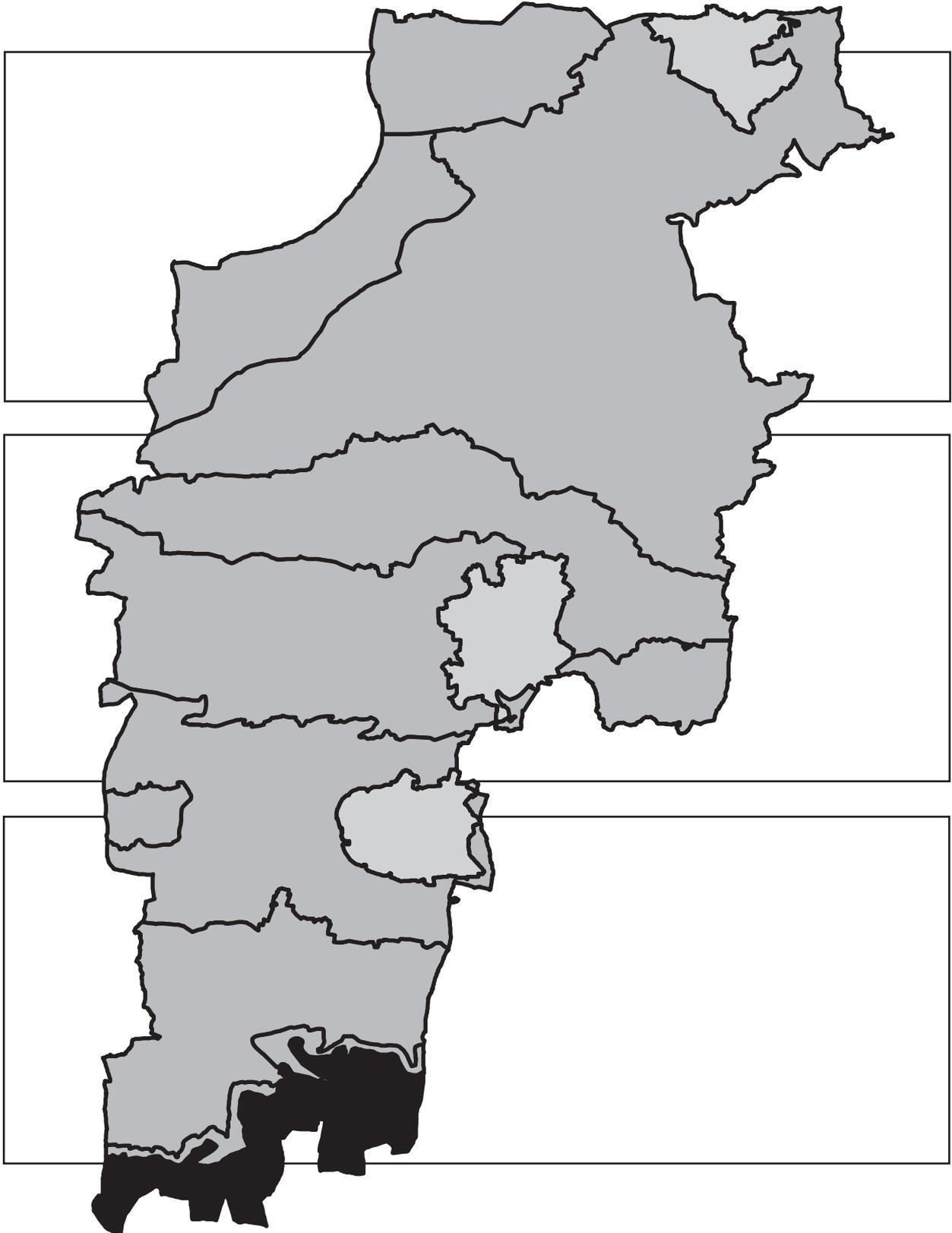


Landscape Character Area 1  
**Devil's Dyke and Clayton Downs**



## Devil's Dyke and Clayton Downs

### CHARACTERISATION

#### Summary and key characteristics

**The open, eastern 'glorious South Downs' defined to the north by a steep escarpment (scarp) facing the Weald. An elemental landscape despite intensive cultivation and the closeness of large urban areas.**

- Elevated, open rolling landform of hills, dry valleys and a steep escarpment (scarp) across uniform chalk upland scenery close to the sea.
- Expansive, open landscape under big skies of variable, elemental landforms imparts a sense of wildness and seasonal mood despite the nearness of urban areas and intensive agricultural use.
- Relatively narrow, branching and winding valley systems and coombes in a variety of forms, often with an enclosed, secluded character.
- Panoramic views across the Weald to the Surrey Hills and the North Downs.
- Southern boundary of the area is fringed by the major coastal towns of Brighton, Hove and Shoreham-by-Sea.
- Predominance of open arable and grassland cultivation with irregular, smaller pastures, woodland patches and hedgerows in the chalk valleys and coombes, on parts of the scarp, and along the scarp foot.
- Remnant species-rich grassland confined to the scarp, other steep slopes and valley sides.
- Isolated farms and farm buildings on the high downland and sparse settlement elsewhere, clustered in the valleys, in hamlets and farmsteads.
- Ridge line was line of a major ancient routeway, today the *South Downs Way*.
- Many landmarks and distinctive prehistoric and historic landscape features.
- Chalk quarries and pits, telecommunications masts, pylon lines, golf courses, and intensive recreational use centred on Devil's Dyke.
- Crossed by the A23 Trunk Road, the A27 Trunk Road (Brighton By-pass) to the south, and by a modest network of high lanes, some of them busy with traffic.
- Much localised traffic noise from roads within and on the edges of the downland.
- London to Brighton Railway Line crosses the area via Clayton Tunnel.
- Traditional rural buildings built of local flint and brick with weatherboarded barns.

#### Description and experience of the landscape

**4.1** The chalk landscapes of the South Downs fall broadly into two types – the enclosed and wooded downs at Angmering Park and west of the River Arun, and the open uplands to the east. The eastern downland is an expansive, open panoramic landscape of uniform upland chalk scenery. Unencumbered by woodland and hedgerows, the rolling land is fully exposed, its height and breadth emphasised by the unbroken landform and its utter difference from the pastoral landscapes beneath and beyond it.

**4.2** The chalk dip slope has been sculpted into distinctive, sweeping forms by dry valleys of various kinds. Most of the valleys are gently rounded, winding trough-shaped hollows which become progressively steeper and narrower as they cut into the more elevated northern part of the chalk dip-slope. These valleys often branch profusely, each branch ending in a deep, steep-sided coombe. Some of the valley features are asymmetrical, comprising a steep mini-scarp on one side and a sweeping, shallow slope on the other. Many of the dry valleys have reached the ridge top, sculpting it into a series of undulating ridges and hills, the latter particularly valued as sites for ancient settlements and fortifications. The sides and floor of the upper dry valley are often used for pasture, the steeper slopes retaining a patchy mosaic of rough grassland and scrub and occasional small patches of woodland.

**4.3** Fields are often very large and rectilinear. Intensive arable cultivation has been the norm since the Second World War although areas of open grassland remain. Hedgerows have never been a feature of the eastern chalk. Where they do occur they tend to be associated with the few farmsteads on the lower slopes, in valley bottoms, or alongside trackways. Some fields are wire-fenced but most remain unenclosed. The arable fields form an extensive, geometric mosaic that varies in colour and texture with different crops and seasonal cycles. The unobtrusive field boundaries detract little from the uninterrupted sweep of the rolling landforms. Small, isolated blocks of woodland, usually with strong, regular shapes, are occasional landmark features, visible for miles around. The uplands feel spacious, bleak and exposed to the elements, skylines and weather a dominant influence. A sense of wildness and seasonal mood pervades the landscape despite the severe pattern of intensive agricultural use and, in places, the nearness of large urban areas.

#### **The open downland in Mid Sussex**

**4.4** The Landscape Character Area lies wholly within the *Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)*, bordering on East Sussex to the east, Horsham District to the west, and the City of Brighton and Hove and Adur District to the south. The south-dipping downland with its system of dry valleys and the spectacular scarp with its embayments and coombes constitute the entire landform. However, for the purposes of the Assessment, the distinctive scarp is described separately as the *Fulking to Clayton Scarp Landscape Character Area (Area 2)*.

**4.5** The open downland in Mid Sussex forms a small part of a massive block of upland stretching from the Adur valley in the west to the River Ouse at Lewes in the east, the coastal chalk cliffline starting at Brighton. The irregular District boundary encloses the upper parts of the dip-slope, the heads of numerous dry valleys and the scarp. The long, lower dry valleys run south into the urban areas of Shoreham-by-Sea, Brighton and Hove. The downs are generally open, with patches of woodland and scrub in the dry valleys and on parts of the scarp. The undulating ridgetop is crowned by a series of hills, at Edburton, Perching, Devil's Dyke and Newtimber. Wolstonbury Hill is a spectacular, seemingly detached hill in its own right. Further east, the ridge rises higher, to 234 metres above sea level at Clayton Holt, a mile or so from the high point of Ditchling Beacon (248 metres) in East Sussex.

**4.6** The vistas from the ridge top are panoramic and spectacular. The chalk scarp itself is visible from Devil's Dyke westwards as far as the Rackham Banks at Amberley, Chanctonbury Ring an unmistakable marker on its high, jutting promontory. Further out still, to the north west, lie the steep scarps of Bexley and Blackdown Hills encircling the Milland Basin and the Surrey Hills behind them stretching to Leith Hill. Cissbury Ring above Worthing is visible to the south-west. The rump of Wolstonbury Hill dominates the view east, the parkland at Danny beneath it. Immediately beneath the scarp lie the vales and sandstone ridges of the Gault Clay and Lower Greensand country with shallow, wood-fringed stream valleys and the fine woodland mosaic that has survived on the Gault Clay. Further to the north, the view encompasses the pastoral landscapes of the Low Weald and the fringes of the High

Weald, patterned with woodlands, fields, hedgerows and field trees, an abrupt ridge line south of the hidden Ouse Valley. Beyond these fringes is the high country of the High Weald forming a succession of wooded, receding, differently-shaded ridge lines.

**4.7** From the Jack and Jill windmills at Clayton, the view is equally fine, with a closer view of the Low Weald and its various components. The Lower Greensand ridge line villages of Hurstpierpoint, Keymer and Hassocks generally fit well within the landscape as a result of a wooded urban environment, although one or two new developments are prominent. The westerly extension of Burgess Hill beyond the Greensand and Weald Clay ridges is now quite visible as a thin, long line of whitish buildings. Beyond Burgess Hill, the new development and the hospitals on the high ridge on the southern edge of Haywards Heath at Rocky Lane and Hurstwood Lane are visible in the landscape. The sandstone ridge on which Henfield sits is a prominent ripple in the otherwise low, stratified Low Weald landscape, to all intents well-wooded despite the general absence of significant woodland cover in the area. Landmarks include the spire and buildings of Hurstpierpoint College and distant church spires at St Hugh's Charterhouse Monastery at Shermanbury and at Twineham.

**4.8** There are various pylon lines crossing both the downland and the Low Weald landscapes and, despite the rural qualities of the vistas, there is an abiding impression of pervasive traffic movement, activity and development. Particularly noticeable is the level of traffic noise at the Jack and Jill Windmills arising from the busy network of roads beneath the scarp and from aircraft flying to and from Gatwick Airport.

**4.9** To the south lie the extensive urban areas of Shoreham-by-Sea, Hove and Brighton, a continuous and intensive metropolitan landscape with tower blocks and the new, high chimney stack on the site of the former Brighton Power Station. Beyond the urban area lies the A27 Trunk Road Brighton Bypass with a tunnel at Southwick Hill, although the rolling terrain hides much of the route from ridge top views. Major roads from the urban areas cross the downland at Pyecombe, principally the A23 Trunk Road and the A273 to Haywards Heath, crossing through the gap above Clayton. The London to Brighton Railway Line also follows this line, in cutting and through the Clayton Tunnel. The A281 to Henfield branches off at Pyecombe, under the scarp.

**4.10** The two minor roads running across the downs from Brighton to Devil's Dyke, Saddlescombe and Poyning's are busy. Devil's Dyke has a public house (the Devil's Dyke Hotel) and is a well-known and popular destination for visitors out to enjoy the scenery and the views. The dramatic promontory on which the hotel sits is a major venue for hang gliding. Mountain biking is popular along the ridgetop and downland tracks and there are two golf courses on the downs within the District, at Devil's Dyke and Clayton.

## **Biodiversity**

**4.11** The downland is noted for its unimproved chalk grassland, most of which lies on the scarp and is protected by three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). There are also a few Sites of Nature Conservation Importance on the downland, comprising a mixture of habitats:

- Chalk grassland, scrub, rare areas of chalk heath and acid grassland at Pangdean, on Pyecombe Golf Course;
- Dry valley-side chalk grassland, scrub and anthills near Saddlescombe Farm and rich herb swards at the Cow Down coombes, Pyecombe; and
- Areas of asymmetrical valley side species-rich chalk grassland south of Edburton and Truleigh Hills on the District boundary, and small areas of chalk grassland at Pond Brow, Pyecombe.

## Historic character

**4.12** Most of the 41 Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) in the District are on the downs, representing successive stages of prehistoric, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman, Saxon and medieval settlement in a rich array of features. These comprise settlement, boundary, defensive and burial features including barrows (including Bronze Age round barrows), bowl barrows, earthworks, cross ridge dykes, hillforts, a Saxon cemetery, a motte and bailey castle site at Edburton and the Deserted Medieval Village (DMV) at Perching. The Jack and Jill Windmills at Clayton are a well-loved downland landmark.

## Settlement form and local distinctiveness

**4.13** There is only one, tiny hamlet of note. Pyecombe comprises two separated settlement groups, lying in the valley gap in the scarp between Newtimber Hill and Wolstonbury Hill. It has a small Norman and 13<sup>th</sup> Century parish church in flint and pebbledash, the low tower with a pyramid roof. The only other settlement of note is the farmstead at Saddlescombe, the farm with a south wing of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century or earlier.

## EVALUATION

### Change - key issues

- Species-rich downland grassland now confined to remnants on the scarp and a few other steep slopes, the significant loss of this habitat due to post-war intensive arable and grass production and scrub encroachment.
- Greater recognition of the value of restoring sheep grazing to maintain increased areas of downland grassland.
- Visual impact of encroaching urban development, new roads and modern farm buildings.
- Continuing pressures for development on the southern downland fringes.
- Impact on the landscape of exposed pylons and telecommunications masts.
- Increasing pressures (including on the public rights of way system) for a variety of activities including walking, horse riding and land use associated with it, mountain biking, off-road vehicle use, hang gliding and golf.
- Increasing pervasiveness of traffic movement and noise within and close to the downs.
- Damage to (and loss of) archaeological remains.
- Gradual suburbanisation of the landscape, loss of locally distinctive building styles and materials, and the widespread use of modern fencing.

### Landscape and visual sensitivities

- Highly distinctive landscape of national importance much valued for its open, scenic qualities, cultural associations and recreational potential.
- High sensitivity to the impact of encroaching urban development, modern farm buildings, masts and pylons and new roads, reinforcing the cumulative visual impact of buildings and other structures.

- Views from the downs are highly sensitive to visually prominent development both on the urban edge to the south and in the Weald to the north.
- Species-rich downland grassland has been reduced to remnants.
- Numerous important archaeological remains are vulnerable to damage and loss.

## MANAGEMENT

### Management Objective

***Conserve and enhance the open, elemental qualities of the downland landscape and its historic legacy, encourage landscape restoration and woodland management, and ensure that new development is well-integrated within the landscape.***

### Land Management Guidelines

- Conserve and enhance the essence of the open downland landscape through scrub clearance and grazing.
- 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.
- Maintain surviving species-rich chalk grassland and plan for the restoration of extensive new areas.
- Protect and enhance the historic legacy of the area including important archaeological remains and ancient routeways.
- Maintain, restore and manage woodland and hedgerow landscapes, and visually important tree clumps and belts where this does not conflict with conservation of the historic and natural environment.
- Carry out landscape improvements to the rural urban fringe to the south in accordance with a long-term plan to be agreed by all partners.
- Maintain and manage dew ponds for their landscape diversity and nature conservation value.
- Protect the character of rural lanes and manage road verges to enhance their nature conservation value.
- Resist creating areas of horse paddocks, riding schools and stabling in open downland.
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- Reduce the visual impact of recreational activities including golf courses, car parks, horse stabling and grazing, and enhance the landscape at Truleigh Hill and around the recreational facilities at Devil's Dyke.
- Conserve and enhance the setting of historic farmsteads and barns.
- 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 downland east of the Adur Valley. The Management Objective and Land Management Guidelines above have been incorporated into the **Planning and Land Management Guidelines Sheet SD6 (Eastern Downs)** 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 *Devil's Dyke and Clayton Downs (Area 1)* and *Fulking to Clayton Scarp (Area 2)* Landscape Character Areas in Mid Sussex District.

The *Beeding Downs (Area A1)* and the *Beeding to Edburton Scarp (Area C1)* Landscape Character Areas defined in the unpublished **Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment** (October 2003).

The *Mill Hill and Southwick Downs* Landscape Character Area (yet to be included in a District Assessment) in Adur District.