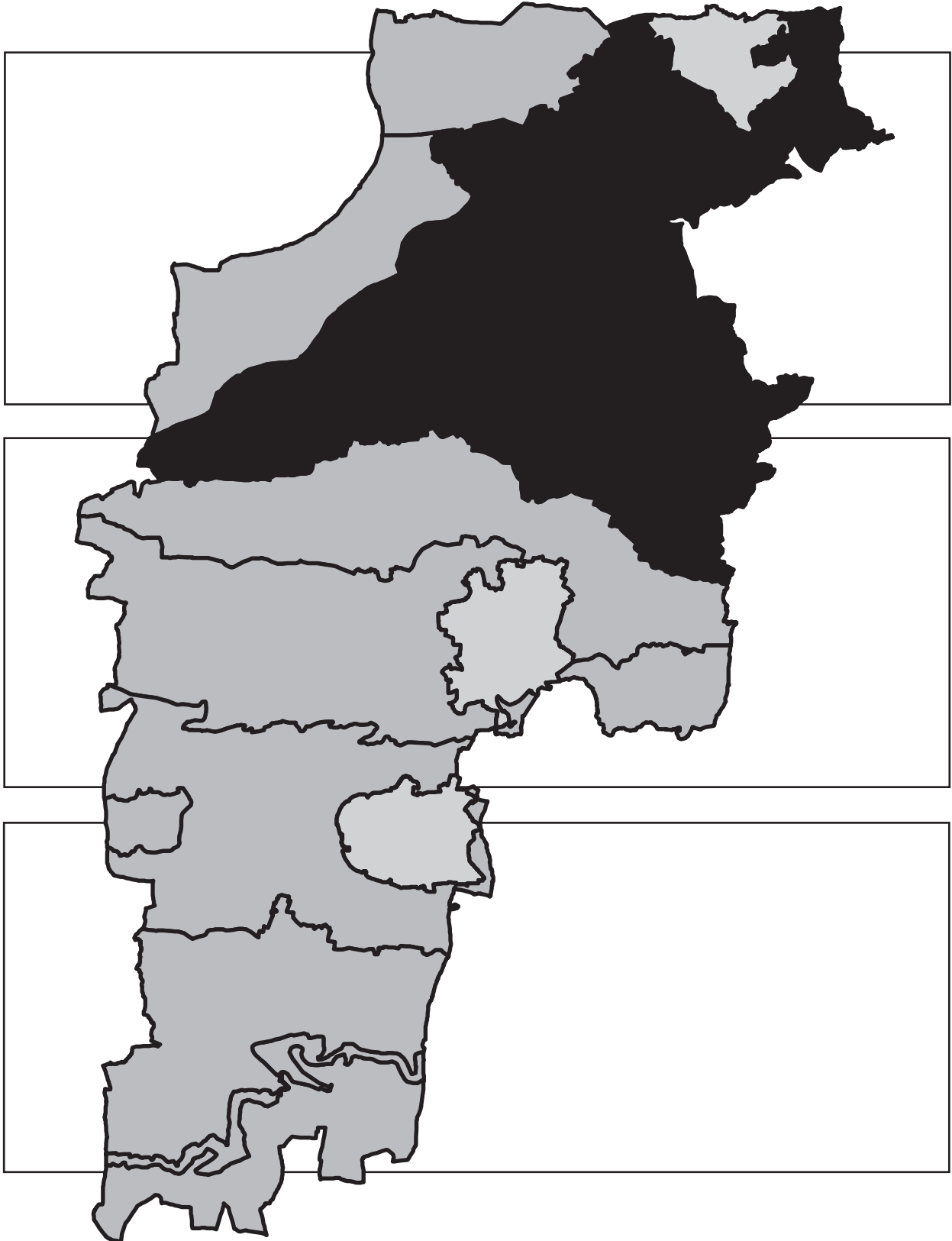


Landscape Character Area 6  
**High Weald**



## High Weald

### CHARACTERISATION

#### Summary and key characteristics

**The High Weald Forest Ridge. Numerous gill streams have carved out a landscape of twisting ridges and secluded valleys. The ancient, densely-wooded landscape of the High Weald is seen to perfection in the area. Includes the township of East Grinstead.**

- Wooded, confined rural landscape of intimacy and complexity, perceived as attractive, locally secluded and tranquil.
- Complex sandstone and clay hilly landscape of ridges and secluded valleys centred on the western end of Forest Ridge of the High Weald plateau deeply cut by numerous gill streams and with sandrock crags.
- Headwater drainage of the River Medway originates here, the southern part of the area drained by the deep, sinuous gill streams running to the River Ouse.
- Long views over the Low Weald to the downs, particularly from the high Forest Ridge.
- Includes major reservoir at Ardingly and adjoins Weir Wood Reservoir.
- Significant woodland cover, a substantial portion of it ancient, including some larger woods and a dense network of hedgerows and shaws, creates a sense of enclosure, the valleys damp, deep and secluded.
- Pattern of small, irregular-shaped assart fields, some larger fields and small pockets of remnant heathland.
- Pockets of rich biodiversity concentrated in the valleys, heathland, and woodland.
- Dense network of twisting, deep lanes, droeways, tracks and footpaths.
- Dispersed historic settlement pattern on high ridges, hilltops and high ground, the principal settlements East Grinstead and some expanded and smaller villages.
- Some busy lanes and roads including along the Crawley–East Grinstead corridor.
- London to Brighton Railway Line crosses the area.
- Mill sites, hammer ponds and numerous fish and ornamental lakes and ponds.
- Varied traditional rural buildings built with diverse materials including timber framing, Wealden stone and varieties of local brick and tile hanging.
- Designed landscapes and exotic treescapes associated with large country houses.
- Visitor attractions include Wakehurst Place, Nymans Gardens, the South of England Showground and the Bluebell Line Steam Railway.

#### Description and experience of the landscape

**9.1** This, the largest Landscape Character Area in Mid Sussex, contains the highest ground in the High Weald within West Sussex and lies wholly within the District and the *High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty* (AONB). It borders on Surrey to the north at East Grinstead and East Sussex to the east. To the north-west lie the

afforested ridges and plateaux of the Worth forests. The area is bounded strongly to the south by the broad, west-east trending line of the Ouse Valley.

**9.2** The geology of the area is complex and locally very variable. It is based on an alternating pattern of heavily faulted, slightly inclined thin sandstone and clay beds which are exposed successively in the deeper valleys. In a few places, local outcrops of sandrock form low, dramatic crags, with many continuous rock exposures edging the valley sides and in the deeper lanes. The underlying rocks contain the entire geological sequence of the High Weald Hastings Beds. The majority of the area comprises mainly Upper and Lower Tunbridge Wells Sandstone and clays and Grinstead Clay in alternating sequences. More localised beds include Cuckfield Stone on higher ground to the south and west and Ardingly Sandstone within the valley systems and to the south and east of Turners Hill.

**9.3** Containing ironstone, the Wadhurst Clay underlying these deposits outcrops in the easterly valley bottoms, making the going on trackways very difficult in places, for the clay can be thick, wet and clinging. The Wadhurst Clay comprises isolated, faulted out portions south of Turners Hill and forms a thick belt running south from Sharpthorne nearly to Horsted Keynes. To the east of this belt lie the sandy Ashdown Beds, so-called because of their dominance as an infertile, heathy rock within the Forest. Finally, there are some scattered deposits of head.

**9.4** The backbone of the High Weald is known as the Forest Ridge, a crest of uniformly high ground running roughly east to west, from Cranbrook in Kent to Horsham, its highest point at Crowborough Beacon in East Sussex (nearly 250 metres above sea level). The Forest Ridge in Mid Sussex runs north westwards from along a high if indistinct ridge line (in places over 170 metres above sea level) through West Hoathly and Selsfield Common to Turners Hill.

**9.5** From this central ridge spring numerous gill (ghyll) streams. These incised streams are the defining landform, dissecting the landscape deeply, carving it into an interlocking array of twisting ridges and secluded, steep-sided narrow valleys. Whilst the pattern of drainage is complex, there are some main pointers to follow. To the north of the Forest Ridge, centred on the boundary with East Sussex, a group of short streams falls to the Medway and Weir Wood Reservoir. To the north lies East Grinstead, the numerous streams draining the southern flanks of the town also emptying into the Medway and the reservoir. The southern slopes of the Forest Ridge are much longer, stretching over a few miles to the River Ouse, which drains them. The biggest, deepest streams include Cockhaise Brook and its tributary streams including the Chiddingly valley; the two valleys flanking Horsted Keynes; the deep valley system below Balcombe containing Ardingly Reservoir; and the western streams draining the southern flanks of the High Weald forests. Many of the streams contain hammer, ornamental or fishponds, the last notably in the valleys flanking Birchgrove north east of Horsted Keynes.

**9.6** A densely wooded landscape clothes this intricate terrain. The woodlands are predominantly deciduous but contain much mixed woodland and coniferous planting (as well as exotic tree species associated with designed landscapes). There is a high incidence of ancient woodland, the core of the historic High Weald landscape. Many woods are small to medium-sized and dominate the deep gills, notably in the Ardingly, Chiddingly and Birchgrove valleys. There is a particular concentration of valley woodlands centred on Gravetye Manor and a network of woods throughout the gills flanking East Grinstead. To the west, the pattern shifts towards large woodlands and plantations more akin to the Worth forests, draped over ridge and valley, for instance at Paddockhurst Park. Between Balcombe and Handcross is a large network of woodlands based on the upper Ouse streams.

**9.7** Once closely associated with the woodland pattern, most of the formerly grazed heathland in the area has disappeared, much of it covered by scrub and

new or naturally regenerating woodland. The small pockets of heathland that remain are a valuable wildlife and landscape resource.

**9.8** Regular fields extend north into the High Weald but become far more intermixed with a landscape of small, irregular-shaped fields predominantly used for livestock grazing. These are the characteristic groups of historic assart pastures, often associated with pockets of ancient semi-natural woodland. Between Crawley Down and East Grinstead and in some places elsewhere there has been extensive boundary removal and field reorganisation due to agricultural intensification.

**9.8** Other than at Handcross and around East Grinstead, there are no major roads in the area although the B roads and some of the lanes are busy with traffic. The area contains a dense network of twisting lanes, droveways and tracks following the sinuous terrain. The lanes are generally narrow, deep in places, some in substantial cuttings with exposed rock faces where centuries of use have progressively cut down into the soft clays and sandstones. The *High Weald Landscape Trail* in Mid Sussex follows many of these routes.

**9.9** On the northern border of the County, the area encompasses the large township of East Grinstead and a portion of the A22 Trunk Road with associated ribbon development. As in the Copthorne and Crawley Down area to the east, the perceived naturalness of the rural landscape is coming under increasing pressure from development and traffic movement along the Crawley–East Grinstead corridor. Elsewhere in the area, there has been significant suburban development at Balcombe and Ashurst Wood and continuing pressures for development in the countryside.

**9.10** The area is crossed north to south in the extreme west by the A23 Trunk Road and by the London to Brighton Railway Line. In the east, the Bluebell Line Steam Railway crosses the area north to south, from Kingscote to Sheffield Park in East Sussex. Part of the former Culver Junction (Lewes) to East Grinstead Railway Line given Royal Approval in 1877, the railway was known originally as the 'Sheffield Park Line'. References to it as 'The Bluebell Line' first appeared in 1958 when the railway preservation group was being formed, doubtless a reference to the bluebell woods along the route.

**9.11** Parkscapes associated with large houses are characteristic. The area contains two large reservoirs, at Ardingly and Weir Wood, popular for sailing, angling and wildlife. The permanent South of England Show Ground is located at Ardingly, which includes a large area of fenced paddock grassland.

## **Biodiversity**

**9.12** Based on the alternation of sandy and clay soils and the particular conditions in the deep gills, the natural history of the area is diverse. The richer sites (albeit restricted in extent) are centred on the strong pattern of gills and woodlands, a few unimproved pastures and freshwater marshes, the reservoirs, and numerous valley ponds including field ponds and their margins.

**9.13** The character of the woodlands is varied and includes a range of semi-natural woodland types, many formerly managed as 'coppice-with-standards' (. Dominant forms include oak-ash and hornbeam woodlands with understorey species such as hazel, as well as stands of beech, sweet chestnut coppices and broadleaved, mixed and coniferous plantation. The reduction of acid heathland to a few pockets scattered through the area is due to the cessation of grazing management, subsequent scrub and woodland invasion and woodland re-planting.

**9.14** The area contains eight Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), well over half those in the District. These include important geological deposits, water areas,

sandrock crags, and wet woodlands and sandrock communities in the wooded gills. These last are particularly important, containing a warm, moist micro-climate which allows plants to flourish (notably ferns, mosses and liverworts) which are more typically restricted to the west of the country, as well as supporting a diverse breeding community of breeding birds.

**9.15** The area also contains over 20 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance - by far the largest number for any Landscape Character Area in the District. These illustrate the great variety of habitats in the area, ranging from woodland and reservoir sites to smaller areas centred on mill and fish ponds (marginal plants, and birds), sandrock crags, freshwater marsh and unimproved meadows. The District Council manages the SNCI at *Ashplats Wood* (East Grinstead) as a nature reserve.

## **Historic character**

**9.16** The Forest Ridge in the area forms part of the route of an ancient, pre-Roman ridge-way. It follows the high point of the ridge westwards from Ashdown Forest, through West Hoathly to Turners Hill and then via Peas Pottage to Horsham. Associated with the routeways, the ancient sites in the Low and High Weald are far fewer than on the downs, although the Iron Age hillfort at Philpots Camp near West Hoathly is an important example of a Wealden hillfort. There is limited evidence of Roman settlement in the area, although the line of the London to Brighton Roman Road crosses the area from north to south, just to the east of Ardingly.

**9.17** The colonizing of the High Weald through transhumance (the seasonal movement of stock between woodland and downland) and later, assarting, created a pattern of small-scale holdings, with an absence of communal farming of large open fields. The generally low fertility of the Hastings Beds and the poverty of its soils contributed to this pattern. In addition, the intractable nature of the steep gills for any other use than woodland meant that woodland persisted as a resource through succeeding economies. Within the woodlands, although sweet chestnut appears to have expanded later with the hop industry, the dominance of oak with hornbeam, other species such as ash, and understorey tree species (species below the main woodland canopy) such as hazel, were established through ironworking and pannage (the right of pasturing pigs and other stock in woodlands).

**9.18** Given that the area was enclosed before the post-medieval period of enclosure, we have therefore inherited a quantity, holding size and structure of woodlands in characteristic locations derived essentially from the medieval woodland pattern of the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Elements of the post-medieval landscape have survived also, centred on formal enclosures of woodlands, commons and possibly the re-organisation of assart fields.

**9.19** The dense pattern of narrow lanes and tracks in the area is also typical of the High Weald, representing a visible survival of ancient routes (*droves* or *droveways*) used for transhumance. Together with the prehistoric ridge-top routes, the droves were one of the most characteristic features of the High Weald in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and remain so to this day. The landscape also reveals a legacy of slag heaps, hammer and furnace ponds, some furnace remains and roads associated with the Wealden iron industry as well as the numerous mills which were once common throughout the country.

## **Historic parks and gardens**

**9.20** Seven of the nine Registered Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in the District lie within the area including a further 22 non-registered mainly post-medieval parkscapes identified by the local authorities.

**9.21** *Brockhurst* lies to the east of East Grinstead. By 1875, Ashurst Lodge was situated within substantial pleasure grounds, the name of the house changing to Brockhurst by 1899. The garden comprises a rock garden, gardens and pleasure grounds laid out by Frederick J. Hanbury between 1908 and 1935 and for which the site was famous. The gardens sit in the remnants of a park developed between 1875 and 1899 incorporating the easternmost of the string of four ponds to the west of the house.

**9.22** *Gravetye Manor* to the north of West Hoathly comprises fine formal and informal gardens, set within a landscape of woodlands and lakes, which were laid out between 1885 and 1935 by the horticultural writer and gardener William Robinson and which survive largely intact. The manor house at Gravetye was built in 1598 by a local iron-master, Richard Infield (see *para* 9.34 below). William Robinson purchased it in 1884, restoring the house and laying out the present gardens. Today, the woodland is held in trust and managed on behalf of the Forestry Commission. The house and grounds are run as a country house hotel.

**9.23** *High Beeches* near Handcross on the edge of the Worth forests originated as an early 19<sup>th</sup> Century villa when, in 1849, the estate was purchased by Sir Robert Loder. He enlarged the house and laid out extensive formal gardens immediately around it. The present 20<sup>th</sup> Century plantsman's and collector's garden was designed and planted by Colonel James Loder between 1906 and 1966 (the mansion was destroyed by fire in 1942). The gardens are open to the public.

**9.24** *Nymans* adjoins the south-eastern edge of Handcross. It probably took its name from the family of Robert le Nynweman or Nyman in the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century. It is today a splendid garden with associated striking parkland, the downland views magnificent. Moreover, it is centred on a remarkably romantic modern ruin (see *para* 9.32 below). Owned by the National Trust, *Nymans* is a principal visitor attraction in the District.

**9.25** *Stonehurst*, a 'new' country house and gardens near West Hoathly and directly east of Wakehurst Place, was laid out on the site of an earlier farmhouse, Stone Farm. Part of this earlier estate included two mills, Corn Mill and Stone Mill which were retained, together with the Mill Cottages set next to the mill ponds. Built around 1910, the brick and weather-tiled house is substantial. *Stonehurst* sits on the edge of the deep Cob Brook valley, the pleasure grounds (including ornamental ponds, pools and waterfalls) and estate extending over 80 hectares of farmland and deep gill woodland centred on Chiddinglye Woods. The valleys contain extensive sandrock crags including the famous 'Great-on-Little' Stone remarked on by Cobbett (1835) (see *para* A5.11 in **Appendix 5**). Much of the valley is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (see *para* 9.14 above).

**9.25** *Wakehurst Place* today is an eminent National Trust property comprising gardens, extensive grounds and a substantial visitor centre. It is the home of Kew Gardens in Sussex and houses the Millennium Seed Bank. The manor of *Wakehurst* probably dates from the mid-13<sup>th</sup> Century, when its connection with the *Wakehurst* family was established. It passed by marriage to the *Culpepers* in 1454 with whom it remained for 200 years, Sir Edward *Culpeper* building the present house in 1590 (see *para* 9.34 below). In 1903 the estate was sold to Gerald Loder, younger brother of Sir Edmund Loder of *Leonardslee* and later created first Lord *Wakehurst*, who established many of the plant collections, particularly those from eastern Asia and the southern continents. The estate was eventually bequeathed to the National Trust. In 1984, management passed to the Board of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew which, in conjunction with the Trust, manages the gardens and estate.

**9.26** The house lies on the eastern edge of the deep *Ardingly Brook* gill woodland valleys and sandrock crags, above a long, narrow reach of *Ardingly Reservoir*. It comprises 40 hectares of ornamental gardens, parkland, and mixed native and

ornamental woodland with adjacent fenced farmland. The parkland lies east of the mansion and gardens. It is open in character with an intermittent scatter of trees of varying ages surviving from the pattern of clumps shown on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1874 and 1909.

## **Settlement form and local distinctiveness**

**9.27** Settlement in the High Weald is typically dispersed, based on an historic pattern of numerous farmsteads within discrete or enclosed small-scale holdings, often set on high ridges, hilltops and high ground. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, nucleated villages had emerged, their dominance as settlements progressively emerging in the modern era. Sometimes, development has resulted from local industries such as clay winning and quarrying. The principal villages are Ardingly, Ashurst Wood, Balcombe, Handcross, Horsted Keynes, Sharpthorne, Turners Hill, and West Hoathly. Slaugham and Staplefield lie on the edge of the Ouse Valley. Since the turn of the century, and particularly after the Second World War, all of the villages have been expanded to some degree by suburban development, notably at Balcombe and Ashurst Wood.

**9.28** Settlement in the area was therefore unobtrusive and scanty until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when the High Weald became a favourite area for the extension in the Victorian and Edwardian eras of 'London into Sussex', characterised by widespread, often lavish, house development, the hilly woodland settings highly prized. The new parkscapes developed as a setting for these houses have bequeathed a legacy of exotic trees and shrubs which are today locally dominant in the landscape. Indeed, the spread of exotic species originally introduced into these parkscapes, particularly rhododendron, have invaded many woodlands, where the 'new' species have supplanted the old. High, clipped roadside rhododendron 'hedgerows' are locally characteristic in parts of the area, for instance, on the road between Turners Hill and Handcross.

**9.29** The style of rural historic building in the area is diverse. There are good examples of timber-framed buildings including "Wealden" houses (variants of the medieval hall house), many formerly owned by ironmasters, most examples of which lie in East Sussex and Kent (it will be remembered that the area of Mid Sussex District was included in East Sussex before 1975). However, whilst timber-framed properties are highly characteristic of the High Weald, they are not visible enough in the area to constitute a dominant visual style, especially as so many of the original frames have been covered by later facades.

**9.30** The so-called Wealden stone from the Ardingly Sandstone and Cuckfield Stone members of the Hastings Beds is an important and substantial fine-grained building stone, especially the deposits won in the East Grinstead area. The stone is very variable in colour depending on its origin, weathering and lichen cover. The stone is markedly grey in some buildings, biscuit-coloured or fawn in others, sometimes iron-caked or rust-stained from iron deposits. However, although locally very distinctive, the use of the stone is not dominant in the area. It tends to be used as ashlar (cut and dressed stone) for more substantial and expensive buildings, rarely used as rough or random stone. Notable concentrations of the use of this stone include at Horsted Keynes and, in delightful profusion, at Slaugham, the various buildings in the village illustrating well the subtlety and variability of colour and texture of the weathered stone. The stone is rarely quarried now.

**9.31** The other local stone used occasionally in the area is Horsham Stone, a flaggy, fine-grained sandstone from the Weald Clay, so-called because the beds occur principally around Horsham. The massive sandstone slabs, often marked with wave formations, are used mainly for roofing and sometimes for paving, and attract a rich patina of mosses and lichens. Apart from some timber-framed houses, more characteristic of the area is the predominance of locally diverse reddish brick and

patterned, hung tiles, and some weather boarding typical of the more easterly parts of the High Weald, notably in East Sussex and Kent.

**9.32** The development of numerous large houses and grounds in the area is a testament to the discovery of the High Weald as a dramatic setting for fine properties. Of the many modern houses, perhaps the finest is *Standen* (National Trust) south of East Grinstead, one of Philip Webb's best houses, built 1891-94. The most remarkable must be the ruined *Nymans*, a convincing evocation of an ancient major manor house, although actually built 1925-30 in Somerset stone in the Cotswold Manor House style. Much of the house was destroyed by fire in 1947. A fine example of an earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century house, *Saint Hill*, lies close to Standen. The High Weald (as with many other areas in West Sussex) was also a popular location for schools. A notable example in the area is *Ardingly College*, a large independent school building in brick, founded in 1858 by Nathaniel Woodward, who also established Lancing and Hurstpierpoint Colleges. *Ditton Place* – a large house of 1904 with stone and brick dressings – is also a school.

**9.33** *Worth Priory of our Lady Help of Christians* lies in a fine position in the Worth forests, on the Forest ridge, looking down on Paddockhurst Park. The principal building is *Paddockhurst*, a vast imitation Tudor mansion of 1869-72 designed by the architect Salvin. Other houses of interest from the Victorian era include the stone-built *Chiddinglye* (1866) and the Tudor-style *Stonelands* (1887).

**9.34** Important historic houses and grounds include *Wakehurst Place* at Ardingly, originally an ironmaster's house, with original parts dating from 1590. *Gravetye Manor* is a late Elizabethan iron-master's house near West Hoathly and *Gullege*, a fine Jacobean house, lies in open country close to the western edge of East Grinstead.

**9.35** Other houses of interest include *Selsfield House* with an early Georgian stone front and *Battens* at Highbrook, a house with two medieval wings, the earliest parts dating from the late 13<sup>th</sup> Century or early 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Near Horsted Keynes, *Treemans* has much Tudor brickwork and some timber framing, with later additions in Wealden stone. The village streetscape of West Hoathly is small and compact with varied materials including Wealden stone, brick, ruddy tile hanging and weatherboarding. The stone front of the *Manor House* faces the church and to the south lies *Priest's House*, timber-framed, of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

**9.36** The eight older churches in the area are generally typical of the High Weald including four with shingled spires and four with towers:

- *St Peter* at Ardingly, outside the village-, low tower, in Wealden stone with a 14<sup>th</sup> Century doorway.
- *St Mary* at Balcombe, much added to in 1847-50, with a shingled spire.
- *All Saints* (1884) at Highbrook, at the end of a long ridge, quite large with a shingled spire.
- *St Giles* at Horsted Keynes, mainly Norman, again, with a shingled spire.
- *St Mary* at Slaugham, Norman, 13<sup>th</sup> Century and later with a pyramidal-roofed tower, in Wealden stone.
- *St Mark* (1847) at Staplefield with a bellcote (belfry).
- *St Leonard* (1895-7) at Turners Hill with a tower, in Wealden stone.
- *St Margaret* at West Hoathly in the centre of the village, Norman, 13<sup>th</sup> Century and later with the usual shingled spire, in Wealden stone.



## East Grinstead

**9.37** Within the area lies East Grinstead, a town with a population of 23,942. It lies on high, ridge-like ground on the County boundary, the northern flanks of the town falling to Dormans Park in Surrey. To the east, the town embraces the Ashplats Wood valley, older ribbon development flanking the A22 which connects the town with suburban development at Ashurst Wood. To the west, the town adjoins more gentle, open farmland and some woodland stretching towards Crawley Down. To the south, the slopes within and below the town are dissected by a series of streams flowing to the infant Medway, complex ridges in between.

**9.38** East Grinstead is an attractive market town of medieval origin which has been greatly expanded in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, four railway lines converged on the town (the first railway station in the town was opened in 1855), and by 1900 the town had significantly increased in size. Edwardian development was of a piecemeal nature, often in isolated blocks along the roads entering the town, notably at Sunnyside and along the main road to North End. Interwar development was more significant, comprising ribbon development at Felbridge, North End and along the Holtye Road and a number of estates (Sackfield Gardens, Halsford Green and Brooklands Park).

**9.39** It was in the post-war period that development was greatly expanded and the urban pattern of the town consolidated. Before 1970, large housing developments were built to the west and a number of consolidating developments on most of the land north of the town centred on Blackwell. Substantial expansion and consolidation of the urban area also occurred at Sunnyside to the south, with new building in Ashurst Wood. Since 1970, there have been smaller, consolidating developments on the edges of various parts of the town. However, the largest development in this period was to the south of the Ashplats Wood, straddling the A22, representing a major eastward extension of the town. These changes have resulted in a compact town form, integrated well with the existing landscape, with relatively few problems associated with the rural urban fringe.

**9.40** The historic town centre of East Grinstead is intimate in scale, revealing its medieval origins, the High Street punctuated by an island, the large 18<sup>th</sup> Century parish church of *St Swithun* with its tower lying behind it, built by James Wyatt using variably coloured Wealden sandstone. The High Street contains many fine buildings, some timber-framed, others elegant examples from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. *Sackville College* is the pre-eminent building, founded in 1617, a long, stone built façade. Other houses of note include *Clarendon House*, late 16<sup>th</sup> Century, timber-framed, of three stories with much adornment, and the gabled *Stone House* of about 1600. Further out, *St Mary's Convent* on Moat Road is an ambitious range of buildings, begun 1865. The chapel was built in 1879-83, very tall with a high tower.

**9.41** The *West Sussex Structure Plan 2001-2016* allocates land to the west and south west of East Grinstead for a strategic mixed-use development of 2,500 homes with an associated relief road. The District Council is preparing an Action Area Plan for Strategic Development at East Grinstead. It will provide detailed guidance on the form of development and the alignment of the relief road.

### Strategic gaps

**9.42** The County Council, Mid Sussex District Council and Crawley Borough Council have long recognised pressures for development on the open land between Crawley, East Grinstead and Ashurst Wood and have designated this land as strategic gaps.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Change – key issues**

- Decline in traditional woodland management techniques such as coppicing.
- Continuing extensive planting of conifers, particularly to the west on the fringes of Worth Forest.
- Spread of invasive introduced species, particularly rhododendron and neglect of some parkland landscapes.
- Reduction of heathland to a few pockets due to cessation of grazing management and subsequent woodland invasion and woodland re-planting.
- Continuing amalgamation of small fields with hedgerow loss and the ageing and loss of hedgerow and field trees.
- Visual impact of new urban and rural development including village expansion, modern farm buildings, horse riding centres and paddocks.
- Proposals for new development and a relief road on the edge of East Grinstead.
- Introduction of telecommunications masts on ridges.
- Expansion of Crawley and East Grinstead and influence of the M23 corridor.
- Increasing pervasiveness of traffic movement and noise in parts of the area, especially along the Crawley–East Grinstead corridor.
- Increasing pressures for a wide variety of recreational activities.
- Perceived increased traffic levels on small rural lanes with consequent demands for road improvements.
- Gradual loss of locally distinctive building styles and materials.
- Gradual suburbanisation of the landscape including the widespread use of exotic tree and shrub species.

### **Landscape and visual sensitivities**

- Woodland cover limits the visual sensitivity of the landscape and confers a sense of intimacy, seclusion and tranquillity.
- Unobtrusive settlement pattern in many parts.
- Older, small assart pastures contribute to the intimacy of the landscape.
- Important pockets of rich biodiversity are vulnerable to loss and change.
- Dense network of twisting, deep lanes, droveways, tracks and footpaths provides a rich terrain for horse-riding, cycling and walking and for the appreciation of nature.
- Long views along valleys and ridges have a high sensitivity to the impact of new urban development, modern farm buildings, masts and pylons and new roads.
- Settlement pattern currently sits well within the rural landscape although there is a danger of the cumulative visual impact of buildings and other structures.
- Legacy of designed landscapes and treescapes.

## MANAGEMENT

### Management Objective

***Conserve the rich mosaic of woodland and other habitats and the intimate nature of the agricultural landscape, the high level of perceived naturalness of the area including its rural, tranquil qualities, and the unobtrusive settlement pattern throughout much of the area.***

### Land Management Guidelines

- Maintain and restore the historic pattern and fabric of the woodland and agricultural landscape for scenic, nature conservation and recreational purposes.
- Avoid skyline development and ensure that any new development has a minimum impact on long and other views and is integrated within the landscape, paying particular attention to the siting of telecommunications masts.
- Plan for long-term woodland regeneration, the planting of new small broad-leaved farm woodlands, and appropriate management of existing woodlands, and reduce rhododendron invasion and bracken cover in woodlands and on heathland.
- Extend existing woodland areas rather than creating new woodland features, reinforcing existing, distinctive landscape patterns.
- Reduce the impact of forestry where possible by encouraging sensitive forestry practice including small-scale felling rotation, and incorporating mixed species.
- Plant trees in drifts and avoid straight lines running across the grain of the land.
- Increase tree cover in and around villages, agricultural and other development and on the rural urban fringe, along the approach roads to settlements, and along busy urban routes including within the Crawley–East Grinstead corridor.
- Conserve and replant single oaks in hedgerows to maintain succession, and replant parkland trees.
- Conserve, strengthen and manage existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees and re-plant hedgerows where they have been lost.
- Conserve the landscape of the gills including wet woodland and sandrock crags, and protect the nationally-rare sandrock plant and other communities associated with them.
- Maintain and manage all lakes and ponds and their margins for their landscape diversity and nature conservation value.
- Conserve and manage remnant open heathland by preventing the encroachment of scrub and create new, interconnected heathlands.
- Conserve species-rich meadows.
- Seek to protect the tranquil and historic character of rural lanes and manage road verges to enhance their nature conservation value.
- Continue to maintain the natural setting of the Worth Way.
- Reduce the visual impact of stabling and grazing for horses.
- Minimise the effects of adverse incremental change by seeking new development of high quality that sits well within the landscape and reflects local distinctiveness.

The area lies wholly within Mid Sussex District. See ***Planning and Land Management Guidelines Sheet HW1 (High Weald)*** in Part Three. The area covered by the Sheet includes:

The *High Weald (Area 6)* and *High Weald Plateau (Area 7)* Landscape Character Areas in Mid Sussex District.