

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Purpose of the Study

1.1.1 Wealden District Council (WDC) commissioned Chris Blandford Consultants (CBA) to undertake an assessment of Green Infrastructure (GI) in Wealden District.

1.1.2 The purpose of the assessment is to assist Wealden District Council in meeting the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated guidance with regards to its plan making and, where relevant, making planning decisions. The provision of an up-to-date assessment will also provide baseline information to inform the production of a GI Strategy, which it is anticipated will be undertaken by the Council following adoption of the Wealden Local Plan.

The Wealden District Local Plan

1.1.3 Wealden District Council adopted its Core Strategy in February 2013. An early review was built into the Core Strategy to re-assess the strategic provision of development in the District. Accordingly, the Council is now preparing its new Local Plan called the Wealden Local Plan.

1.1.4 The Wealden Local Plan will identify policies for housing, the economy, the environment and infrastructure (including GI), and allocate land for new homes in the plan period up until 2028. The Local Plan covers the area of Wealden District, excluding that part which is within the South Downs National Park and will include land use allocations.

1.1.5 The focus for the majority of this housing growth is likely to be within the south of the District around the Hailsham and Polegate area. In addition, a number of other settlements within the District will also be allocated growth. Brownfield sites will continue to be utilised where possible, however the significant growth proposed will most likely result in developing greenfield sites due to limited brownfield land in the District.

1.1.6 The policies set out in the new Local Plan will provide a basis for decision making when determining planning applications, alongside national policy.

1.2 What is Green Infrastructure?

1.2.1 The Landscape Institute's Green Infrastructure Position Statement (2013) provides the following definition of GI, which is generally in line with the GI definitions referred to in the 2014 East Sussex Green Infrastructure Study¹²:

Green Infrastructure

*'GI is the network of natural and semi-natural features, green spaces, rivers and lakes that intersperse and connect villages, towns and cities. Individually, these elements are **GI assets**, and the roles that these assets play are **GI functions**. When appropriately planned, designed and managed, the assets and functions have the potential to deliver a wide range of **benefits** – from providing sustainable transport links to mitigating and adapting the effects of climate change'.*

1.2.2 The Landscape Institute's Green Infrastructure Position Statement (2013) also provides a number of useful definitions for key GI terms as follows:

Green Infrastructure Assets

'GI assets range from country parks, lakes and woodlands to urban interventions such as green roofs and street trees. They can be specific sites at the local level or broader environmental features at the landscape scale within and between rural and urban areas such as wetlands, moors and mountain ranges'.

Green Infrastructure Functions and Ecosystem Services

*'GI functions are the roles that assets can play if planned, designed and managed in a way that is sensitive to, and includes provision for, natural features and **ecosystem services**. They may have obvious primary functions, but each asset can perform different functions simultaneously – a concept known as multifunctionality'.*

1.2.3 Underpinning the multiple functions that GI assets can perform is the concept of ecosystem services. Ecosystem services are defined as the benefits provided by the natural environment's assets that contribute to making life possible (e.g. clean air, water, food and materials). These services may include:

- **Supporting services** essential to the functioning of ecosystems and indirectly responsible for all other services - includes water and nutrient cycling, soil formation and the processes of plant growth.
- **Regulating services** - includes regulating climate, flooding, water and air quality, soil erosion and pollination.

¹ <http://sussexlnp.org.uk/documents/EastSussexGIStrategyFinal.pdf>

- **Provisioning services** - includes the supply of goods such as food, timber, fresh water, fuel and pharmaceuticals.
- **Cultural services** are the non-material direct benefits of importance to the wider social and cultural needs of society - includes recreational space, tourism, spiritual enrichment, inspiration and employment.

1.2.4 The ecosystem services approach to GI planning and management recognise that natural or semi-natural systems can provide services with equivalent or similar benefits to conventional “grey” infrastructure³. Furthermore, it also recognises the benefits of restoring and reconnecting fragmented wildlife habitats at the landscape-scale to create stronger and more resilient ecological networks.

Green Infrastructure Connectivity and Benefits

1.2.5 Whilst individual GI assets can serve one or more functions, the Landscape Institute’s Green Infrastructure Position Statement notes:

*‘**Connectivity** between different GI assets can help maximise the benefits that they generate. Well-connected GI assets create infrastructure that is adaptive and resilient to changes in climate. Physical connections make the most impact, often by creating ecological ‘stepping stones’ that encourage biodiversity migration and connect places with sustainable walking or cycling routes.’*

*‘A GI approach enables landscapes to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits simultaneously and then looks at how those **benefits** can be multiplied by being connected to a wider network of spaces’*

1.2.6 For example, the network of footpaths and cycleways often coincide with green corridors and spaces, providing opportunities for people to gain health and well-being benefits from active recreation while experiencing nature and the landscape.

1.3 National Policy Context

Natural Environment White Paper

1.3.1 The Government’s Natural Environment White Paper ‘The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature (2011) recognises that the benefits and services that a healthy natural environment provides is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing in England. The White Paper sets out how the value of nature can be mainstreamed across society by facilitating greater local action to protect and improve nature;

³ Grey infrastructure comprises transport, energy and water utilities

creating a green economy, in which economic growth and the health of our natural resources sustain each other, and markets, business and Government better reflect the value of nature; strengthening the connections between people and nature to the benefit of both; and showing leadership to protect and enhance natural assets globally.

National Planning Policy Framework

1.3.2 The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out a number of requirements for local planning authorities in their plan making.

1.3.3 With respect to GI, the NPPF sets out the benefits of GI and identifies its importance in delivering sustainable development for individuals, society, the economy and the environment. The NPPF requires local authorities to:

'Set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and Green Infrastructure'⁴.

Planning Practice Guidance on Green Infrastructure

1.3.4 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on GI supporting the NPPF states⁵:

'To assist in planning positively for green infrastructure local planning authorities may wish to prepare an authority-wide green infrastructure framework or strategy. This should be evidence-based by, for example, including an assessment of current green infrastructure provision that identifies gaps in the network and the components and opportunities for improvement. The assessment can inform the role of green infrastructure in local and neighbourhood plans, infrastructure delivery plans and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) schedules.

Local Plans should identify the strategic location of existing and proposed green infrastructure networks. Where appropriate, supplementary planning documents can set out how the planning, design and management components of the green infrastructure strategy for the area will be delivered.

This strategic approach to green infrastructure may cross administrative boundaries. Therefore neighbouring authorities, working collaboratively with other stakeholders including Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), may wish to consider how

⁴ National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 114.

⁵ Planning Practice Guidance, Natural Environment. Reference ID: 8-029-20160211

wider strategies for their areas can help address cross-boundary issues and help meet the Duty to Cooperate.'

1.4 Study Methodology

Study Area

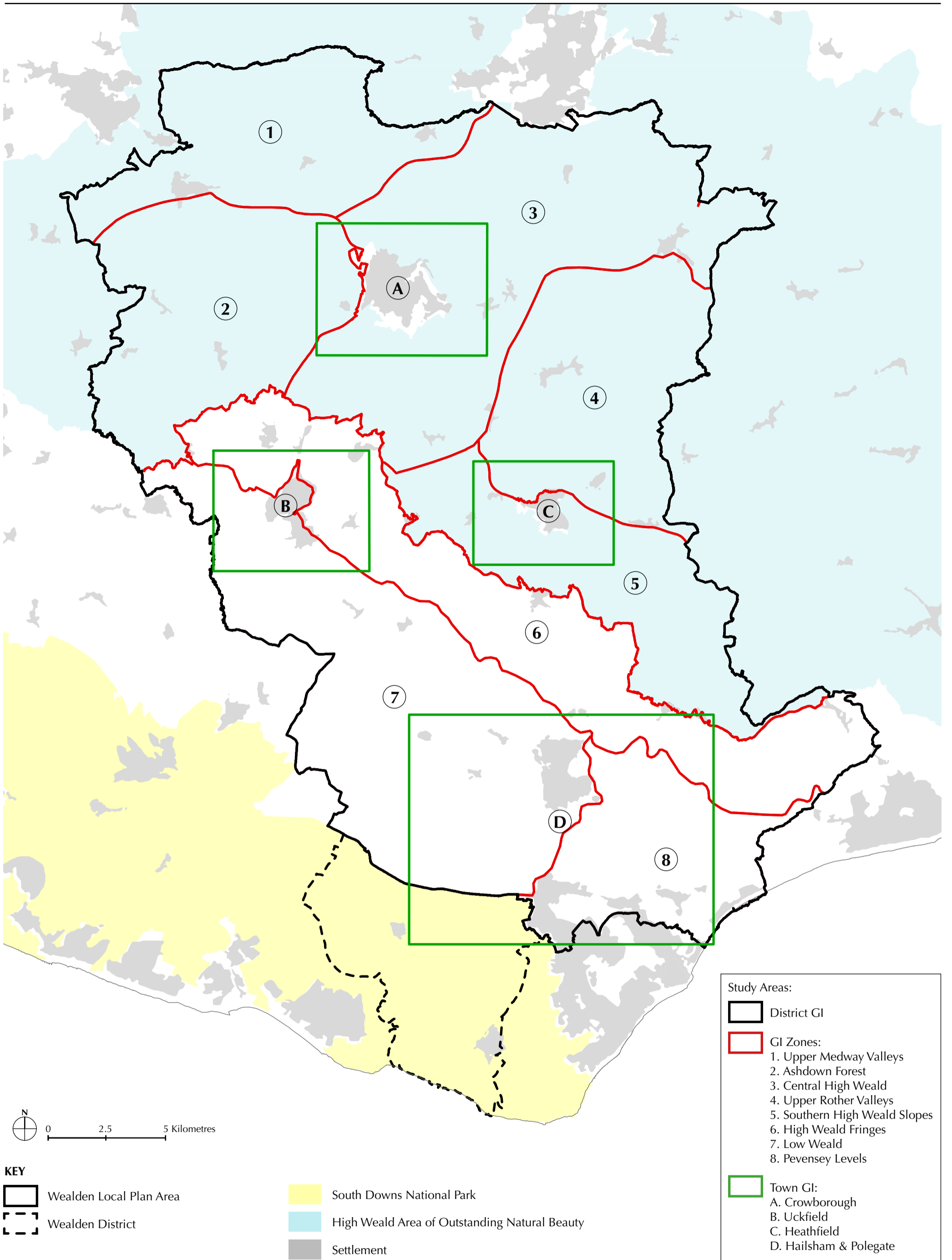
1.4.1 The assessment of GI assets, needs and opportunities within Wealden District was undertaken at three related scales:

- **District Scale GI** – a high level assessment and overview of GI assets, needs and opportunities at a strategic scale, taking into account needs and opportunities for GI provision in adjoining areas where relevant. The study area includes Wealden District but excludes the area that lies within the South Downs National Park as shown on **Figure 1.1**.
- **Sub-District Scale GI Zones** – a more detailed assessment of GI assets, needs and opportunities within eight discrete zones of broadly similar GI assets and landscape types within the study area as shown on **Figure 1.1**. These zones can provide a framework for GI planning at the Parish level (see **Figure 1.2**).
- **Town Scale GI** – a more detailed assessment of GI assets, needs and opportunities focussed on the five main towns within the District (Crowborough, Uckfield, Heathfield and Hailsham & Polegate). The study areas for each town (see **Figure 1.1**) broadly reflect the settlement assessment areas defined by the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2014), adjusted as necessary to take into account key GI assets and areas of potential growth around the towns.

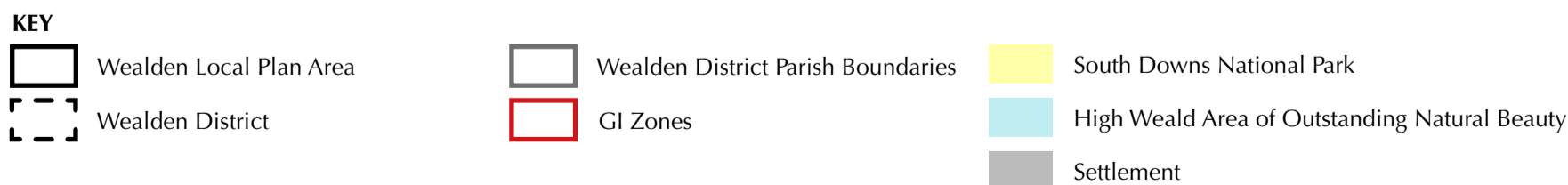
Green Infrastructure Themes

1.4.2 Taking into account the definition of GI (see **Section 1.2**), the NPPF (see **Section 1.3**), and priorities identified in the Council's and other relevant strategies and studies (see **Appendix B**), the following five GI themes have been identified to provide a framework for auditing existing GI assets, assessing the functionality of GI assets in terms of the ecosystem services that they can provide, and in identifying needs and opportunities for GI provision in the study area:

- Biodiversity & Geodiversity
- Landscape & Historic Environment
- Energy & Food
- Water Resources
- Accessible Natural Greenspace & Access Links



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Audit of GI Assets

1.4.3 The audit of GI assets in the study area involved mapping the primary GI assets within each theme at the relevant scale using the most up-to-date datasets available, as recorded in **Appendix A**. The GI assets considered within the scope of this study are as follows:

- Natural and semi-natural greenspaces
- Green and blue corridors
- Productive landscapes (farmland, coppice woodlands and allotments)
- Cemeteries and churchyards
- Parks and gardens
- Amenity greenspaces
- Heritage sites

GI Needs and Opportunities Assessment

1.4.4 Using the GI audit as a starting point, an assessment of needs and opportunities for GI provision in the study area is undertaken at the following scales.

- District Scale GI
- Sub-District Scale GI Zones
- Town Scale GI

1.4.5 The needs assessment involves an analysis of gaps and/or deficiencies in the quality, quantity and connectivity of GI provision within the study area at each scale as appropriate, taking into account relevant standards, guidance and latest available evidence. There is currently no agreed national standard for assessing GI provision. For the purposes of this study, the following approach has been adopted:

- **Quality** – the quality of GI provision is assessed generally in relation to the condition of GI assets (using latest available condition monitoring information) and/or the value attributed to them (by reference to relevant designation/classification systems).
- **Quantity** – the provision of GI in quantitative terms is assessed using the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) developed by Natural England; these aim to ensure residents have the opportunity to interact with nature, and encourage healthier lifestyles and well-being, by encouraging provision of a range of greenspace types and sizes within walking distance and sustainable transport distances of people's homes.
- **Connectivity** – the connectivity of GI assets for people is assessed in relation to the provision of access links for non-motorised users (pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians); and the connectivity of GI assets in biodiversity terms is assessed in relation to the distribution and type of habitats that provide ecological corridors and stepping stones for the dispersal of wildlife.

- 1.4.6 The assessment identifies opportunities for the study area's GI network to be improved through management and enhancement of existing assets, or creation of new GI assets, to help address the identified needs, gaps and deficiencies.
- 1.4.7 The relevant strategies, studies and other information used to inform the assessment are identified in **Section 2.0** and **Appendix B**.

Definition of Green Infrastructure Network

- 1.4.8 Based on the findings of the audit and assessment work, Wealden District's GI network is identified and mapped at the various scales. The GI network comprises broadly defined green and blue corridors containing a mosaic of land uses, natural and semi-natural wildlife habitats and access links. The corridors act as linkages and stepping stones for dispersal of wildlife, provide sustainable transport linkages through provision of footpaths and cycle routes connecting local communities to natural greenspace, and enable strategic linkages with GI networks in adjoining areas. The GI network is supported by analysis of the benefits that protecting, enhancing, linking and extending the GI network can provide to address future needs for GI provision in the study area.

Recommendations

- 1.4.9 Drawing on the findings of the Study, advice and recommendations to assist in the development and implementation of GI policies in Wealden District are provided, including advice for developing a GI Strategy for Wealden.

Limitations

- 1.4.10 The audit of GI assets draws on the latest datasets and information available at the time of the Study and may not be exhaustive. While the mapping and analysis presented in this report is considered suitable for the purposes of this strategic desk-based study, it is recommended that it should be supplemented by appropriate field surveys where the information is used to inform more detailed GI planning and delivery work.