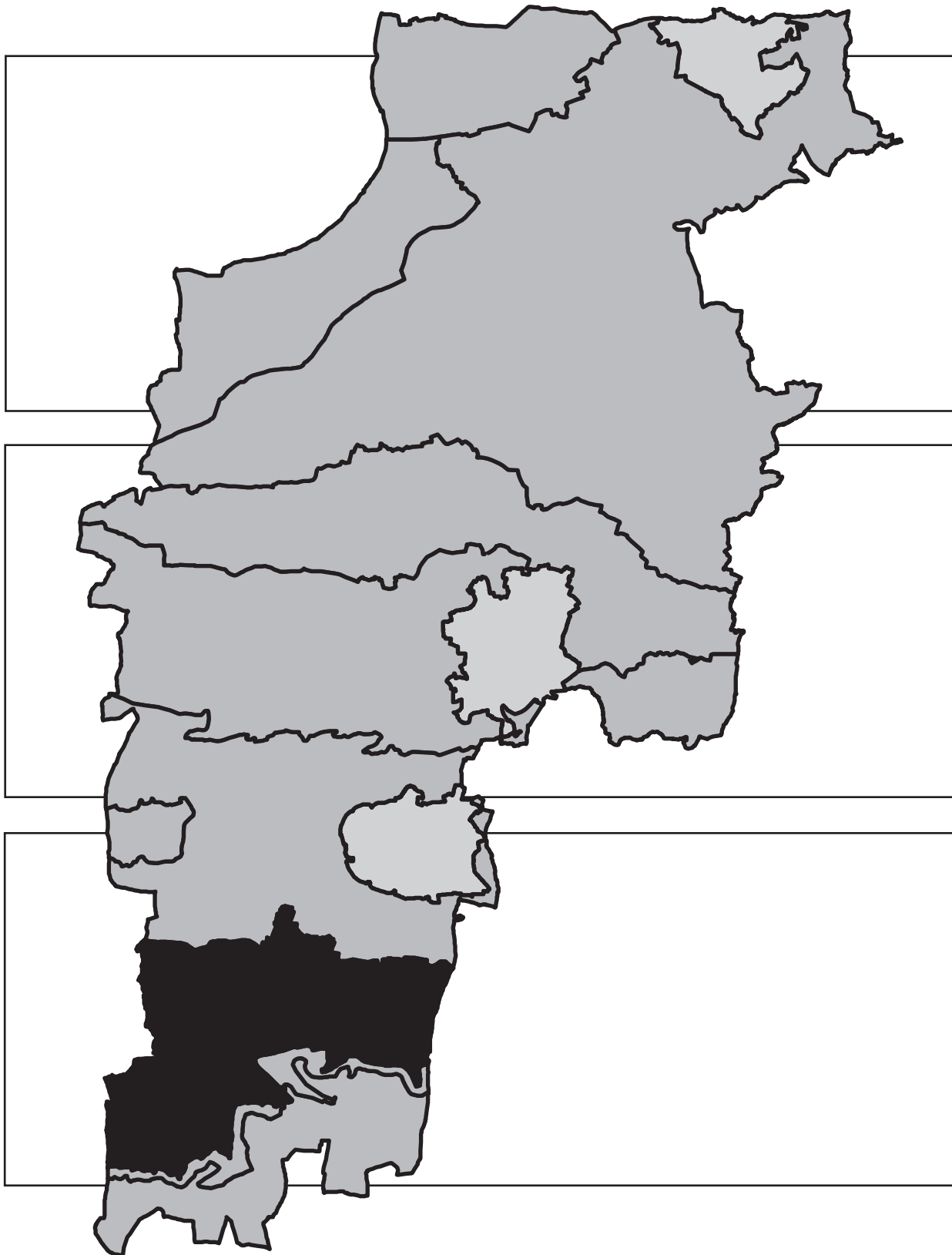


Landscape Character Area 3
Hurstpierpoint Scarp Footslopes



Hurstpierpoint Scarp Footslopes

CHARACTERISATION

Summary and key characteristics

Undulating relief of low sandstone ridges and gentle clay vales. Areas of ancient woodland have survived on the heavier soils of the Gault Clay. Views south are dominated by the steep downland scarp.

- Undulating Lower Greensand low sandstone ridges and gentle and Gault Clay vales drained by the River Adur.
- Concentration of ancient woodland lying on the heavier soils of the Gault Clay.
- Views dominated by the steep downland scarp.
- Arable and pastoral rural landscape, secluded in places, a mosaic of small and larger fields, woodlands, shaws and hedgerows with hedgerow trees.
- Includes the extensive designed landscape of Danny Estate.
- Modest network of country lanes and underhill lanes beneath the scarp.
- Biodiversity in woodland, ponds and stream valleys.
- Characteristic spring-line villages and dispersed farmsteads, some historic.
- Expanded ridge line villages with suburban development at Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks.
- Criss-crossed by roads, many of them busy, including the A23 Trunk Road.
- London to Brighton Railway Line crosses the area.
- Varied traditional rural buildings built with diverse materials including flint, timber-framing, Horsham Stone roofing and varieties of local brick and tile-hanging.
- Dominance of painted render and a wide range of modern styles and materials from the Victorian period onwards.
- Few visitor and recreational attractions.

Description and experience of the landscape

6.1 The Upper and Lower Greensand rocks in West Sussex dominate the north west of the County, forming part of the unique sandstone landscape of the Surrey Hills. In this area, the varied, harder sandstone beds (Hythe and Bargate) of the Lower Greensand, the limestone-white sandstones and hard cherts (respectively Buriton stone and Amberley blue) of the Upper Greensand, and the purple, ferruginous (iron stone) deposits in the Folkestone Beds are locally very distinctive building materials. However, these beds narrow significantly towards the Arun Valley and further east become ever narrower, the Upper Greensand disappearing altogether at the County boundary at Hassocks. Nevertheless, although restricted in elevation and width, the full series of these rocks is present in the downland footslopes east of the River Adur. This underlying geology has a powerful influence on landform and landscape.

6.2 To the west, around Henfield and to the north of the downland scarp, the underlying, compact series of narrow beds of the Upper and Lower Greensand and

the underlying Weald Clay were subject in geological times to intense folding into a steep local anticline or dome. As the dome was planed down by erosion, this exposed the underlying Weald Clay as a vale surrounded by low Greensand ridges and Gault Clay vales to the north and south. The northern ridge of Upper Greensand and a narrow belt of the Folkestone Sands continue from Henfield, through Albourne to Hurstpierpoint, the crest of the ridge enclosing Keymer, separating it from Ditchling in East Sussex. Interestingly, the Folkestone Sands east of Small Dole are reflected in the names of farmsteads – Tottington Sands, Truleigh Sands, Edburton Sands and Perching Sands. The northern face of the ridgeline slopes imperceptibly across the Weald Clay into the Low Weald proper. To the south of the ridge lie a broad vale of heavy Gault Clay and a very thin bed of Upper Greensand, the latter no longer forming a bench under the chalk scarp, as in the west of the County. The footslopes are overlain in places by head, much of it lying immediately beneath the scarp and along the shallow valleys of the characteristic spring line streams issuing from beneath the chalk.

6.3 The resultant footslopes within Horsham and Mid Sussex Districts comprise an undulating relief of low sandstone ridges and gentle clay vales. Unlike the rest of the Low Weald to the north of Henfield and Hurstpierpoint, the area has a noticeable survival of ancient woodland lying on the heavier soils of the Gault Clay. Everywhere within the footslopes, views south are dominated by the steep downland scarp.

The scarp footslopes in Mid Sussex

6.4 That part of the Landscape Character Area south of Hurstpierpoint and on the immediate fringes of the scarp lies within the *Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty* (AONB).

6.5 To the west, the footslopes between the scarp and Albourne comprise broad, rolling clay vales drained by a network meandering streams (including streams in narrow valleys flowing from under the chalk) draining westwards to the Adur Valley. This area contains some major woodlands (for instance, Shaves Wood and Park Wood) including ancient woodland, mainly on the Gault Clay. This has created an undulating, wooded, mixed arable and pastoral rural landscape, the woodland and hedgerows of variable quality, based on medium-sized and some larger fields. The area is seen to advantage from the underhill lane running from Edburton to Fulking.

6.6 South of Hurstpierpoint ridge, the clay vale lies beneath the jutting profile and complex scarp and foot of Wolstonbury Hill. It is characterised by a network of linked or closely spaced woodlands (some parts ancient) centred on the designed landscape at Danny. Apart from the parkland landscape, the pattern of agriculture is similar to that in the area to the west. South of Clayton, there is a substantial grouping of ancient woodlands but in the east, most of the woodland has been cleared and an open landscape created of large fields broken by the shallow, wooded valley at Millbrook Shaw.

6.7 Between the District boundary and Albourne, the Greensand ridge is generally characteristic of the hedgerow-lined, secluded pastoral landscapes of the Low Weald, although the Cutlers Brook valley and other areas to the south are more open and arable. East of Albourne, the ridge is dominated by urban development at Hurstpierpoint, Hassocks and Keymer, the ridge line swinging north of Hassocks to form the distinct crest at Lodge Hill between Keymer and Ditchling in East Sussex (the intensely white windmill on the crest at Oldlands unmissable in the view).

6.8 The area is criss-crossed by roads, the A23 Trunk Road crossing the footslopes south to north between Dale Hill, under the downs north of Pyecombe, today bypassing Albourne, Sayers Common and Hickstead. Also crossing south to north is the A273 which leaves the A23 at Pyecombe in the Downs, enters the footslopes down a dry valley in the scarp at Clayton, thence through Hassocks and Burgess Hill to Haywards Heath. The B2112 crosses from Clayton to Ditchling and then north,

alongside Ditchling Common in East Sussex and back into the County and District at Haywards Heath. Also from Pyecombe, the A281 completes its short journey across the footslopes north-west to Henfield in Horsham District. The B2116 and B2117 cross the footslopes west to east, meeting at Hurstpierpoint, linking the ridge line settlements from Albourne in the west to Ditchling in the east. The underhill route beneath the scarp is a country lane between Edburton and Fulking and from Clayton to Westmeston in East Sussex. To the west, there is a modest network of country lanes and roads characteristic of the Low Weald. The busy London to Brighton Railway Line passes south through Hassocks and runs under the downs through the Clayton Tunnel.

6.9 Other than the ridge line villages already referred to, the area contains a set of small villages and hamlets entirely characteristic of the spring line settlements lying under the scarp. From the west, these are Edburton (just in Horsham District), Fulking, Poynings, Newtimber and Clayton. Otherwise, and especially in the west, there is a pattern of farmsteads and a few loose-knit groups of dwellings along roads and lanes. Parts of the footslopes appear rural and secluded and even locally tranquil. However, some of the minor lanes are busy with traffic. As noted earlier with respect to the experience of the downland view from the Clayton Windmills, there is a marked degree of traffic noise from the complex of roads running over and along the ridge line.

Biodiversity

6.10 The biodiversity of the area is limited due to the extent of modern agricultural cultivation. The farmed landscape contains hedgerows and some hedgerow trees, numerous small ponds (including a few ornamental ponds) and areas of tree cover and damp ground in some of the stream valleys. Otherwise, the principal interest is in the broadleaved woodland cover (concentrated locally in the west, on the Danny Estate and at Clayton), which is generally characteristic of the Gault Clay. A significant amount of this woodland is ancient coppice and oak and ash standard woodland, much of it still in a semi-natural state. Only the larger Shaves and Park Woods have been substantially cleared and replanted with mixed woodland. The area contains no Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and two Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), one of them a small wetland flush.

Historic character

6.11 The Low Weald in Mid Sussex contains remnants of medieval landscapes, the antiquity of the High Weald landscape being far more apparent. Accordingly, the post-medieval period is far more important as a determinant of the historic landscape character of the area. The historic field pattern in the far south of the District is essentially the result of formal enclosure extending over the downs, the Gault Clay vales and the Upper Greensand ridge before giving way to the more mixed pattern (formal and informal enclosure) in the Low Weald. However, irregular informal fields characteristic of valley meadow enclosures occur throughout the District, in the footslopes notably to the west. Formal enclosure was from woodlands, commons and possibly the re-organisation of assart fields. As elsewhere in many parts of the County and District, modern land use changes have tended to fragment older landscapes. In the area, these include major expansion of the ridge line villages, the expansion of villages, hamlets and farms, field amalgamation, and mixed woodland re-planting.

6.12 The complex field pattern resulting is not always apparent to the eye, since the boundaries of both types of enclosure may be sinuous, or have been altered by subsequent field amalgamation. Some fields in groupings are today large and open, reflecting the particular amalgamation efforts of some local landowners, for instance,

east of Clayton (west of Clayton the field pattern is more dense and irregular apart from the open aspect of the designed landscape at Danny).

6.13 As noted above, the persistence of woodland (including ancient woodland) throughout the Gault Clay vale is notable, given that there is virtually no ancient woodland left in the Low Weald within the District. This reflects the consequences of the cultivation of the Low Weald since Saxon times, the Gault Clay being in places simply being too heavy a soil to clear. Where not replanted, the ancient woodlands are most frequently assart woods.

6.14 Roman remains are important in the area, including the line of the London to Brighton Roman Road crossing the District from north to south and the Sussex Greensand Way crossing from west to east across the scarp footslopes, the two roads intersecting at Hassocks. In this vicinity, there are many sites associated with the Roman occupation including terrace ways and branches from the main routeway onto the downs, the villa site at Danny, the cemetery at Hassocks and evidence of Roman and Romano-British farmstead settlement.

Historic parks and gardens

6.15 The area contains 3 historic parks and gardens (Danny, Albourne Place and Newtimber Place) of local interest and importance. Pre-eminent among them is *Danny*, the combination of large house and extensive parkland a principal feature of the downland fringe landscape near Hurstpierpoint and, as noted above, prominent in views from the downs. The medieval Park of Danny was enclosed by the last Sir Simon de Pierpoint in 1343. The present house was built 1593-95 by George Goring, slightly to the east of the old house (see para 6.24 below). In 1652 Danny Great Park was 135 acres with arable land and meadow amounting to about 420 acres. The parkland still contains large, noble oaks of varying ages and growth patterns and is used today for a variety of recreational activities.

Settlement form and local distinctiveness

6.16 Apart from the spring-line villages and expanded ridge line settlements, the evolution of the historic settlement pattern of the footslopes and the nature of its local distinctiveness today are essentially similar to that for the Low Weald. The section on the *Hickstead Low Weald Landscape Character Area (Area 4)* therefore applies.

6.17 The spring-line villages and hamlets are entirely characteristic of the downland edge within Sussex, built in the vicinity of springs and streams gushing from under the chalk and running over the impervious rocks of the Weald. However, the pattern of the location of these villages (and the towns of Storrington and Steyning in Horsham District) relative to the foot of the chalk scarp varies greatly depending on the type of geology and lie of the land. In Mid Sussex, the Lower Chalk base of the scarp below the thin, harder Melbourn Rock member is narrow and flattened. Moreover, the Upper Greensand is virtually absent as a broad, gently inclined bench between the chalk and the heavy Gault Clay (as at Amberley, for example).

6.18 The consequence of this geology is that the villages and hamlets have been located hard up against the scarp itself. To the west, the modest settlements of Edburton, Fulking and Poynings (and the farmstead near the site of Perching Manor) are linked by the underhill lane. They sit pleasingly under the partly enclosed and wooded foot of the scarp, a public spring gushing forth near the Shepherd and Dog public house at Fulking, another spring within the village. Nyetimber Place sits on the flattened Lower Chalk, as does the tiny village of Clayton to the east, joined by the long underhill lane to Westmeston and Plumpton in East Sussex.

6.19 To the west, the village of Albourne (including Albourne Green and Albourne Street) is now by-passed by the new line of the A23 Trunk Road. It has a small amount of development associated with the old road and some modest suburban properties.

6.20 The style of rural historic building in the area is diverse. Timber-framed cottages at Albourne characteristic of the Low Weald contrast with a vivid mixture of cottage and house styles and materials at Clayton. Other villages have a mix of styles of various ages including 20th century infill, notably Fulking and Poynings.

6.21 Apart from flint facing, which is not dominant, there is little local stone use evident in the buildings (a house in Fulking built partly of crumbling Upper Greensand stands out and Lower Greensand has been used locally in Hurstpierpoint for walling). More common as materials are varieties of local brick in various patterns, some as nogging (brickwork filling the sections of timber-framed buildings), and tile hanging (sometimes from top to bottom), all redolent of the Low Weald. Increasingly dominant today is the use of painted render, common in Fulking and Poynings and in Hurstpierpoint. The ridge line villages are characterised by a wide range of styles and materials from the Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian periods including villas and terrace, particularly in Hurstpierpoint.

6.22 The area contains a rich variety of historic buildings, many of them prominent in the landscape, which contribute to the distinctive character of the footslopes. The parish church of *St Bartholomew* at Albourne stands outside the village in quiet countryside, flint-faced with a bell-turret. Norman remnants within the church survived a restoration (including Norman copying) in 1859 by the famous Victorian architect Gilbert Scott. Of particular interest is *Albourne Place*, a mid-17th Century brick house of seven bays graced with giant pilasters (representation of a classical column in flat relief against a wall) and with unique and curious window details. *Gallops*, on the east side of the village, is a good example of a timber-framed house with brick nogging, probably Elizabethan.

6.23 Of Clayton, Nairn and Pevsner (1965) note that the village holds in store one overwhelming surprise and two engaging oddities. The surprise is the entrance to the *Railway Tunnel* (1840), yellow brick, with a pointed arch for the trains to disappear into and castellated turrets. The 'oddities' are *Jack and Jill*, the two windmills on the downs above, he a brick tower-mill of 1876, she a wooden post-mill of 1821 with four sails (Jill came from Dyke Road, Brighton, about 1850).

6.24 Under Wolstonbury Hill, the house of *Danny Park* has two main fronts, the east 16th Century, the south early Georgian. The brick-built east frontage is monumental, the south front stately, the whole building a prominent element in views from the downs. Other buildings of interest include *Newtimber Place*, within a wide moat, the main front late 17th Century and at Fulking, *Perching Manor Farm* with an early Georgian five-bay frontage.

6.25 There is no dominant church style within the spring-line villages, with only four examples (including Edburton), tending towards towers. The parish church of *St John the Baptist* at Clayton is small but rewarding, a nave, chancel and wooden bell turret with 11th Century work and Saxon echoes in the architecture (the wall paintings inside are unique in England for their extent, preservation and date). At Newtimber, the church of *St John the Baptist* has a fine setting in open country, enclosed on two sides by the downland scarp where it funnels into the Pyecombe valley. It has a gothic tower, the early English origins of the church obscured by restoration. At Poynings, the 14th Century parish church of *Holy Trinity*, faced with squared flint, has a tower and interesting architectural details (the *Zion Chapel* (1843) nearby sounds a severe note in this tiny village, now ironically facing the garlanded exterior of the late Victorian *Royal Oak* public house). Nairn and Pevsner (1965) refer to the church and the tiny village at Edburton under one of 'the most sheer and spectacular bits of the whole downs escarpment...the view framed magnificently and perhaps consciously'

in the porch of the parish church of *St Andrew*, another tower church (13th Century rebuilding with later restoration).

Hurstpierpoint, Hassocks and Keymer

6.26 The ridge line villages are another matter entirely, all but one greatly expanded by modern suburban development, with a combined population of 13,085. The medieval township of Ditchling is part of this grouping, albeit far less expanded, just over the County boundary within East Sussex. The urban landscape along the ridge has a distinctly wooded character. As a result, when viewed from the downs (and apart from one or two more obvious areas of recent development), the settlements are well-integrated into the landscape.

6.27 Hurstpierpoint is the principal village, added to in Georgian times and by 1900 a substantial main street with villas at either end. It was expanded significantly by Edwardian terrace and villas in blocks along and off the Cuckfield Road, to the south of the High Street, and westwards as little blocks of ribbon development as far as Wickham Hill. At this time, Hassocks, on the London to Brighton Railway Line, and Keymer were little more than hamlets although a significant estate of Edwardian villas was built at Hassocks.

6.28 Interwar building at Hurstpierpoint was significant also, extending the village northwards with some ribbon development on College Lane and enough along the road to Hassocks to close the gaps between the two places. There was a considerable amount of building at Hassocks in this period, the estates snaking out into the countryside south of Ockley Lane. After the Second World War and up to 1970, the suburbanisation of the three villages was virtually complete. Hassocks was greatly expanded on both sides of the railway line and the long northern finger of Hurstpierpoint consolidated and expanded into a considerable suburb. Significant new building also occurred to the west of the village near Hurst Wickham. Since 1970, development has been limited to small areas of infill and some urban edge building in the northern suburbs of Hurstpierpoint.

6.29 Hurstpierpoint contains two landmark buildings, prominent in views from the downs. The parish church of *Holy Trinity* (1843-5 by Charles Barry) is large and impressive with a high spire. North of the town, in the *Hickstead Low Weald Landscape Character Area (Area 4)*, lies *St John's College* (Hurstpierpoint College), a large independent school building in brick founded by Nathaniel Woodward (Ardingly and Lancing Colleges are the other two Woodward Schools in Sussex). Built in 1851-3, it was designed by R.C. Carpenter, who also designed Lancing. The large building complex is faced with knapped flint, giving a severe effect. The chapel was begun in 1861 and has a tall, landmark tower of 1929.

6.30 The church of *St Cosmas and St Damian* at Keymer (a rare dedication) was restored in Victorian times, but with some Norman work remaining. It has a small steeple. Another landmark from the downs is *Oldland Windmill* on the brow of the Greensand ridge above Keymer, an intensely white 18th Century post-mill tower.

Strategic gaps

6.31 The County and District Councils have long recognised pressures for development on the open land between Burgess Hill and Hurstpierpoint, Hassocks and Keymer and have designated this land as a strategic gap.

EVALUATION

Change - key issues

- Decline in traditional woodland management techniques such as coppicing.
- Continuing amalgamation of small fields with hedgerow loss and the ageing and loss of hedgerow and field trees.
- Visual impact of new urban and rural development including modern farm buildings, horse riding centres and paddocks.
- Increasing pervasiveness of traffic movement and noise in parts of the area.
- Perceived increased traffic levels on small rural lanes with consequent demands for road improvements.
- Gradual loss of locally distinctive building styles and materials.
- Gradual suburbanisation of the landscape including the widespread use of exotic tree and shrub species.

Landscape and visual sensitivities

- High level of perceived naturalness and a rural quality, especially in the more wooded landscape to the west.
- Woodland cover, much of it ancient, imparts a scenic quality to the landscape.
- The area is highly exposed to views from the downs with a consequently high sensitivity to the impact of new urban development, modern farm buildings, masts and pylons and new roads.
- Intimate and unobtrusive settlement pattern of the spring-line settlements combined with the general absence of significant development.
- Scarce pockets of rich biodiversity are vulnerable to loss and change.
- Loss and fragmentation of hedgerows has occurred associated with modern farming.
- The area is visually exposed to views from the downs with a consequently high sensitivity to the impact of new development and the cumulative visual impact of buildings and other structures.
- Increasing pervasiveness of traffic movement throughout the area, particularly on routes crossing from the downs, and along some rural lanes.
- Wooded urban environment and setting of the ridge line villages currently sits well within the rural landscape although there is a danger of the cumulative visual impact of buildings and other structures here and elsewhere in the area.

[continues]

MANAGEMENT

Management Objective

Conserve and enhance the quiet, rural qualities of the western part of the area and the environment of the spring line villages, encourage landscape restoration and woodland management, and ensure that new development is well-integrated within the landscape.

Land Management Guidelines

- Maintain and restore the scenic historic pattern and fabric of the agricultural landscape including irregular patterns of smaller fields.
- Avoid skyline development and ensure that any new development has a minimum impact on views from the downs and is integrated within the landscape.
- Pay particular attention to the siting of telecommunications masts.
- Plan for long-term woodland regeneration, the planting of new small broad-leaved farm woodlands, and appropriate management of existing woodlands.
- Promote the creation of arable field margins and corners including alongside the sides of streams.
- Increase tree cover in and around villages, agricultural and other development and on the rural urban fringe, along the approach roads to settlements, and along busy urban routes including the A23 Trunk Road.
- Conserve and replant single oaks in hedgerows to maintain succession and replant parkland trees.
- Conserve, strengthen and manage existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees, especially around irregular fields, and re-plant hedgerows where they have been lost.
- Maintain and manage all lakes and ponds and their margins for their landscape diversity and nature conservation value.
- Protect the character of rural lanes and manage road verges to enhance their nature conservation value.
- Reduce the visual impact of horse stabling and grazing, for instance, under the downland edge in the vicinity of Edburton.
- Minimise the effects of adverse incremental change by seeking new development of high quality that sits well within the landscape and reflects local distinctiveness.

This area is part of the scarp footslopes east of the Adur Valley. The Management Objective and Land Management Guidelines above have been incorporated into the ***Planning and Land Management Guidelines Sheet LW11 (Eastern Scarp Footslopes)*** included in Part Three. As part of the set of County-wide Land Management Guidelines, the area covered by the Sheet is wider than the areas of downland in Mid Sussex and includes:

The Hurstpierpoint Scarp Footslopes (Area 3) Landscape Character Area in Mid Sussex District.

*The Henfield and Small Dole Farmlands (Area D2) Landscape Character Area defined in the unpublished **Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment** (October 2003).*