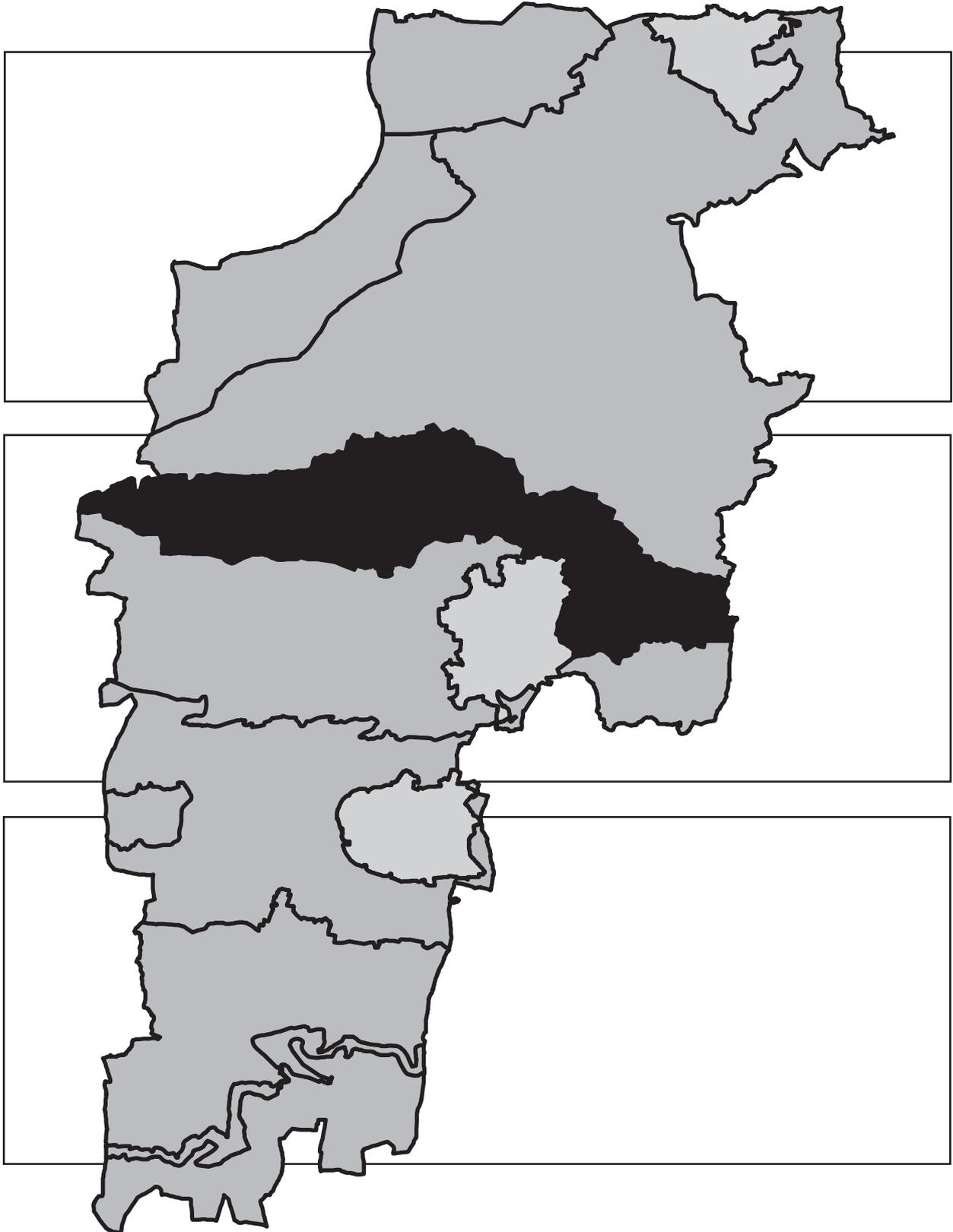


Landscape Character Area 9
Ouse Valley



Ouse Valley

CHARACTERISATION

Summary and key characteristics

Strongly linear valley adjoining Haywards Heath, its boundaries defined clearly by a marked break of slope. In the west, the river is a small, tree-lined stream amidst parallel streams and ridges, the valley broader to the east, the river meandering through water meadows. The signature of the valley is the high, long brick-built Ouse Valley (Balcombe) Viaduct on the London to Brighton Railway Line.

- Shallow but well-defined attractive rural valley landscape of intimacy and unusual complexity with a single, unifying character based on strongly-defined valley edges.
- Parts of the valley are perceived as secluded and locally tranquil.
- A markedly convex v-shaped valley form developed along a heavily faulted rock sequence giving rise to a series of confined parallel tree-lined streams and ridges within and below the valley edges to the west.
- Eastern part of the valley contains a broader, meandering river with water meadows along the as yet narrow but gradually widening, flat valley floor.
- Relatively few panoramic or long views across or down the valley.
- Woodland cover less extensive than that of the High Weald fringes, despite an impression in places of a strong woodland presence strengthened by shaws, hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Pattern of mixed arable and pastoral medium to large-sized fields is in places uncharacteristic of the High Weald.
- Numerous crossing and flanking roads and lanes including the A23 Trunk Road, many of which are busy.
- London to Brighton Railway Line crosses the valley, spectacularly so at the Ouse Valley (Balcombe) Viaduct, and the valley includes a small stretch of the Bluebell Steam Railway Line.
- Pockets of rich biodiversity including ancient woodlands.
- No settlements in the valley other than dispersed farmsteads although the townships of Haywards Heath, Lindfield and Cuckfield lie on the valley edges.
- Varied traditional rural buildings built with diverse materials including timber-framing, Horsham Stone roofing, Wealden stone and varieties of local brick and tile-hanging.
- Old mills, weirs and bridges.
- Extensive designed landscape at Borde Hill.

Description and experience of the landscape

12.1 Perhaps unusually so for a Wealden river, the valley of the Upper Ouse is strongly linear, its boundaries defined clearly by a marked break of slope. The valley lies wholly within Mid Sussex District and mostly within the *High Weald Area of*

Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is the most northerly of the six Landscape Character Areas which cross the District in strong west-east bands.

12.2 The *High Weald (Area 6)* and *High Weald Fringes (Area 10)* Landscape Character Areas respectively bound the valley to the north and south. At the Horsham District boundary, the area adjoins the Landscape Character Area known as the *Mannings Heath Farmlands (Area N1)* in the *Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment* (October 2003). The character of this fairly small area is more open in character than is usual in the High Weald, comprising a plateau patterned with medium to large-sized fields of arable and pasture, a fragmented hedgerow pattern, and generally fewer woodlands. This character continues across the District boundary into the western headwaters of the Ouse Valley. However, the area concerned within Mid Sussex District is very small indeed, comprising a few flatter, fairly open fields above the valley slopes at Tulleys Rough and Warninglid Lane. The area has therefore been included in the valley Landscape Character Area.

12.3 The upper parts of the valley, in Mid Sussex, comprise an area of secluded and complex drainage, the river generally taken to rise at the head of the hammerpond stream beyond Slaugham Manor. From source to mouth, the valley is some 30 miles long of which 12 miles are within West Sussex and Mid Sussex District. Outside the County, in East Sussex, the river continues in a south-easterly direction then turning south at Fletching and running on to Lewes (the River Uck joins it on the way). In the manner of the southerly-flowing Wealden rivers, it cuts through the chalk of the South Downs, flanked by *innings* (water meadows) and reaching the sea at Newhaven.

12.4 Geologically, the valley is on the rock, sand and clay of the Hastings Beds which underlie the High Weald, but is not entirely of them. The line of the valley lies along a heavily faulted rock syncline (strata downward-dipping in a bowl effect). Within this structure, the Hastings Beds (mainly Upper Tunbridge Wells Sandstone) have dropped downward in a series of faults to preserve above them an isolated long, thin member of Weald Clay (an *inlier*). The clay runs from below Lower Beeding in Horsham District to a point just south of Ardingly Reservoir. It contains sandstone beds of Horsham Stone and is covered in places by head. However, the main river does not pick out this line of softer rock as might be expected, but runs above it, across the sandstones of the Hastings Beds. Nevertheless, the presence of this Weald Clay has had an effect on the topography of the valley, as revealed below.

12.5 Where the valley crosses the County boundary at Freshfield Mill in the east, its character has already begun to change from the quiet, tree-fringed stream in a markedly convex v-shaped valley to the west. It is now a more substantial, meandering (and partly artificially straightened) river with water meadows along the as yet narrow but gradually widening, flat valley floor. This change begins to take place east of College Road running across the valley south of Ardingly. Although the character of the valley topography shifts in this way (and this is to be expected), the area as a whole nevertheless appears to have a single, unifying character. This is embodied in the consistent break of slope which strongly defines the valley edge throughout, even though the higher, convex v-slopes gradually flatten and lengthen in the lower reaches. The valley edge is sometimes seemingly high and quite steep, as at Haywards Heath, or very straight, as at Whitemans Green westward. Only on the north side, between Ardingly and Freshfield Mill, is the integrity of the valley edge compromised by big streams flowing in from the north, principally the outfall stream from Ardingly Reservoir and Cockhaise Brook draining a substantial portion of the High Weald slopes to the north-east. Accordingly, for the purposes of this Assessment, the two 'parts' of the valley are treated as a single Landscape Character Area.

The western reaches

12.6 As noted above, the higher, western reaches of the valley lie west of College Lane. This part of the valley has a well-defined edge, on the south, running westwards from the Borde Hill Estate along steep slopes to Cuckfield Hospital and Whitemans Green. Between here and the boundary with Horsham District, the B2115 road to Warninglid defines the valley edge. Beyond Warninglid, the boundary follows a narrow ridgeline from The Grange to Eastland Farm, thin watershed between the Ouse streams and the deep gill system draining the woods and gardens of Leonardslee. Indeed, this southern boundary follows throughout the marked ridge separating the Ouse and Adur river catchments.

12.7 Just a little north, at the Furnace Pond at Lower Ashfold, the northern boundary of the valley runs straight, east along the minor road from Ashfold Crossways to Staplefield. From Brantridge Lane, it crosses to the White House and Pilstye Wood at Rowhill Lane. Hereabouts, the valley edge has climbed higher, over generous, convex slopes. The boundary then crosses the B2036 in a valley and takes in the high ground at Balcombe Place and Stone Hall, both houses sited with magnificent valley viewpoints in mind. In this area, the River Ouse runs close to the Ardingly Reservoir dam as it skirts the bluff at Rivers Wood. The boundary here runs close to the dam and just south of Ardingly College, picking up the east-trending ridge line at Avins Farm, at the point where the character of the lower reaches of the valley begins to develop.

12.8 As noted above, the main river runs above the Weald Clay member. Nevertheless, the presence of this Weald Clay has had a significant effect on the topography of the upper portion of the valley. The valley in this area is much broader than might be expected, since numerous roughly parallel streams run within it, over the Weald Clay, creating a complex topography of long, little ridges, bluffs and tiny, secluded valleys, the slope pattern generally long, convex and gentle. Notable internal ridges include those at Mallion Farm, Biggs Copse and Sydnie Farm (although this last is developed over the sandstone of the Hastings Beds). The hill at River's Wood forms a shallow bluff-like ridge round which the river diverts. All of these ridges are lower than the valley sides, so that the prospect is of a slightly sunken landscape of interlocking spurs and hidden corners, creating a most attractive, scenic effect.

The eastern reaches

12.9 East of College Lane, the lower portion of the valley comes into its own, defined to the north by the ridge topped by Hillhouse Farm. East of the farm, the boundary follows naturally along a network of old lanes – including Stonecross Lane and Plummerden Lane – to Wildboar Bridge where Cockhaise Brook enters the valley. The boundary runs on to Freshfield Crossways and to Kettle's Lane at the County boundary. To the south, the valley side and edge at the County boundary is defined sharply by the steep-sided slopes at Waspbourne Wood. Following this steep valley edge north of Scaynes Hill, the boundary encloses the bowl of streams centred on Walstead, draining the eastern edge of Haywards Heath and Lindfield. The boundary then arcs west around the northern edge of Haywards Heath, across High Beech Lane, picking up the high, wooded ground above Copyhold Lane and the open estate pastures of Borde Hill, thus completing the round.

12.10 Wholly on the sandstone of the Hastings Beds with some head deposits south of Ardingly, the more mature lower part of the valley is more expansive (a particular feature are the tree and hedge-fringed water meadows). However, despite this broadness of the valley floor, the valley edges are still the defining feature, ultimately creating an impression of enclosure rather than openness. The northern slopes are generally flatter and gentler than in the upper portion of the valley, especially where the side streams have had a flattening effect on the ridgelines. However, to the

south, the valley sides are more sinuous and generally quite steep, the land just beyond the valley edge defining a narrow watershed with the Adur streams to the south. It is upon this valley-edge watershed ridge that Haywards Heath sits. The medieval market town of Lindfield, now joined to Haywards Heath by modern development, sits just under the highest point of the valley edge, on a shallow spur which reaches almost to the river.

Other aspects of the valley

12.11 The valley has more affinity with the less densely wooded character and lower terrain of the High Weald fringes than with the densely wooded landscape of the High Weald. However, the woodland cover in the valley is generally markedly less extensive even than that of the fringes, although its pattern of narrow ridge and valley plantings and occasionally heavily wooded valley sides creates an impression of woodland cover with mass and density. Substantial woodlands are more characteristic of the bluffs and valley sides of the lower portion of the valley, notably at River's Wood, Wickham Woods and at Henfield and Waspbourne Woods near Scaynes Hill. The woodlands are predominantly deciduous in appearance but contain much mixed woodland and coniferous planting.

12.12 Although the valley contains significant ancient woodlands, the upper portion in particular represents a significant break in ancient woodland cover between the High Weald and its fringes to the south. Only at the eastern portion of the valley is ancient woodland cover significant. The general absence of ancient woodland in the western portion corresponds with the Weald Clay member, the relatively fertile soils of which may have encouraged clearance. However, the sandstone portion is denuded too, suggesting that the explanation of the absent woodland may be less than simple, since the analysis of the historic landscape does not suggest an overwhelming loss of landscapes of medieval origin in the valley. The area does not contain any heathland characteristic of other parts of the High Weald.

12.13 Regular fields extend north into the High Weald although, in the fringes of the High Weald and beyond, become far more intermixed with the assart landscape. Again breaking away from the High Weald pattern, the overwhelming impression of the area is one of a rich, predominantly pastoral valley landscape composed of a pattern of medium to large-sized fields with some significant tracts of arable farmland, serviced by a network of larger farms. The developing pattern of larger fields has doubtless been fuelled by modern field amalgamation, although not all of this change is of recent origin.

12.14 Although no roads run along the valley (it was always unsuited as a line for communications) it is crossed or flanked by numerous routes. Almost all running from north to south, these roads link the settlements which fringe the valley. Seven minor roads cross the valley as well as three B roads and the A23 Trunk Road to the west. The B2115 runs along the southern edge of the valley from Warninglid to Whitemans Green and the A272 runs along part of the valley boundary at Scaynes Hill. The valley is also crossed by the London to Brighton Railway Line, spectacularly so at the Ouse Valley (Balcombe) Viaduct. At Freshfield, the Bluebell Steam Railway Line crosses the lower slopes of the valley south east from Freshfield Halt. A disused railway line crosses the valley obliquely from the cutting on the London-Brighton line at Copyhold Bridge (Borde Hill) to Horsted Keynes Station on the Bluebell Line. The Sussex Ouse Valley Way, founded by Terry Owens, runs through the Valley on its way to the sea.

12.15 There are no settlements in the valley other than dispersed farmsteads although the small villages of Slaugham, Staplefield and Warninglid and the townships of Haywards Heath, Lindfield and Cuckfield lie on its edges. Farther off are Handcross, Ardingly and Horsted Keynes. The consequence of this degree of settlement close by is that most of the main roads and B roads and not a few of the minor lanes are busy with traffic. Despite the presence of the A23 Trunk Road, this

effect is far less marked in the western portion, where a more secluded, rural quality is uppermost.

12.16 Parkscentres centred on large houses down the centuries are as characteristic in or near the valley as in the rest of the High Weald, although the landscapes associated with them are generally more open in character.

Biodiversity

12.17 The valley has a remnant range of semi-natural woodland types, many formerly managed as 'coppice-with-standards'. Many of these woodlands and associated trees encompass and fringe the numerous small streams and damp hollows of the valley as well as the river itself in its upper reaches. Dominant forms include oak-ash and hornbeam woodlands with understorey species such as hazel, as well as stands of beech, sweet chestnut coppices and broadleaved, mixed and coniferous plantation. There is a modest spread of field and farm ponds throughout the valley, the only significant water body the mill pond at Slaugham Manor. There are no hammer ponds. The lower reaches of the river are a good example of small grazing marsh meadows. Wet marshy grassland and marginal habitats provide nutrient rich nesting sites for breeding birds, rich with insects.

12.18 Although the valley contains no Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), there are six Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs). These vary between large ancient woodlands at Wickham Woods, Haywards Heath and Henfield Wood (with good ground flor and wet or damp areas) and smaller sites at Slaugham, Balcombe and Walstead valuable for meadow, marshland and water edge plants.

Historic character

12.19 Notwithstanding more recent changes to the landscape of the valley, its general historic development is broadly similar to that for the High Weald and its fringes. The background on historic character in the *High Weald Landscape Character Area (Area 6)* therefore applies.

Historic parks and gardens

12.20 Two of the nine Registered Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in the District lie within or on the edge of the valley, including *Slaugham Place*, a small garden enclosure centred on the ruins of the former manor house. The valley contains a further three non-registered, mainly post-medieval parkscentres.

12.21 The park, house and garden of *Borde Hill* lie partly in the valley and partly in the *High Weald Fringes Landscape Character Area (Area 10)*. For convenience, the site will be described here, since the parkland makes a significant contribution to the valley landscape. *Borde Hill* is a late 19th to mid 20th Century plantsman's and collector's garden, laid out by Colonel Stephenson Clarke and set within an early 20th Century park with mid 19th Century origins. Today it is a principal visitor attraction in the District. The registered site comprises 155 hectares of ornamental gardens set within wooded parkland, much of it sweeping gently down the southern slopes of the valley. The house stands on the crest of the valley ridge, towards the centre of the park, and commands extensive views north and south over the park and further northwards to the Balcombe Viaduct and the High Weald. It has a west front of 1598, much of the rest early 20th Century.

12.22 The North Park, laid to grass and permanent pasture, is extensively planted with clumps and individual trees including many exotic species and varieties of oak, the present pattern established by 1909. Other parts of the park contain a pinetum and woodland with exotic tree and shrub species. West of the gardens and on the

slopes to the south towards Lullings Gill, the parkland is more open in character. The eastern end of Lullings Gill contains a chain of new ponds and a lake. The South Park is also less extensively planted with parkland trees. It contains several smaller woods and copses, some with exotic tree species including cedars.

Settlement form and local distinctiveness

12.23 The evolution of the historic settlement pattern of the valley and the nature of its local distinctiveness today is essentially similar to that for the High Weald and its fringes. The background on settlement pattern in the *High Weald* Landscape Character Area section therefore applies. The valley has virtually no development within it, the pattern being one of a series of farmsteads at the centre of relatively large land holdings.

12.24 The valley contains various houses of historic interest including *Slaugham Place* on gentle valley slopes alongside the River Ouse, the ruin of an Elizabethan house. The house was replaced by *Slaugham Manor* in 1901, in a red-brick Tudor style. On the Balcombe Estate lies *Stone Hall*, described by Nairn and Pevsner (1965) as 'a quietly perfect brick house of the late 17th Century' (to the north is *Balcombe Place*, the house of the estate, a Tudor-style mansion of 1856). *Pilstye* is dated 1647, stone with mullioned windows. In the eastern part of the valley, on the broad northerly slopes, lie *Paxhill House* (redeveloped 1865) and *East Mascalls*, a 16th Century house enlarged about 1896 with a form of reticulated decoration not common in Sussex.

12.25 The *Ouse Valley (Balcombe) Viaduct* (1839-41) is one of the most impressive viaducts in England, 1,475 feet long with 37 brick arches, each pier arched at top and bottom, a classical balustrade along the entire length.

Strategic gap

12.26 The County and District Councils have long recognised pressures for development on the open land between Haywards Heath and Scaynes Hill and have designated this land as a strategic gap.

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EVALUATION

Change – key issues

- Importance of retaining the unique identity of the valley and as an important landscape and wildlife corridor.
- Pressures for change in the drainage pattern including drainage of water meadows, straightening of channels and loss of river margins.
- Decline in traditional woodland management techniques such as coppicing.
- Continuing field amalgamation into a pattern of medium and large-sized fields with hedgerow loss and the ageing and loss of hedgerow and field trees.
- Increasing pervasiveness of traffic movement and noise on the network of roads crossing the valley.
- Perceived increased traffic levels on small rural lanes with consequent demands for road improvements.
- Visual impact of new urban and rural development including modern farm buildings, horse riding centres and paddocks.
- Pressures for built development in the urban areas fringing the valley.
- Increasing recreational use of the area, including golf course development.
- 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 in the landscape and drainage pattern and a rural quality with a general absence of development in western reaches of the valley.
- Pattern of medium to large-sized fields and watermeadows intermixed with woodlands and hedges imparts a scenic quality to the landscape.
- Legacy of designed landscapes and treescapes.
- Scarce pockets of rich woodland biodiversity are vulnerable to loss and change.
- Valley-edge settlements include Haywards Heath, Lindfield and Cuckfield, the impact on the valley reduced by their woodland setting.
- Settlement pattern currently sits well within the rural landscape although there is a danger of the cumulative visual impact of buildings and other structures.
- High sensitivity to visual intrusion from pylons and telecommunications masts.

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MANAGEMENT

Management Objective

Conserve the rural quality of the valley including the pattern of the agricultural landscape, the mosaic of woodland and other habitats, and the intimate and unobtrusive settlement farmstead pattern.

Planning and Land Management Guidelines

- Conserve and enhance the undeveloped character, drainage pattern and pastoral qualities of the valley.
- Protect existing views from ridge tops and avoid skyline development, paying particular attention to the siting of telecommunications masts.
- Conserve and enhance the presence of the river and its wildlife by streamside planting and creation of new wetland areas.
- Extend existing woodland areas rather than creating new woodland features, reinforcing existing, distinctive landscape patterns.
- 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 including alongside the sides of streams.
- Increase tree cover in and around villages, agricultural and other development and on the rural urban fringe, including along the approach roads to settlements and along busy urban routes.
- Conserve and plant parkland trees and tree groups and replant single oaks in hedgerows to maintain succession.
- Conserve, strengthen and manage existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees 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.
- Conserve species-rich meadows and road verges.
- Protect the character of rural lanes and manage road verges to enhance their nature conservation value.
- Reduce the visual impact of golf courses, and stabling and grazing for horses.
- Minimise the effects of adverse incremental change by seeking new development of high quality that sits well within the landscape and reflects local distinctiveness.

The area lies wholly within Mid Sussex District. See ***Planning and Land Management Guidelines Sheet HW3 (Ouse Valley)*** in Part Three. The area covered by the Sheet includes:

The Ouse Valley (Area 9) Landscape Character Area in Mid Sussex District.