4.0 THE HIGH WEALD LANDSCAPE
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4.1 General

4.1.1 Within the landscape character context set out in Section 3.0, this Section presents the assessment of the High Weald Landscape (excluding the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and the landscape setting of the selected settlements in this area and within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The assessment includes:

- A summary overview of the High Weald National Character Area and its constituent County Landscape Character Areas.
- Assessment of the character, sensitivity and value of each Local Landscape Character Type identified within the High Weald Landscape (excluding the AONB), including description of each Type’s constituent Local Landscape Character Areas, in accordance with the methodology set out in Section 2.0.
- Assessment of the Landscape Settings for each of the selected settlements within the High Weald Landscape/AONB in accordance with the methodology set out in Section 2.0.

4.2 The High Weald National Character Area

4.2.1 The extent of the High Weald National Character Area in respect of Wealden District is shown on Figure 2.1. A full description of the National Character Area as a whole is available from the Natural England website. A summary overview of the High Weald National Character Area within the District is provided below.

Summary

4.2.2 The High Weald is an area of ancient countryside and one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in northern Europe. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covers 78 per cent of the National Character Area, reflecting the outstanding natural and scenic beauty of the landscape.

4.2.3 From a distance the appearance of the High Weald is one of a densely wooded landscape, although closer inspection reveals a patchwork of irregularly shaped fields and woods forming both open and enclosed landscapes along rolling ridges and within valleys. Along the ridge top roads briefly glimpsed extensive views open up, stretching away over rolling ridges, punctuated by church spires far into the horizon, providing a contrast to the intimacy of the lush green valleys. Everything in the High Weald landscape is of human scale and its rich detail is best explored on foot, cycle or horseback along the myriad of interconnecting paths and tracks.

4.2.4 Sandstone, exposed as outcrops or along the wooded ghylls, provides a nationally rare habitat and supports a rich community of ferns, bryophytes and lichens. The moist microclimate in these sites is vulnerable to climate change. The drained landscape of the eastern High Weald river valleys is the result of a thousand years of modifications and exhibits few of the features associated with healthy natural river valleys. It is grazed by high numbers of sheep. Upriver the ghyll streams and upper reaches function better but remain vulnerable to pollution from agriculture and domestic waste water treatment.

4.2.5 The ancient routeway network in the High Weald is substantially intact but the archaeology associated with it, such as multiple ditches and banks, is vulnerable to physical damage and the ancient, laid coppice stools edging many sunken routeways present a challenge for highway maintenance. Flower-rich grassland persists along road verges and what was common land represents a substantial refuge for populations of rare species, but both are vulnerable to insensitive management.

4.2.6 The distinctive pattern of dispersed historic settlement survives although the character of farmsteads has changed with the widespread conversion of traditional farm buildings to dwellings and the associated disappearance of agriculture and industry from farmsteads. The changing character of the farmsteads and surrounding landscape through gentrification ultimately also leads to a changing character of wildlife in terms of the assemblage of species present. Within the forested ridges and ancient countryside, remnant hammer ponds associated with the once vibrant medieval iron industry, constitute significant local features. Hammer ponds were created by damming streams to provide a controlled flow of water to power the bellows or ‘hammers’ of the forges. There are a number of reservoirs that have a distinctive branching or winding character as a result of their creation from small Wealden river valleys.

4.2.7 Woodland is extensive, covering 26 per cent of the area in a wide range of small wooded pits, linear ghyll woodland, farm woods and much larger wooded estates. Most of the woodland is ancient with carpets of bluebells and wood anemone in spring. Many of the woods were managed in the past as coppice with standard trees. The drier sandy soils were found suitable for pine plantations, which persist within a patchwork of lowland heath and birch woodland. Wild flower meadows are now rare but the medieval pattern of small fields with sinuous edges surrounded by thick hedgerows and shaws (the narrow remains of woodlands cleared to form fields) survives and many fields retain some permanent or semi-improved grassland, which in turn supports common invertebrates and small mammals. Local initiatives have increased the area of restored and newly created species-rich grassland but the decline of grazing threatens their long-term management. Buzzards and sparrow hawks are sighted frequently, but the loss of field barns and conversion of farmstead buildings have led to a decline in once-common barn owls.

4.2.8 The mosaic of small hedged fields and sunken lanes, together with the wooded relief and comparative inaccessibility, provides a sense of remoteness which is rare within lowland English landscapes.

Key Characteristics

4.2.9 The key characteristics of the High Weald National Character Area as a whole are:

- A faulted landform of clays, sand and soft sandstones with outcrops of fissured sandrock and ridges running east-west, deeply incised and intersected with numerous ghyll streams forming the headwaters of a number of the major rivers – the Rother, Brede and Ouse – which flow in broad valleys.
- High density of extraction pits, quarries and ponds, in part a consequence of diverse geology and highly variable soils over short distances.
- A dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and scattered farmsteads and medieval ridge top villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries, with a dominance of timber-framed buildings with steep roofs often hipped or half-hipped, and an extremely high survival rate of farm buildings dating from the 17th century or earlier.
- Ancient routeways in the form of ridge top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways, often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees and wild flower-rich verges and boundary banks. Church towers and spires on the ridges are an important local landmark. There is a dense network of small, narrow and winding lanes, often sunken and enclosed by high hedgerows or woodland strips. The area includes several large towns such as Crawborough, Battle and Heathfield and is closely bordered by others such as Crowborough, East Grinstead, Hastings and Horsham.
- An intimate, hidden and small-scale landscape with glimpses of far-reaching views, giving a sense of remoteness and tranquillity yet concealing the highest density of timber-framed buildings anywhere in Europe amidst lanes and paths.
- Strong feeling of remoteness due to very rural, wooded character. A great extent of interconnected ancient woods, steep-sided ghyll woodlands, wooded heaths and shaws in generally small holdings with extensive archaeology and evidence of long-term management.
- Extensive broad-leaved woodland cover with a very high proportion of ancient woodland with high forest, small woods and shaws, plus steep valleys with ghyll woodland.
- Small and medium-sized irregularly shaped fields enclosed by a network of hedgerows and wooded shaws, predominantly of medieval origin and managed historically as a mosaic of small agricultural holdings typically used for livestock grazing.
- A predominantly grassland agricultural landscape grazed mainly with sheep and some cattle.
- There is a strong influence of the Wealden iron industry which started in Roman times, until coke fuel replaced wood and charcoal. There are features such as a notably high number of small hammer ponds surviving today.
- Ashdown Forest, in contrast to the more intimate green woods and pastures elsewhere, is a high, rolling and open heathland lying on the sandstone ridges to the west of the area.
- High-quality vernacular architecture with distinct local variation using local materials. Horsham Slate is used on mainly timber structures and timber-framed barns are a particularly notable Wealden characteristic feature of the High Weald.

4.3 County Landscape Character Areas

4.3.1 The relevant County Landscape Character Areas within Wealden District (whole or in part) that fall within the High Weald National Character Area are included below (see Figure 3.1), taken from the East Sussex County Landscape Assessment13.

Upper Medway Valley (1)

Summary

1.1.1 This area covers the Medway Valley from Weir Wood Reservoir to Groombridge in the east. The broad flat river valley is overlooked by gentle spurs emphasised by fine mature woods. Unusually the attractive villages of the area lie in the valley. The unity of the area is strengthened by the tree-fringed winding river and by the Forest Way Country Park. The area benefits from its proximity to the heathland of Ashdown Forest.

Key Characteristics

- Gentle spurs and slopes overlooking broad, open valley.
- Spectacular views from spurs.
- Small, relatively natural winding river with scattered elder and willow.
- Rich, varied pattern of woods, trees and hedgerows on slopes; over 15% woodland cover.
- Settlements tend to be in the valleys, which is unusual for the High Weald. Villages are often individually distinctive.
- Buildings typically of stone and white weatherboarding. Rich and varied traditional building materials and styles.
- Affluent, gentrified farms and country houses.

Ashdown Forest (2)

Summary

1.1.2 Ashdown Forest is a heart shaped area lying between Crowborough, Forest Row and Maresfield on the more northerly of the two major ridges in the AONB. It is the largest area of lowland heath in the SE and therefore is of significant nature conservation and scenic value. Ashdown Forest lies on the highest point of the High Weald. It is visually prominent and affords great views in and out of the area. This is a place of great richness and diversity with a unique history and status. The great open sweeps of brown and purple heathland stand out in stark contrast to the surrounding green luxuriance of the rest of the High Weald.

Key Characteristics

- Broad, exposed open heathland ridges.
- Outstanding views from higher ridges.
- Landmark pine clumps with ‘Winnie the Pooh’ association.

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• Extensive woodland (42.5% wooded); predominantly oak-birch woodland, with fine oak and beech woodland on the fringes.
• Shady, secluded ghyll streams with hammer ponds.
• Large country houses, some associated with significant designed landscapes and parkland.
• Indications of human activity of significant archaeological importance.
• Remoteness

Upper Ouse Valley (3)

Summary

4.3.2 This is a gently sloping country of low ridges and wider valleys covered by an intricate pattern of streams and woods. It lies between Wivelsfield Green and Buxted, and includes the valley system of the River Ouse, Longford Stream and the River Uck.

Key Characteristics

• Small, winding, alder-lined rivers and streams.
• Predominantly gentle undulating terrain with broad valleys, but more pronounced relief near northern edge.
• Abundant tree cover, with 17.5% woodland and a strong structure of woods, trees, hedges and shaws.
• Some remote, secluded, unspoiled valleys.
• Significant designed landscapes, parks and gardens.
• Village groups dominated by churches.
• Numerous large ponds.
• Rock outcrops and incised roadways.
• Farmhouses and large farmsteads.
• Rich variety of traditional local building materials.

South Slopes of High Weald (5)

Summary

4.3.4 This is an intricate, small scale landscape with a strong pattern of hedgerows, falling southward from the Heathfield to Battle ridge towards the Low Weald and Pevensey Levels. This landscape of gentle valleys and slopes affords good views of the Downs.

Key Characteristics

• High Weald landscape at its most intricate: a very detailed landscape.
• Deeply dissected into innumerable north-south ridges, valleys and ghylls.
• Streams drain mainly into River Cuckmere or Pevensey Levels waterway systems.
• Close network of ghyll woodland, small woods, shaws and hedges; 15% woodland. An abundance of hornbeam ('horebeech').
• Close network of winding lanes with scattered farms, cottages and linear settlements, often on ridges.
• Varied villages, most with remote rural character and on ridges.
• Secluded, often shady valleys with remote feel.
• Substantial remote areas in the east.
• Parkland and designed landscapes.
• Numerous hammer ponds and other iron industry relics.
• Chestnut post and rail fencing is characteristic of this area.

Upper Rother Valley (6)

Summary

4.3.5 The broad valley of the River Rother dominates the landscape and is overlooked by bold ridges and spurs with ghylls and shaws. These landscape features are dramatised by woodland cover. The area runs from Mayfield in the west, up to Wadhurst in the north and across to Hurst Green in the east. The South is bounded by the ridge-top Burwash road and its villages

Key Characteristics

• The upper half of the largest valley system in the High Weald.
• Flat-floored main valley broadening eastwards.
• Relatively open valley floor with small, winding, partly tree-lined river.
• Rolling, richly wooded landscape centred on main valley.
• Rother regularly floods turning the whole valley bottom into a huge sheet of water.
• Strong pattern of ghyll woods as well as many larger woods.
• Substantial remote countryside and areas of exceptional remoteness.
• Settlements and main roads mainly along ridges on edges of the area.
• Villages have great character and variety often with Landmark churches.
• Fine views across valley.
• Iron industry relics hidden in woods.
• ‘Picturesque’ farms and cottages.
• Designed landscapes and parkland.
Bewl Water Area (7)

Summary

4.3.6 This small area is bounded in the north by the Kent Border and runs West-East from Wadhurst to Flimwell. It is dominated by the flooded Bewl river that forms a large branching reservoir which is surprisingly well hidden from the surrounding countryside, and overlooked by well wooded slopes.

Key Characteristics

• Large branching reservoir, overlooked by wooded spurs, is focus of area.
• Wooded or hedge-patterned slopes with some parkland.
• Chestnut coppice.
• Secluded, small wooded ghylls above reservoir 'branches'.
• Winding, hedge-bounded lanes.
• Orchards and hopfields.
• Ridge-top villages and churches on periphery of area.

Dudwell Valley (8)

Summary

4.3.7 This narrow, deep valley is bounded in the north by the ridgetop A265 and the Burwash villages, and contained by the Dallington ridge in the south. The valley is overlooked by high ridges and spurs patterned with woods, shaws and small fields. The whole area is peaceful and secluded.

Key Characteristics

• The valley is a tributary for the main Rother Valley.
• West of Brightling the valley is narrow and deep, and is overlooked by spurs patterned with woods, shaws and small fields.
• East of Brightling it becomes broader and shallower and is dominated by the village of Burwash.
• Winding, tree-lined stream.
• Feature buildings in the landscape and attractive cottages.
• Burwash has a predominance of red tiled buildings.

Combe Haven Valley (10)

Summary

4.3.8 This landscape is a series of small, winding High Wealden valleys converging to form a tract of levels which curve east and south to almost reach the sea at Glyne Gap, between Hastings and Bexhill. This pleasant rolling, well wooded countryside affords excellent views of the sea and coastal towns, which have a strong influence on the area.

Key Characteristics

• Area is enclosed by the Battle ridge to the north-east.
• Focal open, flat, winding valley floor with wetland.
• Intricate terrain of small, winding valleys and ridges around levels, with abundant woods and ghylls.
• Extensive areas of ancient woodland.
• Contrast between open valley floor and slopes.

Pevensy Levels (25)

Summary

4.3.9 Grazing marsh and reeds are completely dominant in this large, flat, open landscape. This is a landscape characterised by reed fringed drainage channels with scattered thorns and willows. Away from the roads there is a distinct remoteness amongst the big skies and cries of wetland birds.

Key Characteristics

• Reed-fringed winding channels in open wetland pasture.
• Scattered straggly willow and thorn along channels.
• Islands (eyes) of slightly higher ground - Horse Eye, North Eye.
• Main channels engineered.
• Isolated farms and cottages.
• Winding lanes cross the levels.
• Coastline with shingle banks and groynes.
• Coastal development.
4.4 Local Landscape Character Type A: Ridges and Valleys

Character Description

Location and Boundaries

4.4.1 The Ridges and Valleys LLCT (A) is situated in the central part of Wealden District, to the north of Uckfield and Hailsham. It stretches broadly between Splayne’s Green to the west and Cowbeech to the east (the latter being just outside the boundary of this LLCT). To the north, this LLCT abuts the southern boundary of the High Weald AONB. To the south, it meets the northern wooded valleys and clay vales of the Low Weald (LLCT C: Gently Undulating Wooded Valleys and D: Wooded Clay Vales). Sheffield Park lies immediately to the west of this LLCT.

Key Characteristics

- **Topography:** A series of narrow, incised northeast-southwest oriented river valleys which dissect the surrounding landscape of rolling fields and valley side woodlands. Overall, the topography comprises a ridge and valley landscape pattern, with the stream corridors gently meandering through their adjacent valleys.

- **Settlement Pattern:** Small to medium-sized linear villages mainly located on higher ridges of land between the valleys.

- **Views and Visibility:** Views from settlements and higher land into and across the valleys is often limited by abundant small blocks and linear swathes of woodland which line the valley sides. These patches of woodland also provide a strong sense of visual containment from locations along the valley floor.

- **Communications:** The landscape is crossed by an interconnected network of minor rural roads which tend to follow the valley floors or ridges, connecting ridge-top settlements.

- **Tranquillity and Remoteness:** Within much of this LLCT, there is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity; however this is less apparent in close proximity to the large town of Uckfield, which abuts its south-western edge.

Physical Landscape Character

4.4.2 This landscape of ridges and steep sided valleys includes the highest land within the Study Area, divided by watercourses and scattered water bodies. These include the River Uck and the upper waters of the River Cuckmere, which bisect the study area, running north to south. This LLCT is predominantly rural, with small settlements and scattered farms. Settlements, including some larger villages, are primarily found on the ridges and slopes, leaving the valley floors mostly free from settlement. Field pattern is varied, with a mix of small pastoral fields divided by hedges and shaws; and larger, arable fields. The landscape in this part of Wealden District is well treed, including a number of large blocks and belts of woodland, as well as tree lined ghylls.

Historic Landscape Character

4.4.3 The Ridges and Valleys LLCT forms part of the High Weald’s ancient countryside, which is one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in northern Europe. The dispersed settlement pattern and small-medium sized irregular shaped fields, enclosed by a network of hedgerows and wooded shaws, are predominantly of medieval origin. Blocks of Ancient Woodland, scattered throughout, reinforce the historic character of this LLCT and wider High Weald area. An integrated traditional system of forestry and farming as well as the medieval practice of transhumance14 helped shape the character of the landscape, playing a key role in the transformation of a largely uninhabited landscape into the settled landscape which can be seen today. Some of the roads and public rights of way which transect the ridges and valleys form part of the network of historic droveways which connect the Downs and the Weald. These are a visible legacy of the past seasonal movement of animals and people into the woodlands. Cohesive and aggregate assarts dominate the bottom two thirds of the LLCT – created from the medieval practice of cultivating small parcels of land, known as ‘assarting’. Regular piece meal enclosures and modern field amalgamations are also fairly dominant, distributed across the type.

4.4.4 charcoal hearths, pits and/or ponds relating to the iron industry can be found in some of the Ancient Woodland blocks reflecting the wider area’s once busy industrial past. Buxted Park, a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden, was first recorded at Buxted, along with its associated manor house, in 1299. Both the house and grounds have been altered over time, with the current house (home to the Buxted Park Country House Hotel) likely to have been constructed during the 18th century.

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14 Transhumance can be defined as the seasonal movement of people and animals between the settlements of the borders of the Weald and its interior.
4.4.5 Overall, the Ridges and Valleys LLCT is assessed as having Very High Landscape Sensitivity. Strength of place is considered to be very strong as a result of the distinctly recognisable pattern of narrow, incised valleys which cut through the surrounding landscape, resulting in a pattern of ridge-top settlements. There is strong historic continuity as a result of the pattern of ancient fields and woodland, dating from the Medieval period. Overall visibility is considered to be high within this LLCT. Whilst the strongly recognisable pattern of ridges and valleys dominate the landscape, the high frequency of woodlands results in an intermittent sense of visual enclosure.

### Evaluation

#### Landscape Sensitivity

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<td>Strength of Place</td>
<td>Very Strong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landscape Sensitivity</td>
<td>Very High</td>
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#### Landscape Value

4.4.6 The Ridges and Valleys LLCT is considered to have Very High Landscape Value. There is very strong visual unity throughout as a result of the recognisable pattern of ridges and valleys, which contribute to a strong local strength of place. There is strong historic continuity, with numerous patches of Ancient Woodland along the valley sides, and a general absence of detracting features. In addition, there is strong sense of wildness and tranquillity overall.

### Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCA)

**A1: Fletching and Maresfield**

4.4.7 Situated in the north-western corner of Wealden District, this LLCA encompasses a patchwork of small to medium scale rolling arable and pastoral fields, which are interspersed with medium sized woodlands (including High Wood and Spring Wood), providing a sense of enclosure. There are numerous smaller patches of woodland, amongst the smaller fields. The western edge of this LLCA overlooks the large designed landscape of Sheffield Park, and glimpsed views westwards towards woodland within the Park contribute to recognisable sense of place. The central part of the area is crossed by a narrow northsouth orientated stream corridor which runs adjacent to the main A22 road corridor. Busy traffic along this road corridor, detracts from the overall sense of remoteness and tranquility within this part of the LLCA. The large nucleated village of Maresfield dominates the eastern part of the LLCA, with its historic core centred on the church. Long distance views across the LLCA are limited by the numerous patches of woodland and rolling topography, however views to Maresfield church can be gained from fields in close proximity to the edge of the village.

**A2: Budlett’s Common and Five Ash Down**

4.4.8 The south-western part of this LLCA is dominated by large areas of woodland (including Park Wood and Thirty Acre Wood), which provide a strong sense of enclosure. The strongly undulating topography of the LLCA, as a result of a narrow stream corridor which cuts through the area, dominates landscape pattern. The south-eastern edge of the area abuts the large town of Uckfield. Views to the edge of the town are generally limited by woodland at the settlement edge. However glimpsed views are characteristic in places. The main A26 road corridor runs north-south across the area, introducing a source of noise and movement and reducing overall sense of tranquillity. In the north of the area, the small linear settlement of Five Ash Down is a key feature. The village is situated on a ridge of higher land, which facilitates views across adjacent fields. Woodland is a key feature of this area, however, outside the patches of woodland, fields tend to be lined with mature hedgerows.

**A3: Buxted**

4.4.9 Situated to the northeast of the large town of Uckfield (and abutting its eastern and north-eastern edges), this LLCA encompasses the narrow valley of the River Uck and the linear village of Buxted. Buxted is situated on a higher ridge of land on the eastern valley side and overlooks the river valley. Views into the valley are limited by blocks of mature woodland and mature hedgerows at field boundaries. The mainline railway from London to Uckfield runs north-south across the area (with a busy station at Buxted) and introduces a source of noise and movement, reducing the overall sense of remoteness and tranquillity. On the eastern valley side, to the south of Buxted, the landscape pattern comprises an intricate patchwork of small scale fields, interspersed with numerous small woodlands which provide an intermittent sense of enclosure. The western half of the LLCA is dominated by the valley of the River Uck, with its gently meandering stream and streamside woodlands. The river runs through the large landscaped historic parkland of Buxted Park. The parkland, with its designed landscape planting and the historic manor house (which is now Buxted Park hotel), impart a formal landscape character within this area. At the western edge of Buxted Park, views to the eastern edge of Uckfield (at Manor Park) are limited by a large area of woodland (Views Wood). Further south, however, open views to the edge of Uckfield can be gained from the rural roads and network of footpaths within the southern part of the valley.

**A4: Blackboys and Framfield**

4.4.10 The Blackboys and Framfield LLCA encompass an undulating patchwork of small-scale pastoral fields, which are interspersed with frequent patches of woodland. Numerous small stream corridors cross the landscape within the bottom of the valleys. Long distance views across the valleys from the valley sides are...
characteristic, with intermittently wooded skylines contributing to recognisable sense of place. This is an intimate, small-scale and predominantly rural landscape which is crossed by a network of interconnecting, often sunken, rural lanes. There is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity throughout much of the area. The small woodlands and tree lined lanes provide an intermittent sense of enclosure. The two, small linear villages of Framfield and Blackboys, situated on ridges of higher land, facilitate long distance views across the adjacent undulating valleys. An interconnected network of footpaths crosses the area, providing access to the ridges and valleys.

A5: Hawkhurst Common

4.4.11 This predominantly rural LLCA encompasses a pattern of small scale, predominantly pastoral fields, which are interspersed with large areas of woodland, providing a strong sense of enclosure in places. A number of rural road corridors traverse the landscape, which are lined with mature trees and hedgerows. There is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity throughout. Numerous narrow stream corridors permeate the fields, with associated small ponds. These streams feed the larger river corridors outside the area. Views are often dominated by treed horizons and the settlement pattern is limited to small farmsteads. This is a small-scale, intimate, predominantly rural landscape.

A6: Horam

4.4.12 This LLCA embraces an intricate patchwork of woodlands and stream corridors, which are also lined in places by woodland. The undulating landform, coupled with the intermittent woodland patches, results in a strong sense of enclosure within much of the landscape. The network of rural lanes is lined with mature trees and hedgerows and there is a relatively strong sense of tranquillity throughout much of the area. In the north of the area, views to the small nucleated village of Horam contribute to recognisable sense of place. To the south of Horam, the settlement pattern comprises a series of farmsteads, which tend to be located alongside the rural road corridors. The field pattern is small scale, and many of the fields are ancient. The upper course of the Cuckmere River valley runs through the eastern part of this area, with a patchwork of small-scale fields lining the river corridor.
4.5 Local Landscape Character Type B: Ridges and Slopes

Character Description

Location and Boundaries

4.5.1 The Ridges and Slopes LLCT (B) is situated in the south-eastern part of Wealden District, to the north-east of Hailsham. It stretches broadly between Cowbeech to the west and Ninfield to the east but is split approximately in the middle by a narrow strip of Open Levels (LLCT F). To the north, the Ridges and Slopes abut the boundary of the High Weald AONB. To the west, they are adjacent to the High Weald’s Ridges and Valleys (LLCT A), whilst to the south they overlook the Open Levels (LLCT F).

Key Characteristics

- **Topography:** A small-scale landscape of predominantly pastoral fields, which forms the southern slopes of the High Weald (which is situated immediately to the north of the area). The topography slopes from north to south, with the landscape falling away towards the lower Open Levels LLCT (F) to the south.
- **Settlement Pattern:** comprises a series of linear villages which are situated on an east-west orientated ridge at the northern edge of the LLCT. In addition, there are a number of small hamlets and farmsteads dotted throughout the landscape.
- **Views and Visibility:** Panoramic, open views southwards across the Levels are characteristic of the southern part of this LLCT, contributing to recognisable sense of place. Views northwards from the landscape and settlements along the ridge, comprise a foreground of small scale fields and woodlands which form part of the High Weald AONB. Patches of small to medium-sized woodlands provide an intermittent sense of enclosure within this predominantly rural landscape.
- **Communications:** The landscape is crossed by a network of rural, sometimes sunken lanes, which are lined with mature trees and hedgerows.
- **Tranquillity and Remoteness:** There is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity throughout most of the landscape;

Physical Landscape Character

4.5.2 This gently sloping landscape has a number of blocks of woodland, particularly on its lower slopes. The ridges are predominantly free from large woodland blocks, though still well-treed, with hedges and shaws as the predominant field boundaries. The ridges are settled, with villages in a chain along the main ridge. Some scattered, smaller settlements are found across the slopes, which fall away in a south-westerly direction. The falling land is incised by a number of wooded ghylls. This local landscape type is present in two separate parts of the study area, which are bisected by the Waller’s Haven River and an associated area of Open Levels (LLCT F) landscape. The rural landscape between the woodland blocks is primarily farmed, with a mixture of arable and grazing land uses.

Historic Landscape Character

4.5.3 The Ridges and Slopes LLCT (B) forms part of the High Weald’s ancient countryside, one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in northern Europe. The dispersed settlement pattern and small-medium sized irregular shaped fields, enclosed by a network of hedgerows and wooded shaws, are predominantly of medieval origin. Early settlements, such as Herstmonceux and Ninfield, were built on the higher, drier ridge tops, which formed important lines of communication. An integrated traditional system of forestry and farming as well as the medieval practice of transhumance helped shape the character of the landscape, playing a key role in the transformation of a largely uninhabited landscape into the settled landscape which can be seen today.

4.5.4 Visible remnants of the past include blocks of Ancient Woodland and droveways (the latter today taking the form of roads and/or public rights of way). Herstmonceux Castle and Place, a large Grade II* Registered Park and Garden lies south of Herstmonceux. The origin of the park is unrecorded but it would appear that it was in existence by the 12th century. Charcoal hearths, pits and/or ponds relating to the iron industry can be found in some of the Ancient Woodland blocks, reflecting the wider area’s once busy industrial past. As is true of many Wealden villages, Ninfield was involved in the iron industry and today still contains a set of iron stocks. Standard Hill, believed to be the place where William the Conqueror placed his flag after the Battle of Hastings, lies to the west of Ninfield village.

4.5.5 Medium-large sized regular piece meal enclosures dominate this LLCT. Cohesive and aggregate assarts are mainly located in the outer eastern and western parts of the landscape. Medium-large-sized modern field amalgamations are scattered across the Ridges and Slopes LLCT, reflecting modern agricultural needs.

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15 Transhumance can be defined as the seasonal movement of people and animals between the settlements of the borders of the Weald and its interior.
4.5.9 This rural LLCA has a strong landscape pattern of small scale, predominantly pastoral fields, lined with mature hedgerows, often containing hedgerow trees. Panoramic, open views southwards across the lower Open Levels LLCT, with its network of flat, drained fields, contribute to recognisable sense of place. Within the centre of the LLCA, there is a strong sense of enclosure as a result of the hedgerows and small patches of woodland. The landscape is crossed by several interconnecting rural road corridors, several of which have ecologically diverse verges. Despite this, there is a very strong sense of remoteness and tranquility throughout the area. The small linear hamlet of Magham Down has a strong vernacular of red tiled/white painted houses. From the eastern edge of the area, glimpsed views eastwards towards woodland associated with Herstmonceux Castle contribute to recognisable sense of place.

B3: Herstmonceux Castle and Wartling

4.5.10 This LLCA is dominated by Herstmonceux Castle and its associated woodland, which is a key historic feature and visitor attraction. The Castle is generally hidden in views from surrounding rural road corridors as a result of the high hedges and mature trees which provide a strong sense of enclosure. In close proximity to the Castle, Herstmonceux Observatory is a key landscape feature, which is visible within several long distance views across the LLCA and from adjacent LLCAs. In the south of the area, the small hamlet of Wartling is situated on higher land, overlooking the Open Levels LLCT to the south. Panoramic, open views south and eastwards across the Levels can be gained from the road to the south of the village. Topography rises from south to north across the area, with a ridge of higher land running east-west across the northern edge of the LLCA. Two, small linear villages – Windmill Hill and Boreham Street are situated on this ridge of higher land, which overlooks the landscapes of the High Weald to the north. The vernacular white windmill in Windmill Hill is a key landscape/townscape feature.

B4: Ninfield and Hooe

4.5.11 This relatively large LLCA is situated at the eastern edge of Wealden District and is separated from other LLCAs within the same Landscape Character Type, by a valley of Open Levels (LLCA: F2, Waller’s Haven). The northern part of the LLCA is strongly rural and encompasses the small linear village of Ninfield. Ninfield church is a key landmark feature, contributing to recognisable sense of place. To the north of the village, large patches of woodland provide a strong sense of enclosure, linking this area to the strong wooded landscapes of the High Weald to the north. Ninfield is connected to the small hamlet of Hooe Common to the south by the minor rural road corridor of the B2095. Whilst this is a relatively busy north-south road corridor, at a distance from the road, there is a very strong sense of remoteness and tranquility throughout. The small hamlet of Hooe is further to the south. Hooe church, to the east of the settlement, is situated at the end of a narrow, tree-lined rural lane, which results in a strong rural setting. The field pattern throughout most of the area is small-scale and intimate, with mature trees and hedgerows at field boundaries and along road corridors. The topography of the area falls quite sharply from north to south, resulting in lower lying undulating fields in the southern part of the area which facilitate panoramic open views south and westwards across the Open Levels LLCT and its constituent LLCAs.