

Overall Character

The densely-wooded southern flanks of the High Weald Forest Ridge within West Sussex, dissected by gentle gill streams draining west to the River Adur and east to the River Ouse. Includes the settlements of Cuckfield, Haywards Heath and Lindfield.

Key Characteristics

- Wooded, often confined rural landscape of intimacy and complexity partly within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- South and east-draining gills and broad ridges sweeping gently down to the Low Weald.
- Western part drained by the headwaters of the River Arun, eastern part around Scaynes Hill by the River Ouse.
- Long views over the Low Weald to the downs.
- Significant woodland cover, a substantial portion of it ancient, and a dense network of shaws, hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Pattern of small, irregular-shaped assart fields and larger fields, and small pockets of remnant heathland.
- Orchards and horticulture on lower slopes, particularly to the west.
- Biodiversity concentrated in the valleys, heathland, and woodland.
- Network of lanes, droveways, tracks and footpaths.
- Dispersed historic settlement pattern, close to Horsham, the principal settlements Cuckfield, Haywards Heath and Lindfield and a few villages and hamlets.
- Some busy lanes and roads including A and B roads bounding the area to the west, and other roads crossing north to south, including the A23 Trunk Road.
- London to Brighton Railway Line crosses the area at Haywards Heath.
- Mill sites, hammerponds and ornamental lakes and ponds.
- Varied traditional rural buildings built with diverse materials including timber-framing, Horsham Stone roofing, Wealden stone and varieties of local brick and tile-hanging.
- Designed landscapes and exotic treescapes associated with large country houses.
- Major gill woodland garden and visitor attraction at Leonardlee.

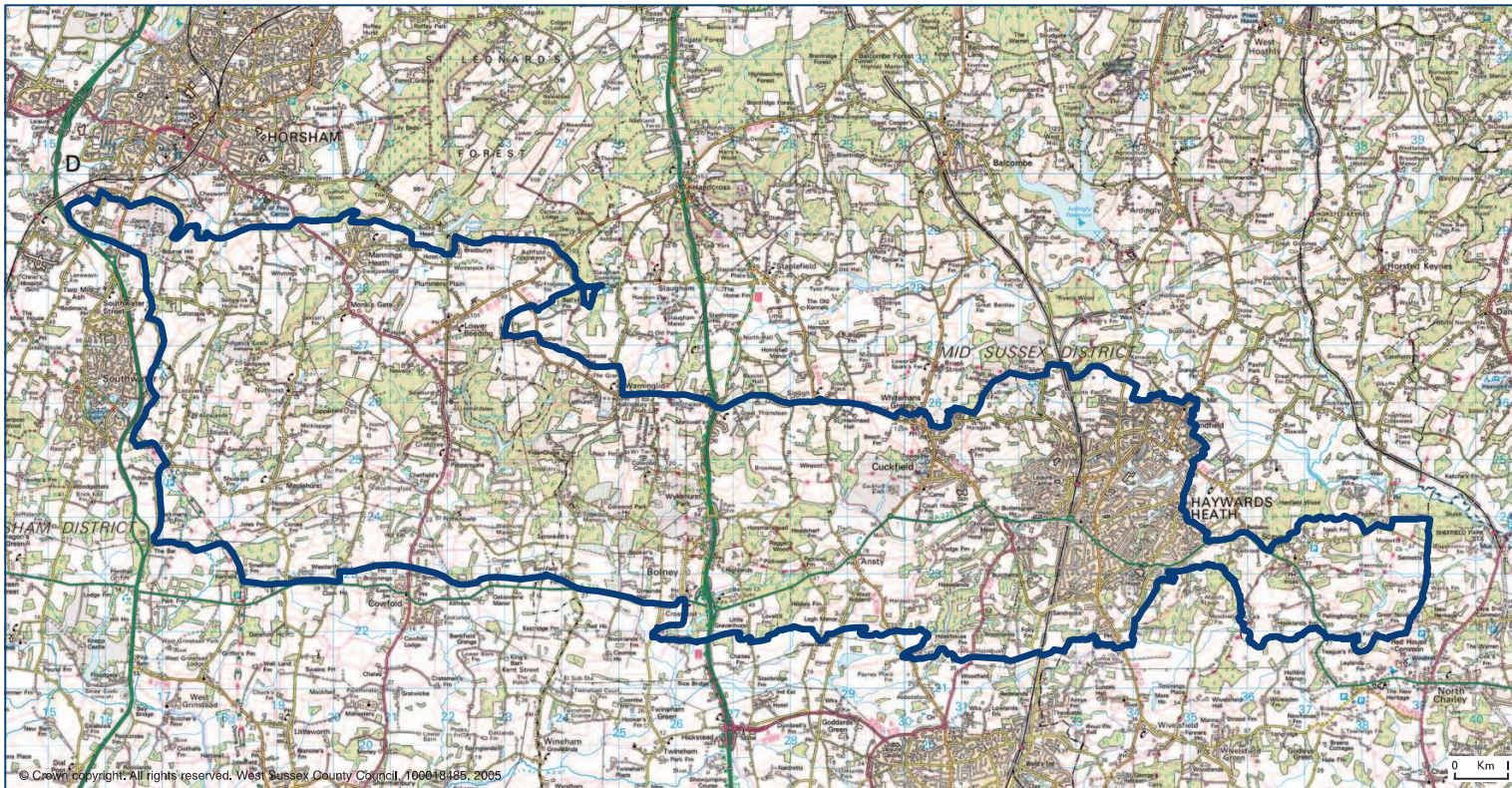
High Weald Fringes

High Weald

The area covered by the Sheet includes:

The High Weald Fringes (Area 10) Landscape Character Area in Mid Sussex District.

The Crabtree and Nuthurst Ridges and Ghylls (Area M1) and the Mannings Heath Farmlands (Area N1) Landscape Character Areas defined in the unpublished **Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment** (October 2003).



Historic Features

- Much of landscape essentially medieval in origin.
- Persistence of ancient woodland.
- Line of Roman road.
- Ancient routeways and droves.
- Remains of Sedgewick Castle.
- Historic country houses, farmsteads and parkscapes.
- Wealden iron hammerponds and mill sites.
- Cuckfield Park.



Braxmead, Bolney

Biodiversity

- Diverse natural history.
- Species-rich gill and semi-natural woodlands.
- Geologically important rock exposures.
- Remnant hornbeam coppice.
- Remnant and dormant wet and dry acid heathland.
- Species-rich meadows and hedgerows.
- Lakes, hammerponds, field and ornamental ponds.

Change - Key Issues

- Decline in traditional woodland management techniques such as coppicing.
- Continuing planting of conifers in some areas.
- Spread of invasive introduced species, particularly rhododendron and neglect of some parkland landscapes.
- Reduction of heathland to a few pockets due to cessation of grazing management and subsequent woodland invasion and woodland replanting.
- Continuing amalgamation of small fields with orchard, 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.
- New development on the southern edges of Haywards Heath.
- Introduction of telecommunications masts on ridges.
- Increasing pervasiveness of traffic movement throughout much of the area, especially in the vicinity of Haywards Heath.
- Increasing pressures for a wide variety of recreational activities.
- 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.



Wood pasture, Cowfold



Millenium Wood, Borde Hill

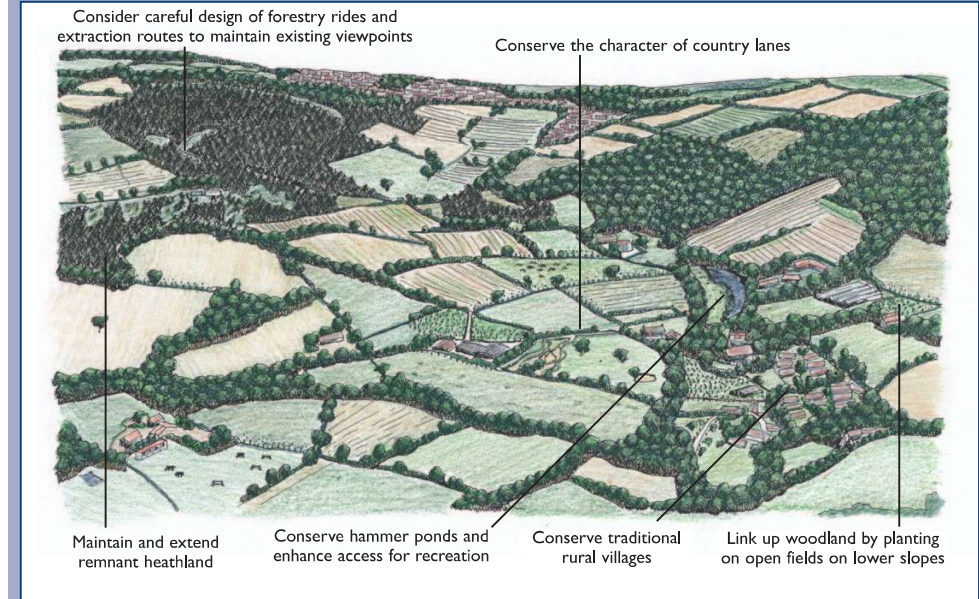
Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

- Woodland cover limits the visual sensitivity of the landscape and confers a sense of intimacy, seclusion and tranquillity.
- Unobtrusive settlement pattern in many parts.
- Older, small assart pastures contribute to the intimacy of the landscape.
- Important pockets of rich biodiversity are vulnerable to loss and change.
- Network of lanes, droveways, tracks and footpaths provides a rich terrain for horse-riding, cycling and walking and for the appreciation of nature.
- Long views from open ground have a high sensitivity to the impact of new urban development, modern farm buildings, masts and pylons and new roads.
- Settlement pattern currently sits well within the rural landscape although there is a danger of the cumulative visual impact of buildings and other structures, particularly on the south side of Haywards Heath.
- Legacy of designed landscapes and treescapes.



Hedgerow trees, Wealden Fringe

Land Management Guidelines



Conserve the rich mosaic of woodland and other habitats and the intimate nature of the agricultural landscape, the high level of perceived naturalness of the area including its rural, tranquil qualities, and the intimate and unobtrusive settlement pattern throughout much of the area.

- Maintain and restore the historic pattern and fabric of the woodland and agricultural landscape for scenic, nature conservation and recreational purposes.
- Protect existing views from the area and avoid skyline development, paying particular attention to the siting of telecommunications masts.
- Plan for long-term woodland regeneration, the planting of new broad-leaved woodlands, appropriate management of existing woodlands, and reduce rhododendron invasion and bracken cover in woodlands and on heathland.
- Extend existing woodland areas rather than creating new woodland features, reinforcing existing, distinctive landscape patterns.
- Conserve woodland biodiversity and the landscape of the gills, including wet woodland, protecting rare and uncommon woodland plant communities associated with them.
- Reduce the impact of forestry where possible by encouraging sensitive forestry practice including small-scale felling rotation, and incorporating mixed species.
- Increase tree cover in and around villages, agricultural and other development including along the approach roads to settlements and along busy urban routes.
- Increase screening of prominent parts of new development on the southern fringes of Haywards Heath.
- Conserve and replant single oaks in hedgerows to maintain succession and replant parkland trees.
- Conserve, strengthen and manage existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees and replant 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 and manage remnant open heathland by preventing the encroachment of scrub and create new, interconnected heathlands.
- Conserve species-rich meadows and road verges.
- Seek to protect the tranquil and historic character of rural lanes and manage road verges to enhance their nature conservation value.
- Reduce the visual impact of 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 guidelines should be read in conjunction with:

- County-wide Landscape Guidelines set out in *A Strategy for the West Sussex Landscape* (November 2005) published by West Sussex County Council.
- Objectives and actions contained in the *High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004* (Adopted March 2004) published by the High Weald AONB Joint Management Committee.