





## SUMMARY

A rolling upland landscape, incised by valleys, with a dispersed settlement pattern of small hamlets and isolated farmsteads hidden within a framework of extensive blocks of ancient semi-natural deciduous, ghyll, and shaw woodlands that surround medium-large fields of arable and small fields of pasture farmland.



## Key Characteristics

- 1) **An intricate topography with a rolling sandstone plateau that forms a series of high ridges which are regularly incised by the thin narrow tributary valleys of the River Teise.**

The basic underlying geological structure of the Local Character Area is of Tunbridge Wells Sandstone forming high ridges, with Wadhurst Clay and localised thin belts of alluvium deposits in the valleys. A higher proportion of Wadhurst Clay and Ashdown Beds occur to the north and north-east of the area within the network of tributary valleys of the Teise. The three tributaries of the River Teise, the largest of which is the River Bewl, flow in a general south to north direction through the area and have a great influence on its character. This variation has resulted in an intricate topography with a domed plateau forming a series of high ridges which are regularly incised by the thin, narrow valleys. Elevation varies from below 40m AOD in the valleys, where the landscape is enclosed and intimate, to over 140m AOD on the more open and exposed ridges.

Numerous Chalybeate or iron-rich springs occur on the upper slopes at the junction of the permeable sandstone and clay.

- 2) **Views from the area are varied and intermittent, creating great visual richness.**

On the basis of topography alone, views from the area are highly varied and intermittent. Combined with other elements, particularly land cover, this diversity is multiplied to create a landscape of ever-changing prospect and refuge, confinement and panorama, with visual richness and an element of surprise.

In the wider landscape, along ridgelines, there are often long views across the open countryside to the forested ridges of Bedgebury and north to the wooded ridges of Goudhurst. Scale therefore varies, with an enclosed feeling brought about by a generally wooded character. On some of the open ridges, hedgerow loss has the potential to create a much more open, exposed character.

- 3) **A well-wooded appearance with a framework of thick ghyll valley woodland and interconnected shaws in the north, and large continuous blocks of ancient woodland in the south.**

The land is of low agricultural quality with the Tunbridge Wells Sandstone producing acidic soil and the clays tending to be very cloddy. For this reason much of the area has remained covered by semi-natural broad-leaved woodlands, many of which are ancient in origin. To the north, the landscape framework is formed by numerous thick ghyll and interconnected shaw woodlands, which collectively create a well-wooded appearance. Woodland dominates the ridgetops and creates an enclosed character.

To the south, large continuous woodland blocks such as Chingley Wood and Kilndown Wood are found. The woods are predominantly semi-natural broad-leaved including oak, sweet chestnut and ash, with some areas of plantation pine. In contrast with Bedgebury these extensive forests do not blanket the entire upland plateaux, but frequently cut across the topography of the mid-slopes, leaving bare or bald ridgelines, as at Kilndown.

- 4) **Irregular medium-large fields of arable and small fields of pasture farmland with occasional hop fields.**

Medium-large arable fields with irregular field boundaries of wooded hedges, shaws and hedgerows are mixed with small pasture fields which represent an extensively intact historic landscape pattern. Much of the area is covered by medieval assart fields bounded by the characteristic thick strips of shaw and ghyll woodland, and early post-medieval regular informal fields with sinuous and wavy boundaries surrounding the early and late post-medieval designed parklands of Scotney Castle, Finchcocks and Glassenbury manors.

Hop gardens once common in the area along the valley are still present on the Scotney estate and hoppers huts can be seen scattered through the landscape.

There are also large poultry farms, located on the open ridges close to the A21.

**5) Network of rural lanes, which run along the ridges and dip down into the valleys. Wooded roadside verges are an important feature.**

The network of rural lanes, which run along the ridges and dip down into the valleys frequently pass through woodland 'shaw' edge or overgrown tree 'tunnels' creating an intimate enclosed character. Many of the rural lanes are part of an ancient network of historic droveways used for transhumance, connecting the larger settlements outside of the High Weald to the woodland pastures known as 'dens'. Many of these droveways were also known as ironways, used to connect Iron Age bloomeries in the Weald with manufacturing places outside the Weald. The routes are also known locally as smugglers routes.

In contrast with the network of lanes, the main A21, a route that originated as a medieval ironway, bisects the area north of Bewl and is a major generator of noise and traffic in the area. The road is of little distinctive quality and cuts across the grain of the landscape, introducing an element of noise and motion.

**6) Hedgerows of highly variable quality, with many remnant hedgerow trees, varying from thick species-rich woodland shaws, to bare hedgerows or those which have been replaced by post and wire fencing.**

Hedgerows within the area are highly variable. Species-rich, thick, tall, somewhat overgrown hedgerows are common, particularly lining the sunken lanes of the mid-slopes. Here, many species are found, including field maple, holly, dog rose and hazel, with foxglove, bracken, bramble, cow parsley and bluebell in their associated verges, enriching the detail of the landscape. On the valleys and slopes in the northern part of the area, thick woodland shaws are the characteristic boundary. Along the ridgelines, especially around the poultry farms the hedgerows are often bare or with a scrubby appearance, although isolated mature hedgerow trees are still present. Many of the hedgerows here, particularly along the road have been replaced with post and wire or concrete post and link fencing, creating a more open appearance.

**7) Frequent historic and converted vernacular buildings and the small village of Kilndown.**

The settlement pattern consists of dispersed and isolated farmsteads, houses and estate houses with the exception of the village of Kilndown and the hamlet of Riseden. A variety of vernacular-style historic farmsteads occur on the valley slopes and in association with medieval assart fields. These include 19<sup>th</sup> century oasts, isolated medieval farmsteads which are strongly associated with ancient routeways and estate cottages in the grounds of larger manor houses.

An exception to this pattern is the large 'industrial' sheds associated with the poultry farms. These large structures interrupt the scale of the landscape particularly as large agricultural fields with a degraded hedgerow structure often surround them.

Most of the settlements and buildings are screened by woodland and therefore only register at close quarters, when a filtered view along a winding lane suddenly reveals their existence. Even many of the larger buildings are not visible at a distance, for example Scotney Castle. There is a lack of intrusion by modern development (except for roads busy with through-traffic), resulting in a quiet rural landscape of relatively dark skies despite the presence of Goudhurst village.

The hamlet of Riseden is located on the mid-slopes at a lower elevation than Kilndown. The hamlet is a loose cluster of dispersed rural buildings including oasts, half-timbered house and charming 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages.

**Kilndown:** The main settlement of the area is situated on a long, narrow sandstone ridge. It grew up in part to provide housing for estate staff for the historic manor of Bedgebury (which was demolished by the 19<sup>th</sup> century). It takes its name in part from the ridge or down it lies on and perhaps latterly from charcoal kilns required to make iron. The village may have started as temporary camps from which the workers would produce the charcoal for the nearby iron



furnaces. The church spire provides a local landmark, although the village remains hidden from view behind trees and surrounding woodland, and the village retains a quiet, rural character. It is a designated Conservation Area.

**8) The landscape has importance for formal and informal visitor attractions e.g. Finchcocks Musical Museum, Scotney Castle and Bewl Reservoir, and there are numerous countryside and woodland trails.**

The area has many distinct and unique buildings, frequently associated with the small waterways. Foremost amongst these is Scotney Castle owned by the National Trust, which is commonly used as a promotional image of the Kent Weald and together with its wider estate is a popular visitor attraction. The associated early 19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century gardens are listed Grade I on the Historic England Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. Finchcocks House is also located in the area, near a tiny stream close to the valley of the Teise. Finchcocks, an early Georgian manor house, once home to a musical museum but now a private house, is a significant local landmark set in parkland.

The Bewl Reservoir – a regionally important visitor attraction that offers sailing, rowing, fishing, riding and biking, occurs at the periphery of the area, but remains largely hidden from view by a basin of rolling ridges.

#### **Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution**

- 1) Scotney Castle was built in 1377 and reduced to ruins in 1840. This romantic moated castle on the River Bewl, with attached ruins of a 17th century house, is a Scheduled Monument. This together with the 19<sup>th</sup> century mansion and renowned picturesque gardens and wider estate, is in the care of the National Trust. Finchcocks House is the most notable baroque house in the county. It is a Grade I listed, three-storey red brick country house with brighter red brick dressings and chimneys dating from 1725. Glassenbury Park comprises early 18<sup>th</sup> century formal gardens set within woodlands and a park with lakes laid out around a 15<sup>th</sup> century moated mansion.
- 2) Part of Lamberhurst Down Conservation Area lies within the character area. The Down is located on a sandstone knoll above Lamberhurst village which is situated in the valley below. It was historically a common used for pasture and grazing with the eastern part partly quarried.
- 3) The old Hawkhurst Branch Railway Line cuts through the area. Known locally as ‘the hop-pickers line’, it ran between Paddock Wood and Hawkhurst, operating from 1892 until the line was closed in 1961. It was known for bringing hop-pickers each season from London’s East End. The line remains conspicuous in the landscape, being demarked by hedgerows, boundaries and earthworks. There is a particularly well-preserved stretch located between Finchcocks and Ranters Lane. Hop pickers huts are preserved on the Scotney estate and at Spelmonden Farm.
- 4) The Wealden iron industry was an important part of the area’s history, with nearby furnaces near Bedgebury (indicated in the names of nearby Furnace Wood and Forge Farm) and Chingley Forge (now under the Bewl Reservoir).
- 5) An ancient droveway between Smugley Farm in the north of the area, and Goudhurst, is known locally as a smugglers’ tunnel, crossing through the ridge. Many of the historic farmsteads date from the medieval period, possibly originating from former ‘dens’.

#### **Semi-Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats**

- 1) The area is ecologically rich with a high proportion of semi-natural woodland, much of ancient origin and some remnant pockets of wooded heathland on acid sands such as at



Chingley Wood and Combwell Wood. Areas of wildflower grassland add a further layer of biodiversity interest, such as at Finchcocks, Scotney Castle and Hallwood Farm.

- 2) Combwell Wood, part of the medieval priory of Combwell is an ancient woodland with ghylls in which peat has accumulated. Much of the woodland is coppiced sweet chestnut and birch with an attractive bluebell understorey that bursts to life in the spring. It is classified as a SSSI and LWS.
- 3) Chingley Wood blankets the north easterly shore of Bewl Reservoir with chestnut coppice under sessile oak, a mature conifer plantation and ghylls with hornbeam, hazel, birch and alder. There is also an area of wooded heath. It is a LWS.
- 4) A large area of shrubby parkland, partly laid out according to picturesque principles, including rhododendron, occurs around Scotney Castle and its enclosed gardens or pleasure grounds. The parkland contains many veteran trees from former field boundaries and woodland areas as well mature ornamental trees. This creates visual variety within the landscape and the area is classified as a SSSI. Scotney has a wide range of habitats including ponds, unimproved grassland, lowland meadows and broad-leaved woodland with coppiced hazel and ash, and oak standards, which support an important invertebrate community. The land bridge over the A21 on the access to Scotney Castle was the first of its kind in the UK and acts as a corridor for wildlife including dormice and reptiles.

## 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 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 scenic ridges and wooded ghyll valleys. The ridgelines and gently undulating hills permit intermittent and glimpsed views within the area, which occasionally stretch for considerable distances across the High Weald.
- 2) The pattern of dispersed farmsteads and hamlets. The settlement pattern is typical of the High Weald landscape. Historic farmsteads - many of which are connected by ancient droveways – oasts, manor houses and historic parks and gardens survive as remnants of the historic evolution of settlement in the landscape. Locally distinctive and historic buildings add important local character to the landscape.
- 3) Ancient routeways that form a clear network of roads and tracks. The raised banks with wooded sides which are now local lanes, roads or public rights of way add historic interest to the landscape.
- 4) Woodland – particularly ancient woodlands, ghylls and shaws as well as individual mature trees. This is of value for many reasons including historic, aesthetic, biodiversity and recreation interest. Large areas of woodland provide a sense of tranquillity and remoteness, where public access allows people to get close to nature. The pattern of woodland, shaws and ghylls also illustrates a historic pattern closely tied to the historic field pattern and farmsteads.

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

- 5) The historic field pattern of small to medium fields which create a regular pattern and with



wavy and some sinuous boundaries, creating a variety in scale and visual interest. They have historic value for representing a time depth in the landscape as well as in combination with the wooded shaws, ancient woodland and hedgerow field boundaries.

- 6) Sense of tranquillity and dark skies across much of the area, as a result of a lack of modern intrusion, with settlement contained within the topographical and wooded framework.
- 7) The association with the nearby old Hawkhurst Branch Railway Line which cuts through the area provides a potential recreational resource, as well as serving as a reminder of the culture of 'the hop-pickers line'.
- 8) Formal and informal visitor attractions including Scotney Castle and its wider accessible estate and Bewl Water with its attractions and circular walk both linking to a wider network of trails and villages.

## 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) Impact of busy main roads cutting through the landscape introducing background noise, visual intrusion and movement.

*Ensure locally sensitive screen planting, in association with development proposals, along main road corridors to reduce visual impact and the wider infiltration of traffic noise.*

## 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 essentially wooded and rural character of the area and its special sense of place.
- 2) Protect the existing pattern of settlement, i.e. small-scale farmsteads in the ghyll valleys, large isolated high-quality historic houses along the valley floors and notable absence of development on the plateau top (except at Kilndown).
- 3) Avoid location in prominent positions such as bare ridgelines – this particularly refers to new agricultural buildings, including poultry sheds.
- 4) Aim to control the proliferation of hobby farms ensuring features such as paddocks and fencing do not incrementally degrade the character and quality of the landscape.
- 5) Maintain and enhance the 'chain' of recreation spaces encompassing Scotney Castle as well as Bewl Water and Bedgebury.