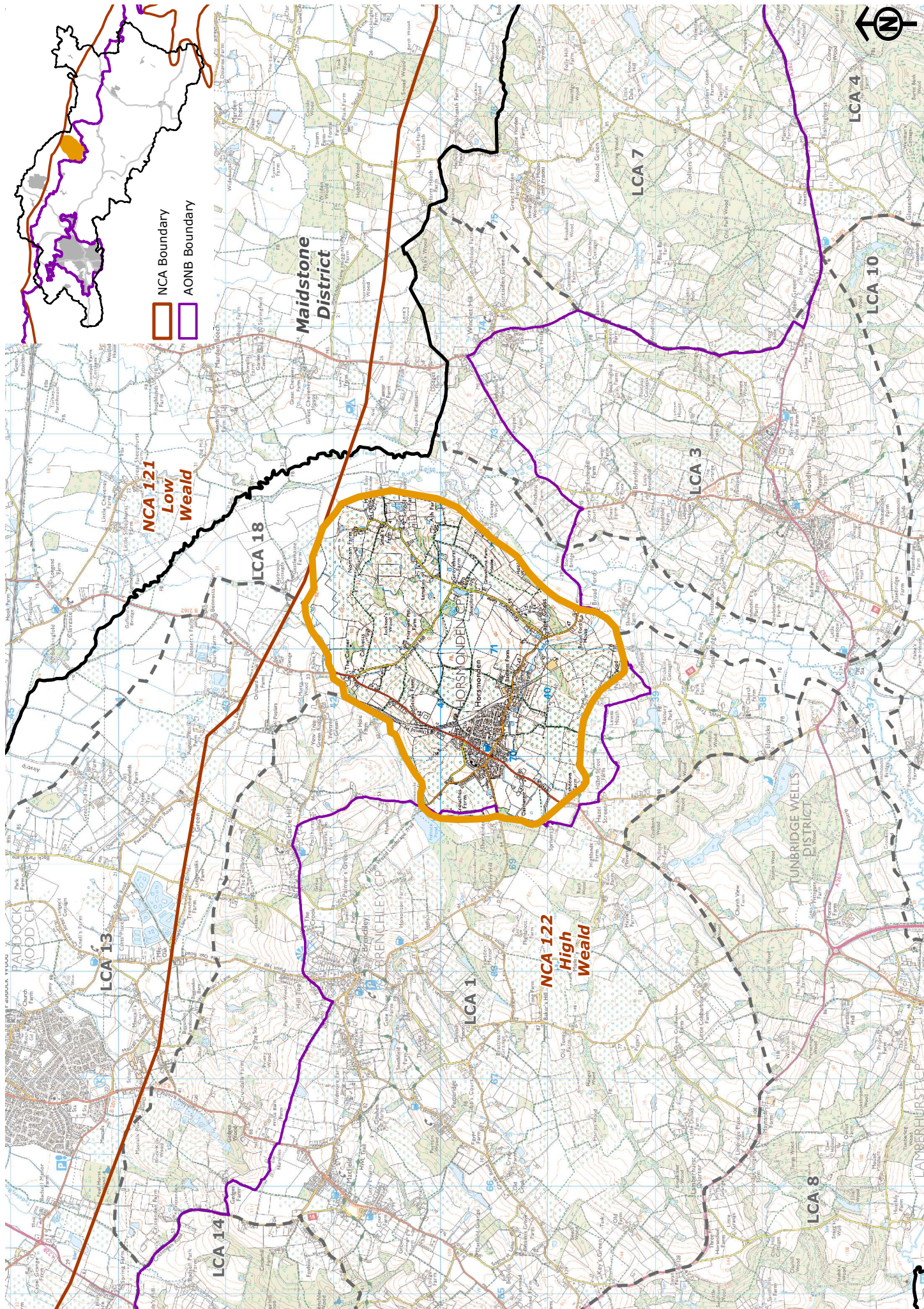


LCA 2 - Horsmonden Fruit Belt



## SUMMARY

The raised sandstone plateau is almost entirely covered by fruit plantations and the area is distinguished by the virtual absence of ghyll woodlands, with only very small isolated woodland copses surviving within the very intensively cultivated landscape. Horsmonden village is the main focus of settlement.



## Key Characteristics

- 1) **A raised sandstone plateau forming a series of undulating ridges on the edge of the High Weald 'upland'.**

The area is almost entirely underlain by Tunbridge Wells Sandstone, creating a relatively simple undulating plateau landform with a series of gentle ridges and rising to a rounded dome top just to the north of Horsmonden village. The intricate incised topography of ghyll valleys on clay, found elsewhere in the High Weald, is not a characteristic feature of the area. A thin strip of alluvium underlies those narrow stream valleys that do cut through the sandstone, as for example from the village of Horsmonden down to the Teise. The boundaries of the area are formed by the River Teise to the east and a minor tributary of the Teise to the west and north. To the north, the land drops down to the Low Weald.

- 2) **Occasional long views out over the patchwork farmland of the Low Weald to the wooded ridge of the North Downs.**

From the higher ground, such as at Hayman's Hill, there are extensive views out over the patchwork Low Weald farmland, terminating at the wooded ridge of the North Downs in the distance.

There are glimpsed views to the south, east and west towards the wooded ridges of the High Weald which also form a wooded backdrop to the elevated village of Horsmonden. Some views valued by the local community include the view from Horsmonden to Brenchley church. The overall effect is of being on the edge of an upland area.

- 3) **A predominantly open landscape with only occasional small woodland copses creating a much more open, agricultural character than in the rest of the High Weald, with a reduced sense of enclosure.**

The areas of fruit cultivation are highly visible in the landscape, as they are located on undulating slopes, as for example at Hayman's Hill Farm. Here, the intersecting regular lines created by the rows of fruit, with strips of grass in between and tall shelter hedges combine to create a visually interesting, busy patterned landscape. Mature trees, steep winding roads with grass verges and small areas of woodland add to this pattern.

- 4) **Some enclosure provided by the alder and poplar shelter hedges around the fruit fields and hedgerow lines along roads, and around ponds.**

Field boundaries are varied and are determined by land use. The area is notable for the absence of diverse 'woodland' shaw enclosures, with prominent lines of alder or poplar trees providing protection and shelter to areas of fruit. In isolated areas where fruit or arable cultivation is not dominant holly hedges are a very locally distinctive feature. Around areas of pasture, paddock fencing and wire boundaries are common and in some areas such as in the north of the area towards the Paddock Wood character area, there is evidence of the removal of hedgerow boundaries to create larger arable fields. In general, the whole area has a less 'wooded' feel compared with other part of the High Weald plateau, although high hedges and mature individual standard trees give a strong texture and structure to the landscape.

- 5) **An intensively cultivated landscape dominated by orchards but also occasional areas of hops and some soft fruit.**

Soils are very variable, reflecting the drift deposits. A belt of Grade 2 agricultural land, which is relatively rare in the Borough, extends across the middle of the ridge top and in part accounts for the intensity of cultivation. Fruit cultivation appears to dominate, at least visually, with large-scale regular orchards of mainly apples on dwarf root stock, surrounded by tall alder and poplar shelter hedges. Areas of soft fruit are also locally common, and also occasionally hop gardens.

The areas of fruit cultivation are visually dominant to a backdrop of other agricultural land uses, including large arable fields in the north of the area and smaller enclaves of pasture.

**6) Many dispersed, scattered rural buildings with the principal settlement and focus of the area being the village of Horsmonden.**

Vernacular houses and historic farmsteads are a regular feature in the landscape, being located alongside several of the roads that cross through the area. Historic farmsteads are particularly strongly concentrated in the north of the character area, on the lower slopes towards the Low Weald. They include medieval courtyard plan farmsteads and late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century oast houses which often remain as farms or have been converted to houses. Vernacular materials of red tile, red brick and timber-framed cottages create subtle hues and a varied texture.

Overall the dispersed settlement pattern, and the nucleated village of Horsmonden, creates a sense of balance and harmony. However, there are also a number of large farm complexes which include extensive farm buildings, barns and fruit packing sheds.

**Horsmonden:** This is the main area of settlement, located just below the plateau top on the edge of a narrow valley running down to the Teise. Although a sizeable village, its situation away from the highest ground means it is not especially visually prominent in the wider landscape.

The focus of the village is the crossroads of Goudhurst/ Brenchley Road with Lamberhurst/ Maidstone Road and a village green, known as The Heath, overlooked by a local pub and some historic cottages. The survival of a number of historic buildings along the roads contributes to the distinctive character of the village which is a designated Conservation Area. Vernacular materials include red brick and red tiles, tile hung upper floors, timber-framed houses with red and blue chequered brick and half-hipped roofs. The village has a strong focus and a wooded backdrop.

Horsmonden's elevation affords views to the wider countryside, including the wooded hills of the High Weald – eastwards along the valley towards Goudhurst and southwards to the wooded ridge of the edge of the High Weald AONB. Views towards the west from Horsmonden to Brenchley connect this area to its wider landscape, providing a visual transition to the High Weald AONB.

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

- 1) The village was an important centre of the medieval Wealden iron industry and there are remnants in the landscape of former furnace ponds, hammer ponds and old workings. The large Furnace Pond to the west of the character area and connected by Furnace Lane, powered one of the major iron foundries in the area, and is said to have produced cannons and guns for warships, including weapons for both sides of the English Civil War. References to this industry remain in the name of the 16<sup>th</sup> century pub The Gun and Spitroast.
- 2) Many of the lanes originated as drove roads or ironways, although the reasonably heavy traffic and associated 'improvements' mean that many now have a modern, even urban, character in places. A green lane runs from Horsmonden Primary School to Grovehurst Lane.
- 3) The former Hawkhurst Branch Railway Line once cut through the area. 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 line remains conspicuous in the landscape, being demarked by hedgerows, boundaries and earthworks. There is a particularly well-preserved stretch located to the north of Horsmonden near to Swigs Hole Farm including the surviving Swigs Hole Bridge which carried the railway track across a river and road. The tunnel to the north of Horsmonden also remains as does the former Horsmonden station which is now a commercial car garage.
- 4) Part of the estate land of Sprivers, a 15<sup>th</sup> century manor house and gardens from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, lies in the south west of the area. Now owned by the National Trust the area within the Horsmonden character area comprises pastoral fields with strong

hedgerow boundaries and a section of ancient semi-natural woodland.

- 5) Although much of the early historic landscape pattern has been altered by orchards and settlement, some areas show remnants of the medieval landscape. For example, at Hayman's Hill, where a semi-regular pattern of fields with wavy boundaries surrounded by hedgerows and small areas of ancient woodland survive. The fields have numerous ponds, likely the result of 'marling' pits - a practice which has its roots in the medieval period where the marl was then used for improving the soil, particularly on clay soils such as at Haymans Hill.

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

- 1) Small copses of ancient semi-natural woodland survive. These are often irregular in shape and on the lower hill slopes. They are also often associated with small field ponds, and together with the roadside and hedgerow field boundaries, grass verges and individual mature trees, create an ecological network.
- 2) A network of hedges and the secondary woodland that has developed along the line of the old railway line are particularly important as linear woodland corridors.
- 3) There are several areas of traditional orchards (orchards managed in a low intensity way with no chemical pesticides) which are BAP priority habitats for the wide range of wildlife they support. The mosaic of habitats may encompass fruit trees, scrub, hedgerows, hedgerow trees, orchard floor habitats, fallen dead wood and associated features such as ponds and streams.
- 4) There are several small blocks of semi-improved pasture which are of considerable nature conservation interest.
- 5) There are a number of ponds which, have great cultural and wildlife interest and are often associated with 'green' or forstals. Although the smaller farm ponds generally do not register in the wider landscape, larger ponds at road junctions such as that at Grovehurst Lane and Hayman's Hill are very prominent, with large open water bodies surrounded by some overhanging woodland.

## **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.

Although not within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, for many people travelling through the area it is perceived as such. There are strong associations between this area and the AONB and the area enhances the character of the AONB landscape. The following key qualities related to the AONB are particularly valued in this character area:

- 1) Frequent glimpsed views to the wooded ridgelines of the High Weald to the east, south and west, for example from the crests of hills in and around Horsmonden. Physically the area forms an 'edge' to the High Weald upland. From the higher ground, such as at Hayman's Hill, there are also extensive views out over the patchwork Low Weald farmland, terminating at the wooded ridge of the North Downs in the distance.
- 2) Frequent historic farmsteads are conspicuous features in the landscape – both isolated and associated with roads and tracks. These add local vernacular character typical of the High Weald, including oast houses, timber-framed farm buildings and details such as

traditional weatherboarding, clay tiles and hipped roofs.

- 3) Locally distinctive features so characteristic of the AONB are consistently represented throughout the area, including orchards, a few remaining hop gardens and ponds, pits and relics of the iron industry.

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

- 4) The scenic quality and interest of the undulating landscape of orchards where intersecting regular lines created by the rows of fruit create a patterned and textured landscape. Traditional orchards which are managed in a low intensity way provide habitat mosaics along with a network of hedgerows, mature oak trees, wide grass verges and occasional woodlands.
- 5) Areas which retain a sense of the historic landscape, where the irregular and sinuous boundaries of ancient woodlands have been carved out to form fields with wavy boundaries surrounded by hedgerows, and with ponds, which are likely the result of 'marling' pits being dug.
- 6) The village of Horsmonden, particularly the focus at the village green which is enriched by the presence of locally distinctive and vernacular buildings as well as the isolated church overlooking the Teise valley which was part of a medieval hamlet.
- 7) The old Hawkhurst Branch Railway Line which cuts through the area and provides a local ecological and potential recreational resource, as well as serving as a reminder of the culture of 'the hop-pickers line' and local hop industry in the area.
- 8) The harmonious balance of landscape features where a strong rural character prevails, and features such as ancient woodland, hedges, mature trees, grass verges, ponds combine with historic buildings, creating an interesting, varied and calm landscape.
- 9) Dark skies away from the main settlement of Horsmonden, particularly in the area north of Haymans Hill, indicate a sense of rural calm.

## 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 enclosure, particularly where fields are enlarged for modern agricultural purposes, including arable production. The absence of ghyll woodland and shaws in this area intensifies the effect of hedgerow loss.

*Opportunities for the creation of new farm woodlands and copses (through planting and/or natural regeneration) should be explored to provide structure and diversity in this landscape, which is vulnerable to becoming increasingly 'open'. In particular, woodland and screen planting should be included in proposals for new development where appropriate. Locally native species should be utilised in all woodland planting initiatives and new woodlands should be designed to 'fit' into the landscape and respect the landform of this part of the plateau.*

- 2) Modern intrusions in the landscape are limited, although dispersed in the wider countryside, there are a number of large modern farm complexes which include extensive farm buildings, barns and fruit packing sheds. These semi-industrial buildings can have a very high visual impact from adjacent and longer views down the valley.

## 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 character area plays in the setting of the AONB. The valued features and qualities of the landscape should be conserved and enhanced.

- 1) Development will need to be sensitive to the essentially rural character of the area which, with both agricultural decline and intensification occurring in tandem, is vulnerable to change.
- 2) Ensure that incremental small scale developments do not erode the character of the area.
- 3) Seek to provide an appropriate sense of visual containment for Horsmonden through protection and enhancement of its orchard setting.
- 4) Consider opportunities for further woodland copse and screen planting in association with new development in this open landscape.