and drainage ditches.
Reinforce the enclosure pattern around settlements such as Marden and Collier Street with hedgerow and mature tree planting. Link these with floodplain copses.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

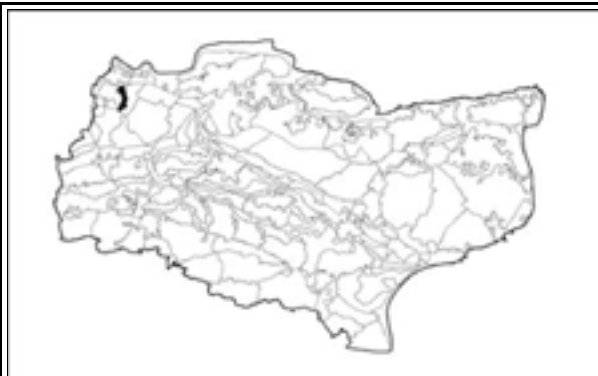
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve the rural elements of the landscape around the settlements
Conserve the scale and tranquillity of rural settlements and hamlets
Conserve and manage mature tree stock
Reinforce enclosure patterns
Reinforce the ecological interest of ditches and watercourses
Conserve and reinforce the attributes of rural lanes

[previous <<](#)



This narrow character area extends from the village of Farningham northwards from the AONB down the Darent valley through Horton Kirby and Darenth as far as Junction 2 on the M25. It is defined by the narrow band of alluvial floodplain gravels which form a substantively flat, wet landscape now characterised by water-filled gravel pits. Low water levels in the river which affect amenity value and wildlife have caused concern since the 1960s.

The slopes of the West Kent Downs rise beyond the Darenth area but, unlike the valley sides of the North Darent character area in the AONB south of Farningham, the slopes in this lower valley are broader and more open. The road towards Sutton-at-Hone, the A225, is a busy link. To the south there are quite dramatic views to the Darenth Downs above Horton Kirby. Motorway noise is intrusive near the M20. Soon the road narrows, with narrow steep lanes feeding off to the west back up the steep valley side.

Away from the A225 the lanes around Horton Kirby wind gently above the valley floor occasionally crossing the Darent over narrow flint bridges through towering trees. The M20 is visible and audible close to Horton Kirby sitting up starkly on its high embankment through the overgrown, gappy hedgerows and pasture grazing sheep and cattle.

Despite Horton Kirby's unremarkable architecture of post-war social housing and late 20th century bungalows, and a backdrop of pylons, the narrow, winding lanes that lead to it still feature the occasional flint building, and isolated parts are attractive. The railway viaduct and brick chimney at South Darenth are striking features in the landscape, visible from some distance away. The landscape north of Horton Kirby is rural but with suburban influences.

South Darenth is equally undistinguished in terms of its architecture, but with a small section of pretty built river frontage. The A225 from Sutton at Hone merges with Hawley close to the M25.

The valley in this area is characterised by extensive Roman remains, highlighting the importance of the river corridor for movement through the Downs in ancient times.

It is an important green link from the countryside of the AONB into the Kent Thames-side area, and has been identified as a major component of the proposed 'green grid'.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, wet landscape marked by water-filled gravel pits. Meandering river still fringed in part by riparian vegetation and crossed by several narrow flint bridges. Many suburban and transport influences.
Extensive Roman remains

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The shallow, fluvial valley is well settled, with intense arable and horticultural uses, and many visual detractors in the form of new urban edges, pylons and transport corridors. It is coherent as a river valley with occasional riparian vegetation on the river bank. In addition, wet gravel pits accentuate the line of the water course. In many case, land uses echo historic patterns, although now more intensely settled. The ecological corridor of the river is very much reduced in scale and has been further weakened in recent years by drought conditions. The farmland retains very little in the way of enclosure or natural habitats. Post and wire fencing is much in evidence as are suburban uses of the open land near settlements.

Sensitivity

The dished landform is apparent, especially from the upper slopes; woodland cover is very limited, confined to recent riparian vegetation.
This landscape area has a moderate sense of place which reflects the occasional historical characteristics of the well-settled valley. Villages have occasional flint churches, houses and bridges amongst the more overwhelming recent residential development. Historic mills and structures such as the viaduct and brick chimney have become distinctive landmarks. Many of the rural heritage features, however are indistinct, and the character of the area is dominated by recent features such as the wet pits. Overall, the sensitivity of the area is high due to the openness and high visibility.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore a strong sense of the river valley to the area. This may be effected by restoring the emphasis of settlements centred around nodes on the river and enhancing the route of the river within the valley by riparian planting and also by open bankside habitat.
Restore ecological diversity along the water course by introducing sensitive water management within the river floodplain and encouraging areas of regenerative semi-natural habitats.
Support the aims of the River Darent Action Plan to reduce abstraction, increase depth of flow and enhance natural habitats.
Within the agricultural land, restore sympathetic field management which includes hedgerow enclosure to the up-slope side of fields, and less intensive agricultural practices such as low intensity grazing near the river course.
Restore distinctive detail in built form by emphasizing views of current landmarks and historic buildings.

CONTEXT

Regional: North West Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

High.

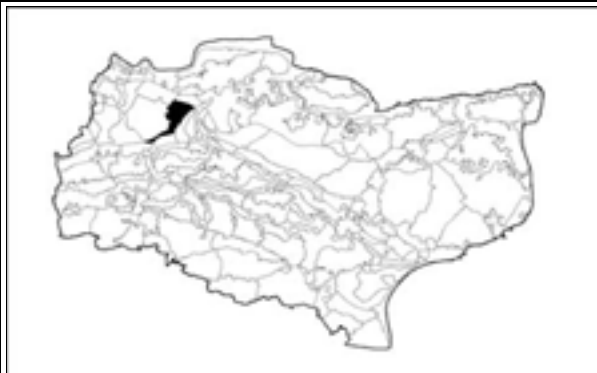
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE.

Restore riparian and open bankside habitats to the river and floodplain and increase the depth of flow by management of the river corridor at strategic sites for the benefit of natural habitats and amenity use
Restore the locational emphasis of settlement on limited nodes on the river
Restore a vegetative framework to the fields on the lower slopes
Restore the emphasis on distinctive detail to built form
Emphasize views of current landmarks.

[previous <<](#)



LUDDESDOWN

This is a rich agricultural patchwork of rolling, valley-side pastures and extensive, undulating arable fields. Large areas of mixed woodland dominate the skyline, and form thick walls around fields, giving a strong definition to the fields. Extensive hedgerow removal, for arable cultivation, has increased the importance of these woodlands in giving structure to the landscape.

Threatened from the west by creeping suburbanisation and from the east by urban and industrial influences, it is still a peaceful, rural area. The thick belt of woodland along the eastern and southern scarp top plays an important role in preserving this atmosphere by sheltering the area from the Medway towns and factories.

WEST KENT DOWNS

Luddesdown lies within the larger character area of the West Kent Downs.

The south-facing, chalk scarp between the Medway and the Darent provides a strong visual boundary, dividing the Kemsing Vale from the deep, dry valleys and wooded plateau of the West Kent Downs. This sense of separation is increased by the extensive tracts of ecologically valuable deciduous woodlands along the top of the scarp.

Woodland is very significant in this landscape, providing an important backdrop for the rolling landform, the network of small country lanes, the scattered settlements and the extensive valley pastures. In the east, around Luddesdown, the fields are contained by thick walls of woodland, and strips of remnant coppice, or shaws, occur frequently along the steeper valley sides. Hidden away among trees are several medieval buildings, such as Luddesdown Court, constructed from the local Kentish ragstone, while the villages of Vigo and West Kingsdown are set deep in the woodlands themselves.

The clay-with-flints soil on the plateau and ridge tops is reflected in the pasture and woodland dominating these areas; in the valleys, the extent of the finer silt soils is reflected by the predominance of arable cultivation. The downland becomes increasingly open in the north, where the intimate character of the scarp top gives way to a large-scale landscape of intensively farmed, rolling valleys and large blocks of deciduous woodland. West of Rochester, the mature woodlands and historic parkland of Cobham Hall are severed from the deciduous coppice woodlands of Shorne Wood Country Park by the busy A2 trunk road and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL).

[next >>](#)

LUDESLOW: WEST KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rolling valleyside pasture and extensive undulating arable fields. Large areas of mixed woodland dominate skyline. Peaceful and rural, but threatened by suburban influences and industrial developments. Many hedgerows removed.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The unity between landform and landscape elements is slightly interrupted by loss of hedgerow and the intensity of some areas of cultivation. However, there are very few visual detractors - some unsympathetic farm complexes and pylons amongst other minor detractors. The strong and extensive ecological base of wooded ridges is modified by the intensive agricultural use within arable areas on the lower slopes. The condition of heritage features is variable: tree cover is good, but field boundaries are few and declining. The scattered and isolated historic farmsteads are dominated by piecemeal residential development in the west of the character area. Characteristic building styles are of mixed age and have a moderate positive impact. The condition of the area is considered to be good.

Sensitivity

The area has a strong time-depth, reinforced by the distinctive ridgeline woodland and ancient highway routes. The historic hedgerow pattern is in decline and no longer contributes to the local distinctiveness. Many of the characteristic narrow, banked roads are open within arable areas, having lost their hedged boundaries. However, where they persist, they have a distinctive mix of species and are characteristically tall. Visibility is moderate as the landform is apparent and tree cover is intermittent. Sensitivity is considered to be high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

It is the ancient characteristics which are the strong element of this landscape, which should be conserved and enhanced. The unity between landform and the landcover is another very positive attribute. The loss of hedgerow in the arable areas may be addressed by conserving and extending remaining hedges along the highway, but this is possibly not appropriate within arable fields. The isolation and small-scale of farmsteads and hamlets should be conserved.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	<u>CONSERVE</u>
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
		poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

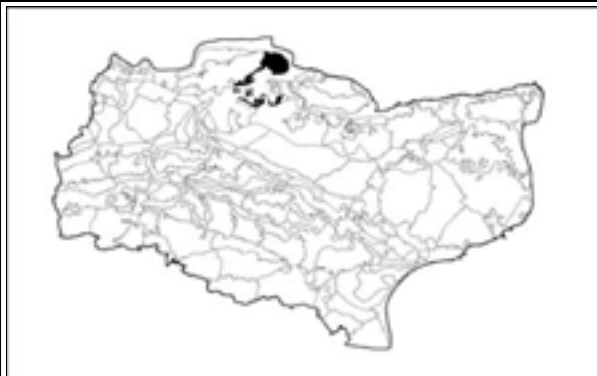
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the ancient characteristics of the landscape such as woodland cover and the isolation of settlements. Conserve woodland on ridges, and enhance woodland by extending wooded shaws into lower slopes. Conserve mix of hedgerow species and management of tall hedgerow. Conserve the characteristics and enclosure of ancient highways.

[previous <<](#)

MEDWAY MARSHES



The Medway Marshes are typically low lying and flat, with huge open skies and extensive views. To the north of the river, the marshes are dominated by the massive industrial complexes of Grain and Kingsnorth which sit in grand isolation amidst open marshland. This contrasts markedly with the more confined and 'hectic' industrial marshland landscapes of parts of the Thames Marshes and the more tranquil, pastoral landscape of the Swale Marshes. The southern Medway Marshes are much smaller and fragmented and have a much less coherent character.

Landform and geology have a profound influence on the character of the marshes which, having been formed from marine alluvial deposits, have a distinctively flat relief. A small outcrop of valley brickearth and gravel forms the higher ground of the Isle of Grain but the landform is obscured and dwarfed by the refinery complex and does not register prominently in the landscape.

The majority of marshland is reclaimed and protected from tidal inundation by coastal walls, although fragments of saltmarsh persist to the seaward side and as islands within the estuary itself. The traditional landcover is coastal grazing marsh, and large areas of typically flat, low-lying pasture with characteristic patterning of creeks and dykes still remain to the west of the Isle of Grain, with smaller fragments at Barksore and Horsham Marshes to the south.

The trend towards arable cultivation is less marked than in the Swale but, instead, the Medway Marshes have come under significant pressure from industrial and urban development. Large areas of the north Medway Marshes are now occupied by extensive industrial complexes, with their associated jetties, roads and rail links, while to the south of the river smaller-scale urban and industrial development has occurred in a piecemeal fashion along the immediate coastline where marshes now barely exist.

The saltmarshes, mudflats and grazing marshes of the Medway form an integral part of the North Kent estuarine and marshland habitat complex which is of international importance for nature conservation. The grazing marshes which separate Allhallows and the Isle of Grain also form part of the North Kent Marshes Environmentally Sensitive Area.

The landscape of the Medway Marshes has long been associated with industrial use. The Romans established extensive salt and pottery workings around Upchurch and the shore was later used for the winning of estuarine clay. Like much of the north Kent coast the Medway marshes were of strategic military importance as illustrated by the blockhouses of Darnet Fort and Grain Tower.

In the 19th century George Chambers, John de Jardin Snr., Francis Moltino, W. D. Doust and William Wyllie painted this coastal landscape. In the 20th century the watercolourist and art historian Martin Hardie worked in this area. More recently Vic Ellis, Rowland Fisher and Hugh Lynch are associated with the Medway Estuary.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Low-lying and flat fragments of marshland with extensive views, dominated by industrial complexes to the north of the river. The southern marshes are less coherent. Some coastal grazing marsh and salt marsh, some coastal smaller and walls, creeks and dykes. Historical military features.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The group marshlands have coherent elements of grazing marsh and salt marsh, ditches and creeks. All are coastal marsh with close estuarine influences, some are fragmented by industrial complexes. There are also many visual detractors within the area, including industrial lighting and residential development amongst others. The potential for semi-natural habitats is reduced in areas of arable cultivation, and the ecological integrity is therefore thought to be moderate. Large scale industrial building and recent residential form has a high negative impact, however, some creeks remain relatively tranquil and retain their cultural links with the waterside. The condition of the area is considered to be poor.

Sensitivity

Historic features of ditches, counter walls, and the legacy of military installations along the estuary are key characteristics which give the landscape a cultural time-depth. New access roads and built development lack local distinctiveness and do not contribute to a sense of continuity in the landscape.

The low-lying, flat nature of the fragments of marshland is apparent in the open view, and visibility is high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore the cultural emphasis, occasional use of open, inaccessible land.
Restore the dominance of the natural features.
Create semi-natural grassland and marshland.
Restore and maintain traditional grazing marsh and associated elements such as counterwalls, ditches and creeks.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

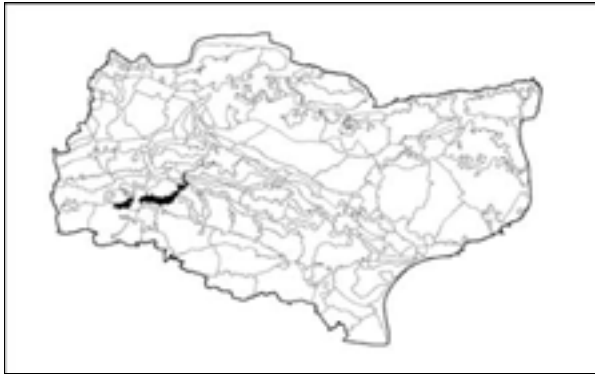
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore cultural and natural elements of the marshland
Maintain areas open landscape

[previous <<](#)



A corridor of flat, open landscape bordering the river Medway from Penshurst in the south up to Nettlestead close to the Greensand, but one of considerable interest for its complex network of small streams and ditches.

Generally the scene is one of large fields of vegetables, grain and occasional hops, but with pastures and damp copses locally significant. Many hedges have been removed, including those along the roadsides, which can give the landscape an exposed feel. The river can at times be traced in the landscape by the small groups of willow along its edge but many have been removed to aid mechanisation.

Neither woodlands, orchards or settlement are characteristic of the floodplain because of the traditional risk of flooding, although locally these land uses do occur. Standing water is common, both as small ponds, such as those at the East Peckham Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI), and in the large reservoir at Haysden, built for flood alleviation but which is also a haven for overwintering birds.

The functional unity of the landscape is being changed from that of the traditional wet meadows, hedged and grazed, to open, larger fields of leafy vegetables and other arable crops that were once confined to the better drained soils of the Fruit Belt.

Visual harmony is disturbed by the large areas of the monochromatic blue - greens of the vegetable crops with the incomplete or lost hedges creating a neglected air.

Tonbridge has spread mainly on the higher land with better drained soils, to avoid the frequent flooding in the past, leaving many parts of the valley free from development. The town and its suburbs are now protected from flooding by the Haysden reservoir scheme, but the river is still liable to spill outside its valley into the broader floodplain and the Fruit Belt, especially at its junction with the Bourne and Teise.

The suburbs of Tonbridge, the A21 and railway, and lines of pylons sometimes intrude on the flat, rural scene.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, open, mainly arable landscape.
Few settlements or roads in floodplain due to seasonal flooding.
Historic bridging points.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The area of the Medway Valley within the Low Weald is often incoherent as a river floodplain, appearing as a flat, open arable landscape in many areas. It retains an aura of inaccessibility apart from the historic bridging points, but is well-used for industrial and commercial purposes, and gravel workings. Arable fields run to the edge of river banks, and flood defences define the river. There is little transitional land from river to farmland. Where there are commercial properties, these dominate the river bank. Scrub and riparian vegetation grow in a limited natural corridor and in regenerative groups around mineral works.

Sensitivity

In a landscape which historically has little or no settlement, the dominant elements in this landscape are comparatively recent such as commercial buildings, post and wire enclosures and the embanked dual carriageway. The river flows through an unremarkable landform with open views over in cohesive land uses. The tree cover is sparse and this raises the sensitivity of the area to 'moderate'.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create areas of gentle transition from the river on the lower contours to the rural landscape on the upper contours. Encourage the regeneration of riparian vegetation, especially around junctions of streams and tributaries, allowing some wetland to develop. Encourage sympathetic farming practices especially in areas immediately adjacent to the river. Restore some natural areas of the river floodplain and tributaries, creating a wider river corridor.
Restore seasonal accessibility to designated areas of the floodplain, possibly in association with the development of commercial land use and natural habitats.
Identify areas of unmanaged land, or land managed unsympathetically to the context of the floodplain, and agree a code of land use.
Create containment to existing urban edges by using riparian landscape elements and existing natural features such as landform and vegetation. Agree a design code for the distinctive new design of built form and flood defence structures.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

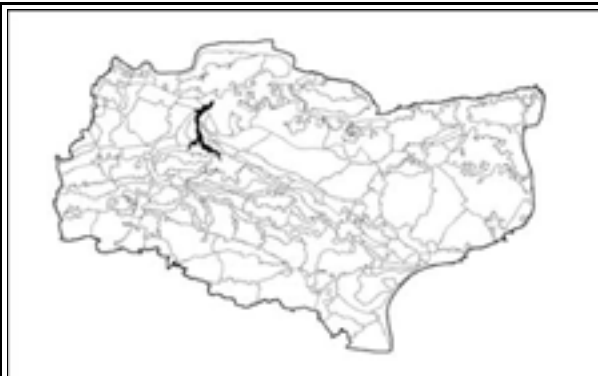
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Very Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create areas of transition from the fluvial to the rural landscape
Create wetland areas
Restore riparian vegetation to riverbanks and at fluvial junctions.
Create a design code for commercial properties and flood defence structures.
Create and restore seasonal accessibility to the floodplain
Create a positive land use code
Restore field boundaries and a cohesive land use to the upper contours
Create a new edge to existing urban areas using riparian elements.

[previous <<](#)



The Medway Valley divides into two distinctive sub-areas as it cuts first through the high Greensand Ridge, producing a narrow, contained valley, then a broader landscape as it crosses the softer Gault Clay vale and on through the chalk.

The latter is the Medway Valley Lower which is essentially a flat landscape developed on the valley alluviums around the meandering river Medway between the tidal lock at Allington on the Maidstone outskirts to Halling downstream. The landscape extends laterally over a broad area around New Hythe and Aylesford defined by the river deposits, but narrows as the Medway cuts through the chalk which encloses the landscape to the north.

Much of the landscape is a rather untidy sprawl of settlements and industry such as Snodland, New Hythe and Forstal that have developed along the river's flanks, most particularly in the west of the valley. It is distinguished by dramatic mineral sites associated with gravel and clay extraction, either still working as at Ham Hill Sandpits, Snodland, or reclaimed as at the lakes at Leybourne. Amongst the enterprises that traditionally used the river, some remain. Many of these are of an industrial nature, such as scrap metal yards, which inevitably detract from the visual quality of the riverside.

The river itself forms an important and distinctive feature within the character area, much of it being either a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). This includes marshes on the east bank of the Medway at Wouldham, part of which are also in an area of Local Landscape Importance. Here an area of extensive unimproved grassland and reedbeds, divided by dykes, remains under grazing. It is hoped to raise the water levels in some of these dykes to improve their nature conservation value.

At the river's margin, areas of reeds and other common emergents, mudflats and wading birds at low tide contrast strongly with the more industrialised areas to the south.

The lakes at Leybourne are an important site for migrant and breeding birds and are variously used for bird-watching or are stocked for fishermen. On the west bank, the landscape is dominated by housing, industry, pylons and arable farming. Snodland is not distinguished by its architecture and whilst Halling retains an attractive riverside church with long views to the chalk scarp, it is dominated by a mélange of 20th century development. Recent redevelopment of old industrial sites on this bank has intensified the built fabric so that when viewed from the east the impression is of continuous development. Allowance should be made for vegetated buffer zones adjacent to the river, to enhance its aquatic habitats and amenity value.

The quieter stretches of the east bank of the river are used for recreation by children, walkers at the water's edge itself and along the bank-top path that meanders down much of this bank, passing occasional old boats nestling on the peaceful bankside. Pleasure craft occasionally make their way up to Allington lock from the estuary. A general sense of quiet pervades on the river, however, especially at low tide when, for many craft, the river is unnavigable.

Much of the east bank remains a tranquil although degraded landscape. Additional new development is proposed at Peter's Pit, Wouldham and at Eccles. New vehicle and pedestrian bridges are proposed across the river as part of the development brief. The area's current relative isolation is likely to be affected by these proposals.

Recreational pressure may be put on the areas of conservation value. Traffic management measures and accessible public transport may be needed to manage the potential traffic impact on the rural lanes. The development proposals are also likely to be highly visible from the Kent Downs AONB.

A further influence on the river valley landscape would be the imposition of dredging, vegetation clearance and other flood-plain management which may be required around new built development and could be in visual conflict with the local landscape character.

The related aspects of reduced rainfall and increased abstraction of the river water have contributed to the changing face of the lower Medway Valley. Low water levels and variable water quality considerably diminish the amenity and the experience of the waterside and the expansive, spacious tidal flood-plain.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Tidal river with well-developed meanders. Residual unimproved grasslands and reedbeds forming important areas for nature conservation. Well developed industrial mineral and urban sites particularly on the west bank.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

Visual unity is incoherent and there are many detracting features. Views are contained by the surrounding Downs but the wide tidal river valley landscape is fragmented by extensive industrial works, floodplain management structures, new riverside residential developments and valley side quarries. Clusters of habitat include wet pasture reed beds and regenerative scrub, but industrial, residential and quarrying activities fragment the ecological interest overall. Aylesford Priory ragstone and flint churches and historic floodbanks are important heritage features, but field boundaries and tree cover are in poor condition. The built development generally detracts from the landscape, with massive industrial complexes, dramatic chimneys and high density residential areas in highly coloured brick. Overall, this is a landscape in very poor condition.

Sensitivity

The strength of character is weak with a lack of local distinctiveness and, in many areas, only a relatively recent time depth. Landform is an apparent element and the lack of significant tree cover creates a highly visible landscape.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restoration and creation of unimproved pastures and reed beds should be used to increase the nature conservation potential and naturalistic landscape qualities of the river floodplain. Tree planting proposals need careful consideration to avoid destroying the open character of the landscape. Scrub and hedges may be more appropriate in integrating the built developments into the valley.

Where they are in a manageable context, existing hedgelines should be gapped up and properly maintained. New hedgerow proposals should aim to link existing remnant hedgerows.

Where appropriate, new developments should be sensitively sited and designed to reflect the riverside context.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Significantly Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

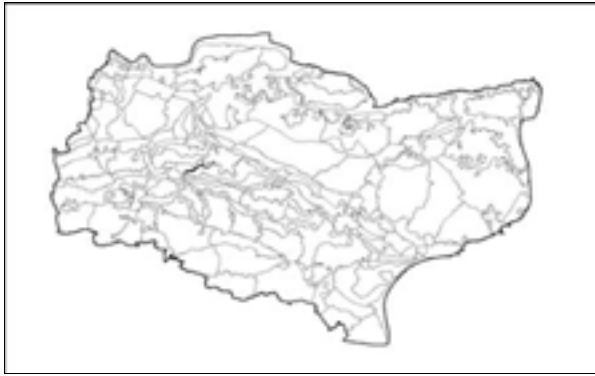
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Very Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore and create pasture and reed beds
Use scrub and hedgerows to integrate built developments
Gap up and maintain existing hedgerows
Link existing hedgerows with new hedges
Site new developments sensitively

[previous <<](#)



The Upper Medway extends from Nettlestead where the river begins its journey through the Greensands to the southern outskirts of Maidstone at Tovil. The deep valley sides that the river has cut through these strata provide one of the most picturesque landscapes of the Medway, notably where it flows beneath the striking historic bridging points.

This stretch of the river forms part of the Medway navigation from the tidal lock at Allington to Leigh near Tonbridge. Perhaps the most important use of the river is for recreation, although before the coming of the railway it was also significant for commercial traffic. Boating, canoeing, and fishing as well as walking dominate the activities. Several moorings and boat yards are available between Watlington and Allington.

There is concern that erosion of the banksides by powered vehicles occurs when they are driven at excessive speed and that some owners dispose of untreated effluent and rubbish into the river. Dominance of stretches of the river footpaths by fishermen can also cause conflict with canoeists and wildlife because of the danger of lines and litter.

The maintenance of water levels for navigation through the use of locks has resulted in algal blooms and associated water quality problems in past years, particularly in summer.

Further, continued dry summers could result in surface flows becoming more seasonal in the headwater streams that feed the Medway.

Beyond the river channel the landscape has changed markedly over the past thirty years due to the reduction in fruit and hops that are grown, with their distinctive high hedges or windbreaks, and due to the expansion of the suburbs of Maidstone. This has resulted in a reduction in enclosure and visual variety, opening out views to the suburbs.

The land use change has also corresponded to a fragmentation in landholdings, for instance at Tutsham Hall, Court Lodge and Gallant's Farm, and the gentrification of associated buildings such as oast houses, most of which have now been converted for residences. These changes are still progressing, although less dramatically.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Steep sided valley cut into the Greensand. Picturesque rural landscape. Historic bridges and locks. Lots of pleasure craft on the river.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The river corridor has coherent landscape elements with some views interrupted by waterside development. Visual detractors include flood control and holiday developments, lighting and a proliferation of boat moorings. The strong corridor of ecological interest is modified by encroaching agricultural land use and the limitations of riparian vegetation. Vegetative heritage features such as pollard willows are poor and built development has an overall negative impact, despite the influence of historic buildings and the frequent use of ragstone. Bridging points are strong features.

Sensitivity

The river corridor is an open landscape with an apparent landform, and visibility is therefore high. Historic bridging points, settlement and pollard willows define the time depth of the landscape, although there is little distinct vegetation with any sense of continuity. The area is considered to be of high sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore riparian vegetation to selected undeveloped stretches of the river corridor to emphasize the river and augment the ecological interest.
Restore the visual and physical containment of the foci of settlement on historic bridging points of the river.
Restore the emphasis on existing vernacular detail.
Restore and manage the setting of bridging points.
Restore managed vegetation to settled parts of the river bank.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

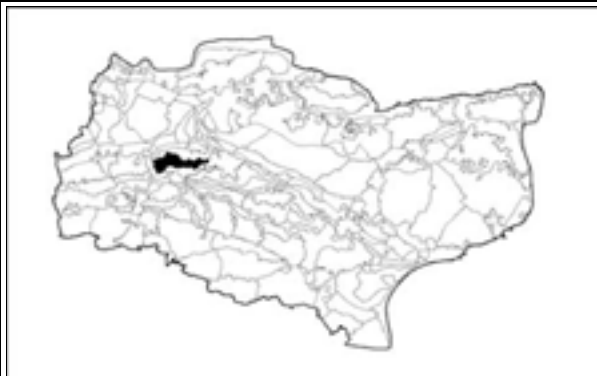
Sensitivity	High.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE.

Restore the riparian corridor
Restore the emphasis on historic bridging points and settlement patterns
Restore managed vegetation to appropriate stretches of settled river bank

[previous <<](#)



An area of extensive broadleaf coppice woodland, mainly of chestnut but including hazel, with oak standards, and conifer plantation, this is an enclosed wooded landscape of green shady lanes, of historic and landscape value, that incorporates Hurst, Mereworth, Hoath and Oaken Woods, and the mixed farmland and developments in between.

This generally flat, wooded landscape, often of high ecological value and scant settlement, corresponds to the poor quality, acid soils that developed on the head deposits lying on the gentle dip-slope of the Hythe Beds. The Hythe Beds themselves give rise to better quality soils which have been more extensively cultivated such as in the fruit-growing areas roundabout.

The woodlands are generally unfenced and criss-crossed by a mix of bridleways, footpaths and private forest tracks. A large section of Mereworth Woods, however, along the A228, 'Seven Mile Lane', is given over to military use and is inaccessible to the public.

At the eastern end of the character area, around East Malling Heath, is a more mixed landscape of arable, grassland and new orchards, with pockets of development, including the emerging business park and residential area of Kings Hill on the old West Malling Airfield. Some of the new housing in this area is fronted by old chain link fence from the days of the airfield.

Whilst the main part of Kings Hill is generally well screened from the rural landscape by the woodland at its perimeter, the smooth, mown entrance of the new access from the A228 is not in keeping with the enclosed wooded feel of the rest of the character area. The result is a disharmony which may be exacerbated by the proposed widening of the West Malling by-pass and the proposed third access to Kings Hill. Already the existing by-pass intrudes where it crosses over the local lanes with some of the mitigation mounds sticking up steeply in an otherwise gently rolling landscape.

Elsewhere farmlands nibble at the edges of the wooded belt, above Crouch, Comp and Herne Pound. Tall hedgerows often line the roadside, the fields a mix of fruit and arable crops.

A strong feature of the southern part of the character area is the extensive and superb views from its edges over the varied rural scarplands, the Medway valley and the Low Weald beyond. The quality of much of the Mereworth landscape is recognised through its designation as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). Part of Oaken Wood is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its geological value.

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Plateau landscape with poor quality soils. Extensive broadleaf coppice woodlands. Narrow shady winding lanes. Sparse settlement.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The strong and simple pattern of dense coppice woodland and some pasture/heathland is infrequently interrupted by smallholdings and residential properties and has begun to be impoverished by some unmanaged land and increasing residential use, although the strong woodland cover remains coherent. The coppice management system of much of the woodland maintains a strong ecological base and is an appropriate use of the poor quality soils. The functional integrity of the area is therefore strong.

Sensitivity

There is a strong time-depth element in this character area with its sparse settlement, narrow enclosed roads and dense woodland, although comparatively recent chestnut and coniferous plantations now dominate the tree cover. The landform is unremarkable from within the area itself, appearing generally flat, and views are well-contained within the heavy enclosure of the tree cover.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the woodland cover and the characteristics of the narrow lanes. Reinforce the wooded edge to existing development and encourage planting of high forest species (such as oak) at visual nodes and boundaries to supplement the existing mature stock. Develop management techniques of the woodland, heath and pasture to promote ecological interest. Increase areas of heathland.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity

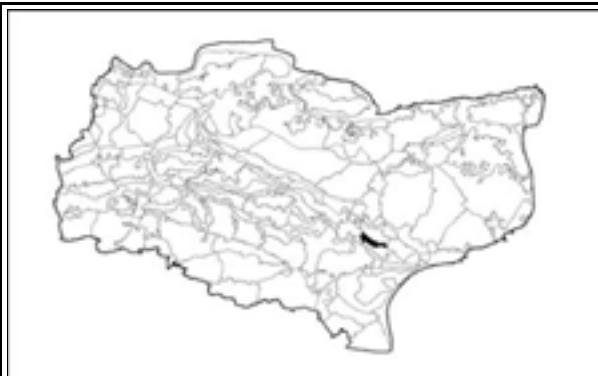
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Very Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve woodland cover
Reinforce the occurrence of mature woodland trees
Reinforce wooded edges to development
Reinforce heathland

[previous <<](#)



This small character area on the Hythe Beds south-east of Ashford is an undulating farmed landscape on the Hythe Beds at around 60 metres. The landscape is one of open arable fields and small-scale pastoral farming with small copses and old gappy hedgerows. The good quality soils used to support a few orchards but these were never typical of this area and have now gone. Suburban housing wraps around the village centre at Mersham with its pleasing ragstone and red brick buildings.

The remaining pasture and hedgerows are vulnerable both to potential removal for arable use and, some have been lost to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. It is likely that the proposed mixed use development at Cheeseman's Green to the south will have a profound effect on the tranquillity and character of Mersham and the surrounding farmland. Increased traffic levels could put pressure on the narrow lanes and village for 'improvements' that would destroy their rural character. This small character area is gradually being enclosed by development on three sides.

Although not often visible in the undulating landscape, the M20 remains audible within these otherwise quiet farmlands.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating landscape with good quality soils. Mixed farmland with small-scale pastoral farming and more open arable fields. Small copses and gappy hedgerows.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The condition of this area is influenced by many visual detractors which include the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, urban edge development and unsympathetic farm buildings. The landscape pattern itself is a coherent pattern of farmland and settlement around the ridgeline, interrupted by loss of hedged boundaries. Many fields are intensively farmed, woodland is limited and hedgerows are declining - semi-natural habitats are therefore not widespread and the ecological integrity of the area is weak. Heritage features of hedgerow and tree cover are vulnerable.

Sensitivity

Landscape features do not contribute to a real sense of local distinctiveness. The narrow highways retain some character, following ancient routes. Settlement is recent and undistinguished. A sense of place is very weak. Historic features such as field boundaries are becoming obscure. Views are open over and apparent landform, and therefore visibility is high. This area has a moderate sensitivity due to the high visibility.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore the cultural integrity of the landscape by enhancing the setting of the ridgeline road and the setting of existing settlements.
Create integrity within the farmland by removing redundant hedgerows and replanting small copses on the lower slopes.
Control the effect of visual detractors. Maintain views where possible.
Create more diverse habitats by the sensitive management of selected pastoral and arable farmland.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

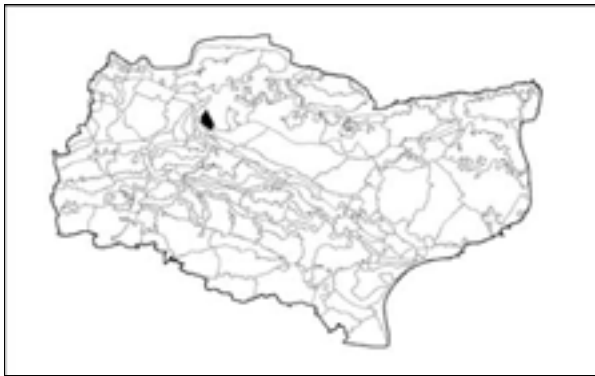
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Very Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create small copses
Create diverse grassland and arable farmland
Create open landscapes where appropriate

[previous <<](#)



NASHENDEN VALLEY

To the west of Walderslade, a series of tiny, steep valleys run north east into the Nashenden Valley. The M2 motorway, which cuts along the north side of this valley, forms the boundary between the AONB and Rochester. This is an open, sweeping landscape of huge arable fields and large blocks of dense, deciduous woodland.

Despite the proximity of the motorway and Rochester, this area still remains a strong rural character. Nevertheless, the long views within the valley make it vulnerable to development, as there are few hedges or shaws to provide screening.

MID KENT DOWNS

The Nashenden Valley lies within the larger character area of the Mid Kent Downs.

The long spine of the Kent Downs in this area stretches from Chatham in the west to the Stour Valley in the east. Although there are local variations in the appearance of the landscape, there is a strong underlying pattern to the landform, which imparts an overall character to the region. Throughout the length of the chalk ridge a series of narrow, steep-sided dry valleys carve their way down the gentle northern dip-slope of the Downs to the flatter land of the North Kent Fruit Belt, around Sittingbourne and Faversham.

The historical poverty of this area resulted largely from the stiff clay-with-flints soils, which overlie the solid chalk. Despite their striking, rich-red colour, these soils are relatively poor and difficult to cultivate, especially as they occur on the exposed upper plateau of the Downs. Edward Hasted, writing in 1798, consistently describes the area in terms such as "an unpleasant dreary country, the soil of which is very poor, being chalky, and much covered with flint-stones". In his day the land was used widely for sheep grazing, interspersed by arable on the lower slopes and large blocks of woodland. Today appreciation of the landscape has changed and the remote, undeveloped ridges and valleys, which resulted from the historical poverty of the soils, are considered one of the most beautiful features of the AONB. Although mechanised farming over the last hundred years has seen an increase in the area of arable land, much of the original ancient woodland survives, walling in the arable plateau and enclosing the rounded, valley bottoms.

[next >>](#)

NASHENDEN VALLEY: MID KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Chalk ridge with some narrow steep dry valleys.
Open, sweeping landscape with huge arable fields and large blocks of dense woodland.
Few hedges or shaws.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

A coherent land pattern follows the top of the scarp and the plateau. The visual unity is interrupted by plantation woodland and sweeping open spaces. Broadleaf woodland and shaws form large clusters of semi-natural habitats around large arable areas. Built development appears generally unremarkable. The condition of heritage features varies - tree cover is widespread, some highways are narrow and well-wooded, wooded edges to arable areas are felt to be vulnerable.

Sensitivity

The area has a strong sense of place, influenced by the dominant landform and the continuity of both the woodland and the form of the common land. Visibility is high due to the dominant landform, although views are intermittent. The area is considered to be highly sensitive.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the localised woodland characteristics such as hazel coppice and many oaks within the mix of other broadleaf species.
Conserve the historic form of pastoral/common clearings with wooded edges.
Conserve wooded edges to roads and encourage the sensitive management of wooded edges to arable areas.
Conserve wooded shaws.
Conserve the remote quality of the landscape and the lack of settlement.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Very High.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

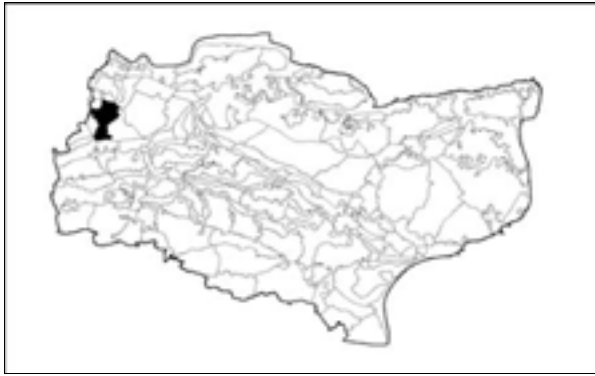
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the historic form of open common land
Conserve wooded edges by sensitive management
Conserve broadleaf woodland and woodland cover generally
Conserve the sparseness of settlement

[previous <<](#)

NORTH DARENT: DARENT VALLEY



NORTH DARENT

At Sevenoaks, as the Darent turns north, it passes from the flat arable floodplain, where a string of new lakes indicates the presence of former gravel quarries into the seclusion of the rural, northern valley. Here the character derives from the cohesion between the steep wood-topped scarps, the lower, intensively farmed scarp foot with its strong pattern of hedges and shaws (thick strips of mature broadleaf trees and small blocks of once coppiced woodland), and the thick belts of trees along the river, road and railway in the valley bottom.

Although the river is largely hidden from view, several stretches of thin Lombardy poplars along the banks send strong visual signals of its presence, making a focal point in the valley. In the north, the ordered pattern of hedgerows gives way to the ancient, unenclosed wood pastures of Lullingstone Park and the open arable fields around Eynsford. These vast chalky expanses are broken up only by occasional thick, overgrown hedges or small shaws, which cast striking lines across the landscape.

Despite its apparent rural seclusion, the North Darent Valley is under considerable pressure. The M25 motorway cuts through its western edge, creating a constant hum of traffic and isolating small sections of the AONB. The fragmentation of farm holdings is allowing the gradual introduction of urban-edge land uses, such as horse pasture and golf courses, into the agricultural landscape.

DARENT VALLEY

North Darent lies within the larger character area of the Darent Valley.

The Darent is the most westerly of the three rivers cutting through the Kent Downs and is strongly contained throughout its extent in the AONB by steep, often wood-topped, scarps and by the Greensand Ridge to the south. It has been called one of the earliest cradles of English settlement in Kent, and its long history of habitation and passage has clearly shaped its present character. There is a rich legacy of Roman remains, including Lullingstone Roman Villa, and several historic tracks run through the valley. In fact its peaceful, rural character today belies a busier and more industrial past. By the time of the Norman Conquest, the natural course of the river had already been diverted to power watermills, a tradition which continued until the beginning of the 20th century. Today only converted mill-houses and occasional ditches remain to indicate the former nature of the valley.

The name 'Darent' comes from the Celtic for 'oak river' and the river still meanders for much of its length through a narrow, tree-lined corridor. From Westerham, it flows east through the wide, clay vale between the chalk and the greensand, before swinging north at Sevenoaks to cut through the Downs. Once, it supported an extensive area of seasonally flooding water -meadows, but over abstraction of river water, changes in farming practice and gravel excavation have virtually eradicated such features and much of the floodplain is now arable. North of Shoreham the chalk scarps widen out, supporting large, undivided arable fields which reveal the open, curving back of the chalk downs.

[next >>](#)

NORTH DARENT: DARENT VALLEY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rural and secluded. Intensively farmed scarp foot with hedges and shaws. Thick belts of trees along valley bottom along river, rail and road. Unenclosed pasture and chalky arable fields in the north - occasional woods and overgrown hedges. Urban influences - horseculture and golf courses.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This open valley is rural and is coherent as an intensively farmed chalk scarp foot with pastures on the higher slopes. In the lower valley, fragmented and mixed land use, in addition to the well-vegetated rail corridor disturbs the visual unity of the area, however, there are few really detracting features. Hedgerows to the upper pastures are also fragmented and wooded ridges are receding. Due to the intensity of the land use, and the changing cultural perspective of land used for amenity use such as a golf course, the cultural integrity of the area is moderate, and the ecological integrity is weak.

Sensitivity

The wide curve of the valley is a dominant element in this area, which has a mixed use and an intermittent tree cover. Visibility is high. The rural landscape has many historic elements. Exceptional mill villages clustered on the river and farms scattered throughout the valley frequently display vernacular building styles and materials, including flint and brick. Unique features such as a mature beech avenue occur along roads leading up the valley sides. The appeal of the built form and settlement pattern in this area tends to mask the breakdown of the historical landscape features. More recent features such as conifer plantations and embanked transport corridors have introduced the less distinctive elements into the landscape.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

This landscape requires the restoration of unifying landscape elements to the lower slopes of the valley. This involves the restoration of a strong field pattern around farms and settlements with well-vegetated boundaries. Ecological value may also be restored by ensuring the sensitive management of these hedgerows, and links to enhanced riparian woodland

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

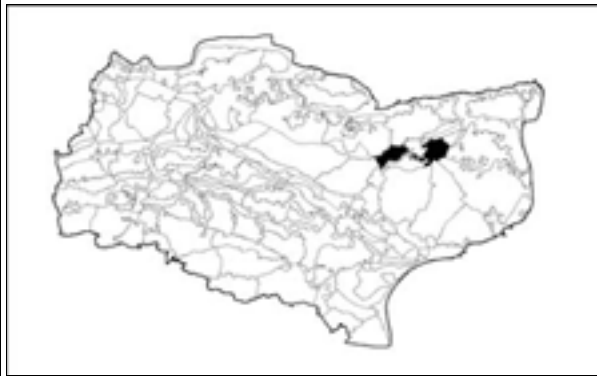
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Conserve the landscape pattern
Conserve and restore hedgerows
Restore riparian vegetation and copses
Restore sympathetic land use within the field system

[previous <<](#)



This forms a small landscape area around and to the east of Canterbury, based on the Thanet Beds, River Gravels Head Brickearths and small areas of Woolwich Beds. It is located from the 20m to above the 40m contour.

The soils associated with the silty drifts of the Brickearths are deep silty soils, affected by groundwater, on which cereals, potatoes and field vegetables were traditionally grown. The soils deriving from the Thanet Beds are deep, better-drained, good quality, silty soils on which most of the fruit and horticultural crops, as well as field vegetables, cereals, potatoes, and some hops can be grown.

There is much evidence of early Roman settlement along the A2 and around Canterbury. Roads first led to Canterbury from the ports of Reculver and Richborough, and thence to London via Watling Street. The Turnpike Trusts helped to raise the funds to establish new roads and maintain the old ones across parish boundaries. The A2 and a Canterbury to Margate route were funded in this way, as well as a link to Dover, although not until after 1780. The Canterbury to Sandwich road was not turnpiked until the 19th century.

To the north of the city, the university buildings are founded within the old parkland of Hales Place.

Nowadays, the small-scale fields and vertical structure of the shelterbelts and orchards gives an unspoilt secluded landscape with a strong sense of enclosure and verdure. This landscape can be viewed most dramatically from the A2 corridor between Dunkirk and Canterbury which gives long and varied views south over the fruit farms towards Chartham Hatch, and on the lanes between the orchards a distinctive, intimate effect is obtained. This landscape is under pressure to farm diversification plans, however, especially for recreation sites such as golf courses with uses such as dry ski slopes being proposed on old orchard land.

Elsewhere, the spread of villages such as Chartham Hatch has despoiled the landscape by unattractive 'fringe' uses and bland housing. East of Canterbury this Fruit Belt has been eroded more seriously. West of the Nailbourne up to Littlebourne there are many redundant shelterbelts but few orchards survive; the red-soiled fields being prepared for more profitable arable or horticultural use.

On the edge of this character area and the Kent Downs AONB, Patrichtown is a delightful village in a Conservation Area.

West of Littlebourne, running down to the Great Stour and the outskirts of Canterbury is the ghost of a park that used to stretch from St Augustine's Abbey on the eastern outskirts of Canterbury to the small port at Fordwich. This area is still known as Old Park and much of the land remains open.

In this area too are the woodlands at Trenleypark Wood, east of Fordwich, which have been identified with one of the parks listed as 'Wickham' in the Domesday Book and which may represent the oldest emparked land in England. By Henry VI's reign it had already been disparked, however. These woodlands, associated with a stream and its adjoining carr, are a large ancient woodland complex on the ridges and valleys to the east of Canterbury. Although a mix of chestnut coppice, conifer plantation and richer coppice with standards, it has a rich and varied ground flora.

The setting of Canterbury is an area of high landscape value because of its attractive valley side topography, views to the cathedral and rural character. The Pilgrim's Way approaches Canterbury within this character area. Pressure for development beyond the urban confines of Canterbury into this landscape are acute.

The road capabilities around Canterbury are often stretched to meet the needs of an excessive volume of traffic. This problem has formerly resulted in proposals being made for alternative new vehicular routes around Canterbury, but traffic congestion may now have to be addressed in more innovative ways.

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Well enclosed, medium scale field pattern. Rolling, quiet, picturesque. Traditional Kentish elements such as hops and orchards are characteristic. Well managed, simple form. The edge of the Canterbury urban area influences views, landuse and circulation. The views towards the Cathedral are very important. Outlying villages are quiet and rural, but with an increasing suburban influence.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The landscape has a coherent pattern of elements: well enclosed and well managed fields with farmsteads and oasts over the rolling landscape. This pattern is interrupted by some large areas of arable cultivation and post and wire fencing, but there are few other visual detractors. The intensity of the fruit and arable farming weakens the ecological interest of the farmland, which has limited woodland, few hedges or any other opportunity for semi-natural habitat. Culturally, there are areas which exhibit an intact framework of well-maintained hedges and shelter belts around large farmsteads and oasts. The area is considered to be in moderate condition.

Sensitivity

Many of the key characteristics, such as single species shelter belts, large square oasts and dwarf root stock trees, are recent influences on the historic landscape. Woodlands and historic hedgerows are indistinct, some highways have also lost distinctive characteristics. Visibility is high as views are open across the apparent landform. Sensitivity is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve historic settlement patterns and isolated settlements on minor ridges in the landscape.
Conserve the enclosure and well-managed attributes of the medium scale field pattern.
Create small woodlands to link with existing copses.

CONTEXT

Regional: North East Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

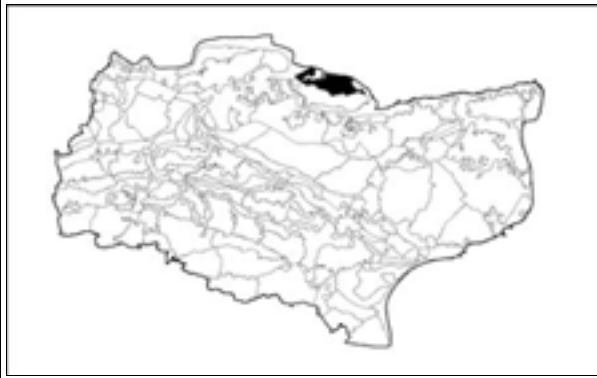
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND CREATE.

Conserve the scale and pattern of settlement
Conserve views to the cathedral
Conserve patterns and management of field enclosure

[previous <<](#)



The landscape of North Sheppey has a particularly distinctive character brought about mainly as a result of its coastal island situation. A sense of remoteness is accentuated by the physical separation of the island from the mainland by the Swale and is strongest in the more rural eastern part of the island. This is coupled with a pervasive sense of exposure which results from the lack of shelter and elevated, coastal position. The atmosphere can be both invigorating and bleak, depending upon weather conditions.

Geology has a significant influence on the character of North Sheppey, which is underlain by a belt of London Clay giving it a distinctive, elevated relief above the surrounding alluvial marshes. The ground rises quite rapidly from the marshes to the south and west and forms an area of complex topography before dropping steeply to the sea on its northern side. These slumped, clay cliffs are of significant geological and landscape interest. At its western end the landform of Furze and Barrows Hill, behind which the ground drops down to an area of low-lying alluvium which is also included within the local character area.

Traditionally, land use was predominantly pasture with occasional orchards but the area is now mainly under arable cultivation. The combined effects of Dutch Elm Disease, coastal exposure and the removal of hedgerows and orchards have all contributed to a very sparse covering of trees which gives the landscape an open and exposed character. Pockets of scrub woodland (such as on Furze Hill and around Brambledown), occasional shelterbelts of poplar around existing or former orchards and overgrown hedgerows (mainly in sheltered valleys within the more complex relief to the north) provide some localised enclosure and shelter.

Urban and industrial development to the north-west has had a significant influence on landscape character and much of the development is visually exposed and poorly integrated. An isolated pocket of remnant marshland separates Sheerness from Minster and is mostly under grazing management, although under extreme pressure from the influence of urban/industrial expansion. Elsewhere, settlements, hamlets and farms mostly retain a predominantly rural character, but some insensitive residential and holiday development is poorly integrated and has an intrusive, sometimes urbanising effect.

Many wildlife habitats have been lost to intensive agriculture or urban/industrial development but important areas of remnant marshland between Sheerness and Minster provide a suitable habitat for birds, including waders, wildfowl and raptors, the presence of which contribute significantly to the more 'natural' landscape qualities of these areas. These marshes are included within the North Kent Marshes Environmentally Sensitive Area, and Minster Marshes and parts of the cliffs along the northern shoreline are designated as non-statutory sites of nature conservation importance.

This area has strong associations with maritime and naval history, in particular the naval towns of Sheerness and Queenborough. Relics of the medieval salt making industry in this area can still be found today

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Island situation, exposed, prominent hills and cliffs above alluvial marshes. Geologically significant. Scrub on hills. Open, intensively farmed land on lower slopes. Denuded landscape. Remnant marshland-creeks and ditches. Prominent dev. and industry. Caravans/chalets.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The north of the island supports much arable cultivation and very little tree, hedgerow or other semi natural habitat. The marshes have some ecological interest but also attract amenity and suburban use such as golf course and pony paddocks, therefore despite some sites of note, the area does not function as a strong ecological network. The location and form of traditional hilltop farms are obscured by residential development. In general, built development has a negative impact. Rural heritage features of hedged field boundaries and woodland are poor-this area has suffered a significant loss of tree cover due to Dutch elm disease.

Sensitivity

Views are open across the exposed hillside and over the flat marshland. The varied land form is apparent in the view and there is very little tree cover. Visibility is therefore high. Settlement is overwhelmingly recent in form. There are many new residential areas, and these urban edges are very visible in the landscape view. Although there are notable heritage sites such as the Minster, the time depth is not apparent in the rural landscape; the most characteristic features are of recent origin. The sensitivity of this area is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore integrity to the remaining farmland: create narrow cross-contour shaws linked to wooded ridge tops.
Restore woodland to hilltops, and hedgerow with mature standards to the road which delineates the base of the slopes and the edge of the marshes.
Create urban edges which promote intermittent views of built development beyond.
Create urban planting to soften wide views of hillside developments
Restore open views across the marshland.
Create and restore ecological networks within the low-lying areas in accordance with inherent drainage patterns

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

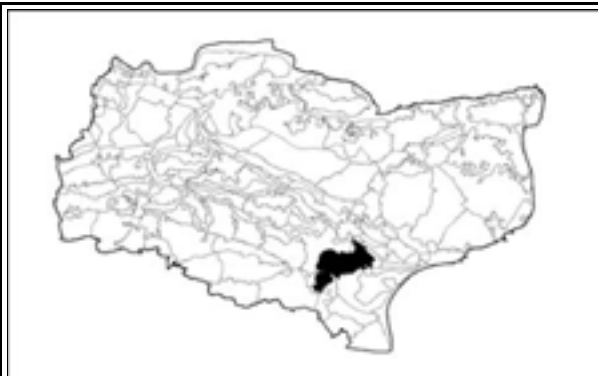
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore woodland to ridge tops
Restore mature standards and hedgerow to the highway
Encourage urban planting within built development
Create urban edges
Restore the prominence of heritage features in the view
Restore and simplify selected open views on the marshland
Restore ecological networks within the remnant marshland. Delineate edges between marshes and higher land by enhancing inherent characteristics

[previous <<](#)

OLD ROMNEY SHORELINE WOODED FARMLANDS



This character area is a gently undulating landscape characterised by extensive coppiced broadleaf and mixed plantation woodlands, such as Orlestone, linked by small to medium sized fields and paddocks. Hornbeam can be dominant as the coppice layer with wood anemones carpeting the ground in spring, and conspicuous ditch and bank at the laneside.

As the land rises towards the south and south east, it begins to divide into a distinct pattern of ridges and valleys until the woodlands open out at the edge of the Old Romney shoreline, giving spectacular views over Romney Marsh as far as Dungeness. The land drops steeply down through an open arable landscape towards the expansive low-lying flat farmlands of the marsh and Shirley Moor.

The landscape between Woodchurch, Kenardington and Appledore is more undulating with a smaller scale landscape pattern similar to the High Weald due to the underlying Tunbridge Wells sands. Settlement is scattered and consists mainly of farmsteads and small suburban-style villages such as Bromley Green and Shadoxhurst that cluster round a few vernacular buildings of more historic origins. Appledore stands out architecturally in the locality, but with the old shoreline too marked by a number of churches of historic origin. The Royal Military Canal is a remarkable historic feature at the edge of the character area, valued now as much for the wildlife it supports.

Generally the feeling is of a remote and unpopulated landscape. The area has a less prosperous ambience than the London-orientated western Low Weald, with occasional vernacular buildings in poor repair.

The traditional land use pattern has been affected by mechanisation to give the large hedgeless fields on the south-east slopes, by the creation of conifer plantations within the broadleaf woods and through the linear creep of development in the past from the few villages along the otherwise unspoilt lanes. Rusting, overgrown cars are testimony to a time when dumping in the woodlands was locally a problem. A strong sense of concord is maintained in most places, due to the enclosure provided by the large tracts of woodland and many small fields and lanes at their margins. Where this pattern breaks down on the south facing slopes a different although bleaker identity is in harmony with the cultivated and open landscapes of Romney Marsh.

[next >>](#)

OLD ROMNEY SHORELINE WOODED FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, or gently undulating with distinctive ridges and valleys dropping down to Romney Marsh.
Large broadleaf or mixed woodlands.
Small -scale pattern of pastoral fields.
Scattered settlement.
Historic churches along the Old Romney Shoreline.
Remote feel

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This heavily wooded area is largely intact in the west, but interrupted on the eastern parts by more intensive and open farming. There are few visual detractors and the area is generally unified. Wooded semi-natural habitats are extensive. Built form has a varied mix of vernacular style but has a positive impact on the landscape. Culturally, the area is strong and retains a remote but well functioning atmosphere, although there are areas of remnant plum and cherry orchards.

Sensitivity

This remote area has a strong sense of place. Woodlands, settlement patterns and highways have an ancient quality, whilst the farmsteads themselves are historic. Woodland also has rare characteristics such as very large oaks, hornbeam coppice and wood bank vegetation, which contribute to very distinctive elements of an otherwise 'characteristic' landscape. Views are mostly enclosed by the frequent tree cover and visibility is low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the woodland cover.
Reinforce the low intensity and diversity of land use within small farming areas.
Reinforce wooded areas to arable areas.
Reinforce local vernacular detail in built form - identify emergent styles.
Conserve the narrow winding characteristics of highways with wide verges, shallow ditches and well maintained hedges.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Good.

Pattern of elements: Coherent.

Detracting features: Few.

Visual Unity: Unified.

Cultural integrity: Good.

Ecological integrity: Strong Network.

Functional Integrity: Very Strong.

Sensitivity Moderate.

Distinctiveness: Characteristic.

Continuity: Ancient.

Sense of Place: Strong.

Landform: Apparent.

Extent of tree cover: Enclosed.

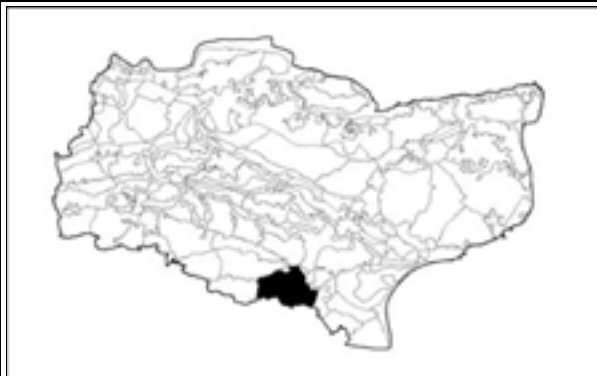
Visibility: Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve woodland characteristics - broadleaf with oak standards
Conserve highway characteristics
Reinforce local vernacular built form
Reinforce wooded edges
Reinforce small scale non-intensive land use

[previous <<](#)



OXNEY

The final retreat of the sea, and the gradual draining of the resultant mud-flats, has left a distinctive landscape here. The flat Rother levels contrast strongly with the ancient cliffs, which rear up from the edge of the floodplain whilst the Isle of Oxney seems almost to float above the smooth green levels which surround it. The valley bottom is punctuated by gnarled willows and thorns, and the scrubby bushes which cling to the edges of the fields give a wild, remote feel to the area. There is an almost unkempt appearance to this valley, re-inforced by the remnant hedges, the leaning post and wire fences and the reed filled ditches which divide the fields from each other. In winter, these elements combine to produce a bleak, untamed landscape, intensified by the bitter winds and sometimes horizontal rain, which can lash across the valley. The lack of a coherent structure to the landscape, provided elsewhere in the High Weald by the strong network of hedge and shaw, extends across the lower slopes of the valley and the Isle of Oxney, only gradually re-asserting itself around Northiam, Ewhurst Green and Wittersham. Oxney itself seems to remain an island, isolated by the farmland which now surrounds it, instead of sea. It is a strange patchwork of tiny landscapes, where neglected pastures and overgrown hedges in the west contrast with large arable fields, edged by post and wire in the north. The dense hedgerows and brick and tile houses, typical of the rest of the AONB, are in evidence around Wittersham, whilst a few small orchards still pattern the gentle slopes. From the edges of the 'island', long views open out across the levels to the ridges beyond.

LOWER ROTHER VALLEY

Oxney lies within the Lower Rother Valley character area.

The Lower Rother Valley runs east from Robertsbridge to Rye, stretching as far north as Tenterden and as far south as Peasmarsh. The Rother was one of the most important rivers in the High Weald, and still dominates the eastern end of the AONB.

This area has historically been subject to alternate flooding and silting and the river has changed its course several times over the centuries. During the Roman occupation, tidal estuary and mudflats extended far up the valley and the Isle of Oxney was a true island. The ancient sea cliffs at Rye, Playden and Oxney are a constant reminder that here, as in Brede, the shape and role of this landscape has changed dramatically over time. The river levels are drained by a network of small ditches and flecked by patches of scrub and stunted trees. Although the Brede and Rother valley floors contain most of the best agricultural land in the AONB, the intensively farmed, arable fields are still interspersed with considerable areas of sheep grazed pasture. The gentle open slopes which rise up onto the enclosing ridges support a network of large, regular fields, surrounded either by overgrown hedgerows closely trimmed, gappy hedges and sporadic trees. Both the river levels and the valley slopes have a bleak, wind-swept feel, despite the intensive agriculture.

Further west, around Bodiam and Sandhurst, the valleys close in. Despite the large fields, there are more small woodlands and thicker hedges, although many are unmanaged and in decline. The terracotta coloured soils of the Hexden valley still support occasional orchards and most of the red-brick or timber framed farms have a pair of redundant oasthouses. In the villages, such as Northiam and Sandhurst, weatherboarding is common, whilst very occasionally a thatched cottage can still be found, a reminder of the days when reeds from the river-levels were a valued roofing material.

The Lower Rother Valley is a wide, flat bottomed valley, whose rolling valley slopes are drained by small ghylls. At the mouth of the valley, where it opens onto Walland Marsh in the east, the Isle of Oxney forms a gentle mound on the flat levels, around which the River Rother and the Reading Sewer flow.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Sandstone ridge "island" surrounded by floodplain.
Wild, remote, bleak and unkept feel. Long views.
Small scale orchards and pasture on "island".
Large arable fields, scrub willows and thorns, post and wire fencing on levels.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The Isle of Oxney and the lower floodplain have coherent landscape patterns based on small-scale enclosures on the upland, opening out to larger arable fields with ditches on the floodplain. The visual unity is interrupted by gaps in over-mature and unmanaged hedgerow, and the dis-use of ditches. The few visual detractors include some small but intrusive settlement edges and WW2 bunkers. The extent of semi-natural habitats ranges from woodlands to wetlands and pastoral grasslands, but is modified by some large areas of intense arable. The condition of field boundaries and tree cover varies. Heritage ponds are not widespread but remain a notable feature. Built form has a moderate positive impact due to its small scale and occasional vernacular detail. The area is considered to be in good condition.

Sensitivity

The limited woodland has ancient qualities; standard oak and hornbeam coppice are prevalent. Most key elements, however, have an historic time depth such as the hedgerow with standards and lines of pollard willows. The reclaimed floodplain is also historic. These features contribute a distinctiveness and continuity which results in a moderate sense of place. The landform is apparent and enclosure of views is intermittent. Visibility is therefore moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the small scale, pastoral influences of upland landscape, replanting broadleaf woodland to promote the enclosure of fields and of the edges of settlement.
Encourage the replanting and long term management of hedgerow with standards.
Reinforce the visual impact and ecological interest of the lowland ditches by extending non-intensive management to the ditch margins.
Reinforce the heritage features of pollard willows by replanting on embankments.

CONTEXT

Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

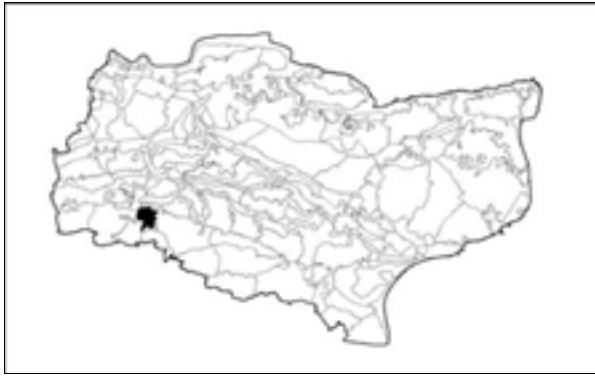
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Reinforce woodland on the upland areas
Conserve the small scale of the uplands
Reinforce hedgerow with standards on upper slopes
Reinforce mature/pollard planting on water courses
Reinforce the diversity of vegetation in ditches

[previous <<](#)



PEMBURY

This is a small, secretive pocket of woodland, mature parkland and pasture. Despite the proximity of Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge, there are surprisingly few houses, but the presence of the towns is felt through the roar of the traffic on the A21, which slices through this area, and the looming industrial estates which stalk the northern boundary of the AONB.

Nevertheless, the thick woodland cloaking the little valleys below Southborough and the gentle sweeps of parkland around Pembury Hill give this area a remote, leisured quality. The small scale of the landscape and the frequent thicket of laurel and rhododendron, allow the area to absorb considerable numbers of people walking or cycling, without detracting from the peacefulness. Along the north-eastern boundary, towards Tudely and Capel, the fields flatten out into the Medway valley and coppiced woodlands give way to Kentish orchards.

CENTRAL HIGH WEALD

Pembury lies within the larger character area of the Central High Weald.

The Central High Weald surrounds Tunbridge Wells, which exerts a strong influence on the neighbouring countryside. It extends south to Crowborough, west to Chiddingstone and east to Pembury and Bayham.

This is the landscape of the great estates, such as Penshurst Place, where dignified expanses of parkland impart a genteel appearance to the countryside. Much of this landscape can be seen from the Mark Cross to Tunbridge Wells ridge, from where the overall impression is of large commercial woodlands and unintensified pastures, interspersed with sweeps of parkland and occasional orchards. Along the northern reaches of the Medway valley beyond Penshurst, the woodlands are replaced by wide arable fields, whilst the steep valleys around Speldhurst and Bidborough are a patchwork of tiny meadows and strips of ghyll woodland.

Despite the peaceful, timeless quality of this landscape, this was an industrial district in the later Middle Ages, with major iron-workings at Eridge Park and Bayham and, in the 19th century, paper mills at Chafford. Many of the houses, especially those belonging to the large estates, are built of local sandstone, whilst the farms which nestle into the valley slopes off the ridge are frequently of warm red brick and tile, sometimes partially timber-framed. Many of these farmsteads are actually a group of several buildings, including barns and cottages, where several farm workers' families would have lived. In the 18th and 19th centuries, when hops became widely used in beer, almost every farm in this area had a hop garden. Nowadays they have almost all gone, but the red-tiled, white-cowled oast-houses still haunt the farmyards and in springtime, wavering, green arms of naturalised hops still reach up from the hedges, as if searching for the long-lost hop-poles.

Tunbridge Wells, founded in 1606 around one of the local iron-rich springs, has gradually influenced the character of this part of the High Weald. As wealth and employment have been created, so the pressure on this landscape has increased. Developers are eager to build on the surrounding fields, commuters use the tiny lanes to avoid the busy main roads and the local population find recreation and escape amongst the gentle slopes of this area.

Tunbridge Wells lies on a ridge. Around the edges of this ridge, especially at Speldhurst and Bayham, steep ghylls descend into the more open, rolling valleys of the River Medway and River Teise. In the north beyond Penshurst, the landscape flattens out towards the valley of the River Eden.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Ridges and small valleys. Wooded valleys, mature parkland and pasture. Coppice woodland, thickets of laurel and rhododendron. Some orchards.
Noise and influence of A21

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The area is a heavily wooded, unified landscape, interrupted by the relatively narrow corridor of the A21. The functional integrity of the area is strong; acid woodland reflects the soil conditions, and rural heritage features are in good condition although some estate farmland is variable and some of the open ridgetops sustain arable cultivation. Landscape use is not intensive. The condition of the landscape is therefore very high.

Sensitivity

Woodland is a dominant element which has an ancient time-depth and also has the more recent characteristics of plantation woods and rhododendron. The landscape pattern is historic and includes woodland estate roads and isolated farms and large houses. The vernacular use of yellow sandstone is distinctive, but not widespread. The scale and detail of historic buildings contributes to the continuity of the landscape. The ridged landform is apparent in the view, but views are generally well enclosed. Visibility is therefore low and the landscape is considered to be of low sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Reinforce the enclosure and density of woodland, ensuring that farmland is small-scale and non-intensive.
Reinforce the time-depth of the area by encouraging the planting and management of broadleaf acid woodland.
Reinforce the dominant woodland characteristics along the road corridor.

CONTEXT

Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Good.

Pattern of elements: Unified.

Detracting features: Some.

Visual Unity: Unified.

Cultural integrity: Good.

Ecological integrity: Moderate.

Functional Integrity: Strong.

Sensitivity

Low.

Distinctiveness: Characteristic.

Continuity: Historic.

Sense of Place: Moderate.

Landform: Apparent.

Extent of tree cover: Enclosed.

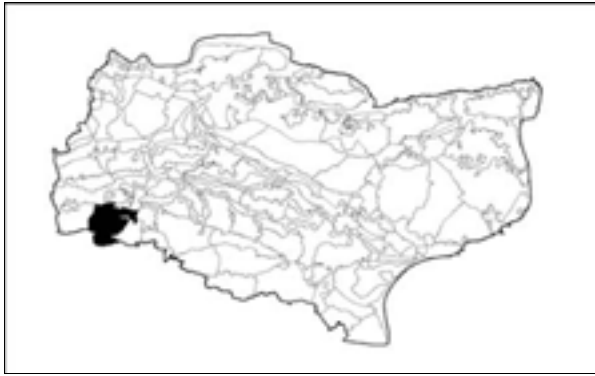
Visibility: Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

REINFORCE.

Reinforce broadleaf woodland
Reinforce the ecological bases
Resist wider impact of the road corridor
Reinforce the use of vernacular materials and local detail in building

[previous <<](#)



PENSHURST

The influence of the River Medway pervades this area. The tiny tributaries which feed into the river have eroded the sandstone ridge around Speldhurst and Southborough. Most of this land is unintensively grazed and woodland is largely confined to the deep ghylls which dissect the edges of the ridge. This area is criss-crossed by a number of small lanes, lined by villas and cottages creeping out into the countryside. As the Medway passes Penshurst, it joins the River Eden. The valley widens out and the surrounding land gradually flattens, encouraging arable cultivation, in large fields, enclosed by trimmed hedges. In the north, around Bidborough, magnificent views stretch across Kent to the Greensand Ridge and North Downs.

This is a densely populated area of small villages and farmsteads, where the local sandstone is frequently used for building. The combination of available local materials and the patronage of the local estates during the 19th century, produced a distinctive style of sandstone and decorative timber-framing, often embellished with ornamental estate emblems and date-stones.

The same sandstone protrudes naturally around the western edge of Tunbridge Wells, ranging from the dramatic outcrops at High Rocks to small patches of exposed stone along the roadside, hidden under a tumble of gorse and bracken. In the north and west, away from the sandstone ridge, timber-framing and tile-hanging are more common and the valley slopes are dotted with red-brick oast-houses and weatherboarded barns.

CENTRAL HIGH WEALD

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[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Sandstone ridge with pasture flattening to open valley with arable cultivation.
Views north to Greensand ridge and North Downs. Small villages and farmsteads.
Buildings of local sandstone. Estate buildings.
Red brick oasts and weatherboarded barns

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There is an intact landscape pattern with a strong woodland element and few visual detractors. The volume of integrated broadleaf woodland, shaws, hedgerows and streams is ecologically robust. Culturally, the pattern of small villages runs along the ridges amidst steep rolling pastures. Farms are found on the slopes. The arable land is found along more gentle slopes and retains many mixed hedgerows, although some of the estate farmland is opening out. The condition of this landscape is considered to be very high.

Sensitivity

The landscape has a strong time-depth due to the small-scale enclosed pastures and mature and varied broadleaf woodland. In addition to this, the vernacular details in buildings are distinctive. Despite the viewpoints to the Greensand and North Downs, it is well-enclosed with many small shaws and wooded lanes, and visibility is generally low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve broadleaf woodland cover, ensuring that long-term management retains the mature element of the woodlands.
Conserve small shaws and wooded edges to roads.
Retain the pastoral use of the land
Conserve the small-scale rural pattern and vernacular details in built form. This ensures that the landscape retains a strong time-depth.
Reinforce the hedgerow network in the lower fields

CONTEXT

Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very Strong.

Sensitivity Moderate.

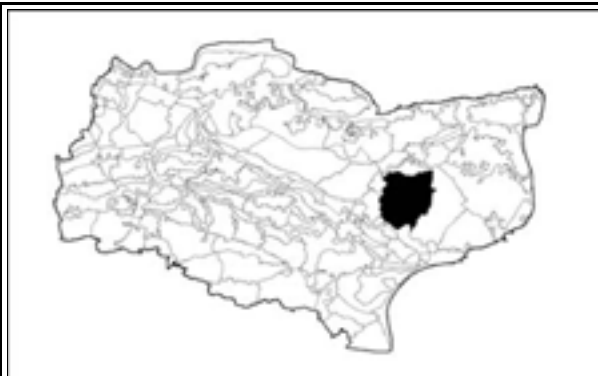
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Very Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve the frequency of small broadleaf woodlands
Conserve wooded edges to roads
Conserve small-scale field patterns
Reinforce hedges

[previous <<](#)



PETHAM

To the east of the Stour Valley is an intimate, remote landscape of long, rolling valleys and widely scattered farms. Blocks of deciduous woodland crown the narrower ridges or sweep along the upper valley slopes, providing a sense of enclosure and emphasising the curving landform. There are frequent tantalising views into secluded coombes and extensive areas of traditional chalk grassland, such as Winchcombe Downs, supporting colonies of rare orchids and butterflies.

Although the hedgerow network is more fragmented and generally less diverse than around Elham, many hedges are overgrown or contain significant numbers of hedgerow trees, producing strong lines of vegetation across the otherwise smooth folds of the valleys. Many of the valley sides have a narrow strip of rough grassland, scrub or woodland along their steepest slopes, where cultivation has never been possible. Known locally as shaves, they are often rich wildlife havens and provide a valuable contrast with the otherwise intensively farmed valley landscapes.

This was once an area of widespread hop cultivation, but although frequent redundant oast houses dot the landscape, there are almost no hop gardens still in production.

EAST KENT DOWNS

Petham lies within the larger character area of the East Kent Downs.

This is a remote, peaceful area of downland, which ends in the dramatic white cliffs of Dover. Above the southern scarp, the broad back of the chalk hills is furrowed by a series of long narrow, parallel valleys running north east. In these dry valleys, the valley bottom streams or nailbournes are underground, only flowing at the surface occasionally, during very wet winters.

The western valley systems are branching and intricate. The steep, rounded slopes are crossed by thick shaws or overgrown hedges, often swathed in the white seed-heads of wild clematis. Large arable fields on the ridge-top plateau are visually contained by long strips of deciduous, ancient woodland along the valley sides or ridge-top conifer forests, west of Elham. Towards the coast, however, the landscape becomes more exposed. There is less woodland and the strongly linear pattern of parallel ridges and valleys is more distinct.

The countryside here is criss-crossed by a maze of tiny, sunken, one-track lanes. Houses are widely scattered and many villages, traditionally built of local flint, brick and tile, are still little more than a church, a manor and a pair of farm cottages - an important characteristic of this landscape. However, this area is best known, not for its beautiful dry valleys or remote churches, but for its long association with the defence of the realm. The "White Cliffs of Dover" and the widely scattered military remains, such as pill-boxes and gun-emplacements, still exert a strong cultural influence on the landscape.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Intimate, remote, long rolling valleys.
Deciduous woodland on ridges.
Chalk grassland/rough grass shaws/rare species.
Overgrown hedgerows with many trees.
Scattered farms and redundant oasts.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There is a coherent pattern of strong landform and wooded ridges and grasslands. The few visual detractors involve development on the ridgeline and suburban land uses. Ridgeline woods, hedges and shaws provide the moderate network of semi-natural habitats within intensive arable and pasture land. Heritage features of woodland and hedges/shaws vary in condition; hedgerows are declining in use and many are over-mature. Built form has a moderate positive impact overall as large farms with many outbuildings are the slightly negative influence.

Sensitivity

There is a distinct settlement pattern of villages within valleys and large farms on the plateau. Built form itself is also distinct and includes some minor estate houses. Many such characteristics are historic, but the broadleaf woodland and the highways have a greater time depth. There is a moderate local sense of place. The sensitivity of this area is considered to be high, mainly due to the dominant landform and the subsequently high visibility.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve woodland cover, ensuring that the characteristic species mix (beech, oak, ash, yew) hazel coppice and beech standards remain distinctive features.
Conserve beech avenues on cross-contour roads and promote their replanting to become a more frequent feature.
Conserve the settlement patterns, avoiding ridgeline development.
Conserve shaws and apply long term management to ensure their continuance.
Conserve and enhance species rich grasslands.
Conserve hedgerows along roads.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity	High.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

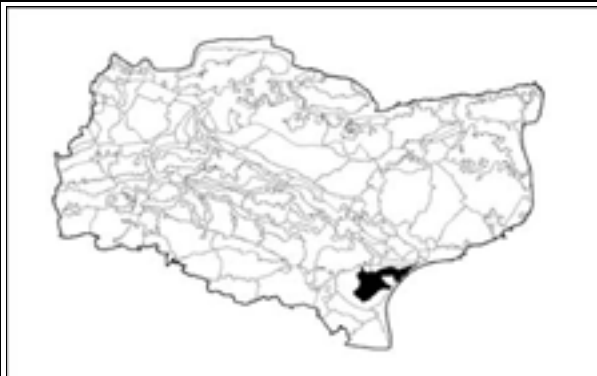
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve settlement patterns, avoiding ridgeline development
Conserve woodland cover and localised characteristics
Conserve grasslands
Conserve shaws
Conserve highway characteristics of narrow cross-contour and ridgeline roads

[previous <<](#)

ROMNEY MARSH MIXED FARMLANDS



This local area is centred on the land to the north of the Rhee Wall known as 'Romney Marsh proper.' It constitutes the calcareous clayey marine alluvium laid down in the tidal lagoon which persisted for a few hundred years at the centre of the emergent grazing marsh.

Soils are stoneless silty clay, and are extremely fertile, Grade 1 agricultural land. Drainage ditches transect the farmland as in other areas of the marsh, but are visually subdued where they are rigorously cleared and surrounded by cereal crops. The effect of the reduction in visible boundaries in the landscape is the appearance of vast arable fields, despite the actual field sizes being moderate. Crops are predominantly cereals and legumes with a wide seasonal variation in colour. There is a small proportion of pasture which supports sheep.

The old villages of Burmarsh, Ivychurch, St Mary in the Marsh are located in the adjacent character area on the edge of the mixed farmlands. The only village to be founded in this area is Newchurch, whose name indicates that it was 'new' to the surrounding settlements in earlier times. It is situated on sandier land, surrounded by sheep pasture, and this pattern is repeated with the outlying scattered farmsteads, such as Pickney Bush Farm and Willow Farm. Roads are narrow and winding, generally following old sea defences and ditches, and tend to run in a north-south direction across the area, possibly indicating lines of reclamation drawn between the existing areas of dry land to either side. Blocks of field patterns are contained within the road framework.

Farmsteads are typically single 20th century houses with a cluster of large agricultural buildings. They are a main detractor in the landscape.

Tree cover is rare, limited to the groups of mature trees which typically surround settlements. There are vestiges of pollard willows along some ditch lines; often a single willow is the only survivor of what may have been a more widespread landscape feature. The forms of the few tree groups near settlements are irregular but the tall pale-grey foliated willow and poplar are the most recurrent. The views are such large scale that the scattered tree groups combine to line the horizon. Short stretches of single species elm hedgerow are fairly common.

The Canal Cut runs through this area, draining the Royal Military Canal to the sea. It is a large engineered channel which cuts straight through the landscape, differing widely from the usually irregular ditch network. A line of visually intrusive transmission towers also cuts across the centre of the mixed farmlands.

The village of Newchurch is nucleic in form, with low weatherboarded, brick and white-painted houses surrounding the stone church and more recent housing on the edges of the village. The belt of pasture around the village is very distinct.

This is a unified landscape with a dominantly flat landform and a few detracting features. Ecologically, it is less sound as the drainage ditches have been modified by agricultural practice and by the increase in the arable cultivation of the land. The landscape framework of ditches in this section of the reclaimed marsh is moderately distinctive. Because of the scarcity of tree cover and the wide views, this landscape is sensitive to any changes.

[next >>](#)

ROMNEY MARSH MIXED FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, open, long views.
Agricultural: arable crops, large agricultural buildings.
Clusters of willow and poplar around settlements.
Open, cleared ditches

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The landscape has a unified pattern of elements, but with some visual detractors; transmission towers and agricultural buildings are highly visible in the open landscape. There is a moderate extent of semi-natural habitats as the value of the ditch network is becoming weak in intensively farmed land. Built development has a moderate negative impact; the isolated farms are mostly unremarkable in design and large agricultural buildings are prevalent within farmsteads. The heritage feature of timber fencing is in disuse and there is some unsympathetic recent detailing of bridges and sluices. Traditional pollard willows are also a diminishing feature. The area is considered to be in moderate condition.

Sensitivity

Visibility is very high over the dominant landform, resulting in the high sensitivity of the landscape. The landscape pattern and many features have an historic time depth.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the isolation and infrequency of built form.
Restore a sense of local detail to engineering works such as bridges and sluices.
Conserve the setting and vernacular emphasis of Newchurch.

CONTEXT

Regional: Romney Marsh

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

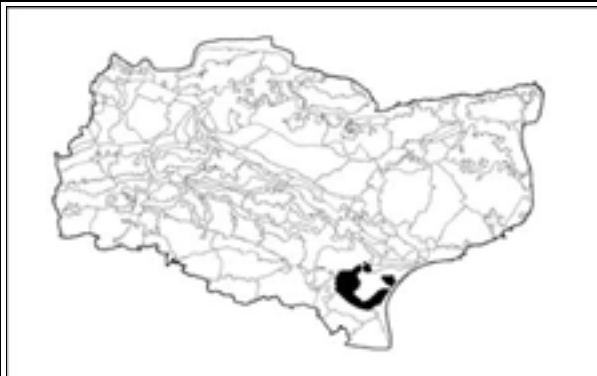
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Conserve the open landscape
Restore a sense of local detail to fencing, bridges and sluices
Restore pollarded willows and poplars associated with settlements
Restore ecological networks and ditches

[previous <<](#)

ROMNEY MARSH SETTLEMENTS



The initial settlements on the marsh grew up on the horseshoe-shaped land which bridged the tidal zone between the old shoreline and the offshore shingle bar.

Most of the Romney Marsh Settlements character area follows the sandier substrata of this older marshland, which was not inundated by the storms of 1287, in contrast to the old marshland south of the Rhee Wall.

To the south, the Rhee Wall is a visual and physical boundary. To the north and east, the area is contained by the old cliff line and the coast, respectively. Views are distantly enclosed by the cliff line and by tree-lined horizons.

The landform is low lying with undulating creek ridges. Field patterns are irregular, and have the appearance of being large due to the lack of immediate enclosure. Farming is predominantly cereals but there are some potatoes, soft fruit and blocks of pasture, especially around Snargate and nearer the old cliff line at Hamstreet.

The pasture often appears very ragged; different colours and textures of grasses grow in patches on old creek ridges and fencing is a mixture of old timber and new metal and wire. In contrast, the arable fields have a uniform appearance and are seasonally variable in colour and movement, although there are still sheep fencing and gates to be seen. Farmsteads are dispersed, mostly single dwellings close to a larger group of big agricultural buildings.

The villages of Burmarsh, St.Mary in the Marsh, and Ivychurch are some of the ancient settlements which sit on the edge of the area, formerly round the edge of an inland lagoon. The circuitous road which links them would have followed the edge of the lagoon. These are very compact, small villages; each centred on a church and sheltered from view, and from the weather, by groups of trees.

Ditches are an integral part of the landscape, some reed fringed, describing straight lines through the middle of fields; many cleared or grazed to the edge of the water level by sheep. Hedgerows are an occasional feature as field and road boundaries, more frequent towards the old cliff line. Roads are tortuous and narrow, following the top of banks and dykes with narrow grass verges and ditches to either side.

Groups of willow remain from the lines of pollard willows which are thought to have been a more widespread feature of the ditch system. Occasional clusters of trees around buildings and in hedgerows give some sense of enclosure, although on a large scale, and the views are still distant.

Running parallel to the northern boundary of the character area is the Royal Military Canal, designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). In some stretches, such as south of Hamstreet, it goes almost unnoticed as the arable crops are taken up to the canal edge. This is in stark contrast to other stretches of the canal which have mature trees and grassy earth banks to emphasise its presence. Bridges, sluices and pumping stations are regular elements all over the character area, but are especially noticeable at junctions around the canal.

The landscape in the Romney settlements is largely unified, despite the introduced seasonal variations of arable cultivation. Its great potential to support wetland habitats is limited by the influence of the current farming methods which are supported by the European Common Agricultural Policy.

The Rhee Wall is a very large distinct earthwork, behind which the landscape of the Romney Settlements sinks. The ditch along the north side of the Rhee Wall is very wide, suggesting that it was the source of material for the earthwork. The sides of the bank itself are grassy with occasional scrub vegetation and are high enough to afford long views over the adjacent farmlands.

[next >>](#)

ROMNEY MARSH SETTLEMENTS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Distinctive lowland with dominant flat landform and drainage ditches.
Remnant willow pollards.
Varied tree lined distant enclosures with distinctive poplars. Narrow roads, ditches either side.
Scattered farmsteads, small villages.
Small bridges and sluices common.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The condition of the area is considered to be high. The landscape elements are unified and there are few detractors in the view. Irregular fields are delineated by ditches and the remote settlements on minor sandy ridges are accentuated by clusters of willow and poplar. The extensive network of ditches has high ecological potential but the habitats are modified by reduced water levels, unsympathetic management and the intensity of arable and pastoral fields. This remote area has a strong cultural integrity. There are few obvious vernacular styles, but the built form has a moderate positive impact.

Sensitivity

This historic landscape is generally distinct and also has some locally distinct elements, such as the churches and sheep fencing. This area is comparatively rural and has fewer recent features than some of the marsh areas. Visibility is very high over the dominant landform.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the ditch network and enhance it by managing water levels to support wildlife habitats and incorporating adjacent banks.
Conserve the wildlife potential in arable and pastoral areas by selecting key areas for sensitive management.
Conserve open views
Conserve clusters of vegetation around settlements, and the isolation of farmsteads and villages.

CONTEXT

Regional: Romney Marsh

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

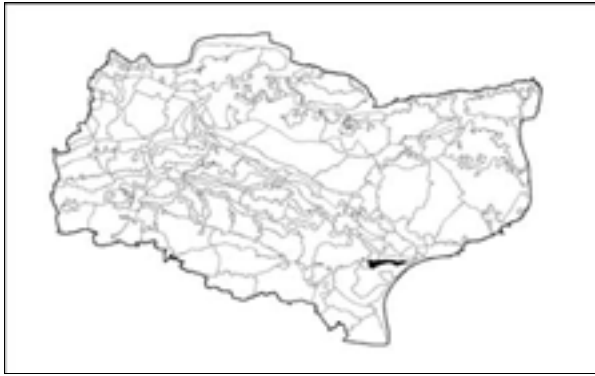
Sensitivity	Very High.
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the ditch network
Conserve wetland habitats
Conserve wildlife potential in arable and pastoral fields

[previous <<](#)



ROMNEY MARSH

The AONB includes a small part of the vast, flat expanse of Romney Marsh, which stretches down to Rye. The name 'Marsh' is misleading, as this area is now highly productive arable land and pasture. Nevertheless, it still retains an extensive network of drainage ditches or 'sewers' which regulate the water table, and support characteristic fringes of feathery reeds between the fields. There are almost no hedges on the Marsh and the occasional scrubby, windblown trees which dot the landscape are largely the result of 19th century attempts to create shelter.

The flatness and remote qualities of the Marsh make it very vulnerable to the intrusive effects of development, which are often worsened by inappropriate measures to conceal the damage, such as conifer shelterbelts.

LYMPNE

The area of the Romney Marsh within the AONB is part of the larger character area of Lympe.

The most southerly part of the AONB extends from Hythe west to Aldington. The character area includes part of the Hythe escarpment, which overlooks Romney Marsh. Until the early Middle Ages, this scarp formed the edge of a large, marshy lagoon. Gradually, however, the lagoon was reclaimed, through a combination of the natural accumulation of silt and shingle, the construction of sea defences and sustained drainage. The resulting land now forms one of the most fertile areas in Kent, with a particularly long growing season.

Most of the Hythe escarpment is the eroded face of the greensands and in particular of the calcareous Kentish ragstone. Over the centuries the surface has gradually slipped to form a steep, uneven slope, enclosing the northern edge of the marsh. The vulnerability of the coast to attack has left a legacy of old military defences scattered across the area, from the tumbled walls of the Roman fort of Lemanis, to the 19th century Royal Military Canal at the foot of the escarpment and the last of the Second World War 'Sound Mirrors' behind Burmarsh, 'listening' for approaching aircraft.

The scarp is highly visible from the flat marsh, forming a long hillside of rough grassland, dotted with scrub. Several large deciduous woodlands break up the sweep of the landform, being more characteristic in the west around Aldington. Between these woodlands, there are spectacular views across Romney Marsh and the English Channel.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Drainage ditches and canal. Reed vegetation.
Flat remote.
Rich arable and pasture.
Scrubby, windblown trees around settlements.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The flat and remote landscape has a coherent pattern of elements but with many visual detractors, although some of these are small scale, such as temporary buildings. The long views permit the intrusion of large scale elements such as lines of pylons. There is a very strong ecological interest, based around the network of ditches and wetlands associated with the canal.

The rural elements of the landscape are strong, but there is a lack of coherence in built form, e.g. bridges and farmhouses, and these have a moderate negative impact on the landscape. This area is considered to be in moderate condition.

Sensitivity

Visibility is high in the open landscape and, although flat, the landform is less dominant due to the varied relief of the adjacent slopes. The historic land pattern traced by ditches and embankments is characteristic, but there are more recent inherent features which define the local character, such as highways, built form and scrub vegetation. The sense of place is relatively weak and the sensitivity of the area is therefore considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the historic landscape pattern by managing ditches so that they retain their visual significance in the landscape.
Conserve the ecological interest by sensitive management of banks and water levels.
Create a sympathetic and coherent design code for built form and engineering details and agricultural built form.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity

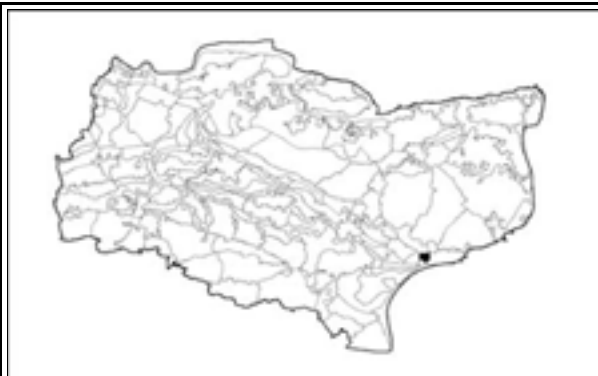
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND CREATE.

Conserve the ecological interest of wetland and ditches within the farmland
Create a design code for built form and its surroundings
Conserve the visual significance of the ditches

[previous <<](#)



SALTWOOD

Around Saltwood, the landscape takes on a more intimate and enclosed character. There is a significant amount of deciduous woodland, especially along the valley sides, and the small pastures are surrounded by dense hedges and hedgerow trees. The towered gatehouse of Saltwood Castle, built in ragstone from former quarries at Hythe, stands in a tiny area of ornamental parkland on the edge of a typical unspoilt valley. These little valleys bring valuable pockets of rural landscape up to the very edge of the town. Further east, however, there are fewer hedges and trees and most field boundaries have been replaced by wire fence. The high, open land above the Sene Valley offers long views across the town and out to sea.

POSTLING VALE

Saltwood lies within the larger character area of the Postling Vale.

Folkestone lies at the most easterly end of the Greensand Belt, on a narrow tongue of land contained by the Downs in the north and the flat expanse of Romney Marsh in the south. These physical constraints have resulted in a considerable amount of activity and development being confined within a small area, on the very edge of the Kent Downs AONB.

The landscape here is dominated by major roads and by the new Channel Tunnel Terminal, all of which are situated on the edge of the AONB between north Folkestone and the Downs. These landscape developments are set against the dramatic backdrop of the steep scarp, which supports botanically rich chalk grassland. A series of remote coombes in the scarp towards Etchinghill overlook the now rare coppiced ash woodland of Asholt Wood. Scrub extends up some of the lower slopes and thick hedges draw attention to the route of the Pilgrim's Way along the scarp foot. Beyond this, the landscape is gently undulating, with large fields and substantial blocks of woodland.

Further south, around the outskirts of Hythe, this open, large-scale landscape gives way to a more intimate countryside of steep stream valleys, small woodlands and pasture. In the west, around Pedlinge, tracts of mixed woodland enclose flat arable fields, which form the edge of a larger area of intensively cultivated farmland, extending beyond the AONB.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Intimate and enclosed valleys.
Deciduous woodland on valley sides.
Small pastures, dense hedgerows.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The landscape features form a coherent pattern which is occasionally interrupted by the loss of hedgerows and the imposition of the motorway corridor on the boundary. Some detracting features can be seen in the view; these reflect the developing use of adjacent areas and the transport corridor. The mixed arable and pastoral landscape is interspersed with a network of woodland clusters, but field boundaries are a vulnerable part of this network. The castle and farm buildings have a strong positive impact on views, promoting a localised vernacular style.

Sensitivity

This historic landscape has some unique elements which contribute to a strong sense of place, mostly associated with the built form. The historic rural details are less distinct, although the woodland is a characteristic feature. Views are intermittent over the land form; visibility is therefore moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore key areas of small scale field pattern in existing open areas where this is appropriate, e.g. at viewpoints and access points.
Conserve the broadleaf woodland cover by sensitive management to ensure a mixed age structure of trees.
Restore distinctive characteristics of the peripheral and estate roads in a consistent approach which defines the area.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity High.

Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

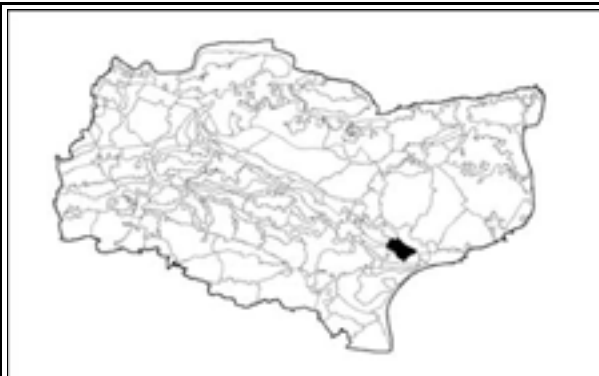
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Conserve woodland cover
Restore areas of dense hedgerow and small scale pastures
Restore the characteristics of the estate roads and peripheral highways

[previous <<](#)

SELLINDGE PLATEAU FARMLANDS



On the Head Brickearths that overlie the often flat plateau of Hythe, Sandgate and Folkestone Beds in this area, deep silty soils have developed that are dominated by cereals, potatoes and other field vegetables. It is a large scale landscape of open fields with the small sprawling settlement of Sellindge and Folkestone racecourse at the centre.

The M20 and the Ashford to Folkestone railway bisect the character area from east to west affecting the landscape aurally over a wide area and causing discontinuities and discordance in the landscape.

South of the A20, around Westenhanger and Moorstock large areas of pasture persist. The land south of the A20 rises up above 70 metres AOD towards the Hythe escarpment with small marshy pasture edging the small streams. The hedgerows are gappy or missing.

North of Sellindge the land again rises as the brickearths cloak the Folkestone Beds below, into a smaller-scale more wooded landscape of pastures, old mineral sites, small lanes and bushy hedgerows. Views extend from the top of the rise at Hyham Hill back to the Downs in the north. Occasional attractive farmsteads of red brick and tile add to the varied rural nature of the scene.

[next >>](#)

SELLINDGE PLATEAU FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat to undulating plateau farmlands on good quality soils. Open arable landscape with pasture locally important on more undulating ground. Small copses and gappy hedgerows on undulating ground.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a fragmented landscape with little clear pattern and many visual detractors associated with road and rail transport corridors and linear development. Agricultural buildings and fences also detract from the view. The area is predominantly covered with intensive arable farmland with very limited potential for natural habitats. The condition of rural heritage features such as tree cover is poor and built form has a high negative impact on the area. Ragstone and brick vernacular buildings are overshadowed by recent built development.

Sensitivity

Historic land patterns are generally obscured or have no real function in the present landscape, with the notable exception of some estate landscape to the north of the character area. The flat landscape is apparent and has long views: visibility is therefore high. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a new framework for this transitional landscape which respects the open, arable use, transport corridors and adjacent small scale character area patterns. Existing built form and settlement edges need to be defined, and the impact of the many visual detractors needs to be controlled.

This landscape presents and opportunity to create new landscape features.

Restore ecological interest to selected areas of arable land by sensitive management.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity Moderate.

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

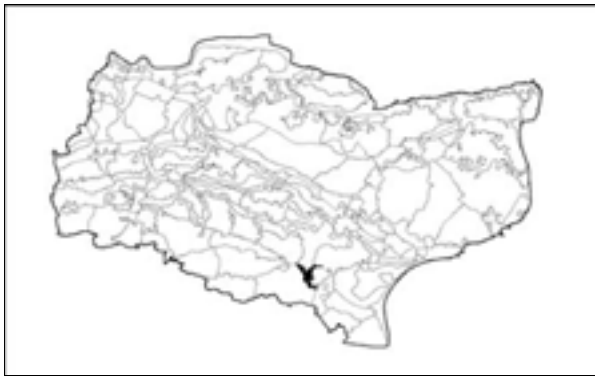
RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create a view landscape framework using small woodland and copses

Create ecological diversity within arable farmland
Restore historical landscape framework in key areas immediately around the remaining farming settlements

Create landscape features to define linear settlements and transport corridors

[previous <<](#)



Shirley Moor is an attached body of floodplain which lies between Tenterden and Appledore. The routes of the Wealden creeks which drained into the Wittersham Levels and thence out onto the marsh are now the main drainage channels in Shirley Moor, known as the Tenterden Sewer and the Cradlebridge Sewer.

The landform within the character area is flat, but has a more undulating appearance due to the gentle hills either side. Woodland and hedgerows on top of the old shoreline, such as Great Heron Wood near Appledore, enclose the flat, ditch-lined fields of the Moor.

In comparison to most other areas of the Marsh, this is a smaller-scale landscape with more hedges and trees, and more immediate enclosure. The fields are large and fairly regular. The trend in the last 30 years has been towards arable cultivation, and the use of the land is now almost wholly arable, creating the appearance of a rural wetland as opposed to a tidal marsh. The area is a large, rolling patchwork of fields with no farm buildings or settlement. Large farm buildings, however, dominate the horizon from neighbouring areas.

Old farmsteads, like Shirley Farm, are located on the edge of the Moor, their former pastures stretching out into the flat plain. There are few roads crossing the area; most skirt the plain, following the edge of the surrounding higher ground. Some older farms still retain a network of weathered timber sheepfolds around the farm buildings, although they are seldom in use.

Within the fields, the ditches are insignificant features, except where the main sewers have reed heads showing above the edge of the banks. There are some scrubby hedgerows along ditches, and isolated oaks along former field boundaries which are now ploughed or neglected.

Single species willow stands occur in patches, such as at the junction of roads and river crossings. The white-green foliage is very distinctive and provides unexpected pools of enclosure in an otherwise open landscape.

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat centre to tidal basin between gently rolling hills.
Open agricultural landscape with patchwork of fields and visually insignificant ditches.
Remnants of sheep farming activities, remnant hedgerows.
Few roads, no settlement.
Willow stands and isolated mature oaks.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The landscape has a coherent pattern of elements within the dished landform. The visual unity is interrupted by the loss of the visual significance of ditches on field boundaries, and the loss of mature vegetation. The few visual detractors involve agricultural silos on the horizon. This is an intensive arable landscape in which the wetland corridors are a weak basis of ecological interest. Rural heritage features of willow stands and mature oaks are limited and over-mature, and are considered to be vulnerable. The condition of the area is considered to be moderate.

Sensitivity

Key characteristics of hedges and ditch field boundaries have become indistinct and do not generally contribute to the sense of place. The landscape pattern is historic, but the historic vegetative features are in decline and the sense of place has become weak. Visibility is moderate as the dished landform is apparent. Views are intermittent and small-scale as a result of small clusters of trees and scrub vegetation obscuring wide views.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Reinforce the routes of natural water courses by allowing woody vegetation to regenerate in corridors along the lines of natural drainage.
Reinforce the visual impact of existing streams by clearing woody growth and managing the ditches and margins to promote diverse marginal vegetation.
Reinforce standard tree planting and hedgerow along the highway and in fields on the upper contours.
Create tree cover on the lower contours, such as willow or poplar plantation.

CONTEXT

Regional: Romney Marsh

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	<u>CREATE & REINFORCE</u>	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

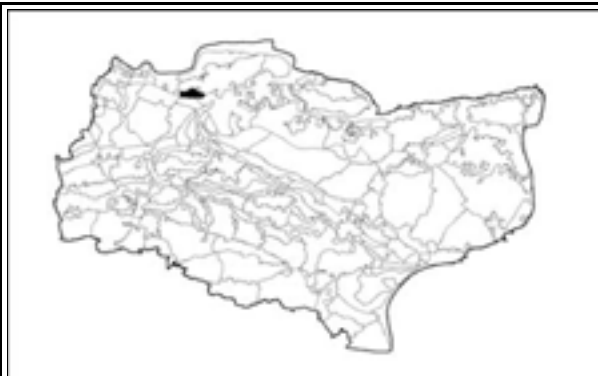
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE AND REINFORCE.

Create woodland on the lower slopes
Reinforce existing hedgerow and standard trees along the highway and upper pastures
Reinforce the sensitive management of existing streams
Allow regeneration of woody vegetation along natural drainage routes

[previous <<](#)



The character area of Shorne is essentially a wooded ridge within a flatter rural setting that has been severed from the more extensive landscape of similar character to the south by the A2 road corridor. This is a discrete tract of landscape lying between the extensive built-up areas of Rochester and Gravesend. It is bounded to the north by open arable farmland of the Hoo Peninsula.

The extent of woodland is the key distinguishing feature in combination with the ridge landform. This significant landform feature provides an attractive backdrop to views from the north.

The settlements of Shorne and Shorne Ridgeway are spread out along the minor roads running north and east through this area. Much of this residential ribbon development is absorbed by existing woodland and therefore does not have an extensive influence. This area has a distinctly rural character.

Geology has a significant influence on the grain of the landform. Bands of Oldhaven, Woolwich and Blackheath Beds, Thanet beds and chalk run in the same direction as the predominant ridge landform which runs in a south westerly to north westerly direction through its landscape context.

The predominant landcover is deciduous woodland dissected by the linear settlement of Shorne/Shorne Ridgeway. The woodland is bounded by agricultural land, generally under arable cultivation with some pasture, and orchards. A quarry is located on the fringe of Randall Wood.

All but a few small blocks of woodland are designated for their nature conservation value. Shorne and Great Crabbles Wood are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as well as being listed on the Ancient Woodland Inventory Court and Starmore Woods are designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs). All the above woods are also listed on the Ancient Woodland Inventory. Such recognition clearly indicates that woodland is a key nature conservation resource in this area as well as being a significant landscape feature.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Wooded ridge isolated by A2. Rural with significant woodland.
Well-contained with orchards. Open, agricultural land at fringes, lack of definition, loss of hedgerows, neglected land.
Residential ribbon dev. and hard urban edge

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The few visual detractors in the landscape are associated with the motorway and approaches. Otherwise, the landscape elements are coherent, dominated by the wooded ridge. The semi-natural habitat extends from the woodland into coppice within the farmland, but there is some loss of hedgerow links in the peripheral arable land. Heritage landscape elements which are associated with the farmland are in decline, but the woodland and built development have a positive effect on the landscape.
This area is considered to be in a good condition.

Sensitivity

Views are generally enclosed due to the high proportion of woodland in the landscape - visibility is considered to be very low over the unremarkable landform. Other elements, apart from the woodland, do not contribute greatly to the distinctiveness of the area, and the overall sense of place is weak. Historic settlements have some distinguishing features, but recent development has little local distinction.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The dominance of the woodland and the ecological interest of this feature may be reinforced by creating woodland links within existing arable areas.
Reinforce the character of historic settlements by controlling highway approaches into villages and creating sympathetic designs to fringe development, and sympathetic treatment to built form and highway detail within the historic core.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Very Low.

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Very Low.

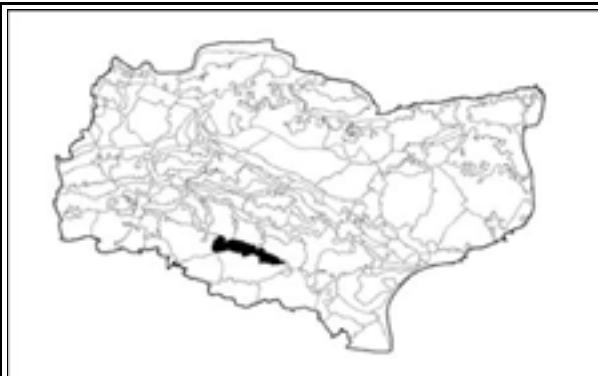
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

REINFORCE.

Reinforce the ecological interest of the woodland, and reinforce woodland links throughout the farmland.
Reinforce the character of historic settlements.
Reinforce the external elements of the historic cores to settlements.

[previous <<](#)

SISSINGHURST WOODED FARMLANDS



Sissinghurst Wooded Farmlands lies between the Teise Valley, Staplehurst and Headcorn Pastures, Biddenden and High Halden Wooded Farmlands of the Low Weald, and the Cranbrook, Oxney and Kent Fruit Belt areas of the High Weald.

This area shows a varied topography between 30 to 100 metres above sea level. It is gently undulating with some open views northwards to the Low Weald. Towards the east, approaching Tenterden, the terrain becomes more undulating and enclosed, with very few long views.

On the upper slopes, enclosure is sustained by areas of woodland around the small to medium-sized fields of rough grassland and pasture. Grazing and horse pasture are the dominant land uses. Larger, more open, undulating fields on lower slopes are generally used for arable production. The traditional orchards of this area are in decline, however some hop production persists on the upper slopes.

Other characteristic features include numerous field ponds and large tracts of broadleaf woodland and coniferous plantation. There are extensive tracts of mixed woodland across the slopes and isolated patches of mature coppice woodlands on upper slopes.

Most internal field boundaries are post and wire fencing. However, mature hedgerows with strong form are found along the winding lanes around Tenterden. Mature hedgerow trees are an important element. Shelterbelts are a feature around existing and former hop fields.

Settlements are small, and mainly situated on the flatter land, above slopes, where the landscape is more open. However, there are dispersed settlements, or individual properties scattered along roads and narrow winding lanes. This is traditionally an area of isolated farmsteads and small settlements in wooded clearings.

Roadside verges are noticeably wider along some of the larger lanes.

[next >>](#)

SISSINGHURST WOODED FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Multicoloured enclosed patchwork of fields, well-wooded. Long views to greensand. Small scale hops and orchards, oasts and weatherboarded barns. Slopes to north from ridge, undulating into wooded ghylls and enclosed pastures.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a strongly unified landscape with a small scale patchwork of hedged fields combined with a heavily wooded backdrop on an undulating landform. Woodland and the occasional plantation is interspersed with pastures, orchards and hop gardens, and some arable land. Narrow wooded roads have no verges. There are relatively few visual detractors which include prefabricated farm buildings and post and rail fencing replacing hedgerows. The area has a strong functional integrity with a strong network of ecologically important woodland corridors, streams, and only a moderate intensity of land use. Hedgerows form a strong network and heritage features include a possible deer park, Sissinghurst Castle and Garden, and many attractive traditional buildings such as oast houses, manor houses, mills and barns with local vernacular dwellings in Kent peg tiles or weatherboarding. Built development has a positive impact. The condition of the landscape is very high.

Sensitivity

Sense of place is very well developed with characteristic features such as hop gardens (sadly in decline), orchards, ancient oak standard woodland and chestnut coppice, hedgerow trees, large specimen mature oaks and species-rich ancient hedgerows. Sissinghurst Castle, with its famous gardens and unique literary association, and the wealth of characteristic historic buildings add to the distinctiveness of the landscape. The ancient origins of the landscape are displayed in sunken lanes winding through ancient woodlands and the irregular hedged field boundaries adjoining them. Visibility is low, with the landform apparent but balanced by the enclosing tree cover. Overall, the sensitivity is moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the ancient woodland and the hedgerow framework through suitable management, especially to maintain the ecological diversity.
Reinforce hedgerows through suitable replanting in gaps by traditional management such as hedge-laying.
Conserve the historic buildings and reinforce their impact by ensuring that any new developments respect their setting, are sensitively designed, and use local materials such as Kent peg tiles and weatherboarding. Resist the effects of suburbanisation and offer design guidance for the conversion of redundant buildings to appropriate uses.
Conserve the character of farms by encouraging the restoration of existing buildings and the careful design, siting and screening of new farm buildings where existing buildings cannot be used.
Protect distinctive standard oaks and plant new ones as future successors.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald/High Weald Appe

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very Strong.

Sensitivity

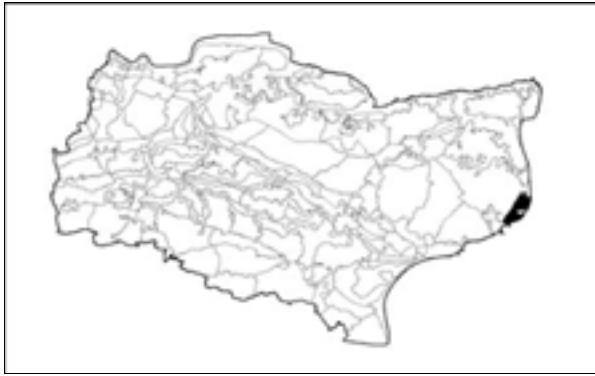
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve ancient woodland and hedges.
Reinforce hedges and maintain traditionally
Conserve historic buildings
Resist suburbanisation and offer guidance on re-use of existing buildings
Conserve the character of farms
Protect distinctive standard oaks and plant successors

[previous <<](#)



SOUTH FORELAND

Rearing straight up out of the English Channel, the 'White Cliffs of Dover' form one of the country's most famous landmarks. Behind the cliffs, the landscape of this small, separate pocket of the AONB epitomises the windswept Channel coastline of the imagination - tufts of windblown thorn and scrub cling to the edges of the huge, rolling fields and the landscape is dominated by the vast horizons of sea and sky.

Edward Hasted, writing in the 1790s, described the area around West Cliffe thus:

"The height and continuance of the hills and the depth and spacious width of the valleys, added to a wildness of nature, which is a leading feature throughout this part of the country, contribute altogether to its pleasantness; and the variety of prospects, as well over the adjoining country, as the sea, and the coast of France beyond it, are very beautiful."

The gentle valleys which furrow the landscape between Dover and Kingsdown still show the pattern of enclosure, much of which was imposed upon the landscape in the 19th century. Before then, the landscape was largely one of unenclosed downland or arable fields. Modern farming, with its lack of need for hedges and trees, is beginning to return this character to the landscape, leaving only occasional overgrown hedges to contain and emphasise the openness.

The sparse tree cover and the rolling, open countryside allow landmarks such as Dover Castle, St. Margaret's Lighthouse and the cliff-top War Memorial to stand out. It also results in a landscape which is very vulnerable to any form of development. The radio masts, which tower above Broadlees Bottom, dominate the locality, drawing the eye to the clutter of wires and sheds which surround them. These structures lack even the softening effect of the scrub and windblown trees that traditionally surround the scattered farm buildings in this area.

The South Foreland Heritage Coast lies between Kingsdown and Dover and, despite the intensive agriculture, still contains some strips of ecologically rich chalk grassland and scrub along the cliff tops. These areas are not only important for their scientific interest but also form a major contribution to the sense of naturalness of this small undeveloped stretch of coastline.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

White Cliffs of Dover. Exposed hilltop, open, rolling cultivated fields.
Landmarks visible. Vast horizons of sea and sky.
Sparse tree cover.
19th century enclosure pattern breaking down.
Radio masts intrude into views.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The pattern of elements is coherent, with open cliff top views of landmarks such as Dover Castle and the lighthouse, and large rolling fields with a windswept feel with low thin remnant hedgerows and patches of scrub. Visual detractors include radio masts and sheds, the Dover Harbour Approach Road and the holiday camp at St. Margaret's Bay. The ecological integrity is moderate with only sparse hedgerows and scrub, and narrow bands of cliff top chalk grassland, increasingly subject to encroaching arable cultivation. Field boundaries are in decline, being sparse and overgrown. Built development consists of unremarkable scattered brick built farmhouses in the valleys with associated trees around.

Sensitivity

Distinctiveness is fairly well expressed but in decline. The ecologically rich chalk grasslands, the huge white chalk sea cliffs and the views of the unique Dover Castle, together with sunken roads with hawthorn hedges, are the most distinctive elements with at least an historic or ancient time depth. The landform is dominant but tree cover is largely open. Sensitivity is therefore high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore a network of hedgerows, concentrating on the roadside and other existing strands to create a bolder landscape pattern and create linking corridors for wildlife.
Encourage larger areas of species-rich chalk grasslands on the cliff top edge.
Conserve pockets of scrub and trees, and recreate similar scrubby pockets to at least soften the impact of sheds and wireless masts.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Very High.

Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Very Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

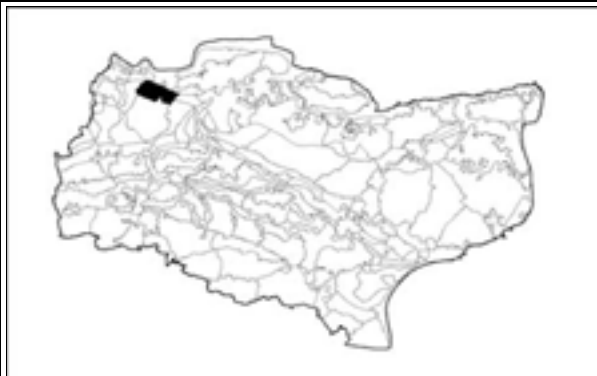
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE.

Restore a new bold network of hedges to create wildlife links
Encourage species-rich grassland
Conserve and recreate scrubby vegetation to screen intrusions

[previous <<](#)

SOUTHFLEET ARABLE LANDS



This local landscape area forms part of the county-wide character area of the North Kent Agricultural Belt developed on the good quality soils of the sands, gravels and clays of the Tertiary Beds overlying the chalk. It is a mix of flat and undulating landform which is sloping generally towards the Thames estuary at Gravesend and Dartford from the edge of the Darenth Downs at Betsham.

On the remnant wooded hill-tops the lanes are deeply cut and old villages such as Betsham nestle in a seemingly tranquil rural landscape. Elsewhere, the landscape is more open with a mix of remnant orchards and a few shelterbelts, but increasingly the landcover is a mix of cabbages and arable crops. The flatter land is particularly open with many hedgerows removed or neglected.

This openness results in the busy A2(T) dominating both visually and audibly over a wide area extending into the northern tip of the Ash Downs. Elsewhere, in the elevated, wooded farmlands to the east of the area, it is the noise that is the most intrusive and detracting element. Some attractive views looking back towards the Downs can be seen from this higher land.

North of Southfleet, the landscape is heavily influenced by transmission lines and development on the rises at Northfleet and the Gravesend suburbs. With many hedges removed, the arable fields, old windbreaks and roadside lighting all stand out. Southfleet and Hook Green retain their tiny vernacular centres, partly due to their conservation status, but a gradual clutter of 20th century development has spread out along the lanes.

Before the 6th century the North Kent Agricultural Belt was substantially forested, although much of the good quality soils were subsequently cleared and cultivated. By the 1960's most of the land north of the railway line was a mix of arable land combined with a high percentage of orchard around Betsham and south-west of Green Street Green. By 1990, the arable land had grown at the expense of the orchard, which has almost disappeared.

The Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) is located adjacent to the A2, skirting Gravesend, before swinging north to travel under the Thames. This has resulted in a trapped section of land (termed the 'sandwich land') between the road and the rail-link. A spur route down the disused railway linking Gravesend to the Longfield line passes close to Southfleet and Betsham. The rail link impacts on these communities on the eastern boundary of this character area.

[next >>](#)

SOUTHFLEET ARABLE LANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Good quality soils developed on the Tertiary Beds overlying the chalk. A generally open arable landscape.
Open landscape allowing transport routes, pylons and settlement to dominate many areas. Remnant unkept hedgerows, shelterbelts and woodland copses giving a scruffy and unmanaged feel.
Long views to the busy A2 (T) and Kent Thames-side beyond

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a coherent landscape where the large-scale rural land use reflects the good quality soils. There are, however, many visual detractors which dominate the view, such as transmission pylons, trunk road, and CTRL. Remnant rural heritage features such as hedgerows, orchards and shelterbelts are few and are in poor condition. The 20th century development of historic village edges gives a high negative impact on the view. This area is considered to be weak ecologically - there is much intense arable cultivation which is relieved only by minimal, unmanaged patches of remnant hedgerow. The condition of this area is considered to be very poor.

Sensitivity

The undulating landform is apparent in the open views over the landscape area. Visibility is therefore high.
The main inherent characteristics which make up the landscape pattern have become indistinct. The historic features of hedgerow enclosure and the more recent shelterbelts are now indistinct elements of the landscape. Building forms on the edge of settlements do not contribute to local distinctiveness and there is very little time-depth to the landscape's current dominant features. The routes of established highways, which are considered to be of ancient origin, no longer have a great impact on the landscape.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

This is a large-scale landscape which has become fragmented with redundant and diverse elements, and denuded of characteristic features. It requires simplification, but also acknowledgment of new functions.
Create a large-scale landscape based on large blocks of woodland and large blocks of arable cultivation. Create ecologically-rich corridors along transport routes. Create an urban edge which restores some characteristic enclosure features, using appropriate species which may be innovative.
Restore the impact of the original highway network, creating appropriate management plans to restore 'managed' characteristics to the landscape.

CONTEXT

Regional: North West Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

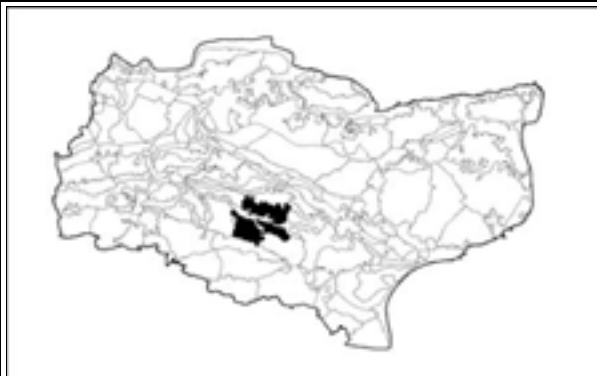
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create a simplified pattern within the landscape using large blocks of woodland, large areas of arable fields
Create an edge to the urban area - restore some enclosure, using characteristic rural features
Create functional agricultural features
Create ecologically rich corridors
Restore the positive impact of historic highway features
Restore open and controlled views across open farmland

[previous <<](#)

STAPLEHURST-HEADCORN PASTURELANDS



This is an extensive character area from Staplehurst in the west to Smarden in the east of mainly flat land, extending northwards to where the land starts to swell as it rises up towards the Greensand. Although this landscape is substantially flat it provides a varied and enclosed landscape of intimate beauty characterised by small to medium sized fields produced by a strong pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, mainly oak. A striking characteristic feature of the area is the numerous small field ponds, often fringed with willow, especially south of Smarden, where they are found in nearly every field.

The sparse network of tranquil lanes, a legacy of the old drover's routes leading north-east to south-west to the High Weald, weave around this pattern of fields. They are usually broad-verged with flowery ditches patterned with ladies smock and primroses in the spring or fringed with rushes and sedges. Many are of high nature conservation value. Occasional small broadleaf copses add to the wooded, intimate scale of the landscape.

The land use is typically one of sheep-grazed pasture, with arable farming locally important. The landscape opens out north of Frittenden, however, with more substantial open fields of arable and improved pasture. This pattern is also repeated around Headcorn, notably east of Waterlane Farm and around Summerhill Farm, where the hedgerows have been removed or replaced by post and wire.

Near Headcorn the pattern is disturbed by the Weald golf course's uncharacteristic bunds, and other schemes have changed the rural pattern. Concern is mounting that some of these diversification projects will fail leaving the land neglected.

The settlement pattern is again traditionally dispersed, being one of historic farmsteads and small hamlets. The most prominent villages, Staplehurst and Headcorn, with their vernacular centres, have been enlarged by the coming of the railway in the 19th century, with further linear, suburban growth developing earlier this century along the A229 and A274 respectively.

Despite these local areas of intrusion, most of the area has a tranquil and forgotten atmosphere with an intimate pattern of fields and lanes.

[next >>](#)

STAPLEHURST-HEADCORN PASTURELANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, low lying and wet, small scale intimate landscape of pastoral farming. Small to medium sized fields enclosed by hedgerow and hedgerow trees. Numerous field ponds. Winding historic lanes, broad verges and flowery ditches. Dispersed settlement including historic farmsteads and villages.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a coherent landscape in which the scale of the dispersed settlement and the relationship of the flat, sometimes watery landform to the landscape elements is apparent, but becoming less definite as the small-scale fruit/pastoral field system encompasses wider arable or more intensive pastoral use. Built development has a positive impact, but the condition of heritage features such as internal field boundaries is variable. Hedgerow remains intact along highways which have additional interest along the very wide grassy verges. Woodland cover is considered to be particularly poor, but in general the landscape is considered to be in good condition.

Sensitivity

This area is considered to be of low sensitivity. The unremarkable landform is not a dominant part of the view: visibility is moderate because it is an open landscape. The distinctiveness of the historic landscape is due very much to the importance of the rural landscape features and the seasonal importance of roadside flora, and as many of these are either in decline, or dependent on sensitive management, the sense of place has become weak.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

As the landscape is considered to be in good condition, the characteristic features require reinforcement to retain and enhance the local distinctiveness. The continuity of small-scale historic field patterns may be reinforced where it is appropriate to land use such as small-scale pastoral enclosures.

The small-scale enclosure may also be effected by the encouragement of woodland regeneration in naturalistic form along wetlands.

The ecological interest of the area may be reinforced by enhancing the management of existing wetlands and by the less intensive management of grasslands and pastures. Large, mature trees are a characteristic feature of hedgerows and the occurrence of these should be reinforced in field boundaries and along highways.

The perception of the landscape structure may also be enhanced by specific management plans for drainage ditches and roadside verges to increase their habitat potential.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Low.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

REINFORCE.

Reinforce the ecological interest by enhancing the wildlife potential of wetlands, grasslands and ditches

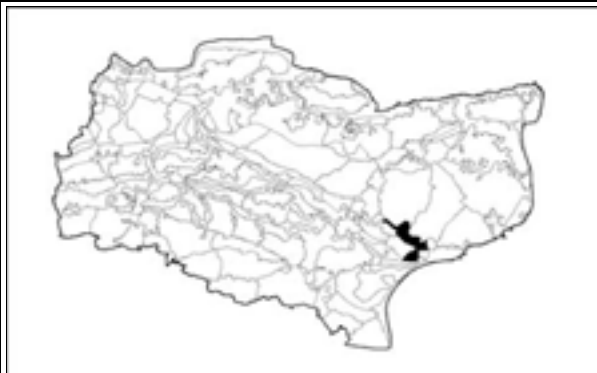
Reinforce the landscape structure by managing drainage ditches and wide verges to provide a full seasonal range of flora, and maintaining dense, tall hedgerows

Reinforce existing areas of small-scale landscape Encourage the regeneration of small-scale woodland in naturalistic form along existing wetlands

Reinforce the occurrence of large mature trees within hedged field boundaries and highways

Reinforce small scale pastoral use

[previous <<](#)



STOWTING

West of Tolsford Hill and Summerhouse Hill is a more open, intensively farmed agricultural landscape, which extends out of the AONB towards Ashford. Large arable fields are surrounded by small shaws or overgrown hedges or by trimmed remnant hedges. Although the scarp is largely grassland, there are occasional blocks of deciduous woodland on the top, such as Postling Wood or Brockman's Bushes on Tolsford Hill. These distinctive features draw the eye away from scarp-foot developments such as the motorways, and provide a means of orientation in the landscape. In the west, towards Brabourne, the scarp becomes shallower and some areas have been cultivated. This has marred the characteristic 'natural' appearance of the eastern slopes, which is further compromised by gradual ribbon development and pockets of suburbanisation along the scarp foot.

In contrast, the flat farmland around Pedlinge is broken up by large blocks of woodland and small ditches. A significant amount of hedgerow loss has occurred in this area and windblown trees straggle along the overgrown channels.

POSTLING VALE

Stowting lies within the larger character area of the Postling Vale.

Folkestone lies at the most easterly end of the Greensand Belt, on a narrow tongue of land contained by the Downs in the north and the flat expanse of Romney Marsh in the south. These physical constraints have resulted in a considerable amount of activity and development being confined within a small area, on the very edge of the Kent Downs AONB.

The landscape here is dominated by major roads and by the new Channel Tunnel Terminal, all of which are situated on the edge of the AONB between north Folkestone and the Downs. These landscape developments are set against the dramatic backdrop of the steep scarp, which supports botanically rich chalk grassland. A series of remote coombes in the scarp towards Etchinghill overlook the now rare coppiced ash woodland of Asholt Wood. Scrub extends up some of the lower slopes and thick hedges draw attention to the route of the Pilgrim's Way along the scarp foot. Beyond this, the landscape is gently undulating, with large fields and substantial blocks of woodland.

Further south, around the outskirts of Hythe, this open, large-scale landscape gives way to a more intimate countryside of steep stream valleys, small woodlands and pasture. In the west, around Pedlinge, tracts of mixed woodland enclose flat arable fields, which form the edge of a larger area of intensively cultivated farmland, extending beyond the AONB.

[next >>](#)

STOWTING: POSTLING VALE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Relatively open. Intensively farmed, grass-scarp slopes and wooded hilltops. Motorway and ribbon development at foot of scarp on edge of area.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This landscape has a coherent pattern of elements with very few detracting features. Ecologically, rich grasslands and small woodlands combine with the open arable fields at the scarp foot to give a moderate ecological value to the area. Rural heritage features - woodland, hedges, small villages - are in good condition, built development in general has a moderate positive impact on the area. The landscape has strong cultural links.

Sensitivity

The landform is a dominant element of the view and visibility is very high over the open landscape. There is an historic time depth to landscape elements and landscape pattern, although field boundaries are becoming indistinct. The rounded chalk hills contribute to the sense of place which is also influenced by characteristic woodland, beech stands and cross contour roads. Built form is a less distinct element of the landscape. This is considered to be a highly sensitive landscape.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve existing woodland on hilltops.
Conserve views of the dominant landform.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity

Very High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

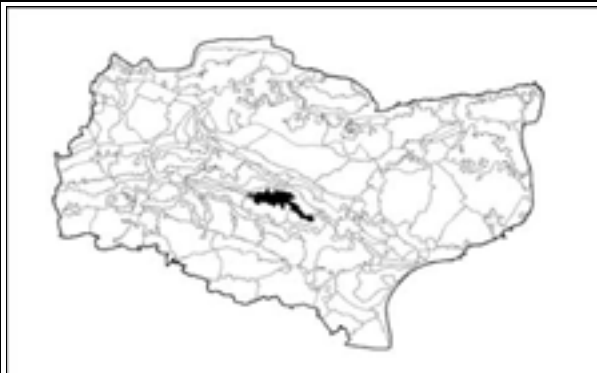
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve existing woodland on hilltops.
Conserve views of the dominant landform.

[previous <<](#)

SUTTON VALENCE TO PLUCKLEY MIXED FARMLANDS



This is a gently undulating or distinctly inclined landscape, stretching from Sutton Valence in the west to beyond Mundy Bois in the east on the boundary with the Greensand Ridge. These south west facing farmlands are dominated by the steep, often densely wooded Greensand scarp to the north.

The mixed farmlands consist mainly of improved pasture but orchards are locally important. The effect is of a well managed sheep-grazed landscape. Occasionally abandoned traditional orchards break with this pattern, with their remnant windbreaks giving a fragmented and rather forlorn appearance.

There is a strong hedgerow pattern in places, albeit these are sometimes tall and unkempt, but where lost on the lower, flatter, slopes around Mundy Bois, for instance, an open landscape with a denuded feel results. Beyond Grafty Green are some areas of very intensive agriculture of mainly open fields where the lack of woodland on the ridge above adds to the sense of openness. At Pluckley Thorne this lack of woodland leaves exposed to view the village development that has encroached on the ridgeline. There has been a spread of dull 20th century housing, generally, around the small settlements along the scarp foot.

Where the intimate pattern of enclosed fields is intact, wide-verged lanes, of high historic and landscape value, with flowery ditches at their margins enhance the scene.

These have evolved from the old sheep drove roads that crossed the Greensand Ridge to the north en route from Teynham and the Faversham Road. The broad width of the verges in the clay vale derives from the constant need to move the route sideways as the unsurfaced tracks disintegrated into muddy quagmires.

A distinctive feature of most of this local character area is the spectacular rural views from the valeside back over the flatter areas of the Low Weald.

[next >>](#)

SUTTON VALENCE TO PLUCKLEY MIXED FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating or sloping landform. Enclosed to north by Greensand ridge with extensive views to the south.
Mixed farmland including sheep-grazing and remnant orchards, shelterbelts and hedgerows.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There are few detractors in this tranquil, rural landscape. The landscape elements of tall hedgerows and shelterbelts are intact and enclose a variety of low-intensity agricultural uses. The area is visually encompassed by the Greensand Ridge to the north.
The intact hedgerow network links with pastures and small copses to form a strong network of semi-natural habitats. Built development also has a positive impact. The cultural integrity of this area appears intact - landscape features have a purpose in the current use of the land, and settlements reflect the rural use of the area. The overall condition is considered to be very good.

Sensitivity

The historic time-depth of the area is a dominant factor in the local distinctiveness. The historic features are characteristic but not considered to be rare in the Kent landscape, and therefore evoke a moderate sense of place. Key characteristics of mature standard oak and orchards are vulnerable and becoming indistinct. Although overlooked by the Greensand Ridge, the landform within the landscape character area is unremarkable with intermittent tree enclosure. Visibility is therefore low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

As the condition of the landscape is very good, it is the continuity of the landscape which may be reinforced to maintain and enhance local distinctiveness.
Reinforce the incidence and management of broadleaf woodland which will maintain the sense of enclosure
Reinforce the highway characteristics of wide verges and tall hedges
Reinforce local detail in built development and in settlement patterns, ensuring that settlement relates to existing landscape features i.e.. reinforce the rural nature of the landscape and resist suburban features
Reinforce rural tranquillity and the emphasis on a variety of non-intensive agricultural land uses.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity Low.

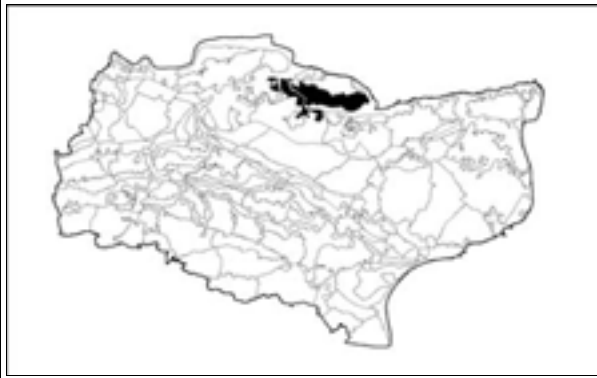
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

REINFORCE.

Reinforce and replant small patches of broadleaf woodland
Reinforce historic landscape patterns
Reinforce wide verges and tall hedges
Reinforce sympathetic detail and scale within built development
Reinforce rural tranquillity

[previous <<](#)



The Swale estuary separates the Isle of Sheppey from the mainland and is flanked on either side by extensive coastal marshes. Despite localised differences in landscape character, the essential marshland character prevails throughout, epitomised by open, flat grazing land with broad skies, few landscape features and an overriding sense of remoteness, wildness and exposure. The Swale Marshes have a predominantly agricultural and particularly tranquil, unspoilt character in contrast with the Medway and Thames Marshes which are more heavily influenced by industry.

Landform and geology have a profound influence on the character of the marshes which, having been formed from marine alluvial deposits, have a distinctively flat relief. Localised outcrops of chalk or London Clay produce landform features (e.g. the Isle of Harty) which have a prominence out of proportion to their modest relief.

A thin ribbon of tidal saltmarsh persists along the outer edges of the Swale Marshes but the traditional landcover of this area is coastal grazing marsh. The rough grassland of the grazing marshes is patterned by a complex system of natural and man-made drainage dykes and fleets which provide a water supply for stock. There is virtually no tree cover and the landscape is generally devoid of features, placing a greater significance on the presence of grazing animals and wetland birds.

More recently, extensive areas of the Swale grazing marshes have been converted to arable cultivation. This results in the loss of the characteristic drainage patterns, removing livestock and wildlife interest and simplifying the textures and colours of the marshland landscape. Localised industrial development has had a direct impact on the marshes in certain areas (e.g. Kemsley) but exerts a much wider influence in long-distance views across the flat, open marshes in certain parts of the Swale.

The grazing marshes, dykes, saltmarshes and mudflats of the Swale are designated as a site of special scientific interest and provide a habitat for internationally significant numbers of wetland birds, qualifying for designation as a wetland of international significance under the Ramsar Convention and under the EC Birds Directive. Extensive areas of marshland on Sheppey are managed by nature conservation organisations, including the RSPB and English Nature, which owns and manages part of the area as a National Nature Reserve.

There is evidence of Iron Age and Roman occupation on the southern part of Sheppey, but this would appear to be fairly sparse. There is also evidence of extensive Roman salt workings and pottery industry at Chetney Marshes whilst the Medieval period the eastern parts of Sheppey became important for their salt workings, the remains of which can still be seen today. St. Thomas Church on the Isle of Harty dates from 1200 and is considered to be the remotest church in Kent.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Coastal marsh with isolated low hilly outcrops.
Remote, wild and isolated. Fleet, creeks and marshland vegetation. Grazing animals and birds.
Extensive areas of cultivated marsh, few features.
Intrusive buildings and industry, infilling of creeks/ditches.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The coastal and cultivated marsh is strongly unified with a recurrent irregular pattern of open grassland, ditches and wetland. Visual detractors such as the development at Ridham Dock are generally large scale but appear few in the wide view and are mainly due to unsympathetic farm buildings, overhead cables or the industrial and urban skyline. The marshes themselves remain tranquil and inaccessible. The network of ditches, creeks, marsh and wetland form a notable ecological base which is linked with other important natural habitats in North Kent. Settlement is limited to historic locations on small hills, although the built form generally has a moderately negative impact. The general condition of the area is very good.

Sensitivity

Views are extremely wide across the open landscape and the extent of the flat landscape is a very dominant feature. Visibility is therefore considered to be very high in this area. Species associations within the natural habitat are recognised as unique or rare features. In addition, the structural form and existence of the island crossing is a locally distinctive and uniquely significant feature within the landscape. Other characteristics such as the landform of reclaimed marshland, are historic; it is their extent which contributes to local distinctiveness.
High visibility and the high importance of natural habitats combine to make this an area of very high sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the openness, inaccessibility and tranquillity of the landscape, resisting the introduction of any additional built-form to the view.
Retain existing long views and existing undeveloped skyline.
Conserve the pattern of sparse settlement, maintaining or reducing the visual emphasis of built form within the landscape area and maintaining areas of undeveloped land intact.
Maintain the simplicity of the landscape and of forms within the landscape.
Conserve the importance of existing unique and locally distinctive structures.
Conserve natural habitats by supporting the sensitive management of ditches and grassland and promoting the value of these within the island.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity

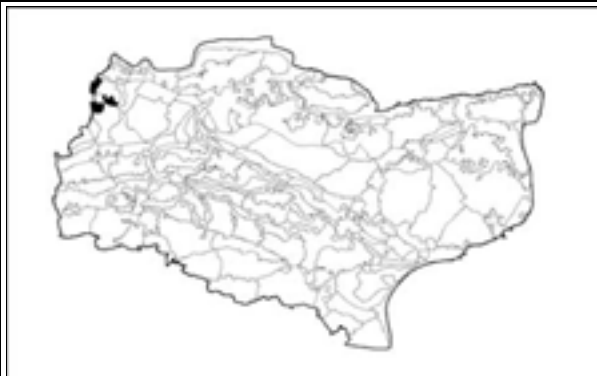
Sensitivity	Very High.
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the existing sparse settlement patterns
Conserve existing open areas intact and retain long views
Conserve natural and cultivated grassland habitats
Conserve saltmarsh

[previous <<](#)



This character area includes land between 60 to 100 metres to the west of the River Darent on the sands, gravels and clays of the Tertiary Beds. It extends westwards over the boundary into the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley down to the Cray Valley, but within Kent it includes the area from Joydens Wood south to Swanley and Crockenhill, and East to Farningham Wood. The good quality soils have led to intensive cultivation, as in the Southfleet area, but there are also remnants of extensive ancient or ancient replanted woodlands at Joydens and Farningham Woods and those north of Hook Green.

The landscape is greatly affected by the proximity to London, contributing to the dominance of roads, such as the A20(T) and M25, and suburban influences in the development of the residential settlements of Joydens Wood and Hextable and the enlargement of Crockenhill and Swanley.

The lane from the A20 to Swanley Village is enclosed with vegetation and intensely rural but then opens out below Farningham Wood to allow noisy intrusion from the M25. Swanley Village has an attractive but tired centre that merges at its edges with bland urban development. Swanley is barely separated from Crockenhill by the A20(T). Although at one time this area was characterised by fruit growing as part of the economy, the few remaining orchards are neglected and will undoubtedly be grubbed up.

Towards Joydens Wood too, there were many orchards but these are now all gone. The land south of the wood is now a golf course. Innovatively, fruit trees have been used as a screen at the roadside. Excellent views of Joydens Wood can be had from the A20(T) and B2173. An ancient earthwork, thought to date from about AD 450, called the Faesten Dyke runs through the wood.

More recently, the Joydens Wood Estate has been carved out of the woodland and is a mix of residential styles, materials and sizes, but with bungalows predominating.

Much of the woodland has heathy plant associations, such as ling, tormentil, broom and gorse, developed on the sands and gravels of the Blackheath Beds that overlie the chalk. This creates a very distinct woodland character with dark edges and understorey, and contrastingly light overhead canopy of foliage, especially where there is a predominance of oak and birch.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Good quality soils leading to intensive cultivation including orchards in the past.
Several ancient and broadleaf woodlands with heathy character.
Substantial suburban and transport influence.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The pattern of this landscape is coherent, with wooded ridges to hilltops and hedged roads outlining large arable fields. However, the irregular field pattern of the former varied agricultural and fruit-growing landscape is well into decline, and there are many detracting features associated with suburban land uses, urban development, road junctions and the loss of elm hedges. There is substantial ecological interest in the ancient and replanted woodland, some of which has a distinctive heathy character due to acid soils. Otherwise, the functional integrity of the existing landscape is low as the emphasis on agricultural and settlement patterns decline and intensive arable cultivation or neglected land become prevalent.

Sensitivity

The landform is not a dominant feature in the Swanley Fringe, and the sensitivity of the area is further reduced by the effect of intermittent tree cover. There are few distinct historic landscape features - much of the landscape is overlain with recent features such as road corridor planting, built development and suburban land uses. Tall, hedged roads are still a feature, but many contain dead elm. The ridgeline woodland retains a strong time-depth.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The landscape pattern no longer reflects the use of the land. Positive landscape elements need to evolve which enhance the setting of residential settlements, provide for amenity uses and realise the ecological potential of the natural conditions. More distinctive vegetation is required to replace the effect which elms would formerly have had on the landscape.
Create small pockets of diverse horticultural and amenity use around settlements on the good quality soils, providing enclosure with small copses.
Recreate woodlands on higher land, especially on sandy soils, using the distinctive local mix of species.
Create an open, large scale agricultural landscape on undulating land between settlements.
Widen ecological corridors associated with the transport network and create rich ecological habitats along these such as grasslands or scrub vegetation.

CONTEXT

Regional: North West Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

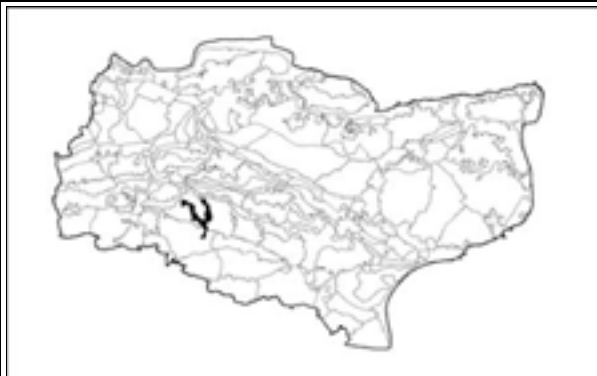
Sensitivity	Very Low.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create an enclosed, rural setting for settlements
New landscape to reflect amenity uses, transport needs
Create and extend woodland
Create habitats along transport corridor landscape

[previous <<](#)



A narrow Y-shaped character area created by the alluviums of the two channels of the River Teise from close to Laddingford and Horsmonden, down to the confluence with the Beult near Benover. Here a landscape of open arable fields and horticultural crops has evolved, with residual tall poplar or alder shelterbelts at the margins marking the position of traditional orchards now removed. Occasionally, more recent dwarf fruiting stock has been planted in their place.

The river edge vegetation has often been removed to increase field size right up to the river channel. Where the hedges have been retained they give unity and variety within the floodplain, but where some are missing or gappy the resulting scene is fragmented.

The character of the Teise valley is wholly rural, with little settlement or other intrusions from urban life in the floodplain itself, and crossed only infrequently by small, old bridges.

East of Horsmonden the river nestles among the orchards, the rolling hills forming strong enclosure. This visual influence peters out nearer Marden, however, and the views from the river from here northwards are of the pleasant farmlands of the Fruit Belt, until it joins the River Beult near Benover.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, low-lying land. Open rural landscape of arable crops. Sparse settlement or road access giving tranquil atmosphere.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This small watercourse lies amongst an open, flat, predominantly arable landscape. The river itself is often unnoticeable except when one is directly over the watercourse and the area is therefore largely incoherent as a river course and floodplain. The narrow character area remains tranquil and largely inaccessible, with minor detracting features such as wire fencing. Occasional bridging points are low-key, using recent materials such as concrete and RS railings.

The stream and associated ditch network within the rural landscape form a narrow ecological corridor. Wetland areas within the managed floodplain are limited and much of the arable cultivation runs right up to the banks of the water course. There are occasional groups of willows, but these do not form a coherent whole. On the edges of the area, the remnant mature oak and ash are senescent and some enclosed orchards remain on the fringes of the arable core.

Sensitivity

The flat open landscape is rarely distinguishable from the surrounding Low Weald. Historic and ancient elements of the landscape such as riparian vegetation on the stream and field enclosures on the fringes of the floodplain are indistinct. Visibility within the area is low due to the insignificant landform and intermittent tree cover.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Accentuate the course of the river and realise the broader ecological potential of the floodplain, setting it in the context of surrounding farmland.
Create new areas of shallow banks within the watercourse to promote bankside habitats.
Identify areas along the stream where it is possible to promote low-intensity grazing on open banks and sympathetic methods of cultivation near the stream.
Create wetland areas and small riparian copses within the lower contours of the floodplain.
Reintroduce Black poplar and create a new framework for adjacent farmland by using willow lines along the stream and creating a visible intermittent edge to the higher contours of the floodplain with hedgerow and standard trees.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

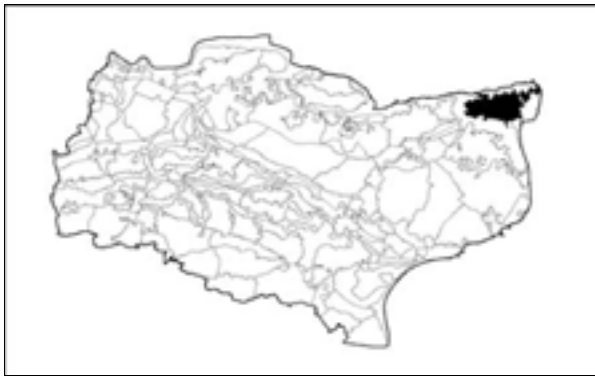
Sensitivity	Very Low.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create riverside plantings of willow and black poplar
Create riparian woodland
Create wetland areas
Create enclosure to upper stretches of farmland
Create bankside habitats

[previous <<](#)



Thanet forms a distinct landscape area defined by the former limits of the island that was cut off from the mainland by the Wantsum Channel; until it silted up approximately 1000 years ago. The island quality is preserved in the way that Thanet rises out of the marshes to a modest height of about 50 metres. The landscape falls into two distinct types, based on the local topography. These are the flat plateau top above the 40 metre contour and the sloping backdrop to the marshes between the 20 and 40 metre contours. This sloping edge runs around the south and west of the chalk outlier from Cliff End, Minster and Monkton to Sarre and St. Nicholas at Wade. The slope and plateau top of the character area give long views over Pegwell Bay and the Chislet and Worth Marshes. On the seaward side Thanet is characterised by steep chalk cliffs and small sandy bays.

The geology of the Upper Chalk which underlies most of the area is a soft white chalk with abundant flint horizons, hence the use of the latter material for building. The soils of Thanet are nearly all Grade 1 except for small pockets of woodland which mark tiny areas of Grade 3 land.

The Thanet landscape has been an arable one for generations, the good quality easily-worked soils lending themselves to cultivation. Around 1700 BC, the Beaker people discovered the ease with which the Thanet soils could be cultivated where the chalky soils were exposed. Remains of small fields and lynchets can still sometimes be seen. Other relics of the Bronze Age include hoards of implements such as the one found at Minster in Thanet. Much later, it was on this relatively well-populated and cultivated island that St. Augustine landed in 597 AD.

With the exception of Monkton, settlements are nucleic, centred on mills and former small ports or ferry landings at the edge of the Wantsum Channel, now located on the edge of the marsh. Downbarton and Minster still retain some evidence of their harbours which are thus important monuments. Those located on the seaward side of the island were originally fishing villages but have now burgeoned into an urban network that follows the coastline with few undeveloped breaks. The road pattern encircles the plateau and crosses it in fairly straight routes with large open spaces in between.

Since 1960 there has been a marked increase in the extent of urban land, notably in the coalescence of Ramsgate with both Broadstairs and Margate. Ramsgate-Margate-Broadstairs now forms the largest conurbation in East Kent. This has been, in part, at the expense of some of the few remaining grasslands, for example at what is now Northwood industrial estate. Arable land has also been lost between Cliftonville and Kingsgate at Northdown, St. Lawrence in Ramsgate and through infilling at Birchington. Pasture has been lost to arable land south and west of Garlinge, north of Stone House on the outskirts of Broadstairs and around Manston Aerodrome and Sarre. A few pockets of orchard west of Cliff End have been removed, as have those west of Minster.

Separation of settlements is now enforced through local policy, encouraging the idea of open arable fields or country parks as a way of retaining the intrinsic character of the landscape.

Views on the plateau are wide, simple and unrestricted and there is a sensation of being on elevated ground. One of the most striking characteristics of Thanet are the long views both to the 'island' from the main routes onto it, and back from Thanet over the old Wantsum Channel, now the Chislet Marshes. It is important that these long views over the flat marshlands are not obscured or marred by development. Already the existing power lines form a significant visual intrusion in the open landscape, as do the new lighting columns of the improved Thanet Way, notably at night. When the Richborough power station is decommissioned it may be possible to remove the power lines as far west as Monkton.

Also distinctive on the coastal side are the dramatic chalk cliffs which are designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) with their narrow strip of remnant grassland alongside. At Kingsgate Bay this drama is enhanced by the striking stacks. Perhaps the most characteristic aspect of Thanet's landscape, however, is its open nature. The lack of vegetation is in part historic, due to early intensive agriculture. It is thought that the centre of Thanet, for instance, would originally have been heavily wooded.

The unenclosed nature of the landscape has been exacerbated since the last war by the loss of elm trees and hedgerows to Dutch elm disease. This loss of vegetation has allowed the suburban edges of the seaside towns to spill into the landscape visually. Further proposals, such as the Manston Business Park and Allan Grange Park, may intensify the sense of intrusion into the rural landscape. Undoubtedly a buffer strip of hedgerows, shaws, woodland and copses would soften and green these edges.

Thanet and Pegwell Bay have strong connections with William Dyce and Charles Dickens. The seaside scenes in David Copperfield were set around Ramsgate and Pegwell Bay, and Charles Dickens himself lived in Broadstairs for a time. Christina Rossetti wrote the evocative In the Bleak Midwinter Christmas carol on a very cold day in Birchington.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Open, large scale arable fields with predominance of brassicas. Long views. Central domed ridge to the island, with the aerodrome dominant on the crest.
Exposed landscape, historically long denuded seaside/coastal influence with big skies.
Suburban character to towns. Open cliff-tops, bleak, grassy spaces.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

Despite visual detractors such as high rise coastal development, main roads and lighting, the large-scale open landscape is considered to be coherent in its pattern of elements. This, however, is an intensively farmed landscape with limited natural habitats; and the effect of coastal and commercial development overwhelms the local vernacular building styles of historic villages, although there are important heritage sites such as abbeys and windmills. The vulnerability of the farmed landscape, the lack of natural habitats and the negative impact of recent development leaves the landscape in poor condition.

Sensitivity

The sense of place in Thanet is very strong, in part due to the island quality, accentuated by the dominant landform and long views. The area has both historic and ancient characteristics associated with settlements and road patterns, farming and cultural use. The open views contribute to the high sensitivity of the Thanet landscape.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The cultural associations need to be restored in this landscape. This entails the definition and enhancement of the settlement pattern, some of which is historical and some more recent. This is a straightforward strategy for small, historic villages on the marsh edge, but is a more complicated issue for the coastal conurbations.
The restoration of coastal influences, historically graphically represented by windmills, piers, marshes and sea defences, should be considered in new design and in the management of coastal zones.
Although it is recognised that access throughout the island is important, the perception of access and circulation responding to the domed, island landform should be restored: the main circulation linking the coastal settlements; developments and circulation within the domed centre of the island should be minimised and simplified to ensure an uncluttered landscape. Formal blocks of localised screen planting should be avoided; any planting associated with built development should accentuate and respect the landform and be applicable to the wider landscape.
The perception of reduced interest in the arable areas may be addressed by the less intensive cultivation of some arable land, and the re-introduction of field boundaries such as boundary mounds. The central, open landscape is a particular feature to maintain.

CONTEXT

Regional: North East Kent

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Very High.

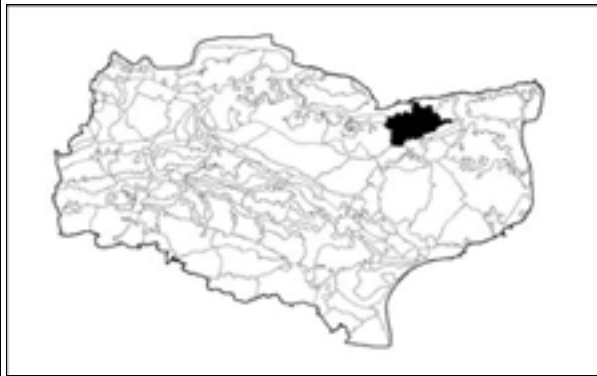
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE.

Restore the importance of historic and ancient features
Restore the scale and containment of small settlements on the edge of the marshes
Restore coastal and sea-edge influences in the location and detail of the built form
Restore areas of scrub planting on areas of marginal vegetation and marsh edges
Restore semi-natural habitats along cliff-tops which are not developed.
Restore and enhance views/sea views from key locations
Restore the influence of the landform on access and circulation
Ensure that development and associated planting respect and enhance the landform

[previous <<](#)



This local area is defined by the limits of an outcrop of London Clay that includes Whitstable and Herne Bay on the north coast and the domed landscape of the Blean woodlands which drops down to the outskirts of Canterbury. The landscape rises to over 80 metres in the west around the village of Blean, gradually dropping eastwards to the 20 metre contour, towards the Wantsum and lower Stour Marshes and the coast.

The clay is blue-marine clay weathering to brown with a renowned fossil association as part of its makeup. It outcrops as cliffs on the coast near Herne Bay and is very susceptible to erosion; sometimes at the rate of three metres per year. Fossils are often found exposed at the coast near Herne Bay.

The soils derived from the clay are slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged clayey soils mostly with brown sub-soils. Some are silty or loamy soils over clayey base soils with better drained soils on the slopes. The traditional use of these soils has been for dairying with some cereals, deciduous or coniferous woodlands. Between Blean and the coast behind Whitstable and Herne Bay there still exists a well developed field system, but much has been opened to arable uses.

The domed high ground, known as 'The Blean' is dominated by ancient woodland or ancient replanted woodland, most of it designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and it is also a candidate Special Area for Conservation (SAC). It remains as one of the most extensive semi-natural woodlands in Kent and the south east of England. The most densely wooded landscapes correspond to poorer soil, although the perimeter areas have been cleared for agriculture. The acid soil conditions support a significant area of dense heathy woodland, much of which is managed as hornbeam and chestnut coppice and which harbours the last few colonies of the rare Heath Fritillery butterfly. Other woodland types include single-age stands, regenerative birch and scrub, and oak standards within the coppice. Views from the cleared edges of the woodland can be long-reaching and dramatic, for instance the view of the conurbation and seascape of Herne Bay from Thornden Wood. Looking south, the city of Canterbury can be surveyed from the higher ground of Tyler Hill.

Wooded areas include Thornden, Clowes, and Honey Wood near Tyler Hill, Church Wood and East Blean Wood. Small pockets of Grade 2 land reflect the overlying drift deposits such as Head Brickearths found around Amery Corner and Cutballs Farm, and those deposited in the old channel of the Sarre Penn through Chislet Park, Rushbourne Manor and Hoades Court.

The landscape varies from the flatter land close to Whitstable, north of the A299, to the rising, rounded, often wooded heights of the Blean woods to the south. Whitstable itself is a mix of white painted clapboard, seaside villas, bungalows and colourful beach huts. Most noticeable is the wind, the sky, the muddy sand flats and the openness of the seaside space.

Brett Gravels are the last remaining industrial function within the town harbour, although the Seasalter Fish Company still runs a whelk operation. The famous Whitstable oysters are also still farmed and brought ashore here, sadly not in the numbers that they once were. The harbour is very much alive even though the railway, the Whitstable Harbour Branch, from Canterbury, was closed in the late 1950s.

The centre of the town is very 'unspoiled' having local shops and individual merchants rather than the big chains, but it suffers from heavy traffic. It has a thriving local artist population.

The new Thanet Way cuts through Clapham Hill above Whitstable south of the A299. Over Clapham Hill the landscape rolls down the valley and up to Pean Hill.

Along the coastline, holiday chalets and insubstantial housing, a mix of horse pasture or grazing goats, cast a suburban air but the backdrop of wooded hills provides a remote setting. The occasional square oast implies the presence of hops in the past, with some evidence of orchards in the place names and in the presence of residual poplars, but no orchards or hops are present now. Diamond spile fencing is used in both Whitstable and on individual rural cottages.

Some open areas still exist between Herne Bay and Whitstable which are currently protected by local planning policy.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Densely wooded, rounded hilltops with sparse nucleic settlements and few roads within the woodland. Flat coastal plain. Haphazard seaside and leisure development. Neglected pasture near the coast- a high proportion of unfarmed land.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The landform of the Blean is clearly defined from the open, flat coastal plain to the rounded, wooded hills in the south of the area. The landscape elements are coherent, but piecemeal development and unsympathetic land use interrupts some of the woodland, and coastal development with road links detract from some open views. The ecological value is strong in the woodland and at the coast, but weaker in intermediate areas, despite areas of rough grassland - links between the two are also weak. Built development has a moderately negative impact on the area as a whole. There is also much unfarmed land near the coast. In general the land use is not intensive, and access remains limited across the large wooded ridge. Overall, the condition of the area is high.

Sensitivity

The Blean has one of the largest areas of ancient woodland within Kent and retains a very strong time-depth. The type of tree cover is very distinctive, but other historic features such as small pastures within the woodland, and wet-fenced pastures on the coastal strip, are becoming indistinct. Recent built form is also indistinct. Tree cover is widespread on the hill tops but stops abruptly at the top of lower slopes. Visibility is therefore considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the ancient characteristics of the woodland including the density and management of the characteristic species. The limited access of the woodland lanes should also be conserved.

The hedged farmland on the lower slopes requires reinforcement of the landscape pattern, and also requires reinforced links with the woodland on higher ground so that the woodland character extends towards the coastal plain. This may also encompass the route of the Thanet Way which currently bisects the character area.

The natural landscape features of the coastal plain -such as open grassland and wet fencing - should be reinforced and linked with the wooded characteristics of the southern Blean where there is natural drainage.

CONTEXT

Regional: North East Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

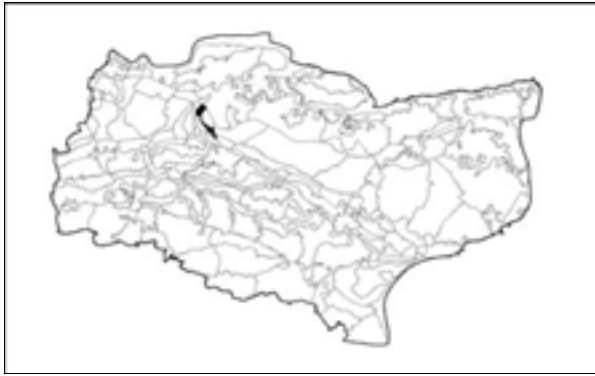
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve tree cover and specific mix of species - oak, hornbeam and chestnut coppice
Reinforce the field pattern and enclosure on the lower slopes
Reinforce the links between coastal plain and wooded ridge
Reinforce natural habitats on the coastal plain

[previous <<](#)



THE EASTERN SCARP

The pattern of intensively farmed scarp-foot fields and dense woodland above is continued on the eastern side of the valley. In the north, a small area of flat, riverside marshes is included within the AONB. Despite being dominated by overhead wires and pylons, the narrow, scrub-flecked ditches and rough tussocky grass give the area a sense of wildness.

The hedges here are in poor condition, but the woodlands on the upper slopes give weight and emphasis to the scarp, helping to contain the influence of the valley developments outside the AONB. There have been cement works on the river here since the 19th century and cement blocks have been used locally since that time. A good example of this can be seen at Borstal Court Farm, on the edge of Rochester.

MEDWAY

The Eastern Scarp character area is part of the larger Medway character area of the Kent Downs AONB.

The Medway Valley, running between Maidstone and Rochester, divides the AONB into two sections. In common with the other river valleys crossing the Downs, this was one of the earliest areas of permanent settlement in Kent. The long history of human activity in this area is illustrated by the group of prehistoric sites, such as Kits Coty standing stones, which form the most important group of Megalithic monuments east of the Berkshire Downs. There are several Roman sites here and the ancient trackway, now known as the Pilgrim's Way, passes through this area.

The AONB covers the scarp and scarp foot within the Medway Valley character, but excludes the industrial valley bottom. Despite the urban developments, however, the Medway Valley provides an important rural buffer between the Medway towns and Maidstone.

The steep scarp slopes, which enclose the river valley, rise sharply up behind rolling, intensively cultivated fields. There has never been a strong hedgerow network on the lower part of the scarp foot and the few hedges that do exist are mostly narrow and gappy. It is characteristic, however, to find thicker, overgrown hedges surrounding the fields on the upper slopes, above which swathes of dense, mixed woodland dominate the skyline, separating the valley and the Downs. These woodlands, and the mosaic of unimproved grassland and scrub associated with them, are of national nature conservation importance, both for their flora and fauna.

[next >>](#)

THE EASTERN SCARP: MEDWAY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Lower slopes of scarp and wild riverside marshes in AONB.
Intensive open arable fields, woodlands on upper slopes.
Views of adjacent cement works, overhead wires and pylons.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The landscape elements are coherent, but are interrupted by the decline in field boundaries and the lack of contour-related shaws. There are many visual detractors; industrial farm buildings, landfill sites and overhead cables are highly visible. Longer views are interrupted by the industrial development of the lower valley. The ecological interest of the area is very weak as there is very little natural vegetation within the intense arable farmland. Built form has a highly negative impact. Rural heritage features are not readily apparent.

Sensitivity

Ancient highways and historic farmsteads form the basis of the landscape, but now contribute little to the local distinctiveness. Hedgerows have suffered additionally from the loss of elms. The local sense of place is very weak. Sensitivity is considered to be moderate due to the high visibility over the open landscape.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore woodland links from the higher wooded ridge to the land-folds of the lower slopes, Replant shaws.
Restore hedgerow along highways.
Create appropriate settings for historic farmsteads and more recent settlements.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity Moderate.

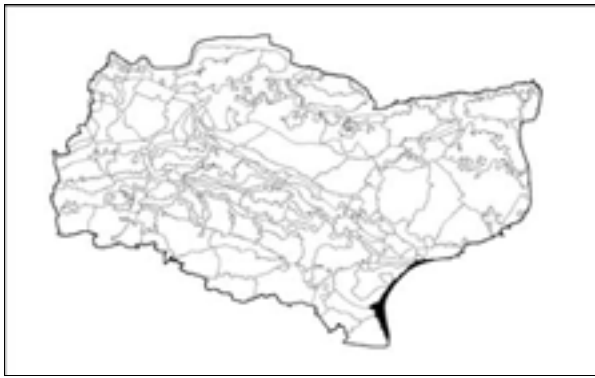
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Very Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore hedges along roads
Restore wooded shaws
Create settings for settlements

[previous <<](#)



The only major area of residential growth on Romney Marsh is found on the coastal strip between Hythe and Dungeness. But this area also incorporates the natural coastal features of sand dunes, shingle and intertidal mudflats, many of which are of international ecological importance.

If left to natural forces, the coastline would be inundated by the sea. Response to this increasing pressure has already occurred as the present sea wall at Dymchurch, built in the 19th century, is set back some 50 metres from the earlier coastline. Kentish ragstone was the core material in its construction and there are a few fine construction details associated with the marsh drainage sluices which empty at low tide. On the seaward side, massive structures to combat powerful wave action have been engineered in concrete.

Land use is the dominant element in this character area. The linear form of the 20th century coastal settlements follow the sea wall in a string of undistinguished houses and caravan parks. These have developed around the only original coastal settlement of Dymchurch, and continue all along the previously unsettled shoreline. Where the sea wall has been constructed around Dymchurch, the new housing sits behind the structure; only the pitches of roofs showing above the steep grassy banks.

The grander forms of early 20th century guesthouses do exist, but the main expression of the coast as a holiday location is holiday camps and caravan parks, the former having become prevalent in the 1930s. Built form lines the coastal road, with no distinction of individual developments or communities. Some heritage features provide focal points of interest, such as the early 19th century installations of robust, squat Martello towers, two of which survive as tourist attractions along the Romney Coast. Even more imposing is the Dymchurch Redoubt, built in the same era on a massive earth bank, now situated just behind the sea wall, visible from inland.

In contrast to the statuesque military features, the coastline also displays its fishing heritage; boats are drawn up on the shingle beaches, and some fishing huts survive.

One of the most renowned features of the holiday coast is the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway - a working steam-powered railway on a miniature scale which runs along the edge of the urban area. Some residential developments have been built around the line, incorporating special miniature bridges over the track. It is an unorthodox, but real, method of transport, and says much about the individuality of the marsh.

The natural landscape of the coast is a recognised haven for birds which is of international status. The seafront can be bleak and exposed, but the landform is flat, as elsewhere on the marsh, and views are exhilarating. Various conditions of tidal mudflats, shingle and aeolian sand dunes provide a variety of breeding grounds and landfall sites for migrating birds.

Romney Warren Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which falls in the coastal area, is a stabilised dune system; grassy and open, now used as a golf course. It is notable for its grasses and clovers. It is also the only open stretch of coast in this area where building has not reached the shore, and as such retains the natural quality of the landscape where sand, stone and special colonies of grasses merge with the sea.

In the summer, the extensive sandy beaches can heave with holidaymakers from the caravan sites, or day-trippers. Uncoordinated and unrestrained advertising and signing, which is linked with the tourism, undermines the inherent quality of this area.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Sheltered linear 20th century holiday development behind sea wall.
Many temporary structures. Heritage structures such as Martello Towers.
Dominant sea wall.
Sand dunes and dune grasses. Mudflats and timber groynes on seaward side.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The coastal landscape is coherent as linear settlements and coastal defences follow the beach and tidal zones, but it is interrupted by restricted views to the sea, and development into the marshland. There are many visual detractors which include a proliferation of overhead cables, general road furniture and fencing, and unsympathetic commercial development. The built form is varied and has a moderate negative impact, in some cases due to the poor repair of buildings. The ecological integrity of the grasslands and tidal zone is mainly undisturbed and remains strong. Other heritage features of historic military defences and the major sea defences and drainage outlets have a positive impact on the area.

Sensitivity

This area has some unique and rare features which include the dune, grassland and coastal vegetation, and more notably the individualistic built form, some of which is recent. The area itself has a recent time depth overall. The sense of place is considered to be moderate. Visibility is very high and this results in the landscape being highly sensitive.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore the remote sense of place by using sympathetic materials and simplistic approach to the treatment of the coastal road.
Remove roadside and landscape clutter.
Allow adjacent grasslands and dunes to be apparent at intervals.
Conserve the individuality of built form and detailing, and encourage this to enhance the sense of place.
Conserve all coastal habitats, ensuring that intertidal zones and coastal grasslands are managed to enhance wildlife interest.
Restore appropriate settings to the historic monuments of the Martello Towers and redoubt, to enhance their status in the landscape.
Restore approaches to the sea wall.

CONTEXT

Regional: Romney Marsh

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

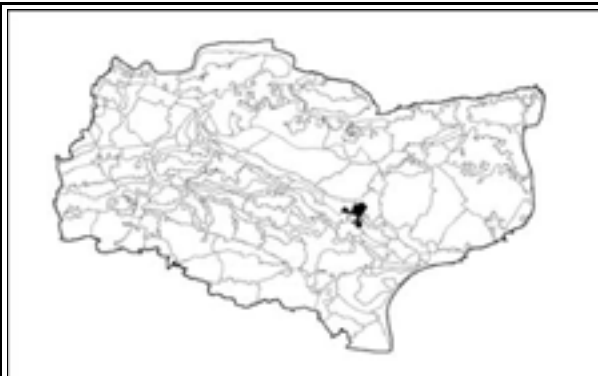
Sensitivity	High.
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Conserve coastal habitats; grasslands, dunes and intertidal zones.
Conserve individualistic built form
Restore the sense of place to the coastal road
Restore appropriate settings to historic buildings
Restore appropriate approaches to access to the sea wall, where views of the sea are limited

[previous <<](#)



This is a low-lying, flat to gently undulating farmed landscape associated with the well-drained Head Brickearths west of the Great Stour to the north of Ashford. Most of the land use is a mix of cereal and field vegetables with a small percentage of orchards and grassland developed on the mainly deep high quality soils.

Generally, because of the prevalence of arable farming, the fields are large and the landscape is open as a result. This contrasts with the Stour Valley itself, which is still pastoral on the wetter soils close to the river.

Woodland is not a feature of this character area, although small copses and clumps do occur. The railway to Canterbury runs along the eastern boundary to the site but does not impinge to any great extent. From most places the presence of the North Downs encloses views over the landscape to the north-east. Beyond Boughton Corner, this enclosure is more marked and the sliver of character area from this point is included in the North Downs AONB.

A notable feature just north of Ashford are the parklands of Kennington Hall. Kennington itself can be viewed from the Stour farmlands. Considerable development is proposed south-east of Kennington at Little Burton Farm which could have an impact on farmland to the north as well as on the Stour Valley character area to the south.

The Stour Gap has changed considerably since the 1960's when well over half the land use was either pasture or orchard. What must have been then a varied landscape of small hedged fields and flowery orchards has changed to one of open monocultures of cereals and vegetables. The landscape would be enhanced if some of the characteristic valley hedgerows or shelterbelts could be restored within the existing land uses.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Low-lying flat or gentle undulating landscape with highest quality soils. Open arable farmland enclosed by Downs to the north.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The pattern of landscape elements is fragmented by mixed land use and industrial development. Visual detractors include the intrusion of the urban edge, industrial farm buildings and suburban influences. The network of ditches and streams provides a moderate ecological base within arable areas. Heritage features such as hedgerows and orchards are declining and built form has a moderate negative impact over the whole area. Culturally, the area is in transition and reflects neither the natural drainage or the farmstead bases in the area. The condition is considered to be very poor.

Sensitivity

Landscape features tend to be indistinct in character and do not contribute to a strong sense of place, with the exception of some localised details in historic buildings such as steeply pitched roofs and arched mullioned windows. Riparian vegetation and hedgerows are notably indistinct.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create riparian framework for fields within the lower contours, and small copses and shaws in the more elevated arable farmland.
Create a new setting for this stretch of the Pilgrims Way which reflects the rich farming heritage and links adjacent farmland.
Create an urban edge - this could focus on streams and water courses.
Create a design code which reflects the strengths of the local built form.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

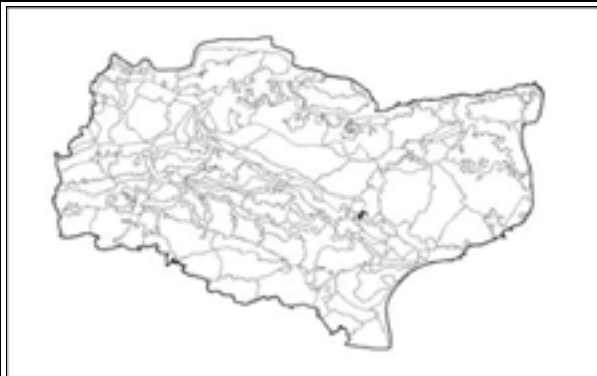
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create riparian vegetation
Create small copses and shaws
Create an appropriate framework for the Pilgrims Way, including selected areas of farmed land
Create an urban edge
Create a design code for built form

[previous <<](#)



The Great Stour flows through a flat, narrow valley of floodplain alluviums that are generally clayey or silty and subjected to seasonal waterlogging. The river is shallow, clear and fast-flowing and is characteristically well vegetated, both within its channel and on its banks. In several places the river's course can be tracked from afar via the pollarded willows on its banks.

The low lying river landscape is of lowland clay character, and is a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) from Ashford downstream. Whilst unimproved pasture is virtually non-existent alongside the river now, some semi-improved pastures do remain including the narrow, flat fields north of Lee's Farm up to the boundary with the AONB south of Wye. Most of the rest of the land in the valley is now arable although the soils are not of the highest quality.

In recent decades, low water flows during the summer months have led to concern over the habitats and wildlife within the river valley.

Little building occurs on the valley alluviums because of their liability to flooding, and the river is not crossed again by a vehicular bridge until Wye. The outskirts of this village stand up rather starkly over the farmland.

Over the length of the valley, the Downs are visible to the north.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, low-lying valley with alluvial soils subjected to seasonal waterlogging. shallow, clear fast-flowing river with generally well-vegetated banks of high nature conservation value. Mixed farmland of irregular sheep-grazed pasture and larger arable fields. Sparse settlement and crossing points. Long views to North Downs.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a coherent landscape in which farmland within the flat valley leads down to the river channel itself. The pattern is interrupted due to the reduced emphasis on riparian vegetation and the reduced visual quality of drainage ditches within the agricultural land. The strong semi-natural habitats of the river corridor runs through farmland which has some intensive use, and therefore the ecological integrity of the whole area is moderate. Culturally, the area remains generally unsettled and the land use reflects the nature of the soils. It is considered to be in moderate condition.

Sensitivity

The flat valley is the dominant part of the open view, and visibility is therefore very high. There are few features which contribute to a locally distinct sense of place, with the exception of the river itself. Ditches on field boundaries are characteristic. The lack of settlement is also characteristic. There are few elements which indicate time depth; there are occasional recent agricultural buildings in the view.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create habitat diversity within ditches in farmland, ensuring that this also increases the visual quality of the ditches.
Create a riparian vegetated corridor, including areas of wetland grasses and wetland tree plantations.
Conserve the sparse settlement pattern and integrity of river crossings.
Conserve the river course and banks.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Very Weak.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

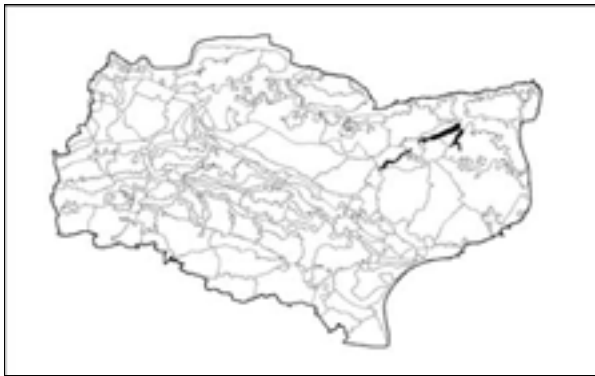
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Conserve the river corridor and banks

[previous <<](#)

THE STOUR VALLEY



The Stour Valley incorporates the flat-bottomed floodplain of the Great Stour and Little Stour rivers. It is a narrow character area which runs from south west of Canterbury, then through the city itself and on to Grove at the edge of the Chislet marshes. The Little Stour drains a small area from Wickhambreaux and Wingham down to its outlet on the marsh of West Stourmouth.

The valley is well contained as the fertile, well cultivated sides rise resolutely on either side of the flat valley floor. Near Canterbury, the banks are steeper and accentuated by woodland on the tops. At Chartham and Stamford Street the slopes are dramatically steep.

The course of the river winds through wet, marshy and reed fringed land which has scrub and dense riparian vegetation along the river margins. Agriculturally, it is classified as poor, the alluvial soils being generally waterlogged with some peat.

Wetland pasture is still much in evidence although larger arable fields sweep up the valley sides, such as near Trenleypark Wood. The pasture still exists in small pockets either side of the meandering river, where it is drained by a close network of regular ditches. A variety of scrub vegetation and trees, including poplars and willows, line the ditches and enclose small spaces within the valley.

Original settlements were built at the edge of the fluvial marshland, such as the villages of Westbury and Fordwich. Roman roads followed the edge of the floodplain or the higher ground. The city of Canterbury, which was founded on the edge of the Stour, has now spilled out into the Stour Valley in the form of housing estates, light industry and car retail units. Pylons are also much in evidence along the Great Stour near Sturry and the outskirts of the city. The river itself becomes lost in a unmanaged strip between developments, except where the heavy detailing the highway bridges makes it apparent.

There are few routes which cross the two valleys, but busy feeder roads to the industrial units and the main routes out of Canterbury traverse the length of the Great Stour. A railway line enforces the impact of the transport corridor, and inhibits access across the valley. Near the urban areas, the valley is noisy and fragmented.

Both rivers are characterised by the old watermills which can be found along their courses. At Wickhambreaux, the tall weatherboarded mill house provides a striking feature at the edge of the picturesque village. Mill ponds and mill races are part of the watercourse, now redundant and overgrown in many cases, such as in Milner Close near Fordwich.

The much shorter course of the Little Stour runs through a banked canalised section through the tiny hamlet of Seaton. The river was diverted during the 18th century to serve a purpose-built mill and now follows a shallow depression through wetland pasture.

Gravel extraction has been a major influence on the valley landscape. Wet pits cover vast areas of the valley floor from Chilham to Upstreet. Old pits with open water, spits and islands, and the surrounding marshland, provide Kent's most extensive water and wetland habitats at Westbere Marshes, Stodmarsh and Preston Marshes.

Stodmarsh Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) includes the lakes at Westbere. Its marsh is also protected as a National Nature Reserve. Visually, it is an intriguing watery plain which widens as it approaches the Chislet marshes into a colourful spread of grassland, reedbeds and scrub. There are also some mono-species tree plantations associated with the gravel workings.

The underlying peaty soils have given rise to very large reedbeds (*Phragmites australis*) and fen plants where the reeds have been cut. Rich habitats are also found where the ditches between wetland pastures are sensitively maintained and cleared of reeds: the rare rootless duckweed (*Wolffia arriza*) and sharp-leaved pondweed (*Potamogeton acutifolius*) have been found at Stodmarsh.

The wide valley mouths can be viewed either side from the gentle rise of Grove Hill in the East Kent Horticulture Belt. Both plains have been affected by coal mining activities; Stodmarsh contains central lagoons caused by mining subsidence in the Chislet colliery, and the Little Stour has been polluted with saline water from Tilmanstone colliery, reducing its diversity of aquatic plants. The sites attract many breeding and wintering birds, some rare such as Cetti's warbler which breeds here in significant numbers.

To the south west of Canterbury, around Stamford Street and Chartham, the Great Stour Valley is far more traditionally rural. It is well enclosed by the steep sides of the valley and is inherently small scale; outside the urban areas of Canterbury, shady pastures on the flat.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat valley floor, widening towards the river mouth. Long distance views of Canterbury Cathedral. Valley sides are steep, dropping in height as the valley widens towards the river mouth. Wetland pasture drained by well vegetated ditches and dykes; small scale, well enclosed field pattern. Marshland, colourful reeds and grasses, lakes and open water. Rich and diverse habitats. Settlement on river at edge of floodplain and linear settlement surrounding the valley. Watermills.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The flat valley floor and pastoral landscape is coherent, but interrupted by linear settlements along the road and around existing hills. Visual detractors include transport corridors and the urban edge. The river is the basis for a strong ecological corridor with a surrounding network of ditches, and some unfarmed marsh, wetlands and open water. The extent of tree cover is poor, although there is some plantation woodland - tree lines along water courses are generally mature. Historic cores to enlarged settlements, vernacular details and historic water mills are noticeable within more recent development. Built form has a moderate positive impact. The condition of the area is considered to be moderate.

Sensitivity

Visibility is high in the open landscape and this influences the high sensitivity of the area. The dominant time depth is historic, although an ancient highway follows the valley floor. Mills, river crossings and tree lined ditches confirm the historic influences which are characteristic of the area and give a moderate sense of place.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve ditches and the pattern of sinuous pastures.
Conserve the strong ecological corridor of the river, wetlands and ditch network, and enhance it with sensitive management.
Conserve areas of non-intensive use within farmland.
Restore managed tree cover in and around areas of settlement.
Conserve and restore tree lines along water courses.

CONTEXT

Regional: North East Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Coherent.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

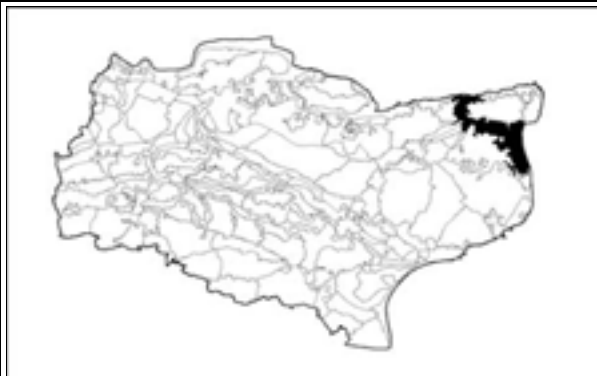
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Conserve and manage ditch network, wetlands, marsh and wet pastures
Conserve and restore tree lines and managed riparian trees near settlement.

[previous <<](#)

THE WANTSUM AND LOWER STOUR MARSHES



The marshlands around the north-east Kent coast are the reclaimed and silted up course of the Wantsum Channel and the former mouth of the River Stour. The flat and open landscape continues around the coast to the Sandwich flats and the Lydden valley, which is located between Sandwich and Deal. The flat landform dominates and the landscape is large-scale with very long views, but it is bordered by the gentle slopes of the Thanet chalk and the horticultural belt. This adjacent higher ground abuts the marsh in a very irregular pattern, softening and adding interest to an otherwise uniform expanse; all views contain some background element of landform. From a viewpoint at Upstreet, the eye is drawn to the twin towers of the Richborough power station and the wind turbine, and to the church tower of St Nicholas at Wade, on Thanet. Centrally located in the marsh are the banked and snaking forms of the Stour and Wantsum rivers which are now surrounded by open fields. Archaeological evidence of activity in the Iron and Bronze Ages has been found here, but it is known that the sea and river channels were navigable during the Roman occupation.

The present field pattern is fairly small and regular, described by a network of drainage ditches, dykes and flood control banks. Where these are intensively cleared and managed, they are almost imperceptible from any distance. Where the clearance is less intensive, the watercourses are reed-fringed and give a sense of scale and some enclosure to the land. Reed-fringed dykes can still be found near Grove Ferry. Current farming practices tend towards the removal of some open drainage ditches. This is noticeable in the Chislet marshes where remnant lines of reeds and pollard willows can be seen.

Soils are heavy alluvial clay, generally poor quality and subject to flooding and waterlogging. The land was originally reclaimed as summer pasture for sheep, for each of the adjacent parishes and this is reinforced in the place names in the marsh. The Ash Levels were gradually reclaimed and used in the drier seasons by the inhabitants of Ash - there are also the Monkton, Minster and Chislet marshes, each associated with their various parishes. Much of the land was owned and reclaimed by the wealthy abbeys in the area. Parish boundaries continue down on to the marshland, encompassing the reclaimed territory up to the banks of the Stour. Currently, arable farming is the major land use on the plain around Thanet due to agricultural improvements and drainage. The reclamation continues; areas of the Stour near Upstreet and Grove have been reclaimed for farming within the last 30 years. Evidence of the former pastoral use, such as sheep fencing and gates, has almost totally disappeared. Small patches of unimproved grasslands still exist, such as on the edge of the Ash levels. Former salt works are also evident.

There is no settlement within the marsh. Roads across it are still limited to the few original crossing places; these link the routes that follow the edge of the adjacent higher ground. Drove roads (reputedly to be former groynes associated with reclamation) leading from the villages into the marsh end abruptly, thus reducing the accessibility of the marsh and enforcing its remoteness. Settlements on the edge of the area are usually the sites of original ferry crossings, such as Grove Ferry which persisted as a ferry crossing until the late 1950s.

The eastern marshes, around Sandwich and Worth, have more of a coastal influence. Views are open to the sea. This is a comparatively smaller-scale marshland which was also systematically reclaimed by ecclesiastical landowners around Sandwich. It is bordered by sand dunes and the coastal mudflats of Sandwich Bay. In particular, the Lydden Valley (near Sandwich), which is drained by the North Stream, is quiet and relatively pastoral; the watercourses are still prevalent and it appears to be less intensively farmed where there are arable crops. It is extremely inaccessible and remote, although transected by the Minster to Deal railway line. The remote marshes are predictably rich in wildlife where they are not intensively farmed and drained. The rich habitats of the Lydden Valley and the Hacklinge Marshes are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The banks of the North Stream are included within the designated area. Around Hacklinge, the dykes and marshland support an unusual fen vegetation on alluvial and peat soils, and they attract a variety of breeding birds; some rare, such as the Cetti's Warbler.

Sandwich itself is located in a loop of the River Stour within the marshland. It was formerly an important port and still has a remarkably complete medieval town centre which adjoins the river. Richborough has been strategically important since the Roman invaders built the castle on a promontory within the marshes. The last 100 years has seen the area evade the development of a major port, but it has become a repository for large industrial buildings (including the electricity power station) and for waste materials. Large buildings are in scale with the open landscape, but they are served by wide, fast roads and are enclosed with incongruous security fencing and cosmetic planting, thus detracting from this atmospheric location. Weatherlees Hill at Richborough is noted for its orchids. Along the coast, there is a long barrier of aeolian sand dunes which lie between the marshes and the sea. They form a small but individual character area on the edge of the marsh with their characteristic grasses and maritime influences. The dunes are used almost exclusively as golf courses, and as such are protected from use by the wider public. About 40 species of grass have been found in the sandy coastal grassland, and there are other numerous rare plants such as the lizard orchid, which can be found at the Royal St. George's Golf Links. The coastal mudflats of Pegwell and Sandwich Bay are designated within the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which covers the Hacklinge marshes and the sand dunes. They are also internationally important for bird life, providing a landfall for migrating birds and breeding grounds for a range of rare summer and winter bird populations.

[next >>](#)

THE WANTSUM AND LOWER STOUR MARSHES

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, open and remote. No settlement on marshland.
 Reculver Towers and Richborough Fort mark the end of the Wantsum Channel.
 Regular field pattern fringed with dykes and drainage ditches. Flood defences are characteristic elements.
 River courses, flooding and waterlogging.
 Coastal influences-climate, sand dunes and seabirds.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The flat landscape of the former sea channel retains its characteristic long views and isolated stretches of farmland crossed by drainage channels. It is coherent as reclaimed marsh but few natural grasslands now exist and the intensive use for arable cultivation - with intensive management of ditches - have reduced the visual and ecological interest. There are very few visible lines of vegetation associated with drainage. Built development is encroaching on some edges and detracting features such as the urban edge, fencing and farm buildings and road bridges are increasing and become prominent in the flat landscape.

Sensitivity

Visibility is generally high in the flat, open landscape. The area is otherwise slightly contained by the low rises of Thanet and the East Kent Horticultural Belt to the north and south respectively, opening out to the sea at Sandwich. The historic pattern of ditches and sea defences are becoming indistinct where there are new road patterns and new uses.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore the visual interest of drainage channels by restoring grasses and reeds.
 Restore the ecological diversity of ditches by sensitive management.
 Create ecologically rich wetland/marsh/grasslands. Linear and marginal habitats at the upper edge of the marshland and along flood defences could reinforce the edge of the low-lying land where the distinction is weakest.
 Restore land patterns governed by historic sea defences and land drainage, noting the hierarchy of natural drainage channels and the subsequent man-made reclamation.

CONTEXT

Regional: North East Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

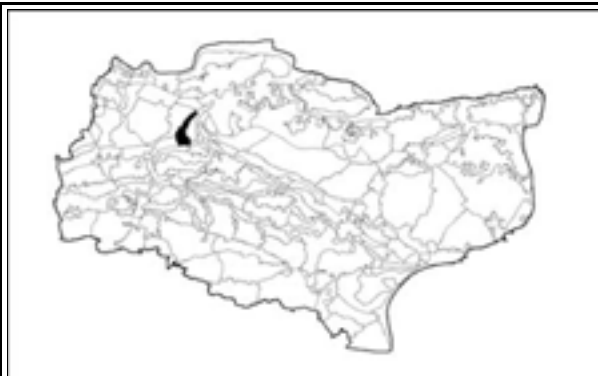
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore ecological and visual interest of drainage channels
 Create wetland/marsh/grassland
 Create new reed beds
 Restore land patterns of drainage and sea defences

[previous <<](#)



THE WESTERN SCARP

The intensively cultivated belt of arable land along the scarp foot is the result of the slow but constant washing of light chalky soils from the scarp. The resulting land is very fertile and many of the apparently modern, huge ploughed fields along this belt have, in reality, scarcely changed in appearance for over a century. Nevertheless, there is a sense of 'prairie farming' here, which is increasingly accentuated by the gradual loss or decay of hedges, especially along the roadsides. The lower slopes of the scarp bear the scars of former chalk quarries, whose clear affinity with industry threaten the integrity of the rural character of the AONB.

MEDWAY

The Western Scarp lies within the Medway Valley character area.

The Medway Valley, running between Maidstone and Rochester, divides the AONB into two sections. In common with the river valleys crossing the Downs, this was one of the earliest areas of permanent settlement in Kent. The long history of human activity in this area is illustrated by the group of prehistoric sites, such as Kits Coty standing stones, which form the most important group of Megalithic monuments east of the Berkshire Downs. There are several Roman sites here and the ancient trackway, now known as the Pilgrim's Way, passes through this area.

The AONB covers the scarp and scarp foot within the Medway Valley character, but excludes the industrial valley bottom. Despite the urban developments, however, the Medway Valley provides an important rural buffer between the Medway towns and Maidstone.

The steep scarp slopes, which enclose the river valley, rise sharply up behind rolling, intensively cultivated fields. There has never been a strong hedgerow network on the lower part of the scarp foot and the few hedges that do exist are mostly narrow and gappy. It is characteristic, however, to find thicker, overgrown hedges surrounding the fields on the upper slopes, above which swathes of dense, mixed woodland dominate the skyline, separating the valley and the Downs. These woodlands, and the mosaic of unimproved grassland and scrub associated with them, are of national nature conservation importance, both for their flora and fauna.

[next >>](#)

THE WESTERN SCARP: MEDWAY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Fertile base of chalk scarp.
Historically large open arable fields with further loss of enclosure by hedgerow removal.
Chalk quarries and industry.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There is a coherent pattern of elements within this landscape area as the fertile base of the chalk scarp opens to large arable fields below the wooded scarp. Visual detractors include tipping, quarries and views of the motorway and industry beyond. The ecologically-rich clusters of small woods and streams and wet pits are curtailed in areas of intensive arable cultivation; the ecological integrity of the landscape area is therefore moderate. Heritage features are variable; urban development overlooking the river does not respect local character, but there are historic farmsteads which demonstrate the vernacular and enhance the sense of place. Field boundaries are few and vulnerable within areas of intensive cultivation.

Sensitivity

Visibility is high due to the dominance of the scarp slope landform. The sense of place has become moderate due to the intensity of land use on the lower slopes and the resultant loss of rural landscape features. The sensitivity of the area, however, remains high. Historic farmsteads and villages contribute to the time-depth and distinctiveness - ragstone is widely used as a distinctive local material. Settlement patterns based on large farmsteads, the Pilgrim's Way and spring line villages are becoming obscured. Remaining woodland and hedgerow are of distinctive species, but are in decline. Narrow, ancient highway routes, are characteristic features which enhance the continuity of the area.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the distinction between the wooded scarp and the lower arable fields, ensuring that the wooded edge remains dense.
Restore the wooded edge to the lower scarp in areas of urban development.
Restore occasional wooded shaws to define large blocks of arable cultivation.
Introduce areas of less intensive arable cultivation associated with the wooded shaws.
Conserve the narrow routes of highways, following contours.
Restore the importance of vernacular detail in built form.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity High.

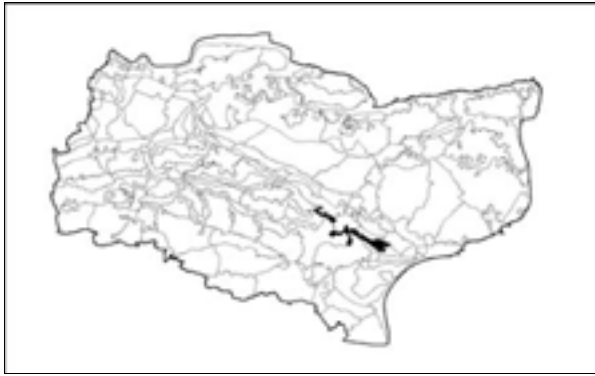
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Conserve the large-scale of open arable fields
Restore ecological interest to arable areas
Conserve broadleaf woodlands and the strong wooded edge to the lower slopes
Restore some wooded shaws to the arable land
Conserve and restore the characteristics and enclosure of ancient highways
Restore hedgerows and shaws, and hedged enclosure to roads

[previous <<](#)



A flat generally open landscape of the Great Stour and East Stour rivers, the land use is one of mixed farming with crest top woodlands, as at Godinton Park, enclosing views in the middle distance. These hills are formed from Greensand outliers which intrude into the clay vale in this area. These low ridges also include Hothfield, the site of Godinton House itself, and the outlier that forms Hurst Hill, Clap Hill and that at Great Chart. Occasionally, east of Ashford, there are views north-east over the low rise of the Greensand to the North Downs beyond.

Clumps of field trees and copses provide interest as does the irregular presence of riparian vegetation along the river. Where the river has lost its associated vegetation, however, it is often inconspicuous. Hedgerows are relatively infrequent and often gappy, with many of the field trees being of a similar age with no sign of renewal of the stock. A more intimate enclosed landscape of hedged fields can be found south of The Forstal, on the East Stour, and several old mills add to the historic scene. The loss of hedgerows is associated with the conversion of unimproved pasture to vast, arable or improved pastureland and it is likely that the remaining pasture may be vulnerable to further conversion. The advent of under field drainage and improved mechanisation has allowed this blurring of the traditional land use boundaries between the river floodplain, the clay soils and the freer-draining Greensand.

The loss of hedgerows and trees contributes to a loss of visual unity, and is eroding the traditional wildlife corridors along the river and between the fields.

Diversity is limited to the tree copses, hill top woodlands beyond the character area and residual riverside vegetation, but often the fragmentation of these elements contributes to a discordant sense of change, coupled with an increasingly bland picture, starved of variety, formed by the flat, arable and improved grass fields.

The landscape around the South Willesborough dykes is similarly open but has long views to the suburbs of Ashford. Fingers of pasture and neglected farmland extend right up the A2042 to the town centre. The Ashford to Folkestone railway line cuts across to the north of the area, rarely impinging on the landscape, but this may change significantly when the Channel Tunnel Rail Link is constructed. A major part of the remaining valley character is under pressure for a mixed development at Cheeseman's Green and Conscience Farm which may be contributing to the sense of neglect and degradation.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, open valley landscape enclosed by outliers of Greensand.
Mixed farming including a high percentage of arable. Historic mills on river.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The flat, arable landscape is showing increasing fragmentation as a result of the loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. The landscape is interrupted by intensive cultivation and visual detractors such as post and wire fencing, overhead cables, transport corridors, industrial development and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. The loss of hedgerows and the intrusion of development contributes to a loss of visual unity. Ecological integrity is moderate, with a network of ditches and streams, although many ditches adjoining agricultural land have been cleared of natural vegetation. Although there is much intensive arable cultivation, there are some areas of neglected land. Field boundaries of ditches and roadside hedgerows are vulnerable. Heritage features contributing to cultural heritage include large red brick farms, estate parkland, ragstone walls and bridges. These have a moderate positive impact on the landscape, although large farm buildings, silos and recent village enlargements detract.

Sensitivity

Strength of character is weak with an indistinct sense of place. The ditch system is not visible except where marked by characteristic pollarded willows and hedgerows are fragmented. Landform is insignificant and the lack of significant tree cover gives a moderate visibility. Overall, the sensitivity of the area is low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a new landscape structure building upon the existing ditches and hedgerows to create linked corridors for wildlife.
Ensure that the important roadside hedgerows are gapped up and reinforced with standard trees to give structure to the landscape.
Create new hedgerows and copses to screen intrusive elements such as the urban edge and transport corridors.
Create new waterside and ditch vegetation using native wetland species and pollarded willows to reinforce the riparian character.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity Low.

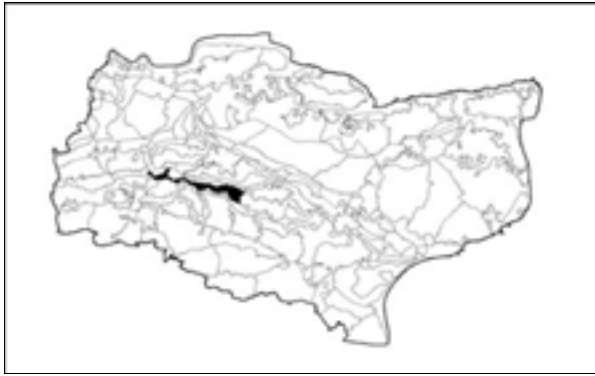
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create a new landscape structure of linked ditches and hedgerows
Gap up roadside hedgerows and reinforce with standard trees
Create and reinforce new hedges and copses to screen intrusions
Create new waterside vegetation including pollarded willows

[previous <<](#)



This undulating landscape of parkland and mixed farming bridges the boundary of the Weald Clay vale at its junction with the Greensand, the parkland straddling this higher, better-drained land from Oxon Hoath in the west to Linton and Boughton Monchelsea in the east.

The farmlands include orchards, a few hop-gardens, pasture, arable and horticultural crops, but further east beyond Linton, the frequency of the pasture increases. The landscape here is composed mainly of small hedged fields of both pasture and arable, with narrow lanes, broad verges and flowery ditches, as this area merges with the Valeside Farmlands beyond. The landscape opens out along its length with its junction with the Beult Valley, however, where the land becomes flatter and larger machinery can be used. This is particularly noticeable between Hunton and Linton.

The distinctive historic parklands of Linton and Hunton, although affected by the 1987 storm, provide stands of majestic trees in rolling, grazing land. The fringes of the old deer park at Oxon Hoath and Royden's Hall also traverse the character area boundary, with the remaining woodlands and pasture at Nettlestead Green Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) nearby perhaps being the remnant of some great medieval park. Together, these parklands supply a rich component in the composition of the landscape, even more so where hedgerow and trees have been removed from the surrounding farmlands, and sheep have given way to static crops.

Many large groups of oasts, scattered in the landscape, bear testimony to the greater distribution of the hop-gardens in earlier years. Most oasts have been converted for housing but occasionally one is used for storage.

Extensive views open out between the parkland and hedgerow trees over the flat main vale of the Low Weald and the Beult Valley below. Northwards, enclosure is given by the Greensand Ridge with its strong pattern of orchards or woodland.

Although in places the traditional mixed farming is being lost to more open arable fields, overall visual unity is conserved by the remaining pleasing mix of pasture, hop and orchard. Where arable dominates, however, it produces a scene with little visual variety, and blurs the boundaries between the Beult valley and these Valeside Farms and Parkland. Where the vegetation structure is lost the pylons and main roads, such as the A229 become more intrusive.

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating mixed farmlands, residual orchards, hop gardens and pasture.
Historic parklands straddling the Greensand boundary
Strong enclosure from Greensand Ridge.
Views over the Beult Valley

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a tranquil, rural landscape with very few visual detractors. It appears to be an ordered, medium scale rolling landform in which the varied land use is a secondary feature. The estate landscape features are vulnerable, but the area is culturally and visually coherent. The extent of semi-natural habitats is moderate, running through a diverse but limited network of streams, shaws and roadside hedges. Existing woodland trees in general are felt to be vulnerable. Standard oaks in hedgerows are also a mature feature characteristic of the area. This area is considered to be in good condition.

Sensitivity

The landform itself is unremarkable, although it is contained by the Greensand Ridge to the north. Views are contained by intermittent tree cover and visibility is low. The key characteristics of this landscape are felt to be uniformly historic, many of them are also typically 'Low Weald' such as the wide-verged roads. The local distinction is due to the influence of estate parklands and farms, but the individual features associated with historic estate farms are not over-riding contributions to the landscape character.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Reinforce the emphasis on estate layout and boundaries, identifying the distinctive cultural attributes of the estate farms.
Reinforce the incidence of mature oaks alongside the highway network and agree long-term management and replanting plans.
Reinforce the ecological interest by sensitive management of stream courses and encourage the planting of small copses.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity Low.

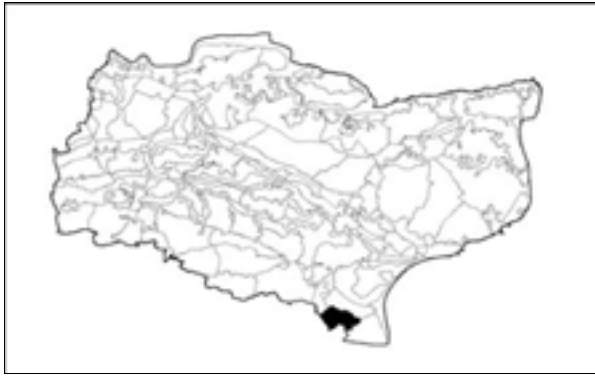
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

REINFORCE.

Reinforce estate parkland characteristics
Reinforce and maintain oak trees within the hedgerow network
Reinforce riparian features
Encourage the planting of small copses

[previous <<](#)



Some of the most recently reclaimed farmland within Romney Marsh as a whole lies within Walland Marsh on the land which was one of the later channels of the River Rother. This land was opened to the sea after the 13th century storms destroyed the natural coastal defences and was then reclaimed by the marsh inhabitants from marine conditions.

Views on the Walland Marsh Farmlands are not restricted by any landform or feature. It is an exceptionally open, large scale landscape with seemingly infinite horizons. Its southern boundary, which is the sea and coastal sand dunes, is not visible from within the character area. The land is flat, and there is no shelter from any of its extreme weather conditions.

Scrubby forms of willow trees on the horizon are exceptional, but do intimate that this too might once have been a more enclosed farmland. The irregular patterned ditches are further apart, and the field pattern is therefore larger than elsewhere on the Marsh. The impression gained is of total arable cultivation, although there is some pastoral use in the most inaccessible areas.

The potential for selected parts of the marsh to support significant wildlife is demonstrated by the Romney Marsh Nature Reserve; an area of remote farmland which is now actively managed to encourage the development of wetland and grassland habitats. The land within the Nature Reserve is relatively low lying and, although much of it was formerly under arable cultivation, has quickly taken on a wetland character. Banks of old sea walls surround the grassland, some of which has been surface-scraped to provide areas of standing water and reed beds. The area now attracts mixed populations of farmland birds in large numbers, and is also used for summer grazing.

Within Walland Marsh Farmlands there are no through roads, with the exception of concrete farm tracks, and almost no settlements apart from a few large, isolated farms. Farmsteads are located on the ancient settlement areas of the former islands in the saltmarsh - those of Scotney, Agney and Cheyne.

The presence of World War II structures is relatively prominent in this remote, agricultural landscape. The few military houses, old concrete surfacing to tracks and the old wire fences are indicative of the use of Walland Marsh during the war.

[next >>](#)

WALLAND MARSH FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Big skies, distant horizons, intense light or weather conditions, very flat. Arable crops, large unenclosed fields, seasonal contrasts in landcover. Very few settlements, no roads, inaccessible. Vestiges of military use-wire fences and concrete roads and fence posts some former military housing.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a simple, large, strongly unified landscape with very few visual detractors. Pylons and isolated agricultural buildings are visible within the wide view. There are some areas of ecologically-rich wet pastures, and an extensive ditch network, but also vast areas of intense arable cultivation with little margin for semi-natural habitats. The network of ditches also constitute a heritage feature, the condition of which varies, but is particularly poor in intensively-managed farmland. Built form is extremely sparse and includes isolated farmsteads on former sandy islands in the marsh, and intriguing vestiges of military use. It has a moderate positive impact on the area due to the isolated setting. The overall condition of the landscape is considered to be moderate.

Sensitivity

This is an extremely open landscape in which the flat landform and large skies are the dominant influence. The land pattern is historic, but there are also more recent time depth elements of remote structures and land use, all of which contribute to a strong sense of place. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be very high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve open, uncluttered views, ensuring that structures are isolated and limited.
Conserve the isolation of settlements.
Conserve wildlife habitats.
Restore additional grassland habitats.
Restore the ecological integrity of the ditch network by the sensitive management of water levels and less intensive cultivation of ditch margins.

CONTEXT

Regional: Romney Marsh

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

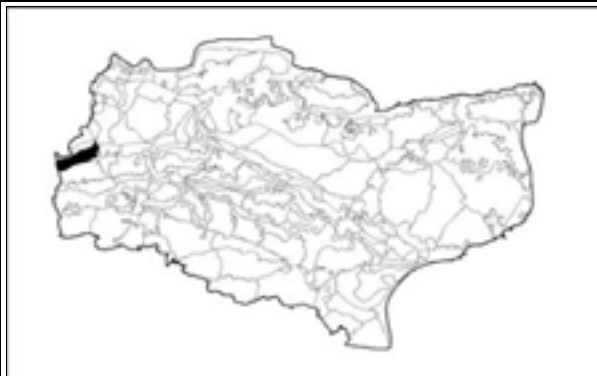
Sensitivity	Very High.
Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Conserve open views
Restore grassland and wetland habitats
Restore the ecological interest of the ditch network
Conserve the isolation of settlement

[previous <<](#)



WEST DARENT

The West Darent conforms to the typical scarp-dominated pattern of landscape which characterises the Kent Downs. The woodlands of the upper scarp are bordered by extensive pastures on the slopes below them. These, in turn, are contained by the bank of intensively cultivated arable fields on the fertile strip of soil along the scarp foot. Below this strip the heavy gault clay of the valley bottom supports a more mixed agricultural landscape. The tradition of intensive arable cultivation on the scarp foot has resulted in a sparse network of narrow hedges, which contrasts with the smaller, more irregular pastures, surrounded by thick hedges and hedgerow trees, which characterise the clay valley. Several areas of historic parkland about the ancient trackway, the Pilgrim's Way, which enters Kent along the scarp foot above Westerham, and the A25, which runs along the foot of the greensand beside the river.

In recent years, the building of the M25 and M26 motorways through the middle of this vale, while continuing the tradition of this area as a transport corridor, has damaged the visual integrity of the landscape, and altered the focus of the valley away from the river and its historic villages.

DARENT VALLEY

West Darent lies within the larger character area of the Darent Valley.

The Darent is the most westerly of the three rivers cutting through the Kent Downs and is strongly contained throughout its extent in the AONB by steep, often wood-topped, scarps and by the Greensand Ridge to the south. It has been called one of the earliest cradles of English settlement in Kent, and its long history of habitation and passage has clearly shaped its present character. There is a rich legacy of Roman remains, including Lullingstone Roman Villa, and several historic tracks run through the valley. In fact its peaceful, rural character today belies a busier and more industrial past. By the time of the Norman Conquest, the natural course of the river had already been diverted to power watermills, a tradition which continued until the beginning of the 20th century. Today only converted mill-houses and occasional ditches remain to indicate the former nature of the valley.

The name 'Darent' comes from the Celtic for 'oak river' and the river still meanders for much of its length through a narrow, tree-lined corridor. From Westerham, it flows east through the wide, clay vale between the chalk and the greensand, before swinging north at Sevenoaks to cut through the Downs. Once, it supported an extensive area of seasonally flooding water -meadows, but over abstraction of river water, changes in farming practice and gravel excavation have virtually eradicated such features and much of the floodplain is now arable. North of Shoreham the chalk scarps widen out, supporting large, undivided arable fields which reveal the open, curving back of the chalk downs.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Scarp-dominated landscape with wooded top.
Intensive arable at base of scarp with sparse hedgerows.
Pastures on intermediate slopes.
Historic parklands around Pilgrim's Way.
M25, M26 motorways alter the focus of the area.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This area is in a moderate condition. The landscape pattern is coherent, flowing from the wooded ridge of the Downs, through the large arable fields of the lower slopes, down to the pastures and parklands nearer the river itself. Wetland nature reserves, and the small area of wet-fenced pasture near the river, provide strong clusters of ecological importance. Outside these areas of particular interest, the loss of hedgerow and intensive arable cultivation on the lower slopes of the chalk scarp reduce the potential for natural habitats. The embanked and vegetated motorway is a recent element in the rural landscape.

Sensitivity

The historic land use pattern is becoming indistinct as hedges and ditches disappear and the villages expand. The core villages retain a distinctive character in which vernacular building styles and materials are very evident. This area also benefits from the visual strength and historic nature of the parkland and the strong visual and cultural feature of the Pilgrim's Way.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the features of the estate parkland such as mature tree groups, boundaries and entrances. Manage existing mature trees and programme replanting to sustain the feature. Small copses are a distinct but declining feature of the lower clay slopes.
Conserve existing copses and encourage the creation of new small copses in this area, where possible linking to the vegetated embankment of the motorway to reduce the isolated linear effect of the road corridor.
Create occasional vegetative links/shaws from the wooded ridge, down the scarp slope to provide intermittent enclosure, to reduce the effect of the more exposed arable fields and to enhance ecological interest.
Conserve the remnant small pastures in the valley bottom. These occur around settlements and could be adapted to create a rural setting, or 'urban edge', to the existing residential development.
Conserve and enhance the network of ditches within the floodplain, retaining their use as wet fencing to the pastures, ideally involving the positive management of the ditches as part of the land drainage system.
Conserve the narrow, hedged, route of the Pilgrim's Way, ensuring that the hedges are well-maintained.
Create an urban edge to existing settlement along the river valley, containing the built form with copses, ditches, and wetlands linked to the existing nature reserves.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Moderate.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

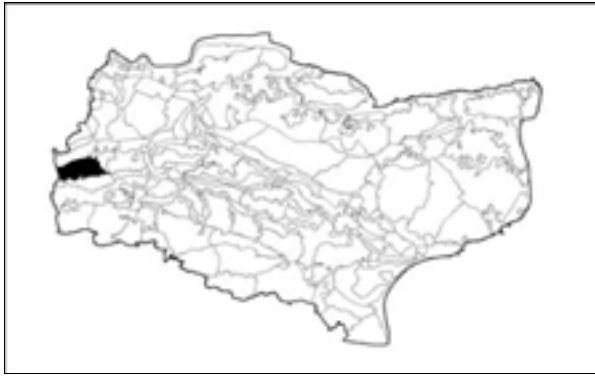
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND CREATE.

Conserve the form and features of the historic parklands
Create wooded links to the base of the scarp from the wooded ridge
Create an edge to urban areas and riverside villages
Conserve the features of the Pilgrim's Way
Conserve and create small copses on the clay vale
Create wooded links to incorporate the motorway corridor

[previous <<](#)



WESTERHAM GREENSAND

The Westerham greensand rises gently up from the Darent Valley in the north to its highest points along the top of the southern scarp, such as Toys Hill and Goathurst Common. Many of these areas are owned by the National Trust and open to public access. This is an area of dense woodland, where thickets of birch and gorse are interspersed by tall stands of oak and beech, conifer plantations or old chestnut coppice. These woodlands enclose the landscape, concealing the small lanes which criss-cross the area and hiding the sinuous pastures which line the valley sides or bottoms. Larger fields are often edged by thick strips of mature trees or dark walls of woodland, their old internal hedges removed or replaced by fences. This hedgerow removal is gradually opening up small areas of the landscape. Scattered farms hug the sheltered valleys throughout this area and many substantial modern houses are surrounded by pony paddocks.

The southern boundary of this area is formed by the dramatic scarp, which drops down to the extensive pastureland of the Low Weald. The woodlands which characteristically clothe these slopes are predominantly deciduous and suffered extensive damage in the 1987 storm, in particular along the top of the slopes, leaving in places only a thin fringe of wind-battered trees against the skyline.

SEVENOAKS RIDGE

The Westerham Greensand area lies within the larger character area of the Sevenoaks Ridge.

The ridge around Sevenoaks is the product of the underlying acidic sandstone, which in the south rises up from the clay vale of the Low Weald in a steep, tree-covered scarp between Crockham Hill and Shipbourne. Offering panoramic views towards the High Weald and Tonbridge, the Greensand Belt reaches over 245 metres at Toys Hill, while its gentle northern slopes are scarred by series of deeply cut valleys. Much of the ridge is covered by dense, mixed woodland, producing an intimate, secretive landscape, shaded by swathes of beech and conifer forest. The poor soil of the sandstone, however, discouraged early settlers and, while the river valleys and fertile vales of Kent had been settled for centuries, this area remained dense forest interspersed with occasional summer pastures until the 10th and 11th centuries. Today, the dominant characteristics of this landscape are still the thick woodland and heathy commons, within which small pockets of farmland lie.

The acid greensand provides a variety of sandstones, which have been quarried since pre-Roman times. This abundance of stone has given rise to an alternative name for the area-the Chartland. Chart derives from the Scandinavian kart, meaning stony ground and still occurs in several place names, such as Brasted Chart. Historically, these stones were widely used for construction and can still be seen in buildings around Sevenoaks.

[next >>](#)

WESTERHAM GREENSAND: SEVENOAKS RIDGE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

High greensand scarp slope with dense woodland.
Enclosed, sinuous pastures at valley bottom, scattered farms and concealed small lanes.
Large modern houses and pony paddocks.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a strongly unified landscape with very few apparent visual detractors. The woodland is a dominant and distinct element which runs down into wide shaws around managed pastures, accentuating the landform. The intensity of land use is moderate and there is much ecological value in the widespread acid woodland and grasslands.

Original ridge top settlements around commons were formerly concealed but some village enlargements and new development are no longer totally contained, appearing in long views. New ridge top settlement can be unsympathetic in materials.

Sensitivity

Overall, the settlements, including historic and recent, have a moderately positive impact on the area. There is also a strong time-depth to the landscape with highway routes following ancient track ways, and the use of vernacular materials (ragstone, brick and hung tile) in historic settlements, and settlement located around historic commons. The south-facing ridge itself is a very dominant feature; visibility within the area is reduced by the dense tree cover, but the sensitivity remains high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the dense and widespread nature of the woodland, respecting the mix of tree species and understorey which accentuates the acid nature of the soil. The wide shaws are also an important part of the landscape; the mixed age-structure of the vegetation within the shaws requires special management to conserve this feature.
Small, nucleic settlements within the woodland cover are characteristic. Linear or piecemeal development should therefore be resisted, especially where there are near and distant views of a development site.
Highways are also very distinctive with oblique angle junctions and cross-contour routes. These characteristics should be conserved where possible.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity High.

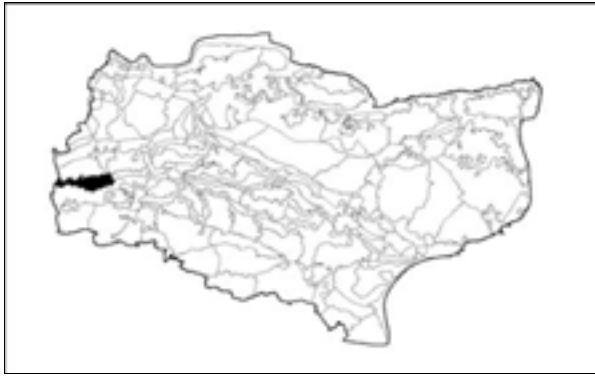
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the area and characteristics of the woodland
Conserve nucleic settlement characteristics and woodland enclosure around settlements
Conserve highway characteristics

[previous <<](#)



WESTERN LOW WEALD

Stretching from Crockham to Sevenoaks Weald, this is a typical area of Low Weald landscape. A patchwork of medium-sized pastures is surrounded by a strong network of trimmed hedges, producing a distinctive field pattern across the gentle slopes. Mature hedgerow trees and small deciduous woodlands are scattered throughout the area, giving the countryside a deceptively densely-wooded appearance. The dramatic bulk of the greensand scarp dominates the northern horizon, still conspicuously wooded despite extensive storm damage. Views from the scarp top stretch away to the High Weald, south of Tonbridge, across a seemingly unspoilt mosaic of small-scale farmland.

THE LOW WEALD

The Western Low Weald forms part of the larger character area the Low Weald within the Kent Downs AONB.

The clay of the Low Weald meets the scarp of the Greensand Ridge between Crockham Hill in the west and Ivy Hatch in the east. Small springs, seeping out from between the upper layers of greensand, have cut a series of deep furrows into this scarp, before draining eventually into the flat Eden Valley in the south.

In contrast with the wooded greensand, the Low Weald is an open, pastoral landscape. Although there are areas of arable cultivation, the heavy, wet clay favours grassland and the emphasis here is on intensively grazed fields, separated by shaws. Between these woods, piecemeal hedgerow removal has left a considerable number of former hedgerow trees isolated in fields abutted by fences. However, the increasing number of horses kept in this area is reintroducing smaller fields into the landscape, but these paddocks are usually bounded by temporary fences, rather than new hedges. The clays of the Low Weald were traditionally used to construct the timber-framed buildings so typical of this area. Nevertheless, the underlying sandstones were also widely used and combinations of these materials are not unusual.

[next >>](#)

WESTERN LOW WEALD: THE LOW WEALD

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Pastoral landscape, patchwork of medium-sized pastures.
Mature hedgerow trees and small deciduous woodlands give wooded appearance.
Wooded greensand scarp in view.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape with very few visual detractors. The strong and varied semi-natural habitats of hedgerow, woodland and wetland are slightly reduced in value by isolated areas of more intensive farming. The condition of heritage features is generally good - the rural landscape pattern currently retains functional integrity and the impact of built development is positive, however, vegetative heritage features such as mature hedgerows are considered to be vulnerable due to over-maturity and lack of long-term management objectives.

Sensitivity

This is considered to be a characteristic historic landscape with overtones of ancient woodland, and the sense of place is therefore considered to be moderate. The intermittent tree cover allows limited views throughout the area. Overall sensitivity is rated as low due to the limited visibility.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

This landscape is considered to be vulnerable to the over-maturity of its main features - such as the characteristic hedgerow network with mature oaks. It is important to reinforce this feature by ensuring that land use and arable cultivation techniques are sympathetic to the growing conditions for hedgerows, and that long-term plans exist for the continuous replacement of senescent vegetation.

It is also felt that the area would benefit from the reinforcement of existing natural wetland habitats. The effect of streams and watercourses could be enhanced and reinforced as an inherent part of the clay landform.

The rural nature of this unified landscape is an important perception to reinforce.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity

Low.

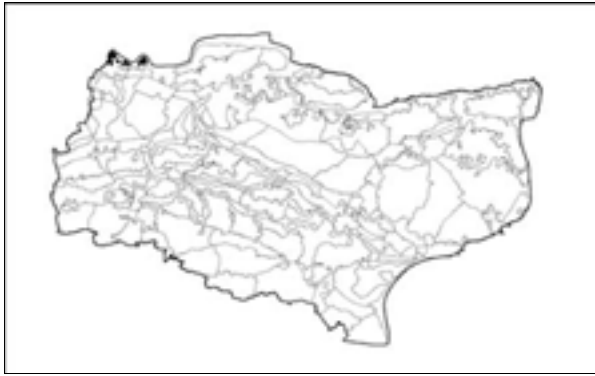
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

REINFORCE.

Reinforce natural habitats of hedgerow, woodlands and water courses.
Reinforce landscape pattern by long-term management
Reinforce rural land use
Reinforce historic character

[previous <<](#)



The landscape is essentially low-lying, flat, open marshland adjacent to the River Thames that has become fragmented into isolated remnants by extensive urban and industrial development, creating a discordant character. The landscape is still undergoing change and is often degraded by neglect as much as by the proximity of industrial or urban influences, although some parts still retain a distinctively marshland character. The marshes are distinguished from others within the East Thames Corridor by their predominantly urban, estuarine context and the varied skyline created by the complex, often discordant, mix of industry, urban development, river uses (shipping channels and port facilities), remnant grazing marsh and arable farmland.

Dartford, Swanscombe and Botany marshes are formed from alluvium deposits and Stone Marshes are predominantly with overlying alluvium deposits. As a result there is a distinct lack of landform features and the whole area is low-lying at or below five metres AOD.

There has been a steady and significant loss and degradation of the once predominant landcover of grazing marsh, resulting from conversion to improved grassland, arable and urban/industrial use (e.g. mineral workings, industrial buildings). Only a few scattered tiny pockets of grazing marsh habitat remain, principally on Dartford and Botany marshes and saltmarsh is confined to a thin strip beyond the tidal defences. Improved grassland (converted grazing marsh) is now the dominant land use on Dartford marshes whereas arable is more typical of Swanscombe and Broadness Marshes. Isolated pockets of scrub woodland are a valuable but localised feature. Stone Marshes have been substantially modified by large-scale development and tipping with large areas of bare or built ground but contain remnants of semi-improved grassland, scrub and open water habitats. Localised wetland and scrub vegetation are also associated with the flooded gravel pits at Littlebrook, to the south-east of Joyce Green Hospital.

Few wildlife habitats remain within this area but dykes, ditches, remnants of traditional grazing marsh, wetlands and scrub are important localised features. The majority of Dartford Marshes is designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) as well as an area to the east of Joyce Green Hospital, with key habitats listed as estuarine mosaic, ditches/river, grassland and scrub.

The density of Palaeolithic archaeological finds in the area is perhaps the highest in Kent. The peninsula north of Swanscombe contains significant numbers of finds dating from Mesolithic and Neolithic times.

This area of the Thames has strong cultural associations with maritime painting. In the 17th century the landscape of the southern shore of the Thames formed the setting for the work of important artists such as Isaac Sailmaker and William van de Velde, younger and elder; and later with painters such as Charles Dean, Alexander Maitland and William Wyllie and in more recent years with the work of the Wapping Group of painters. Literature is also linked to this maritime setting with such writers as Joseph Conrad.

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Low-lying flat, open marshland, fragmented by built development. Urban/estuarine context. River uses.
Remnant grazing marsh and arable farmland.
Some localised ditches, dykes, wetlands and scrub.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

These small areas of low-lying, open marshland are greatly fragmented by views of industrial and housing development, creating discordant fragments of the character area. Views out are limited by sea defences and development. There are many large-scale visual detractors such as quarries and industrial parks, with associated access roads and signage some instances of tipping. Localised ditches, wetlands and scrub raise the ecological profile of the area, but only operate as weak networks, with the ditches being generally unmanaged and scrub vegetation becoming more prevalent. Some former grazing marsh has been converted to improved grassland. There is very little evidence of the cultural elements of the former estuarine grazing marsh or of natural links with adjacent areas - the functional integrity of this area is very poor.

Sensitivity

The built form and general land use within the area has a high negative impact. Many elements within the landscape such as roads and structures are recent and have become characteristic of the area, but are not locally distinct. Urban skyline features can be said to be recent characteristics.
The original sea defences and drainage patterns, which are the remnants of the historic character of the area, are generally overwhelmed by large engineering bunds and have become degraded through lack of appropriate management of watercourses. This is potentially a very distinctive landscape which currently has a poor sense of place. The openness of the area means that visibility is high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a new framework for the remaining area of marshland and open pasture, incorporating adjacent areas of commercial or residential development. In degraded areas, create a new landforms which incorporate new managed wetland and drainage features, but also enhances the existing historic features of the landscape such as ditches and dykes. Restore habitats by enhancing the management of existing semi-natural grazing marsh and drainage systems.
Create new habitats such as reedbeds and salt marsh.
Create a visual containment to the remaining undeveloped marshland using features of land drainage and marsh e.g. a major peripheral drain which also serves as a natural habitat.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Significantly Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

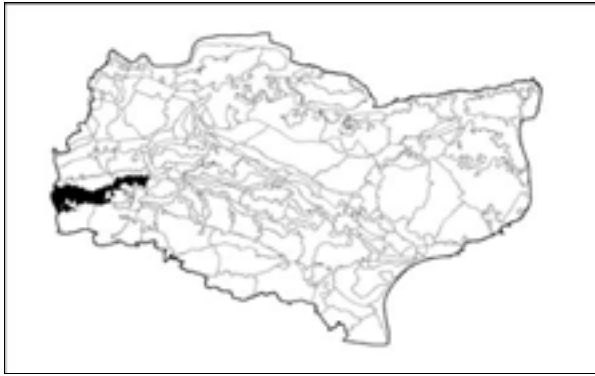
Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create a boundary feature to the remaining open marsh/grassland
Create reedbeds and salt marsh
Create a framework to the adjacent industrial activities, developing a design code which respects the inherent landscape conditions and enhances the industrial areas
Restore habitats by sensitive management

[previous <<](#)



A distinctly undulating pastoral landscape of small to medium sized fields, including old meadows, partially enclosed by small, broadleaf coppice woodlands, such as the Dunk's Green Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI), often with ancient coppice stools and pollards as in Clear Hedges Wood, North Frith. Shaws and hedgerows, with their distinctive field oaks, provide further enclosure and intimacy to the landscape. Some enlargement of field size has taken place to allow for the conversion of grassland to arable causing the loss of traditional boundaries. Post and wire fencing now fills the gappy hedgerows. Otherwise there is little to detract from the traditional scene.

The pattern of ridges and small valleys is enhanced by many small streams, that have created the valleys as they work their way to the River Eden to the south, and the network of winding ditch-lined lanes. Over a wide area the distinctive Greensand Ridge to the north, with its shattered woodlands from the 1987 storm, gives a dramatic backdrop to the farmlands below.

The settlement pattern is generally scattered, being composed of historic farmsteads, such as Bore Place or those of medieval hall house origins, such as Broxham Manor, with small hamlets carved out of the original wooded landscape. At Bore Place, traditional skills such as brick-making and coppice crafts have been revived, and the local community involved in creating an imaginative sculpture, the Wood N Horse, from some of these coppice products. Elsewhere attractive groups of oasts give evidence to a time when hop growing extended into this part of Kent.

Small ponds are still characteristic of these farmlands and the reservoir at Bough Beech stands out as a distinctive, man-made feature that has now acquired enormous value for wildlife with part of it being managed as a nature reserve.

20th century expansion of towns such as Edenbridge has contributed to the blurring of landscape patterns, causing visual intrusion locally. Hedgerows and trees could be used to incorporate this sort of post-war built development, as well as changes to crop patterns, in the landscape. The Redhill to Ashford railway cuts across the southern edge of the character area, encouraging past development such as at Marlpit Hill, but is rarely intrusive in the landscape. Proposals to widen the line for freight may affect this status quo.

[next >>](#)

WESTERN WOODED FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating landform bisected by many small streams.
Small woodlands, shaws, hedgerows and hedgerow trees enclosing small, historic pastoral fields.
Strong enclosure from the Greensand ridge.
Scattered small settlements including historic farmsteads.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a mature, enclosed landscape of well-defined lines, with a dense, generally well managed hedgerow network and small copses. The frequent occurrence of mature oaks is currently a very strong element of the view, although it is vulnerable due to the single age of the mature trees and the arable cultivation of land within the root zone. Land use within the landscape framework is mixed, but intensive arable and cattle farming detracts from the general ecological value which is otherwise good. Scattered farmsteads are the basis for this rural landscape which has a clear cultural identity.

Sensitivity

The maturity and prevalence of high-forest woodland species and the small-scale pastoral pattern emphasises the strong time-depth element of this landscape. Although well enclosed to the north by the Greensand Ridge, the relief of the character area is unremarkable, gently undulating. Intermittent lines of mature trees and small woodlands allow limited views through the rural landscape.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Reinforce the mature tree framework by the sensitive management, conservation and replanting within hedgerows and along highways.
Explore management techniques which are sensitive to the root zones of the trees.
Reinforce the wetland corridors and the natural habitats of the unfarmed landscape such as the woodland.
Conserve and manage the woodlands, hedgerow pattern, hedges and narrow grass verges on highways.
Conserve the cultural emphasis on historic scattered farmsteads as a basis for the land use.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Very Good.

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity Moderate.

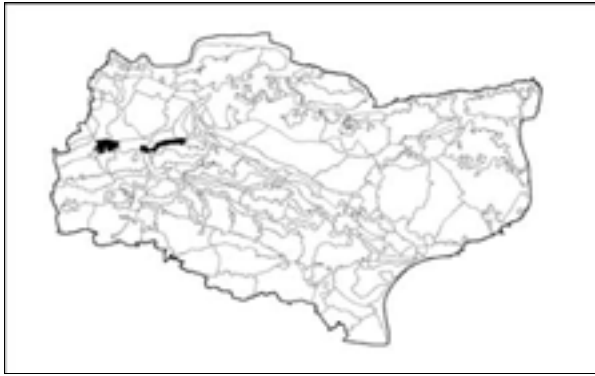
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve hedgerow pattern and woodland cover
Reinforce mature tree cover - predominantly oaks
Reinforce natural habitats
Conserve historic settlement pattern

[previous <<](#)



This is an undulating landscape focused on the water courses of the river Darent and on a small stream feeding the Medway near Wrotham. In many ways this area is dominated by the transport corridor of the M20/A20/M26 and the railway. In particular the traffic levels along the A20 and A25 have caused a loss of character of Wrotham Heath and the merging of Platt with Borough Green along the A25. Here, the traditional boundaries are replaced with conifers and close-board fencing that suburbanises the roadside, with garish petrol stations adding to the busy roadside scene. Between the main roads, however, the free-draining soils of the Folkestone Beds support small areas of broadleaf woodland, a high percentage of cattle-grazed pasture bounded by hedgerows and small arable fields in an enclosed and varied pattern.

The woodland is typified by that at High Haugh and Valley Wood at Wrotham Heath, Sites of Nature Conservation Interest and together an Area of Local Landscape Importance. Although little of the sessile woodland remains, a small area of ancient oak coppice remains with bilberry, ling and cow-wheat present. The sandy Folkestone Beds also support remnant heathy grasslands such as those that can be seen at the Wrotham Golf course with bell heather, ling and the delicate harebell all present in the roughs. Visually the course is largely well-contained, eastwards, the solid geology is overlain by acid drifts which supports remnant mixed broadleaf woodlands such as Leybourne Wood, which will be affected by the proposed by-pass.

The small woodlands help screen the motorway and provide enclosure to the hospital at Addington, and to the outskirts of Wrotham Heath and Borough Green, but extraction sites such as the one at Nepicar Farm are still visible through a thin tree cover. The noise from the motorway is still audible as well. Woodlands provide enclosure to the tiny wooded lanes, such as St. Vincent's Lane that defines the boundary of Addington Park, much of which is now West Malling Golf Club.

Around Sevenoaks, the landscape character is dominated by flooded mineral workings which have become valuable wildlife habitats.

At Wrotham Heath the centre is dominated by the road junction of the A20 and A25, although Platt has an historic centre of Ragstone buildings that climb attractively up a narrow wooded lane towards the better quality soils of the Hythe Beds. The character area as a whole is generally attractively enclosed to the south by these wooded slopes with occasional glimpses to the Downs available from the A20 and broad views from the M20. Close to the A20, however, there is a clutter of roadside sellers, petrol stations, lorry stops, conifer hedges and eroded verges that dominates the roadside views. Closer to Leybourne cluttered pony paddocks can also be found.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating landscape with varying soils. Mixed farmland with enclosed fields. Small sessile oak woodlands with heathy grassland. Enclosed wooded lanes. Mineral extraction. Transport corridor.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This undulating rural landscape of small-scale mixed use is historically and currently well-settled. It is fragmented by the motorway corridor and impoverished by suburban land uses, some of which are associated with new residential and leisure developments. These have also resulted in some loss of enclosure and a change in road and settlement characteristics. The frequency of small copses and the occasional heathy grasslands retain some ecological interest. However, large-scale intrusions in the landscape, such as mineral workings, and the fragmented landscape elements, leave the landscape in poor condition.

Sensitivity

The generally undulating landscape frequently displays strong, localised relief giving a moderate visibility through intermittent tree cover. Although the transport corridor now tends to dominate the area as a whole, the historic character of the frequent small farms and villages, many with ragstone details, retain a moderate sense of place. The area is considered to have a moderate sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore small-scale rural enclosure to land around settlements using appropriate hedgerow species where these can be well managed. The restoration of small broadleaf copses to steeply undulating land and stream corridors would enhance both the natural habitats of the area and the overall enclosure, and can be used to incorporate the visually detracting features into the wider landscape. It would restore the perception of the ancient character of the area. The restoration of parkland features may be incorporated into new amenity uses for open space.

Create a clear landscape pattern which recognises the transport corridors and mineral workings, creating cohesive elements around these dominant land uses and ring-fencing historic settlements. The function of these cohesive elements should recognise the amenity requirements of the open space.

Create a new woodland framework to the transport corridor.

Create links or corridors of agricultural land between settlements, with a small-scale pattern and enclosure to restore the setting of the villages

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
poor			
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore parkland features
 Restore rural setting to villages
 Restore woodland to steep slopes and water courses
 Create landscape pattern around transport corridor and mineral workings
 Create new agricultural links between settlements

[previous <<](#)



WYE

Around the ancient town of Wye, whose Georgian facades reflect a period of 18th century prosperity, the Stour passes through a wide, flat floodplain before cutting north into the Downs. There is little woodland here, but narrow lines of trees, or overgrown hedges around field boundaries, cast veils of light vegetation across the open landscape. Below the great expanse of Challock Forest in the west, the slopes are open, still bearing traces of ancient field systems. On the eastern scarp, however, the slopes are much steeper and more convoluted, producing a series of enclosed coombes, dominated by the rough grassland, scrub and deciduous woodland of the Wye and Crundale National Nature Reserve. These areas of 'natural' vegetation are in sharp contrast with the ornamental tree planting at Eastwell Park and Planting.

Nevertheless, there is a gradual decline in the condition and extent of the former hedgerow network. In some areas, ploughing extends right up to the riverbanks and some riverside trees have been removed. In the parks and woodlands storm damage has caused considerable damage, requiring extensive replanting and management.

STOUR VALLEY

Wye lies within the larger Stour Valley character area of the Kent Downs AONB.

The Great Stour is the most easterly of the three rivers cutting through the Downs. Like the Darent and the Medway, it too provided an early access route into the heart of Kent and formed an ancient focus for settlement. Today the Stour Valley is highly valued for the quality of its landscape, especially by the considerable numbers of walkers who follow the Stour Valley Walk or the North Downs Way National Trail.

Despite its proximity to both Canterbury and Ashford, the Stour Valley retains a strong rural identity. Enclosed by steep scarps on both sides, with dense woodlands on the upper slopes, the valley is dominated by intensively farmed arable fields interspersed by broad sweeps of mature parkland. Unusually, there are no electricity pylons cluttering the views across the valley. North of Bilting, the river flows through narrow, pastoral floodplain, dotted with trees such as willow and alder and drained by small ditches. To the south around Wye, however, the floodplain widens out and the pastures along the immediate riverside are surrounded by intensively cultivated arable fields on the rich, well-drained brick-earth soils. The field pattern is picked out by a network of narrow, trimmed hedges and lines of mature trees, such as poplars.

On the valley sides, many of the arable fields are surrounded by thick shaws or dense, overgrown hedges which extend down from the woodlands on the upper slopes. Hedgerow trees, in particular oak and ash, are frequent and much of the woodland along the east side of the valley is of national importance for its plant, insect and other animal communities.

[next >>](#)

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Wide, flat floodplain.
Lines of trees and overgrown hedges.
Open, ancient field systems in west.
Steep slopes in east with rough grass, scrub and deciduous woodland.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a mixed landscape of small fields with hedgerows in decline, and small plantation woodlands. There is much arable cultivation, with pasture and arable near the riverside but with some distinctive willows remaining. On the side slopes, the old field systems are in decline as arable cultivation becomes dominant. This creates an incoherent landscape and there are several detractors, especially the railway line and the post-war linear development of existing villages. Ecologically, there is only a limited extent of habitat associated with the woodlands and the river corridor. Tree cover is patchy and field boundaries are in decline. This is a landscape in very poor condition, although the historic settlements at Wye and Godmersham, historic flint churches and the distinctive large barns and houses with long sloping roofs have a positive impact.

Sensitivity

There is a moderate sense of place, with the distinctive pattern of historic settlement being the major contributor. Hedgerows are mainly located on roadsides, but the traditional historic pattern of internal field boundaries, hedgerow trees and woodlands is becoming indistinct. The river itself has lost its strength of character since arable cultivation often stretches to the very edge of the water, with the distinctive alders and willows and aquatic vegetation having been removed. Historic buildings, hamlets and villages are often characteristic and add to both time depth and distinctiveness. Landform is apparent and tree cover is intermittent, giving a moderate visibility.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create and reinforce the ecological importance and visual impact of the river corridor by replanting where possible with willows and alders, establishing marginal aquatic vegetation and broad areas of bankside vegetation, including tall grassland and scrub.
Create floodplain wetlands adjoining the river to increase ecological diversity and a distinctive river-side character.
Manage existing hedgerows, especially the remaining road-side hedges and hedgerow trees, including gapping up and planting new trees.
Establish small blocks of woodland to create a new sustainable landscape structure to offset the loss of hedgerows and trees to soften the impact of the railway and linear developments.
Encourage the planting of rows of poplars and other windbreak trees to create a landscape structure where internal field boundaries have been removed.
Conserve historic buildings and improve their setting in the landscape through appropriate planting and reducing clutter.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

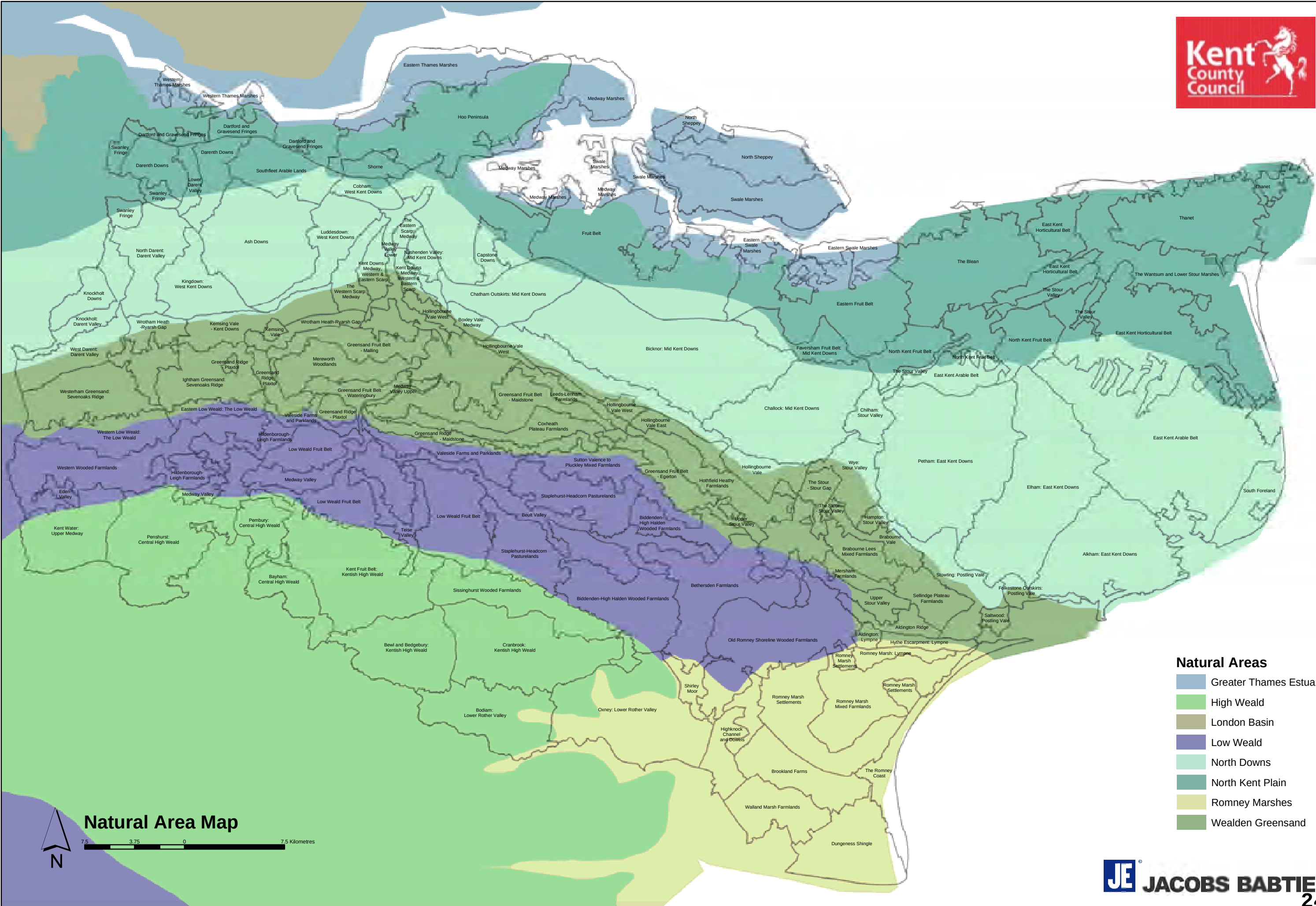
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create and reinforce the ecological and visual impact of the river corridor
Manage roadside hedgerows and plant hedgerow trees
Establish small woodland blocks to soften development
Plant poplar windbreaks to create a new landscape structure
Conserve and improve the setting of historic buildings

[previous <<](#)





6.0 HOW WE PRODUCED THE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT OF KENT

The methodology used to undertake judgments on the landscape assessment is based on the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage's '*Landscape Character Assessment Guidance*'.

Local character areas have previously been identified across the county. These are described in the following reports that are collectively referred to as the Landscape Assessment of Kent.

- The High Weald (1994)
- The Kent Downs (1995)
- Thames Gateway, Eastern Swale Marshes and Eastern Fruit Belt (1995)
- The Low Weald Landscape Assessment & Guidelines (1997)
- The Greensand Belt Landscape Assessment & Guidelines (1998)
- North West Kent Landscape Assessment & Guidelines (1998)
- North East Kent Landscape Assessment & Guidelines (1998)
- Romney Marsh Landscape Assessment & Guidelines (1998)

These studies were undertaken over a number of years whilst landscape assessment methodologies were developing and therefore there is a need to bring them together on the same basis. The character areas have been revisited and minor amendments have been made to the boundaries to align with features on the ground to update them to conform to the current guidance. Field Assessment Sheets were then carried out; these have been designed to analyse the component factors of the landscape and to reach a series of decisions on the **Condition** and **Sensitivity** of each character area.

Condition is strongly influenced by the impact of external factors. The assessment of condition evaluates the pattern of the landscape and the presence of incongruous features on the unity of the landscape. It also evaluates how well the landscape functions as a habitat for wildlife and the condition of cultural or 'man-made' elements such as enclosure, built elements and roads. Urban fringe areas are often under pressure that can frustrate other land uses. This often means that these areas are described as being in a poor condition whilst other more remote areas may still have the same basic features but be in a better condition. It is therefore practical to assume that condition may vary throughout a character area so that any conclusions should be regarded as a summary of the overall situation. **Condition** is defined by an analysis of Visual Unity and Functional Integrity and is classified as very poor, poor, moderate, good and very good.

Visual Unity is the result of an analysis of the Pattern of Elements, for example the pattern of vegetation, enclosure, settlement, and the relationship of these to the landform etc., weighed against the number of Detracting Features in the landscape.

Functional Integrity is an assessment of how the landscape functions and considers both the influence of man (Cultural Integrity) and nature (Ecological Integrity).

Sensitivity is a measure of the ability of a landscape to accept change without causing irreparable damage to the essential fabric and distinctiveness of that landscape. The term change refers to both beneficial changes such as a new woodland as well as change that

may be brought about by new land uses. **Sensitivity** is defined by an analysis of Sense of Place and Visibility and ranges from very low through low, moderate, high and to very high.

Sense of Place balances Distinctiveness with Time depth. Distinctiveness is defined by how much the key characteristics contribute to a sense of place. For example in a landscape where hedgerows are a key characteristic if the network is intact the landscape can be described as distinct or 'characteristic'. Some landscapes have features that may be considered unique or rare and these will obviously contribute to a strong sense of place. Time depth ranges from recent, through historic to ancient and reflects how long that landscape has taken to establish. Ancient landscapes are uncommon in Kent but include those that have had very little intervention by man or contain ancient or prehistoric features. Historic landscapes are generally from the medieval period onwards. This is when the pattern of most landscapes in Kent was established and is generally discernible today (although overlain with modern features). Recent landscapes are those where historic elements have been replaced with new elements or land management. They include reclaimed landscapes.

Visibility addresses the issues of Landform and the intercepting feature of Tree cover. For example an open hilltop landscape has a higher visibility than an enclosed lowland landscape.

The conclusions reached regarding each of the character areas are expressed using a matrix that encompasses Condition and Sensitivity. This analysis gives a broad indication of each area's ability to accommodate a change in management or use without loss of overall integrity. The matrix helps to assist in the direction of any policy that might be applied to the land in question.

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high
		Sensitivity		

The combination of condition and sensitivity assessments has generated appropriate actions for each character area:

Although conclusions have been reached for each of the character areas, it is not the purpose of this study to rank one character area against another. Likewise this study is not intended to identify in detail areas suitable for development. It may however offer guidance to both the local planning authority and developers when deciding the type and scale of development that may be appropriate whilst respecting the character of the landscape.

Conserve - actions that encourage the conservation of distinctive features and features in good condition.

Conserve and reinforce - actions that conserve distinctive features and features in good condition, and strengthen and reinforce those features that may be vulnerable.

Reinforce - actions that strengthen or reinforce distinctive features and patterns in the landscape.

Conserve and restore - actions that encourage the conservation of distinctive features and features in good condition, whilst restoring elements or areas in poorer condition and removing or mitigating detracting features.

Conserve and create - actions that conserve distinctive features and features in good condition, whilst creating new features or areas where they have been lost or are in poor condition.

Restore - actions that encourage the restoration of distinctive landscape features and the removal or mitigation of detracting features.

Restore and create - actions that restore distinctive features and the removal or mitigation of detracting features, whilst creating new features or areas where they have been lost or are in poor condition.

Reinforce and create - actions that strengthen or reinforce distinctive features and patterns in the landscape, whilst creating new features or areas where they have been lost or are in poor condition.

Create - actions that create new features or areas where existing elements are lost or in poor condition.

It has to be recognised that whilst the process adopts a complex but logical critique of the landscape many of the individual decisions are still based on the trained but subjective judgments of the assessors. However by simplifying the conclusions into a series of generic actions it is possible to reach informed and well supported judgments on the landscape character.

Actions are offered that are locally appropriate to the character area and respond to the generic actions that have been identified. Many of these actions are not within the remit of the Local Authority to implement directly as they are not responsible for managing the land in most cases. Such references are included with the view to influencing opinions, generating support and guiding policy. In many instances certain forms of land management have a strong influence on the landscape character. These are often dependent on market forces and land management practices for their retention e.g. sheep grazing on marshland and fruit production.

7.0 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Character

A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.

Characteristics

Elements, or combinations of elements, which make a particular contribution to distinctive character.

Elements

Individual components that make up the landscape, such as trees and hedges.

Features

Particularly prominent or eye catching elements, like tree clumps, church towers, or wooded skylines.

Characterisation

The process of identifying areas of similar character, classifying and mapping them and describing their character.

Condition

The assessment of condition evaluates the pattern of the landscape and the presence of incongruous features on the unity of the landscape. It also evaluates how well the landscape functions as a habitat for wildlife and the condition of cultural or 'man-made' elements such as enclosure, built elements and roads.

Sensitivity

This is a measure of the ability of a landscape to accept change without causing irreparable damage to the essential fabric and distinctiveness of that landscape. The term change refers to both beneficial changes such as a new woodland as well as change that may be brought about by new land uses. Landscape assessment considers sensitivity on an areas sense of place and its visibility.

Sense of Place

Sense of place is the term used to describe the individuality and distinctiveness of a particular place or area. It is about the common identity and perception of a particular place to groups or individuals.

Time depth

Time depth reflects how long that landscape has taken to establish. Ancient landscapes are uncommon in Kent but include those that have had very little intervention by man or contain ancient or prehistoric features. Historic landscapes are generally from the medieval period onwards. This is when the pattern of most landscapes in Kent was established and is generally discernible today (although overlain with modern features). Recent landscapes are those where historic elements have been replaced with new elements or land management. They include reclaimed landscapes.

Enclosure

Enclosure is the term applied to the joining of strips of open field systems to make larger compact units of land. These were then fenced or hedged off so that farmers had land in one farm rather than in scattered strips. Prior to 1740 most land was enclosed by agreement, which often meant larger farmers buying off smaller farmer to get rid of opposition. In areas where there was sufficient opposition or a number of smaller farmers an Act of Parliament to enclose than land had to be obtained. This became the accepted procedure after 1750.

Kent differs from other parts of England in its lack of open field systems. It is not clear whether this is due to pastoral traditions and a distinct inheritance custom or to the complexities of Kent's peninsular geology. Whatever the reason the Enclosure Acts did not affect Kent and the field systems found in today's landscape maintain their medieval origins.

8.0 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
CTRL	Channel Tunnel Rail Link
ESA	Environmentally Sensitive Area
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
NNR	National Nature Reserve
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SNCI	Site of Nature Conservation Interest
SPA	Special Protection Area for Birds
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

9.0 OTHER USEFUL PUBLISHED INFORMATION

Title	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans – A Guide
Copyright / ISBN	Countryside Agency
Published by	Countryside Agency 2001
Source	Can be ordered or downloaded from the Countryside Agency website: www.countryside.gov.uk
Summary	The purpose of this guide is to assist local authorities, AONB staff units, AONB partners and others concerned with the production and implementation of AONB Management Plans.

Title	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Policy Statement 1991
Copyright / ISBN	Countryside Commission / ISBN: 0 86170 317 0
Published by	Countryside Commission 1991
Source	Can be ordered from the Countryside Agency website: www.countryside.gov.uk
Summary	The Countryside Commission's policies for improving the administration and management of AONBs, prior to the 1997 consultation on funding and management of AONBs.

Title	Greensand Belt – landscape assessment and guidance
Copyright / ISBN	Kent County Council/ ISBN 1 901509 10 9
Published by	Kent County Council 1998
Source	Kent County Council
Summary	The document provides an objective rural assessment of landscape character for the whole of Kent. The assessment is intended for use by the County Council to inform landscape policies in the review of the Medway and Kent Structure Plan and by District Councils as an input to policy in their Local Plans.

Title	High Weald
Copyright / ISBN	Countryside Agency / ISBN: 0 86170 438 X
Published by	Countryside Agency 1994
Source	Can be ordered from the Countryside Agency website: www.countryside.gov.uk
Summary	A landscape assessment of the High Weald

Title	High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004 – A 20 year Strategy
Copyright / ISBN	High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Published by	High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee 2003
Source	Can be ordered or downloaded from the Kent Downs AONB website: www.highweald.org
Summary	The management plan is primarily for all local authorities, statutory undertakers, utilities and public bodies who have a new duty of regard for the purposes of the AONB designation in their functions and operations. Consultation Draft

Title	Heritage Coasts: A Guide for Councillors and Officers
Copyright / ISBN	Countryside Commission / ISBN: 0 86170 456 8
Published by	Countryside Commission 1995
Source	Can be ordered from the Countryside Agency website: www.countryside.gov.uk
Summary	This advisory booklet provides information on all aspects of Heritage Coasts. It is invaluable to local authority councillors, officers on committees involved in the running of Heritage Coast management services and anyone with a general interest in Heritage Coasts.

Title	Heritage Coasts in England: policies and priorities
Copyright / ISBN	Countryside Commission / ISBN: 0 86170 353 7
Published by	Countryside Commission
Source	Can be downloaded from the Countryside Agency website: www.countryside.gov.uk
Summary	The Countryside Commission's policy on Heritage Coasts. It also includes statements of commitment to Heritage Coast objectives by the Government and interested organisations.

Title	Kent Design - a guide to sustainable development
Copyright / ISBN	Copyright Kent Association of Local Authorities
Published by	Kent Association of Local Authorities, March 2000.
Source	
Summary	Ten objectives and principles are identified in this Guide against which development can be judged. A sustainability checklist is offered to test proposed development. Principle 10 covers biodiversity interests and reaffirms the need to conserve, create and integrate open space, landscape and natural habitats as part of development. For adoption as supplementary planning guidance.

Title	Kent Downs
Copyright / ISBN	Countryside Agency / ISBN: 0 86170 477 9
Published by	Countryside Agency 1995
Source	Can be ordered from the Countryside Agency website: www.countryside.gov.uk
Summary	A landscape assessment of the Kent Downs

Title	Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland
Copyright / ISBN	Countryside Agency
Published by	Countryside Agency 2002
Source	Can be ordered from the Countryside Agency website: www.countryside.gov.uk
Summary	This guidance document provides advice on how to identify the different components of landscape character that makes it unique, for example, woodlands, hedgerows, moors, mountains and farmland, building styles, and historic artefacts.

Title	Management Plan for the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty 2004-2009
Copyright / ISBN	Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Published by	Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee 2003
Source	Can be ordered or downloaded from the Kent Downs AONB website: www.kentdowns.org.uk
Summary	The management plan is primarily for all local authorities, statutory undertakers, utilities and public bodies who have a new duty of regard for the purposes of the AONB designation in their functions and operations. Consultation Draft.

10.0 WHERE TO GO FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Organisation	Countryside Agency
Relevance to Planning Process	The Countryside Agency is the statutory agency responsible for improving quality of life in the countryside.
Phone	01242 521381
Fax	01242 584270
Email	info@countryside.gov.uk
Website	www.countryside.gov.uk

Organisation	Defra
Relevance to Planning Process	The Government Department primarily concerned with creating a better environment
Phone	08459 33 55 77
Fax	020 7238 3329
Email	Helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk
Website	www.defra.gov.uk

Organisation	District Councils
Relevance to Planning Process	Determine all planning applications other than those in respect of minerals, waste, schools and highways. Ensure that development conforms to the plans and policies for the district and takes into account the effects of proposals on the surrounding area.
Phone	
Fax	
Email	
Website	http://www.kent.gov.uk/ (links to Borough, District & City Councils)

Organisation	Environment Agency
Relevance to Planning Process	Public body responsible for protecting and enhancing the environment in England.
Phone	01732 875587
Email	enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk
Website	www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Organisation	High Weald AONB Unit
Relevance to Planning Process	
Phone	01580 879499
Email	Info@highweald.org
Website	www.highweald.org

Organisation	Kent County Council
Relevance to Planning Process	Determines Minerals, Waste School and Highway Schemes plus has a view on strategic applications.
Phone	01622 221537
Fax	01622 221636
Email	biodiversity@kent.gov.uk
Website	www.kent.gov.uk/environment/careenv/safeguarding/biodiversity

Organisation	Kent Downs AONB Unit
Relevance to Planning Process	Provide landscape design guidance in partnership with local authorities represented in the AONB, comment on forward / strategic planning issues major planning applications by virtue of their scale, precedence etc.
Phone	01622 221522
Fax	01622 221636
Email	Kentdowns@kent.gov.uk
Website	www.kentdowns.org.uk

Organisation	Kent High Weald Countryside Project
Relevance to Planning Process	The Kent High Weald Project was established in 1991 to: <i>conserve and enhance our natural heritage, providing opportunities for people to become actively involved in practical conservation.</i>
Phone	01580 715919
Fax	01580 712064
Email	kenthighweald@kent.gov.uk
Website	www.kenthighweald.org

Organisation	Kentish Stour Countryside Project
Relevance to Planning Process	The Kentish Stour Countryside Project works closely with landowners and local communities to promote both landscape and nature conservation, and develop opportunities for appropriate countryside access and informal recreation.
Phone	01233 813307
Fax	01233 812532
Email	kentishstour@kent.gov.uk
Website	www.kentishstour.org.uk/

Organisation	Medway Valley Countryside Project
Relevance to Planning Process	The Medway Valley Countryside Project aims to: <i>maintain and enhance the Medway valley from Tonbridge to Rochester as a green corridor for the benefit of wildlife and the local community, through the promotion of community awareness and action.</i>
Phone	01622 683695
Email	matthew.davey@kent.gov.uk
Website	www.kentdowns.org.uk/medway_valley.html

Organisation	North West Kent Countryside Project
Relevance to Planning Process	The North West Kent Countryside Project works to: <i>conserve and enhance the wildlife, landscape and cultural heritage of the countryside in both a rural and urban context.</i>
Phone	01322 294727
Email	nwkentcp@kent.gov.uk
Website	www.kentdowns.org.uk/north_west.html

Organisation	Romney Marsh Countryside Project
Relevance to Planning Process	The Romney Marsh Countryside Project aims to: <i>care for the special landscape and wildlife of the Romney Marsh and Dungeness, encouraging people to enjoy and understand the countryside through guided walks, cycle rides, countryside events and children's activities.</i>
Phone	01797 367934
Fax	01797 367934
Email	mail@rmcp.co.uk
Website	www.rmcp.co.uk

Organisation	White Cliffs Countryside Project
Relevance to Planning Process	The White Cliffs Countryside Project was launched in 1989 to: <i>help care for the special coast and countryside of Dover and Shepway districts.</i>
Phone	01304 241806
Email	tic@doveruk.com
Website	www.whitecliffscountry.org.uk

