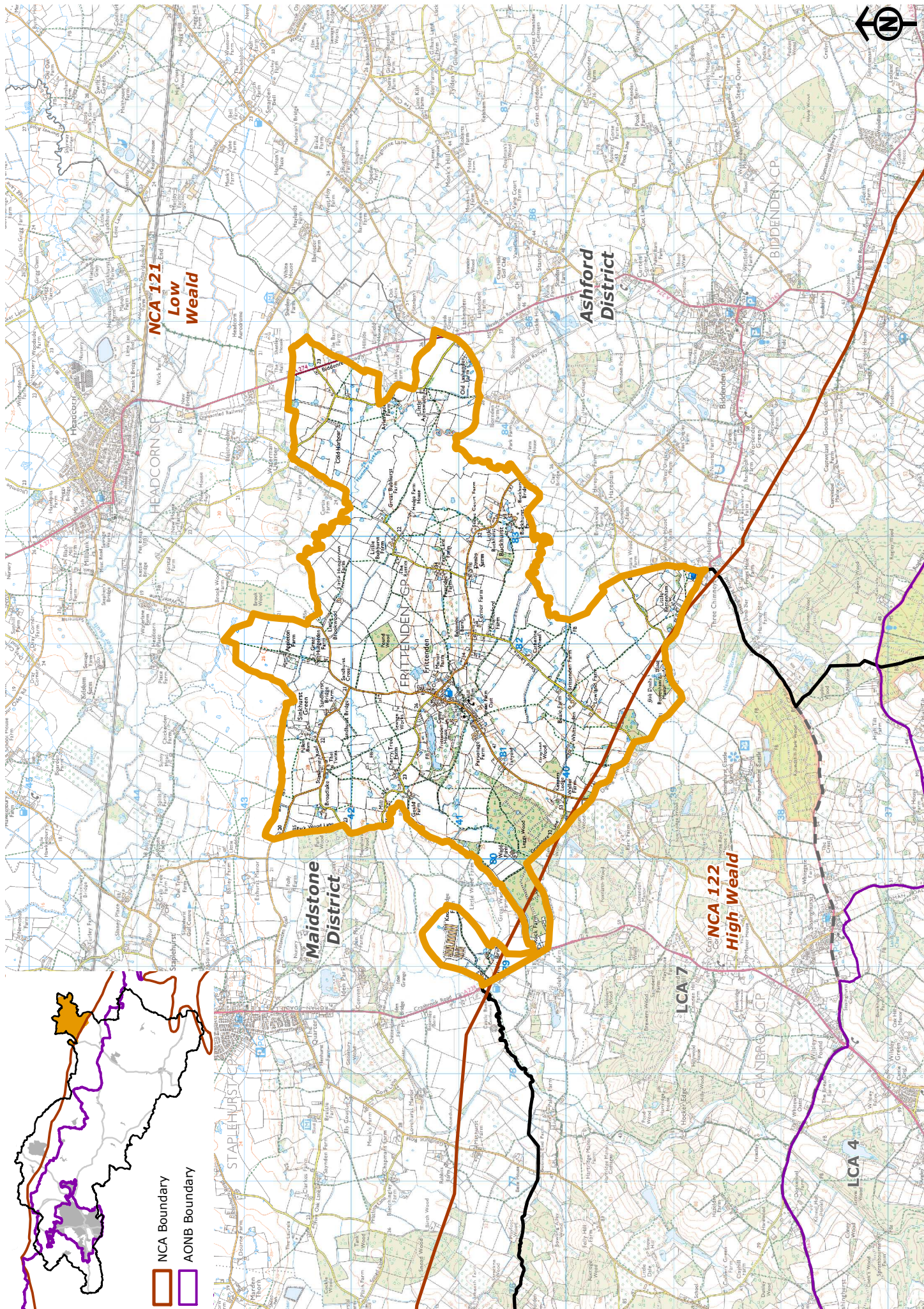


LCA 12 - Frittenden Pastures Low Weald Farmland



SUMMARY

A flat to gently undulating lowland clay vale landscape of pasture, with some larger arable fields, is studded with numerous small field ponds and water-filled ditches set within a framework of mature remnant hedgerow trees and derelict hedgerows. Settlement is centred on the loosely-knit village of Frittenden with a collection of attractive vernacular buildings dispersed throughout the area.



Key Characteristics

- 1) **The flat to gently undulating topography of this lowland landscape, underlain by the Weald Clay, is its defining characteristic. The Biddenden Fault creates a clear boundary between the Low Weald and the High Weald.**

The southern boundary of this Character Area is concurrent with the Biddenden Fault, which runs approximately north-west to south-east and has created a relatively simple lowland landscape predominantly between 20m and 40m AOD, on heavy Weald Clay overlain by localised drift deposits of alluvium and river brickearth. This landscape rises and undulates gently to the south of the area to meet the footslopes of the High Weald.

- 2) **Open and distant views are given a sense of depth by the wooded backdrop of the High Weald ridge to the south and distant views of the Greensand ridge to the north.**

Topographically the landscape is highly visually permeable, with extensive views into it from the surrounding higher land, and internal enclosure determined to a large extent by local land cover, particularly the field boundaries. Substantial distant views from the north out across the Low Weald enrich the landscape with a great sense of depth.

- 3) **Poor soils giving rise to a predominantly pasture sheep farming landscape, often combined with cattle raising and now also localised areas of horse paddocks.**

The Weald Clay produces heavy soils with a tendency to form irregular layers of ironstone concretions that create a barrier to plant root growth. The area is therefore a predominantly pasture landscape supporting sheep grazing, sometimes in combination with cattle farming. Infrastructure, such as cattle troughs and rusting gates and fences, are a feature of the grazed land, while overgrazing of some areas, in combination with 'hobby' farming, also raises landscape issues. Localised horse paddocks, with a range of associated fences, are a feature.

- 4) **Small to medium pasture fields and medium to large arable fields. Some areas of large scale arable cultivation on the river terrace deposits, particularly noticeable around Knox Bridge.**

Small semi-regular shaped pasture fields with wavy boundaries frequently divided by hawthorn hedges or post and wire fencing, and medium-large arable fields or open grassland which is largely improved. Sheep grazing provides visual interest and a rural pastoral quality. Arable cultivation occurs on the alluvial soils associated with the Hammer stream to the east and here fields tend to be larger. Arable cultivation also occurs in the Knox Bridge area, where the fields are extensive with prominent storage sheds creating an almost 'industrial' appearance. Around the village of Frittenden, a few small orchards provide local 'grain' and character.

- 5) **Remnant hedgerow trees (predominantly oak and hawthorn) particularly important in creating the landscape structure and imparting a sense of woodland enclosure, in an area where there are few woodlands.**

Hedgerows sub-dividing the Frittenden pastures create pattern and structure in the lowland landscape, although some are in decline. Woodland cover is confined to a few isolated blocks such as Leggs Wood and Pound Wood and as such has a very limited influence on landscape character.

Despite this absence of true woodland, the hedgerow trees (usually remnants) combined with the distant wooded ridges, create a sense of enclosure and a lush, verdant quality.

- 6) **A landscape studded with field ponds often with associated copse vegetation and willows and rural lanes lined by water-filled ditches creating points of interest and diversity. Hammer Stream and other small tributaries of the Beult cross through the area.**

Water is an important element within this lowland landscape. However, in the Frittenden lowlands, unlike some other parts of the Low Weald, it is the smaller static local features of ditches and field ponds which create local identity, rather than the slow rivers and waterways. There are two small

streams within the area, which flow to the valley of the River Beult in the north east. Due to their relatively small scale within this flat landscape, the streams are not prominent features and are only readily identifiable from close range. This lack of visibility is exacerbated in pasture and arable farmland where the banks of the watercourses have become bare and eroded and are devoid of vegetation.

The multitude of farm ponds is a key characteristic; they are found throughout the area, frequently in clusters and vary from minute wet scrapes to small lakes. In combination with their associated waterside vegetation copses, or solitary willow trees, they impart a lush quality wherever they occur and provide an important visual contrast with the surrounding land. Water-filled ditches are also common, frequently occurring beside rural lanes, and create a similar verdant quality.

7) Dispersed settlement pattern with buildings of generally low visual prominence in the wider landscape with loosely nucleated village settlement on a low ridge at Frittenden.

Settlement is not a dominant element of the landscape, because of the relatively low number and dispersed distribution of buildings and the low lying topography and lack of conspicuous ridgeline settlement. This is instrumental in maintaining the character of a predominantly rural landscape.

Elsewhere, the scattered settlement pattern includes individual farmsteads and rural buildings widely dispersed throughout the area. Buildings also add to the character of Frittenden. The magical view of Sissinghurst Castle from Digdog Lane complements the character of the area whilst providing a strong sense of orientation.

Frittenden is a traditional village and Conservation Area, arranged along a low ridge. Historically there were two main nuclei: at the crossroads with the pub, and at the church, and a number of listed buildings remain, clustered in these two locations. Settlement has since filled in the area along the Street, creating a loose-knit linear village.

Views to Frittenden are infrequent and restricted to close-range locations where the tall sandstone spire of the Grade II* listed 15th century St Mary's church emerges from the surrounding farmland. Recent linear expansion of the village from the crossroads along the approach roads has eroded the form of the village and many of the newer dwellings lack the detail and intricacy of the older vernacular residences.

Knox Bridge is a small linear settlement focussed on the A229 Cranbrook Road with views to large agricultural buildings.

8) Distinctive vernacular architecture, with timber-framed houses, oasts, tile-hung dwellings, sandstone and weatherboarding, frequently occurring in close proximity.

The range and presentation of vernacular styles makes an essential contribution to the rustic ambience and interest of the area. The close juxtaposition and diversity of styles is a particularly remarkable feature. The open situation of individual buildings permits mid to close range views; however, their relatively small-scale and vernacular character enables integration with the landscape and lessens their prominence. The exception to this is the dense cluster of large warehouse buildings in the Knox Bridge area.

A number of medieval farmsteads and later oasts remain dispersed across the area, generally associated with routeways leading up to the High Weald.

Local vernacular includes timber-framed buildings, oasts, tile-hung buildings, sandstone and weatherboarding.

9) Peaceful rural quality and sense of 'remoteness' with extensively very dark skies.

There is a lack of modern intrusions within the area, creating a perception of a deeply rural area with extensively very dark skies. The scenic character is dominated by horizontal swathes of pastoral fields punctuated by frequent mature trees creating a lush and verdant quality.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) Links to the iron and brick-making industry and pastoral history are particularly evident. Clay was extracted to the south west of Frittenden village for the manufacture of bricks and tiles and there was a small brickworks in Digdog Lane which produced bricks and tiles used in local buildings in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- 2) The numerous farm ponds probably arose as a result of 'marling' (spreading clay on fields) as well as iron ore extraction during the 14th and 15th centuries and/or clay pit digging to support the tile and brick manufacturing industry.
- 3) The network of narrow rural lanes which criss-cross the area are of particular note. Many roads originate from ironways, whereas other roads link to pastoral use and originated as drove roads connecting to the markets in the north.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) A few small pockets of semi-improved grassland remain, at Little Bettenham and Ibornden Farm. There are also small areas of traditional orchard habitat scattered across the area.
- 2) Along the rural roads, particularly leading up to the village of Frittenden, the hedgerows are generally intact and tend to be fairly high and diverse comprising dense hawthorn, field maple and hornbeam with associated species-rich verges and wet ditches, including sedges, wild garlic, lords-and-ladies and bluebells.
- 3) The few semi-natural wooded areas that occur, such as Leggs Wood ancient woodland and LWS, Pound Wood ancient woodland and Brick Pit Wood ancient woodland, a former coppice, are of considerable nature conservation interest.
- 4) The broad grassy verges alongside many lanes are a notable feature and provide a roadside reservoir of biodiversity in this increasingly intensively managed and 'improved' landscape.

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.

This area does not lie in the High Weald AONB. However, there are some associations between this area and the AONB and the following key qualities related to the AONB are particularly valued in this character area:

- 1) Views of the wooded ridge of the High Weald which provides a backdrop to the area.
- 2) Rural lanes which are remnants of the ancient routeways and radiating droveways which continue into the AONB, reminders of the historic practices of transhumance and exploitation of the resources of the forest.
- 3) The dispersed settlement pattern of the area and a relatively large number of historic farmsteads, isolated farmhouses, hamlets and the small village of Frittenden which continue the small scale pattern of family holdings so characteristic of the AONB.

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

- 4) Distinctive vernacular architecture, with timber-framed houses, oasts, tile-hung dwellings, sandstone and weatherboarding.
- 5) The strong natural character imparted by pockets of semi-improved grassland, traditional orchards, ancient woodland and grass verges.
- 6) A strong rural landscape character with a lack of intrusion by modern development, and some of the consistently darkest skies of the borough which provide a sense of 'remoteness' and tranquillity.

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 and erosion of the banks of the watercourses and ditches, through overgrazing, is a significant issue.

Where possible the restoration of a buffer strip of vegetation along ditches and waterways (in both arable and pasture fields) should be secured. Also, allowing bankside vegetation to regenerate so that these important wetland features register in the landscape and fulfil their ecological potential.
- 2) Knox Bridge area of lower quality suffering intrusive built form, noise and movement from A229. Settlement of low visual quality and large-scale intensive agriculture with dominant agricultural buildings.

Targeting landscape improvements (such as hedgerow planting) in the Knox Bridge area as a key gateway between the Low and High Weald; to reduce the scale of the landscape, enhance its visual interest and limit impact of traffic from the A229 on the ambience of the area.
- 3) Hedgerows in a state of decline. To the north and east, neglect and poor management has resulted in extremely sparse and gappy hawthorn-monoculture hedgerows interspersed with occasional solitary, or groups of, remnant hawthorn and oak standards.

Landscape Strategy

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

Landscape Strategy

The valued features and qualities of the landscape should be conserved and enhanced.

- 1) Any enhancement should aim where possible to ensure the maintenance of this area as an essentially pasture landscape, limiting of further field enlargement and arable cultivation. In the longer term, restoration and enhancement of wet meadows and pastures alongside the waterways and ditches should be a priority.
- 2) The key requirement is to retain the small-scale pasture and relaxed ambience of the area. The open character of this lowland landscape means that development has the potential to be visually prominent and could challenge these qualities.
- 3) Preserve the traditional form and landscape setting of Frittenden village.