1.0 INTRODUCTION
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1.1 Background

European Landscape Convention

1.1.1 The UK Government signed the European Landscape Convention on the 24 February 2006. The Convention aims to encourage public authorities within member states to adopt exemplary and long-lasting policies and measures for the protection, management and planning of all landscapes, both outstanding and ordinary, that determine the quality of people’s living environment.

1.1.2 The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as:

’an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.’

1.1.3 The term landscape is typically synonymous with the countryside; however, landscape is everywhere and may comprise rural landscapes, urban landscapes or townscape, urban fringe landscapes, coastal landscapes or seascapes, etc.

1.1.4 The European Landscape Convention defines ‘landscape character’ as:

’a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occur consistently in a particular type of landscape.’

National Planning Policy Framework

1.1.5 Previous national planning policy (PPS1, PPS7 and PPS22) required that the preparation of Local Development Frameworks (now Local Plans) be informed by an assessment of landscape character. These policies shifted the emphasis away from locally defined landscape designations (unless they could be adequately justified) towards recognition that criteria-based policies should be capable of providing sufficient protection for locally important landscape character.

1.1.6 The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) retains the requirement to take account of landscape with paragraph 109 stating that:

‘The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils.’

1.1.7 Paragraph 113 goes on to state that:

‘Local planning authorities should set criteria-based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged.’

1.1.8 Finally, Paragraph 170 in the NPPF re-affirms the need for landscape character assessments by stating that:

‘Where appropriate, landscape character assessments should also be prepared, integrated with assessment of historic landscape character, and for areas where there are major expansion options assessments of landscape sensitivity.’

Wealden District Local Plan

1.1.9 In September 2007, Wealden District Council (WDC) commissioned the Landscape Section of East Sussex County Council (ESCC) to prepare a Landscape Character Assessment & Development Option Evaluation Study to inform the preparation of the Wealden District Local Development Framework Core Strategy. The ESCC study identified the indicative capacity of landscapes around the District’s five market towns, in potential areas for new settlement options and around selected villages to accommodate development, and made recommendations on preferred development locations.

1.1.10 The Core Strategy, adopted in February 2013, provides for 4,685 net additional dwellings to provide a total of 9,440 new homes across the District over the period of 2006-2027. The majority of these new homes will be provided within, or as extensions to, the urban areas of Wealden’s five market towns. Growth has also been allocated to a number of villages within the District. In addition, the Core Strategy’s Infrastructure Delivery Plan identifies the strategic infrastructure required to support growth over the plan period.

1.1.11 The Strategic Sites Local Plan takes forward the development allocated by the Core Strategy within eleven Strategic Development Area’s, which are within or adjoin the five market towns in the District.

1.1.12 The Delivery and Site Allocations Local Plan will contain the general development management policies for the District, together with specific site allocations and policies for the development identified within the villages in the Core Strategy (Policy WCS6).

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1 The European Landscape Convention opened for signature in Florence on 20 October 2000. Jim Knight, Minister for Rural Affairs, Landscape and Biodiversity announced the UK signing of the European Landscape Convention on 24 February 2006.

2 Wealden District Local Development Framework: Landscape Character Assessment & Development Option Evaluation Study (February 2009, The Landscape Section of East Sussex County Council for Wealden District Council)

3 These figures do not include completions on windfall sites.
1.1.13 In May 2014, the Council commissioned Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) to prepare a Landscape & Settlement Character Assessment to inform the preparation of the Delivery and Site Allocations Local Plan.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives

1.2.1 The main purpose of the study is to contribute to the evidence base underpinning decisions on how best development should be accommodated within the District for the period to 2027. The study will assist the Council in identifying broad locations for accommodating development site allocations in the Delivery and Site Allocations Local Plan. Principally, the study aims to provide a tool for defining areas in which to allocate development assigned to the settlements identified in Policy WCS6 of the Wealden Core Strategy. It will also be used to inform the development of polices on landscape management and protection in the Local Plan.

1.2.2 In addition, the study will provide a tool for decision making in the development management process and help guide landscape management decisions.

1.2.3 The key objectives of the study are to:

1) Assess the character, sensitivity and value of the District’s landscapes outside of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the South Downs National Park.

2) Evaluate the capacity of the District’s landscapes outside of the High Weald AONB and the South Downs National Park to accommodate renewable energy development (solar farms and wind turbines).

3) Assess the character, sensitivity and value of landscapes around selected settlements within the District.

4) Evaluate the capacity of landscapes around the settlements identified in Policy WCS6 of the Wealden Core Strategy to accommodate residential and commercial development (as listed in Appendix 1).

5) Evaluate the contribution of landscape settings around settlements with existing or potential Conservation Areas to the historic character of the settlements (as listed in Appendix 1).

1.3 Structure of the Report

1.3.1 The structure of the report is as follows:

- Section 2.0 sets out the assessment methodology used by the study.
- Section 3.0 provides an overview of the landscape character context for the study.
- Section 4.0 presents the assessment of the High Weald Landscape (excluding the AONB) and the landscape setting of the selected settlements in this area and within the AONB.
- Section 5.0 presents the assessment of the Low Weald Landscape and the landscape setting of the selected settlements in this area.
- Section 6.0 presents the assessment of the Pevensey Levels Landscape and the landscape setting of the selected settlements in this area.
- Section 7.0 presents the evaluation of the capacity of the District’s landscapes outside of the AONB and National Park to accommodate renewable energy development.

1.3.2 Supporting information, including a glossary of the terms used in the study, can be found in the Appendices.