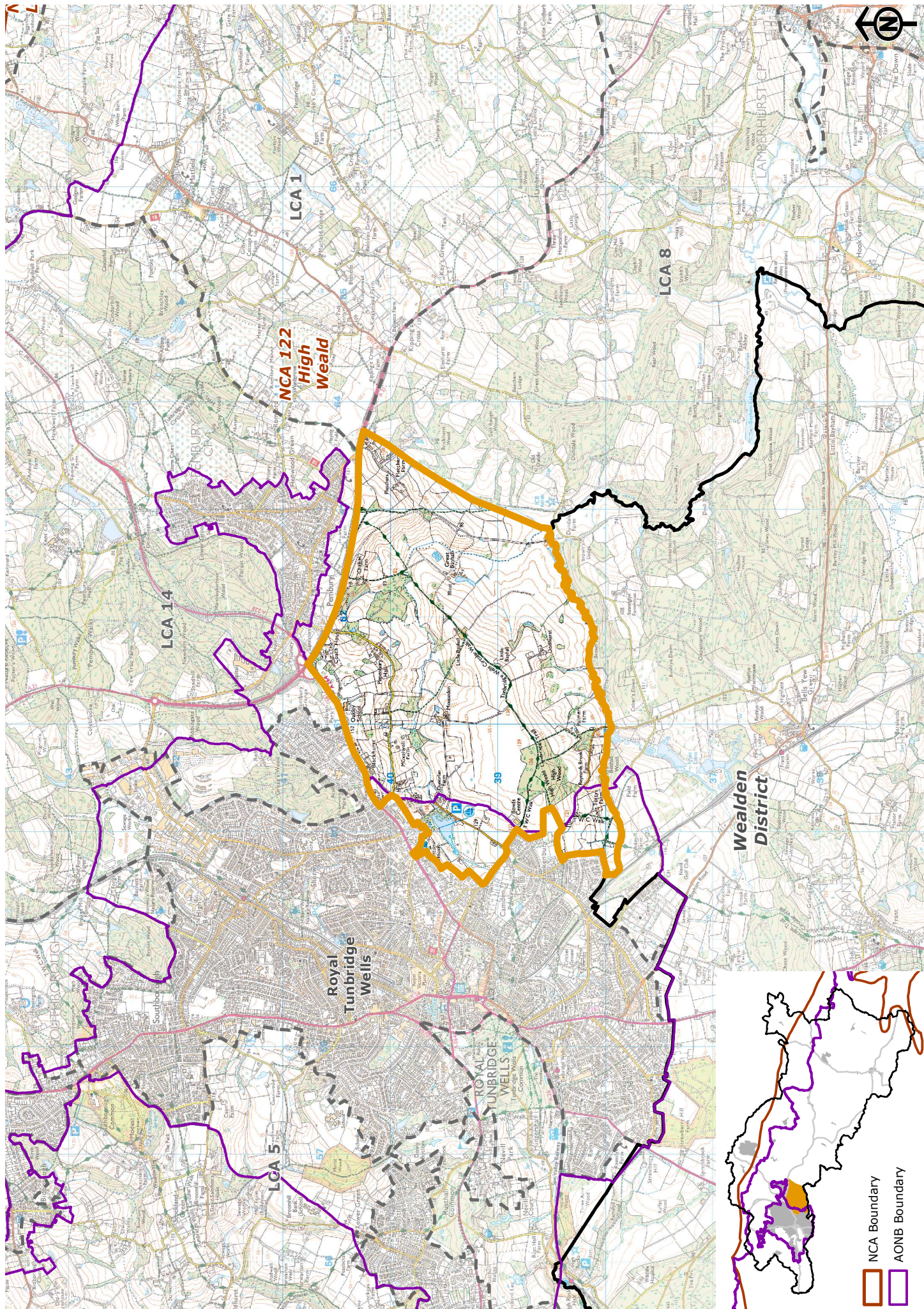


LCA 19 - Bayhall Open Farmland



SUMMARY

An open, arable landscape along a high, broad ridge extending from the eastern edge of Royal Tunbridge Wells, forming a stark contrast with the surrounding areas which are characterised by pasture surrounded with wooded shaws and ghylls. The edges of the area are smaller in scale and contain landscape parkland and medieval fields.



Key Characteristics

1) Distinctive topography with a high sandstone ridge providing extensive, panoramic views out across the successive wooded ridges of the High Weald.

Topographically, the area forms a high ridge of Tunbridge Wells Sandstone which extends east from the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells to Little Bayhall and is cut on either side by tributaries draining eastwards to the headwaters of the River Teise. Another parallel ridge in the north of the area continues into the Pembury character area.

The presence of the acid sandstone beneath the surface is indicated by gorse on some steep banks and verges along the ridge. The relatively wide tributary valleys, such as Reynard's Brook, which drops down from Hawkenbury on the south-eastern edge of Royal Tunbridge Wells, are underlain by the Wadhurst Clay, with a narrow belt of alluvium lining the valley floor.

Bayhall ridge, at 136m AOD, is one of the highest points in the Borough, offering extensive and panoramic views across successive wooded ridges of the High Weald and to the wooded slopes of the Bayham character area. Likewise, the ridge, with High Wood on the ridgetop, forms a distinctive feature in views from the southern edge of Royal Tunbridge Wells and from the wider landscape including from Wealden district to the south, and from the Bayham character area to the east.

2) An open arable ridgetop with local contours and undulations infilled and smoothed out creating a bland, expansive character lacking local landscape detail.

Land cover comprises a central ridge of intensively managed arable land, surrounded by grassland on the heavier clay soils in the valleys. Much of the arable land has been 'improved', with local undulations and hollows in the topography filled in and smoothed out creating an unnatural landscape, lacking small-scale detail and interest. Removal of the majority of the hedges and local landscape features such as copses, has created expansive arable plains with a very open, exposed character. This pocket of land is quite unlike the rest of the Borough, and only the long views out across wooded ridges provide a true 'High Weald' sense of place, although long boundaries, remnant shaws, tracks and farmsteads provide reference points for the underlying medieval landscape.

3) Intersecting valleys to the north and south provide areas of diversity with permanent pasture and ghyll woodlands.

The valley of Reynard's Brook to the south marks the borough boundary – this valley is an attractive rural enclave with thick, diverse hedgerows and shaws of holly, oak and hawthorn, and narrow ghyll woodland in tributary side valleys, surrounding unimproved pastures on the steep sides. The springs and flushes on the middle slopes are particularly important habitats supporting a range of flora including marsh violet, bog asphodel and a range of mosses and sedges. High Wood is an area of ancient woodland and there are small irregular medieval assart fields surrounding the woodland adjoining the urban edge of Tunbridge Wells at Hawkenbury.

Similar diversity is introduced to the valley to the north of Mouseden and near Pepenbury (previously Larkfield) Hall where small woodland copses survive alongside ancient wooded ghyll valleys and larger blocks of ancient woodland to the south of Pembury.

4) Blocks of woodland and individual mature trees on the ridgetop are a very important landscape feature and ecological resource.

Diversity in the somewhat bland, open character of the central ridge is provided by several blocks of woodland which have escaped clearance. These are now both important landscape features and reservoirs of biodiversity in the intensively farmed landscape. High Wood on the ridgetop is an ancient woodland with oak standards over coppiced sweet chestnut and a thick carpet of bluebells in spring.

5) Large 'historic' farm complexes dispersed across the area on the upper slopes.

Settlement comprises scattered large farm complexes on the upper slopes. Most of the farm complexes have historic origins and are dispersed across the character area appearing as defined clusters in loose courtyard arrangements. Dodhurst and Great Bayhall (a former moated site) are medieval farmsteads in origin, whilst others containing historic buildings date from the 18th and 19th centuries including Palmer's Farm, Mouseden and Fletchers Farm though they have since been altered or renovated. The newer, larger, associated sheds and barns required of more industrial modern farming, which surround the farmhouses, can be particularly prominent in this open landscape.

Other development within the area is infrequent although there are occasional residential dwellings dispersed along rural lanes, set back and integrated with landscaping. Vernacular materials include red brick, red hanging tiles and pitched/ gable roofs.

6) At the northern and western edges of the area, an ornamental/ parkland character providing a transition between Royal Tunbridge Wells town and the wider countryside.

Historic parks and gardens include Dunorlan Park, Blackhurst Park, and the former designed parkland at Oakleigh. Dunorlan Park was designed by Robert Marnock. It is located on the edge of Royal Tunbridge Wells and is situated on a ridge to make the most of the views of the surrounding countryside of the High Weald. Most of Marnock's design and many of the mid-19th century features survive within the public park, including mature trees of oak, beech, sweet chestnut and Scot's pine and exotic trees including cedar, cypress, deodar and Ponderosa pine grouped on sweeping lawns with water features.

7) Ancient routeways running along the ridgelines, now forming rural lanes, tracks and recreational footpaths, particularly the High Weald Landscape Trail.

The ancient routeways run broadly north-east/ south-west along the ridgetops and link to ridgetop routeways across the High Weald. These historic droveways were the former lanes used for transhumance – the seasonal movement of people and animals for summer and winter feeding. This generally involved feeding pigs on acorns and fallen forest nuts and fruits in areas of woodland pasture (or 'dens'). The high Bayhall ridge has long been an important routeway. Today the road along the ridgetop has been closed to through traffic and forms a well-used recreational route linking the circular High Weald Walk into Royal Tunbridge Wells. Cornford Lane is a narrow rural road bordered by hedgerows, trees and grass verges.

8) The remnant historic landscape of medieval assart fields, wooded shaw boundaries and ancient routeways which retains a rural character despite the area's proximity to Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Small areas of permanent pasture are noticeable – for example alongside Cornford Lane, with small irregular fields of medieval assart with remnant shaw boundaries to the north and south. The valley to the east of Great Bayall also provides an area of local interest with small irregular medieval assart fields over the ridge.

The steep topography and woodland block combined with little sense of modern intrusions in the heart of the area (such as main roads) provides a sense of rural quiet despite the proximity of the area to Royal Tunbridge Wells and the A21. A lack of street lighting generates relatively dark skies in central and eastern parts.

The Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk and High Weald Landscape Trail cuts through the area on the high ridge and offers panoramic views back to Royal Tunbridge Wells with the area prominent in views out from the eastern edge of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Dunorlan Park in particular.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) Great Bayhall has its origins as an old manor house of Pembury; a house dating from 1650 is known to have stood here (on the site of a 12th century building) until it was

demolished and rebuilt this century. An interesting old barn, moat and ponds remain as evidence of the historic manor.

- 2) Hawkenbury, on the south eastern edge of Royal Tunbridge Wells was formerly a small ridgetop hamlet; now it has merged with the eastern edge of Royal Tunbridge Wells, with extensive new suburban development.
- 3) The concentration of landscaped parklands and gardens, and remnant features such as parkland trees, reflects the influence during the late post-medieval and early modern period of the development of the town as a place for leisure and recreation. The estates are representative of the wealth of the area, giving rise to areas being gentrified from small farms to country mansions with larger gardens.
- 4) The effects of the modern industrial farming on the historic landscape features are evident but medieval pattern is not entirely extinguished

Semi-Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) High Wood LWS is an ancient woodland with the highest part managed as chestnut coppice with occasional oak standards.

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 (apart from the area in the north comprising the north-facing slopes that descend into the Low Weald). The following elements of character related to the AONB are particularly valued in this character area:

- 1) Ancient routeways running along the ridgelines, and the network of other recreational footpaths linking to the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk and High Weald Landscape Trail. These local routes add historic interest to the landscape, provide strongly rural character and enable public access across the landscape and between settlements and the AONB.
- 2) Remnant ancient ghyll valley woodlands and blocks of woodland, providing value including historic, aesthetic and biodiversity interest. High Wood on the ridgetop is a very important landscape feature and ecological resource, also providing diversity in the context of the somewhat bland, open character of the central ridge.
- 3) The dispersed pattern of settlement typical of the High Weald landscape. Although many of the farmsteads have been modernised and altered, the dispersed pattern is strongly characteristic of the High Weald.
- 4) The distinctive topography which allows intervisibility to and from this area and the surrounding High Weald landscape.
- 5) The remnant historic landscape of medieval assart fields, wooded shaw boundaries and ancient routeways which retains a rural character despite the area's proximity to Royal Tunbridge Wells.
- 6) Extensive, panoramic views from the High Weald Landscape Trail across the High Weald and the wooded slopes of the Bayham character area.

Other features and qualities considered to be of particular landscape and visual value to the

character area include:

- 7) Landscape parkland character provided by areas such as Dunorlan Park, which creates a limit to the town and allows landscape to penetrate into the town. The views from the park which take in views of the town (e.g. St Peter's spire in Camden Park) as well as views of the landscape to the south and east, including High Wood.
- 8) The rural character of the area despite its proximity to Royal Tunbridge Wells, created by the character of rural lanes, individual mature trees and local vernacular materials.

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) Degradation of local character through loss of small-scale features including copses and field boundaries and micro-topographic variation.

Any enhancements should focus on:

Restoration of landscape structure through re-planting of thick hedges and hedgerow trees. It may not be practical to sub-divide the now large arable fields, but the restoration of outer boundary hedges with small field copses may be more appropriate (note: it will be important to ensure that any tree planting does not obscure the extensive views from the ridgeline).

- 2) The sense of a 'creeping' urban edge of Royal Tunbridge Wells and threat of potential suburban expansion out from Hawkenbury across the ridgetop.

Landscape enhancements including native tree planting to integrate the newer edge of Royal Tunbridge Wells into their rural landscape setting should be provided through the development process where possible.

- 3) Busy traffic detracts from the character of rural lanes.

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, particularly the role the areas of the northern slopes play in the setting of the AONB. The valued features and qualities of the landscape should be conserved and enhanced.

- 1) Maintain the pleasant rural character of the valleys, particularly Reynard's Brook, with its scattered agricultural estate cottages, which provides an abrupt contrast with the development at Hawkenbury.
- 2) Target landscape enhancements along the High Weald Walk recreational route. Reinstatement of adjoining field boundaries by re-planting hedges of locally native species and removal of barbed wire is a priority.
- 3) Promote local recreational routes including the network of local footpaths which link with

the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk and the High Weald Landscape Trail.

- 4) Any enhancements in association with potential development should:
 - a) Sustain appropriate woodland management at High Wood to maximise ecological, landscape and recreational benefits, as part of High Weald-wide woodland management and marketing initiatives (promoted by the Woodland Enterprise Centre); and
 - b) In the longer term, seek opportunities for the re-creation of heathland on the arable land of the high sandstone ridges (building on the successful restoration at Pembury and Hadlow, and possibly linking into these sites).