2. **Landscape and Ecological Context**

2.1 **Landscape context**

*Regional context*

2.1.1 National Character Areas (NCAs) have been identified by Natural England\(^1\) and provide the landscape context for an area at regional level. The four NCAs which provide the landscape context for this study (identified on Figure 2.1) are:

- High Weald NCA
- Low Weald NCA
- Pevensey Levels NCA
- South Downs NCA

*County context*

2.1.2 County Landscape Character Areas of relevance to this study are identified in the East Sussex County Landscape Assessment\(^2\). Five character areas (identified on Figure 2.1) extend across the area which this study covers:

- 5. South Slopes of High Weald
- 15. Eastern Low Weald
- 24. Eastbourne Levels
- 25. Pevensey Levels
- 35. Hailsham

*Local Landscape Character Types and Character Areas*

2.1.3 The local landscape character context for the area covered by the study is set out in the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment\(^3\). This identifies Local Landscape Character Types (LLCT) and the constituent Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCA) within Wealden District. The LLCTs and LLCAs of relevance to this study are summarised below. A figure is provided in each sub-area chapter illustrating the local landscape character context in relation to each of the sites assessed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Landscape Character Type</th>
<th>Local Landscape Character Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Ridges and Slopes</td>
<td>B1: Cowbeech Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B2: Magham Down and Flowers Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Wooded Clay Vales</td>
<td>D6: Upper Dicker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D7: Wilmington and Abbots Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Open Clay Vales</td>
<td>E4: Wilmington Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E5: Hailsham and Lower Horsebridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E6: Hellingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Open Levels</td>
<td>F1: Down and Whelpley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F4: East Polegate Levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Urban Dominated Landscapes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^3\) Chris Blandford Associates (2014) - Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment

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The Landscape Partnership
April 2017
2.2 Ecological Context

Habitats

2.2.1 The Low Weald NCA\(^4\) to the west of Hailsham as a whole supports over 29,000 ha of woodland, of which almost 50% is Ancient Woodland. The High Weald NCA to the north of Hailsham has over 46,000 ha\(^5\). Broadleaved woodland is thus common in all sub-areas but the West and South Hailsham sub-areas are particularly well-wooded. Some of the woodland is designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and much has been identified as woodland Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) (now Section 41) habitat.

2.2.2 The ancient character of many of the woodlands is reflected by the presence of banks and ditches, and in the sinuosity of the woodland margins. Oak is a prominent tree of the Low Weald and the woodland often has oak standards over hazel coppice. Old coppiced woodland varies between chestnut, hornbeam or hazel. Small tree groups frequently occur within the fields and as part of the hedgerow pattern, numerous mature standard trees are dotted along hedgerows. Often where hedgerows have vanished, lines of single mature trees remain.

2.2.3 Much of the area around Hailsham is under pastoral management. Some of the local grasslands have been substantially improved, either for horse grazing or to ensure a high quality hay crop; however much is semi-improved and there are also areas of relict marsh grassland in poorly drained areas; and therefore areas of grassland are often of potentially high botanical and general biodiversity interest. The pastures and meadows are typically bounded by dense, species rich hedgerows, many of which appear of ancient origin. The hedgerows provide habitat corridors which link the woodlands.

2.2.4 To the east, the flat drained marshland of the Pevensey Levels, a low-lying area of floodplain between Eastbourne and Bexhill in East Sussex, is present. This area has both national and international designation (see below), and the entire area of which has been identified as floodplain grazing marsh BAP habitat, this habitat extending almost as far as the outskirts of Hailsham. The Hailsham East sub-area sites lie on the edge of this floodplain and thus include areas of low-lying floodplain grassland featuring a network of drainage dykes which are contiguous with those of the designated site.

2.2.5 The soils of the area are typically poorly drained. The area is heavily dissected by river floodplains and many small, narrow watercourses cut into the clays. The area has a very high density of ponds, that part which corresponds to the Low Weald being rated second nationally in this respect\(^6\).

Designated sites

2.2.6 The Pevensey Levels are internationally important for wildlife, with Ramsar, Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designations covering 3,500 ha of land. The ditches support a wide variety of plant and animal species, many of which are rare in the UK, including the fen raft spider, rare molluscs and over 20 species of dragonfly and damselfly. The wet pasture supports wintering and breeding waders and wildfowl.

2.2.7 The area around Hailsham also features a number of locally designated sites (LWS)

- CW14 Hellingly Cemetery
- CW21 Monkyn Pin
- CW28 Beatons Wood

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\(^4\) NCA Profile:121 Low Weald (NE450)
\(^5\) NCA Profile 122: High Weald (NE508)
\(^6\) NCA Profile:121 Low Weald (NE450)
• CW30 Bramble Grove
• CW40 Twenty Acre Wood
• CW74 Diplocks Wood
• CW87 Michelham Priory
• CW92 Abbotts Wood
• CW97 Jarvis’s, Nobody’s and Park Wood complex

2.2.8 The majority of these are woodland sites, reflecting the importance of woodland within the local biodiversity context.
WEALDEN LANDSCAPE & SETTLEMENT CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

FIGURE 2.1
COUNTY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS IN WEALDEN DISTRICT

County Landscape Character Areas:
1. Upper Medway Valley
2. Ashdown Forest
3. Upper Ouse Valley
4. Central High Weald
5. South Slopes of High Weald
6. Upper Rother Valley
7. Bewl Water Area
8. Dudwell Valley
9. Darwell Valley
10. Combe Haven Valley
11. Brede Valley
12. High Wealden Coast
13. Lower Rother Valley
14. Western Low Weald
15. Eastern Low Weald
16. Ditchling - Mount Harry Downs
17. Falmer Telscombe Downs
18. Lower Ouse Valley
19. Leedes Downs
20. Firle Bishopstone Downs
21. Lower Cuckmere Valley
22. Wilmington Downs
23. Eastbourne Downs
24. Pevensey Levels
25. Rye Winchelsea Area
26. Saltdean - Peacehaven
27. Eastbourne
28. Battle
29. Wealden District
30. 1:25,000 Landscape Character Assessment Study Area
31. National Character Area Boundary

KEY

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