Overall Character of the High Weald

The High Weald is essentially a medieval landscape of rolling hills, networks of woodlands and shaws, irregular-shaped assart fields, remnant open heaths and ancient routeways. It is a complex sandstone and heavy clay landscape with a combination of ridges and deep steep sided valleys known as ghylls, drained by sinuous streams. The large area to the north of this character area is a wooded, confined pastoral landscape, locally secluded and tranquil with a high proportion of ancient woodland and occurrences of geologically important rock exposures. The ancient byways and trackways are distinctive features in the landscape; their use dates back to the medieval period when farmers would drive their pigs up to the woodlands to feed them on acorns and to gather wood for fuel and building materials (examples of transhumance and the practice of pannage). The forest plateau is undulating with a greater proportion of plantation mixed woodland and 20th century development. The Ouse valley is gently sloping with higher fertility, a less wooded character and with a greater proportion of arable farmland and large modern fields.

Key Landscape Characteristics

Protect, conserve, and enhance:
- The tranquil, intimate and enclosed rural character of the area
- The qualities of fine long views from ridges
- Exposures of sandstone
- The network of ancient woodland including larger deciduous woodlands, ghyll woodlands and shaws
- Mixed woodlands on the plateau replacing coniferous over time
- Areas of heathland
- The qualities of the River Ouse, its valley bottom and lower sides with medium-large scale field patterns of wet meadows and pastures bounded by hedges with trees
- The fine grain and irregular pattern of assart fields
- Shaw enclosures and linking into, and integrating settlement
- The dense network of hedgerows, restoring where necessary, retaining the oak standards and other hedgerow trees
- Network and character of sinuous un-kerbed deep lanes, ancient droveways, greenways, tracks and footpaths
- Mill sites and ponds, hammer ponds, ornamental lakes and ponds
- Narrow field entrances and traditional gates
- Designed landscapes associated with large country houses and their settings, avoiding the spread of invasive species such as rhododendron

Historic landscape

Protect, conserve, and enhance:
- Landscape essentially medieval in origin
- The persistence of ancient woodland and the persistence and pattern of assarts and shaws from medieval period (12th-14th century)
- The patterns of dens (wood pastures) and droves (transhumance routes) which define the scale and grain of the High Weald
- Prehistoric rock shelters
- Ancient routes including prehistoric ridgeway and Roman road
- Iron Age remains such as hillforts (rare)
- Iron industry remains (from prehistoric, Roman and medieval period) including strings of hammer, furnace ponds, pond bays, furnace remains, forge sites
- Medieval moated sites
- Historic mills, weirs and bridges
- Historic farmsteads and parkscape
- Veteran trees
- Designed landscapes and country homes including Standen, Wakehurst Place and Nymans
- Bluebell railway – Horsted Keynes station

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Protect, conserve and enhance the nature conservation value of:
- Diverse natural history
- Ancient woodland
- Coppice with standard woodland including oak-ash with hornbeam and hazel, beech and sweet chestnut
- Unimproved and semi-improved pastures and wet meadows
- Wet and dry acid heathland expanding through management where possible
- Freshwater marshes and wetlands
- Rivers, species rich ghylls and ditches
- Networks of species-rich hedgerows
- Geologically important rock exposures
- Sandrock communities
- Reservoirs, valley ponds, hammerponds, fish and ornamental ponds, field ponds and their margins
- The unique characteristics of historic buildings that provide habitats for wildlife

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Local Distinctiveness

Local Distinctiveness is the essence of what makes a place special to us. It is what makes somewhere unique, a combination of the cultural landscape, wildlife, archaeology, history, geology, topography, traditions, buildings, materials, and crafts.

It is important to consider local distinctiveness within plans, policies and developments incorporating distinctive qualities and reflecting the county’s sense of place.

The Cultural Landscape is held together by the commonplace and the rare, the ordinary and the spectacular (Common Ground)

Indicative cross section of the High Weald showing geology and key landscape features
In the High Weald the historic settlement pattern is formed of dispersed large and small farmsteads at a fine grain associated with small land holdings of woodland and pastures (dens and assarts). Hamlets sometimes arise from an aggregation of farms with additional houses for workers. Villages were formed subsequently in late medieval times based on the need to trade but are less characteristic of the High Weald. Large houses and associated parks and gardens are a feature of the 19th and 20th centuries. Larger settlements are located away from the steeper topography avoiding valley bottoms and were planned from medieval times.

### Key Settlement Characteristics

**Overall existing pattern**

In the High Weald the historic settlement pattern is formed of dispersed large and small farmsteads at a fine grain associated with small land holdings of woodland and pastures (dens and assarts). Hamlets sometimes arise from an aggregation of farms with additional houses for workers. Villages were formed subsequently in late medieval times based on the need to trade but are less characteristic of the High Weald. Large houses and associated parks and gardens are a feature of the 19th and 20th centuries. Larger settlements are located away from the steeper topography avoiding valley bottoms and were planned from medieval times.

**Maintain, protect and enhance where possible:**

- The existing dispersed pattern of farmsteads related to the agricultural/woodland use of land on ridges and valley sides avoiding valley bottoms.
- The scale, vernacular style, massing and materials of rural buildings and their cartilage boundaries.
- Larger settlements on gentle ridges or gentle valley edges ensuring that they are integrated into the landscape and screened, allowing views out where the existing pattern allows.
- Existing country houses and their settings while avoiding further erosion of the rural character, use and pattern of the landscape.
- Conservation areas, lists buildings and their settings
- Rural character of the local road network through sensitive and appropriate design and signage

### Villages

**Location:** on ridges, often between major ghylls such as at Ardingly and West Hoathly

**Distribution:** widespread and rare

**Origin:** late medieval

**Circulation Pattern:** linear

**Pattern:** hierarchies of buildings with farm as largest. Fine grain, usually single depth plots. Frontage continuous, including semi-detached or detached cottages. Buildings normally face front. Small front gardens and variable rear gardens

**Open spaces:** usually limited to gardens of properties. Occasional large verges and rare greens

### Hamlets

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**Distribution:** widespread and rare

**Origin:** late medieval

**Circulation Pattern:** linear

**Pattern:** hierarchies of buildings with farm as largest. Fine grain, usually single depth plots. Frontage continuous, including semi-detached or detached cottages. Buildings normally face front. Small front gardens and variable rear gardens

**Open spaces:** usually limited to gardens of properties. Occasional large verges and rare greens

### Farmsteads

**Location:** ridges and slopes avoiding valley bottoms

**Distribution:** larger farmsteads widespread and common, some widespread smaller farmsteads

**Origin:** medieval, 20th Century

**Pattern:** larger farms - loose courtyards, some with timber framed barn, cattle shelters, cart and storage sheds. Large farmhouse separate with separate access. Smaller farms - dispersed pattern with small house and small associated outbuildings

### Dwellings

**Character:** small plots normally with mix of detached, semi-detached, some terraces - often associated with estates on the fringes of the area. Frontage continuous in centre of larger settlements and broken into semi-detached or detached elsewhere. Small front gardens except in large village centres where there are none

**Relationship to road:** facing the front of the plot normally with some side on

**Size:** 2 story small scale cottages, rarely some with third storey in attic (such as in large settlements)

**Walls:** multi/red brick, decorative red clay tile hung first floor with brick, timber frame, Wealden stone in places (usually ashlar) – Cuckfield stone or Ardingly sandstone

**Roof:** plain clay or with Horsham stone (rare)

**Enclosure:** hedges – hawthorn, privet, yew, beech in places; timber picket fence and gates; Wealden stone walls, some with brick coping

### Historic Landscape Character Analysis (HLCA): The Age of the High Weald Landscape

The HLCA can interpret how the landscape has changed due to human intervention over many historical periods. In the High Weald large areas of medieval landscape are intact. These maps of the Cuckfield area are for illustrative purposes only, for information on the HLCA: [www.westsussex.gov.uk/character](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/character)

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**Further information:** West Sussex County Council - West Sussex Character Project, [www.westsussex.gov.uk/character](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/character).


High Weald AONB, [www.highweald.org.uk](http://www.highweald.org.uk).


Sussex Archaeological Society, [www.sussexpast.co.uk](http://www.sussexpast.co.uk).

Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre, [http://sbrs.org.uk/](http://sbrs.org.uk/)


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