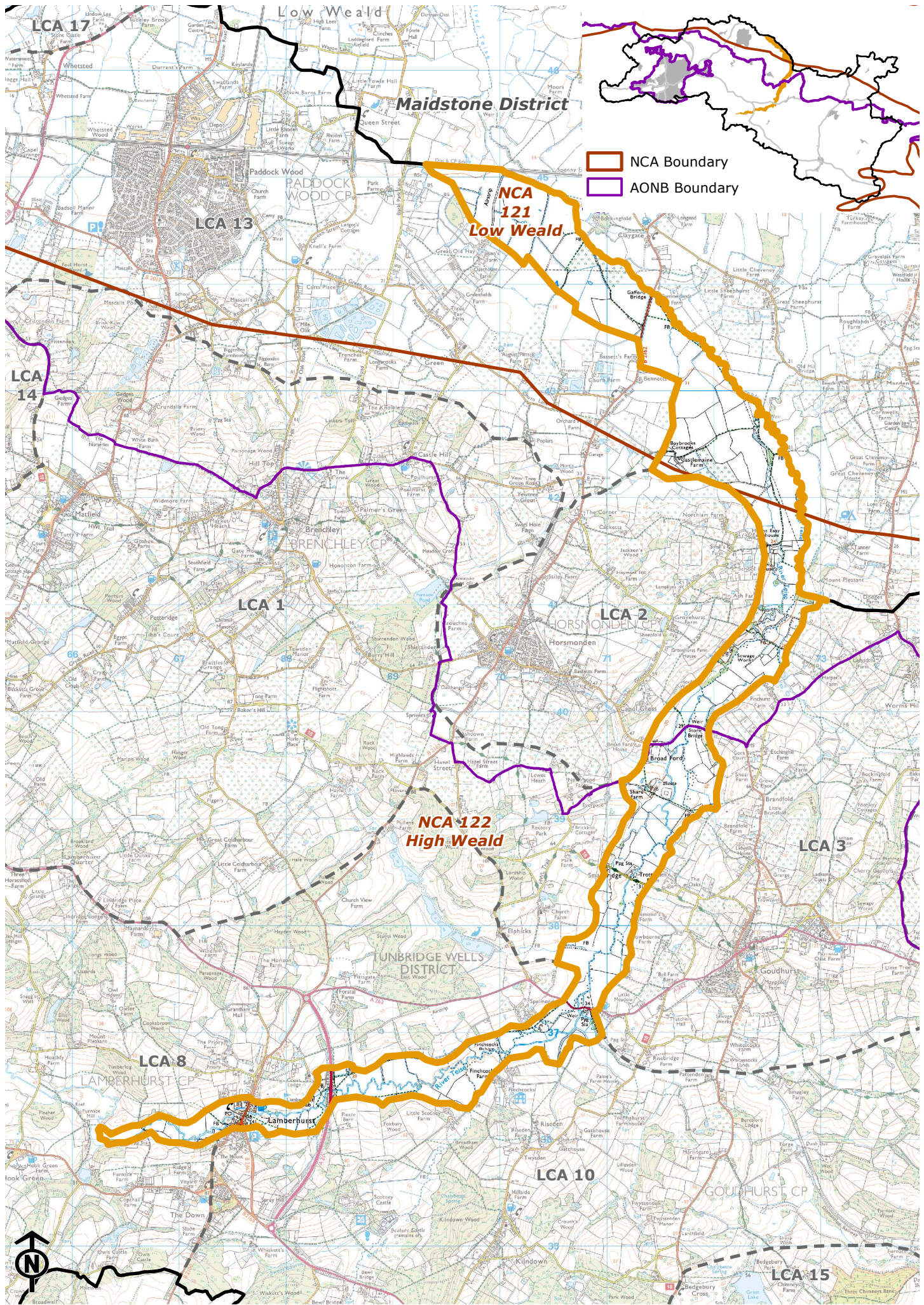


LCA 18 - Teise Valley



SUMMARY

A narrow, low-lying river valley enclosed by the rolling High Weald plateau. Comprises a medium to large-scale, open landscape of arable and orchards set against a backdrop of small copses, wooded hedges and occasional bankside vegetation.



Key Characteristics

1) Low-lying flat valley landscape around narrow, deep river channel, virtually dividing the Borough into two.

The River Teise flows from south to north through the Borough. The river valley comprises alluvial drift deposits covering the floodplain with localised strips of the solid geology of Wadhurst Clay and Ashdown Beds. The outward expression of a valley landscape commences near Lamberhurst in the High Weald, where it is narrow and strongly incises the upland plateau. To the north, east of Horsmonden, where the river enters the Low Weald, the valley broadens out, which reduces the sense of enclosure.

Upstream from Lamberhurst, at Bayham, the valley of the Teise is small and contributes to the character of the surrounding landscape rather than creating a distinctive landscape in its own right. That portion of the 'Teise' is therefore described in the Bayham Local Character Area (number 8).

2) Strong sense of enclosure created by the valley sides and rolling High Weald plateau.

The valley is surrounded by the gentle rolling hills of the High Weald plateau that are formed from Tunbridge Wells Sand. These impart a strong sense of enclosure with distant views through the valley and permit extensive views into the valley. The wooded ridges of the adjoining character areas add to the sense of enclosure.

3) Alluvial floodplain supporting large fields of intensive arable agriculture which extends right up to the river edge.

The flat alluvial valley is predominantly used for arable farmland, with a relatively low level of permanent pasture. The intensity of farming, with arable land extending right up to the river banks and the general absence of trees and hedgerows, combine to create an open landscape lacking variety. This is in great contrast with the rich detail and pattern of the High Weald Fruit Belt landscape, which occurs on either side of the valley.

Fields are medium to large-scale and surrounded by wooded hedges (hawthorn), some of which are in decline and have been replaced by post and wire fencing. An informal pattern of fields in an irregular or regular arrangement and with sinuous boundaries are bounded by ditches, hedges or wooded hedge boundaries. Much of the field pattern retains a medieval or early post-medieval time depth. There are occasional shelter hedges of alder or poplar marking the position of orchards which have declined and have been removed.

Small blocks of mixed/broad-leaved woodland occur, including remnant of ancient assart woodland – such as at Hook Wood, on the valley sides and in some locations specimen conifers are also present, creating interest and variety.

4) Pockets of river edge vegetation, including willow and alder, increasing as the valley widens out towards the Low Weald – but large sections of the bankside lack vegetation and the river course barely registers in the wider landscape.

The narrow, deep water corridor of the Teise has muddy brown waters due to the high clay content. It follows a relatively straight course with gentle meanders and the river itself is not highly prominent in the landscape. At long range its existence can only really be discerned through the presence of occasional willow, ash and alder trees and moisture-loving plants that dot its banks.

Some sections of the river have been engineered and there are localised sections of concrete bankside and weirs/sluices, often coinciding with the bridging points. Where the river has not been engineered, deep, vertical mossy banks are characteristic.

The riverbanks are frequently bare of vegetation to permit arable farmland to exist right up to the river edges, although isolated pockets of remnant bankside vegetation include alder and willow which visually enrich the otherwise open, intensively farmed valley landscape.

5) Infrequently crossed by rural lanes and Lamberhurst bypass, which dip down from the surrounding plateau and cross narrow brick bridges.

There are numerous, small bridged river crossings which permit closer-range views of the river and from which the Teise's shallow and steep riverbanks are visible. Each of these crossings creates a distinct and memorable impression of going down into a rural valley landscape, crossing a small river via a tiny old brick bridge and then rising up the valley side. The High Weald Landscape Trail crosses the river over the bridge at Smallbridge at the bottom of Goudhurst hill. This also follows the route of an ancient droveway, continuing up into the wooded pastures of the High Weald. Other bankside footpaths allow public access for walking and enjoyment of the river along much of its route. The river is also enjoyed by the local community for fishing.

Lamberhurst bypass crosses the Teise over a bridge and embankment to the east of Lamberhurst.

6) Very sparsely settled, except at Lamberhurst where a distinctive village has grown up around the bridging/fording point.

The valley is sparsely settled and few buildings can be discerned, creating a tranquil but unnerving sense of isolation as well as some very dark skies in some areas. Occasionally, scattered farm buildings or churches on the adjacent ridgetops come into view but this is an infrequent occurrence.

There are a few historic buildings located on the valley sides including historic oasts and outbuildings for farms on the top of the valley slopes in Horsmonden and Goudhurst. Hope Mill is an 18th century mill on Goudhurst Road (now converted for residential use). Vernacular materials include timber-framed buildings, weatherboarding, red brick, tiled roofs.

Lamberhurst: is the only settlement and is a designated Conservation Area. Its situation within the valley setting means the settlement does not register widely within the landscape, unlike the ridgetop settlements that characterise other parts of the High Weald. The settlement is linear, focused upon the bridge over the Teise, once the route of the A21 the road is now a local route with traffic calming. The A21 now follows a bypass to the east of the village traversing the river over a modern road bridge and is the source of background noise that intrudes upon the peace and tranquillity of the valley.

To the west of Lamberhurst the river valley character is dissipated by rising land and woodland which, together with the trees around the village, create a sense of enclosure. This creates a strong setting to the village enhanced by the intervisibility across the open river valley.

The village contains a variety and richness of building forms and styles with an attractive jumble of buildings leading the eye downwards to the Broadway and river crossing. The village is well-contained, linear in form, has continuous frontage, a varied and distinctive roofscape and contains distinctive traditional materials including brick, stone and weatherboarding with a simple colour palette.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) Historically the valley had little major development but in prehistoric and early medieval times the river would have been an important navigable water way. There is one Scheduled Monument – a Saxon Moat at Share Farm, near Broad Ford, an indication of wealth and status in the area.
- 2) The River Teise and its tributaries has provided water power for the grist mills to grind corn from the early 1100s, also fulling mills for the cloth industry and later the motive force behind the forge trip hammers and even a blast furnace.
- 3) The fording point was the reason for the growth of Lamberhurst and was initiated as an

ancient droveway, being the only easily accessible site at which to cross the River Teise, connecting the Weald to the towns in the north (the North Downs and the North Kent Plain). The building of a church on the site of the present church of St Mary in the 9th century led to the growth of the village, which developed on both sides of the river. Both banks of the Teise consisted of large areas of water meadow, a rarity within the Weald, and were used for raising and grazing sheep. The village developed a wool and cloth industry in the 12th and 13th centuries and as this demised, developed a weekly market to serve drovers of Welsh cattle on their way to summer pasture on Romney Marsh. The village established inns, a tannery and slaughter house, during the 14th and 15th centuries. However, by the 1450s the leather industry had moved to nearby Hook Green. Lamberhurst became an important centre of the iron industry in the 16th – 18th centuries, as well as a centre for small leather workshops, tailors and clock and watch makers. Following the decline of the iron industry the village took on more of an agrarian character and the surrounding area was mostly owned and shaped by a few large landowners. From the early 19th century, hops and arable farming became the main industry.

- 4) The former Hawkhurst Branch Railway Line crossed over the river valley, with the former Hope Mill Station located on Station Road, near Spelmonden which was built to serve Goudhurst. Known locally as 'the hop-pickers line', it operated between Paddock Wood and Hawkhurst, opened in 1892 until the line was closed in 1961. It was known for bringing hop-pickers each season from London's East End. The station has been demolished and most of the platform has been removed. Very little historic evidence of the line remains in this location.

Semi-Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) The only area designated for nature conservation is the Woods and Pasture near River Teise above Lamberhurst designated a LWS. This includes ancient, mixed broad-leaved woodlands that occur along the steep slopes and floodplain of the Teise, together with a section of the River Teise with its fringing scrub and woodland. Ash and alder dominate the bank margins, whilst further up the banks, woodlands include ash and field maple in the valley woods with a rich flora including dog's mercury, yellow archangel, early purple orchid and sanicle in drier areas, with damper parts containing lady's smock and pendulous sedge. Of particular note are the areas of alder carr that have developed on the floodplain, with marsh marigold and large patches of ramsons.
- 2) The higher ground is drier and here the woodlands include actively managed coppice with pedunculate oak standards as well as sessile oak and beech stands with holly.
- 3) The intensity of farming has severely restricted the value of the Teise valley as a wildlife habitat and the only area of unimproved grassland that remains in the valley occurs around the site of the Saxon Moat, a Scheduled Monument.
- 4) The bankside and aquatic vegetation of the River Teise is of fairly restricted interest. Hemlock, water-dropwort and purple loosestrife are found, along with invasive aliens such as Himalayan balsam.

Valued Features and Qualities

In addition to the valued features and qualities which apply to the whole of the Borough noted in **Chapter 1**, features and qualities considered to be of particular value in the landscape character area are identified below.

The southern part of the area lies within the High Weald AONB. The following elements of

character related to the AONB are particularly valued in this character area:

- 1) The Teise river valley contributes strongly to the character of the surrounding High Weald, as the narrow valley strongly incises the upland plateau. This contributes to the variety and interest of views across the High Weald which are far reaching, such as between Goudhurst, Horsmonden and Lamberhurst, and emphasises views of church spires - particularly the churches at the top of the river banks (St Mary's, Lamberhurst and St Margaret's, Horsmonden).

Other features and qualities considered to be of particular landscape and visual value to the character area include:

- 2) The traditional rural landscape of the river valley, including the remnant historic field boundaries of sinuous informal field patterns bound by hedges and ditches, pockets of woodland and vegetation, and grazing sheep on pasture fields.
- 3) Recreational value of walking along the river banks and fishing on the river.
- 4) The small bridges which follow ancient routeways, allowing recreational access and providing a historic reminder of the ancient routeways which continue up into the plateau of the High Weald.
- 5) The village of Lamberhurst which has a strong character influenced by its distinctive form, variety and richness of materials and building styles and its rural, wooded setting.

Detractors and Opportunities

In addition to the detractors noted in **Chapter 3**, features which detract from the character area are identified below.

Detractors and Opportunities

- 1) Loss of field boundaries and loss of riverbank vegetation.

Encourage reinstatement of riverside vegetation and hedgerow boundaries where appropriate.

Landscape Strategy

Borough landscape considerations are detailed in **Chapter 3**, and local objectives are outlined below.

Landscape Strategy

The Local Character Area should be considered in the context of the High Weald AONB, and the potential role of certain parts of the character in the setting of the AONB. The valued features and qualities of the landscape should be conserved and enhanced.

- 1) Maintain the secluded sparsely-settled character of the area. It is important that the valley does not become significantly further developed. The Teise Valley is highly visually permeable and any development, even single farm buildings on the valley floor or adjacent valley side, has the potential to be intrusive.
- 2) The restricted valley setting means that large-scale buildings in association with arable cropping have the potential to have a very high visual impact.

- 3) Proposals for large-scale or non-rural developments frequently associated with main roads, e.g. filling stations, should be resisted within the restricted rural valley setting.
- 4) Long-term enhancements should aim to restore a natural river profile and improve the aquatic and marginal habitats, including removal of invasive, non-native species. Encourage regeneration of bankside vegetation and restoration of former valley habitats such as wet meadows and permanent pasture. The objective is to conserve and enhance the remaining ecologically valuable grasslands, plus consideration of opportunities for re-creation of species-rich valley grasslands using seed of local provenance.