

Tunbridge Wells - Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of Proposed Allocation Sites within the High Weald AONB



6.5: Southborough

Revision B

6.5 Southborough

Southborough sites considered:

SO 3 - Land at Mabledon and Nightingale; and

SO 4 - Land at Mabledon House;

See Figure S1 for site locations. The High Weald AONB is shown as a green wash.

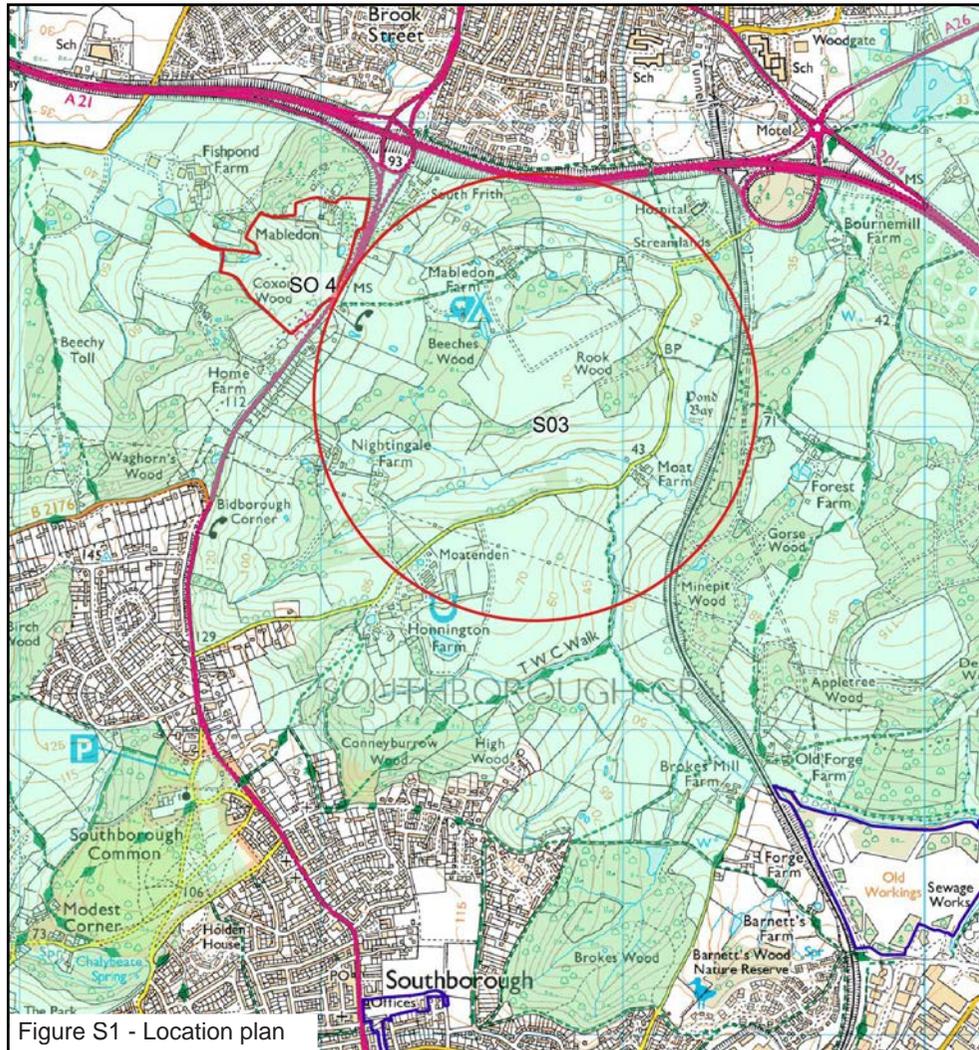


Figure S1 - Location plan

6.5.1 Settlement Context

6.5.1.1 Both draft allocation sites are located within Southborough parish, between Southborough (to the south) and Tonbridge (to the north). Tonbridge, which is located within Tonbridge and Malling District, is contained to the south by the A21 dual carriageway. Southborough lies to the immediate north of Royal Tunbridge Wells and approximately 2km south of Tonbridge. Southborough is also linked to Bidborough (located to the west) via Bidborough Corner, which is located to the north of Southborough and approximately 1.27km to the south of Tonbridge. Southborough and Tonbridge are connected via the A26 London Road. Site SO 4 lies to the west of this road and site SO 3 lies to the east. A railway line runs north-south between Royal Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge, which contains site SO 3 to the east. SO 4 is bisected by the Borough boundary which also runs close to Mabledon Farm in S03 with some land surrounding the farm also falling outside the Borough boundary.

6.5.1.2 The majority of settlement within Southborough is located on a broad ridge, with the A26 following the line of the ridge top. The settlement pattern is constrained by the steep-sided slopes to either side of the ridge. The A21 cuts through the landscape to the north of the parish and is associated with a modified topography of roadside embankments. The southern edge of Tonbridge is located on sloping ground to the north of the dual carriageway. The land between the two settlements consists of an undulating landscape with broad ridges incised by narrow, steep sided valleys. Streams, ponds and small waterbodies are common features within the landscape.

6.5.1.3 Southborough contains two nucleated areas of settlement separated by Southborough Common, a large area of open space, which connects the town centre to the wider rural landscape to the west. The settlement spreads out to the south-east, connecting to Royal Tunbridge Wells, and also to the north-west, connecting to Bidborough. Ribbon development extends north along the A26, between Bidborough corner and Tonbridge. Tonbridge is a nucleated settlement, with the bulk of the residential development contained between the railway (which runs west-east through the town centre) and the A21.

6.5.1.4 Both Southborough and Tonbridge have been excluded from the AONB designation (see figure S1 opposite). The intervening land between the two settlements lie within both the AONB and Green Belt. The majority of the woodland within the study area is designated Ancient Woodland (see figure S2). Both Beeches Wood and Rook Wood are also Local Wildlife Sites.

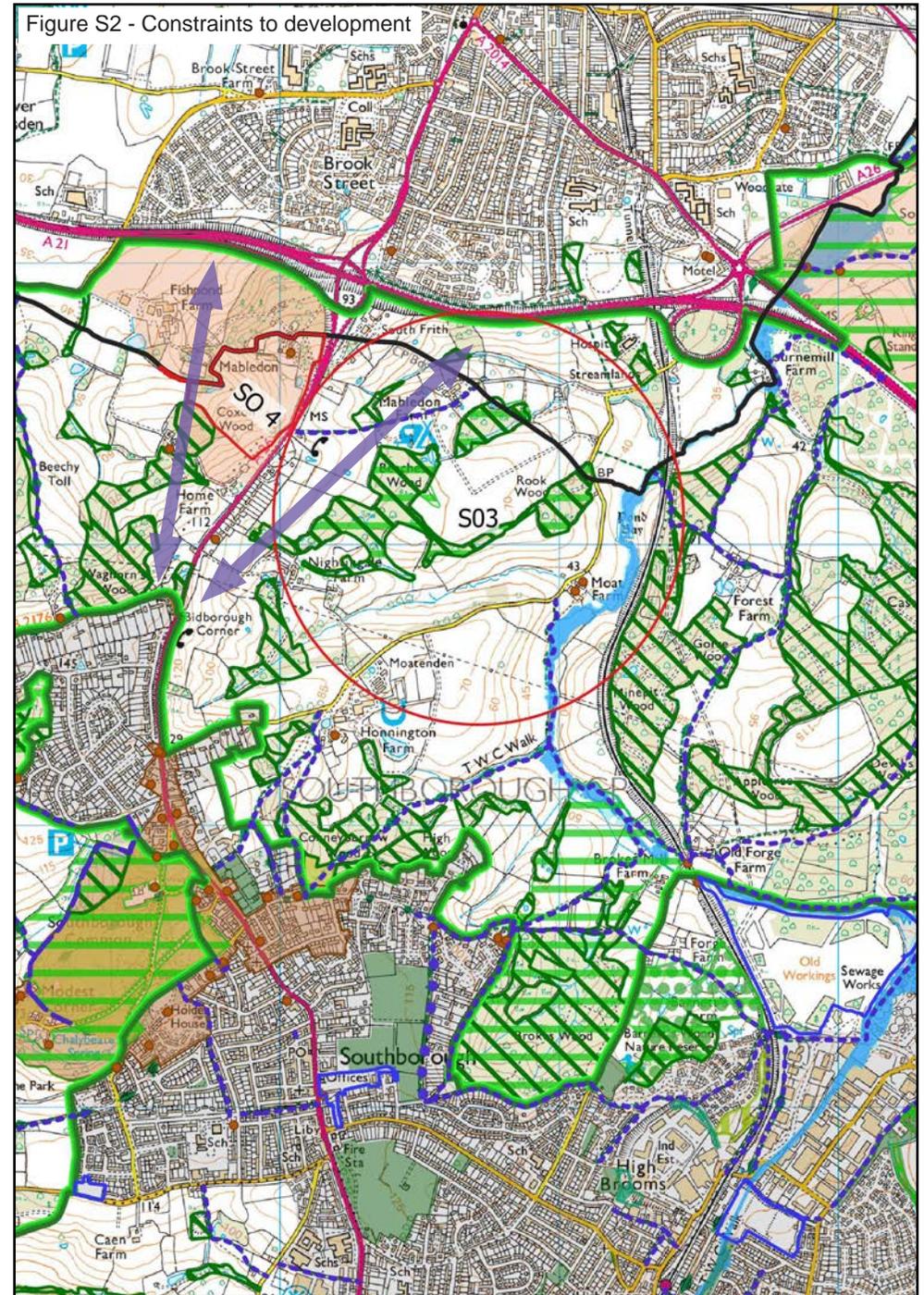
6.5.1.5 The local area has a rich heritage, with Conservation Areas at Southborough and Bidborough. Southborough Common lies within a Conservation Area and is also a Local Wildlife Site. The land around Mabledon House is a Registered Park and Garden and the house itself is listed. There are numerous listed buildings associated

with the historic core of local settlement and scattered within the wider landscape, representing historic farmsteads.

6.5.1.6 One of the key considerations for development within this study is the separation between settlement, particularly the strategic separation between Southborough and Tonbridge. Other constraints to development within this area include small areas of floodplain and the amenity of local rights of way.

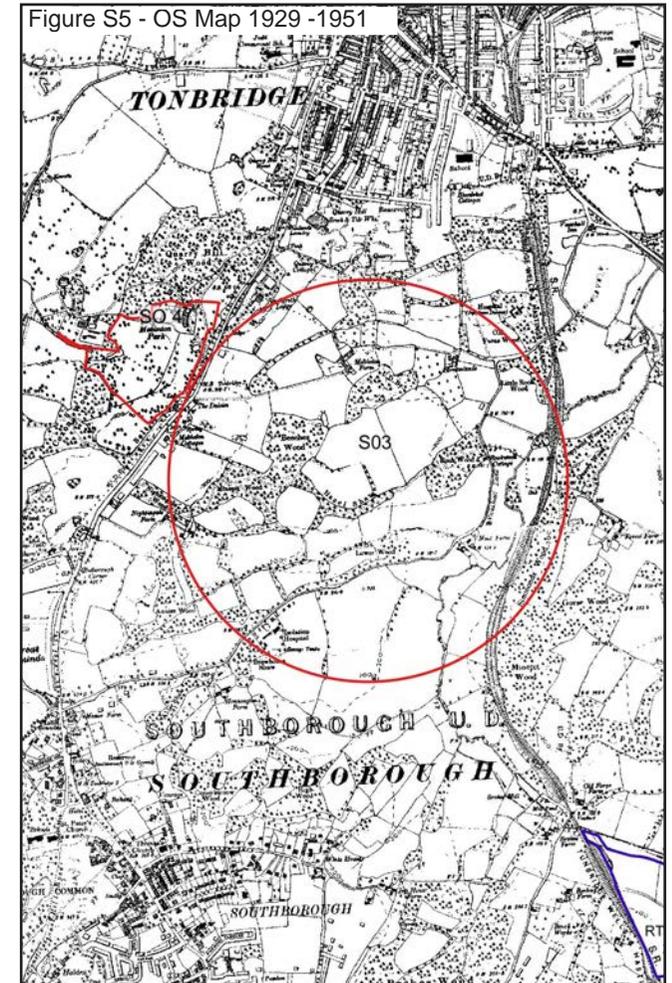
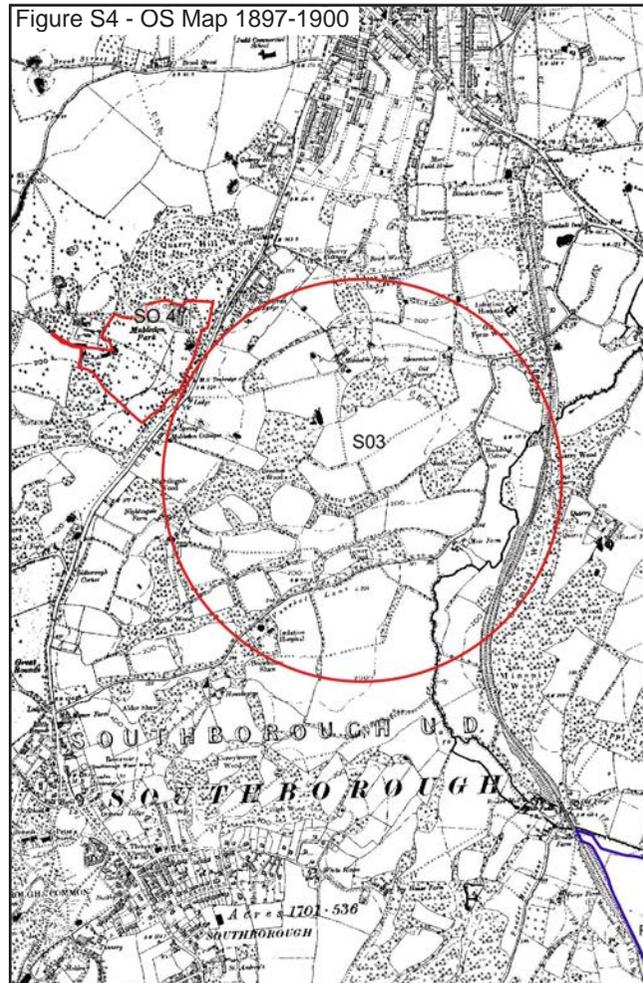
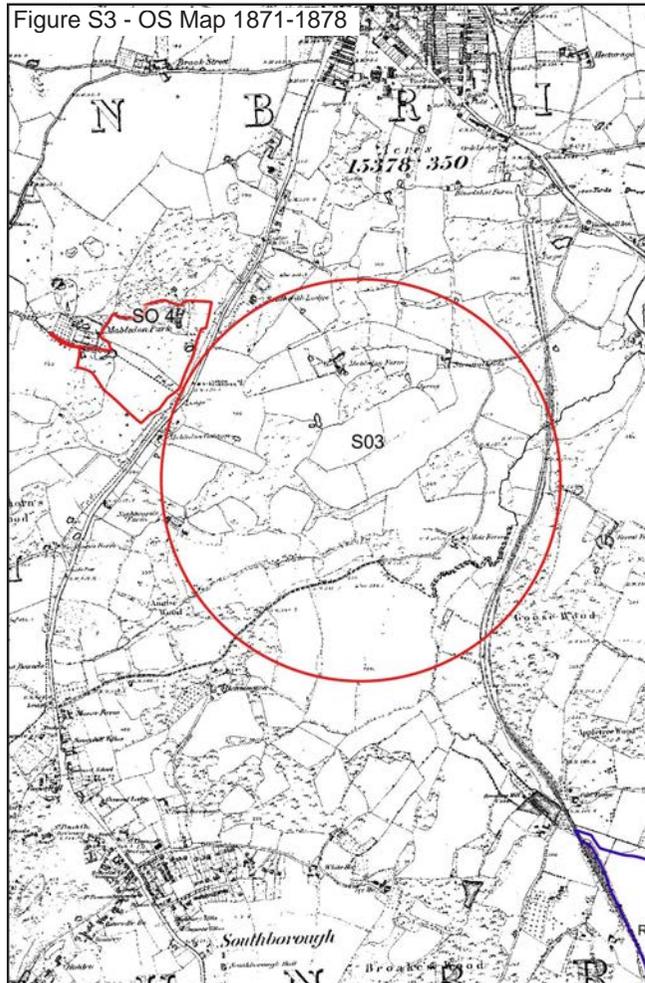
KEY

- Study Sites
- Other draft allocation
- Borough boundary
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Ashdown Forest 7km Buffer (EN13)
- SSSI
- Ancient woodlands
- Local Wildlife Site
- Sites of Nature Conservation Value
- Local Nature Reserve
- Candidate Local Nature Reserve
- Conservation areas (EN7)
- Grade I Listed Building
- Grade II* Listed Building
- Grade II Listed Building
- Scheduled monuments
- Registered Historic Parks and Gardens
- Byway Open to All Traffic
- Public Bridleway
- Public Footpath
- Restricted Byway
- Country parks
- Open Access Land
- Local greenspace (EN17)
- Flood zone 3b
- Flood zone 3a
- Flood zone 2
- Safeguarded railways
- Arcadian areas (EN19)
- Existing limits to built development (STR1)
- Strategic settlement separation



6.5.2 Settlement Evolution

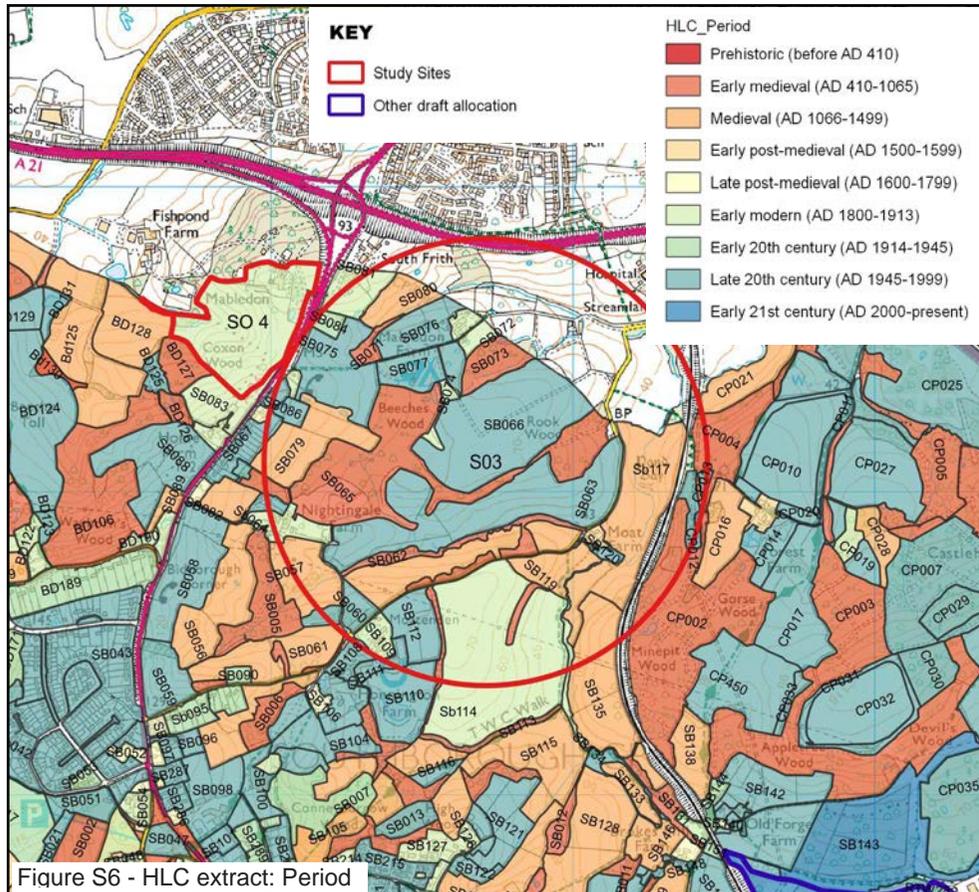
6.5.2.1 The origins of Southborough are linked to Southborough Manor and its associated estate. Figures S3 - S5 illustrate the consistency of land use within the draft allocation sites over the last 100 years. Site SO 3 remains part of a rural landscape, which has seen little change aside from some field amalgamation. Site SO 4 is associated with Mabledon Park and the most significant change to this landscape has been the construction of the A21 dual carriageway, together with the associated slip roads, to the north of the site.



6.5.3 Historic Landscape Character

6.5.3.1 The Kent Historic Landscape Characterisation was updated for Tunbridge Wells Borough in 2017. Extracts from the study, within Tunbridge Wells borough and relevant to the Southborough sites, are shown on the table opposite. Cells have been merged where data matches.

6.5.3.2 This data has been used to gauge the historic context of the landscape within the study area, which has then been tested through field work in order to analyse which elements are reflected in the current landscape setting.



Site	HLC ID	Type	Period	Additional information	
SO3	SB056	Aggregate assart fields	Medieval	Large irregular assarts with wavy or mixed boundaries	
	SB057	Aggregate assart fields	Medieval	Regular assarts with straight boundaries	
	SB058	Modern field amalgamation	Late 20th century	Large irregular assarts with wavy or mixed boundaries	
	SB059				
	SB060	Wood pasture	Late 20th century	Regular assarts with straight boundaries	
	SB061	Cohesive assart fields	Medieval		
	SB062	Shaws	Early medieval		
	SB063	Modern field amalgamation	Late 20th century		
		Sb064	Large farmstead	Early modern	
		SB065	Gill	Early medieval	Pre-1801 assart woodland
	SB066	Modern field amalgamation	Late 20th century	Regular assarts with straight boundaries	
	SB067	Ribbon settlement	Late 20th century	Post-1801-settlement (general)	
SO3	SB070	Small farmstead	Late post-medieval	Post-1801-settlement (general)	
	SB071	Gill	Early medieval	Regular assarts with straight boundaries	
	SB072	Large farmstead	Early modern		
	SB073	Coppices	Early medieval	Pre-1801 scarp and steep valley woodland	
	SB074	Shaws	Early modern	Regular assarts with straight boundaries	
	SB075	Modern field amalgamation	Late 20th century	Regular assarts with straight boundaries	
	SB076				
	SB077	Caravan and camping			
	SB078	Ribbon settlement	Late 20th century	Post-1801-settlement (general)	
	SB079	Cohesive assart fields	Medieval	Regular assarts with straight boundaries	
	SB080				
	SB081	Large landscaped gardens	Early modern	Regular assarts with straight boundaries	
	SB082	Infill	Late 20th century		
	SB084	Small farmstead	Early 20th century		
	SB085	Ribbon settlement	Early modern	Post-1801-settlement (general)	
	SB086	Small farmstead	Late 20th century		
	SB090	Small farmstead	Early 20th century	Regular assarts with straight boundaries	
SB117	Irregular informal fields	Medieval			
SO4	SB083	Parkland	Early modern	Post-1801 parkland	

6.5.4 Landscape Character Analysis

6.5.4.1 Both Southborough study sites are located within the 'Wooded Farmland' Character Type, to the north and west of Royal Tunbridge Wells, which is described as: *'Extremely varied and complex landscape. Distinct, high ridges with weathered sandstone outcrops intersected by ravine woodland, beech and holly hedges and sunken lanes. These contrast with unimproved pasture and common land. Other characteristics include rolling upland areas, incised by valleys, with small settlements and pastures hidden within a framework of deciduous, ghyll and shaw woodlands.'*

6.5.4.2 The landscape character type has been broken down into Landscape Character Areas and the sites lie within Character Area 'Speldhurst Wooded Farmland'. Key characteristics of the Character Area include:

- 1) *'Complex topography with open, smooth ridges of sandstone radiating out from Royal Tunbridge Wells, cut by deep tributary valleys.'*
- 2) *Conspicuous outcrops and crags of sandstone which have been weathered into unusual, distinctive forms.*
- 3) *Hedgerows dominated by holly and beech with areas of gorse common in boundaries and verges.*
- 4) *Varying field sizes from large-scale open pasture and arable on the ridge tops to small, irregular fields within the valleys.*
- 5) *Small villages on the ridge tops, with church spires and towers at Bidborough, Southborough, Speldhurst and Rusthall, are prominent skyline features.*
- 6) *Ornamental designed parklands and country estates on the ridge tops.*
- 7) *Extensive, panoramic views available out across surrounding countryside and open hill tops.*
- 8) *Long, narrow ghyll woodlands, hidden within deep clefts of the valleys, support a particularly rich, lush vegetation cover.*
- 9) *Commons, permeating the built up areas of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough, retain remnants of their former heathland character.*
- 10) *Networks of narrow lanes following ancient routeways, descend and climb the valleys and ridges. Dark tunnels of holly and steep banks of sandstone are distinctive features.*
- 11) *Broad swathes of permanent and semi-improved pasture on the hill slopes represent an internationally important reserve of acidic and neutral grassland.*
- 12) *Haysden surrounded by open, pasture valley.*
- 13) *A relative rural character despite its proximity to Royal Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge. Well served by recreational routes allowing good access to nature.'*

6.5.4.3 'Valued features and qualities' that are unique to the character area, relevant to the study sites and sit outside of the special qualities noted within the AONB Management Plan include:

- 7) *The role of the landscape, particularly the Commons, in providing a setting to*

the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells... .. The area around Haysden also provides an important strategic gap between Royal Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge. Despite its proximity to the towns, this area retains a pleasant, rural, farmed character.

10) Ornamental parklands and gardens, which provide a sense of history and attractive landscapes.'

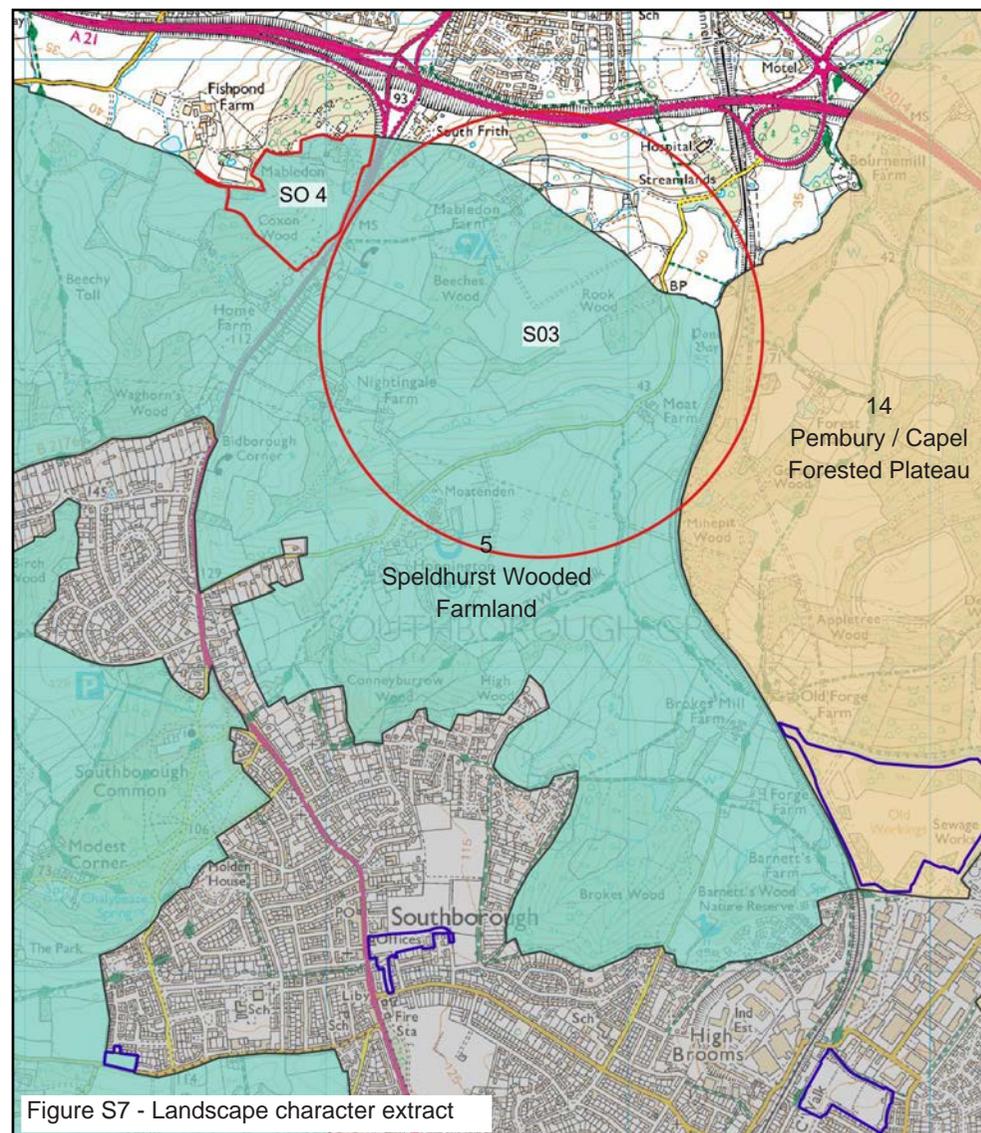


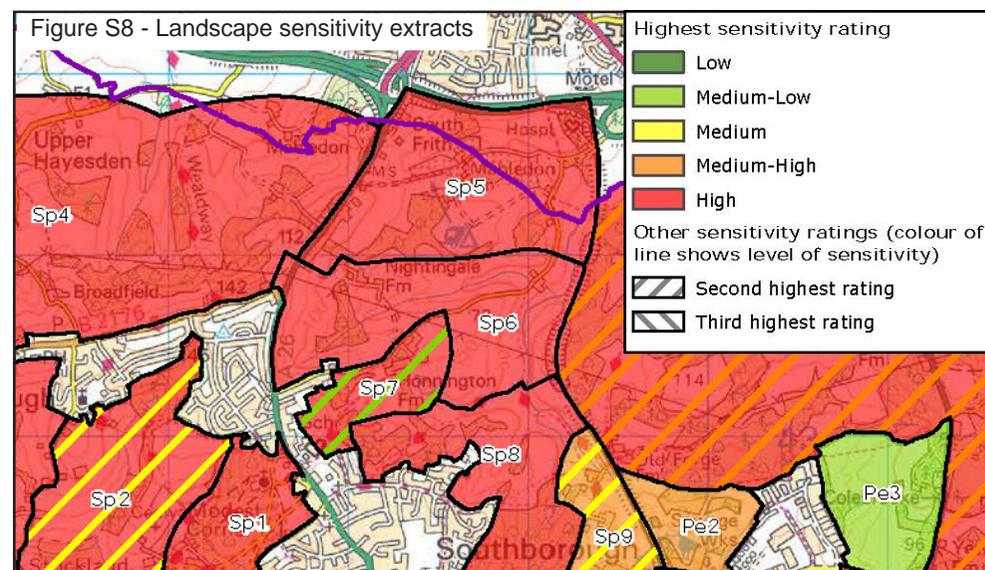
Figure S7 - Landscape character extract

6.5.5 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

6.5.5.1 In February 2017 the council published the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Countryside around Tunbridge Wells, produced by LUC. Study Site SO 3 straddles two Sensitivity Sub-Areas: Sp5 and Sp6 (see figure S8 opposite). Study Site SO 4 lies within Sensitivity Sub-Areas Sp4.

6.5.5.2 The table below provides extracts from the assessment, which have been collated into table format for ease of reference.

6.5.5.3 The Southborough study sites are both located within areas that have been assessed as having high landscape sensitivity.



Study Site (s)	Sensitivity Sub-Area	Sensitivity rating	Sensitivity text - conclusions
SO 3	Sp5 (northern part of the site)	High / Medium high (limited small development)	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 high 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 medium-high.
	Sp6 (southern part of the site)	High / Medium High (All development)	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.
SO 4	Sp4	High (All development)	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 high sensitivity to any scale of development.

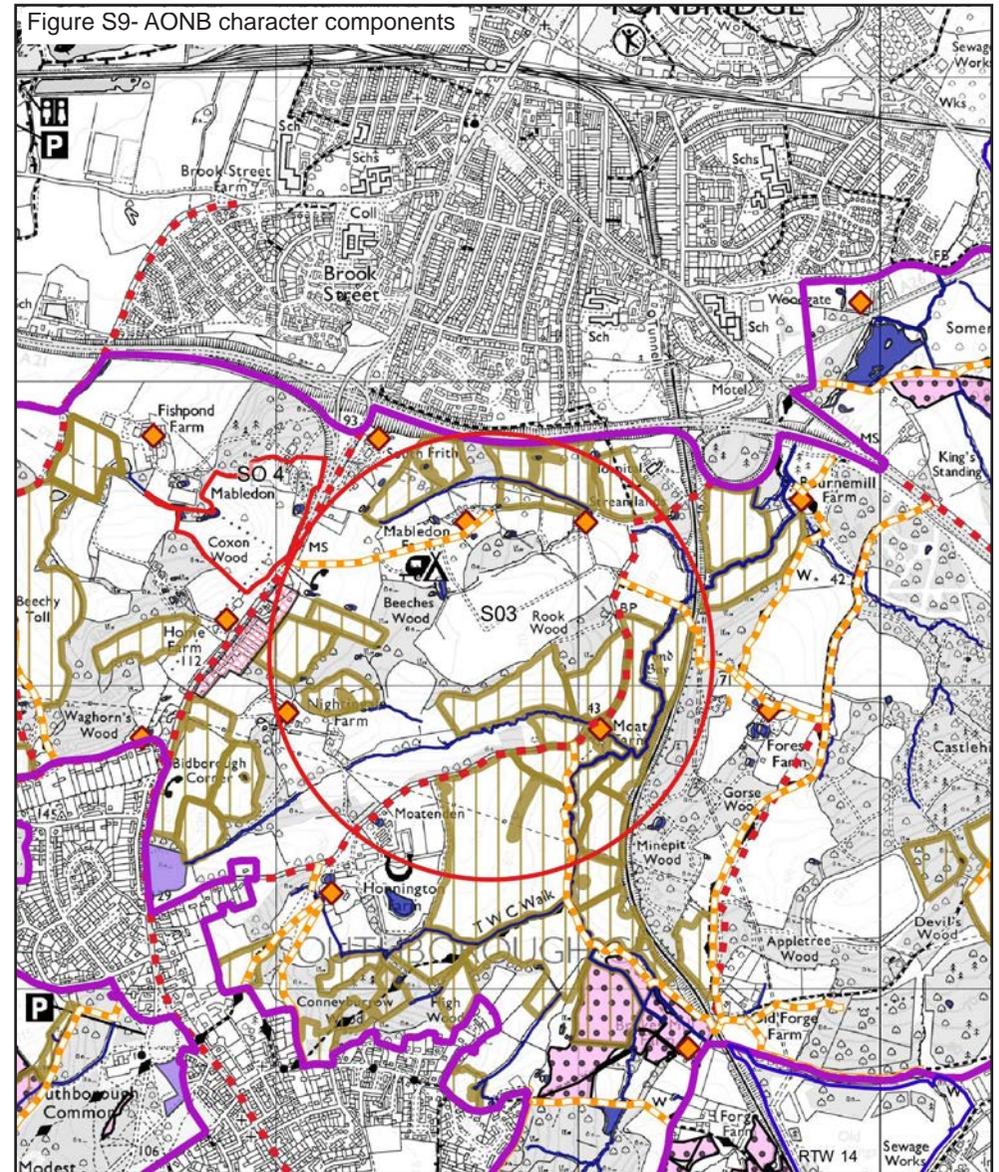
6.5.6 AONB Landscape Character Analysis

6.5.6.1 The High Weald AONB Management Plan contains a 'Statement of Significance' which defines the qualities that make the High Weald special at a national level. This statement sets out 5 key 'character components' that contribute to the unique natural beauty of the area and make the High Weald distinctive. For each of these components the High Weald Management Plan lists out key characteristics, issues and objectives. This information has been used within this report to analyse the potential effects of development on the High Weald AONB.

6.5.6.2 The five defining components of character defined for the High Weald include:

1. Geology, landform and water systems – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with numerous gill streams.
2. Settlement – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads and late Medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
3. Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).
4. Woodland – abundance of Ancient Woodland, highly interconnected and in smallholdings.
5. Field and Heath – small, irregular and productive fields, bounded by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths, and inned river valleys.

6.5.6.3 The characteristic components for this study area have been mapped within figure S9. The Ancient woodland has not been included as this information is has been identified on figure S2 and discussed within section 6.5.1.



KEY

- Study sites
- Other draft allocation
- High Weald AONB boundary

Geology, landform, water systems & climate

- Water - ponds, reservoir, etc (G1)
- Watercourses (G1)
- Sandstone outcrops (G2)

Settlement

- Historic farmsteads (S2)
- Historic settlement extent c. 1860 (S2)

Historic routeways

- PROW (R1)
- Roads (R1)

Field and heath

- Historic field boundary
- Heathland
- Known wildflower meadows

Site : SO 3 - Land at Mabledon and Nightingale;

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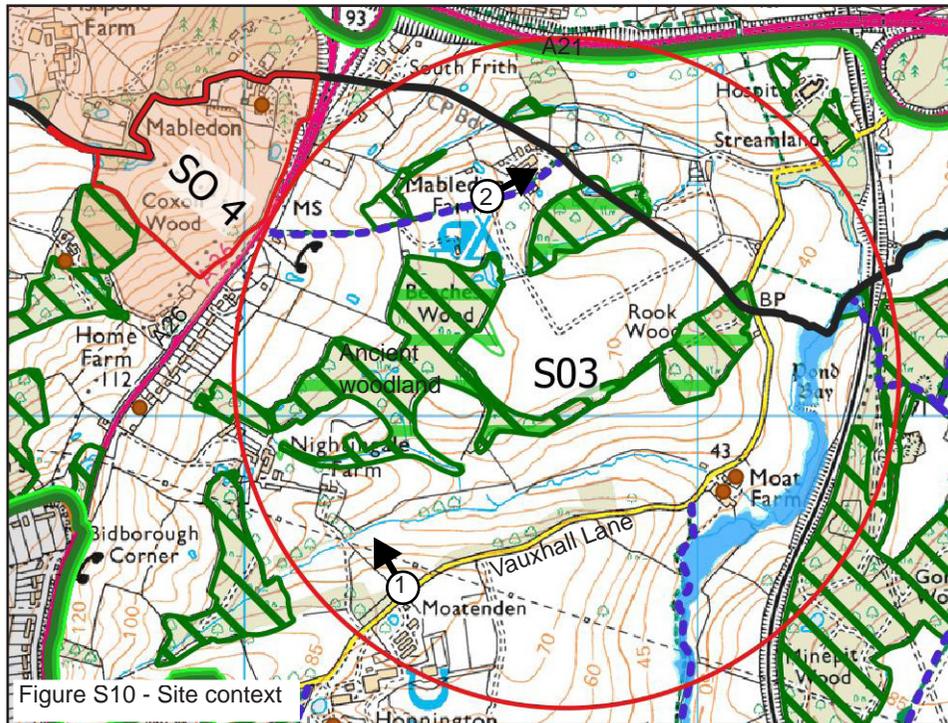
Site location and context:

This draft allocation covers two farmsteads and the surrounding land with the development area not predetermined but to be focused on the farmstead and linked to wider landscape management and improvements. The baseline section of the site analysis looks at the whole area, to discern whether there are any differences in sensitivity across an area of search. The area of search is concentrated on two farmsteads: Mabledon Farm and Nightingale Farm. The land within the area of search is located to the south of the A21, east of the A26, west of the railway line and north of Vauxhall Lane. The wider area straddles the Borough boundary that runs close to the farmstead at Mabledon Farm.

The area consists of a rural agricultural landscape interspersed with copses of woodland. The area includes two streams and numerous small ponds / waterbodies. The only settlement is the two farmsteads, with associated outbuildings and isolated cottages. There is a community hospital to the north-east and a former isolation hospital (Moatenden) to the south.

Designations and development considerations:

The area lies within the AONB and Green Belt. The majority of the woodland is designated Ancient Woodland and both Beeches Wood and Rook Wood are Local Wildlife Sites. Listed Buildings lie at the edges of the area of search and include Moat Farm. A public right of way runs along the access to Mabledon Farm, but terminates at the farm buildings. One of the key development considerations for the study area is maintaining the strategic separation between Southborough and Tonbridge. Development within the study area could affect the valued elements recorded within the Tunbridge Wells Landscape Character Assessment.

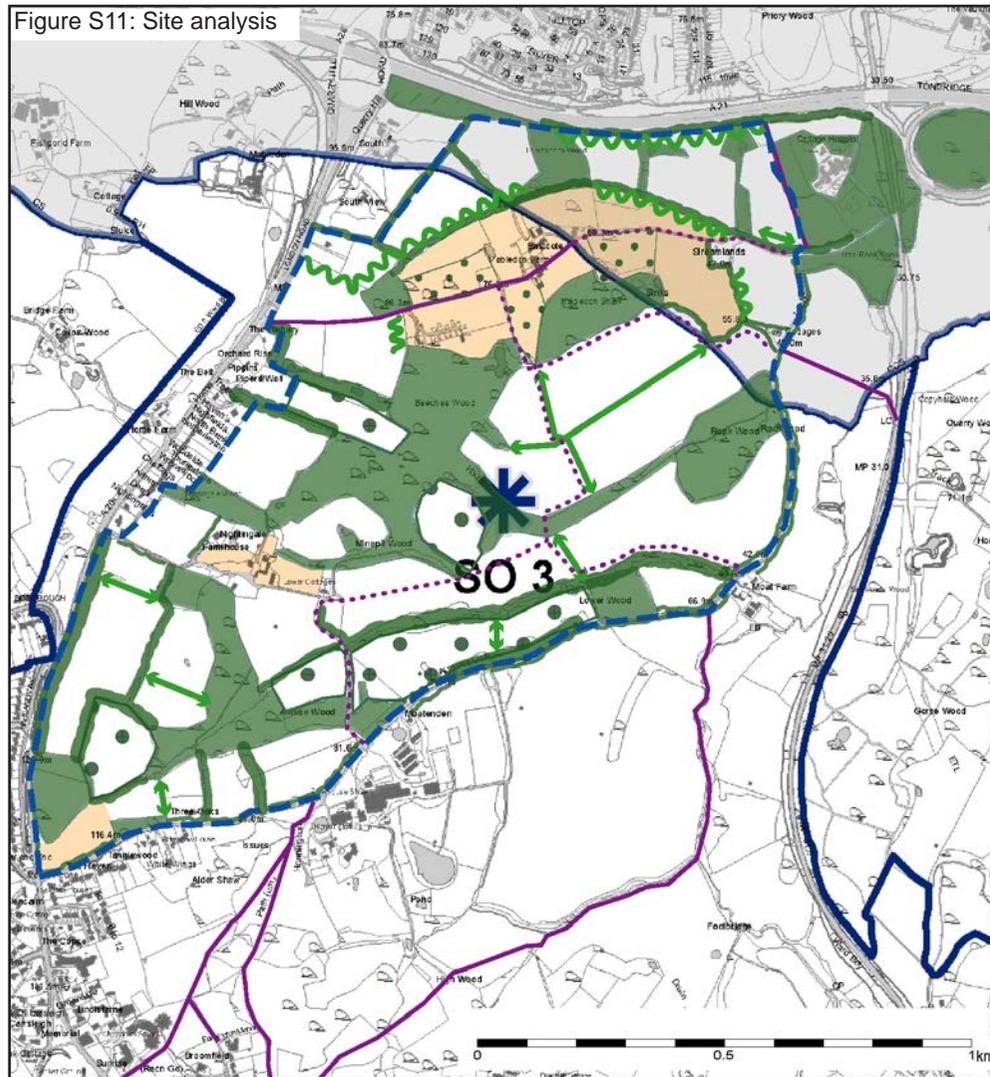


Photograph 1: View north-west from Vauxhall Lane towards Nightingale Farm.



Photograph 2: Looking east at the Mabledon Farm complex.

<p>Landscape baseline and key features</p>	<p>Visual baseline and key viewpoints</p>	<p>Perceptual and experiential qualities</p>	<p>Representativeness of AONB Qualities (with reference to the relevant character components and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan)</p>
<p>The area of search is typical of the 'Speldhurst Wooded Farmland'. It has a complex topography with a mosaic of land uses including arable farmland, pasture, woodland and orchards. The area provides strategic separation between Southborough and Tonbridge. The area generally has an intrinsic landscape value and contribution to the character and scenic beauty AONB.</p> <p>Settlement is limited within the area and is represented by scattered farmsteads and cottages.</p> <p>There is an area of land around Mabledon Farm which is more contained from the wider landscape, has features in decline and contains large, modern barns, which do not site well within the landscape. Parts of this area have a lower susceptibility to small scale development and there is the opportunity for enhancement within this area.</p> <p>Two smaller areas near Nightingale Farm have also been identified as having potential for enhancement and / or a lower susceptibility to small scale development.</p> <p>The only recreational provision within the study area is the public right of way that runs from the A26 to Mabledon Farm, where it terminates. There is potential for enhancement to the footpath network.</p> <p>Key landscape features within the site (ordered from higher to lower sensitivity) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient Woodland (including those designated as Local Wildlife sites); • Other broadleaved woodland; • Intact native hedgerows; • Orchards - condition varies; • Streams and waterbodies; and • Historic field systems. 	<p>While parts of the private land within the area have long -ranging views, public viewpoint locations with open views across the site are limited. There are parts of the area of search that are well contained from external view.</p> <p>There are open views of the northern part of the site from the public footpath leading to Mabledon Farm. Views from the western section of the path are long-ranging and attractive, whereas to the east, the path is enclosed by hedgerows, which restrict outward visibility.</p> <p>There are occasional open views across the area from gaps in the tree belts lining the A46. These views are likely to be appreciated more by pedestrians using the pavement than by motorists, as the gaps are limited in extent and the views for motorists would be transient in nature.</p> <p>Vauxhall Lane is located to the south and east of the area and is generally contained by hedgerows and tree belts. Gaps within the roadside vegetation affords open views of parts of the area of search. The lane is a narrow single track, with few stopping points, so views are likely to be transient in nature. Where views are possible, they are panoramic and long -ranging.</p> <p>There are likely to be private views of parts of the study area from properties within and adjacent to the study area. There is a visual relationship between the area of search and some of the properties lining the A26</p> <p>Visual receptors (public views) to be considered (ordered from higher to lower sensitivity) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walkers on the public footpaths; • Pedestrians on local roads including Vauxhall Lane and the A26; and • Motorists on local roads including Vauxhall Lane and the A26. 	<p>The area of search is generally highly attractive and rural in character, despite it's close proximity to settlement and major roads. The noise from the A21 is audible form the northern extents of the area.</p> <p>The changes in topography and land cover create a complexity to the landscape that has a high scenic quality and is representative of the High Weald.</p> <p>There are long views across the landscape from high points in the ridge tops, which are contrasted by the containment of the steep valleys and woodland.</p> <p>The land around Mabledon Farm is more enclosed, with views restricted by hedgerows and woodland.</p> <p>The majority of landscape features are in good condition, however there is a noticeable change in condition of landscape features within the vicinity of Mabledon Farm. Some of the orchards are overgrown with bramble, fences are in a state of disrepair and some of the trees are in poor condition. The large, modern barn and associated area of parking to the east of the farm is at odds with the rural landscape and local vernacular.</p> <p>There are no known associations with people, places, events, art or literature.</p>	<p>Geology, landform, water systems and climate: The area of search contains sandstone ridges and water features, which contribute to the High Weald landscape.</p> <p>Settlement: The area of search contains limited settlement, with built form comprising scattered farmsteads and houses. Residents within the area have a strong connection the countryside, however there are limited opportunities for the wider population of Southborough to access the area.</p> <p>Routeways: Both Vauxhall Lane and the footpath to Mabledon Farm are mapped as historic routeways. There are opportunities to enhance the ecological function of both routeways.</p> <p>Woodland: The area contains tracts of woodland, including Ancient Woodland. The area does not currently contribute to woodland accessibility. There are opportunities for improved management and productivity of the woodland resource.</p> <p>Field and Heath: The majority of the land is agriculturally productive and has tangible links to historic field patterns. There are opportunities to reinstate historic boundaries in the few locations where these have been lost.</p> <p>Other qualities: The noise of the A21 adversely affects tranquillity within the northern part of the site, however other areas of the site feel relatively remote and peaceful. There are opportunities within the area to promote land based activities and more positive land management.</p> <p>Summary: The area represents a high quality landscape with complex topography and characteristic features. Some areas within the site are in decline and would benefit from improved management. There are numerous opportunities for enhancement in terms of recreation, biodiversity and landscape condition.</p>



KEY

Area of search	Area of decline
Existing GI retained	Proposed woodland / parkland
Existing woodland retained	Potential landscape buffer
Existing orchard retained	Potential landscape feature / connection
Existing footpath	Potential footpath connection

Description of proposed development:

A mixed use scheme including land based economic development and approximately 50-120 homes.

Proposed mitigation measures:

Mitigation relating to reg 18 Allocation policy AL/SO 3.	Additional mitigation measures proposed within this study
An overarching masterplan for the site, including live-work units and 'a scheme of landscape restoration and management for green space and the wider agricultural holding' (Policy).	Broaden the concept of an overarching masterplan into a whole estate plan for Mableton, with landscape scale enhancements;
Provision of pedestrian and cycle links to the wider public right of way network (Policy).	Retention and protection of key landscape features within the site, including woodland, waterbodies and traditional orchards;
Justification for quantum of development if in excess of 50 dwellings (Policy).	A reduction of the number of proposed houses within the allocation;
Provision of buildings for land-based economy (Policy).	
Provision of community facilities, including buildings, allotments, orchards, and recreation (Policy).	
Requirement for high quality and sustainable forms of housing development (Policy).	

Landscape and recreational opportunities:

There are numerous opportunities within the area of search to improve recreational facilities and enhance landscape character.

Potential opportunities include:

- New footpath and cycle links along with access for informal recreation;
- Improved management and use of existing landscape features e.g. woodland and orchards;
- Improvements to biodiversity, including improved habitat connectivity and the creation of new complementary habitats; and
- Diversification of land use as part of an invigorated land-based economy.

<p>Potential Landscape effects (Assuming no mitigation)</p>	<p>Potential effects on Visibility (Assuming no mitigation)</p>	<p>Assessment of effects against the landscape character components of the High Weald AONB Management Plan (assuming no mitigation)</p>	<p>Potential to avoid or reduce adverse effects (draft policy AL/SO 3, the site analysis plan for the site and the text on mitigation measures opposite, set out the proposed mitigation for the site)</p>
<p>The quantum of development proposed within the draft allocation is likely to give rise to adverse effects on landscape character. The associated infrastructure likely to be required for this scale of development is also likely to have adverse effects on the character and appearance of the AONB.</p> <p>The scale and nature of these effects is not possible to predict without a proposed location for the development or any details of what the development is likely to entail.</p> <p>A traditional housing development in the wrong location within the site would lead to significant adverse effects on the landscape of the AONB.</p> <p>More sensitively located, farm scale clusters of development - or innovative and new ways of living (for example unique dwellings located in newly planted woodland) are likely to have lower effects.</p> <p>With the level of detail provided at this stage it is not possible to make assumptions on the potential effects on individual features within the area of search.</p> <p>It is likely that a concentrated area of new settlement would adversely affect the strategic gap between Southborough and Tunbridge.</p>	<p>The scale and nature of potential visual effects is not possible to predict without a proposed location(s) for development or any details of what the development is likely to entail.</p> <p>Predicted visual effects would be higher if they introduce uncharacteristic or atypical elements to parts of the site that are visible from public viewpoints. This includes the footpath within the site, Vauxhall Road and the A26.</p> <p>Visual effects would be lower if the proposals were contained within the landscape, were designed to fit the local vernacular and settlement pattern and if they replaced other unsightly buildings, for example the new barn at Mabledon Farm, that currently have a low contribution to the character or appearance of the AONB.</p>	<p>Geology, landform, water systems and climate: It would be possible to provide the allocated development without adverse effects on this character component. Development in the wrong location could adversely affect this character component.</p> <p>Settlement: It is likely that the quantum of development set out within the allocation would adversely affect the settlement pattern within the area of search.</p> <p>Routeways: Development adjacent to the routeways within or adjacent to the site, could cause adverse effects on the routeways.</p> <p>Woodland: It would be possible to provide the allocated development without adverse effects on this character component, however Development in the wrong location could have adverse effects.</p> <p>Field and Heath: The development is likely to involve the loss of agricultural land. The scale of these effects is unknown without more detailed proposals.</p> <p>Other qualities: The proposed development has the potential to both harm and enhance the High Weald AONB. It is likely that it would enhance the current land-based economy in this area. It is also likely to improve amenities, infrastructure, and skills development for the local community in the area. There are opportunities to provide facilities and access routes which would allow people to learn about and enjoy this part of the AONB.</p> <p>The proposals set out within the draft allocation could however, cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the AONB, adversely affect settlement pattern and settlement separation and associated infrastructure could increase activity and noise, which would reduce the peaceful character of parts of the study area.</p>	<p>The likely effects of the proposed allocation cannot be predicted without further detail. This detail is also required in order to predict how a mitigation strategy may reduce the effects of development.</p> <p>In order to provide helpful information to the council and other users of this report, we have set out locations within the area of search that have a lower sensitivity to the type of land-use changes that are proposed and provided advice on enhancements that are possible within the wider area of search.</p> <p>It may then be possible to bring forward a proposal that is suitable for the site and which balances a smaller scale of development, with area-wide enhancements that could provide benefits for the High Weald.</p> <p>The predicted effects on settlement pattern could be moderated by a reduction in overall proposed numbers and if the use of innovative / sympathetic types of development or infrastructure were proposed.</p> <p>There are opportunities to enhance existing routeways through the development, both in terms of connectivity and ecological enhancement. There is also the potential for woodland management and access to be improved.</p>

Conclusions:

The area of search indicated within the allocation consists of a high quality AONB landscape with a complex topography and characteristic features. The area also forms the strategic gap between Southborough and Tunbridge. These observations are reflected in the judgements of the sensitivity study undertaken by LUC, which assesses the study area as having a high sensitivity to development. The study does however add that '*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 medium-high.*'

The area of land around Mabledon Farm is one of the more enclosed parts of the study area and, with landscape features in decline and a large modern barn / structure to the east of the farmhouse, which is unsympathetic to the AONB surroundings. There may be the opportunity for sensitive development / redevelopment and landscape restoration within this area. Two other locations within the area of search have been identified as having a lower condition or a lower susceptibility to change, than the remainder of the study area.

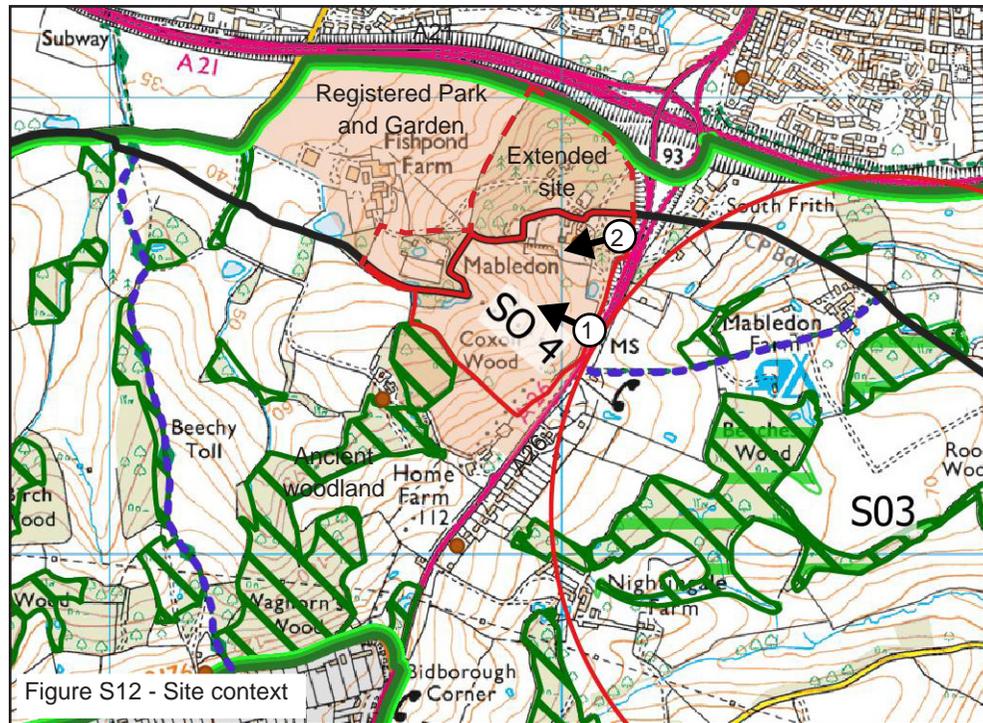
There are numerous opportunities to provide enhancements within the area of search that could result in substantial benefits to the AONB and local communities. It is likely that these improvements are linked financially to some form of development.

The recommendation of this report is that the scale of development proposed within the draft allocation is too high. The concept of some form of new development, which is innovative, has a high design ethos and landscape scale benefits (as alluded to within the draft allocation), may be feasible if a smaller quantum of development can be accepted.

The concept of whole estate plans has worked well in other sensitive locations and may be a mechanism by which this area can be invigorated, using a holistic and landscape led approach, where all new development is directly linked to the enhancement that it can offer to the High Weald AONB.

Site : SO 4 - Land at Mabledon House;

Site : SO 4 - Land at Mabledon House;



Site location and context:

The site is located to the south of Tonbridge, at the junction between the A21 dual carriageway (located to the north) and the A26 London Road (located to the east). The main house is within the Borough but other buildings and the northern part of the site lies within Tonbridge and Malling Borough. Bidborough Corner lies approximately 570m to the south-west of the site.

The site consists of woodland and parkland to the north, the house and gardens in the centre and open parkland to the south. There is a quarry to the west and a walled garden and cottage to the south west of the main house. The northern woodland contains a collection of outbuildings. The site is bound to the north, west and south by woodland, and to the east by a tree belt lining the A26. The site contains a number of ponds and waterbodies.

Designations and development considerations:

The site is located on the northern edge of the High Weald AONB and is washed over by Green Belt. The site and adjacent land to the north and south, are part of a Registered Park and Garden, centred around Mabledon House, a Grade II listed building. A further listed building is located at Bridge Farm, to the south-west of the Site. Coxon Wood is also located to the south-west of the site and is designated Ancient Woodland. The landscape within the site forms part of the strategic separation between Tonbridge and Southborough.

Ornamental parks and gardens are listed as a valued feature within the Tunbridge Wells Landscape Character Assessment.



Photograph 1: Looking west across the parkland to the south of the site



Photograph 2: View of Mabledon House, taken from the access drive to the east.

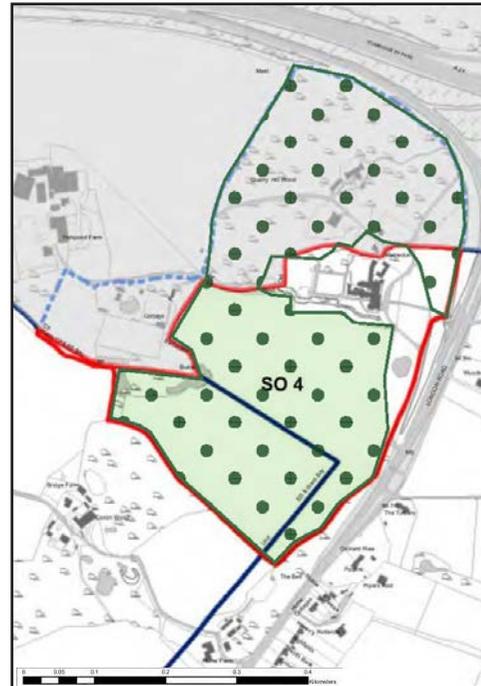
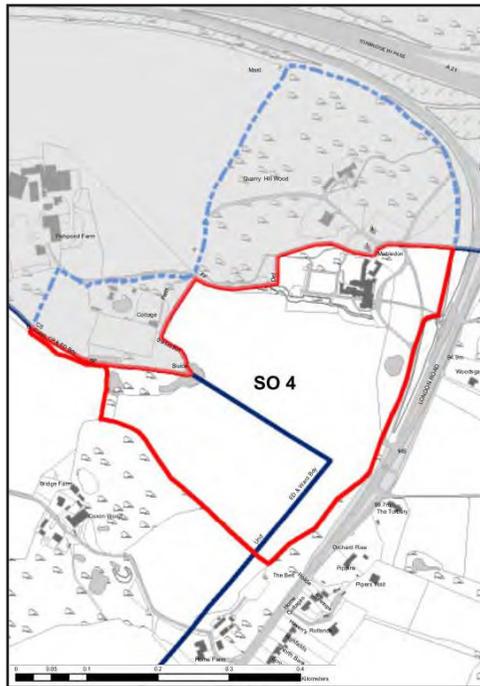
Landscape baseline and key features	Visual baseline and key viewpoints	Perceptual and experiential qualities	Representativeness of AONB Qualities (with reference to the relevant character components and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan)
<p>The site consists of a Registered Park and Garden within the High Weald AONB. The site therefore has a very high landscape value. The condition of the southern field and house frontage is generally good but would benefit from ongoing management. In contrast the designed landscape to the rear of the property and some of the built elements, including the cottage, are in poor condition. The walled garden is overgrown and there is a lack of coherent management for vegetation within the designed landscape, leading to a loss of detail.</p> <p>The northern part of the site is contained from, but contributes to the wider landscape as it provides a wooded backdrop to views from the west. The southern part of the site has a strong connection to the wider countryside and provides a rural and sylvan character to the adjacent stretch of the A26.</p> <p>The only part of the site that might have a slightly lower susceptibility to change is the area to the north-west of the house, which is contained from the wider landscape and includes an assortment of existing outbuildings and modern dwellings.</p> <p>The site is affected by the noise from adjacent roads, particularly the A21 dual carriageway.</p> <p>Key landscape features (ordered from higher to lower sensitivity) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small copse of Ancient Woodland to the south-west of the site (indirect effects possible). • Parkland (wood pasture) to the south of the site; • Parkland (formal) associated with the house and gardens; • Undesignated woodland to the north and north-west of the site; • Ponds and waterbodies; and • Tree belt at the eastern site boundary; <p>There is no public access or recreational provision within the site.</p>	<p>The site is generally well contained by existing woodland and tree belts, however there are long views out to the west from the high ground within the southern parkland area of the site.</p> <p>There are glimpsed and partial views of the site from the A26 London Road, associated pavement and properties, through the existing tree belt that lines the road at the eastern site boundary. Views are more apparent in winter when the trees and understorey vegetation are not in leaf. Views consist of trees in the foreground, with the undulating southern parkland of the site falling away to the west. Mabledon House is not visible from the road.</p> <p>There are partial and glimpsed views of the site boundary trees, from the footpath located to the east of the site (leading towards Mabledon Farm), however views of the site itself are limited.</p> <p>There are some distant views of the wooded western edge and chimneys of Mabledon House, from Lower Haysdon and the stretch of the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk, which runs between Bidborough and Lower Haysdon.</p> <p>There are occasional transient glimpses of the woodland within the north-western part of the site from the A21.</p> <p>Visual receptors (public views) to be considered (ordered from higher to lower sensitivity) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walkers on the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk to the west of the site; • Walkers on the footpath to the east of the Site; • Walkers and Motorists using the A26 London Road; and • Motorists on the A21 dual carriageway, travelling east. 	<p>Mabledon house is a grand and attractive building, set within landscaped gardens, with parkland and woodland beyond (photograph 2). The design of the house was influenced by Decimus Burton, an important figure in the evolution of Royal Tunbridge Wells.</p> <p>The house is approached from the east along a curving driveway, with lawns interspersed with mature parkland trees. The formal gardens are located to the west of the house.</p> <p>The wider setting to the house is provided by woodland to the north (which assists in containing the site from the A21) and open parkland to the south. The parkland is set within an undulating landscape, primarily with a west-facing slope, which affords some semi-contained but attractive views to the west (photograph 1).</p> <p>The landscape has a clear design intent, but nevertheless has a rural character, particularly to the north and south of the main building. It is a complex and varied landscape, with a high scenic quality.</p> <p>The noise from adjacent roads is a detracting feature which reduces the sense of tranquillity within the site.</p>	<p>Geology, landform, water systems and climate: The site is typical of the High Weald with respect to geology, landform and water features.</p> <p>Settlement: The site comprises the historic landscape associated with Mabledon House, which contributes to the pattern of the wider historic landscape. The site provides a visual connection to the surrounding countryside for existing residents, however there are opportunities improve access to the rural landscape within the site.</p> <p>Routeways: There are no routeways within the site, however the A26, to the east of the site is mapped as a routeway, as are the footpaths beyond the site to the east (to Mabledon Farm) and west (Tunbridge Wells Circular Route). While these routeways are outside the site, they have the potential to be influenced by development within the allocation.</p> <p>Woodland: The site contains woodland to the north and there is a copse of Ancient Woodland located to the south-west of the site. A small copse of woodland also lies to the west of the site. There are opportunities to enhance the ecological quality and sustainable use of these woodlands.</p> <p>Field and Heath: The site is recorded within the HLC as an early-modern parkland, and contains no mapped historic field boundaries. The southern parkland is grazed however the remainder of the site is not in agricultural use. The desk top analysis has identified that the site comprises woodland, parkland and wood pasture priority habitats.</p> <p>Other qualities: The site has an intrinsic quality, recognised through its designation as a Registered Park and Garden. The noise from adjacent roads adversely affects tranquillity, particularly to the north of the site.</p> <p>Summary: The site has a high contribution to the character and appearance of the High Weald AONB.</p>

Proposals:

Site : SO 4

Figure S13: Allocation proposal (From policy)

Figure S14: Strategic Green Infrastructure



Description of proposed development:

A coordinated development across the borough boundary, to include:

- A luxury hotel with up-to 200 rooms
- Complementary spa and conference facilities; and
- A restored parkland setting.

Proposed mitigation measures:

Mitigation relating to reg 18 Allocation policy AL/SO 4 and associated proposal plan	Additional mitigation measures proposed within this study
Provision of a Conservation Plan including a detailed scheme of restoration for the built heritage assets and for the Historic Park and Garden (Policy).	Retain the southern parkland within open space. This area of the site is unsuitable for built development.
Provision of a Landscape and Ecological management plan for the site, including a landscape maintenance schedule for restored landscape features (Policy).	Any new buildings should be concentrated within areas that already contain built form.
Provision of public access to the heritage assets, to include potential new rights of way and cycle routes to link with other rights of way (Policy).	Proposed development should respect the character and setting of the existing house and gardens.
Scope to enhance tree coverage along the southern edge of the site (Policy).	Any new buildings should be subservient in design, including height, scale and massing, to the existing house.
Proposals to be supported by relevant landscape, arboricultural and ecological studies (Policy).	Retain key landscape features where possible.

Landscape and recreational opportunities:

There are opportunities to create new recreational facilities, both for visitors to the hotel and the local community. The nature and location of the opportunities would be subject to detailed design. There are opportunities to provide an informal walking route around the southern parkland, which would allow local people to appreciate this part of the AONB.

<p>Potential Landscape effects (Assuming no mitigation)</p>	<p>Potential effects on Visibility (Assuming no mitigation)</p>	<p>Assessment of effects against the landscape character components of the High Weald AONB Management Plan (assuming no mitigation)</p>	<p>Potential to avoid or reduce adverse effects (draft policy AL/SO 4, the proposed GI plan for the site and the text on mitigation measures opposite, set out the proposed mitigation for the site)</p>
<p>The site is a highly sensitive landscape in it's own right, with a highly sensitive wider setting. In order for the allocation to be feasible in landscape terms, the proposals would need to seek to minimise harm and maximise the opportunities for enhancement.</p> <p>The location of development within the proposed allocation would be critical in determining the potential effects on the landscape. A development that is located in a prominent location within the site, is out of scale with the existing buildings and does not fit in with the vernacular of Mabledon House, would have significant and potentially wide-reaching adverse effects on both the Registered Park and Garden and the wider AONB.</p> <p>The proposals would have to be very well designed and sensitively located in order to minimise the potential adverse effects. The area of lowest sensitivity to additional development in landscape terms is located to the north-west of Mabledon House, where there are existing buildings located within an enclosed and wooded setting.</p> <p>The potential effects on landscape features are difficult to predict without more detailed design. There are opportunities, through the sensitive redevelopment of the site, to retain and enhance the features that make the Park and garden special, and to provide ongoing maintenance of these features.</p> <p>The effects on recreation within the site are likely to be positive.</p>	<p>The visibility of any development within the proposed allocation site would vary with design and is difficult to predict without more detailed proposals, due to the sloping nature of the site.</p> <p>Any removal of trees along the eastern boundary would increase the visibility of the site from the A26, eastern footpath and the dwellings located opposite the site.</p> <p>In a worst-case scenario, the proposed development would be higher than the existing house and would skyline in views from the west and north-west, which would have wide-ranging visual effects.</p> <p>Development that is enclosed within the wooded landscape to the north-west of the site and is lower in height than the existing manor house and adjacent trees, is likely to be contained from the wider landscape.</p>	<p>Geology, landform, water systems and climate: It would be possible to provide the allocated development without adverse effects on this character component.</p> <p>Settlement: It is likely that the quantum of development set out within the allocation would adversely affect the designated landscape and listed building. A smaller development, that could largely be contained within the existing manor house, would be more appropriate.</p> <p>Routeways: Development adjacent to the routeways adjacent to the site, could cause adverse effects on these routeways, particularly the character of the A26.</p> <p>Woodland: It would be possible to provide the allocated development without adverse effects on this character component. There is the potential for access to woodland to be improved. There is also the potential for harm if the development is badly designed or poorly located.</p> <p>Field and Heath: The development is unlikely to involve the loss of agricultural land but has the potential for harm to priority habitats.</p> <p>Other qualities: The proposed development has the potential to both harm and enhance the High Weald AONB. Insensitive development within the site could harm the significance of both the listed building and the Registered Park and Garden. It could also have adverse effects on the rural character of the parkland, which in turn would harm the wider AONB.</p>	<p>The proposed mitigation measures seek to protect the southern part of the site, which is currently open parkland, with a strong relationship with the wider landscape. The protection of this area of the site from development would ensure that the proposals would not harm the parkland, adjacent Ancient Woodland or the tree belt adjacent to the A26.</p> <p>The sylvan nature of the A26 (a historic routeway) would be retained, and the character of this part of the site would be preserved, with an opportunity for enhancement. The retention of this area of the site would also protect the strategic separation between Southborough and Tonbridge.</p> <p>The design stipulations put forward within both the allocation policy and this report, seek to define an approach to the proposed allocation that would minimise harm and maximise the potential benefits in landscape terms.</p> <p>The proposed allocation provides opportunities to improve amenities and informal access routes which would allow people to learn about and enjoy this part of the AONB. There are opportunities for long term maintenance of this designed landscape, which would secure it's future.</p>

Conclusions:

The site is part of a highly sensitive landscape, covered by multiple designations. The existing built development is contained by woodland, however the woodland itself is a highly visible and characteristic part of the AONB landscape. The site as a whole has been considered to have a high sensitivity to all development within the sensitivity study carried out by LUC. There should be no development within the informal parkland to the south or within the northern and western extents of the northern woodland.

The change of use within Mabledon House is unlikely to cause harm to the surrounding landscape. There is also an area of the site located to the north-west of Mabledon House, which is well contained and contains built development in the form of existing outbuildings. There is potential for sensitive development in this location, which could replace or re-purpose existing buildings. Development within other areas of the site is likely to harm the significance of the Registered Park and Garden, and the character and appearance of the High Weald AONB.

The scale and nature of the proposed design will be critical for the acceptability of development within the proposed allocation site. The allocation should only come forward if the proposals can justify the exceptional circumstances for development within the AONB and Green Belt, and can prove that any perceived harm to the heritage assets (including the Registered Park and Garden) within the site is fully justified.

This is an extremely high bar, but may be achievable, if the proposals are sensitively designed, make best use of existing built form / development footprint and provide tangible landscape benefits including the maintenance of the park in perpetuity.

It is unlikely that the scale of development currently proposed within the allocation (specifically the provision of 200 rooms), could be integrated into the site without harm to the landscape. It is recommended that a hotel with a smaller capacity is proposed if the allocation is to move forward.

Policy recommendations for the Regulation 19 version of the Draft Local Plan include:

- Include a stipulation that any new buildings should be subservient to Mabledon House;
- Development to be focussed to the north-west of Mabledon House, but not to extend any further than existing built form.
- Provision of details which clearly demonstrate the proposals in terms of massing, design, elevations and landscape proposals.
- Include wording regarding sustainable development - as already included within the policy for site SO 3.

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6.5.7 Cumulative effects of development proposed at Southborough

6.5.7.1 Both sites within this study area are highly sensitive and the development set out within each of the draft allocations (SO 3 and SO 4) has the potential to generate significant adverse landscape effects in isolation.

6.5.7.2 The potential for cumulative effects within proposed allocations SO 3 and SO 4, will depend upon more detailed design, namely the location and size of built form. There is the potential for cumulative adverse effects on:

- The High Weald AONB, both within and surrounding the sites;
- Strategic settlement separation between Southborough and Tonbridge;
- Introduction of new settlement that is at odds with the existing settlement pattern; and
- Effects on the setting and significance of heritage assets, including the Registered Park and Garden at Mabledon House.

6.5.7.3 There are unlikely to be cumulative effects between these sites and other development proposed within the AONB.

6.5.7.4 The likelihood of potential cumulative effects on the landscape and character of the High Weald AONB could be reduced by:

- Reduction in the volume of development proposed within each allocation;
- Sensitive location of development within each site, following the recommendations set out for each site;
- Retention of key landscape features; and
- Maximisation of mitigation measures and enhancements proposed within each site.

6.5.7.5 Providing that the mitigation proposals outlined within each site analysis page are adhered to, it is unlikely that development within the sites would lead to cumulative adverse effects on the 'Speldhurst Wooded Farmland' Character Area.

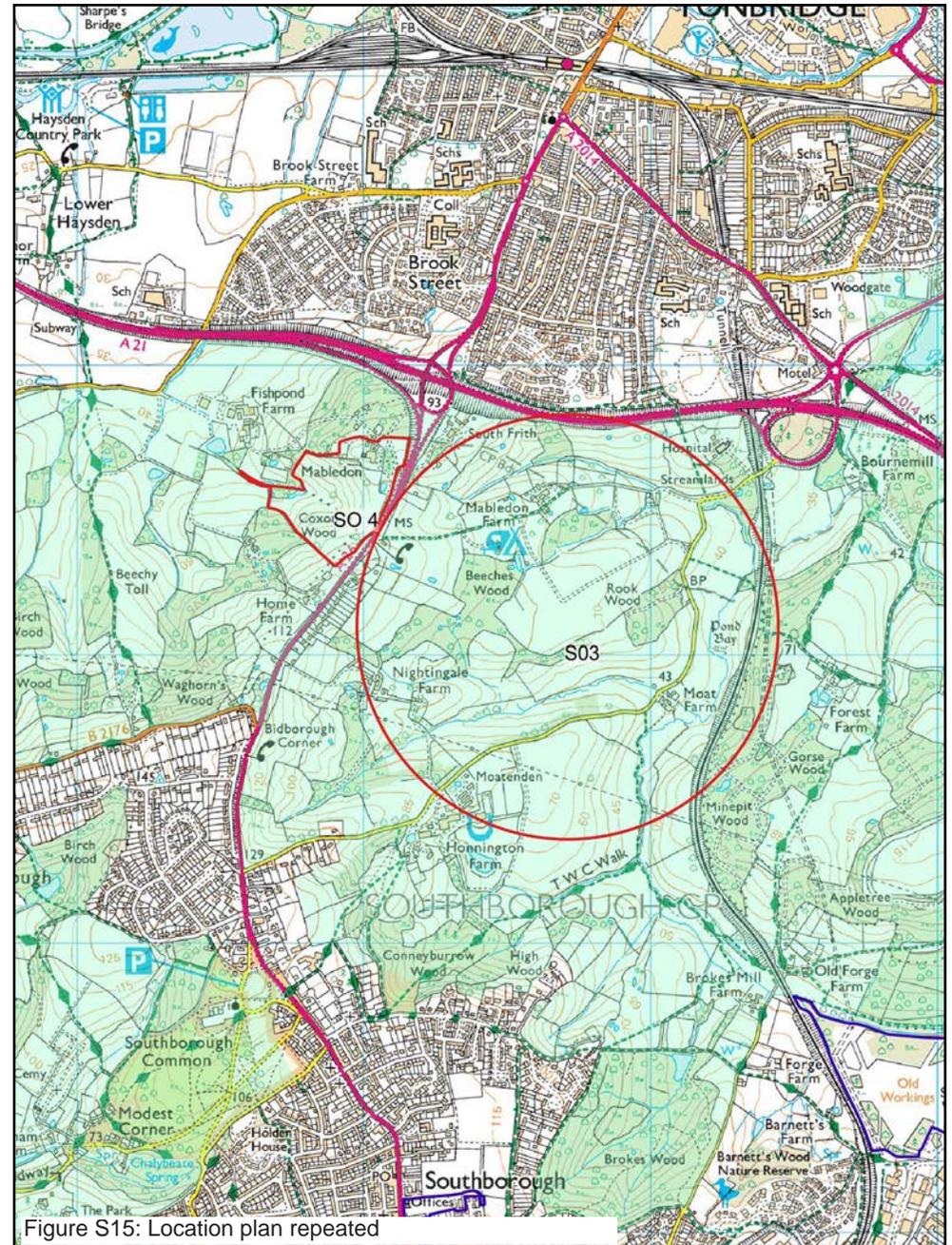


Figure S15: Location plan repeated

6.5.8 Summary and conclusions

- 6.5.8.1 Draft allocation SO 3 is an area of search, which has an ambitious set of policy requirements that seek to create an exemplar scheme within the High Weald AONB. The area of search is located within a highly sensitive landscape, where there is potential for harm to the AONB, but also potential for a series of landscape scale enhancements that would benefit the AONB. Consideration should be given as to whether there is a better mechanism for delivering the vision for SO 3 than the current allocation, for example as part of a whole estate plan. It is recommended that a lower housing number is allocated and that numbers of dwellings should be intrinsically linked to enhancements within the wider land ownership.
- 6.5.8.2 Draft allocation SO 4 is also located in a highly sensitive landscape, covered by multiple designations. The potential effects of the draft allocation within his site are highly dependent of the detailed design of the proposals. The GI and associated policy recommendations stipulated for the site as part of this report, could be sufficient to moderate the potential effects of development (in accordance with para 172 of the NPPF, section c). There are opportunities within the site to provide long-term landscape and maintenance benefits that would protect the Registered Park and Garden, in conjunction with new development within this site. The harm, mitigation and proposed enhancements that would result from the draft allocation would need to be carefully balanced in order to protect the character and appearance of the AONB.