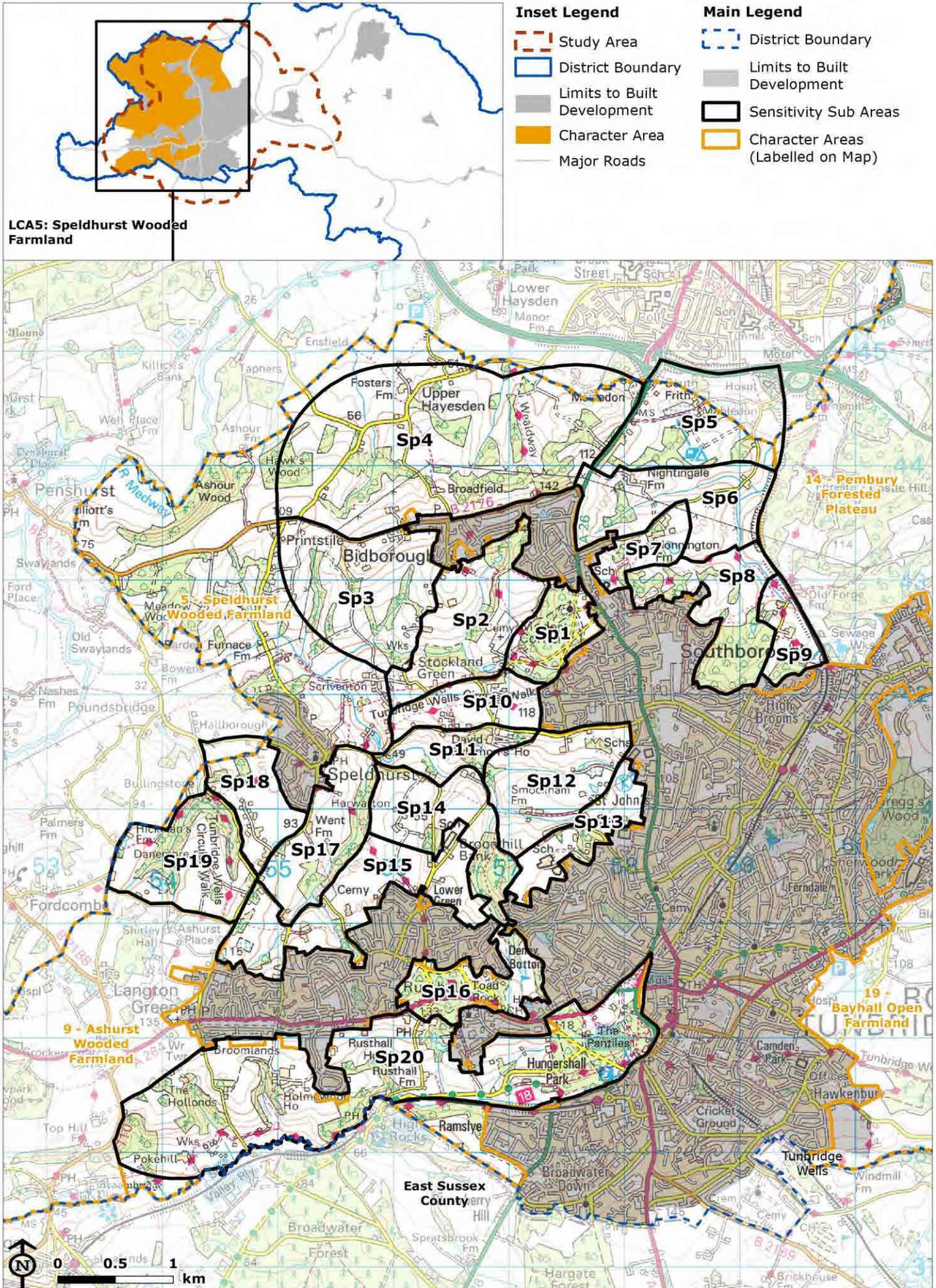


Speldhurst Wooded Farmland

Landscape Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland

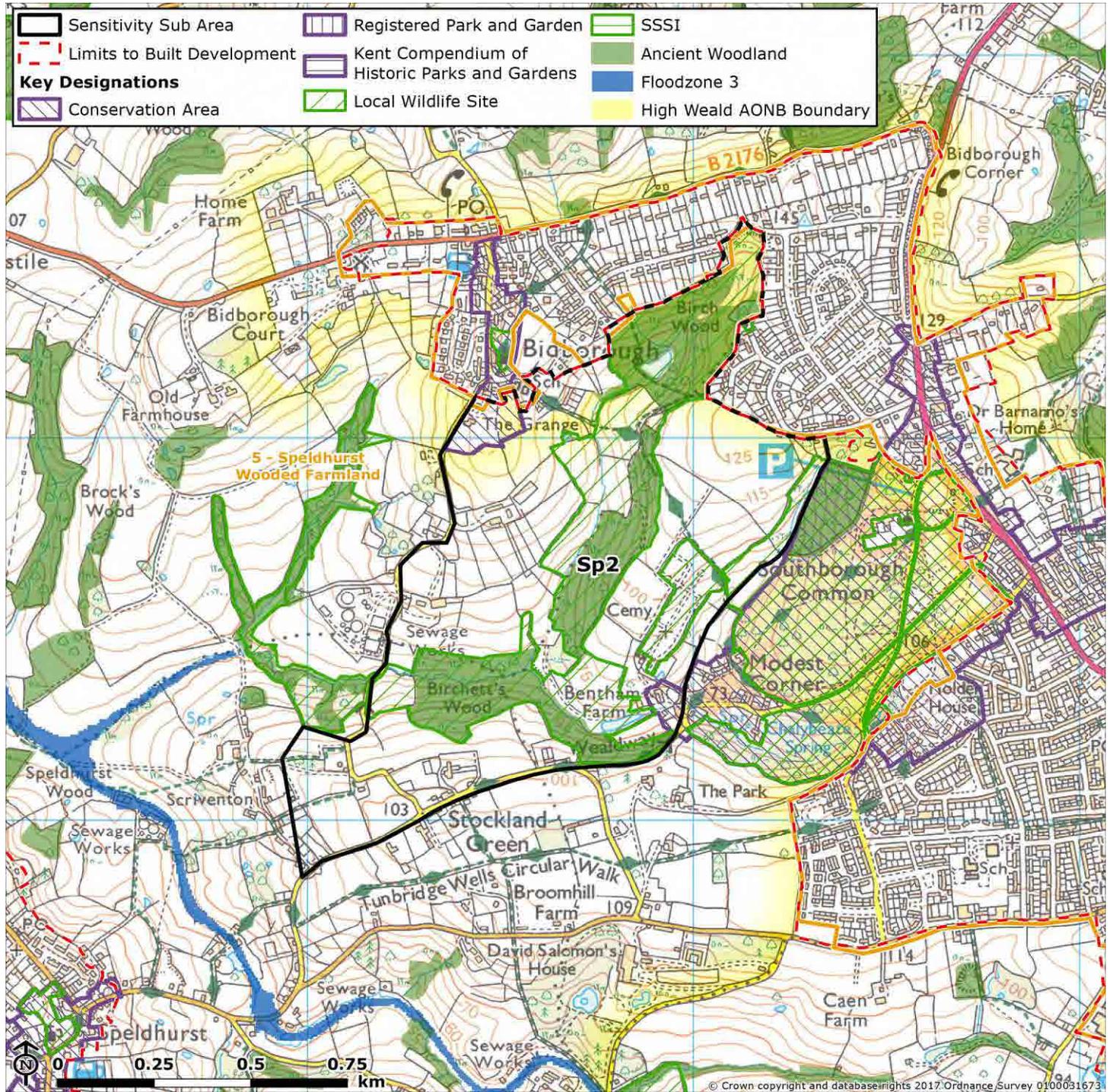


Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp1
Description		Area (Ha) - 43.2
Sub-area Sp1 is located to the west of Southborough. It consists of Southborough Common, the hamlet of Modest Corner and St Peter's Church and cemetery. The sub-area lies within the High Weald AONB.		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	Topography is distinctive and characteristic of the LCA - Southborough Common lies on a ridge radiating out from Tunbridge Wells (with the church situated at the high point) and drops down to incised valleys along the south and west of the sub-area. The Common itself is a strongly characteristic feature of the character area. Ancient woodland is present (Whortleberry Wood), as are areas of wildflower grassland and heathland. A Chalybeate Spring is present in the south of the sub-area, a distinctive feature to local character. There is a strong natural character as a result of deciduous woodland and the Southborough Common Local Wildlife Site.	
Settlement form and edge	Historically the Common was a major determinant in the layout of Southborough, surrounded by a series of informal edge settlements, with hamlets linked through the Common. Over the last century infill and expansion have amalgamated some of these, blurring the characteristic pattern of development but Modest Corner remains as a distinct hamlet group and its separation is therefore important to character. The Common itself forms a definite boundary between town and countryside. The pattern of settlement in the wider area is characterised by undeveloped areas at the ends of the ridges west of Southborough, Bidborough and Tunbridge Wells, which represent important open areas allowing appreciation of the topography and views to and from the wider area of Tunbridge Wells.	
Settlement setting	Southborough Common is important in the setting of Southborough and, as with the other Commons around Tunbridge Wells, contributes a distinct identity historically, visually and in providing a balance between developed and undeveloped areas. The wooded valley and Modest Corner in the south of the sub-area are also important in creating a rural setting. The landscape is important in views from many parts of the built-up area. The sub-area is open access land with recreational routes crossing through it, and this in combination with the natural character, contributes to its value as an opportunity to get close to nature so close to Southborough and Tunbridge Wells town centre.	
Visual character	The woodland and valleys to the south and west create a degree of enclosure but the ridge is visually prominent. Views to the open area are important from the town. The sub-area contributes to scenic views within the AONB and the Conservation Area as well as recreational routes crossing through the area. There are distant views over Tunbridge Wells from the top of the ridge.	
Perceptual qualities	The contrasts between the openness of the top of the ridge and intimacy of the valleys add to its perceptual qualities typical of the AONB. The hamlet of Modest Corner is well-concealed within the landscape framework and the whole sub-area has a rural and natural character with strong aesthetic qualities.	
Historic character	The sub-area has strong historic character which is important at the character area level. Historically it was the focus of the community of Southborough and retains most of its characteristic historic elements. The Common, Whortleberry Wood and Modest Corner have a strong historic connection – Modest Corner was a discrete hamlet group linked through the Common to other hamlets arranged informally around the edges; Whortleberry Wood would have provided resources for the commoners and areas of the Common itself used for grazing and woodland pasture. A high proportion of the buildings within the area are listed and historic, enforcing the strong sense of history in this area. The southern part of the sub-area lies within the historic park and garden of Bentham Hill House.	
Sensitivity conclusions		
This area is a characteristic High Weald AONB landscape which is also important to the character of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough and the Speldhurst Character Area as a whole. It is particularly highly sensitive in terms of its distinctiveness, recreational function, the role it contributes to the setting of Royal Tunbridge Wells, rural and historic character. Sub-area Sp1 is therefore considered to have a <i>high</i> sensitivity to any scale of development.		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics.



Representative views



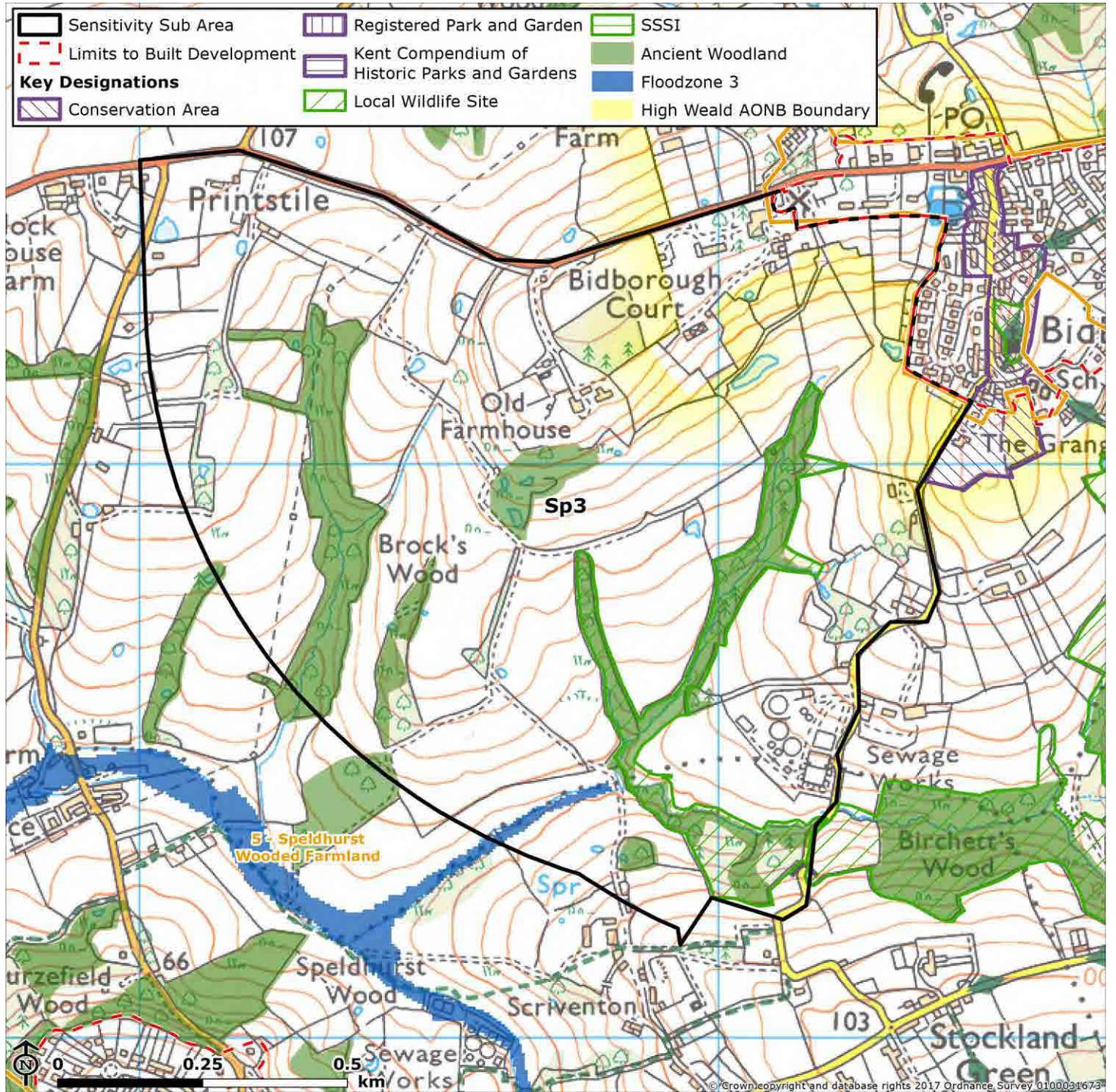
Fields west of Southborough Common, looking south-west

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp2
Description		Area (Ha) - 105.2
Sub-area Sp2 comprises agricultural land and woodland within the valley to the south of Bidborough, north of Stockland Green and north-west of Southborough Common. It is within the AONB apart from small areas around houses at The Grange and Spring Lane in Bidborough.		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	The complex topography comprises incised wooded ghyll valleys with streams, steep sides and open fields on the ridge tops. Blocks of ancient woodland at Birch Wood, Birchett's Wood and along the steep ghyll valley are representative of the character area and the AONB. Pasture fields adjacent to Southborough Common contain valued unimproved grassland and wildflower grassland (part of Bidborough Woods and Pastures LWS which extends across much of the sub-area).	
Settlement form and edge	Historically the settlement of Bidborough originated around Bidborough church on the ridge top, expanding north along High Street ridge. Later settlement grew along the east-west ridgeline (Bidborough Ridge) and since then it has merged with Southborough. There was a manor and estate at Great Bounds, in between Bidborough and Southborough: the area formerly occupied by Great Bounds is now residential development and the southern extent of this at Birchwood Avenue/ Dower House Crescent remains similar in form to the historic extent of the estate. Settlement form is closely associated with the ridgelines. The undeveloped areas at the southern end of the two ridges within the sub-area (south of the Grange and south-west of Birchwood Avenue) are important in allowing appreciation of the topography and views to and from the wider area of Tunbridge Wells, in the same way as the ridgelines radiating into the countryside further west in Bidborough and south in Southborough and Tunbridge Wells. The incised valleys of the sub-area are contrary to the existing settlement pattern. In general the existing settlement edge is well-integrated with trees and woodland but appears inconsistent where individual houses depart from the ridge top pattern or lack woodland screening, such as south of Spring Lane, Bidborough and Birchwood Avenue, Southborough.	
Settlement setting	The ridges and ghyll valleys provide a visual setting to Bidborough, Southborough and Stockland Green. The sub-area plays a role in the distinction and separation between Bidborough and Southborough. The Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk crosses through the sub-area, providing important recreation value in joining nearby destinations and providing experience of the countryside.	
Visual character	The ridge tops and sloping valley sides of the sub-area are visually prominent, particularly from higher ground. There are scenic views of the High Weald AONB landscape across the valley from the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk at Stockland Green and from the ridge north of Southborough Common.	
Perceptual qualities	The sub-area is scenic and comprises a typical High Weald AONB landscape. It is also valued for the lack of intrusions and 'unspoilt' quality so close to Tunbridge Wells, Bidborough and Southborough. It has a strong rural character with few views of built development and the typical ghyll valleys and ridge tops are readily appreciated from a number of vantage points.	
Historic character	There is a relatively intact medieval landscape of ancient woodlands and irregular informal fields forming a mosaic with wooded boundaries and ancient ghyll woodlands. The southern edge of the Bidborough Conservation Area extends into the north-western corner of the sub-area; there are a number of listed buildings within the historic core of Bidborough, to which the sub-area is likely to play a role in their settings.	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>The scenic, undulating topography, pasture and wooded ghyll valleys of this sub-area make it typical of the High Weald AONB and Speldhurst Character Area. Its rural character, visual prominence and function as part of the setting of the settlements of Bidborough and Southborough (and on a more strategic scale, Royal Tunbridge Wells), and the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk as well as its relatively intact medieval landscape, indicate that it has a <i>high</i> sensitivity to all types of development.</p> <p>There is a small area adjacent to the existing settlement edge at Birchwood Avenue considered to be of lower sensitivity to small scale development (<i>medium</i> sensitivity) as a result of the consistency with adjacent settlement form and opportunity for enhancing the settlement edge.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

It is considered important to retain open undeveloped areas of landscape at the ends of the open ridge tops, however there may be opportunities for improving the settlement edge in the Birchwood Avenue area of Southborough through limited development as long as any development is well-integrated with the landscape by woodland planting and landscaping. Any development here should consider the visual sensitivity as a result of its ridge top location.



Representative views



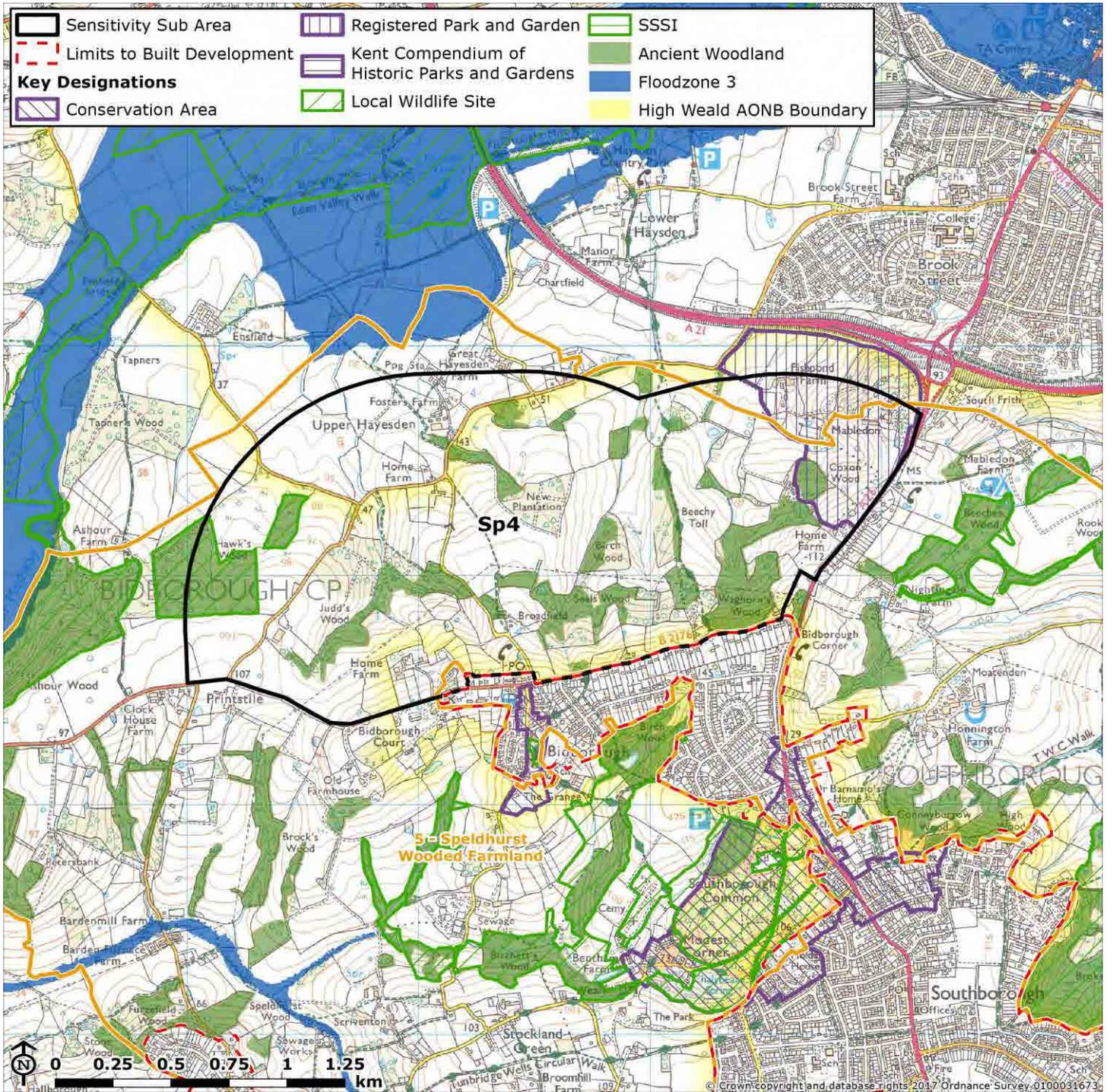
Arable field south of the B216 looking south.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp3
Description		Area (Ha) - 133
<p>Sub-area Sp3 comprises undulating agricultural land and wooded valleys west of Bidborough. It lies within the AONB apart from small areas immediately adjacent to Bidborough including Bidborough Court and modern residential development at Mill Court (which partly lies within the LBD). The hamlet of Printstile lies at the outer edge of the study area on the B2176 Penshurst Road, and there are a few isolated dwellings and a sewage works elsewhere.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	<p>The topography is complex and comprises incised wooded ghyll valleys with streams, steep sides and the distinctive ridgetop of Bidborough Ridge. Ancient woodland is present along the wooded ghyll valleys, the easternmost of which is also designated as part of the Bidborough Woods and Pastures LWS. The physical character is strongly representative of the character area and the AONB.</p>	
Settlement form and edge	<p>Historically the settlement of Bidborough originated around the church at the high point of the ridge, and developed north along High Street ridgeline. The village later grew along the east-west ridgeline of Bidborough Ridge. The settlement form remains closely associated with the ridgelines. Historic farmsteads at Bidborough Court and Old Stables remain, and although they were once dispersed, they have since been amalgamated into the overall settlement form. Nevertheless, they are set back from the main road and have a degree of distinction from the overall settlement, marking a distinction between the end of the village and the transition to countryside. The undeveloped area at the end of the ridge (west of Bidborough Court) is important in allowing appreciation of the topography and views to and from the wider area of Tunbridge Wells, as with those ridgelines radiating into the countryside further south in Southborough and Tunbridge Wells. In general the existing settlement edge is well-integrated with trees and woodland.</p>	
Settlement setting	<p>The sloping and wooded valley sides and ridges provide a setting to Bidborough and Printstile and a visual backdrop and landscape setting to Speldhurst. The landscape of the sub-area also provides a sense of separation between Bidborough and Speldhurst, which is located on high ground to the south-west.</p>	
Visual character	<p>The sloping valley sides of the sub-area are visually prominent, particularly from higher ground. The ridge itself is a prominent feature, rising significantly above the surrounding landscape.</p>	
Perceptual qualities	<p>The sub-area has a strong rural and agricultural character and is a typical High Weald AONB landscape. Dispersed farmsteads or detached houses is the characteristic pattern, associated with the roads and lanes. There are some localised detracting elements such as the pylon line and large farm structures at Printstile but these elements do not affect the overall sense of rural character and relatively dark skies. On the whole built development is well-integrated in the landscape by tree and woodland screening.</p>	
Historic character	<p>There is a relatively intact historic landscape pattern of irregular fields and ancient woodland although some of the fields have boundary loss. The roads on the northern and eastern boundaries are ancient routeways and Frank's Hollow Lane has a particularly rural character. Two surviving 19th century farmsteads, and listed buildings at Bidborough Court, are characteristic of the historic dispersed settlement pattern and increase sensitivity in historic terms.</p>	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>The sub-area has a rural character, with complex topography and wooded ghylls typical of the High Weald AONB and the Speldhurst character area. The dispersed settlement pattern, the visual prominence of the sloping valley sides and the relatively intact historic landscape pattern as well as the role the area plays in the setting of the villages of Bidborough and Speldhurst and the hamlet of Printstile mean that it is considered to have a <i>high</i> sensitivity to any scale of development.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics.



Representative views



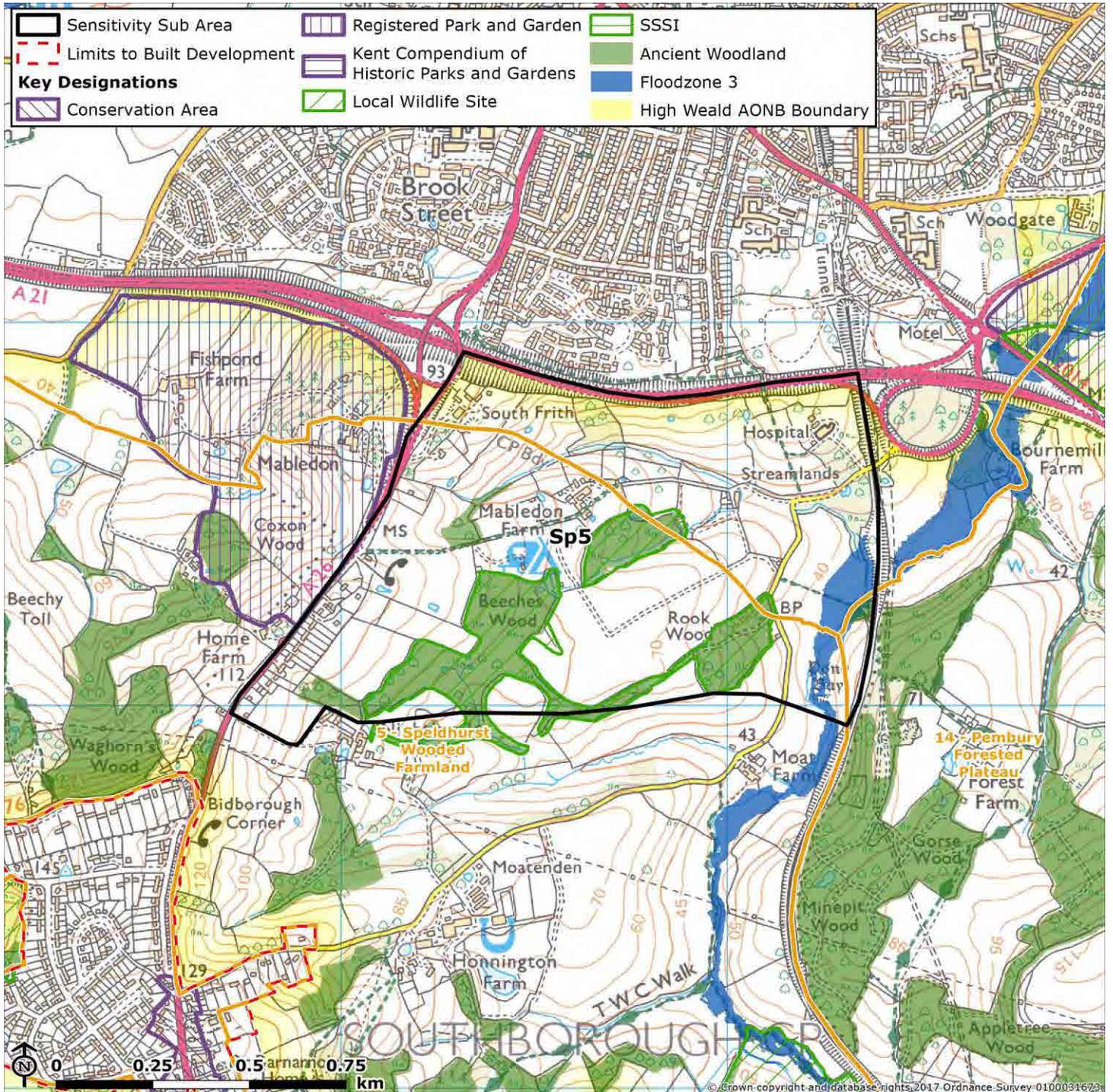
View across the sub-area from the Bidborough Ridge B2176.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp4
Description		Area (Ha) - 350.7
<p>Sub-area Sp4 consists of the north-facing scarp slopes of the Bidborough Ridge directly north of Bidborough village, west of the A26 and south of the A21. Tonbridge lies to the north of the A21. The landscape comprises agricultural fields and woodland with a pattern of dispersed farmsteads and the hamlet of Upper Hayesden. The majority of the sub-area lies within the AONB except for the area around Upper Hayesden and Fishpond Farm in the north of the study area.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	<p>Although a relatively large scale landform and land cover pattern, the scarp slope of the Bidborough Ridge is distinctive and the lower slopes are characterised by gently sloping valleys extending down to a broad flat to gently undulating valley in the north around Upper Hayesden. There is extensive woodland across the upper slopes, some of which extends to the north along the valleys or slopes, creating strong physical character typical of the character area and the AONB.</p>	
Settlement form and edge	<p>The settlement of Bidborough is closely associated with the ridgeline and the settlement of Tonbridge to the north is contained by the A21. Therefore the sloping topography and distinct separation by the A21 means that any development within the sub-area would be inconsistent with existing settlement form.</p>	
Settlement setting	<p>The sub-area is an important strategic gap between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. The undulating fields and sinuous woodlands are important to the visual setting of Bidborough and Tunbridge Wells in views west of the A26, enhancing the approach into the town from the north. The sub-area provides an important rural setting to Tunbridge Wells where development is largely hidden in views towards the town from the north in the Tonbridge area and Sevenoaks borough. The Wealdway provides important recreational value for walkers to experience the surrounding landscape, including woodlands such as Waghorn's Wood.</p>	
Visual character	<p>The sub-area is extensively visible from the Bidborough Ridge, providing the rural foreground to extensive and panoramic views which are important to the character of the area. The wooded upper slopes and undeveloped landscape are very distinctive and important in views from the north. The gently sloping north-facing slopes are highly visible in the surrounding landscape. The lower areas around Upper Hayesden are less visible, particularly where there is woodland or tree cover.</p>	
Perceptual qualities	<p>The sub-area has a strong rural character. Rural lanes cross through the area north-south following former ancient routeways. The pattern of settlement is dispersed, with predominantly individual properties or historic farmsteads. There are larger clusters of development around Upper Hayesden and Great Hayesden Farm which originated as historic farmsteads. The main roads to the north and east (A21 and A26) of the sub-area influence tranquillity locally, as do the main settlements of Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. However, despite the proximity of these influences the sub-area retains a sense of rural quiet and relatively dark skies in the west.</p>	
Historic character	<p>A number of ancient routeways cross through the area along the minor roads and Wealdway recreation route, which retain distinctive and rural characteristics. In combination with small irregular fields and sinuous medieval assart and ghyll woodland, and a few isolated historic farmsteads, this creates a relatively intact historic landscape although some of the arable fields on the lower slopes have been modified and enlarged.</p>	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>This area is important to the character of Royal Tunbridge Wells and provides a strategic open gap between Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge. The rural character of the area and the wooded upper slopes are particularly important visually as well as the setting for the adjacent settlements. The historic value of the landscape elements such as ancient routeways, ancient woodland and historic farmsteads also increases sensitivity. Sub-area Sp4 is considered to have a <i>high</i> sensitivity to any scale of development.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics.



Representative views



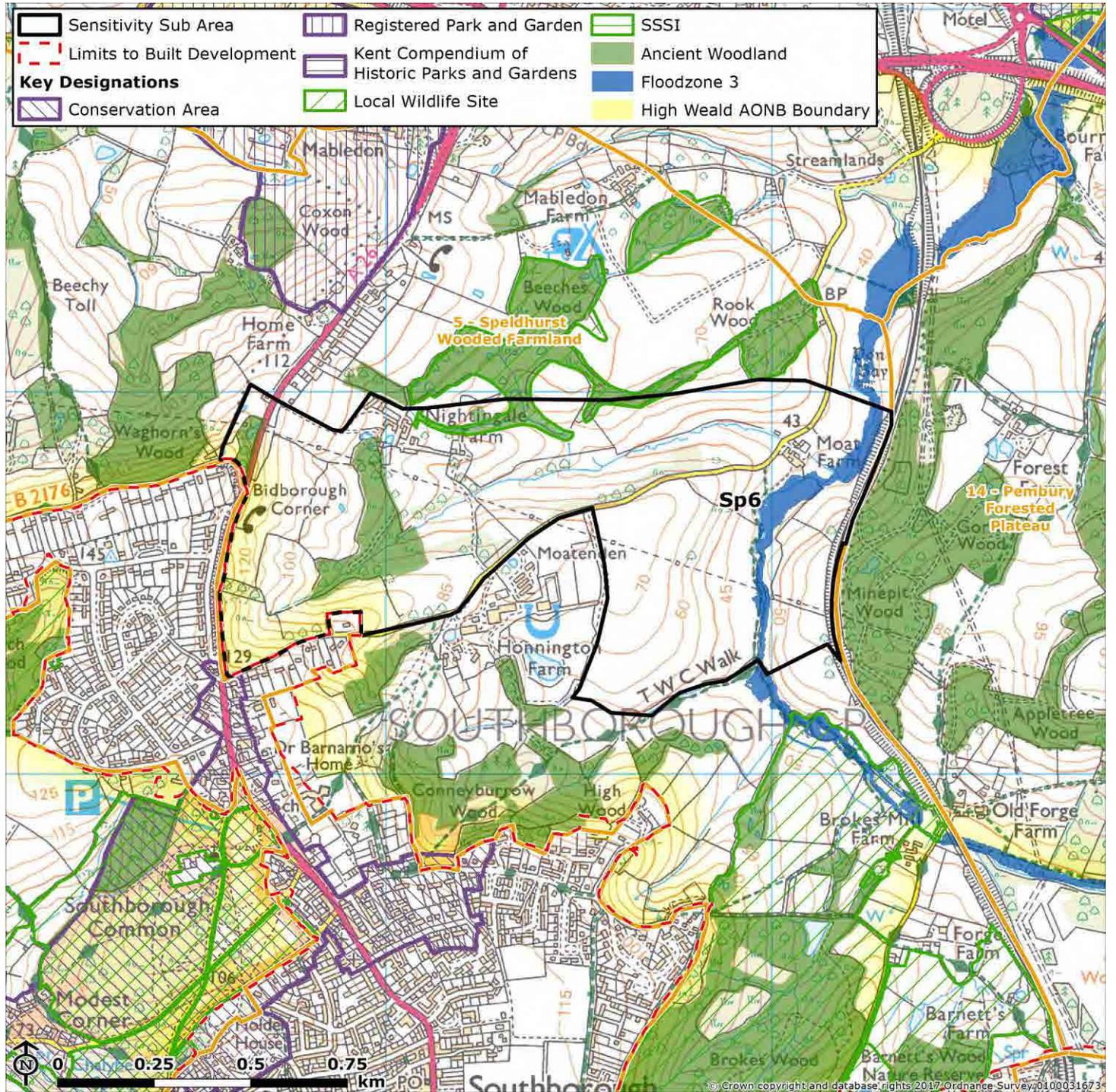
Pasture fields, looking east from Vauxhall Lane.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp5
Description		Area (Ha) - 117.5
<p>Sub-area Sp5 consists of undulating agricultural land and woodland south of the A21 Tonbridge Bypass and east of the A26 between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. This is a rural landscape, although includes a row of houses along the A26 in the south-west of the sub-area and a cottage hospital, as well as a camping and caravan park close to Mabledon Farm. The sub-area lies within the AONB.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	A complex and undulating landform of ridges and valleys. Landscape features key to landscape character include ghyll valleys and a number of blocks of ancient woodland (some designated LWS) connected by shaws. Relatively large fields create a medium scale landscape pattern. The sub-area is typical of the character area and High Weald AONB landscape.	
Settlement form and edge	The settlement of Tonbridge is contained to the north of the A21, south of which is a steep valley meaning that development south of the A21 would be inconsistent with existing settlement form. The settlements of Bidborough and Southborough have coalesced just south of the area at Bidborough Corner and although there is a row of houses in the south-west of the sub-area, they are separated from Bidborough Corner by a block of woodland and individual trees, meaning that development would also be inconsistent with the form of Bidborough/ Southborough.	
Settlement setting	The sub-area forms part of an important strategic rural gap between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells, and is particularly valuable in views from the A26 and A21.	
Visual character	The varied visual character means that the ridgetop and the sloping valley sides in the western part of the sub-area are more exposed and visible than the more enclosed valley in the east of the sub-area.	
Perceptual qualities	The sub-area has a strong rural character. Buildings including Tonbridge Cottage Hospital, Mabledon Farm form dispersed clusters. Despite its proximity to the settlements and main road to the west, there is strong rural character with limited urban influences. The sub-area has high scenic qualities and is typical of the undulating landscape of the AONB.	
Historic character	Some of the fields have undergone modern field amalgamation, but many of the remaining woodlands and fields retain an intact medieval pattern. Historic dispersed farmsteads include Mabledon Farm and the listed Mabledon Cottages which was historically associated with the former Mabledon Park on the other side of the now A26 road.	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>This area is strategically important to the setting of Royal Tunbridge Wells (including Southborough/ Bidborough) and provides a strategic open gap between Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge. The ancient woodland, complex landform and strong perceptual qualities - particularly the rural character of the area indicate that it has a <i>high</i> sensitivity to any scale of development. There may be pockets of land associated with existing development where sensitivity to limited small-scale development which could be relatively contained in the wider landscape which would be <i>medium-high</i>.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics.



Representative views



Looking north-east along the valley from the A26.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland	Sub-Area Sp6
--	---------------------

Description	Area (Ha) - 100
--------------------	------------------------

Sub-area Sp6 lies east of Bidborough. It contains the valleys of two tributary streams running east-west and north-south. It is contained by the A26 to the west and the rail line between Tonbridge and Tunbridge wells to the east. The area contains agricultural land, woodland and farmsteads. The sub-area lies within the AONB.

Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description
Physical character	A complex topography is characterised by distinct steep valleys and hilltops. Natural features important to local character include Annise Wood, a block of ancient woodland and individual mature trees. The sub-area is typical of the character area and High Weald AONB landscape.
Settlement form and edge	The settlements of Bidborough and Southborough have coalesced west of the area at Bidborough Corner and an important block of woodland separates this part of the settlement from the row of houses on the A26 just north of the sub-area. Existing settlement in Bidborough/ Southborough is contained on the ridgelines and the distinct valley landform of the sub-area means that development within it would be inconsistent with existing settlement form.
Settlement setting	The sub-area contributes to an important strategic rural gap between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. It also forms part of the rural setting to the Conservation Area at the gateway to Southborough. The trees north of Bidborough Corner create a strong sense of rurality on the approach into Tunbridge Wells from the north.
Visual character	The sub-area allows open and expansive views across the valley to and from the wider parts of the High Weald AONB, including views from the edge of the Southborough Conservation Area.
Perceptual qualities	The sub-area has a strong rural character despite its proximity to the town. Buildings clustered within farmstead arrangements (Nightingale Farm and Moat Farm) create a characteristic dispersed settlement pattern. There are few modern intrusions, with the exception of a line of pylons. The sub-area has high scenic qualities and typical AONB undulating landscape.
Historic character	The hilltop (east of Honnington Farm) and upper slopes have undergone modern field amalgamation, but the more steeply sloping parts of the valleys retain an intact medieval landscape of assart woodland and fields. Nightingale Farm and Moat Farm contain historic farmsteads, with listed buildings at Moat Farm.

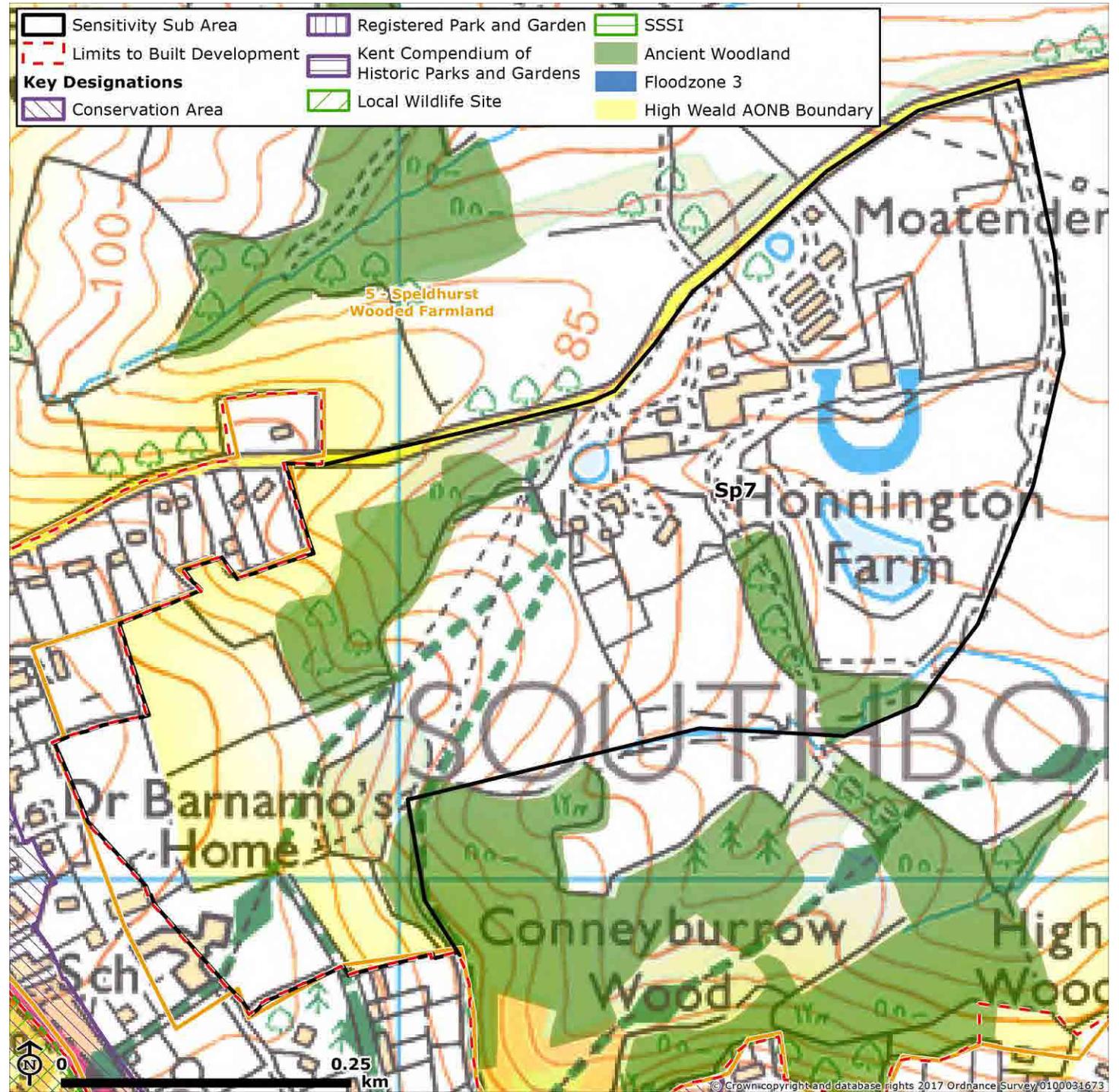
Sensitivity conclusions

This area is important to the setting of Royal Tunbridge Wells and forms part of the strategic open gap between Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge. The complex topography, strong rural character and medieval landscape pattern indicate that the area is of *high* sensitivity to all scales of development.

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 Small	H	MH	M	ML	L
 Medium	H	MH	M	ML	L
 Large	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics



Representative views



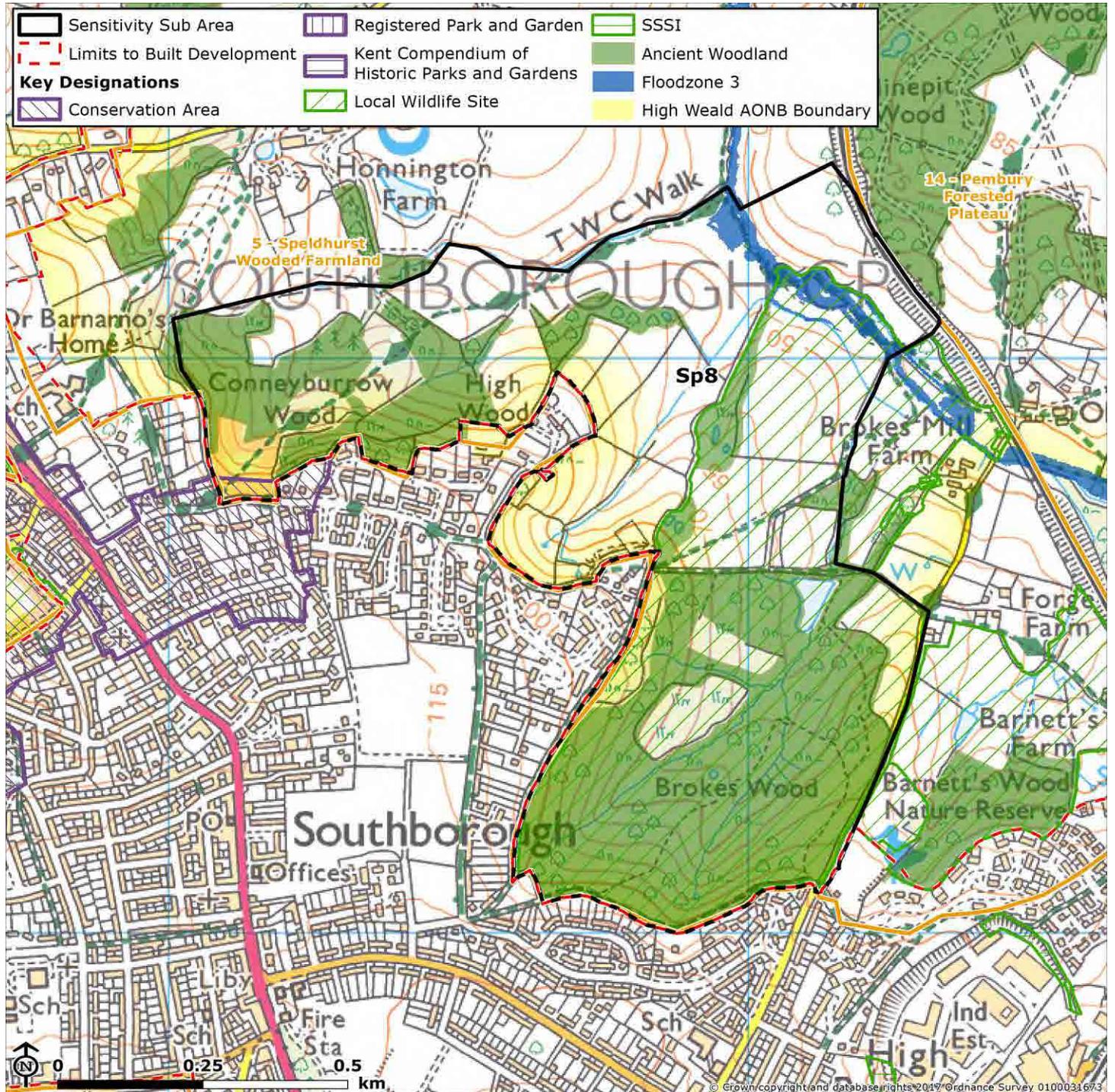
Fields east of the A26, looking east.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp7
Description		Area (Ha) - 31.5
<p>Sub-area Sp7 is located to the east of Southborough. It comprises undulating fields, woodland and the small commercial complex and equestrian centre at Honnington Farm, south of Vauxhall Lane. The sub-area lies within the AONB.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	The topography is broad and quite steeply sloping but with areas of flatter land at the ridgetop adjacent to the existing settlement edge, and towards the valley bottom where Honnington Farm is located. There are some landscape features important to local character including blocks of ancient woodland/ replanted ancient woodland and ponds. The sub-area is typical of the character area and High Weald AONB landscape.	
Settlement form and edge	The area adjacent to the settlement edge is on flatter ground and is consistent with the existing settlement edge which includes a school, recently constructed care home and residential dwellings along the A26; and residential dwellings along Vauxhall Lane and Vicarage Road. However, development on the steeper wooded slopes of the sub-area would be inconsistent with settlement form.	
Settlement setting	This is a strong wooded landscape providing containment to the settlement edge. Part of the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk crosses through a small part of the sub-area, linking Southborough with woodland and the wider AONB landscape.	
Visual character	Some of the fields on the flatter land adjacent to the settlement edge and in the east of the sub-area are more visually enclosed by trees, hedgerows and woodland rendering them less sensitive in visual terms. The steeply sloping sides are visually exposed and there are also long distance views across the slopes from the public right of way across the valley landscape and the High Weald.	
Perceptual qualities	The sub-area has a strong rural character away from the settlement edge (which has more human influence and less connection with the wider landscape). The larger buildings of Honnington Farm are well integrated into the landscape with tree planting and landform.	
Historic character	There are occasional historic features important to landscape character – including Honnington Farm historic farmstead (19th century) and listed barn. Ancient wooded shaws and occasional irregular assart fields survive.	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>The sub-area overall is typical of the AONB and the Speldhurst character area. The ancient woodland, historic Vauxhall Lane, steep slopes and intervisibility with the wider High Weald AONB (particularly from the TWC Walk) indicate a <i>high</i> sensitivity to all scales of development.</p> <p>However, areas close to the existing settlement edges both along Vauxhall Lane and around Meadows School, are more visually contained by woodland and /or topography, with the area adjacent to the school also on flatter land more consistent with the existing settlement edge. This area would be less sensitive (<i>moderate/ low</i>) to smaller scale development or medium scale development provided the building height was no greater than existing</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

Ensure any development adjacent to the settlement edge is well integrated into the landscape and forms an appropriate transition between settlement and countryside. Existing trees, hedges and public footpaths should be protected. The rural, wooded character should be retained, as should areas which are more visually open with views to the wider AONB landscape.



Representative views



Wooded ghyll valley, looking north from the footpath at the corner of Brokes Wood.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland	Sub-Area Sp8
--	---------------------

Description	Area (Ha) - 86
--------------------	-----------------------

Sub-area Sp8 is located to the north-east of Southborough between the settlement edge and the Tonbridge to Tunbridge Wells railway line. The sub-area consists of rural ridges and valleys with a large block of woodland at Brokes Wood. The sub-area lies within the AONB.

Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description
Physical character	The topography is steeply sloping and a distinctive AONB landscape of wooded ghyll valleys and undulating ridges. There are many landscape features important to local character including wooded ghyll valleys of ancient woodland, small streams and ponds, large block of ancient woodland (Brokes Wood which is also designated a LWS) and semi-improved meadow (designated SNCI). The sub-area is typical of the character area and High Weald AONB landscape.
Settlement form and edge	The adjacent settlement edge at Southborough is strongly associated with the edge of the ridgeline and is well-integrated with the overall landscape. Any development on the steep scarp slopes of the sub-area would be inconsistent with existing settlement form.
Settlement setting	A small part of the sub-area lies within Southborough Conservation Area (Hilly Fields). As the landform drops away it allows spectacular views to the north from the Conservation Area, framed by trees. The Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk crosses through the area and the landscape provides important recreational value and setting to this experience.
Visual character	There is strong intervisibility between the sub-area and the surrounding area. It is visually open and forms the foreground of views to the wider AONB.
Perceptual qualities	The sub-area has a strong rural character and strong scenic qualities typical of the AONB. There is a strong sense of tranquillity and little modern human intrusion.
Historic character	The sub-area represents a highly intact medieval landscape of irregular assart fields, ancient wooded shaws and ghylls and a late post-medieval pond in Brokes Wood possibly associated with the historic iron industry.

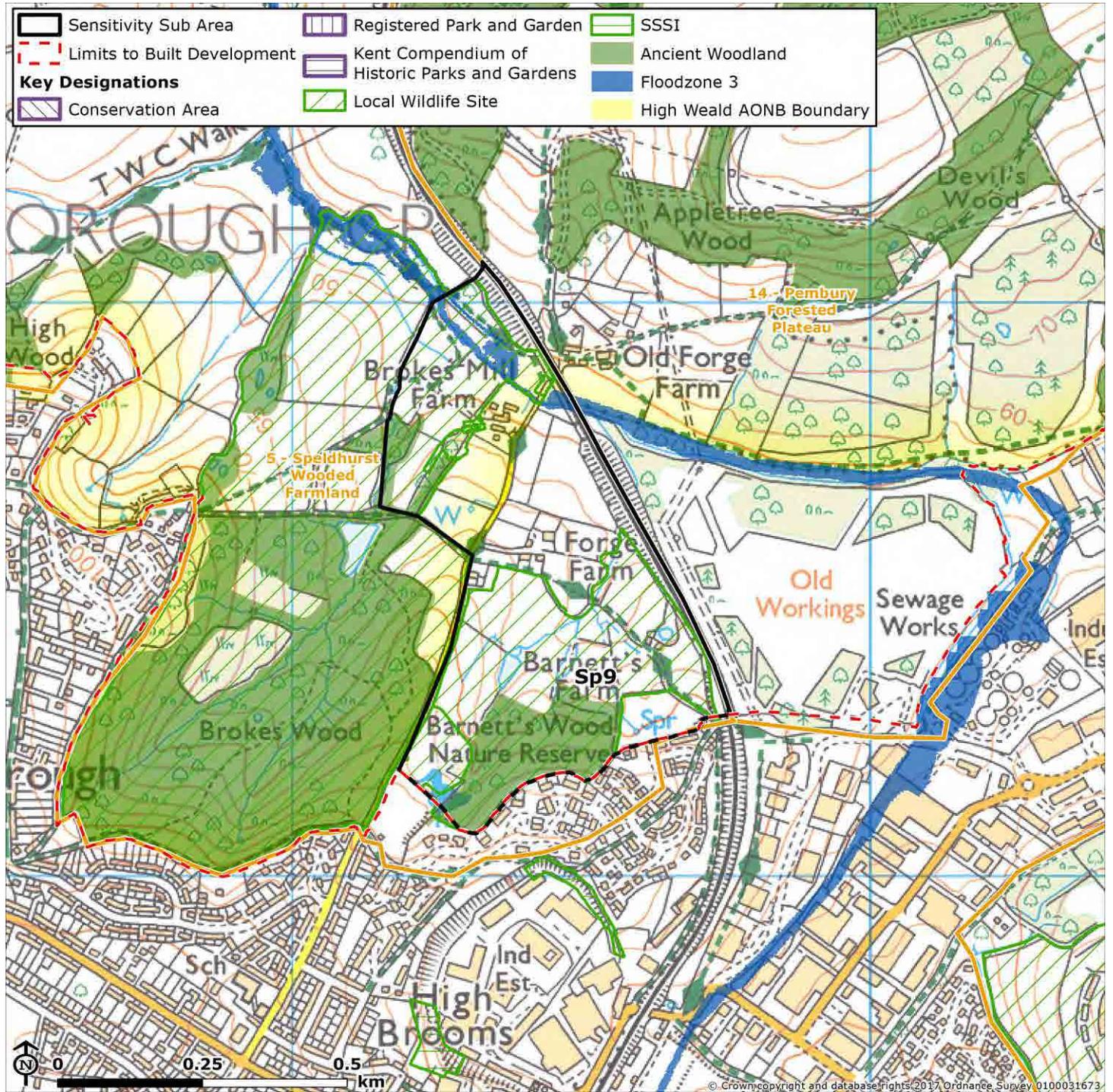
Sensitivity conclusions

The sub-area is typical of the AONB and Speldhurst character area. It is particularly sensitive as a result of the complex landform, woodland and its separation from the existing settlement as well as its strongly rural and tranquil character and intact medieval landscape. Sub-area Sp8 is therefore considered to have a *high* sensitivity to any scale of development.

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 Small	H	MH	M	ML	L
 Medium	H	MH	M	ML	L
 Large	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics.



Representative views



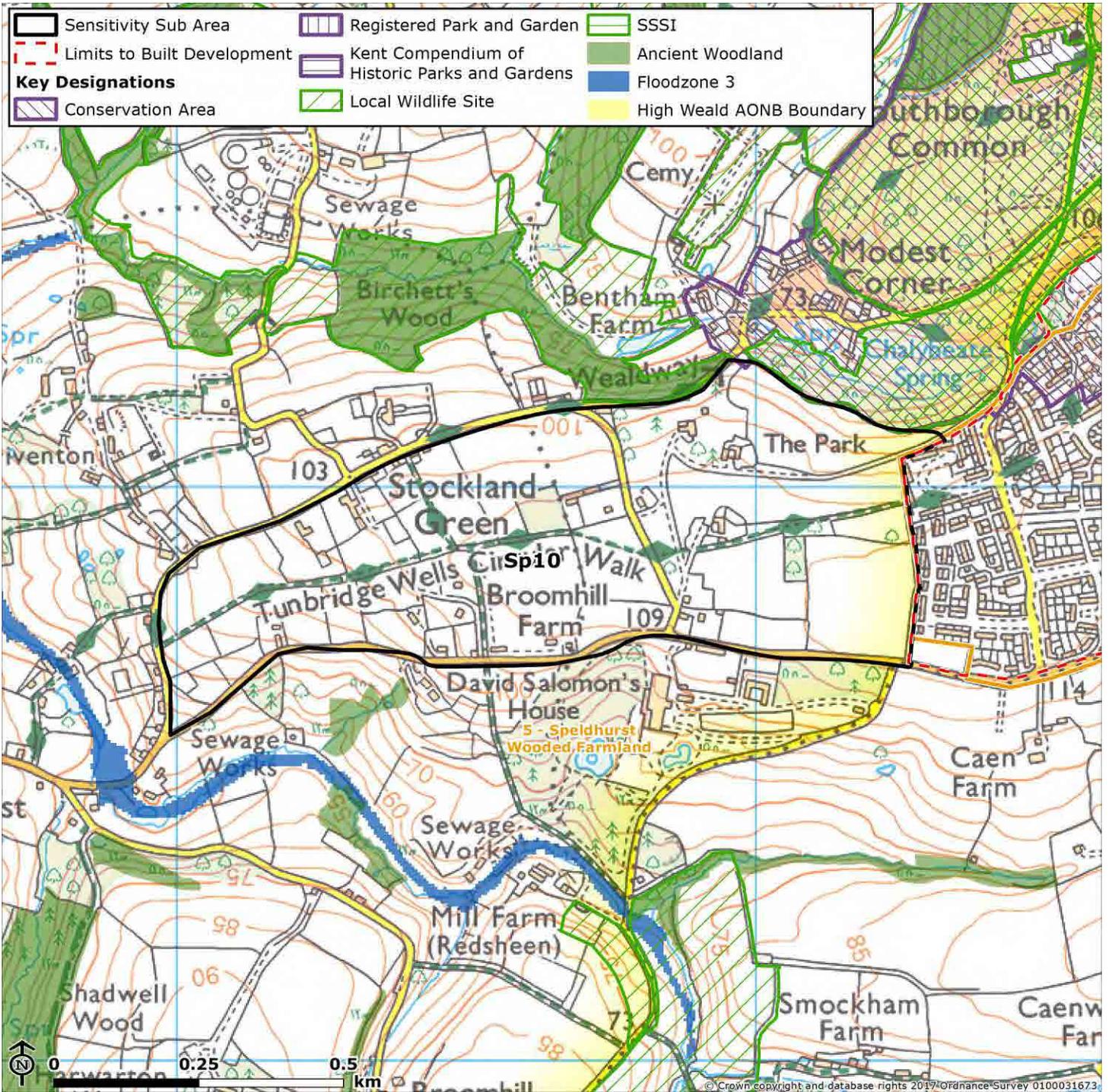
Field adjacent to Powder Mill Lane, looking west.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp9
Description		Area (Ha) - 31.8
Sub-area Sp9 extends to the north of High Brooms and is bounded to the north and east by the Tonbridge – Tunbridge Wells rail line. It contains agricultural fields and farms as well as Barnett’s Wood Nature Reserve. The northern part of the sub-area west of Powder Mill Lane, lies within the AONB.		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	The sub-area comprises gently sloping landform of lower valley slopes. There are occasional landscape features of importance to character including Barnett’s Wood Nature Reserve which is ancient woodland as well as areas of semi-improved wildflower grassland, also part of Barnett’s Wood LWS. The landscape pattern is relatively small scale, with small fields and occasional water bodies and watercourses.	
Settlement form and edge	The adjacent settlement edge in High Brooms is two storey houses in cul-de-sacs and is relatively well integrated with trees and woodland in Barnett’s Wood and in back gardens. Existing settlement is on the upper slopes and therefore development on the lower slopes of the sub-area would not be consistent with wider settlement form, although incremental expansion down the slope east of Barnett’s Wood would not be wholly uncharacteristic as long as development was contained within a wooded framework.	
Settlement setting	There is relatively high value in terms of recreation as the area is accessible to residents (Local Nature Reserve and Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk). The woods in the sub-area provide a visual backdrop to the adjacent settlement although this is more incidental than being of particular importance to the settlement character.	
Visual character	The sub-area is generally well-contained with a strong landscape structure of trees and wooded boundaries, and some fields are very enclosed. The low elevation and surrounding ridges mean that it is relatively contained with regards to views from the wider landscape.	
Perceptual qualities	The lack of views of suburban settlement gives the sub-area a rural character overall. However there are some detracting elements such as suburban boundary treatments (metal gates and fences, close board boundary fences), telegraph wires, some areas of under-management (e.g. uncontrolled scrub and deteriorating buildings). Powder Mill Lane has a strong rural character and provides a link with the AONB character. The farmsteads are also typical of the dispersed settlement pattern of the character area and AONB although they contain modern elements.	
Historic character	There are occasional historic features important to character: Powder Mill Lane is an ancient routeway and is a strong feature characteristic of the character area and in relation to the AONB. The viaduct is an interesting feature and Brokes Mill Farm historic farmstead. The historic landscape pattern is partly intact, including irregular medieval fields and assarts.	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>Key sensitivities of the sub-area include the areas of woodland and ecological value, the high recreational value of the nature reserve and recreational route and the connection the route provides to the wider landscape and AONB, and the rural character of Powder Mill Lane. Remnant historic features and character provided by irregular fields are also sensitive to change. Overall sub-area Sp9 is considered to have a <i>medium-high</i> sensitivity to small scale development and some areas with potential for restoration considered to have a <i>medium</i> sensitivity to small scale development. The area is considered to have a <i>high</i> sensitivity to medium and large scales of development as taller built development would be inconsistent with the existing settlement edge character.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is potential for restoration of some areas that are more degraded. The character and rural quality of Powder Mill Lane should be retained and any development should be appropriate in character to the adjacent highly rural and scenic landscape in Sp8 and the AONB. Elements important to landscape character such as the woodland should be protected. There may be capacity for limited development east of Barnett’s Wood as part of expansion of the existing settlement edge as long as development was contained within a wooded framework, as well as west of Barnett’s Wood within the existing wooded framework which is more visually contained. Any development should be appropriate in character to the adjacent rural landscape and provide an appropriate transition in terms of urban edge treatment.



Representative views



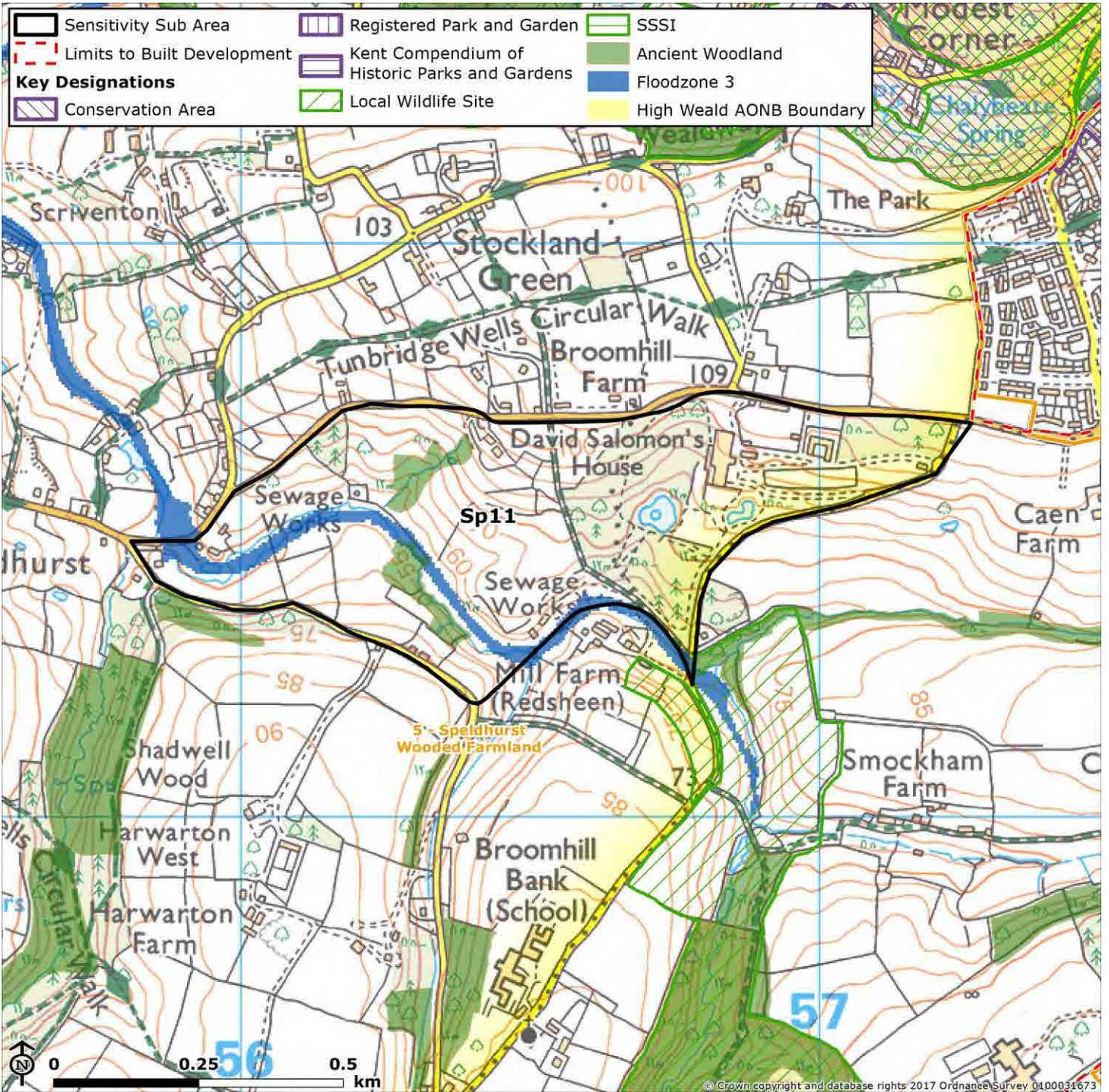
Enclosed field, looking north from the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp10
Description		Area (Ha) - 49.6
<p>Sub-area Sp10 is an elevated ridge top that extends from the western edge of Southborough. It consists of agricultural fields, the former parkland of Bentham Hill House and the hamlet of Stockland Green as well as scattered individual houses in large grounds. The sub-area lies within the AONB.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	<p>The landform of the sub-area is an elevated ridge that radiates out from Southborough. The relatively broad landform has a medium scale and regular pattern of fields and some smaller scale residential plots/ small holdings surrounded by a strong landscape structure of hedgerows and trees. Individual mature parkland trees on the slopes are important landscape features contributing to local character.</p>	
Settlement form and edge	<p>The adjacent settlement edge of Southborough comprises a row of two storey short terraced houses along Bright Ridge. The existing settlement edge is exposed, with modern houses visible over the boundary of low hedgerows and intermittent trees. There are no distinctive separating features between the settlement and the landscape of the sub-area meaning that development within the area would be in keeping with existing settlement form.</p>	
Settlement setting	<p>The rural character of the sub-area provides separation between Southborough and hamlets of Stockland Green and Modest Corner (and on a more strategic scale as an important part of the gap between Speldhurst and Tunbridge Wells), maintaining a dispersed settlement pattern typical of the AONB. It also forms part of the setting to the country estates (Bentham Hill House and Salomon's) which are important to the character of the area. Bentham Hill House is locally distinctive, sited on a hill. The Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk follows the ridgeline through the sub-area providing a valued recreational asset to the local community, connecting Speldhurst, Southborough and Bidborough.</p>	
Visual character	<p>Some smaller fields and lanes are visually enclosed by dense woodland and hedgerow screening which forms a strong landscape structure. However, overall the sub-area's elevated ridge landform is prominent in views from other ridges to the north and south (forming an important part of views in the AONB) and this high visibility makes it more sensitive.</p>	
Perceptual qualities	<p>The sub-area has a strong rural character away from the settlement edge at Southborough. It is crossed by narrow, winding rural lanes. Farmsteads and the hamlet of Stockland Green are typical of the dispersed settlement pattern of the AONB.</p>	
Historic character	<p>Some of the fields date back to the early post-medieval period but they do not have a particularly strong historic character owing to their regular formal pattern. The parkland at Bentham Hill house is an important feature to character and there are a number of listed buildings. The roads to the north and south of the sub-area are ancient routeways and along with Stockland Green Road, are important to the character of the area and a feature of the AONB landscape..</p>	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>The sub-area is typical of the AONB and character area. It is sensitive in relation to the visual prominence of the elevated ridge landform in views from other ridges to the north and south and from the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk, the parklands and estates it contains, and the role the rural landscape plays in maintaining a dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and farmsteads, indicating it has a <i>high</i> sensitivity overall to all scales of development.</p> <p>However, the area adjacent to the existing settlement edge is considered to have a lower sensitivity (<i>medium</i>) to small scale development as a result of the consistency with existing settlement form and the relatively strong landscape structure which may help to contain future development.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

Any development adjacent to the existing settlement edge should be appropriate in character to the rural landscape to the west (e.g. a more irregular edge with integrated tree planting may be more appropriate). Valuable trees and woodland should be retained and enhanced to provide an opportunity for integrating the settlement edge with the adjacent landscape and providing a strong transition. Consideration should also be given to the visual impact of any development in views from the surrounding landscape and suitable integration of the TWC Walk.



Representative views

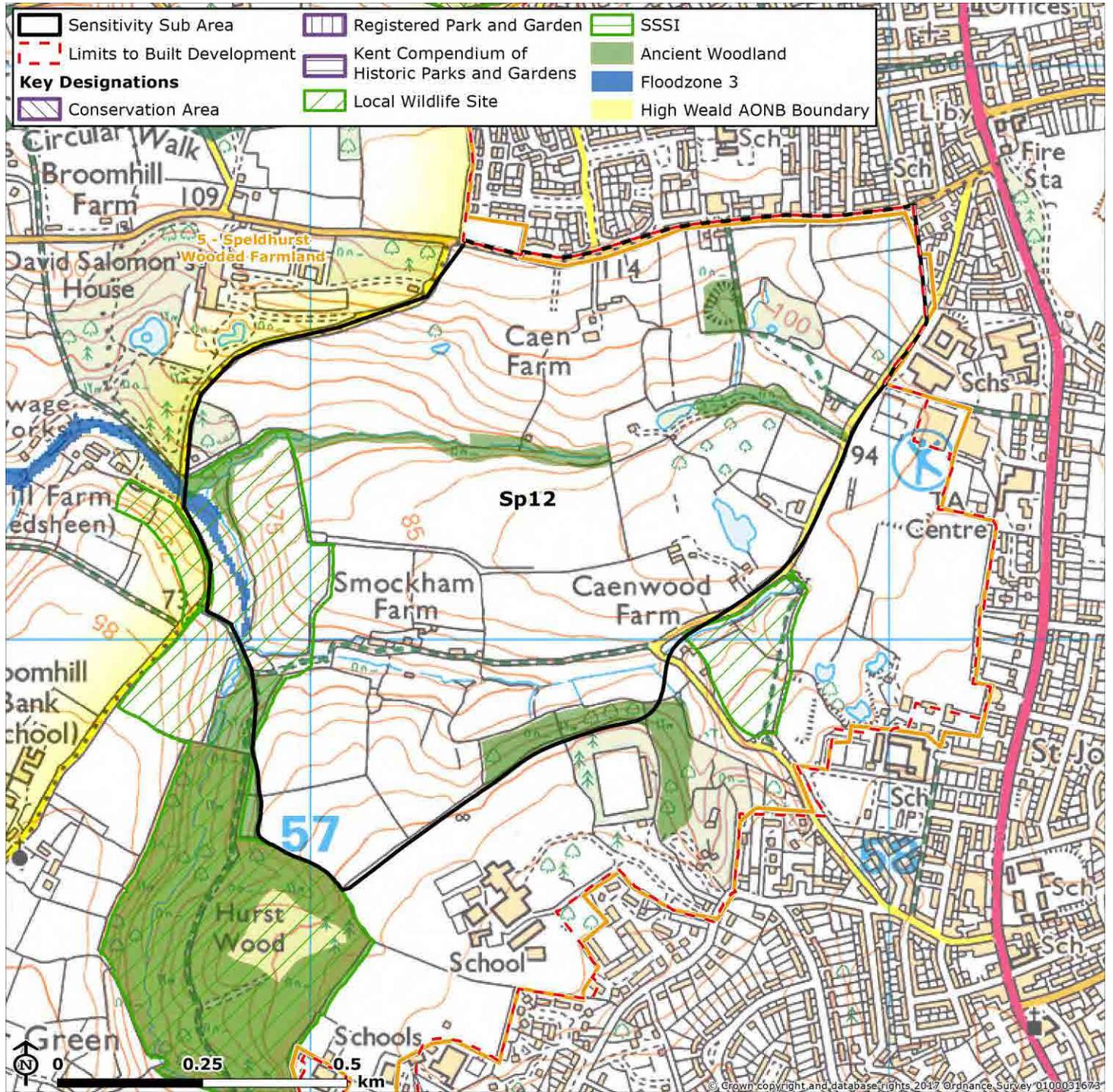


Looking south-west down the slope towards the ghyll valley woodland from the footpath to the north of Sunnybank Farm.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp11
Description		Area (Ha) - 40.1
<p>Sub-area Sp11 is located south of Etherington Hill (road) and is contained to the north of Broomhill Road and Lower Green Road. The north-eastern corner adjoins the settlement edge west of Southborough. The sub-area comprises steeply wooded slopes which descend to a tributary stream. It contains Salomons Estate (hotel and university buildings) and surrounding historic parkland and woodland, as well as isolated farmsteads and a small sewage works. The sub-area lies within the AONB.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	<p>This is a complex landform comprising undulating steep, wooded slopes and tributary valley typical of the AONB and character area. There are many landscape features important to character including woodland (some of which is ancient), ghylls with tributary streams, parkland and estate features around Salomon's, pastoral fields and hedgerows. These are all considered to be highly sensitive.</p>	
Settlement form and edge	<p>The sub-area is not adjacent to the settlement edge although it adjoins the corner of Southborough at its north-eastern corner. The surrounding settlement is contained on the higher ridge top and therefore development within the sub-area would be inconsistent with existing settlement form.</p>	
Settlement setting	<p>The sub-area forms part of the wider network of wooded ghyll valleys which are important to the setting of Royal Tunbridge Wells as a whole. It also forms part of the gap between Speldhurst and Tunbridge Wells, maintaining the distinct identity of the two settlements.</p>	
Visual character	<p>The sub-area is well wooded and therefore visually enclosed by tree cover as well as high hedgerows, with the lower slopes and valley bottom even more enclosed by landform as well. There are occasional areas in the surrounding landscape from where the wooded valley side with interspersed pastoral fields can be glimpsed- e.g. from ridge to the south, which is important as they are typical views within the AONB. There are distant and expansive views from Salomon's park and garden across the sub-area towards the south and west.</p>	
Perceptual qualities	<p>The sub-area has a rural and secluded character, with woodland and pasture fields typical of the AONB and character area, despite some presence of modern human activity around Salomon's. A dispersed pattern of farmsteads and rural lanes provides strong perceptual qualities to the sub-area.</p>	
Historic character	<p>Salomon's historic park and garden (listed on the Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens) is important to character, including the listed buildings. The remainder of the sub-area has an intact medieval character of small irregular assart fields with wooded boundaries. The roads to the north and south of the sub-area are ancient routeways, a feature characteristic of the AONB.</p>	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>The sub-area is considered to be sensitive in relation to the complex landform and physical features, its separation from the settlement edge and the strong wooded, rural character typical of the AONB and Speldhurst character area. Despite the visual containment the complex topography is likely to result in little capacity for development and it is therefore considered to be highly sensitive to all types of development.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures



Representative views



Smockham Farm.

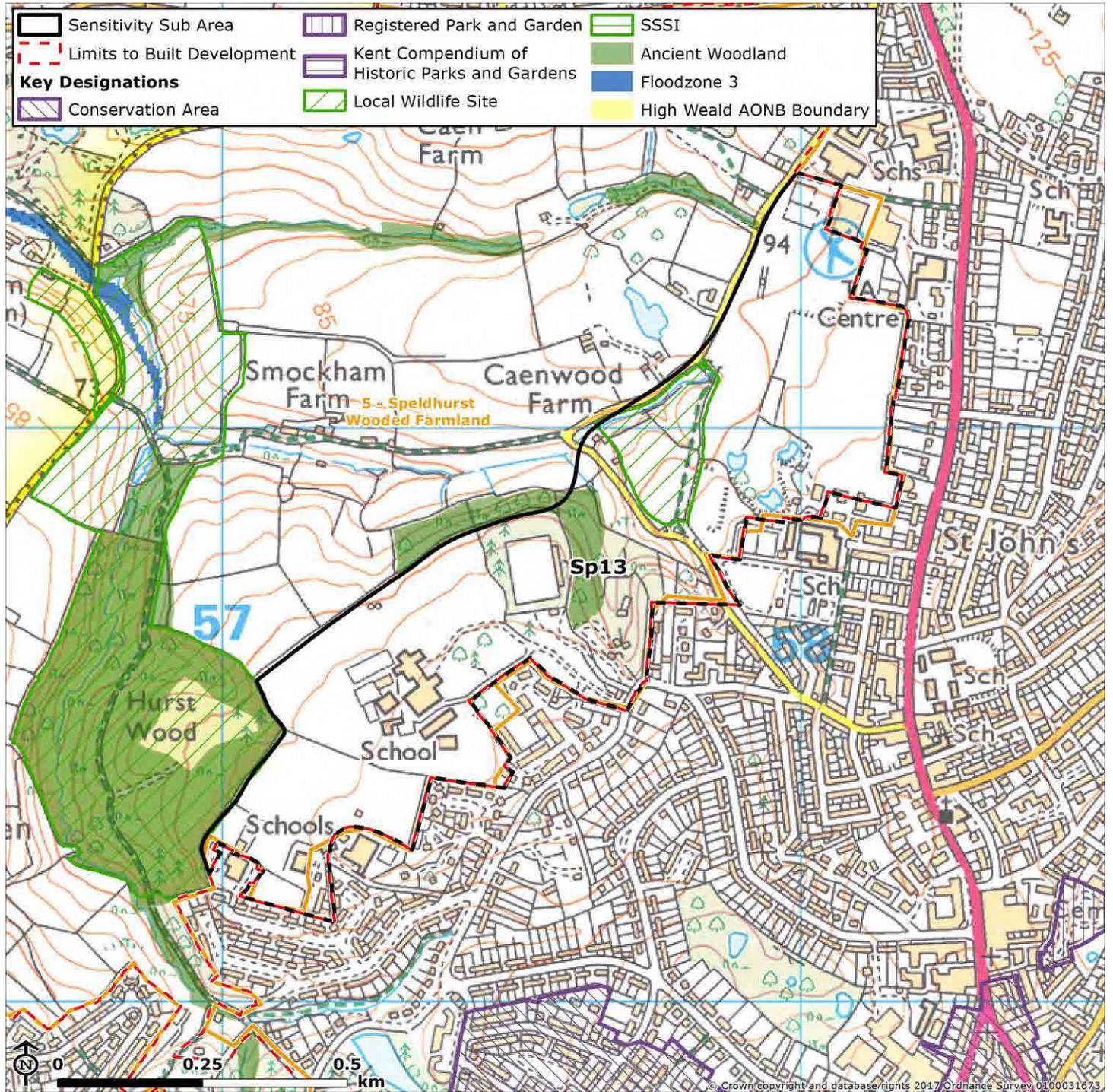


Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp12
Description		Area (Ha) - 92.2
<p>Sub-area Sp12 is located to the south-west of Southborough adjacent to the settlement edge, and north-west of Royal Tunbridge Wells, contributing towards separation of the two areas to some extent (although they are joined along the A26). The sub-area lies to the south of Speldhurst Road and the west of Reynolds Lane (which is within the LBD at its northern end). To the west the area is contained by Broomhill Road and to the south by Hurst Wood. It consists of undulating open and grazed fields with east-west running tributary stream. Development consists of isolated farms and detached residential dwellings off Reynolds Lane and Speldhurst Road. Adjacent to Speldhurst Road there are allotments and a rifle range. The sub-area is not within the AONB.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	The sub-area comprises undulating landform with distinct steep valleys and broad ridges. The broad ridges are flatter and simpler in topography and landscape pattern as is the top of the slope in the north of the sub-area. Some landscape features important to local character including an ancient woodland and ghyll valleys typical of the AONB, small tributary streams, and a field of unimproved/ semi-improved pasture (part of the Broomhill & Reynolds Lane Pastures LWS).	
Settlement form and edge	The settlement of Southborough lies to the north and north-east of the sub-area. Settlement is primarily north of Speldhurst Road and east of Reynolds Lane but development has occurred beyond these boundaries creating the perception of an un-integrated settlement edge. Areas adjacent to the existing settlement edge which are on higher ground would be in keeping with existing settlement form. However the slopes, valleys and the lower ridge west of Caewood Farm would be more sensitive as development in these areas would be inconsistent with existing settlement form.	
Settlement setting	The sub-area forms part of the wider network of wooded ghyll valleys which are important to the setting of Royal Tunbridge Wells as a whole. To some extent the rural landscape separates the two areas of Southborough and Royal Tunbridge Wells (although they are joined along the A26).	
Visual character	The open ridgetop and slopes are visible in nearby views (forming a foreground to views of the High Weald from Broomhill Road and Speldhurst Road). There are sweeping views across the area from the corner of Broomhill Road/ Speldhurst Road to Royal Tunbridge Wells and churches on the skyline, indicating a high sensitivity.	
Perceptual qualities	There is some sense of disturbance and modern human influence across the area such as growth of scrub, telegraph poles, suburban boundary treatment and the presence of detached modern houses with suburban boundary features (e.g. off Reynolds Lane). Nevertheless the area has a rural character away from the settlement edges, accentuated by presence of wooded valleys and a dispersed pattern of farmsteads with a lack of views to development over the most part. The southern part of Reynolds Lane and the public footpath leading to Smockham Farm have a rural character.	
Historic character	Reynolds Lane and the public footpath leading to Smockham Farm, Speldhurst Road and Broomhill Road are ancient routeways and have strong character. Historic farms (Smockham and Caewood) also add to the historic interest. Overall there is a degree of disturbance, possibly as a result of a historic quarry and brickyard in the area (shown on historic maps) although woodland and fields around the ghyll valleys retain important historic character.	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>The key sensitivities of the sub-area are the sloping topography and wooded valleys, the visual prominence and intervisibility with the High Weald AONB and the rural character including the strong historic character of the rural lanes and dispersed settlement pattern.</p> <p>The areas close to the existing settlement edges on flatter ground are less sensitive (<i>medium</i> sensitivity to small scale development and <i>medium-high</i> sensitivity to medium scale development).</p>		

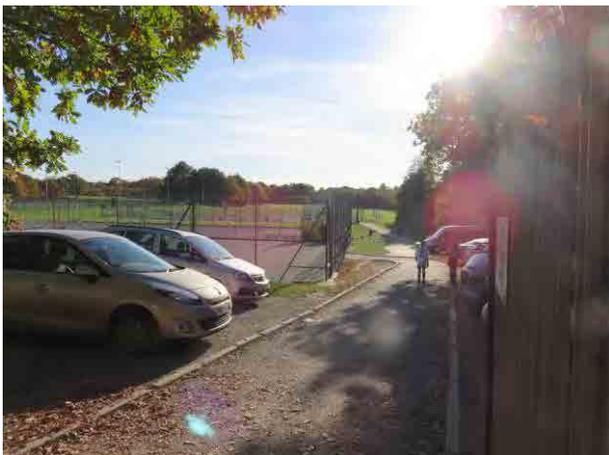
Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation across the majority of the area as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics. Any development within the area of flatter land adjacent to existing settlement should retain and incorporate existing vegetation where possible and ensure an appropriate transition to the highly sensitive rural countryside in the adjacent area in the design, materials and siting of built elements.



Representative views



View across tennis courts and recreation grounds from near Reynolds Lane.

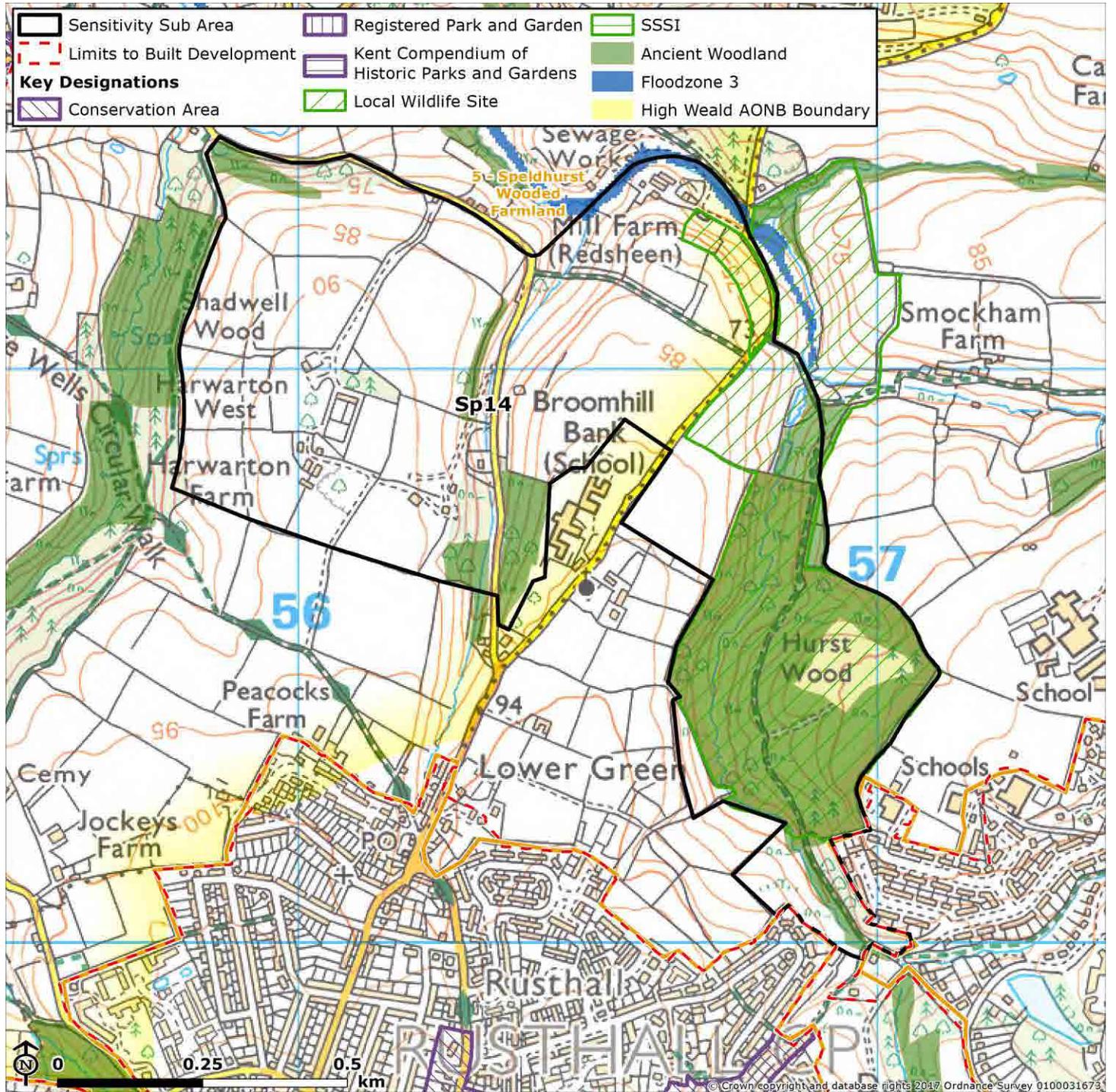
Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp13
Description		Area (Ha) - 48.6
<p>Sub-area Sp13 is located to the north-west of Royal Tunbridge Wells, along the settlement edge. It comprises the northern part of a ridge running north-east/ south-west, containing schools and recreation grounds with a wooded tributary valley dissecting the area north-west/ south-east, parallel to Reynolds Lane. It is a Rural Fringe site and is not within the AONB.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	<p>The area is on the northern part of a ridge running north-east/ south-west and topography is flat to gently sloping. A distinct steep wooded valley runs parallel to the west of Reynolds Lane and dissects the area north-west/ south-east which is more sensitive. Landform and landscape pattern is medium-large scale but most of the area is recreation fields and school grounds. There are a few landscape features of importance to character including mature trees, the wooded valley (some of which is ancient woodland) and an area of unimproved neutral scrubby grassland (part of Broomhill and Reynolds Lane Pastures) which have biodiversity value.</p>	
Settlement form and edge	<p>The adjacent settlement edge of Royal Tunbridge Wells occupies the southern half of the ridge on which the sub-area lies. Development at the settlement edge comprises recent residential housing which has expanded west of the A264 and north of Mount Ephraim across the undulating topography, as well as a number of schools. The sub-area is therefore consistent with the adjacent settlement form with regards to topography and land use with most of the sub-area characterised by recreation uses and schools.</p>	
Settlement setting	<p>The sub-area does not have a particular role in the setting of Tunbridge Wells although it does act as a transition between the built up area and the countryside and there are a number of mature trees which add visual interest to views from the urban edge.</p>	
Visual character	<p>The sub-area is quite well enclosed by trees and woodland.</p>	
Perceptual qualities	<p>Reynolds Lane has a strong semi-rural character which is accentuated by adjacent woodland and rough pasture at The Rocks and in the wooded valley to the west and south of The Rocks which is of high sensitivity. The concentration of recreation grounds and schools along with activity from outdoor sport gives an overall suburban character which is lower sensitivity.</p>	
Historic character	<p>Reynolds Lane is an ancient routeway and has strong sense of place. There are few other historic features important to character.</p>	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>The rural lane, and the wooded valley are the key sensitivities of this sub-area. Overall, it is considered to have a <i>medium-low</i> sensitivity to small scale development. As the character of existing development within the sub-area and on the settlement edge includes some larger scale community facilities up to approximately 2 storeys, the sub-area would also potentially be able to accommodate similar scales of development to that existing (<i>medium or medium-high</i> sensitivity).</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

The key sensitivities of the sub-area are the sloping topography and wooded valleys, the visual prominence and intervisibility with the High Weald AONB and the rural character including the strong historic character of the rural lanes and dispersed settlement pattern.

The areas close to the existing settlement edges on flatter ground are less sensitive (medium or medium-high sensitivity) to small or medium scale development in areas associated with existing development of a similar scale.



Representative views



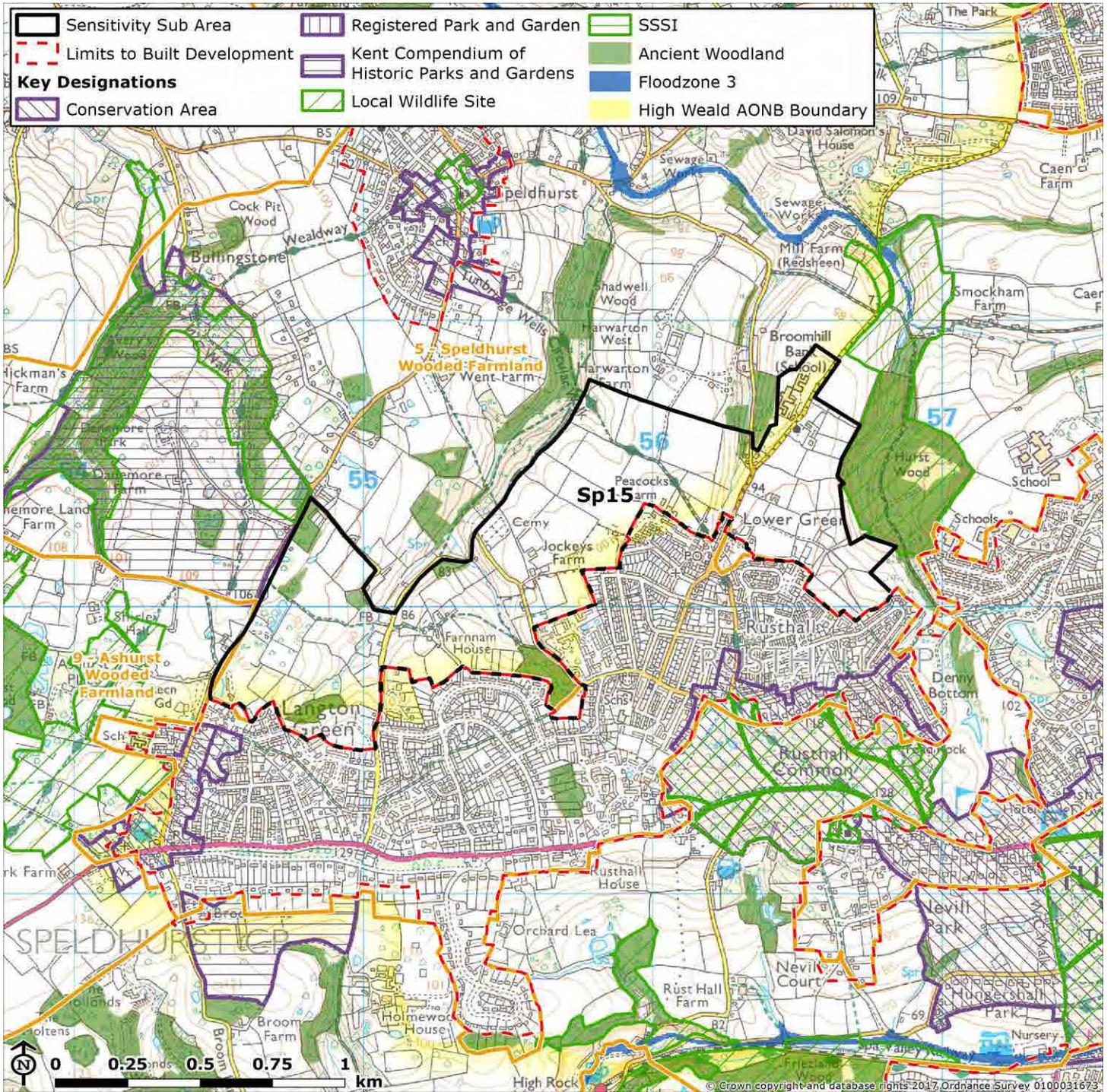
View of the area in the mid-distance, looking south from Etherington Hill.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp14
Description		Area (Ha) - 83.8
<p>Sub-area Sp14 is located in between Speldhurst, Rusthall and Royal Tunbridge Wells and does not adjoin any settlement edges. It comprises the northern ends of two low ridges which extend north from Rusthall, and intervening wooded ghyll valleys. Lower Green Road runs along the western valley and the eastern valley is bordered by Hurst Wood. The land cover comprises open ridgetop fields with some development including a private housing estate of detached properties in the north of the area off Broomhill Road (partly under construction), isolated farms and detached houses. The western part of the sub-area west of Broomhill Road is within the AONB.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	The distinct landform comprises the ends of two broad ridges radiating out from Tunbridge Wells, and intervening wooded ghyll valleys with tributary streams. Hurst Wood, is a large area of ancient woodland and Local Wildlife Site with unimproved/ semi-improved pasture, and smaller areas of ghyll woodland and shaws. The distinct landform and area of woodland indicate high sensitivity.	
Settlement form and edge	The sub-area is separate from the settlement edges of Speldhurst and Tunbridge Wells, forming a rural landscape between the settlements.	
Settlement setting	The sub-area forms a wider rural setting to Speldhurst and is important in contributing towards the separation of Speldhurst and Tunbridge Wells.	
Visual character	The northern ends of the ridges are open and visually prominent locally, indicating a higher sensitivity. Some areas set back from the edges of the ridges where there are higher levels of tree cover are more enclosed.	
Perceptual qualities	The sub-area is typical High Weald AONB. It has a sense of rurality and high scenic value with a typical dispersed settlement pattern.	
Historic character	The landscape has some historic features which contribute to character including a strong network of ancient routeways along roads and footpaths, and a pattern of medieval, early post-medieval and late post-medieval fields on the valley slopes which indicate a sense of time-depth.	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>The sub-area is particularly sensitive (<i>high</i>) with regards to the visual prominence of the ridges and the woodland and as part of the gap between Speldhurst and Tunbridge Wells, to all types of development.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics.



Representative views



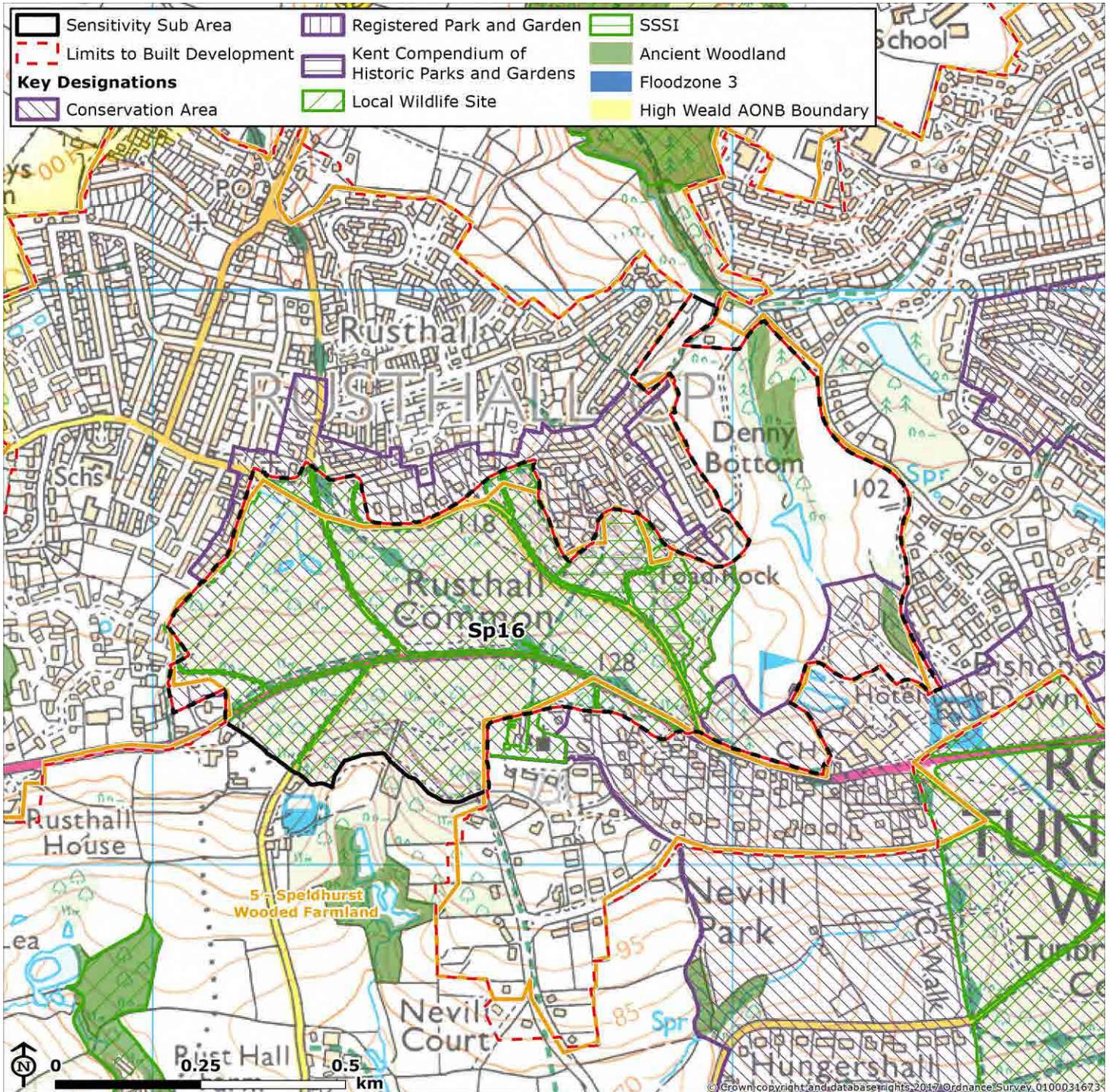
Looking south towards the settlement edge of Langton Green from the public footpath.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp15
Description		Area (Ha) - 119.4
<p>Sub-area Sp15 is located north of the settlement edges of Rusthall and Langton Green. The area consists of the northern, lower parts of ridges which extend north from the settlements, with intervening wooded valleys. Rural lanes run along the valley sides – Farnham Lane, Nellington Road and Lower Green Road, with Speldhurst Road forming the western edge of the sub-area. The sub-area contains settlement edge land uses north of Rusthall including playing fields, allotments, recreation grounds and agricultural fields and farms further north as well as Broomhill Bank School and surrounding cluster of houses off Broomfield Road. North of Langton Green there are back gardens, detached houses and open fields with detached houses off Burnt House Lane. Most of the sub-area lies within the AONB except for the area east of Broomhill Lane and some small areas on the edge of Langton Green.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	The relatively complex landform comprises the northern, lower parts of ridges which extend north from Rusthall and Langton Green, with intervening wooded ghyll valleys. North of Rusthall on the broad ridges, the land is flatter and therefore less sensitive in this respect. A regular field pattern with hedgerow and wooded boundaries creates a relatively strong landscape structure. Wooded valleys and some small blocks of ancient woodland are important to local character.	
Settlement form and edge	The sub-area lies adjacent to the settlement edge north of Langton Green and Rusthall. Areas close to the settlement edge which are on higher and flatter land share consistency with the settlement form in terms of topography as well as land use where urban edge land uses such as recreation grounds and allotments extend into the sub-area. Although generally well integrated into the landscape by trees and vegetation, these areas would have slightly lower sensitivity as development would not represent a step-change in settlement form, except where landform is more complex and distinctly different from the higher, flatter topography.	
Settlement setting	The sub-area plays a role in the wider setting and rural separation between Speldhurst and Rusthall/ Langton Green. Part of the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk crosses through the sub-area, indicating some sensitivity as a result of the recreational value of the landscape.	
Visual character	The relatively strong landscape structure of woodland, hedgerows and trees provide a degree of visual containment. However, the elevated ridges are visible in distant views from the surrounding ridges. Areas close to the existing settlement edge which are set back from the edges of the ridges are quite visually enclosed and contained.	
Perceptual qualities	The sub-area has a sense of rurality as a result of rural lanes and pastoral fields although near the settlement edge the character is more influenced by urban land uses with associated suburban qualities.	
Historic character	The landscape has some historic features which contribute to character including a strong network of ancient routeways along roads and footpaths, and a pattern early post-medieval and late post-medieval formal planned fields divided by wooded hedgerow boundaries, medieval assart fields and occasional historic farmsteads, indicating a sense of time-depth.	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>The areas of flatter land on the broad ridges adjacent to the settlement edge of Rusthall and adjacent to the settlement edge of Langton Green are lower sensitivity (<i>medium</i>) with regards to topography, consistency with settlement form and visual containment as a result of strong landscape structure and being set back from the edges of the ridges.</p>		
<p>The remainder of the sub-area is higher sensitivity (<i>medium-high</i>) as a result of the more complex topography and rural character, as well as potential visibility of development from the surrounding ridges.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

Limit development to areas which relate to the existing settlement edge – i.e. flatter ground. Protect trees and woodland and ensure any development creates an appropriate transition between settlement and the rural landscape through integration and enhancement of the strong landscape structure of woodland/ hedgerows and trees. Consideration of the impact of development on longer distance views should be given.



Representative views



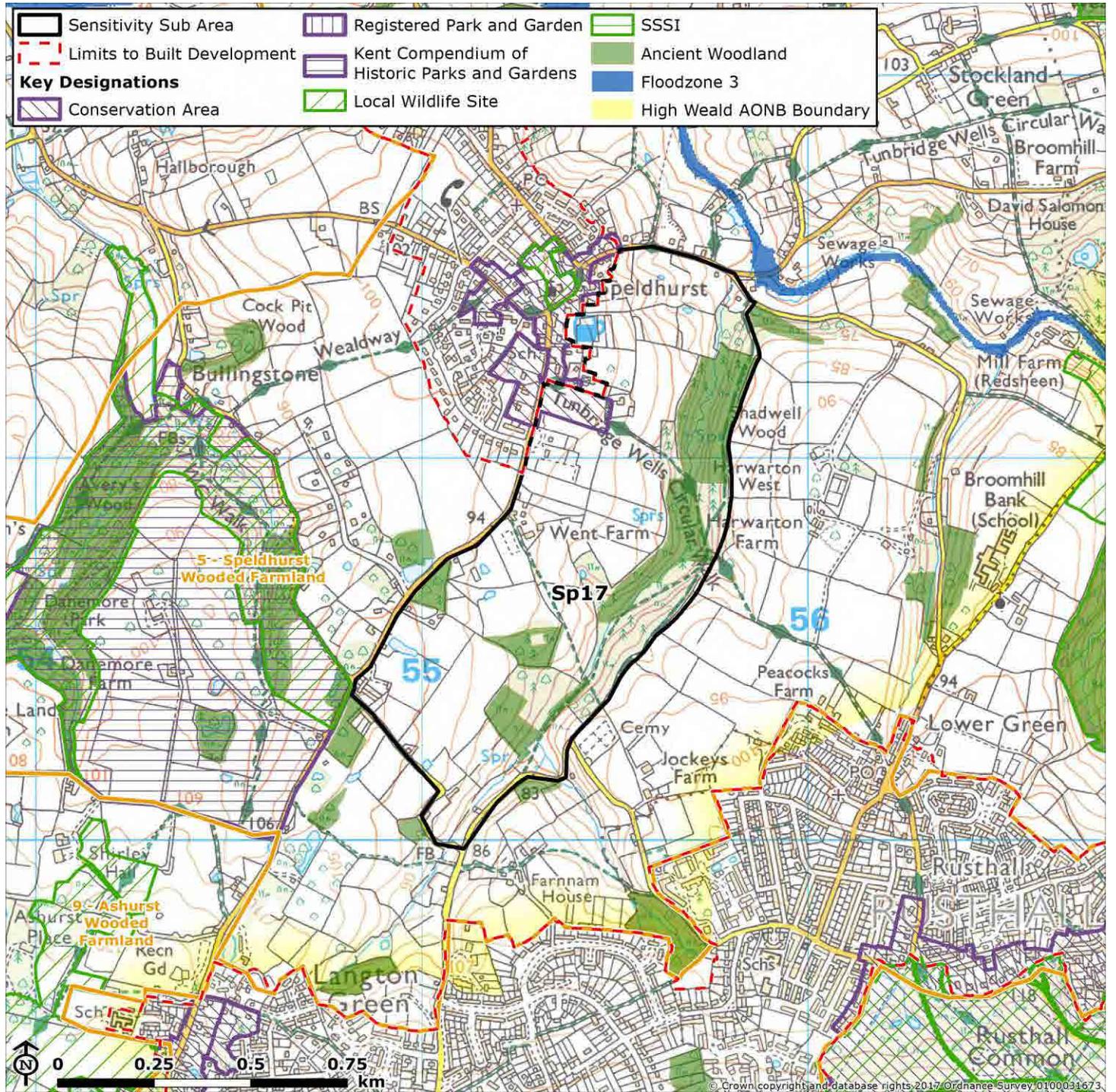
Speldhurst Wooded Farmland

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp16
Description		Area (Ha) - 57.3
Sub-area Sp16 consists of Rusthall Common and the Spa Golf Course at Denny Bottom. The sub-area is not within the AONB.		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	The landform is dramatic and very distinctive to local character, with a ridgeline at the Common and a valley at the golf course. Distinctive sandstone outcrops (including Toad Rock SSSI) are important to local character as is the area of unimproved grassland on the Common. Ancient woodland in the ghyll valley around the golf course is also important to local character. The Common itself is a strongly characteristic feature of the character area.	
Settlement form and edge	The sub-area is surrounded by development in Rusthall to the north and west, and Tunbridge Wells to the east and south. Settlement is generally set back from the road, accentuating a strong separation between the landscape of the sub-area and the settlement. The Common and golf course are themselves, strong features in the form of the surrounding settlement.	
Settlement setting	The sub-area plays a very important role in separating Rusthall from Tunbridge Wells. The Common is also an important part of the setting of the settlement, as with the other Commons around Tunbridge Wells, contributes a distinct identity historically, visually and in providing a balance between developed and undeveloped areas.	
Visual character	The topography of the Common creates numerous views within the Common and to its surroundings. There are long distance views to the south over Happy Valley to Ashdown Forest beyond. The woodland of the Common is widely visible from the surrounding settlement.	
Perceptual qualities	Despite the A264, golf course and views of surrounding settlement (and hotel) the whole sub-area has a rural, wooded character with strong aesthetic qualities and a distinctive sense of place.	
Historic character	The character of the sub-area has undergone modern change: the Common has become wooded over and the landscape around Denny Bottom has become a golf course.	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>This area is a characteristic High Weald AONB landscape which is also important to the character of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall and the Speldhurst Character Area as a whole. It is particularly highly sensitive in terms of its physical, visual, settlement form and setting. The sub-area is therefore considered to have a <i>high</i> sensitivity to any scale of development although there may be pockets of land associated with existing development and on flatter ground where sensitivity to limited small-scale development could be relatively contained in the wider landscape and would be <i>medium-high</i> sensitivity.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics.



Representative views



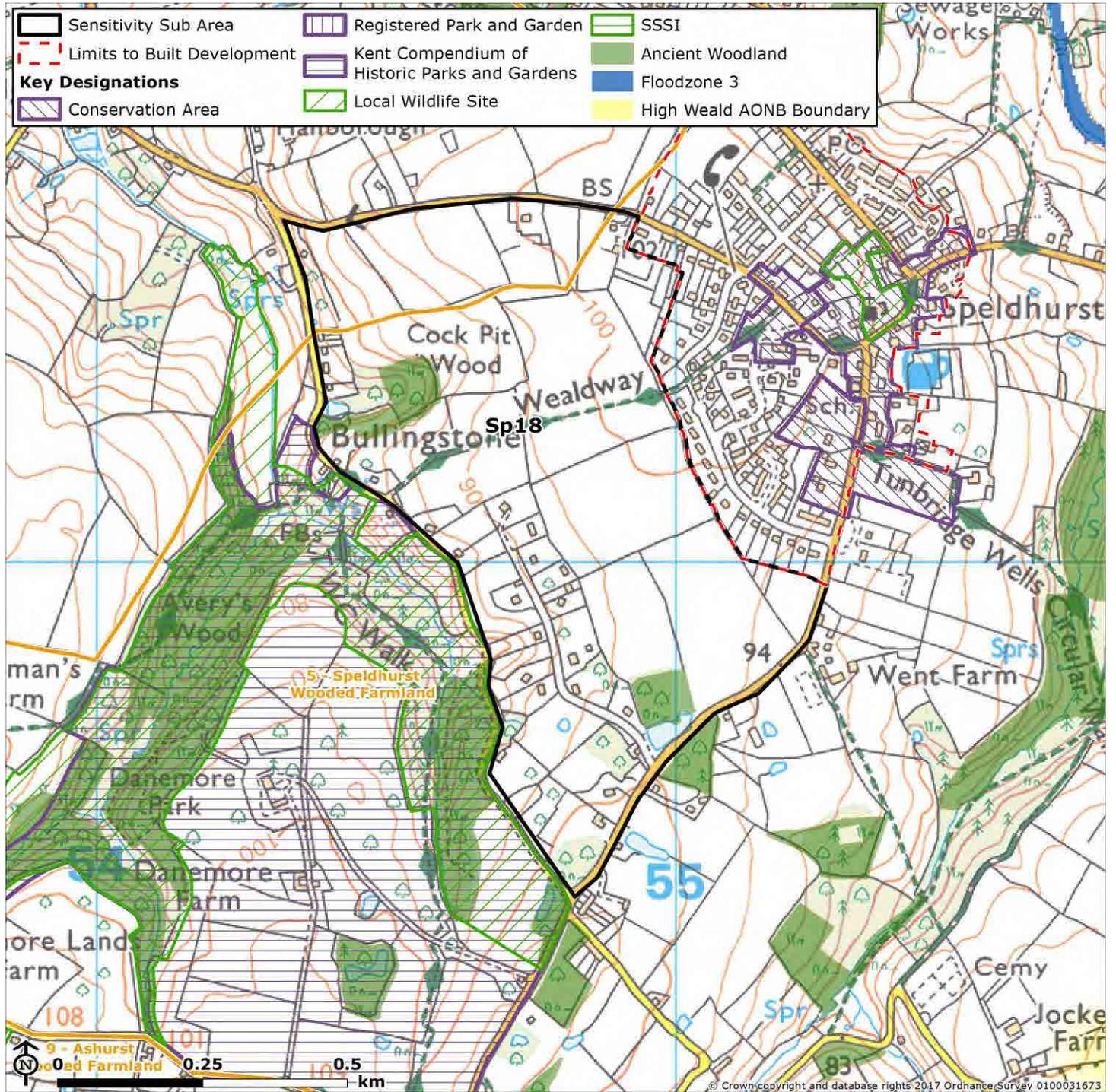
Speldhurst Wooded Farmland

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp17
Description		Area (Ha) - 77.5
<p>Sub-area Sp17 consists of the east-facing valley slopes of agricultural land and a wooded ghyll valley east and south of Speldhurst. Development within the area includes a nursery and rural business park off Speldhurst Road and scattered detached residential properties off Speldhurst Road and Burnt House Lane. The sub-area is within the AONB. The east facing slopes are distinctly separate from the higher plateau at the edge of Rusthall to the south east.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	<p>The landform comprises the south-eastern facing slopes of the broad ridge on which Speldhurst lies, which fall down to a distinctive steep-sided ghyll valley. Shadwell Wood/ Sproud's Wood contains ancient woodland and replanted ancient woodland, small areas of heathland and semi-improved meadow which are important to local character. Some larger scale arable fields are less sensitive in physical terms but are not related to an existing settlement edge.</p>	
Settlement form and edge	<p>Speldhurst is a nucleated ridge-top settlement historically centred around the junction of Langton Road/ Penshurst Road and Speldhurst Hill. The existing settlement comprises low density residential development in large garden plots and is well integrated by tree cover. Adjacent to the sub-area the settlement form and edge quite closely resembles the historic form, with only a shallow depth of development extending east of Langton Road on the ridge top. The sloping topography of the sub-area is sensitive – in maintaining the ridge top form of the settlement.</p>	
Settlement setting	<p>The rural landscape of the sub-area contributes to the rural setting and village character of Speldhurst. The field east of Langton Road and St Chad's Cottages is included in the Conservation Area because of its importance to the setting of the village and the views across it from the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk which crosses through the sub-area and connects Speldhurst to Tunbridge Wells. The area also contributes to the separation between Speldhurst and Tunbridge Wells and is important to the character of both settlements.</p>	
Visual character	<p>There are occasional attractive views from Speldhurst into and across the sub-area. The wooded valley is visually enclosed although the upper slopes with open fields are visually exposed.</p>	
Perceptual qualities	<p>The sub-area is typical of the wider AONB and Speldhurst character area, with rural character and dispersed settlement pattern as well as the adjacent nucleated village of Speldhurst. The area has relatively dark skies despite its proximity to Tunbridge Wells and the undulating landform and wooded ghyll valley provide scenic contrasts of high quality.</p>	
Historic character	<p>Some of the fields on the upper slopes have undergone modern amalgamation and some of the woodland in the valley is now conifer plantation, reducing the historic intactness of the landscape. There are some historic elements which are important to character including historic farmsteads and the ancient route ways surrounding the sub-area which have strong historic character.</p>	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>The sub-area is considered to be particularly sensitive in terms of the role it plays in the setting of Speldhurst and Tunbridge Wells. It is also sensitive as a result of its visual prominence and rural character. Overall sensitivity to all types of development is judged to be <i>high</i>, albeit there may be small areas close to the existing settlement edge of Speldhurst which are more enclosed and could accommodate some smaller scale development.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics.



Representative views



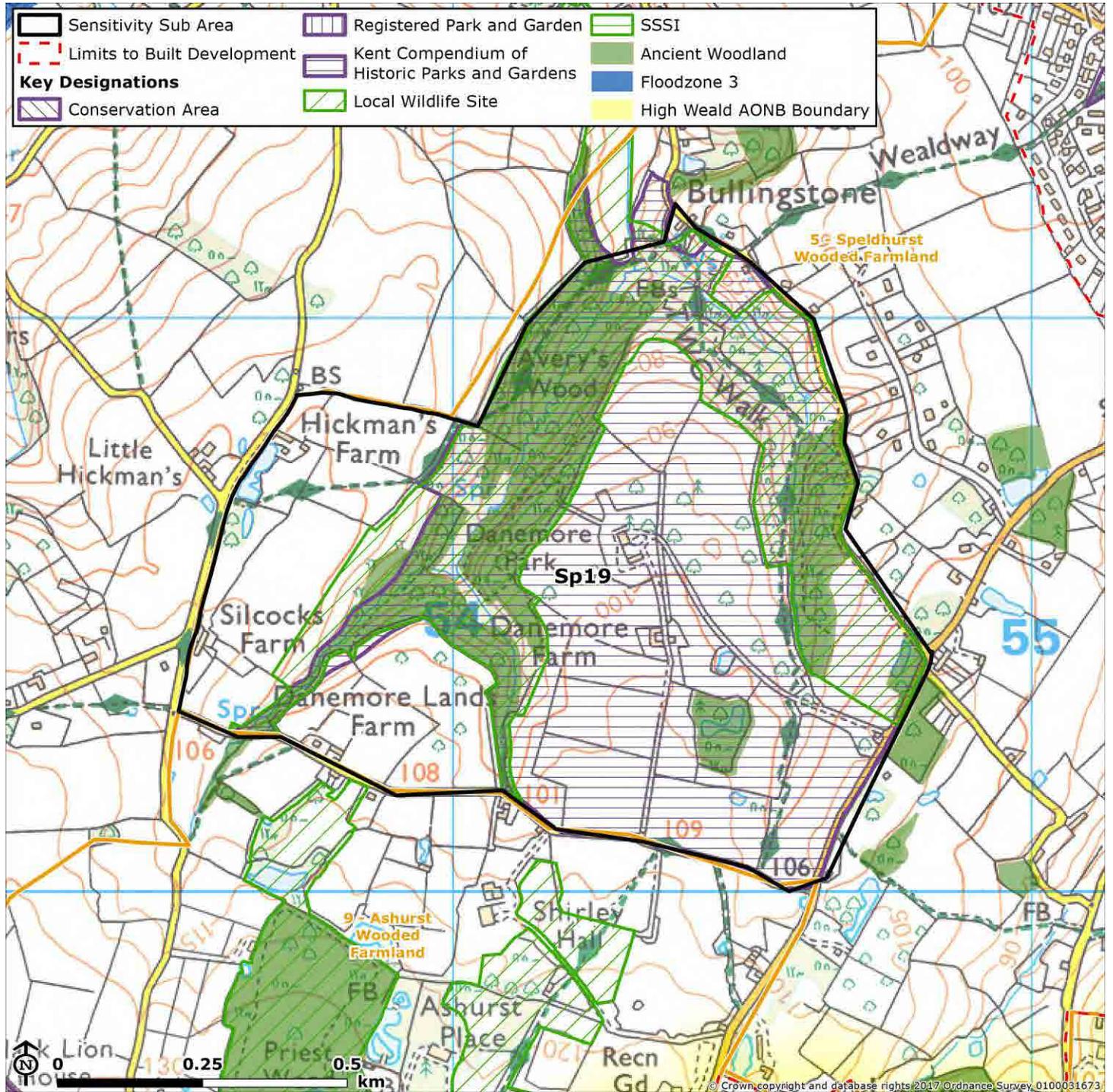
View across fields from the public footpath, looking north-east.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp18
Description		Area (Ha) - 57.2
Sub-area Sp18 consists of agricultural fields on the western part of the broad ridge on the western edge of Speldhurst. Development within the area consists of detached houses along Penshurst Road, Bullingstone Lane and the hamlet of Bullingstone, as well as the private gated residential development at Ewehurst Lane. Its boundaries are formed by the rural road network. The sub-area lies within the AONB.		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	Topography is gently sloping, with a flatter/ gently sloping area on the highest part of the ridge adjacent to the settlement edge of Speldhurst village. The landscape pattern is relatively large scale, with medium-large sized regular arable fields, and smaller scale within residential plots at Ewehurst Lane. There are relatively few landscape features of importance to character exceptions being the large pond and isolated blocks of ancient woodland.	
Settlement form and edge	Speldhurst is a nucleated ridge-top settlement historically centred around the junction of Langton Road/ Penshurst Road and Speldhurst Hill. More recently Speldhurst has expanded west. The settlement edge is comprised of low density residential development set in large gardens. With regards to topography, development within the area would not represent a step change in settlement form, however, the existing settlement edge is relatively well integrated by mature trees/ vegetation.	
Settlement setting	The rural and open landscape of the sub-area contributes to the rural setting and village character of Speldhurst and the setting and separation between Speldhurst and Bullingstone/ Ewehurst Lane. The Wealdway recreational route crosses through the area, providing important recreation value to the character of the area.	
Visual character	The broad ridge, although open, is visually well-contained by hedgerows and trees in mid-distant views, although there are occasional glimpses to distant wooded ridges.	
Perceptual qualities	There is a strong rural agricultural character to the area which has a sense of relative remoteness and tranquillity with relatively dark skies. Existing residential development at Ewehurst Lane is well-integrated and not readily perceptible in the wider landscape.	
Historic character	The field pattern is regular but likely to be early post-medieval formal or consolidated strip fields, indicating historic intactness. There is likely to be some historic significance to the relationship between the main field system and the small corner of medieval coppiced woodland. Ancient routeways around the perimeter of the sub-area and listed buildings in Bullingstone are important to the character of the area.	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>The key sensitivities of the sub-area are its role in the setting of the village of Speldhurst and the strong rural and tranquil character. Owing to the relatively flat and large scale topography, development adjacent to the existing settlement edge of Speldhurst would be associated with the settlement and would not represent a step-change in settlement form (however, it would be important to maintain the nucleated form and distinctive identity of Speldhurst). The sub-area is therefore considered to have a <i>medium</i> sensitivity to small scale development.</p>		

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

It would be important to maintain the nucleated form and distinctive identity of Speldhurst village e.g. by maintaining a separation between Speldhurst and Bullingstone and by limiting the overall quantity of development. Although development within the area would have an impact on the rural quality of the sub-area, owing to the relative visual containment, impacts on the wider character area are likely to be limited. Any development should be appropriate to the rural character of the area.



Representative views



Looking west across the sub-area from Speldhurst Road.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland	Sub-Area Sp19
--	----------------------

Description	Area (Ha) - 94.3
--------------------	-------------------------

Sub-area Sp19 consists of the Registered Park and Garden of Danemore Park and surrounding landscape, located south of the hamlet of Bullingstone and to the north-west of Langton Green although it does not adjoin the settlement edge. The area contains no development apart from isolated dispersed farmsteads and Danemore Park. The sub-area lies within the AONB.

Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description
Physical character	The sub-area comprises parts of four ridges radiating north from the broad plateau west of Langton Green, and intervening valleys which join and form the northern edge of the sub-area. The steep wooded ghyll valleys are typical of the Speldhurst character area and the AONB and contain large swathes of ancient woodland (part of Avery's Wood LWS). The parkland of Danemore is important to the character of the area.
Settlement form and edge	The sub-area is isolated from the settlement edge and is therefore sensitive in this regard.
Settlement setting	This area of ridges and wooded valleys forms part of the wider rural setting of Royal Tunbridge Wells. The Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk follows the valley around the edge of the sub-area.
Visual character	The broad ridge, although open, is visually well-contained by trees and woodland in mid-distant views, although there are occasional glimpses to and from distant ridges.
Perceptual qualities	There is a strong rural character to the area which has a sense of relative remoteness and tranquillity with relatively dark skies. The rural lanes surrounding the sub-area have a strong rural character.
Historic character	Much of the sub-area is listed on the Historic England Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. There are a few listed buildings including Danemore Park, some medieval assart fields and ancient woodlands indicating a high sensitivity.

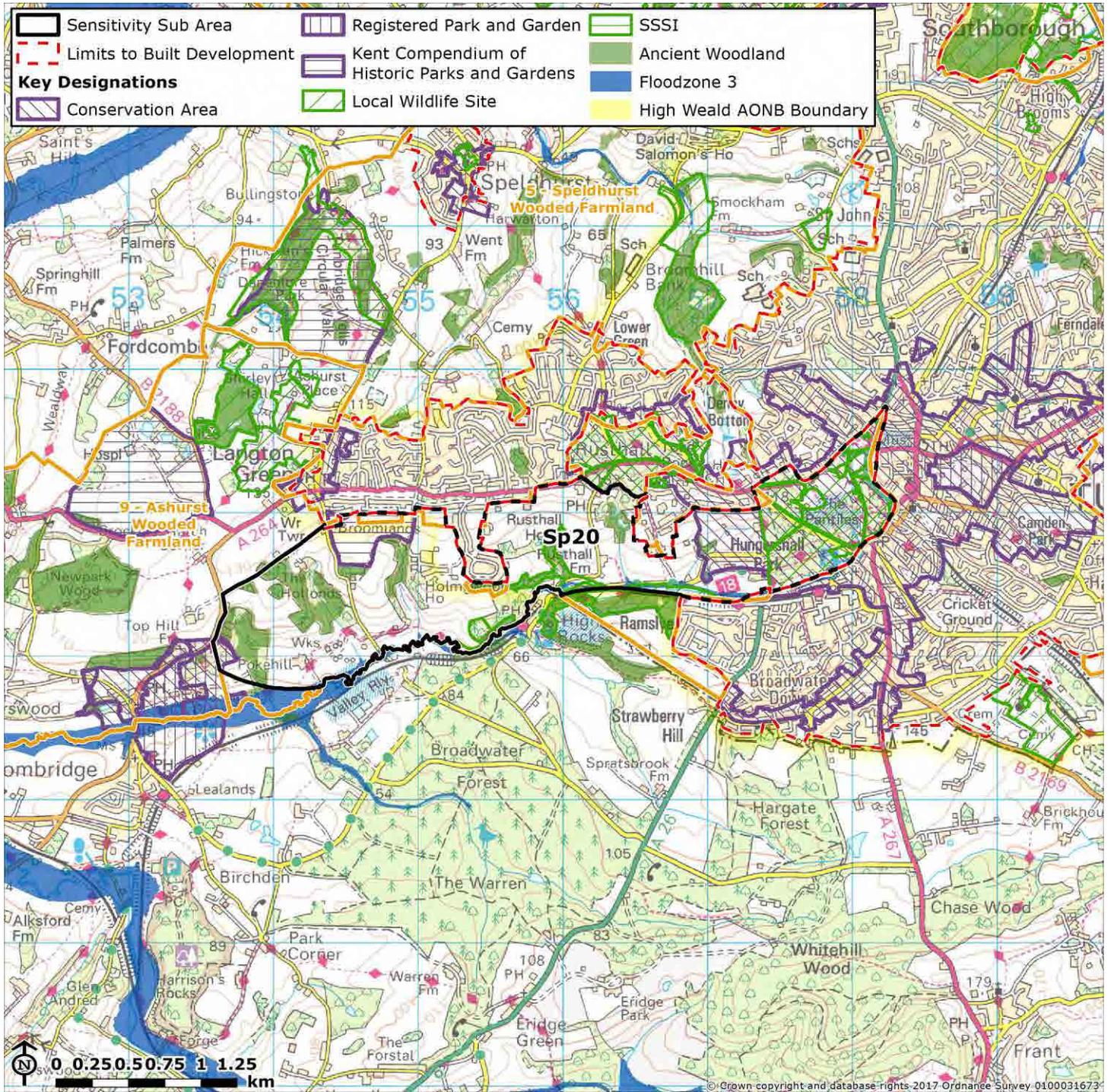
Sensitivity conclusions

The distinct ridges and valleys typical of the High Weald AONB, extensive ancient woodland and strong character of the parkland are all important to the character of the area. The recreational value of the TWC Walk and the rural character all indicate that this area is of *high* sensitivity to all scales of development.

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 Small	H	MH	M	ML	L
 Medium	H	MH	M	ML	L
 Large	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics.



Representative views



Looking north from Hungershall Park towards Nevill Park.

Character Area 5 - Speldhurst Wooded Farmland		Sub-Area Sp20
Description		Area (Ha) - 350.5
<p>This sub-area encompasses the northern side of the upper reaches of the Grom valley, extending out westwards from Tunbridge Wells Common and contained by the urban edges of Rusthall and Langton Green to the north. The boundary with Wealden District, which follows the River Grom, is taken as the southern boundary. There are several farmsteads in the sub-area, Holmewood House School (which incorporates a former farmstead), a few ridge-crest properties, a row of large houses at Hungershall Park and part of the Wyevale Garden Centre site off of Eridge Road.</p> <p>The High Weald AONB boundary runs through the central part of the sub-area, so land to the east of Holmewood House School and north of the woodland that forms the southern edge of the urban area on Hither Chantlers is excluded from the designated area.</p>		
Assessment criterion	Sensitivity description	
Physical character	A number of tributaries feed into the River Grom from the slopes beneath the western edge of Tunbridge Wells at Nevill Park, Rusthall and Langton Green, and the valleys around them form a complex landscape with frequent steep slopes. Woodland clothes many of the steeper slopes and well-treed hedgerows divide the area into typically small fields, creating a complex and small-scale landscape that is characteristic of the High Weald AONB and sensitive to built development.	
Settlement form and edge	Other than to the south-east, urban development has for the most part kept to high ground above the valley, adhering to upper slopes in the vicinity of the A264 Langton Road to create a generally linear settlement edge but with several exceptions where development has extended either out onto smaller spurs of high ground, such as at Hither Chantlers and Hungershall Park (the latter sufficiently isolated to have been excluded from the Limits to Built Development) or downslope (e.g. The Midway). This blurring of the settlement edge reduces sensitivity to an extent, but there is still generally a greater sensitivity associated with the lower slopes of the valley. To the south-east the valley-floor A26, the Spa Valley Railway and the upper reaches of the River Grom form a strong distinction between the sub-area and the urban area, with the partial exception of the area around the Wyevale Garden Centre, which is contained from the wider valley by Hungerford Park.	
Settlement setting	The valley is important as a setting for the adjacent settlements located on higher ground: the edges of Tunbridge Wells, Rusthall and Langton Green. At its eastern end it preserves separation between different areas of Tunbridge Wells, penetrating to the heart of the town, and at its western end it separates Langton Green from the valley floor village of Groombridge. Visual containment by valley-side woodlands preserves rural character on approaching Tunbridge Wells from Groombridge along the valley-floor on the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk and from the Spa Valley Railway, a popular local tourist attraction. Tunbridge Wells Common is particularly important as a recreational resource and visual setting close to the historic town centre.	
Visual character	Landform and land cover help to contain existing development in views from roads and public rights of way, but new development on the valley sides or floor would be harder to conceal. Where development is visible it typically appears isolated within a generally rural landscape. Prominent large houses positioned along the ridge crest to enjoy expansive views generally add to the character of the landscape, reflecting its scenic qualities.	
Perceptual qualities	The valley retains a rural character, despite its proximity to urban areas and the blurring of the settlement edges by development on spurs of higher ground, because of the extent of tree cover, the use of small fields for grazing, the complexity of the landform and the containment of the narrow, historic lanes that traverse it. No major roads intrude on the sub-area.	
Historic character	The valley's role in the setting of Tunbridge Wells is an important aspect of the historic character of the town. The large dwellings positioned to enjoy views across the valley reflect the development of the town as a resort. The eastern end of the sub-area, including Tunbridge Wells Common and houses at Nevill Park and Hungerford Park, together with the attractive valley across which they face each other, is all designated part of the town's conservation area. Most of the woodlands are ancient and there are a number of historic farmsteads and medieval assart fields. Broomlands, abutting the southern edge of Langton Green, features in the Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens. The lanes crossing the sub-area are historic routeways; Broom Lane in particular is a narrow, tree-lined lane cut deep into the valley side.	
Sensitivity conclusions		
<p>A combination of sensitivities gives this sub-area high landscape value. It is particularly important as a key part of the historic setting of Tunbridge Wells and the adjoining settlements of Rusthall and Langton Green. The intricate, small-scale landscape of the upper Grom valley contains distinctive characteristics typical of</p>		

the High Weald AONB. The ridge and shallower upper slopes of the valley, and the contained area to the south of Hungerford Park, are least sensitive to built development, but the only undeveloped high ground in the sub-area is at Broomlands, which features in the Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens and has valued open views across the valley. Sensitivity to all scales of development is *high*, other than in the area to the south of Hungerford Park where sensitivity to limited small or medium-scale development which could be relatively contained in the wider landscape would be *medium-high*.

Development scenario	Sensitivity assessment				
 <p>Small</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Medium</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L
 <p>Large</p>	H	MH	M	ML	L

Guidance on potential mitigation/enhancement measures

There is little scope for mitigation as any strategic development is considered likely to result in change that significantly detracts from valued landscape characteristics.