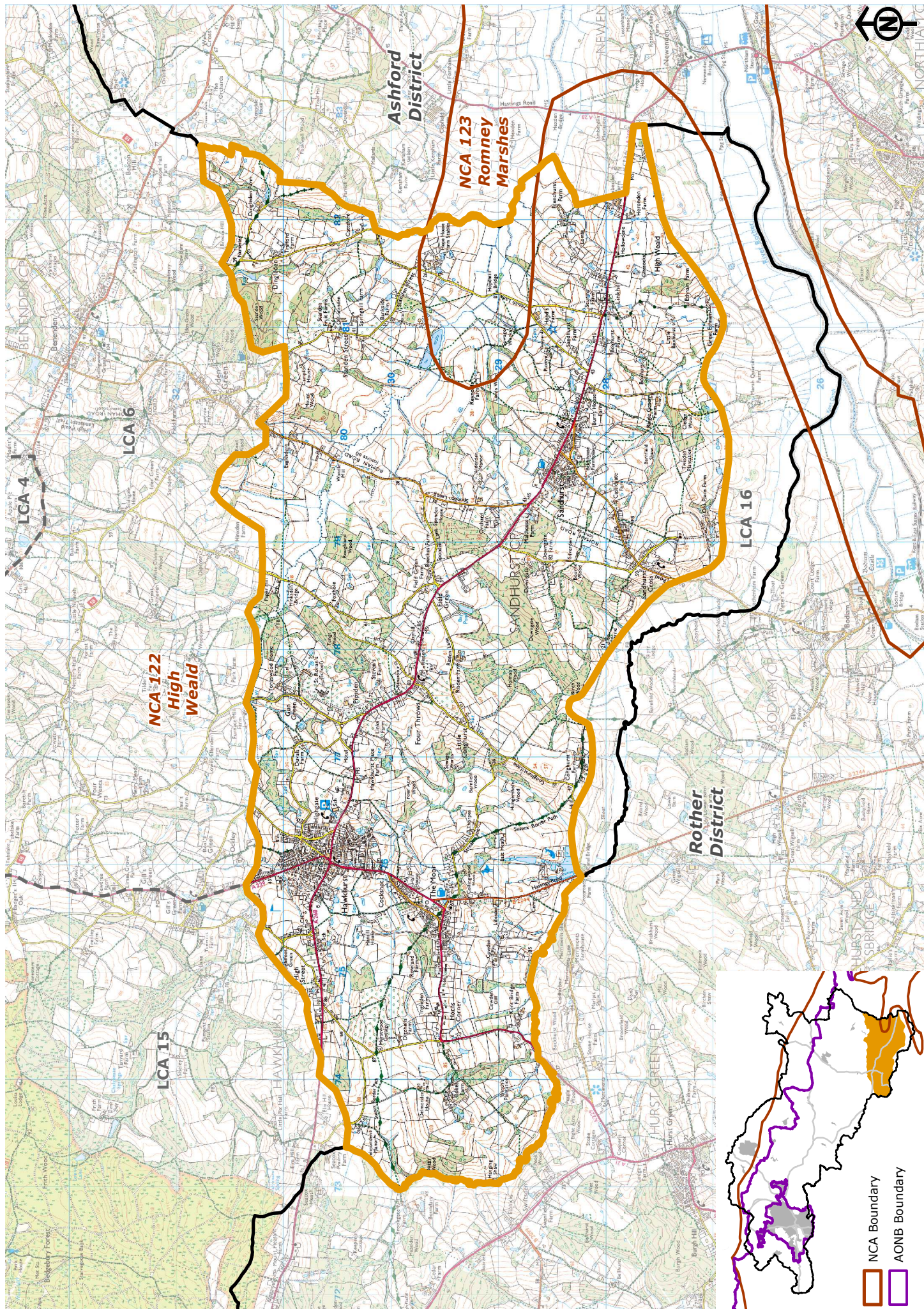


LCA 11 - Hawkhurst Wooded Farmland





## SUMMARY

A peaceful, managed, farmed landscape of pasture and open arable fields on the gentle open slopes rolling down from the plateau to the River Rother and Hexden Channel. Fields are bounded by thick, wooded shaws with some deep intersecting ghylls, resulting in an interesting landscape pattern with occasional built landmarks such as a windmill or church tower.



## Key Characteristics

- 1) **Strong upland ridge of Tunbridge Wells Sand dropping to valleys to the north and south incised by deep narrow tributary valleys that join the Hexden Channel and Kent Ditch and ultimately flow to the River Rother.**

The geology comprises Tunbridge Wells Sand with linear belts of Wadhurst Clay revealed along the main river valleys. Significant faulting has occurred in, or proximate to, the area. The Sandhurst and Benenden Faults run in a north west to south east direction and the small water corridors in the area that have cut through the sandstone mirror this pattern. The landform is simply a series of relatively low lying ridges rolling down to the two main valleys of the Hexden Channel in the north and the larger River Rother in the south, both of which are fed by numerous small streams flowing from the ridgeline watershed. Locally these side valleys create a more intricate, dissected landform.

Within the character area as a whole, views vary from enclosed on the valley floor to distant views from the ridges. Due to the relatively low elevation and the presence of the larger valley landscapes within view, this area feels somewhat less enclosed than other parts of the High Weald Plateau. From some locations in the south there are extensive views of the Rother Valley, the floodplains of which create an abrupt change in landscape character.

- 2) **Mixed agricultural landscape of small-scale pasture and medium-large scale arable fields, with larger rolling arable slopes to the valleys and occasional fields of orchards and hops.**

Generally the area has a managed farmland character with a peaceful, rural ambience. Both arable and pasture farming is found in the area. The steeper areas contain small sheep grazing fields or paddocks to create an attractive rural scene of livestock grazing grassland with a backdrop of valley woodlands rippling into the distance. Arable farmland tends to occupy the larger fields on gentler slopes. In some areas hedges have been removed and replaced with post and wire fencing.

There is a relatively intact historic landscape pattern of medieval assart fields, generally medium in size, with irregular shapes and sinuous wooded boundaries. There are also some medium-large early post-medieval regular informal fields with mixtures of sinuous and straight boundaries bounded by hedges. Generally this creates a medium-large scale field pattern but with human-scale features such as field ponds and narrow lanes, churches and farmsteads creating a more intricately textured landscape pattern overall.

There are occasional fields of orchards and hops, adding variety and interest to the area, such as those between Sandhurst and Hawkhurst.

- 3) **Wooded character arising from thick linear ancient ghyll woodlands, shaws, hedgerow trees and overgrown hedgerows.**

The steep topography and heavy clay soil of the tributaries has made agricultural development difficult and dense ghyll woodland frequently nestles in the valleys. Many large shaws extend from these ghylls to surround the agricultural land. Blocks of ancient woodland are found at Downgate Wood, Standen Wood, Tongwood, Whites Wood and Roughland Wood. Other woodlands are small copses and narrow shaws or ghylls.

- 4) **Numerous rural lanes following a pattern of ancient routeways crossing north-south through the area and joining with the main east-west routeway following the ridgeline.**

The area is crossed by a number of important historic routes and the area is well settled. There are numerous roads that span the minor ridges, crossing in a south to north direction and connecting to the A268 that follows the main ridge in an east to west direction. This road has six

listed milestones along its route, which provide local landscape interest and detail. Rural lanes are bounded by hedges, ditches and wooded banks.

Ancient routeways, a typical feature of the High Weald, were the former droveways used for transhumance – the seasonal movement of people and animals for summer and winter feeding. This was based on feeding pigs on acorns and fallen forest nuts and fruits in areas of woodland pasture (or 'dens') within the area.

**5) Ridgetop settlements, dominated by brick and weatherboarded buildings. An occasional windmill or church tower provides distinctive landmarks in mid-distant views. Small farmsteads line the minor ridges separating the ghyll valleys.**

Settlements and hamlets of Sandhurst, Four Throws, Hawkhurst Highgate and High Street occur along the main ridge top and A268 at regular intervals. South of this on a parallel, lower ridge are the smaller settlements of the Moor (south of Hawkhurst) and Sandhurst Cross (south of Sandhurst). Elsewhere settlement is more sparse, still largely confined to the minor ridges between the ghyll valleys. As a result the area appears from the main roads to be quite densely settled, but further afield the intimacy of the landscape creates a more secluded feel.

Built styles vary, although brick or weatherboarded farmsteads predominate. There are a number of buildings of historic and architectural importance including a Grade II\* former paper mill and numerous Wealden halls and houses. Typical details include white weatherboarding, red brick and red/ brown tiles and pitched/ gable roofs.

Historic farmsteads are dispersed across the area, closely associated with the historic routeways, with some 19<sup>th</sup> century outfarms or clusters of farmsteads once part of a small hamlet or covered yard. Some medieval hamlets remain near villages such as High Street.

**Hawkhurst (Highgate):** is located on a broad, high plateau on the main ridgeline between the Rother Valley and the Hexden Channel. The name 'hurst' means a wooded hill and Hawkhurst dates from before the thirteenth century. The Colonnade is an early 19<sup>th</sup> century timber framed and weatherboarded row of shops, with cast iron columns and is a distinctive structure on the high street.

Hawkhurst (the Moor) the early medieval settlement of Hawkhurst, is located to the south of Hawkhurst, separated by a small valley. The Moor consists mainly of cottages and the 13<sup>th</sup> century St Laurence sandstone church clustered around a large triangular village green.

**Sandhurst** is a large, fairly sprawling settlement east of Hawkhurst, similarly located on the ridgeline. It extends southwards, down the valley slopes to include the satellite settlement of Sandhurst Cross, built around the Grade II\* sandstone church of St Nicholas.

**6) A peaceful rural ambience with dark skies away from the main settlement of Hawkhurst.**

The area has a strong rural character that takes on an air of tranquillity and solitude, particularly within the confines of the small stream valleys. Unspoilt by modern intrusions, the area has dark skies across most of the landscape except for around the village of Hawkhurst.



### Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The road from Sandhurst to Benenden has functioned as a Roman road, an ironway and a drove road.
- 2) Sawyers Green originally developed at the crossing of two drove roads.
- 3) Smuggling became an important influence in the area during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. There were heavy taxes on the wool being sent to Europe, so farmers smuggled it out of the country. In the early 1700s the Hawkhurst Gang of smugglers was notorious throughout southern England. The smugglers brought brandy, silk and tobacco up from Rye on packhorses, and stowed them in hidden cellars and passages. There are associations between the gang and the landscape, in the use of sunken smugglers' lanes and using churches.
- 4) By the 15<sup>th</sup> century Hawkhurst had become a centre of the cloth and iron industries. This resulted in a number of large houses and manors being built close to the main villages. Lillesden historic park and garden is a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century garden with a late 19<sup>th</sup> century mansion and extensive parkland which originated as the site of a 16<sup>th</sup> century house, close to The Moor area of Hawkhurst. It has since been redeveloped for private residential use.
- 5) Saint Ronan's School is known locally as the home of the man who invented the Oxo cube. The detail 'OXO' can still be seen in darker brick, above the entrance gate.

### Semi-Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) The woodland in this area is predominantly oak with other species including beech and ash. Much of the woodland is classified as ancient, and often contains areas of worked or abandoned coppice most commonly associated with an intricate network of small streams fed by numerous springs especially around Hawkhurst.
- 2) Downgate Wood is ancient woodland containing oak standards over unmanaged hornbeam, ash, hazel and alder coppice and is a LWS.
- 3) Tongwood is an ancient ghyll woodland of relict beech and oak and is a LWS.
- 4) Bokes Farm is a designated LWS comprising two wooded ghylls with streams, adjacent broadleaved woodland and shaws, hedgerows, a green lane, rough grassland, cattle-grazed pasture, and a number of ponds combining to form an interesting complex for wildlife.
- 5) The churchyard at Sandhurst contains an important area of unimproved grassland. The churchyard at Hawkhurst has an important community of lichens.
- 6) The lake at Collingwood, The Moor is an important habitat of ecological interest and is a designated Nature Reserve and LWS.

## 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/Kent Downs AONB. The following key qualities related to the AONB are particularly valued:



- 1) The scenic rolling hills 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 historic farmsteads and hamlets and locally distinctive buildings which add important local character to the landscape and a sense of history.
- 3) Ancient routeways that form a clear network of rural lanes, footpaths and tracks, lined by ditches, hedgerows or woodland which add historic interest and local distinctiveness to the landscape.
- 4) Woodland – particularly ancient woodlands, ghylls and shaws. This is of value for many reasons including historic, aesthetic, biodiversity and recreation interest.
- 5) The relatively intact ancient landscape pattern of irregular medieval fields bounded by woodland, shaws and ghylls, closely related to the presence of historic farmsteads and the network of ancient routeways.

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

- 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 distinctive character of the ridgetop villages and the distinctive landmark features.
- 8) The strong natural character indicated by the presence of a number of ecological designations.

## 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) In some areas hedges have become unmanaged through neglect or removed and replaced with post and wire fencing.
- 2) Hawkhurst is a busy settlement with some detracting features including buildings with standardised or low quality materials such as modern brick and plastic weatherboarding which may benefit from repair or renovation.
- 3) Busy roads such as the A268 and A229 impact on the rural character.

*Any enhancements should seek to reduce the impact of traffic congestion on the villages through traffic calming and signage that is in character with the surrounding countryside.*

## Landscape Strategy

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

### Landscape Strategy

The Character Area should be considered in the context of the High Weald AONB, particularly the



role certain parts of the character area may play in the setting of the AONB. Protection of the valued features and qualities of the landscape should include appropriate planning to ensure any new development is appropriate in scale and character to the landscape context.

- 1) Control further development proposals which could adversely affect the rural character of the landscape and tip the scales to a more urban character.
- 2) Limit new large-scale development wherever possible because it is rare within the area and has the potential to be highly visible on the ridge lines and intrusive within the quieter picturesque ghyll wooded valleys.
- 3) Avoid deterioration of the currently high quality built environment and vernacular heritage, particularly proximate to Hawkhurst.
- 4) Recognise the profile of the area as a linkway for recreational users and seek appropriate improvements through, for example, Section 106 agreements as appropriate.