5.0 THE LOW WEALD LANDSCAPE

5.1 General

5.1.1 Within the landscape character context set out in Section 3.0, this Section presents the assessment of the Low Weald Landscape and the landscape setting of the selected settlements in this area. The assessment includes:

- A summary overview of the Low 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 Low Weald Landscape, 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 Low Weald Landscape in accordance with the methodology set out in Section 2.0

5.2 The Low Weald National Character Area

5.2.1 The extent of the Low 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 Low Weald National Character Area within the District is provided below.

Summary

5.2.2 The Low Weald forms the eroded outer edges of the High Weald, largely coinciding with the outcrop of Weald Clay but also with narrow bands of Gault Clay and the Lower and Upper Greensands, which outcrop close to the scarp face of the South Downs. Below the irregular escarpment of the Greensands belt and the chalk lies a broad vale, rarely exceeding more than 40 m above sea level, with many areas as low as 15 m. The resulting landscape is gently undulating with occasional steep-sided stream valleys, ridges and plateaux, becoming hillier to the south as it reaches the South Downs.

5.2.3 Water is a dominant feature, owing to the topography and impervious clay, particularly ponds and many meandering streams with riparian willows and alders. The area includes major parts of the valleys and floodplains of several principal rivers of the region.

5.2.4 Land use is still predominantly agricultural, and largely pastoral owing to the heavy clay soils with either grazed grassland or forage, including hay meadows. Most grassland has been agriculturally improved, but fragments of unimproved, floristically rich meadow and pasture are still present.

5.2.5 Fields are generally small and irregular in shape, many formed by woodland clearance or ‘assarting’ in the medieval period and often bounded by shaws, or formed from cleared land along woodland edges. Many of the species-rich hedgerows in this area may be remnants of larger woodland and often follow the pattern of medieval banks or ditches. Wherever there are lighter soils on slightly higher ground, more mixed farming is found. Fields in these areas tend to be larger and more regular in shape with fewer hedgerows.

5.2.6 Like the High Weald, the Low Weald is densely wooded in places. Numerous and extensive blocks of ancient, semi-natural coppiced woodland and important wood pasture sites are striking features. Oak is the principal tree and, despite centuries of clearances for settlement, transport and agriculture, significant areas of Ancient Woodland survive.

5.2.7 Isolated farmsteads, often occupying ancient sites (some moated), form the predominant settlement pattern, intermixed with small villages, often with ‘Street’ or ‘Green’ names suggesting secondary settlement. These farmsteads are associated with a landscape of small and irregular shaped fields, created by assarting from woodland in the medieval period, or medium-sized and more regular shaped fields created between the 15th and 18th centuries by enclosure through agreement of former arable strips. The latter are more common in the eastern parts of the area. Many small towns and typical Wealden villages, on the heavier clay soils in the western part, are scattered among a patchwork quilt landscape of woodland, permanent grassland, hedgerows and wetlands. Traditional buildings are often made of brick, with local colour variations, and some flint towards the South Downs. Pre-18th-century buildings were predominantly timber framed and even later buildings are often weather-boarded.

Key Characteristics

5.2.8 The key characteristics of the Low Weald National Character Area as a whole are:

- Broad, low-lying, gently undulating clay vales with outcrops of limestone or sandstone providing local variation.
- The underlying geology has provided materials for industries including iron working, brick and glass making, leaving pits, lime kilns and quarries. Many of the resulting exposures are critical to our understanding of the Wealden environment.
- A generally pastoral landscape with arable farming associated with lighter soils on higher ground. Land use is predominantly agricultural.
- Field boundaries of hedgerows and shaws (remnant strips of cleared woodland) enclosing small, irregular fields and linking into small and scattered linear settlements along roadsides or centred on greens or commons. Rural lanes and tracks with wide grass verges and ditches.
- Small towns and villages are scattered among areas of woodland, permanent grassland and hedgerows on the heavy clay soils where larger 20th-century villages have grown around major transport routes.
• Frequent north–south routeways and lanes, many originating as drove roads, along which livestock were moved to downland grazing or to forests to feed on acorns.
• The Low Weald boasts an intricate mix of woodlands, much of it ancient, including extensive broadleaved oak over hazel and hornbeam coppice, shaws, small field copses and tree groups, and lines of riparian trees along watercourses. Veteran trees are a feature of hedgerows and in fields.
• Many small rivers, streams and watercourses with associated water meadows and wet woodland.
• Abundance of ponds, some from brick making and quarrying, and hammer and furnace ponds, legacies of the Wealden iron industry.
• Traditional rural vernacular of local brick, weatherboard and tile-hung buildings plus local use of distinctive Horsham slabs as a roofing material.
• Weatherboard barns are a feature. Oast houses occur in the east and use of flint is notable in the south towards the South Downs.

5.3 County Landscape Character Areas

5.3.1 The relevant County Landscape Character Areas within Wealden District that fall (whole or in part) within the Low Weald National Character Area are included below (see Figure 3.1), taken from the East Sussex County Landscape Assessment18.

Upper Ouse Valley (3)

Summary

5.3.2 This is a gently sloping landscape of low ridges and wider valleys covered by an intricate pattern of streams and woods. It lies between Wivelsfield Green (outside the Study Area) and Buxted, and includes the valley system of the River Ouse and the River Uck.

Key Characteristics

• Small, winding, alder-lined rivers and streams.
• Predominantly gently 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

5.3.3 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.

Western Low Weald (14)

Summary

5.3.4 The low lying clay vale stretches from the foot of the Downland scarps to the High Weald, between Ditchling and Ringmer in the south and North Chailey and Isfield to the north (outside Wealden District). Its abundant trees and hedges, combined with undulating landform create a sheltered, secluded countryside with a strong landscape structure.

Key Characteristics

• Gently undulating, relatively low-lying countryside.
• Abundant trees, with small woods and hedges, several large areas of woodland.
• Abundance of oak in woods and hedgerows, also field maple and hornbeam.
• Designed landscape and some fine parkland and ornamental woodland.
• Gentle, winding, partly tree-lined rivers and streams.
• Small attractive villages, and their flint churches are on higher ground, particularly along the Greensand ridge running parallel with the Downs.
• Larger 20th century villages have grown near railways and through routes.
• Frequent uninterrupted views of the bold scarp of the Downs just to the south.
• Rich, secluded, sheltered feel due to combination of gentle relief and abundant small woods, trees and hedges.
• Pattern of parallel lanes running from the Downs.

Eastern Low Weald (15)

Summary

5.3.5 This area is more open and exposed than the western low weald, with many more flat, treeless areas. It contains the large woodland areas of Abbot’s and Vert Woods, which are mainly conifer plantations. Running from Ringmer in the west (outside Wealden District) to Polegate in the east the area contains the upper River Cuckmere and Arlington Reservoir.

Key Characteristics

• Significant areas of flat, nearly treeless country with remote windswept feel.
• A greater area (15%) is under woodland than in the Western Low Weald but, by contrast, nearly all of this is in large blocks over 2 Ha.
• About half the woodland is coniferous.
• Hedgerows and hedgerow trees are slightly less abundant, and trees are often small and wind-bent.
• Ancient pathways cross the area, including ancient Drove roads running North and South across the Low Weald.
• Fine, open views of the Downs.
• Small, remote and largely unspoiled rural villages.

Pevensey Levels (25)

Summary

5.3.7 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 staghorn 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
5.4 Local Landscape Character Type C: Gently Undulating Wooded Valleys

Character Description

Location and Boundaries

The Gently Undulating Wooded Valleys LLCT (C) is situated along part of the western boundary of Wealden District, wrapping round Uckfield’s southern edges. To the north, this LLCT is adjacent to the High Weald’s Ridges and Valleys LLCT (A); whilst to the east it abuts the Wooded Clay Vales LLCT (D) of the Eastern Low Weald.

Key Characteristics

- **Topography:** A series of northeast-southwest flowing river valleys which are often lined with areas of mature shaws/woodland. The relatively narrow valleys cut through an undulating landscape of predominantly pastoral fields;
- **Settlement pattern:** is limited to farmsteads and small linear villages which are often situated on the valley sides or on higher ridges between two valleys.
- **Communications:** A number of A-road corridors cross the landscape, introducing a source of noise and movement and these are connected to a network of minor rural road corridors which follow the valleys sides and cross the valleys.
- **Views and Visibility:** At the eastern edge of this LLCT, views to the urban edge of the large town of Uckfield are a key feature, which contributes to recognisable strength of place.
- **Tranquillity and Remoteness:** Despite the presence of the A22, A26 and A272 main road corridors, there is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity with the valleys, particularly along the stream/river valley floors, at a distance from the roads and from the edges of Uckfield.

Physical Landscape Character

5.4.2 This sparsely settled landscape is distinguished from the Ridges and Valleys (LLCT A) landscape to the north east by its more gentle topography. The field pattern is very varied, ranging from large, irregularly shaped arable fields to an intricate network of small fields used primarily for grazing. Uniting the varied field pattern is a consistency in presence of hedges and shaws as a field boundary. These boundary features contribute to the well-wooded character of the landscape along with a large number of small woodlands, primarily deciduous, and scattered larger woodland blocks. The small settlements that are present within the landscape are predominantly associated with higher ground rather than the valley floor.

Historic Landscape Character

5.4.3 Generally, medium-large sized modern field amalgamations dominate this LLCT, reflecting the needs of modern agricultural practices. Irregular small-medium sized fields, generally enclosed by hedgerows and shaws, are remnants of the former medieval practice known as ‘assarting’. Cohesive and aggregate assarts, as well as assart woods, are clustered mainly to the south-east and west of Uckfield. Isolated farmsteads associated with this medieval landscape form the predominant settlement pattern, intermixed with small villages. A swathe of regular piece meal enclosures is present in the west and south-west of this LLCT.

5.4.4 Important Ancient Woodland survives, dotted across the LLCT. This is also true of historic pits and quarries, created as a result of the extraction of materials used in industries such as iron working, and brick and glass making. There is evidence of iron working in the Low Weald for over 2,000 years, including hammer and furnace ponds, grand houses built by once wealthy foundry owners and coppiced woodland (which provided the necessary charcoal fuel for smelting). Other vestiges of the past include drove roads (now used as roads/public rights of way), which were once used by early farming communities to move livestock to and from Downland grazing, and isolated farmsteads occupying historic sites (e.g. Medieval farmstead at Buckham Hill). Horsted Place, a Grade II Registered Park and Garden, reveals a late 20th century garden designed by Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe amid the setting of the remnants of 19th century ornamental woodland and parkland.
Evaluation

Landscape Sensitivity

5.4.5 Overall, the Gently Undulating Wooded Valleys LLCT is assessed as having High Landscape Sensitivity. Strength of place is considered to be strong as a result of distinct pattern of narrow stream corridors and wooded valleys and the fields within the valleys are ancient in many places. Overall visibility is considered to be high as a result of the dominant topographical pattern of valleys which cut through gently undulating field and the intermittent sense of enclosure, resulting from the patches of mature woodland.

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| Indicative Landscape Sensitivity| High       |

Landscape Value

5.4.6 The Undulating Wooded Valleys LLCT is considered to have High Landscape Value. There is a strong pattern of valleys and woodlands, and the landscape is generally in good condition. A few visual detractors are present at the edges of Uckfield, and along main road corridors, however, generally this is a unified landscape. Views across and along stream corridors contribute to recognizable strength of place and there is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquility at a distance from the main roads and edges of Uckfield.

Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCA)

C1: Fletching and Piltdown

5.4.7 This LLCA encompasses several narrow, meandering stream corridors which run north-south across the landscape and feed the main valley of the River Ouse, further to the south. Lined in places with areas of mature, often Ancient Woodland, these corridors are key landscape and ecological features within this gently undulating landscape. The small village of Piltdown is situated towards the centre of the area, and other houses and farmsteads have developed along the linear north-south road corridors that cross the area. The main A272 road corridor (which connects Maresfield in the northeast, to Newick in the southwest) introduces a source of noise and movement within this otherwise, predominantly tranquil landscape. There is a mature landscape structure of trees and hedgerows, lining road corridors and field boundaries.

C2: Uck Valley

5.4.8 The gently meandering corridor of the River Uck flows north-south through this LLCA, lined in places with small areas of mature woodland. Numerous small ponds and waterbodies associated with the main river corridor are recognizable landscape features. In the south of the area, open, localized views across predominately arable fields to wooded low ridges, contribute to recognizable sense of place. Patches of woodland (much of which is ancient) contribute to an intermittent sense of enclosure within this gently undulating landscape. A network of rural road corridors, lined with mature trees across the landscape and historic houses and farmsteads are scattered along, and set back from the road. The dismantled railway corridor which once housed the Lewes to Uckfield line, is a key landscape feature, with the southern part of the line forming the Lavender Line, a functioning vintage steam railway. Within the southern part of the area, there is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquility. There is contrast within this LLCA between the northern and southern landscapes. In the north, where the landscape abuts the southern edges of the large town of Uckfield, urban fringe land uses (such as industrial estates and sewage works) are apparent. The dominant corridor of the A22 also introduces a source of noise and movement, crossing the northern part of the LLCA and disturbing the overall sense of remoteness and tranquility. Views to the urban edges of Uckfield are a key feature in the north of the area.

C3: High Cross

5.4.9 This relatively small LLCA forms the southeastern landscape setting to the town of Uckfield and comprises a pattern of regular shaped blocks of mature woodland and small stream corridors (such as the Ridgewood Stream). These stream corridors feed the River Uck to the southwest. High Cross Lake is also a key landscape feature. The settlement pattern comprises isolated farmsteads and large residential properties that are situated alongside the network of rural roads. This is a gently undulating, treed landscape, with views to wooded skylines contributing to recognizable sense of place. The overall sense of remoteness and tranquility is diminished by noise and movement associated with the A22 main road corridor in the south and the residential edges of Uckfield in the northwest.

C4: Little Horsted

5.4.10 This LLCA encompasses a patchwork of undulating arable and pastoral fields, interspersed with stream corridors, small waterbodies and blocks of woodland. Field boundaries and road corridors tend to be lined with low, trimmed hedgerows or mature trees. Views are characterised by distant wooded skylines. The A26 main road corridor runs north-south through the western edge of the area, and the A22 main road corridor runs along the northern edge, introducing a source of noise and movement. At a distance from these roads, there is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquility throughout. In the north of the area, the designed landscape associated with the East Sussex National Golf Club impacts a human influence on the landscape. There is strong sense of enclosure at the southern edge of the area, as a result of the large area of woodland (Plasnett Wood), which dominates landscape character.
5.5 Local Landscape Character Type D: Wooded Clay Vales

Character Description

Location and Boundaries

The Wooded Clay Vales LLCT (D) is located in the south-western part of Wealden District; stretching broadly between Halland to the north-west and Hailsham’s urban edge to the south-east. To the north, this LLCT abuts the High Weald’s southern Ridges and Valleys LLCT (A); and to the south and east the Open Clay Vales LLCT (E). To the west, it is adjacent to the Low Weald’s Gently Undulating Wooded Valleys LLCT (C).

Key Characteristics

• **Topography:** A flat, to gently rolling landscape of clay vales, which supports a small-scale patchwork of arable and pastoral fields, interspersed with small areas of woodland (much of which is ancient).

• **Settlement Pattern:** A small-scale pattern of rural hamlets, villages and farmsteads/houses which tend to be located along the network of minor roads that cross this predominantly rural landscape. This LLCT abuts the main town of Hailsham in the east.

• **Views and Visibility:** Open views across gently rolling fields are punctuated by hedgerows and small blocks of woodland. From the south of this LLCT, open views across the adjacent Open Clay Vales (LLCT E) can be gained. To the east, open, panoramic views across the vast Open Levels (LLCT F) contribute to recognisable sense of place.

• **Communications:** The landscape is crossed by a network of rural road corridors, which are often lined with mature trees and hedgerows. In contrast, the A22 main road corridor runs east–west across the northern part of the LLCT and also forms part of its eastern boundary. A network of footpaths connects the hamlets and villages to their landscape settings.

• **Tranquillity and Remoteness:** There is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity throughout most of the landscape, at distance from the A22 main road corridor.

Physical Landscape Character

This rolling clay landscape of woodland and farmland is scattered with villages, hamlets and farmsteads, all small in size. The area is predominantly rural, with a mixture of pastoral and arable farming, as well as a significant presence of equestrian land uses. The arable land is primarily, but not exclusively associated with higher ground. The landscape is very well treed, with a number of large blocks of woodland, as well as the small woodlands, hedges and shaws typical of Wealden landscape. Woodland is primarily deciduous or mixed, adding ecological and landscape value. The main hydrological feature in this LLCT is the River Cuckmere, running north-west to south-east through the landscape in a broad, shallow valley.

Historic Landscape Character

5.5.3 A large proportion of the landscape is made up of cohesive and aggregate assarts and assart woods of varying sizes. This reflects the popular medieval cultivation practice known as ‘assarting’. Isolated farmsteads associated with this medieval landscape form the predominant settlement pattern, interspersed with small villages. Regular piece meal enclosures and modern field amalgamations are interspersed throughout assarts. Large-scale planned private enclosures are present to the south of East Hoathly and around Lower/Upper Dicker. There are two large 20th century plantations, one to the south and one to the north. Co-axial fields survive around Deanland Wood.

5.5.4 Similarly to the Gently Undulating Wooded Valleys LLCT (C), important Ancient Woodland survives, scattered across the landscape; as well as droves, historic ponds linked to the iron, brick and/or glass making industries and historical sites (e.g. Michelham Priory, originally founded by Augustinian canons).
Local Landscape Character Areas

D1: East Hoathly and Halland

This LLCA has a strong landscape structure of woodlands which are interspersed with small to medium-scale, predominantly pastoral fields. This pattern is particularly prevalent in the northwestern corner of the area and is likely to be the result of assarting. Field boundaries are lined with mature hedgerows, resulting in an intermittent sense of enclosure overall. A network of minor, rural road corridors, often lined with mature trees crosses the landscape. In the southeast of the area, to the south of the small village of East Hoathly, there is a stronger sense of openness, with fewer woodland patches. Settlement pattern comprises farmsteads and houses which are set back from the rural road corridors. The A22 main road corridor bisects the area, introducing a source of noise and movement and reducing the overall sense of remoteness and tranquillity. To the southeast of the A22, the field pattern is larger, comprising more recent, arable fields. Within this part of the area there is a sense of openness as a result of low hedgerows and gaps in roadside trees/hedgerows.

D2: Laughton

Overall, the Wooded Clay Vales LLCT is assessed as having High Landscape Sensitivity. There is a strong strength of place as a result of the patchwork of arable and pastoral fields and woodland. The landscape also has a strong landscape structure, resulting from the networks of mature hedgerows and trees lining road corridors. There is strong historic continuity throughout the LLCT, with many ancient field patterns and several areas of Ancient Woodland. Overall visibility is considered to be moderate as a result of the intermittent sense of enclosure provided by areas of woodland and the gently rolling topography.

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<td>Visibility</td>
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<td>Strength of Place</td>
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D3: Upper and Lower Vert Wood

This LLCA is almost entirely covered in mature, dense woodland, encompassing Upper and Lower Vert Wood, Laughton Common Wood, Sandpit Wood and Bowen Wood. There is a very strong sense of enclosure throughout. One minor road corridor runs north-south through the woodland. The woods tend to have a relatively open understorey. An unmade track/bridleway crosses the woodland east-west. The A22 main road corridor also crosses the north-eastern corner of the area, introducing a source of noise and movement. At a distance from the A22, this LLCA has a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity throughout.

D4: Golden Cross

This relatively large LLCA, encompasses several small villages and hamlets, such as Chiddingly, Muddles Green and Whitesmith. There is very strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity within the northwestern part of this area around Chiddingly. Here, a network of small to medium-scale, predominantly pastoral fields are lined with small mature woodlands and a dense hedgerow network. The network of rural roads is lined with trees and trimmed hedgerows. Short-distance views to wooded skylines contribute to recognisable sense of place. The landscape is crossed by numerous stream corridors. The A22 main road...
corridor runs along the southern edge of the area introducing a source of noise and movement and reducing the sense of remoteness and tranquility in the south. Overall, this LLCA encompasses a patchwork of predominantly pastoral fields, small woodlands and stream corridors.

D6: Upper Dicker

5.5.12 This LLCA encompasses a radial network of minor rural corridors which converge at the village of Upper Dicker in the centre of the area. There is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquility throughout much of the area, which comprises a relatively small-scale patchwork of arable and pastoral fields. There is strong historic continuity within this area, evidenced by the ancient field pattern and the remains of Michelham Priory to the southeast of Upper Dicker, in the east of the area. The gently meandering corridor of the River Cuckmere is a key landscape feature within the east. Views southeast from the eastern part of the area are enclosed by mature woodland within Wilmington and Abbot’s Wood (LLCA D7). There is a mature landscape structure of hedgerows and trees throughout.

D7: Wilmington and Abbots Wood

5.5.13 There is a strong sense of enclosure within this LLCA, which encompasses mature woodland within Wilmington Wood and Abbots Wood. There are no road corridors running through the woodland, however the Robin Post Lane track/bridleway provides access north-south. This LLCA forms a wooded backdrop to views from surrounding LLCAs and also from the southern edges of the town of Hailsham. The A22 main road corridor runs north-south along the eastern edge of the area, introducing a source of noise and movement. To the north and east of the woodland, an ancient field pattern of small-scale, predominantly pastoral fields is apparent.
5.6 Local Landscape Character Type E: Open Clay Vales

Character Description

Location and Boundaries

5.6.1 The Open Clay Vales LLCT (E) is situated in the south-western part of Wealden District, broadly stretching between Ashton Green to the north-west (which sits immediately outside the boundary of this LLCT) and Polegate to the south-east. The Open Clay Vales also wrap around all but the south-western quarter of Hailsham. To the north, the majority of this LLCT is adjacent to the Wooded Clay Valleys LLCT (D); with a small portion in the east being adjacent to the High Weald’s Ridges and Valleys LLCT (A) and Ridges and Slopes LLCT (B). To the east, the Open Clay Vales abut Polegate’s urban edge and also overlook Pevensey’s Open and Settled Levels (LLCTs F and G). To the south this LLCT meets the northern edge of the South Downs National Park. The Wooded Clay Vales LLCT (D) also lies to the west of Hailsham.

Key Characteristics

- **Topography:** Flat to gently sloping, predominantly low-lying landform associated with several stream and river corridors. Small hills of higher land provide landscape interest.
- **Settlement Pattern:** A small-scale pattern of rural hamlets, villages and farmsteads/houses which tend to be located along the network of minor roads that cross this predominantly rural landscape. This LLCT abuts the main town of Polegate in the east.
- **Views and Visibility:** Open views across predominantly flat fields are characterised by wide skies. Views southwards (from most areas) to the dominant ridges of the South Downs contribute to a strongly recognisable sense of place and provide orientation. Views northwards to the Wooded Clay Vales (LLCT D) comprise wooded skylines.
- **Communications:** The landscape is crossed by a network of rural road corridors, which are often lined with mature trees and hedgerows. The mainline Lewes-Eastbourne railway runs west-east across this LLCT and the A27 main road corridor forms the southern boundary.
- **Tranquillity and Remoteness:** There is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity throughout most of the landscape, at a distance from the A27 main road corridor and railway line.

Physical Landscape Character

5.6.2 This predominantly low-lying LLCT is characterised by a lower level of tree cover than much of the study area, and very gently rolling topography. The landscape is largely rural, comprising a mixture of small pastoral fields, and larger fields managed as arable land. The lowest lying areas also have a presence of some coastal and floodplain grazing marsh. This lowest-lying land frequently encompasses a network of man-made drainage ditches, which add to the existing naturally occurring small watercourses that criss-cross the landscape, many of which flow into the main drainage channel that crosses this LLCT, the River Cuckmere. Field boundaries are predominantly hedgerows, with occasional hedgerow trees and shaws, usually associated with smaller pastoral fields. Settlements are small and scattered, and include a number of farmsteads.

Historic Landscape Character

5.6.3 Regular piecemeal enclosures and planned private enclosures dominate the central part of this LLCT, as well as its eastern and western fringes. Large blocks of assart woods located north and south of Ripe and Chalvington and a swathe of cohesive assarts in the south-eastern part of this LLCT reflect the past medieval cultivation technique of ‘assarting’. Isolated farmsteads associated with this medieval landscape form the predominant settlement pattern, intermixed with small villages. Medium-large segregated blocks of consolidated strip fields lie in the central part of this LLCT as well as in its eastern and western edges.

5.6.4 Similarly to LLCT C (Gently Undulating Wooded Valleys) and D (Wooded Clay Vales), important Ancient Woodland survives, scattered across the landscape; as well as droves, historic ponds linked to the iron, brick and/or glass making industries and historical sites (e.g. Wootton Manor, a site rooted in Medieval times though much altered through the centuries and which now includes an early 20th century garden designed by Detmar Blow).
Evaluation

Landscape Sensitivity

5.6.5 Overall, the Open Clay Vales LLCT is assessed as having High Landscape Sensitivity. There is a strong strength of place as a result of open views southwards to the ridges of the South Downs and a recognisable landscape pattern of arable/pastoral fields and stream corridors. The landscape also has a strong landscape structure, resulting from the networks of mature hedgerows and trees lining road corridors. There is strong historic continuity throughout the LLCT, with many ancient field patterns apparent. Overall visibility is considered to be moderate. Landform is predominantly flat and is considered to be visually insignificant. There is also a strong sense of openness throughout much of the LLCT.

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5.6.6 The Open Clay Vales LLCT is considered to have High Landscape Value. There is a strong strength of place as a result of views to the South Downs. There is also strong historic continuity throughout. There are many valuable landscape and historic landscape features, including woodland, mature hedgerows, stream corridors and historic buildings. There is also a strong sense of wildness and tranquillity throughout this predominantly rural landscape, which has few detracting features.

Local Landscape Character Areas

E1: Laughton Place

5.6.7 This predominantly flat and low-lying LLCA has a strong sense of openness. Views southwards to the ridges of the South Downs contribute to recognisable sense of place. The southern part of the area contains some marshy areas, whilst the north of the area is covered by a patchwork of medium to large-scale arable and pastoral fields. Fields are lined with a network of mature hedgerows and trees, and road corridors tend to be lined on both sides with low to medium hedgerows. Numerous drainage ditches and small stream corridors cross the landscape and these are reed-fringed in places. There is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity throughout. The settlement pattern is sparse, with occasional farmsteads a feature.

5.6.8 In the north, this LLCA contains the two linear villages of Chalvington and Ripe, which are connected by a minor rural road corridor. These historic villages have a strong local vernacular character, with houses often displaying traditional red brick/tile upper floors and white painted lower floors. Village churches often form focal points within views to these villages from their landscape settings. Landscape pattern comprises a mixture of medium to large-scale arable and pastoral fields. Whilst hedgerows are apparent, they are not dominant landscape features, and there is a strong sense of openness throughout much of the area. Panoramic, open views southwards towards the ridges of the South Downs contribute to recognisable sense of place. The network of rural roads tends to be lined with tall, mature hedgerows, often resulting in glimpse views to adjacent fields and the South Downs whilst travelling along them. The railway corridor crosses the southern part of the area and the A22 main road corridor forms the southern boundary. Both of these transport corridors introduce a source of noise and movement to this otherwise predominantly tranquil landscape. In the south, the small village of Selborne, centred on its historic church is a key feature.

E3: Arlington

5.6.9 The large expanse of Arlington reservoir is the key landscape feature within this LLCA. Open views across the water from locations in close proximity to the reservoir are a key feature. In addition, views southwards to the ridges of the South Downs contribute to recognisable sense of place. The reservoir is a nature reserve and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its ecological interest. The northern and western edges of the reservoir are fringed with mature woodland. The River Cuckmere valley runs north-south through the eastern part of the area, to the east of the reservoir. This is lined with a patchwork of arable and pastoral fields. Settlements include the small village of Arlington, to the east of the reservoir and the small hamlet of Berwick Station to the southwest, which has developed in conjunction with the railway corridor. The railway corridor crosses the southern part of the area and the A22 main road corridor forms the southern boundary. Both of these transport corridors introduce a source of noise and movement to this otherwise predominantly tranquil landscape.

E4: Wilmington Green

5.6.10 This relatively small LLCA is situated directly to the south of Abbots Wood (within LLCA D7). As a result, views northwards are dominated by wooded skylines. Open views southwards towards the ridges of the South Downs are a key feature (as with adjacent LLCA’s within the Open Clay Vales LLCT). The area is generally low lying, however a series of small hills provide topographical variation in the west. Landscape within the area comprises a patchwork of arable and pastoral fields which are lined with mature hedgerows. Settlement pattern is generally absent, other than a few scattered farmsteads in the northwest of the area. The railway corridor and A27 main road corridor reduce the sense of remoteness and tranquility
in the south. Urban fringe land uses (including a motel and associated car parking) are apparent at the edges of Polegate to the east of the area.

E5: Hailsham and Lower Horsebridge

5.6.11 This gently sloping area of landscape forms the eastern edge of the Clay Vale landscapes and overlooks the Open Levels LLCT to the east. As a result, open views eastwards across the striking, low lying Levels, with their networks of drainage ditches are a key feature and contribute to recognisable sense of place. Landscape within the area comprises a small-scale patchwork of predominantly pastoral fields, lined with a network of hedgerows. The Cuckoo Trail footpath runs north south through the area, connecting Polegate and Willingdon in the south to Hailsham in the north. The A22 main road corridor, just to the west of this LLCA disturbs overall sense of tranquillity. In the north, this area forms the landscape setting to the southern edges of Hailsham, and as such, views to the urban edges are a key feature. In the south, urban fringe land uses and roundabouts associated with northern edges of Polegate diminish the rural character.

E6: Hellingly

5.6.12 This LLCA wraps around the northern edge of the large town of Hailsham and provides its northern and eastern landscape setting. To the east Hailsham, open views across the Levels are a key feature looking eastwards, whilst views westwards are dominated by residential properties at the urban edge. Here, a patchwork of small scale, predominantly pastoral fields dominate landscape character. To the north of Hailsham, settlement pattern includes the two small villages of Hellingly and Lower Horsebridge. From this part of the LLCA, views southwards are dominated by the urban edges of Hailsham (although these are often screened by mature vegetation). Urban fringe land uses are apparent, including several nurseries. The upper reaches of the River Cuckmere also flows north-south through this LLCA. Despite proximity to Hailsham, there is a strong landscape structure of hedgerows lining field boundaries and trees lining some of the road corridors.