

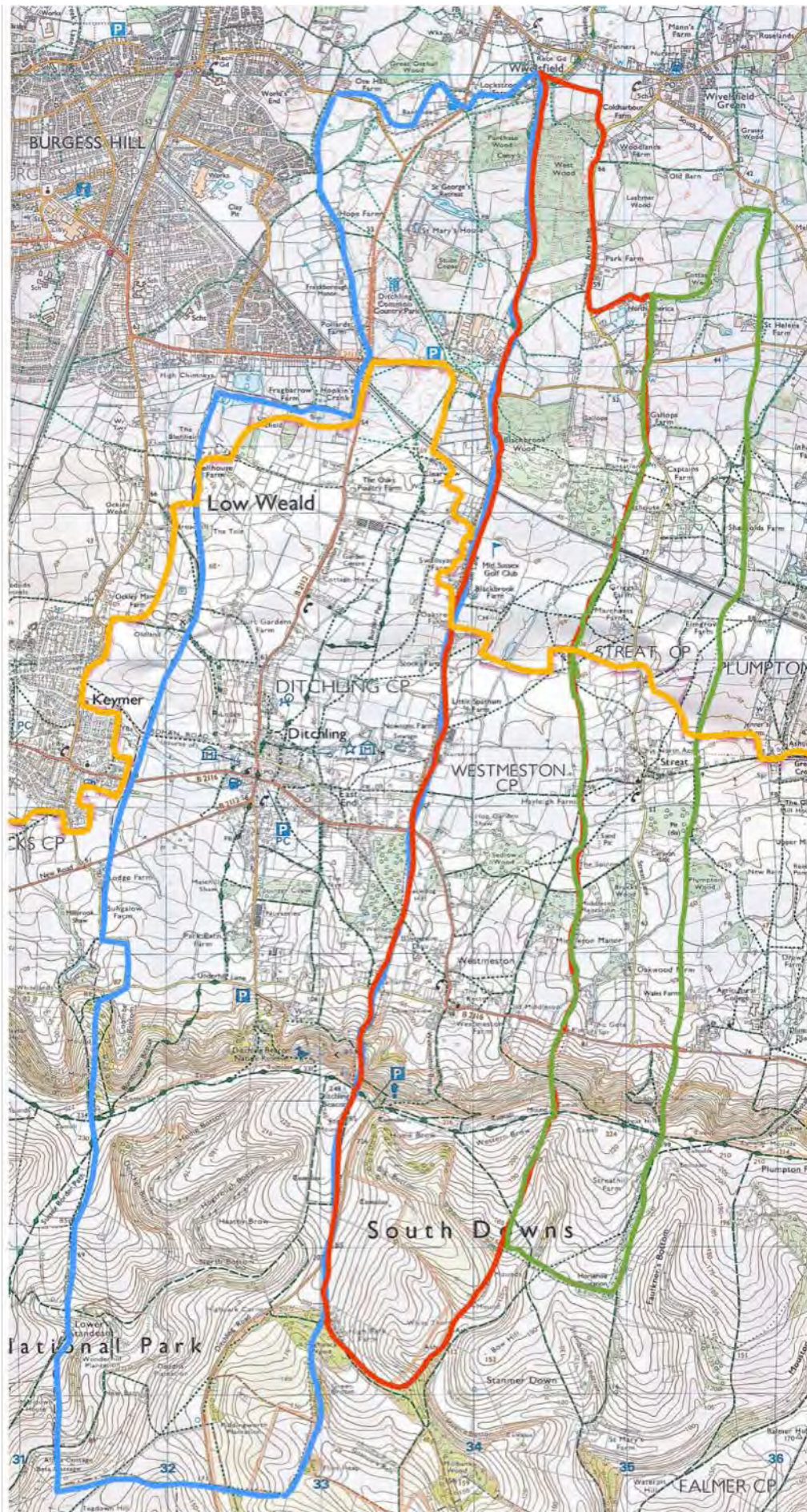
Ditchling Streat & Westmeston neighbourhood development plan

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION  
Volume 2

Item 6: Statement of  
local landscape character

*Prepared by the neighbourhood development plan  
conservation focus group*

May 2017



**KEY**  
**Ditchling**  
**Westmeston**  
**Street**

Northern boundary of the South Downs National Park

The three beacon parishes of East Sussex

This study is Item 6 of the supporting documentation, held as separate Volume 2 to emphasise the high quality and conservation importance of the local landscape.

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## I Introduction

### I.1. Purpose of this study

This document was prepared by the conservation and landscape team as part of the evidence base supporting the neighbourhood plan<sup>1</sup> of the three Beacon villages of East Sussex. Its purpose is to develop a local landscape character statement for the Beacon Parishes to:

- capture the local characteristics and features of the parish landscapes
- identify how these landscapes are valued and used by local people
- communicate thoughts of the local community on potential landscape change (threats and opportunities) and what the implications of this would be.

### I.2. Definition of landscape character assessment

*‘Landscape is defined as an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.*

*Landscapes which are different from one another are said to have their own landscape character comprising a distinct and recognizable pattern of elements, or characteristics’.*

European Landscape Convention

Landscape character assessment (LCA) is the process of identifying and describing variation in character of the landscape. LCA documents identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive by mapping and describing character types and areas. They also show how the landscape is perceived, experienced and valued by people<sup>2</sup>.

Landscape character assessments recognise the distinctiveness of ‘ordinary’ landscapes as well as nationally protected areas, and therefore value “*our whole countryside: everywhere has significance for what it is, what it contains and what it means to us*”<sup>3</sup>.

Many local authorities have prepared Landscape character assessments (LCAs) for their areas. In the case of the Beacon Parishes, both the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) and East Sussex County Council (ESCC) have prepared statements that include the Beacon Parishes neighbourhood plan area. See section 2 below.

A local or community landscape character statement builds on these existing LCAs. It describes and champions the special qualities of a local area and records the views of the community on, and their aspirations for, its future use and management.

### I.3. Approach to the development of a local landscape character statement

The methodology used to develop this statement is based on that developed by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and set out in its publication *Unlocking the landscape: Preparing a Community Landscape Character Assessment (2005)* (ibid).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.beaconvillagesplan.co.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> Planning and development guidance. Landscape and seascape character assessments (2014). <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/landscape-and-seascape-character-assessments>

<sup>3</sup> Unlocking the landscape. action pack: preparing a community landscape character assessment. CPRE 2005



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# Existing landscape character assessments

## 2.1 East Sussex County Council, landscape character assessment, 2010

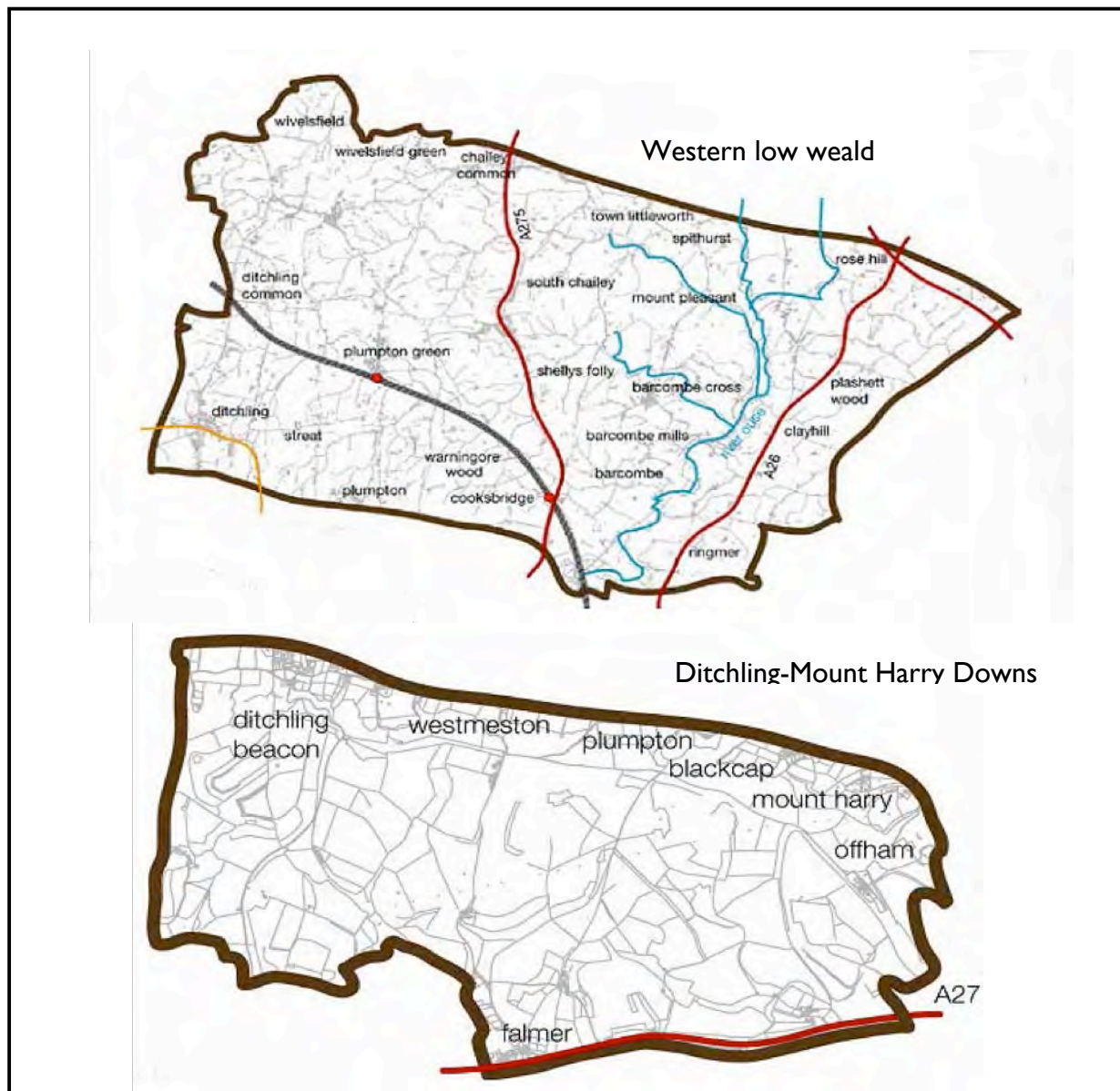
The entire Beacon Parishes area is covered by this assessment which was carried out at the county scale in 2010. The area falls into two main landscape types:

The Downs and The Low Weald – and more specifically, into two sub-categories:

- Ditchling to Mount Harry Downs
- The Western Low Weald

The boundaries of these areas are shown on **Figure 1**. The description, characteristics and management priorities of each are summarized in Box 1 below.

*Figure 1: Boundaries of landscape character areas (East Sussex landscape character assessment)<sup>4</sup>*



<sup>4</sup> See <https://new.eastsussex.gov.uk/environment/landscape>

**Box 1. Extract from Landscape Character Assessment, ESCC 2011<sup>5</sup>.**

### **Ditchling to Mount Harry Downs**

This is the highest part of the East Sussex Downs, culminating in Ditching Beacon, with fantastic views across the low weald and towards Brighton. These downs have a fine fluted scarp. Wide rolling ridges and valleys descent southwards towards Falmer and the A27. These ridges are mostly arable but with some grassland.

#### **Characteristics**

- The highest, most inland part of the East Sussex Downs
- Innumerable coombes
- More woods, tree belts and parkland than in most of the Downs
- Fine, fluted scarp with scrub, woods and grassland
- Wide, rolling ridges and valleys to the south, mostly arable
- Beech prominent in tree belts and woods. Whitebeam prominent on parts of scarp
- Memorial tree plantations at Westmeston and Blackcap
- Hamlets on scarp springline with flint churches
- Large country houses at the foot of the Downs in parkland or designed landscapes.
- Outstanding views across Weald and along Downs to east and west, especially from Ditchling Beacon. Surrey Hills, Hampshire and Isle of Wight (visible on clearest days)
- Distinctive sunken ancient north-south drove routes on bostals, scarp to weald
- Remote areas

#### **Landscape action priorities**

- Management, restoration and some extension of woods, tree-belts and feature tree groups, encouraging beech as the dominant tree. Give priority to ancient woodland to soften urban fringe.
- Control scrub invasion into chalk grassland whilst retaining substantial scrub areas as important landscape features. Prioritise scrub clearance on areas of remnant, semi-natural chalk grassland and sites of archaeological value.
- Encourage continued restoration of arable land to chalk grassland, particularly near crest of Downs and areas adjoining ancient grassland
- Management of recreation to maintain remote and tranquil areas particularly improve the South Downs Way by removing fences
- Improve Ditchling Beacon car park and traffic management along Ditchling Road
- Investigate removal, re-routing or undergrounding of power lines

<sup>5</sup> <https://new.eastsussex.gov.uk/environment/landscape>

## **Western Low Weald**

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

### **Characteristics**

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

### **Landscape action priorities**

- Establish strong, final development edges for larger villages, with new tree planting
- Prepare village tree conservation plans
- Prepare farm conservation schemes to conserve the essential landscape structure of hedges, trees and small woods and improve screening of modern farm buildings
- Management of river and stream channels, especially conservation of riverside trees
- If major development is in prospect, carry out detailed advance landscape assessment and planning followed by a bold advance tree planting structure.



## 2.2 SDNPA integrated landscape character assessment (LCA) 2011

The assessment was completed in 2011<sup>6</sup>. It was prepared to guide and change development so that it does not damage characteristics or value of the landscape. It also contains recommendations to identify ways that 'character of place' can be maintained or improved.

Like the East Sussex study above, this assessment identifies several landscape character types and sub-types in the planning area:

### Open Downs

- Adur to Ouse open Downs

### Downs Scarp

- Adur to Ouse Downs scarp

### Scarp Slopes

- Adur to Ouse scarp foot-slopes
- 

The boundaries of these areas are shown in **Figure 2**.

The LCA document provides a detailed description of each of these. Key extracts of sections on characteristics, sensitivities and management options are set out in Box 2 overleaf.

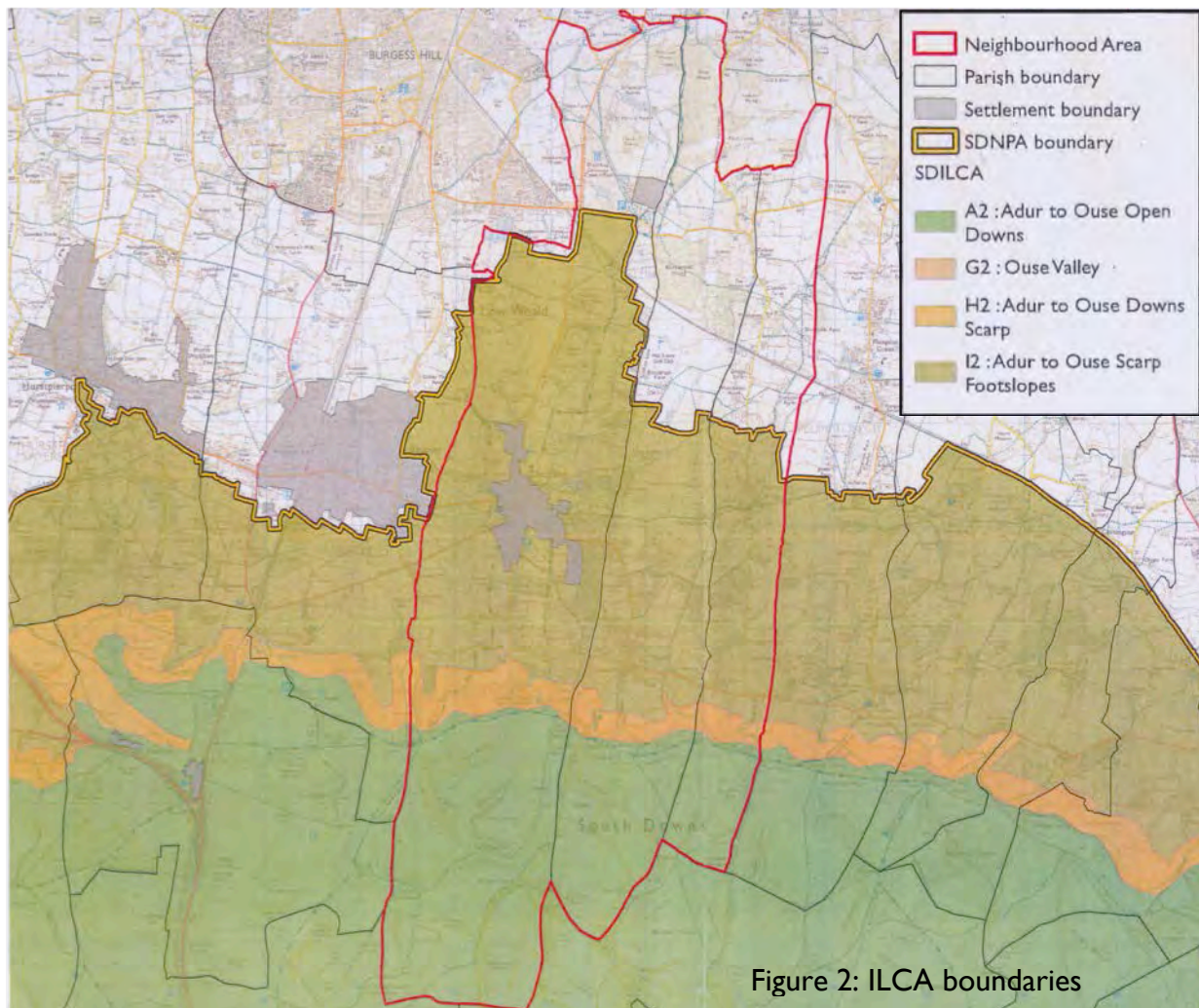


Figure 2: ILCA boundaries

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ILCA-2005-Introduction.pdf>

Box 2: Extract from South Downs integrated landscape assessment, 2011

## Adur and Ouse Downs

### Specific characteristics

This area exhibits open rolling upland chalk scenery typical of the *Open Downs* landscape type. The blunt, whale-backed downs reach a dramatic 248m at Ditchling Beacon and are furrowed by extensive branching dry valley systems producing deep, narrow, rounded coombs. Three Iron Age hillforts overlook the Weald (Devil's Dyke, Ditchling Beacon and Wolstonbury).

The Location of Brighton on the edge of this area means that this character area has been influenced, on its edges, by urban fringe features such as road cuttings and traffic associated with the A23 and A27 roads, views of built development, electricity pylons, golf courses and a cluster of communication masts at Truleigh Hill.

The proximity of Brighton also means that here are a large number of potential users of the area – networks of open access land, which tend to coincide with the steeper slopes and area of chalk grassland, the extensive network of public rights of way and car parking facilities, make this a highly accessible landscape. Public transport routes between Brighton and Devil's Dyke, Ditchling Beacon and Stanmer Park enhance countryside access further. The South Downs Way national trail follows the ridge of the northern scarp along much of its length and provides magnificent panoramic views.

An 18<sup>th</sup> century landscaped park at Stanmer is an important feature. Although large parts of the park are now converted into modern arable fields, parts of the parkland pasture survive around Stanmer House. The original boundary is still evident in the landscape, particularly where it is formed by a high stone wall.

### Sensitivities

Of particular sensitivity in this character area is the level of perceived tranquility and remoteness which is being eroded by traffic pressures and urban development on the adjacent coastal plain –light pollution already impacts on dark skies. Given the proximity to and views over development on the coastal plain, this area is also especially sensitive to changes in the adjacent urban area.

### Landscape management/development considerations

Seek opportunities to reduce the visual impacts of existing visually intrusive elements on the downs. These include severe cuttings and traffic associated with the A23 and A27 roads, the prominent urban fringes of Brighton, large electricity pylons, golf courses and communication masts at Truleigh Hill.

## **Adur to Ouse Downs scarp**

### **Specific characteristics**

A dramatic steep north-facing chalk escarpment with a distinctive concave-convex slope profile. Almost unbroken tracts of unimproved grassland, scrub and hanger woodland are present along the scarp slope and contribute to the outstanding ecology of the character area. Occasional areas of arable land, improved pasture grassland and semi-natural woodland occur on more shallow slopes along the scarp, extending into it from the intensively farmed foot-slopes and open downland which sandwich the escarpment.

A range of woodland and scrub types occur, including ash and beech woodland hangers, species-rich woody scrub which includes Juniper, a UK priority BAP<sup>7</sup> species. Most of the scarp carries national nature conservation designation (SSSI<sup>8</sup>).

Countryside access is good with the majority of the scarp designated as open access land.

Many rough sheep tracks, rights of way, cattle tracks (marking the route of stock movement to the coast for export) and tank/military tracks zig-zag across the open scarp and ascend the coombes, providing good access on foot and horseback. There are also a number of way-marked walks at Ditchling Beacon and bus access to the Beacon from Brighton.

### **Sensitivities**

Species-rich woody scrub which includes juniper, a UK priority BAP species; the distinctive oak, ash and beech woodland hangers; panoramic views over the surrounding lowlands, particularly from the popular viewpoint of Ditchling Beacon.

### **Landscape management/development considerations**

Conserve species-rich woody scrub and seek opportunities to extend such habitats (particularly Juniper); manage hanger woodland to ensure a diverse species and age structure and consider opening up paths/rides for access; promote enhanced environmental management of chalk grassland habitats and control scrub invasion; maintain panoramic views over the surrounding lowlands, particularly from popular viewpoints such as Ditchling Beacon.

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<sup>7</sup> Bio-diversity action plan

<sup>8</sup> Site of special scientific interest

## **Adur to Ouse Scarp foot-slopes**

### **Specific Characteristics**

These foot-slopes cover a relatively large area at the foot of the northern scarp. The foot-slopes extend some way north of the scarp and include parts of the Low Weald, exhibiting a number of different geological bands. These include Lower Chalk, Upper Greensand, Gault Mudstone and Lower Greensand. This area also includes a small area of weald clay north of Ditchling.

The Lower Chalk at the base of the steep scarp has been eroded into a smooth concave form with large modern arable fields replacing the former medieval open field systems. These chalk slopes support remnants of chalk grassland.

North of this is a narrow band of Upper Greensand bench. Moving away from the scarp slope, the older Gault Mudstones are revealed. Here, irregular enclosed fields represent a largely intact late medieval landscape with many fields originating as woodland assarts – this area has a more ‘Wealden’ character. There are frequent but small blocks of ancient woodland as well as more recent plantations and game coverts.

Within the clay vale are outcrops of sandstone which give rise to locally sandy areas, such as around Ditchling, which support pasture and coniferous plantations. There are also a number of quarries associated with this geological formation, demonstrating the economic value of the sands.

Typical of the scarp foot-slopes, the junction between the chalk and clay is marked by springs and a strong of nucleated villages. Edburton, Fulking, Poynings, Westmeston, Plumpton and Offham are all typical spring-line villages. The villages are linked by Underhill Lane, indicating the route of the ancient coaching lane at the scarp foot. The steep chalk scarp forms a dramatic backdrop to these villages, such as at Fulking.

The area supports a well developed network of rights of way with a north-south orientation providing access between the downs to the south and the Low Weald to the north. The density of public rights of way is particularly high around Ditchling and includes the Sussex Border Path (long distance recreational route). Stoneywish Country Park, on the edge of Ditchling, provides further opportunities for countryside access.

## **Adur to Ouse Scarp foot-slopes continued**

### **Sensitivities**

The intact medieval character on the clay, particularly the fields originating as woodland assarts; the form of the spring-line villages at the scarp foot; remnant chalk grassland; ancient woodland; areas of acid grassland on sandstone.

### **Landscape Management/development considerations**

Conserve the intact medieval landscape on the clay, particularly the fields originating as woodland assarts; conserve areas of chalk grassland and extend such habitats on areas of Lower Chalk at the scarp foot; conserve and seek to extend areas of unimproved grassland on sandstone outcrops; conserve ancient deciduous woodland and support the restoration of conifer plantations to native species.

### **In addition:**

Conserve the settlement pattern of the nucleated spring-line villages; ensure urban fringe land uses, such as garden centres, nurseries and sewage farms, do not erode the rural character of the landscape; seek to minimise use of excessive lighting, signage and 'suburban' features on the edge of Ditchling; use broadleaved woodland planting to screen built development and quarries.

## 2.3 South Downs National Park view characterisation and analysis

This report<sup>9</sup> was completed by the SDNPA in November 2015 to provide evidence on the types of views available in the National Park and its setting. It offers a brief analysis of:

- Key view patterns
- A range of representative views and key areas of overlapping visibility
- Key types of view

The authority designed the report to assess the visual impact of a range of potential land use changes. It is supported by a 3D model hosted on the SDNP website. Results relevant to the Beacon parishes neighbourhood plan areas are:

### Representative views

Within the report, 78 different views were identified to represent types found across the park. Those visible from or within the Beacon parishes neighbourhood plan area are:

*No. 13 Blackcap:* On the Downs ridge west of Lewes, this is a natural observation point offering good views over The Weald to the north and across the dip-slope to the coast. This viewpoint is also noted in South Downs Way literature.

*No. 22. Ditchling Beacon.* This fort provides a natural vantage point within National Trust land providing views north over the Low Weald. The South Downs Way passes through here (noted in the literature about the trail) and the views north from the scarp south of Ditchling are also referred to in the online information about the Sussex Border Path.

### Viewshed Analysis

This identifies the areas that are most frequently visible and therefore indicate a potential for visual sensitivity both within the national park and its setting. Those relevant to the beacon parishes are:

- Along the north facing escarpment
- Across the lowland to the north of the national park.

### Landmarks

The 'V' stand of trees at Streat, planted in 1887 to celebrate Queen Victoria's golden jubilee.

### Analysis of View Types

Various types of views were identified and described. Those relevant to our neighbourhood planning area are:

- Views from the Scarp looking north across the Low Weald outside the National Park
- Views across the undeveloped Downs

A detailed description of these is presented in Box 3 below.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Viewshed-Study-Report.pdf>

**Box 3: Analysis of view types relevant to the neighbourhood plan.**

**Views from the scarp looking north across the Low Weald outside the national park**

**Description**

This view type includes views from the steep chalk scarp east of the Arun Valley looking north across the scarp foot-slopes (within the National Park) and the Low Weald (outside the National Park). These views are probably the most iconic of the views from the South Downs National Park and many of these views are experienced from the South Downs Way.

**Special Qualities**

The elevated position on the scarp means this view type represents the stunning panoramic views that are recognised as contributing to the Park's special qualities. It also reveals a rich variety of wildlife and habitats (the second of the Park's special qualities) including some of the iconic habitats of the South Downs such as the sheep-grazed chalk grassland, juniper scrub and calcareous pedunculate oak-ash woodland. The view also reveals the tranquillity of the downs as a result of the lack of intrusive development and sense of space. The view also reveals the way that farming has shaped the landscape (contrast between enclosed farmland on foot-slopes and in the Low Weald and open sheep grazed downs scarp), the rich cultural heritage as a result of heritage assets in the view (historic parklands, country houses and churches) and the distinctive settlement pattern including the spring line villages at the foot of the scarp.

**Threats**

Threats to this view type could result from changes affecting iconic habitats of the scarp, disrupt or alter the scale and shape of field patterns, change the distinctive settlement pattern of small historic villages, or form intrusive new developments within the view either by day or night.

**Aim and Management Guidance**

The aim is to ensure that there remain opportunities to access and appreciate these panoramic views, and to ensure the special qualities recorded above are retained. In particular, by referring to guidance for landscape type I contained in the South Downs Integrated LCA, it will be important to maintain the:

- ability to access the panoramic views across the Low Weald as well as views along the scarp;
- generally undeveloped character of the view, especially within the National Park;
- distinctive scarp face profile, its iconic chalk grassland, juniper scrub and woodland habitats;
- scale and shape of the distinctive field patterns associated with the scarp foot-slopes and Low Weald beyond the Park; and
- heritage assets, such as church towers and country houses, as features within the views;

and ensure that

- any built development is integrated into its rural landscape context using native vegetation and minimise visibility from the national park; and
- development outside the national park does not detract from the general rural farmland patchwork setting to the park.

### **Box 3: Analysis of view types relevant to the neighbourhood plan, continued**

#### **Views across the undeveloped Downs**

##### **Description**

This view type includes views from within the heart of the National Park, looking across the typical downland landscape of rounded hills indented by dry valleys and coombes.

##### **Special Qualities**

The elevated position of these viewpoints within the core of the downs means they represent some of the ‘breathtaking views’ that are noted in the first of the Park’s special qualities, and are often ‘unspoilt’. They also reveal a rich variety of wildlife and habitats including some of the iconic habitats of the South Downs such as the sheep-grazed, ancient woodland and yew woodland. They also reveal the tranquillity of the downs as a result of the relative lack of development and sense of space. The way that farming has shaped the landscape is revealed in these views. They also reveal a rich cultural heritage in the form of hill forts (which often form viewpoints themselves), deserted medieval settlements, barrows, earthworks and field enclosures.

##### **Threats**

Threats to this view type could result from changes that affect the iconic chalkland habitats of the downs, loss of deciduous woodland, affect historic features or form intrusive new developments within the view either by day or night, affecting the sense of tranquillity and ‘unspoilt’ nature of the views.

##### **Aim and Management Guidance**

The aim is to ensure that there remain opportunities to access and appreciate these views, and to ensure the special qualities recorded above are retained. In particular, it will be important to maintain the:

- ability to access and appreciate exceptional views across the downs and the rounded hills indented by dry valleys and coombes;
- iconic habitats that are typical of the South Downs such as the sheep-grazed chalk grassland, ancient woodland and yew woodland;
- generally undeveloped character of the downs and the open, undeveloped skylines;
- generally undeveloped backdrop to the views and ensure that new development does not intrude into currently undeveloped and ‘unspoilt’ views;
- heritage assets, such as hill forts, deserted medieval settlements, barrows, earthworks and field enclosures, as features and landmarks within the views.

Refer to guidance for downland landscape types A, B and D as well as H (major scarps) for more detail, contained in the South Downs integrated landscape character assessment



## 2.4 Lewes District Council landscape capacity study (2012)<sup>10</sup>

Lewes District Council and the South Downs National Park Authority prepared this study in 2012 to inform the emerging core strategy and future planning policy decision. Its aim was to identify where development might be accommodated within the district without having an unacceptable impact on the landscape.

For each distinct landscape character area in the district, landscape capacity to accommodate change was assessed by looking at the combination of the following:

- Landscape character sensitivity: *the degree to which the character of the landscape is robust enough to accommodate change without adverse impact*
- Visual sensitivity: general visibility of the landscape and potential to mitigate visual effects, including landform/cover and number/types of visual receptors
- The 'value' of the landscape: classification of the general quality of an area through physical features in the landscape which contribute to the value and/or sense of place.

The findings of the study which relate to the neighbourhood planning area are set out in Box 4a and 4b below.

### Box 4a: Extract from Lewes District Council landscape capacity assessment

#### **Landscape assessments and preferred development areas:**

##### *Ditchling*

The preferred areas for development around Ditchling, from a landscape perspective, are identified as:

- South of Lewes Road

The Medieval village of Ditchling lies at the foot of the Downs along the parallel greensand ridge. The village is located along one of the many lanes which run perpendicular to the Downs. Development is concentrated around the crossroads radiating from this point, particularly along the Lewes Road to the east. The majority of Ditchling is covered by several areas of archaeological interest, including the remains of the main east- west Roman road in Sussex.

There is little scope, in landscape terms, for significant development around Ditchling. The main constraint to development is the visual sensitivity of the landscape. Land to the west is particularly open gaining uninterrupted views to the Downs which, in addition to the area's historical significance, contributes to the landscape value as designated National Park. South east of the crossroads the landscape is comparatively well contained by tree belts and a block of woodland which obstruct views southwards. This landscape has the potential for small scale change but within the context of a strong landscape structure. Other small pockets of land, adjacent to the existing development, may also have potential.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.lewes.gov.uk/Files/plan\\_LCS\\_2012.pdf](http://www.lewes.gov.uk/Files/plan_LCS_2012.pdf), September 2012

**Box 4b Character area capacities with mitigation potential and management opportunities**  
 (Extract from Landscape Capacity Study (2012)).

Character area	Land-scape quality	Land-scape value	Character sensitivity to change	Visual sensitivity	Management opportunities	Mitigation potential	Land-scape capacity
Lodge Hill	High	High	High	High	Maintain existing hedge and tree structure to preserve character of the area which is elevated and exposed to the wider landscape.	Very little scope to accommodate change. Open and expansive views to the south. Land to the west, made up of gently sloping agricultural fields provides a gap between Ditchling and Keymer	<b>None/negligible</b>
Land south of Keymer Road	Good	Medium /high	Moderate	Moderate	Retain open landscape character to provide gap between Ditchling and Keymer to the West. Conserve remnant trees and hedges. Screen Rec ground. Avoid further development along Clayton Road to avoid creation of ribbon extension into the village.	Little scope to accommodate change	Low
South of Lewes Road/ the Nye	Ordinary/ good	Medium	Moderate	Moderate	Some areas in poor condition	Well contained fields defensible boundaries. Strengthen existing hedges for screening. Low density/ sensitive design.	Medium
East of Dumbrells	Good	Medium/ High	Moderate	Moderate	Continue with pastoral use to manage landscape. Hard standing and other equestrian and agricultural related buildings detract from the landscape.	Some existing well screened and contained fields. Low density.	Low



3

# Local landscape character analysis

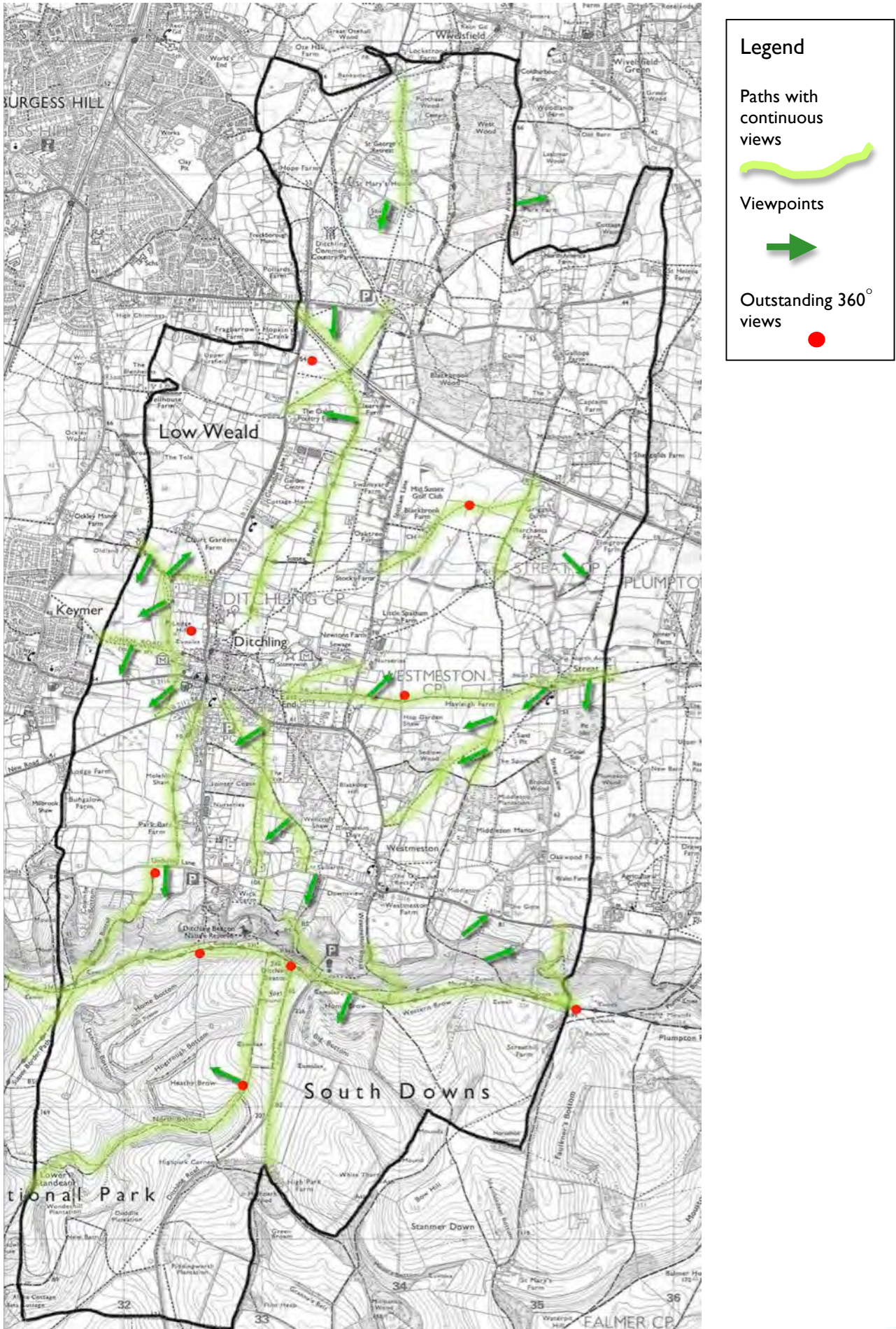


Figure 3: Key views

The following sections record the findings of a local landscape character analysis carried out by the Neighbourhood Plan conservation focus group in 2015. This analysis set out to supplement the already comprehensive descriptions of the landscapes of the Parishes, with a finer scale description of the views and landscape features valued by people living in the area.

### **3.1 Key views**

The SDNP View analysis identified two types of view that are present within the Neighbourhood Plan area:

- Views from the Scarp looking north across the Low Weald outside the national park.
- Views across the undeveloped Downs.

The local landscape character assessment process supported this but added more detail on the types and location of key views available within the Beacon parishes area. These are shown on **Figure 3** ( previous page) and are described below.

#### *3.1.1 Outstanding 360 degree long distance views from the Downs*

From top of the Downs, at Ditchling Beacon and all along the South Downs Way as it traverses east-west through the parishes, there are long distance, panoramic 360 degree views which are spectacular and varied.

### View south from Ditchling Beacon towards Stanmer

This view is dominated by the predominantly agricultural landscape – with a mixture of arable and pasture fields – dotted with small areas of woodland (shelter belts). Much of this land on the northern edge of Brighton is owned by the council and was bought initially to protect the water catchment/aquifer in times of expansion of the city post-war. It is rented out to agricultural tenants. The open, expansive views to the south include the urban conurbation of Brighton and Hove/Shoreham, the coastline and the English Channel:



The Iron Age hill fort on the Beacon itself is a local landscape feature (although not interpreted or signposted and hence may not be obvious to many). This fort and several others along the top of the Downs indicate ancient land use and significance of this landscape (see below):



### View to the South East

As above, there are open, expansive views to the south-east with glimpses of the Seven Sisters and the cliffs at Birling Gap in the distance. The Amex Community Stadium is visible in the medium/long range view - tucked between the Downs and the coast. The mosaic of arable /pasture/ woodland is a particular characteristic of this view:



### View to the West

To the west there are open distant views across the Downs plateau to Truleigh Hill and its transmitter towers – and along the escarpment to the south coast, West Sussex and Hampshire. The long distance sequence of escarpment ridges to the west (Wolstonbury Hill, Truleigh Hill, Chanctonbury Hill) is a particular feature of this view. Again, it is an agricultural landscape with the dry valleys and undulations in the underlying topography very evident. Walking along the South Downs Way, the views to the south open out as the various undulations of the land on the open downs come in and out of view:



### View to the North

Where the views to the south, east and west are agricultural and somewhat wild, the views to the north are of the mosaic of woodland, fields and settlements that stretch along the flat uninterrupted weald for many miles. The views are absorbing and uplifting giving a real sense of height above the land below. They are 'big' and expansive landscapes and the distance of view possible is very rare in the south-east of England.

The land use mosaic is a dominant feature of this view – the landscape 'matrix' is agricultural land and woodland with settlements dotted between/amongst these. Settlements are thus distinct from each other and all are separated by the matrix of woodland and farmland between them. The settlements, for the most part, nestle within the surrounding landscape although some notable and visible developments within Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath do stand out clearly, demonstrating the need for sensitive location and design of any significant development in this landscape.

Walking along the South Downs Way along the Beacon, the views to the north are dominant, unobstructed and consistent. The views combined with the tranquility of experience on this path, even on a busy summer's day, makes this a very popular destination for walking.

These 360 degree views, combined with the tranquil rural setting make Ditchling Beacon and the area on the top of the Downs a very popular place for recreation. These include: jogging, walking, cycling and horse riding along the South Downs Way and up the escarpment from the villages to the north; paragliding; and model aircraft flying. It is popular with individuals and groups alike. The South Downs way itself is often used for sponsored walking/cycling events while the road up to the Beacon from Ditchling is on the route of the London-Brighton cycle race and is very popular with recreational cyclists and cycling clubs throughout the year. Pedestrian access is facilitated by the bus service from Brighton and by car – parking provided by the National Trust at its Ditching Beacon car park. This has recently been re-landscaped to create more space and emergency access. It appears quite 'stark' at present following excavation, but this is likely to soften over time as the vegetation returns.

Despite the high use of the Beacon, it remains an inspiring and tranquil place to walk or cycle and it is possible, quite quickly, to escape any sense of crowding such is the size and scale of the landscape and views.



Keymer



Rural gap between settlements

Ditchling



Westmeston

### **3.1.2 Views south to the Downs scarp from the villages and surrounding land**

The north face of the Downs escarpment is a dominant landscape feature from the villages and surrounds, sitting directly to the south and running in a continuous east-west direction. It rises steeply from the flatter land to the south and at Ditchling Beacon, directly to the south of the village, the Downs reach their greatest height (245m above sea level). The Beacon and the escarpment either side are the characteristic ‘whale back’ shape that has been celebrated in art and literature and are considered by many to be an iconic English landscape image.

From the north, the land cover on the Downs (of grassland and native woodland) makes this a predominantly rural view. Parts of the scarp are owned and managed by conservation organisations such as the National Trust and the Sussex Wildlife Trust. The management practices are focused on conservation of the ancient woodland on the scarp and enhancement of areas of chalk grassland and associated flora which occur in this area<sup>11</sup>.

A series of footpaths and bridleways run up the slopes to the plateau above. Many of these are ancient in origin and connected with grazing patterns the movement of people and their livestock through this landscape between common lands distributed on the plateau and on the lower ground to the north of the villages. The road running up the Beacon winds its way up (or down!) through the scarp, providing glimpses of the view below as the woodland opens up on the bends. This road is one of the few that bisects the scarp and as a result is busy. It is also popular with local cycling clubs and those from further afield, who come to climb the famous Beacon (which is also one of the few cycling ‘climbs’ in the south-east of England).



<sup>11</sup> See SDNPA management plans

There is no visible development on the ridges other than the Jack and Jill windmills which are thus a distinctive local landscape feature (although they sit just outside the Ditchling parish boundary) The face of the escarpment is, in places, covered by pockets of woodland. The most obvious woodland feature is the 'V' is a locally famous belt of trees on the northern face of Streat Hill approximately opposite the end of Streat Lane. This was planted to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. Hiking to the 'V' from Ditchling village is an annual activity for the children at the village primary school.

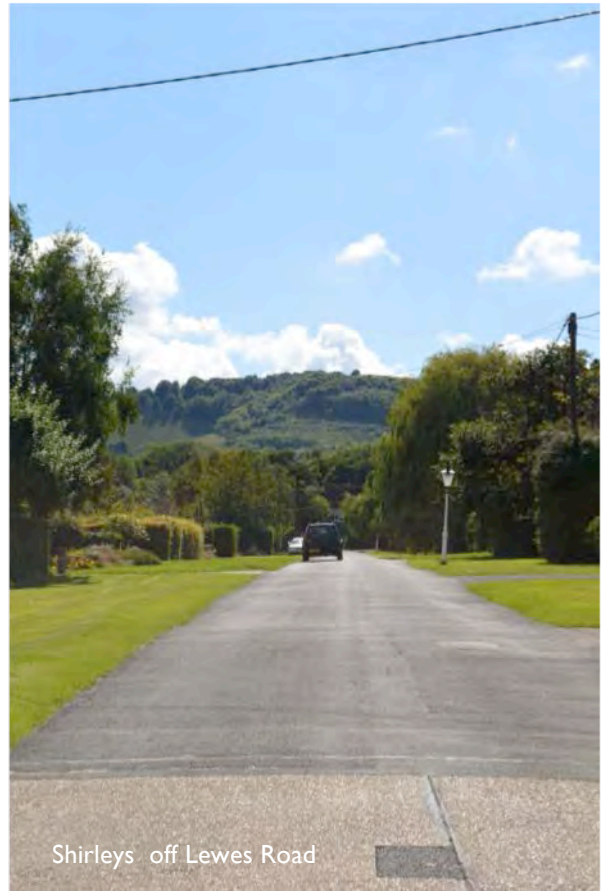


The three villages of Ditchling, Streat and Westmeston sit just to the north of the scarp and views out of all of the villages are thus dominated by the steep north facing slopes of the Downs escarpment. These views very much characterise the villages. They are available from all of Westmeston given its small size and proximity to the hillside. The centre of Streat is heavily wooded and thus views to the Downs are only available once south of the centre or on either of the bridleways heading east-west. In Ditchling, views are not available in some places due to topography, woodland or development that obscure views in places. However, once in the village centre or when travelling east-west along Lewes Road/ Keymer Road the views are once again available. For those travelling into Ditchling from the north, the Downs are visible from Ditchling Common and then disappear again as Common Lane approaches the village. The sudden 'appearance' of the Downs above the High Street accompanies arrival in the village centre and from this viewpoint the Downs provide the dramatic backdrop to the village so valued by residents and visitors alike.





Ditchling High Street



Shirleys off Lewes Road

### Views to the south



From Streat churchyard

## 3.2 Distinctive Landscape Features

There are several distinctive landscape features within the Beacon Parish area. These characteristics, landmarks and locally distinct areas of land make a considerable contribution to the overall landscape character of the area.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather a selection of the more distinctive local landscape features within the Parish boundaries. Their location is shown on **Figure 4**.

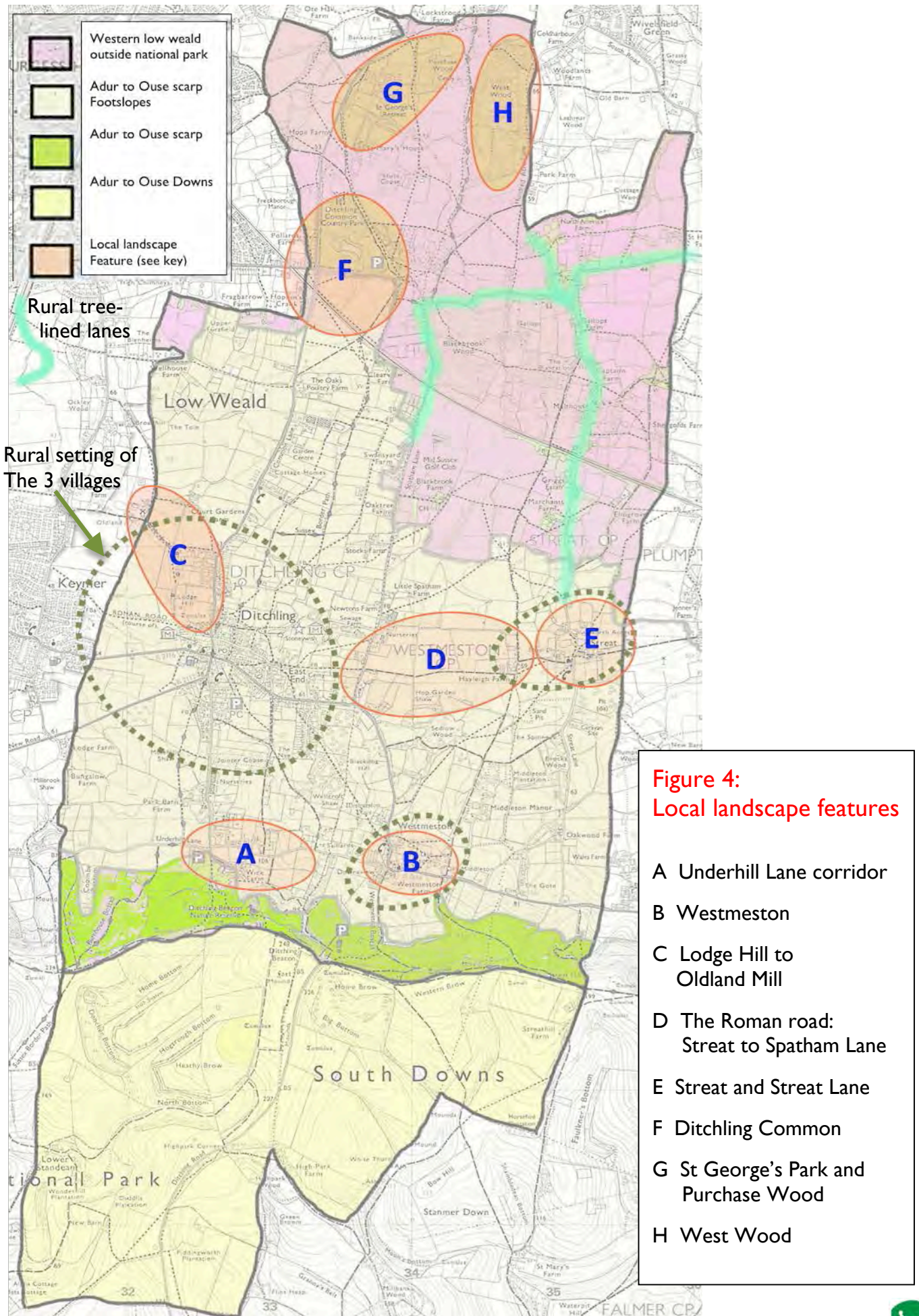
### 3.2.1 Rural setting of the three villages

The Beacon Parishes are predominantly rural in their character, with farming and woodland the dominant land cover and scattered very low density development present throughout, but mostly along the rural lanes and the Lewes road.

The three settlements are nestled within this rural landscape, with Ditchling the largest and thus most dominant in the landscape. However, despite its size it fits very well into its surrounding landscape, helped by the surprising amount of woodland in and around the village, particularly to the east and south.



Ditchling village



**Figure 4:**  
**Local landscape features**

- A Underhill Lane corridor
- B Westmeston
- C Lodge Hill to Oldland Mill
- D The Roman road: Streat to Spatham Lane
- E Streat and Streat Lane
- F Ditchling Common
- G St George's Park and Purchase Wood
- H West Wood

Ditchling's distinctive settlement boundary and its rural setting is at its most vulnerable to the west, due to its close proximity to neighbouring Keymer, which sits just over a mile to the west (over the county boundary into West Sussex and outside the boundary of the National Park and Ditchling Parish). However, despite the closeness of its neighbour, Ditchling remains a distinct settlement within a rural landscape, thanks to the clear strip of countryside and rural land use between the two.

Edge of Keymer



Ditchling

Narrow but distinct rural gap between villages



Streat



Westmeston



### 3.2.2 The Underhill Lane Corridor

Underhill Lane runs west-east through Ditchling and Westmeston parishes and is notable in the area as a ribbon of residential and agricultural development closely hugging the base of the scarp. It is thus very visible from the top of the Downs. Fields to the north of the lane are used for grazing, although there are striking groupings of paddocks and vineyards particularly on the area of Underhill Lane between Beacon Road and Westmeston.

Nye Lane runs between Ditchling and Underhill Lane, and as a bridleway provides recreational access between the village and paths which climb to the top of the Downs. Nye Lane is used extensively by local people and those visiting the area via the South Downs Way.



Vineyard



Paddocks

### **3.2.3 Lodge Hill to Oldland Mill**

Rising as it does above Ditchling Lodge Hill stands out as the only area of elevation within this landscape type. Oldland Mill, which is just outside the Ditchling Parish boundary to the west, is an important feature in the landscape above the village. The circular walk from the village, up Lodge Hill and beyond to the Mill is very popular with local people and access to Lodge Hill is permitted by the Turner Dumbrell Trust that owns and manages the land. Lodge Hill is topped by a Bronze Age barrow and also home to a Mesolithic/Neolithic flint working site. It is also of geological interest being the only outcrop of any height to the south of the South Downs chalk ridge for many miles. The views from the hill to the South are outstanding, particularly to the south where there are uninterrupted views across Ditchling to the Downs beyond. In the winter during snow, its slopes are a magnet for local children who congregate to sledge down its steep slopes. Across Lodge Hill Lane, the footpath across the field towards the mill provides long distance, open views to the west.



Lodge Hill from Hayleigh's Farm, Streat



Oldland Mill in Keymer Parish,



... and as viewed from the Beacon

Lodge Hill



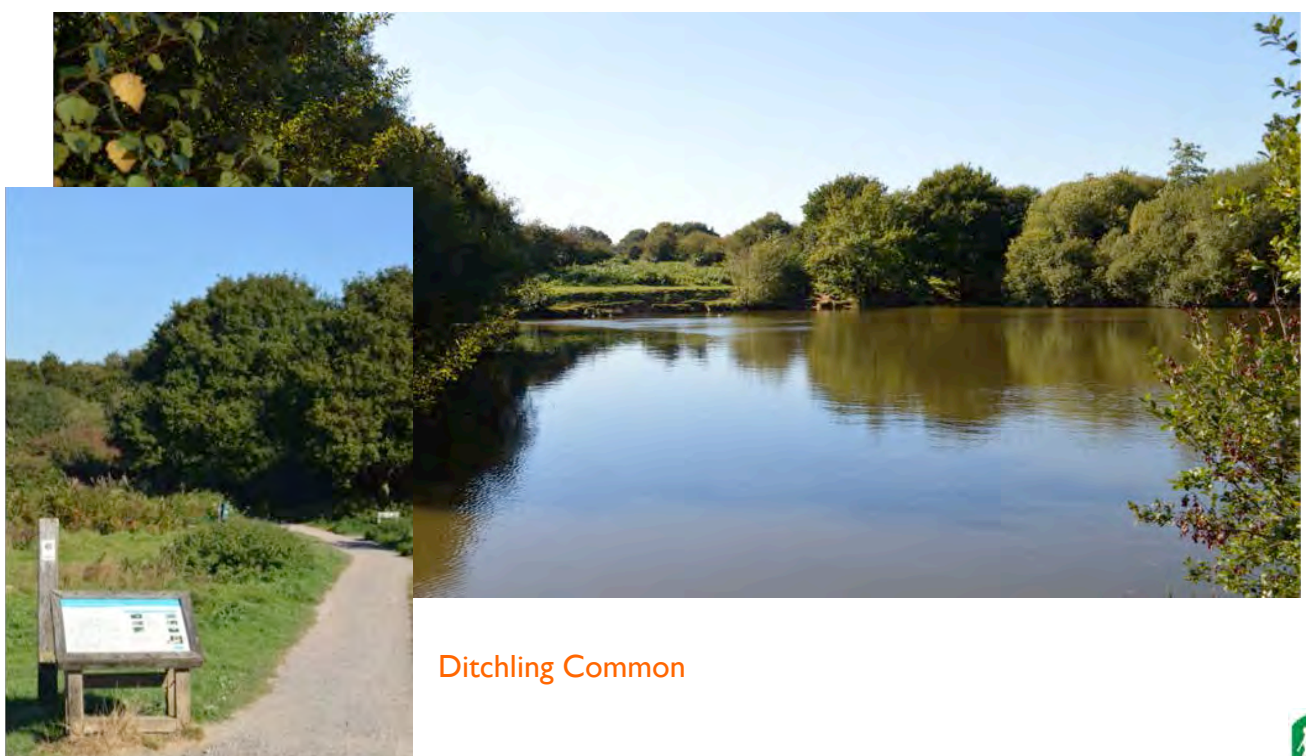
View from west side of Lodge Hill towards Oldland Mill

View from Lodge Hill to the west and Wolstenbury Hill



### 3.2.4 Ditchling Common

Ditchling Common is bisected by Folders Lane East/Middleton Common Lane and is made up of existing common land and the more recently created Country Park, owned and managed by East Sussex County Council. This is an important recreational resource for people from the three parishes and neighbouring Burgess Hill. Its combination of open ground, quiet woodland walks and a large and attractive pond system at its centre creates a very attractive walking environment. The network of footpaths also makes it accessible for those with less mobility. It is popular with dog walkers, fishermen and families and has a large car park providing easy access off Folders Lane East. Its central open area is covered with bracken for most of the year which turns an attractive brown colour in autumn. The bluebell display in Spring, both in its woodland and on the open ground, is notable. There are wide and expansive views from the open ground both north and south of the road. Part of the Common is an SSSI and requires specific grazing to retain and enhance its botanical interest. This is currently managed by East Sussex County Council and is guided by its management plan for the site.



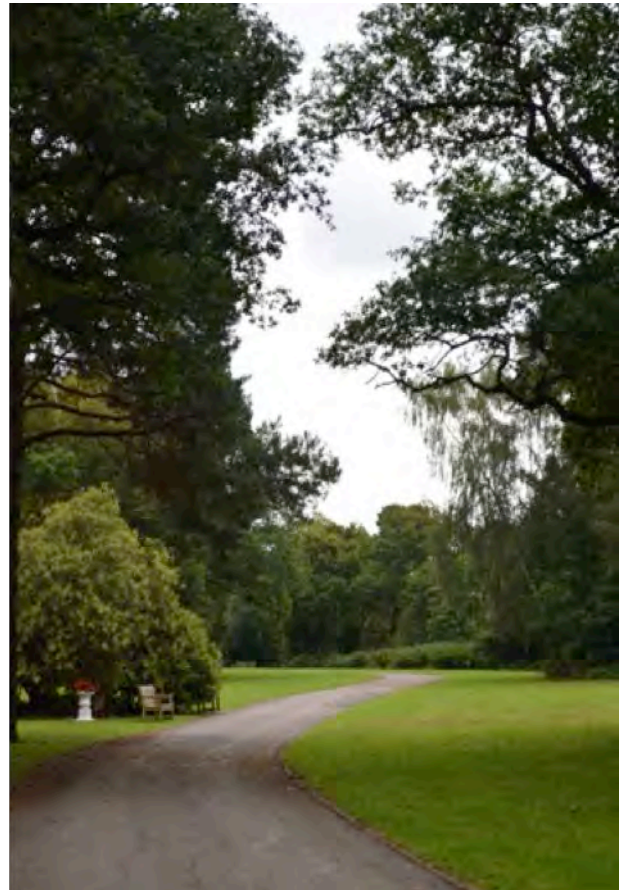
Ditchling Common

### **3.2.5 St George's Park and Purchase Wood**

St George's Park sits just north of Ditchling Common. St George's Retreat was established on the site in 1868 by Augustinian Nuns as a place of shelter or care for the elderly and remains a complex of care homes and retirement accommodation in two locations within the park. Elements of its 'parkland' landscape remains, including a fishing lake, open fields, large mature trees, woodland walks and open views to the Downs to the south. The new developments are very visible in the landscape but are clustered in two locations thus preventing sprawl into the surrounding rural landscape. It remains a tranquil, rural place sheltered from noise from the busy adjacent Haywards Heath – Ditchling road. Purchase Wood and West Wood border St George's Park to the north and east respectively and provide attractive and popular walking routes for residents and visitors.



View into Purchase Wood  
from St George's Park



St George's Park entrance



Ditchling Common industrial estates  
visible from St George's Park



St George's Park care homes

### 3.2.6 West Wood

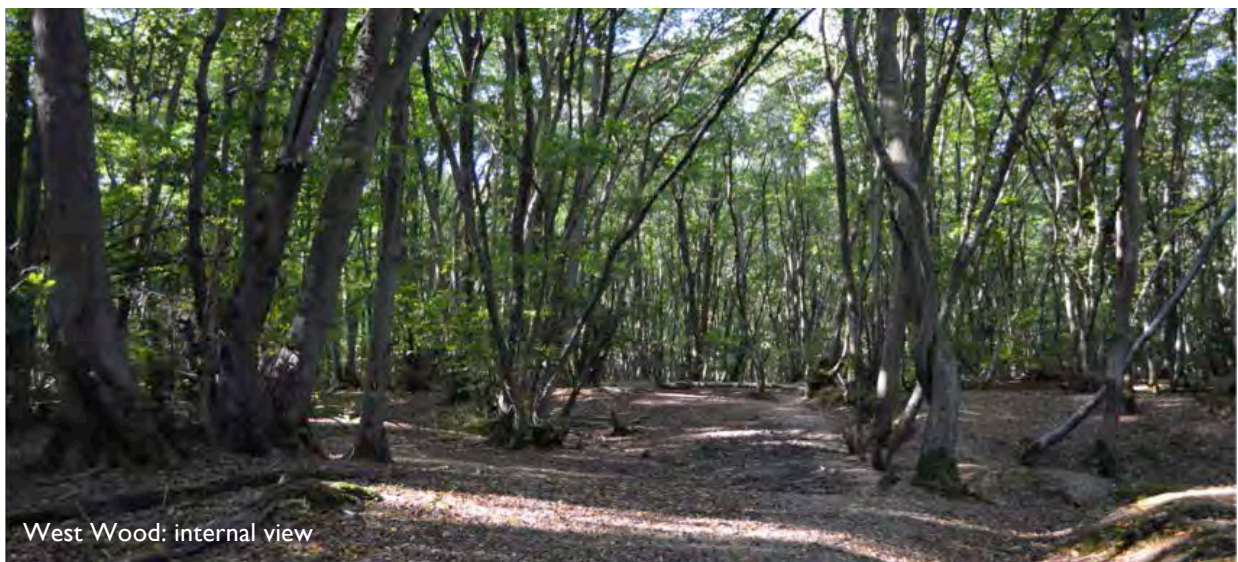
West Wood is a large expanse of native woodland that stretches from St George's Retreat north to Wivelsfield Green. It is criss-crossed with footpaths and as it borders the village of Wivelsfield Green. It is a valued recreational resource for its residents. West Wood also provides a dominant flank to the west edge of Hundred Acre Lane and can be accessed via several entrances along this rural lane.



Access to West Wood from Wivelsfield Green



West Wood



West Wood: internal view

### **3.2.7 The Roman Road – Streat to Spatham Lane**

Between Streat and Spatham Lane, below the Greensand Ridge at Hayleigh's Farm, is an open, flat agricultural landscape running alongside the ancient Roman Road. This area provides panoramic views to the Downs to the South and stretches north to the woods along Middleton Common Lane. The Mid Sussex golf course sits amongst this flatter, open area of landscape.



Hayleigh's Farm





Open views south to the Downs



Top left: view west from the Greensand Ridge towards Lodge Hill;  
Top right: Mid Sussex Golf Club

Lower left and right: views of open fields, east along the Roman Road from Spatham Lane.

The lane along the route of the Roman Road is not a through-road and provides vehicle access only to the farm and houses at Hayleigh's Farm. However, it is very popular with local residents for walking, horse-riding and links through to the Bridleway to Streat and Plumpton and a network of footpaths running north and south from the Hayleigh's Farm corner.

### 3.2.8 Streat and Streat Lane

Streat Lane runs south from Middleton Common Lane to the Lewes Road. It is a narrow road, which is visually very diverse along its length. At its northern section it is characterized by open grass verges and views to the Downs to the south. Closer to the village of Streat, it is bounded by trees and high hedges which cast deep shade around the centre of the village itself. At its southern end it is more open and dominated by the views of the steep Downs scarp, its woodland and the ‘V’



(Top L & R) Views south along Streat Lane



(Left and above): Streat church and Streat Place

Streat itself is located along the Greensand Ridge and is focused around Streat Place and Streat Parish Church. In addition, a small number of houses stretch along the bridleway that runs east-west along the Greensand Ridge.



(Left to right): Streat bridleway to Plumpton and to Ditchling; telephone box by Streat church



### 3.2.9 Westmeston

Westmeston sits along Lewes road and Underhill Lane, and the centre of the small settlement sits at the junction of the two. Its principal landmark is the parish church.

Of the three Beacon villages, Westmeston is the one that sits closest to the base of the Downs and so its landscape is dominated by the spectacular views of the hills above.



The downs from Westmeston churchyard



Lewes Road through Westmeston;



Westmeston church

### **3.2.10 Rural tree-lined roads and lanes north of the Downs**

The roads and lanes in the parishes are all relatively narrow rural roads, lined in many places by woodland and hedges particularly towards the northern ends of the parishes.

The B2112 runs north–south through the centre of Ditchling village, carrying large volumes of traffic between Haywards Heath/Burgess Hill and Brighton. The B2116 runs west-east through Ditchling and Westmeston en route to Lewes (east) or Hassocks (west). They traverse agricultural and wooded landscapes in the main and in places provide views and glimpses of the surrounding countryside and the Downs. But both routes are heavily trafficked, diminishing their quiet rural characteristics.

The smaller lanes are narrower and quieter. They provide a more ‘enclosed’ experience, being narrower than the main roads and more densely wooded along stretches. Hundred Acre Lane<sup>12</sup>, Streat Lane, and Spatham Lane run north-south and are lined by hedges and trees with glimpses to fields at the sides and beyond where there are breaks in the hedges. Middleton Common Lane runs west-east and again is lined in large part with hedges and trees.



View east over agricultural landscape



View South along Hundred Acre Lane



North end of Spatham Lane



Middleton Common Lane

<sup>12</sup> In photo, note missing field boundary where hedge has been removed. This gap allows long distance views across fields and hedges with views as far as the Chailey Windmill and Ashdown Forest possible on a clear day.



4

Issues/threats

The South Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment<sup>13</sup> and the East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment<sup>14</sup> identify sensitivities and management priorities for the landscape character areas that fall within the neighbourhood plan area (see section 2 above).

**The following issues/threats to the landscape in the area were identified by the focus group should be considered alongside to the findings of the Landscape Character Assessments to which they are supplementary.**

#### 4.1 Open Downs

- Changes in landuse or agricultural practice would have a significant impact on this landscape. Current changes in the funding for agri-environment schemes may have an impact on how this agricultural land is managed as much is covered by agri-environment schemes.
- More development around the northern edges of Brighton/Shoreham would be very visible. It is possible that the new offshore Rampion windfarm (once constructed) may be visible out to sea. However, it is positive that any associated transmission lines are to be located underground between Worthing and Bolney, thus significantly reducing the impact on this and surrounding landscape character.
- There is relatively high recreational use of this area due to the bus and road connections to Brighton and the villages to the north. Numbers are probably constrained by the size of the car park. Care should be taken before proposing any significant increase in visitor numbers or new visitor infrastructure given the rural, tranquil properties of this landscape which would be undermined by large increases in visitor numbers.
- There is no 'interpretation' at this visitor 'hot spot' – and so visitors get little or no insights into the landscapes they see before them, the historical land use patterns that have shaped it and the links between the Downs and the villages below.
- The iron age fort on the Beacon is largely obscured by vegetation and is thus not easily identifiable by visitors.

#### 4.2 Scarp

- Ongoing management of the reserves owned by Sussex Wildlife Trust and The National Trust will result in gradual changes to the vegetation cover. The general management aim is to control woodland and scrub encroachment onto the Downs plateau and to restore the open grassland areas.

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<sup>13</sup> See again <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ILCA-2005-Introduction.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> and: <https://new.eastsussex.gov.uk/environment/landscape>



### 4.3 Foot-slopes

- The rural setting and distinct settlement boundaries of Ditchling are very vulnerable to the west due to the narrow rural gap between Ditchling and Keymer. This would be compromised by any further development in the rural gap.
- The flat and mainly wooded/agricultural landscape of the foot-slopes will be very sensitive to any further large-scale development (e.g. large agricultural or commercial buildings, solar farms etc) due to the visibility of any such development from the top of the Downs. In terms of impacts on key views, the landscape capacity to absorb change is greater in the areas further from the Downs escarpment due to the distance from viewpoints on the Downs. Thus areas to the north of the parishes may be able to accommodate greater disturbance/change.
- The field sizes in this landscape contribute to the complex mosaic of woodland and fields and are a key characteristic. However, many have been enlarged in recent times through the removal of hedges and these larger fields are now very visible in the views of the foot-slopes from the South Downs Way. Protection of the landscape quality will thus require retention of field size and hedges where possible.
- Similarly, woodland is a significant component of this landscape and whilst the landscape could absorb small reductions in woodland or hedgerows, any large reductions would be highly visible and would also reduce woodland based recreation opportunities, which are so valued by the residents in this area.
- The dark skies experienced when in the foot-slope and escarpment area are a key characteristics of the parishes and would be vulnerable to the development of additional street lighting or development requiring bright lighting in the area.

## This study

is item 6, part of the supporting documentation volume to the main neighbourhood development plan of the Beacon villages of Ditchling, Streat and Westmeston East Sussex,

prepared by the neighbourhood plan's conservation group.

For more information, please refer to the web site:

<http://www.beaconvillagesplan.co.uk/>

May 2017

