6.0 Polegate and Willingdon

6.1 Context

Location

6.1.1 The Polegate and Willingdon sub-area extends from the west side of Polegate (adjacent to the A22/A27) around the northern edge (south of the A27) to the area of undeveloped landscape between Willingdon and south Polegate. Twelve sites were assessed within this sub-area. (Refer to Figure 6.1 for location of sites). The sub-area is varied and covers a range of landscape character types and local landscape character areas.

Landscape Character Context

6.1.2 At the county level of landscape character assessment, the Polegate and Willingdon sub-area comprises part of the Eastbourne Urban Area together with parts of three Landscape Character Areas (LCA). (Refer to Figure 2.1 for County Landscape Character Context). The west side of the area falls within the Eastern Low Weald LCA, the northern edge falls within the Pevensey Levels LCA, and the central area falls within the Eastbourne Levels LCA. Each of these areas are briefly summarised below with the characteristics of particular relevance to this sub-area underlined for emphasis. These summaries are taken from the East Sussex County Landscape Assessment:

6.1.3 The Eastern Low Weald County LCA is summarised as:

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.

The key characteristics are described as:

- 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.
- Hedges 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.
- Historic designed landscapes and parkland.
- Small, winding, partly tree-lined streams, notably the River Cuckmere, but also many artificial, straightened drains and channels

6.1.4 The Pevensey Levels County LCA is summarised as:

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.

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Away from the roads there is a distinct remoteness amongst the big skies and cries of wetland birds.

The key characteristics are described as:

- Reed-fringed winding channels in open wetland pasture.
- Scattered straggly willow and thorn along channels.
- Islands (eyes) of slightly higher ground.
- Main channels are engineered.
- Isolated farms and cottages throughout the LCA.
- Winding lanes cross the levels.

6.1.5 These characteristics of the Pevensey Levels LCA are typical of the extensive area of open landscape to the north east of Polegate beyond the A27. However they are not typical of the area on the northern edge of Polegate (south of the A27) within which sites 150/1510, 241/1510, 457/1510 and 193/1510 are located. These sites are closer in character to the Eastern Low Weald (described above).

6.1.6 The Eastbourne Levels County LCA is more relevant to the low lying areas of this sub-area and is summarised as:

This small tract of levels is separated from the Pevensey Levels by the low Polegate-Stone Cross-Pevensey ridge. Its other boundaries are the urban edges of Eastbourne, Willingdon, Langney and Sovereign Harbour.

Photo 6.1 – The Eastbourne Levels is a flat, pastoral landscape

Photo location: View north across site 540/3370

The key characteristics of the Eastbourne Levels are described as:

- Quiet pasture and reedy channels
- Flat open landscape
6.1.7 Site 120/1510, 236/3370, 540/3370, 271/1510, 772/1510, 048/1510 and 835/1510 fall within this area and are generally representative of this character area.

6.1.8 At the local level of landscape character assessment, three Local Landscape Character Types (LLCT) are relevant (Open Clay Vales, Open Levels and Settled Levels) and four Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCA) are relevant (E4: Wilmington Green, F4: East Polegate Levels, F1 Down and Whelpley and G1 Pevensey and Hankham (refer to Figure 6.2).

6.1.9 The Open Clay Vales LLCT extends around the north-western edge of Polegate and within this, three sites fall within the LLCA E4: Wilmington Green (sites 257/1510, 204/1510 and 255/1510). There is a strong sense of place in this area arising from a strong historic continuity with many ancient field patterns apparent and open views to the South Downs. It is a predominantly rural landscape with a strong sense of wildness and tranquillity throughout and few detracting features. Overall, the Open Clay Vales LLCT is assessed as having High Landscape Sensitivity and High Landscape Value as detailed in the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2014).

6.1.10 LLCA E4 Wilmington Green is relatively small and situated directly to the south of Abbots Wood. The area is generally low lying, however a series of small hills provide topographical variation in the west. The key characteristics of this LLCA are detailed below with those characteristics which are particularly evident in the Polegate and Willingdon area underlined for emphasis:

- **Views northwards are dominated by wooded skylines**
- **Open views southwards towards the ridges of the South Downs are a key feature**
- **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.

Photo 6.2 – Views northwards in the Open Clay Vales are enclosed by the wooded edge of Abbot’s and Wilmington Wood

Photo location: View north across site 204/1510 (Cophall Farm)
The railway corridor and A27 main road corridor reduce the sense of remoteness and tranquillity 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.

6.1.11 Sites 257/1510, 204/1510 and 255/1510 which fall within this LLCA, are representative of the wider LLCA although they are located in an area with a more pronounced topography than much of the rest of the area and are therefore locally visually prominent.

6.1.12 The Settled Levels LLCT covers the southern edge of the Pevensey Levels extending eastwards from the northern edge of Polegate towards Pevensey Bay. Three sites fall within this LLCT and are within LLCA G1: Pevensey and Hankham (sites 241/1510, 457/1510 and 193/1510).

6.1.13 Within the LLCT the strong pattern of ancient drainage ditches on low lying open landscapes (dating back to the Middle Ages) and strong historical and cultural associations with Pevensey Castle and Anderita Roman Fort contribute to the strong historic continuity and very strong sense of place. The absence of tree cover and low lying open landform results in the area’s very high visibility. The Very High Landscape Value arises from the presence of nationally important ecological habitats together with a strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness. However, although these characteristics are clearly evident in the LLCT as a whole, they are not typical of the area to the south of the A27 in which the assessed sites are located.

6.1.14 Overall, the Settled Levels LLCT is assessed as having a Very High Landscape Sensitivity and Very High Landscape Value, as detailed in the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2014).

6.1.15 LLCA G1 - Pevensey and Hankham, encompasses Pevensey, Westham and Hankham and extends between Pevensey Bay in the east and Polegate in the west. The key characteristics of this LLCA are detailed below with those characteristics which are particularly evident in the area underlined for emphasis:

- Strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity within the Levels in the north
- Lower sense of tranquillity and remoteness in the south due to the A27 road corridor, railway corridor and proximity to densely settled urban edges
- Houses, nurseries and a school within Hankham introduce a human influence in the centre of the area
- Scattered farmsteads along the network of rural road corridors to the west of Hankham
- Pastoral fields, low hedgerows and trees
- Views to treed settlement edges
- Alluvial drainage marshes, lined with reed-fringed ditches to the south of Westham

6.1.16 Sites 241/1510, 457/1510 and 193/1510 which fall completely or partially within this LLCA are not typical of the LLCA. They fall within a narrow belt of arable landscape which is most strongly influenced by the A27, the adjoining urban edge and the belts of vegetation associated with both of these.
Photo 6.3 – The A27 forms a dominant feature in the landscape and encloses the urban area

Photo location: View east from road bridge close to site 241/1510 (Land at Shepham Lane)

Photo 6.4 – An enclosed belt of arable landscape on the northern edge of Polegate contrasts with the open landscape of the Pevensey Levels further north

Photo location: View across site 241/1510 (Land at Shepham Lane)

6.1.17 The Open Levels LLCT covers the area between Polegate and Willingdon together with a belt of land which extends out north-eastwards from the northern edge of Polegate (around Ottenham Court). Five sites fall wholly or partially within this LLCT. Four of these are mainly within LLCA F4: East Polegate Levels (sites 540/3370, 236/3370, 772/1510 and 120/1510) while the western end of site 241/1510 falls within LLCA F1: Down and Whelpley.

6.1.18 Within the LLCT the strong pattern of ancient drainage ditches on low lying open landscapes and open views northwards to the southern slopes of the High Weald all contribute to the very strong sense of place. The absence of tree cover and the low lying open landform results in the area’s very high visibility. The presence of nationally important ecological habitats together with a strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness contribute to the value of the
landscape. However, although these characteristics are clearly evident in the LLCT as a whole, many of them are either weaker or not present within the local areas in which the assessed sites are located.

6.1.19 Overall, the Open Levels LLCT is similar to the Settled Levels LLCT and is assessed as having a **Very High Landscape Sensitivity** and **Very High Landscape Value**, as detailed in the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2014).

6.1.20 LLCA F4 East Polegate Levels is surrounded on all sides by Polegate, Willingdon and Langney. The LLCA comprises predominantly pastoral fields with playing fields and recreation grounds closer to the urban edges. The key characteristics of this LLCA are detailed below with those characteristics which are particularly evident in the Polegate and Willingdon area underlined for emphasis:

- The LLCA is surrounded on all sides by the settlements of Polegate, Willingdon and Langney
- Views from the LLCA are dominated by the predominantly residential urban edges of the urban areas
- The eastern part of the LLCA comprises predominantly small pastoral fields and rough grassland, crossed by a network of reed-fringed drainage ditches
- The western part of the LLCA comprises further pastoral fields and, in closer proximity to the urban edge, a series of playing fields and recreation grounds. Mature trees are a key feature
- The overall sense of remoteness and tranquillity within the LLCA is diminished as a result of the presence of the railway corridor, the A27 road corridor in the east and the proximity to urban edges

6.1.21 The four sites which fall within this LLCA are generally representative of the wider LLCA.
**Existing Settlement Pattern**

6.1.22 The existing settlement pattern in the area is a contrast between the dense urban area of Polegate and Willingdon and the open, generally unsettled areas of landscape of the surrounding Levels and Open Clay Vales.

6.1.23 The western edge of Polegate is clearly contained by the A27 and railway line and the northern edge is also contained by the A27, although there is currently a belt of undeveloped landscape separating the urban edge from the A27. Twentieth century expansion of Eastbourne, Polegate and Willingdon has seen the gradual coalescence of the three settlements and has resulted in a continuous urban area extending from Eastbourne in the south to Polegate in the north, which encircles a central area of open undeveloped landscape (described above as the Eastbourne Levels) much of which lies within floodzones 2 and 3. (Refer to Figure 6.1 for existing settlement pattern.)

6.1.24 Generally, the northern and western settlement edges of Polegate are well integrated with existing mature vegetation (particularly along the A27 road corridor) and there are few open views of the settlement edge from the wider landscape in this area. Embankments and existing mature vegetation generally screen views of Polegate from the A27 as it passes around the west and north of the settlement. However, there are clearer views of the urban edge from the A22 as it passes across the floodplain.

**Visual Context**

6.1.25 Within the Polegate and Willingdon area, long distance views towards the South Downs make a significant contribution towards the sense of place of the area. From many areas, the distinctive ridge of the South Downs particularly of the areas around Coombe Hill and Folkington Hill are a prominent feature in the background of views. In clear conditions, views from elevated parts of the sites on the west side of Polegate (e.g. sites 204/1550, 255/1510 and 257/510) extend many kilometres to the west towards Firle Beacon and beyond.

*Photo 6.6 - Long distance views towards the South Downs contribute to the sense of place in the Polegate and Willingdon area*

*Photo location: View south across site 540/3370 (Land at Broderickland and Hamlands Farm)*
6.1.26 The principal area of the South Downs which falls within the visual influence of the sites within the Polegate and Willingdon sub-area is illustrated on Figure 6.7. There are additional areas of the South Downs beyond this area (particularly to the west) which may also be visible in clear conditions from the sites. However, the distance of these areas means that the individual sites are unlikely to be discernible.

6.1.27 From within the South Downs (particularly between Wilmington and Willingdon) there are panoramic long distance views north across the area towards the wooded slopes of the High Weald in the distance.

![Photo 6.7 — The South Downs afford panoramic views north towards the High Weald](image)

*Photo location: View north from public footpath south of Folkington*

6.1.28 From public rights of way on the upper north-facing slopes to the south of Folkington, views extend towards Hailsham and beyond and are dominated by the extensive woodland area formed by Abbot’s and Wilmington Wood. The urban area of Polegate is noticeable (but not prominent) from some points but woodland on the lower slopes screens much of the urban edge. Within some of these views, sites 204/1510, 257/1510 and 255/510 are open to view but, in their current undeveloped state, they blend with the surrounding area and are not noticeable. Three large wind turbines on the north side of Polegate form intrusive features in the view.

6.1.29 On the south-west side of Willingdon a number of public rights of way and an area of Access Land rise towards Coombe Hill (854m AOD). From the upper slopes there are open views northwards towards the Pevensey Levels. Sites 236/3370 and 540/3370 are clearly visible forming a visually distinctive area of undeveloped land enclosed on all sides by the urban edges of Polegate and Willingdon.
6.1.30 The sites on the northern edge of the area between the A27 and the existing urban edge (e.g. 241/1510, 457/1510 and 193/1510) are predominantly screened from view by vegetation and the existing urban edge.

**Green Infrastructure Context**

**Accessible Natural Greenspace**

6.1.31 Accessible natural greenspace has been considered and evaluated in a separate report produced by Chris Blandford Associates (CBA 2016 Wealden Green Infrastructure Study). The CBA study identifies the key Green Infrastructure (GI) links in terms of movement of people through the landscape and also identifies a number of areas of GI deficit, these mainly being associated with the existing urban areas of Polegate and Hailsham. The CBA report also identifies a number of Green Infrastructure opportunities and these are considered further in the context of the Polegate and Willingdon sub-area below.

**PRoW**

6.1.32 Several footpaths cross the sub-area including: the long distance recreational route 'The 1066 Country Walk' which provides a connection between the Pevensey Levels and the South Downs; and a pedestrian and bridleway route connecting Polegate with the Wilmington and Abbot’s Wood complex to the northwest. The Cuckoo Trail (Sustrans route) also crosses the area providing a route around the northern edge of Polegate and across the Eastbourne Levels. Figure 6.6 illustrates the location and reference name for all the PRoW within the sub-area.

**Strategic infrastructure context**

6.1.33 There are no Strategic Green Corridors in the Polegate and Willingdon sub-area.

6.1.34 The Pevensey Levels to South Downs Strategic Green Access Link (E) passes through the sub-area. Strategic Green Access Links connect communities and businesses within Hailsham & Polegate, and in the surrounding villages to local leisure opportunities/destinations, greenspaces and public transport services.
6.1.35 At a more local scale, a network of Local Green Links connects the Hailsham & Polegate Urban Green Grid to the Strategic Green Access Links, Green Infrastructure and Blue Infrastructure within the countryside in and around the towns. This network includes local GI linkages connecting the town centres with open spaces throughout the built-up areas and in the surrounding countryside. The Polegate and Willingdon sub-area encompasses a Local Green Link with branches running south and eastwards from Polegate, and is adjacent to two further corridors running north and west/ south westward from Polegate.

6.1.36 Protection of corridors of undeveloped land/countryside as green wedges between the built-up area of Hailsham & Polegate and the surrounding villages, to safeguard the towns’ character and landscape setting, provides the opportunity to locate accessible natural greenspace in these areas. One of these Proposed Areas of Search for New Accessible Natural Greenspace lies within the sub-area. Further information is provided in the 2016 Wealden Green Infrastructure Study.

**Green Infrastructure**

6.1.37 Figure 6.3a shows the Green Infrastructure of the sub-area, which is dominated by the large tract of woodland of the Wilmington Wood complex in the northwest.

6.1.38 The local ‘Blue Infrastructure’ described below forms an extremely important part of the local ‘Green Infrastructure’.

6.1.39 In terms of Green Infrastructure, the western part of the sub-area is distinct from the east, having a reduced Blue Infrastructure component, and features the aforementioned Wilmington Wood complex, which directly abuts site 204/1510, and a number of green lanes and broad wooded strips which are presumed to have arisen from hedgerows which form strong green corridors running broadly northwest to southwest and southwest to northeast. A minor track running parallel to the A27 further reinforces a well-developed and coherent Green Infrastructure in this part of the sub-area.

6.1.40 This western part of the sub-area provides vital green - and also blue - linkage between the woodland habitats to the west of Hailsham and the Pevensey levels.

6.1.41 In contrast, the eastern part of the sub-area is dominated by the expanse of the Pevensey levels to the north and northwest, and is linked to the levels by a series of watercourses. In terms of Green Infrastructure, the key corridors are provided by a belt of vegetation alongside the A22 which joins to Worth Way, a green lane immediately north of Polegate. Further to the south, in the area of sites 236/3370 and 540/3370 a vegetated railway line provides a green corridor out into the southern part of the Pevensey Levels, but otherwise strategic green linkages are limited to discontinuous lengths of hedgerow, trees and shrubs along field boundaries, ditches and a track. Strengthening the corridor of vegetation along the railway line and reinforcing linkages along tracks and footpaths would benefit wildlife in this area.

**Blue Infrastructure**

6.1.42 Blue infrastructure, which comprises undeveloped areas of floodplain which typically have a pastoral character and often feature semi-improved grassland, wet woodland and marsh grassland, forms a very important component part of the local ‘green infrastructure’. Blue infrastructure provides both a corridor of movement, particularly for species such as bats, which navigate through the landscape using features such as watercourses and hedgerows and aquatic mammals (otter and water vole). It also provides a valuable foraging resource for a wide range of animal species, including amphibians, certain species of reptile, and most
species of bat. Floodplain and riparian habitats may also support notable plant species and wetland invertebrates.

6.1.43 Figure 6.3b shows the Blue Infrastructure Context of the sub-area and the relationship between areas of floodplain (as defined by Environment Agency mapping of Zones 2 and 3), watercourses, and waterbodies such as ponds and lakes as taken from Ordnance Survey 1:25,000. (It should be noted that this map series under-estimates the number of ponds: some further small ponds may also be present). The relationship between the proposed allocation sites and blue infrastructure features can clearly be seen.

6.1.44 The Polegate and Willingdon sub-area sites all lie around the upper sections of the streams and drains which feed the Pevensey Levels, and as such there is both excellent connectivity with the designated habitats of the Levels and also a likelihood that riparian species, including some of the rare and scarce plants and animals which use the Pevensey Levels may be present in suitable on-site habitats, although the major routes (A27, A22) and sections of disused railway line create a partial barrier to movement of certain less mobile species. Several of the sites, most notably 540/3370 and 236/3370 overlap with the indicative floodplain to a greater or lesser degree, and consequently often feature marsh grassland or semi-improved grassland with boggy patches. The high degree of blue infrastructure connectivity also means that development of these sites and others which lie alongside watercourses and ditches may create a pollution risk to the wetland habitats of the Pevensey Levels unless this is adequately mitigated against.

6.1.45 Opportunities exist to re-naturalise the minor floodplain system in the Mornings Mill Farm area and thereby improve habitat linkages.

**Key Green Infrastructure Opportunities**

6.1.46 Where appropriate, new developments in the sub-area should, in addition to retaining wildlife habitats, also seek to promote opportunities for enhancing existing wildlife habitats, and/or creating new habitats, related to residential development sites around Hailsham & Polegate. In the context of the Polegate and Willingdon sub-area, the following opportunities, taken from the CBA report and the individual site assessment reports for the sub-area, would apply:

- Opportunities exist to improve the existing urban edges of Polegate through the provision of new development and GI associated with further growth of the town to enhance the surrounding landscape.
- Where appropriate, promote opportunities for landscape enhancements related to residential development sites around Polegate.
- Opportunities exist within Polegate to create improved links between development and GI provision, to restore and improve degraded landscapes by increasing woodland areas, protecting landscape features and creating multifunctional green networks focussed on existing tree belts and hedgerows connected to the Cuckoo Trail green corridor.
- Some of Polegate’s rural landscape has been degraded by urban fringe pressures including urban fringe uses and commercial development. The relatively recent road development at Cophall roundabout to the west of the town has also resulted in the loss of landscape structure.
- Opportunities exist to strengthen Polegate’s landscape structure and mitigate the visual impact of the A27 through the provision of open space and the creation of multifunctional green networks.
- Seek opportunities to provide better access links between development and green spaces around Polegate through the provision of access routes, and to enhance the landscape in respect of the setting of the South Downs National Park.
- Consider how these improvements might be an opportunity to deliver additional multiple benefits in the town such as through incorporating tree planting to improve access for
wildlife, drainage, and address poor air quality, whilst improving the experience of walking through green corridors within the town.

- Where appropriate to do so, promote and encourage the use of best practice innovative architectural and planning solutions that take inspiration from local distinctiveness and character.
- Where appropriate, seek to improve water quality and manage local flood risk through promoting the use of SuDS, green roofs and rain gardens for example, particularly within new housing developments. Opportunities exist in areas of most need, to consider how SuDS could also help to provide additional accessible greenspace.
- Explore opportunities to promote gardening for wildlife and growing food within existing and new residential areas.
- Where appropriate, seek opportunities to safeguard and enhance existing wildlife sites in or adjacent to the sub-area for example Abbots & Wilmington Wood & Milton Hide LWS and Pevensey Levels, and through sensitive management improve their overall condition.
- Contribution to 'B-Lines' project through seeding with native wildflower seed mix and use of native flowering trees and shrubs in planting schemes.
- The internal and external boundary vegetation should be allowed to develop to a broader, taller form and strengthened by further planting, including berry bearing species to provide for bird foraging, and native species to attract insects. A structurally diverse range of plants should be used, including shrubs large enough to support nesting birds.
- Creation of permanent wildflower grassland and native scrub habitat on development site boundaries and within areas of public open space.
- Creation of new wildlife habitat including grassland, woodland and scrub on land outside the development site boundary.
- Retention and enhancement of ditches and watercourses through selective removal of overhanging woody vegetation and sensitive re-profiling.
- Enhancements to retained on-site woodland habitat, including thinning out non-native deciduous tree species, and replacement planting with native species.
- Renaturalise the minor floodplain system in the Mornings Mill Farm area.

Minor site-specific measures are set out in the individual site reports.

Ecological and Biodiversity Context

6.1.47 The assessed sites are all in close proximity to the contiguous settlements of Polegate and Willingdon, which lie to the north of Eastbourne.

6.1.48 The sites within the Polegate and Willingdon sub-area can effectively be divided into two subsets: those that lie close to the southwestern margin of the Pevensey Levels SSSI, Ramsar and SAC, a large tract of floodplain marshland (refer to Figure 6.4) featuring important grazing marsh dyke communities; and those to the northwest of Polegate, which lie close to the large tract of Ancient Woodland habitat to the west and southwest of Hailsham (the Wilmington Wood complex). Sites in the former group tend to feature larger fields, which are divided by ditches and watercourses as well as by well-maintained but often species poor hedgerows. Mature standard trees tend to be infrequent. Those in the latter group (i.e. 204/1510, 255/1510, 257/1510) feature both large and small fields, bounded by mature species rich hedgerows, and this area is also characterised by a relatively high density of ponds.

6.1.49 Refer to Figure 6.4 for a map showing designated sites and biodiversity habitats in the vicinity of Polegate and Willingdon.

6.1.50 Protected species recorded within the vicinity of the Polegate and Willingdon sites (refer to Figure 6.5) reflect the proximity of floodplain habitats; for example bird species associated with sites in the east of the sub-area include those of wetland habitats, such as Cetti’s
warbler, lapwing and little egret, and species which forage over open countryside and marsh-edge habitats such as barn owl and hobby. Protected species recorded in the vicinity of sites in the west of the sub-area include species more commonly associated with woodland, such as common crossbill and long-eared owl.

6.1.51 Similarly, invertebrate species recorded within the northwestern area include species of woodland, hedgerow, heathland and species rich grassland habitats: the butterflies white letter hairstreak, white admiral, grizzled skipper, small heath and pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly. A wide range of reptile species have also been recorded in this area: common lizard, slow worm, grass snake and adder.

6.1.52 Both parts of the sub-area are important for bat species, including Brandt’s bat, whiskered bat, brown-long eared bat, common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, serotine, Daunbenton’s bat, Natterer’s bat, noctule, and Bechstein’s bat; and both otter and water vole are known to be present in the local area, although perhaps are more common in the western part of the sub-area.

6.1.53 Non-native species include a variety of invasive species associated with wetlands and waterways: in the east of the sub-area these include Himalayan balsam, parrot’s-feather New Zealand pygmyweed and floating pennywort and species typical of woodland and waste ground such as rhododendron variegated yellow archangel and Japanese knotweed are more prominent in the west.

6.2 Overview of assessments

6.2.1 The Polegate and Willingdon sub-area contains twelve sites which were assessed. Broadly these sites fall into three areas: west of the A22 (north-west of Polegate); south of the A27; and, between Polegate and Willingdon. (See Figure 6.1 for location of sites assessed).

6.2.2 Two sites (236/3370 and 540/3370) have significant proportions of their area within Floodzone 2/3.

Landscape assessments

6.2.3 Three of the sites assessed were located in the Open Clay Vales LLCT (204/1510, 255/1510 and 257/1510) on the west side of the Polegate sub-area. Overall, the Open Clay Vales LLCT was assessed in the 2014 Landscape study as having High Landscape Sensitivity and High Landscape Value. The three sites assessed were also considered to be of high landscape sensitivity. These sites have a strong strength of place arising from the survival of many ancient field patterns, striking open views to the South Downs and the absence of detracting features. They form part of an extensive tract of Open Clay Vales landscape to the west of Polegate which is separated from the existing urban settlement of Polegate by the A27 road corridor. Existing recent development in the area around the A27/A22 interchange is visually intrusive and detracts from the landscape and visual quality of the area.
6.2.4 The landscape value of these sites was assessed as being either Moderate, Moderate-High or High and as a result the landscape capacity of these sites was considered to be Moderate-Low or Low.

6.2.5 All three sites contain elevated sloping areas which are visually prominent and development in these areas would be visible from a wide area. If development came forward on sites 257/1510 255/1510 and the upper parts of site 204/1510, it would be clearly visible from PRoW in the South Downs and would be likely to result in significant adverse visual effects particularly from viewpoints on Folkington Hill within the South Downs National Park (SDNP). Potential development on these sites would be contrary to the existing settlement and land-use pattern of the wider landscape area, which is characterised by occasional scattered farmsteads and extensive areas of arable and pastoral farmland with few roads or built features and would likely detract from the sense of tranquillity and remoteness, which is characteristic of the area. Development in the area would also extend the urban area of Polegate to the west side of the A27 which would break the strong edge of the settlement which is currently formed by the A27.

6.2.6 If land is allocated for development on these sites, substantial landscape mitigation measures would be required to reduce any potential effects. Development would be less intrusive if located on the lower areas of the sites and if substantial planting were integrated within the development areas. Field boundary vegetation would need to be retained intact to provide historic continuity and new tree belts integrated within development areas. Even with mitigation measures in place, the residual landscape and visual effects of large or medium scale development on these sites would likely be significant.
Photo 6.10 – Elevated sloping areas in the Open Clay Vales are visually prominent with long distance view to the South Downs

Photo location: View south form upper slopes of site 255/1510 (Land at and adjoining Honey Farm)

6.2.7 Three further sites within the sub-area were located in the Settled Levels LLCT (241/1510, 193/1510 and 457/1510) forming a continuous area on the northern edge of Polegate. This LLCT is of Very High Landscape Sensitivity and Very High Landscape Value. However, the three sites are located on the edge of the landscape character area adjacent to the existing settlement edge and do not share many of the characteristics of the wider LLCT and are of lower sensitivity. They comprise a narrow strip of arable landscape enclosed with strong belts of mature vegetation. Traffic noise from the A27 is dominant and there is a strong sense of separation from the wide area of open countryside to the north. Of the three sites, site 241/1510 at the western end is the best quality, forming an attractive area of arable landscape which is separated from the urban edge by a mature tree belt which lines the Cuckoo Trail.

6.2.8 The introduction of development on these three sites would be contained by the A27 and screened by the roadside vegetation, so would be unlikely to result in significant adverse effects on the wider landscape character of the Settled Levels and Open Levels to the north. However, development in the area would likely have a detrimental effect on the character of the Cuckoo trail as it passes the sites and on views from the trail. Development would also alter the character and edge of the urban settlement in the area as views beyond the Cuckoo Trail across open arable fields would be replaced with views of urban development.

6.2.9 Landscape measures to reduce potential landscape and visual effects arising from development on these sites include retention of the existing tree belts around the sites and the introduction of a landscape zone along the northern edge of the existing settlement edge to create a green corridor along the Cuckoo Trail.
6.2.10 The remaining six sites within the Polegate and Willingdon sub-area are located within or adjacent to the Open Levels LLCT which forms part of the wider Eastbourne Levels character area. Two large sites (236/3370 and 540/3370) extend across the centre of an area of open landscape between the existing urban edges of Polegate and Willingdon. The remaining four sites are located around the edge of this area.

6.2.11 Together, the sites form a substantial proportion of the western end of the Eastbourne Levels character area. This open area of landscape is widely visible including from the A22 (which passes through the area), surrounding road and rail lines (particularly the A2270 – Eastbourne Road), PRoW including the Cuckoo Trail and the 1066 Country Walk and from elevated parts of the South Downs (particularly between Folkington and Combe Hill).

6.2.12 Although the landscape sensitivity of the wider Open Levels LLCT is very high, the sensitivity of the sites assessed is lower. The sites fall within an area which is strongly influenced by the existing urban edge, does not have the qualities of remoteness and tranquillity and is of lower ecological interest than the Open Levels to the north. Three large wind turbines to the north of the A27 are visually prominent and form detracting elements in the local landscape. However, all the sites have prominent views to the South Downs which contributes to the sense of place of each site and the ancient field pattern is still evident across much of the area.

6.2.13 Sites 120/1510, 772/1510, 271/1510 and 835/1510 are all small and located adjacent to the existing development edge. If development came forward on these sites it would be unlikely to result in significant landscape or visual effects, subject to it being of a suitable scale and design with appropriate landscape measures.

6.2.14 Sites 236/3370 and 540/3370 are large sites which together extend across an area of strategic open landscape which separates the settlements of Polegate and Willingdon. This small area of Levels landscape is strategically important as it forms a green heart to the surrounding settlements which encircle it (Eastbourne, Stone Cross, Polegate and Willingdon). It provides a landscape setting for these settlements which forms accessible countryside for the residents and a sense of separation between the different settlements.
6.2.15 Depending on its scale, development on sites 236/3370 and 540/3370, if it came forward, would result in significant adverse effects on the local landscape character area and the wider Eastbourne Levels. Effects would include urbanisation of the area resulting in loss of openness, erosion of the Levels landscape character, increased coalescence of Willingdon and Polegate and a more urban setting for the 1066 Country Walk and the Cuckoo Trail. There would also be adverse visual effects arising from the loss of views over open landscape. Key views that would be affected include views from PRoW in the South Downs National Park between Folkington and Combe Hill, views from the PRoW which cross the sites and nearby PRoW including the Cuckoo Trail and views from the roads, railway lines and properties which surround the site.

6.2.16 If sites 236/3370 and 540/3370 are allocated for development, it will be important to retain the existing landscape features within the area (including tree lines, woodland blocks, PRoW and the ancient field patterns) and develop a separate identity for the area which allows the sense of separation between Polegate and Willingdon to be maintained. A wedge of green space should be retained in the centre of the area around Mornings Mill Farm which extends from the Eastbourne Road (A2270) along the 1066 Country Walk and connects to the undeveloped landscape which forms the floodplain to the north. This would maintain some separation between the two settlements and provide a green corridor which connects with the open countryside to the north.

Ecology assessments

6.2.17 It was considered that the sites assessed in the Polegate and Willingdon area were of ecological value at up to a District-level scale. This is in part because a number of the sites contain, or overlap with sites of known ecological value, notably Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh or Deciduous Woodland BAP (S41) habitat. Other sites support a wide variety of habitat types including biodiverse ditch networks and watercourses, species rich semi-natural grassland, mature woodland or species rich hedgerow. Where such on-site habitats
abut off-site habitats of known wildlife value, for example sites 204/1510, 241/1510, 236/1510, the wildlife interest of the site itself is likely to be significantly greater and the potential for protected species interest is likely to be considerably higher than might otherwise be the case.

6.2.18 All sites would be likely to be used by foraging or commuting bats, moving between urban, woodland and wetland sites in the local area, and the density of local ponds, particularly to the northwest and east of Polegate coupled with existing records of this species in the local area, indicates that a number of sites are likely to support great crested newt. Similarly, a number of the sites supporting mature hedgerow or woodland are in close proximity to sites which are known to support dormouse. All sites will require protected species survey. Refer to individual site reports for a summary of the potential for protected species interest and the surveys recommended.

6.2.19 The Polegate and Willingdon sites are effectively divided into two groups: those to the west and northwest of the settlement, which feature important hedgerow networks, and include or abut important woodland habitat; and those to the east and northeast, which lie in close proximity to and share similar habitats with the internationally designated Pevensey Levels. The former group will potentially support woodland bird species and may also be important for commuting and foraging bats; the latter group may support wetland bird species, bat species with a preference for foraging around floodplain margins, and also, potentially, where habitat is suitable, some of the uncommon invertebrate and plant species for which the Pevensey Levels are noted, for example the fen raft spider, uncommon molluscs and water-beetles, breeding wetland birds such as lapwing and reed bunting and plant species such as sharp-leaved pondweed and greater water parsnip.

6.2.20 Development of the larger sites in the sub-area: 241/1510, 255/1510, 204/1510, 236/1510, 540/1510, or development of a large number of the smaller sites in combination would result in a significantly elevated number of residents close to the Pevensey Levels, who may choose to use the Levels for recreation. The disturbance impacts arising from this would need to be evaluated through Habitats Regulations Assessment of both individual developments above a certain scale, and also cumulative impact assessment, and appropriate mitigation measures employed if necessary.

6.2.21 The likelihood of ecological interest for each site is summarised in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site name</th>
<th>Level of value/scale</th>
<th>Likelihood of ecological interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>120/1510 Hindsland Fields (east), Eastbourne Road</td>
<td>Lower/Parish</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>193/1510 Land bounded in part by A27(T) and Levett Road</td>
<td>Lower/District</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>204/1510 Cophall Farm, Baytree Lane</td>
<td>Lower/District</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>236/3370 Mornings Mill Farm</td>
<td>Lower/District</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>241/1510 Land at Shepham Lane</td>
<td>Lower/Parish</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>255/1510 Land at and adjoining Honey Farm, Eastbourne Road</td>
<td>Lower/District</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>257/1510 Land adjacent to Cophall Farm, Eastbourne Road</td>
<td>Lower/District</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>271/1510 Land South of Aberdale Road</td>
<td>Lower/District</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>457/1510 Little Shepham, Shepham Lane</td>
<td>Lower/Parish</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.2.22 If proposals for development come forward on these sites, or if the sites are allocated for development within the Wealden Local Plan, appropriate measures will need to be incorporated to ensure the potential effects on biodiversity are avoided/minimised and/or mitigated, and that enhancements can be delivered in accordance with local and national planning policy. This should be done on a site by site basis, taking into account green and blue infrastructure local to the site, and ensuring that valuable habitats on site are retained and enhanced, and that additional measures such as new ponds, new areas of woodland or grassland, or features such as bird and bat boxes and habitat piles can be delivered wherever feasible. The individual site reports provide outline/indicative avoidance, mitigation and enhancement proposals, however these should be refined and developed by the Ecologists working in support of any future planning application, along with other more species- or habitat-specific measures as may be indicated by the outcome of the recommended species and habitat surveys.
Figure 6.1

Site Locations

November 2016
Figure 6.7
Visual Influence on South Downs National Park

Key
- Site Boundary
- South Downs National Park
- Zone of Visual Influence
- Long Distance Views to South Downs

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