High Weald AONB Management Plan Review 2024
Habitat Regulations Assessment

Stage 1 (Screening) Report

Prepared by:

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
Woodland Enterprise Centre
Hastings Road
Flimwell
East Sussex, TN5 7PR
www.highweald.org

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Section 1 - Introduction

Legislation on Habitats

1.1 The Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) process assesses the potential effects of a plan or project on the conservation objectives of sites afforded the highest level of protection in the UK, for their exceptionally important (rare, endangered, or vulnerable) species and/or habitats. These were classified under European legislation - 'Habitats Directive' and the 'Birds Directive'- but since 1st January 2021, they are protected in the UK by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). These sites previously formed part of a network of internationally important sites throughout Europe designated for their ecological status, known as the 'Natura 2000' Network, and Sites within the network were referred to as 'Natura 2000 sites'. Post Brexit, these sites are now referred to as 'European sites' and the 'National Site Network'. The National Site Network of European protected sites in England include:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)
- Special Protection Areas (SPA)
- Ramsar Sites (Internationally important wetlands)
- European offshore marine sites
- Proposed SACs
- Potential SPAs
- Areas secured as sites compensating for damage to a European site.

1.2 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), and the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora as identified in Annexes I and II, respectively of European Council Directive 92/43/EEC requires that any plan not directly connected with or necessary to the management of European sites, but likely to give rise to a significant effect, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, should be subject to appropriate assessment. The plan should only be adopted after it is ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned.

1.3 National legislation:
The Conservation Regulations 1994
The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)
The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019
reflects European Directives legislation, although it further prescribes that the plan-making authority shall consult the appropriate nature conservation body and have regard to any representations made within such reasonable time as the authority specifies.

1.4 This paper documents the initial stages of assessment described as 'screening', which determines whether specific European Sites require the application of Appropriate

Assessment in the plan making process. As part of the screening process, the plans and strategies considered in combination with the Core Strategy are documented as well as:

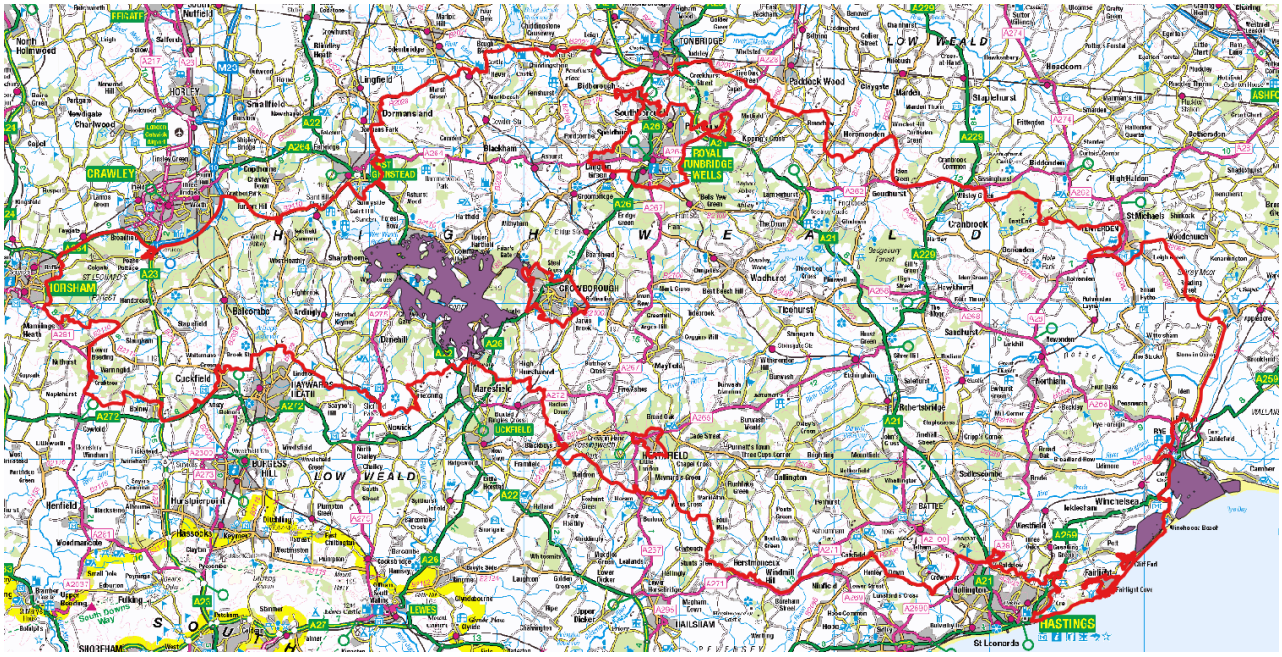
- the scope of the study area;
- characteristics of the European Sites;
- possible impacts;
- the determination as to whether the High Weald AONB Management Plan Review will have significant in combination effects; and
- whether further Appropriate Assessment is required in relation to the European Sites Identified.

1.5 The European Sites which are in or close to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are:

- Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Dungeness Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Dungeness, Romney Marsh, and Rye Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar
- Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Pevensey Levels Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar

Special Areas of Conservation in light blue

Special Protection Areas in purple



Ramsar Sites in orange

Appropriate Assessment

1.6 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), does not specify how the stages of the Appropriate Assessment should be undertaken, although it confirms that the Appropriate Assessment must be recorded and carried out with a view to informing decisions in the Plan. It is recognised that the assessment should be proportionate to the geographical scope of the option and the nature and extent of any effects identified.

1.7 There are three key stages of Appropriate Assessment as defined in the Habitats Regulations Assessment guidance 'Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site' (February 2021). The stages are described below:

Stage One: Screening

This step is a simple assessment to check or screen if a proposal:

- is directly connected with or necessary for the conservation management of a European site
- risks having a significant effect on a European site on its own or in combination with other proposals

If not, there is no need to go through the appropriate assessment or derogation stages.

Stage Two: Appropriate Assessment

An appropriate assessment must be carried out if you:

- decide there is a risk of a likely significant effect on a European site
- do not have enough evidence to rule out a risk

The assessment should be to assess the likely significant effects of the proposal in more detail and identify ways to avoid or minimise any effects.

Stage Three: Derogation (allow exceptions)

To decide if the proposal qualifies for a derogation, it must apply three legal tests in the following order:

1. There are no feasible alternative solutions that would be less damaging or avoid damage to the site.
2. The proposal needs to be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest.
3. The necessary compensatory measures can be secured.

A record of all findings, including a failed test, must be kept.

1.8 This paper implements the screening element (stage 1) of the Habitats Regulations Assessment process, as described in relevant guidance 'Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site' (2021).

Section 2 - Screening Assessment

2.1 In terms of screening Part 6 (Chapter 1) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) states:

Any plan or project which

(a) is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and

(b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site,

must make an appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan or project for that site in view of that site's conservation objectives.

2.2 Habitats Regulations Assessment guidance 'Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site' (2021), suggests a three-stage process in undertaking screening involving:

Step One: Determination of whether the Plan is for the conservation management of the habitats or species for which the European site has been designated;

Step Two: Assess the likely significant effects on a European site that could affect its conservation objectives;

Step Three: Check for combined effects with any other proposal planned or underway and affects the same site, that on its own also does not have a significant effect.

2.3 Additionally, it is necessary to consider if the proposal could cause a significant effect on a European site. A proposal, alone or in combination with other proposals, could cause a significant effect on a European site if there is:

- a reduction in the amount or quality of designated habitats or the habitats that support designated species,
- a limit to the potential for restoring designated habitats in the future,
- a significant disturbance to the designated species,
- disruption to the natural processes that support the site's designated features,
- only reduction or offset measures in place.

If there is no likely significant effect on the site, either alone or in combination, then you do not need to carry out an Appropriate Assessment.

Step One:

Determination of whether the Plan is directly connected or necessary to the management of the Site

The European Sites which are in or adjoining the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are:

- Ashdown Forest SAC
- Ashdown Forest SPA
- Dungeness SAC,
- Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SPA and Ramsar Site
- Hastings Cliffs SAC
- Pevensey Levels SAC and Ramsar Site

2.4 Evidence for the designated sites which fall within or adjoining the High Weald AONB is included within Appendices A-E. This includes evidence gathered from published site details.

2.5 The High Weald AONB Management Plan Review 2024-2029 is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European Site. For a project or plan to be directly connected with or necessary to the management of such a site it must refer to management measures that are solely for conservation purposes of that specific site. The High Weald Management Plan is a strategic (i.e., not site specific) landscape management plan and its objectives are concerned with the protection and enhancement of natural beauty. This requires a broader approach; consequently, the objectives reflect this, and are primarily concerned with conserving and enhancing landscape features.

Step Two:

Assess the likely significant effects on a European site that could affect its conservation objectives

<u>The High Weald AONB</u>

2.6 The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies at the heart of South East England, covering 1,461km^2 (570 sq. miles), across four counties. It is an historic countryside of rolling hills draped by small irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and ancient droveways and sunken lanes. The distinctive character of the High Weald arises from a long history of human interaction with the natural environment, and the exploitation of its resources – wood, iron, and food. The landscape of the High Weald is essentially medieval, and its present form was fundamentally established by the 14th century and has survived major historic social and technological changes. Its future evolution and conservation are dependent on understanding and reinforcing the traditional interactions between people and nature that are responsible for the landscape we value today.

2.7 Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) requires local authorities to have regard to 'the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs' in making decisions that affect the designated area. Local authorities with land in an AONB, acting jointly in the case of AONBs crossing administrative boundaries, are legally obliged under the same Act to prepare and publish a plan which 'formulates their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it', and to review this plan every five years. To assist the local authorities in meeting these statutory duties a High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) was established. This is a partnership of the 15 local authorities covered by the designation plus Natural England and other organisations representing farming, forestry, business, and recreation interests. The Partnership is supported by the High Weald AONB Unit, a strategic, specialist team that advises on the management of this nationally valued landscape.

The High Weald AONB Management Plan

2.8 The High Weald AONB Management Plan was first published in 2004 as a twenty-year plan until 2024. It was reviewed in 2009, 2014 and 2019 but these reviews were limited in scope and did not change the fundamental basis of the Management Plan. The High Weald AONB Management Plan identifies and sets management goals for the key features of the landscape that have survived and form the essential basis of its natural beauty. These key components of Natural Beauty are being actively researched and understood to inform best practice in caring for and managing them, and to inform the choices for its future conservation and enhancement.

2.9 The Management Plan sets the context and background against which policies and actions can be judged in terms of their impact on natural beauty as defined by the components of natural beauty. The Plan gives a framework of features and management advice against which decisions on the type and form of land management can be assessed. This allows stakeholders and agents to measure their activities against these components and effectively audit their actions against the duty under section 85 of the CRoW Act.

Scope of Management Plan Review 2024-2029

2.10 The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004 was reviewed in 2009, 2014 and 2019 as required under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. As the 2004 Management Plan was a twenty-year strategy, these reviews were 'light touch'.

2.11 The current review of the Management Plan will begin a new 20-year strategy, and therefore a more substantive moderate scale review is underway than the previous reviews. The present Management Plan is considered in general fit-for-purpose, so most of the review resource will be dedicated to focusing on developing a new twenty-year Direction of Travel strategy section of the Plan.

2.12 The High Weald AONB Unit does not envision undertaking any specific research projects for the intended new sections, due to both budget and time constraints, but also

because the new sections and content all fall into academically well researched areas e.g., climate change, soil science, nature recovery, dark skies, and wellbeing benefits of accessing natural environments.

2.13 **What will remain unchanged?**

- The High Weald AONB Units approach to, and philosophy of natural beauty, and majority of its key components will remain unchanged.
- Most of the overall structure of the 2019-24 Management Plan and content will remain unchanged. Specifically, there are no changes planned for the chapters on The High Weald (facts and figures, landscape, brief history), About the Plan and AONB Policy and Legal Framework other to ensure they are up to date.

2.14 **What will be deepened and/ or enhanced?**

- The JAC Commitment and Vison will be strengthened.
- What is Natural Beauty is to be updated with contemporary research.
- The Key Characteristics: will be reviewed to ensure a good understanding of what characterises each key component. The individual component vision statements will be removed / incorporated into the overall vision.

2.15 **What will be reviewed and refreshed?**

- All key facts and figures within the Management Plan will be checked and up-dated as required, including High Weald and natural and cultural capital facts and figures.
- The 'Other Qualities' sections will be revamped as 'Perceptual and Aesthetic Qualities'. This will address the qualities that are perceived from moving through the natural and cultural landscape of the High Weald, but which cannot be addressed through the characters of physical features alone. For example, long views, quietude, tranquillity, rurality, and other experiential qualities.
- Planning and development will be given its own section, including Planning Principles for the High Weald AONB.

2.16 **What will be added?**

- A new key component 'Dark Skies' will be added. This will build on substantial work that the High Weald Unit has been undertaking regarding dark skies over the past few years, including work with CPRE and the South Downs National Park Authority, and a number of local dark skies groups.
- High Weald Direction of Travel Strategy – this constitutes the largest change and forms an additional part of the Management Plan (key components and other existing sections making up the first part). This section sets out the drivers for change to the High Weald for the next 20 years and will present an aspirational investment plant for the next 20 years for conserving and enhancing the functional landscape and natural beauty of the High Weald.
- This section is broken down into:
  An introduction to the drivers for change, which will underpin the 20-year strategy.
  1. Soil Health – addressing the neglected importance of soil health with a soil-up strategy based around the holistic land management approach of regenerative agriculture.

2. Climate Change – coupling the ranging threats from climate change with sustainable, nature-based solutions to creating a climate resilient landscape.
3. Nature Recovery – addressing the ecological crisis and how delivery of recovery strategies may be expected to look across the High Weald.
4. People and Access - tackling inequity in access to the natural world, health, and education.
5. Planning and Development – with a dedicated section to providing guidance specific to Local Authority planners using the Management Plan.

Step Three:

Check for combined effects

2.17 This section considers any implications the Management Plan review may have 'in combination' with other plans and/or projects. Only other key plans and projects which are most relevant should be collected for the 'in combination' test.

2.18 The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029 has been screened under the Habitats Regulations Assessment, including in combination with the following plans:

- National Planning Policy Framework;
- Local Plans for the local authority areas within the AONB;
- Local Transport Plans for East and West Sussex, Kent, and Surrey; and
- Environment Agency River Catchment Flood Management Plans.

2.19 Whilst the Management Plan has been reviewed in the context of the increased development pressure proposed in these plans and others, it does not in itself determine the amount of development or where sites should be located. Rather it sets objectives that should be taken into account by those taking decisions that affect the AONB, including those taking decisions about how much and where development should take place. Since these objectives are intended to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB, provided the objectives themselves do not conflict with the conservation objectives of the European sites then the Management Plan will not have a significant effect on these sites.

<u>Proposed Changes to the Management Plan Objectives</u>

New objectives:

Objective G3 To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty.
Objective G4 To restore soil health across the High Weald.
Objective S3 To conserve the distinct built heritage of the High Weald.
Objective DS1 To preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising light pollution obtrusive external lighting and internal light spill from domestic, commercial, and public premises in both existing and new developments within the High Weald, and from highways lighting.

Objective DS2 To protect wildlife and habitats for wildlife from light pollution across the High Weald.
Objective PQ1 To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the High Weald's character and aesthetic qualities and to promote and facilitate contributions by communities and individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald.
Objective PQ2 To protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.
Objective PQ3 To foster and promote equitable access and informal enjoyment of the High Weald landscape and the integrated management of its resources for the enjoyment of natural beauty by all.
Objective LBE2 To reconnect settlements, residents, and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside, and maintain and improve rural amenities and services that support communities within the context of the rural settlement pattern.

Rephrased objectives:

Objective G2 To protect landform and geological features including, sandstone outcrops.
Objective S2 To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure new development reflects the character of the High Weald in its siting, scale, layout, and design.
Objective W1 To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland.
Objective FH4 To protect individual archaeological features as well as historic assets and patterns of field and heath.

<u>Conclusion of Screening Report</u>

2.20 A matrix is attached at Appendix F which lists the objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029, assessed against the conservation objectives of the European sites. The assessment is designed to determine whether a Management Plan objective is likely to have a significant effect on a European Site.

2.21 This screening assessment showed that:

- 9 Management Plan objectives positively reinforce the conservation objectives of the European sites;
- 10 Management Plan objectives are unrelated to the conservation objectives of the European sites and therefore not applicable or have no effect; and
- 6 Management Plan objectives have potential conflicts or uncertain effects on the conservation objectives of the European Sites.

2.22 The Management Plan objectives with potential conflicts or uncertain effects on the conservation objectives of the European Sites were then considered further and amendments made to the Management Plan as set out in Appendix F to ensure that there will be no risk of conflict between the wording in the Management Plan and the interest features of the designated sites.

2.23 In conclusion it is considered that the proposed changes to the Management Plan objectives will not result in the High Weald AONB Management Plan Review 2024-2029 having a likely significant effect on the European Sites either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Section 3 - Consultation

3.1 Natural England is the statutory consultee for the Appropriate Assessment process. However, local authorities in which the sites are located, and neighbouring local authorities will also be consulted on this screening report:

These organisations are detailed below.

Local Authorities (in which sites are located)

- Wealden District Council
- Hastings Borough Council
- Rother District Council
- East Sussex County Council

Neighbouring/ Other Authorities

- Ashford District Council
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- Tandridge District Council
- Sevenoaks Borough Council
- Mid Sussex District Council
- Horsham District Council
- Crawley Borough Council
- Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

3.2 In addition, this and related documents will be made available to all stakeholders and members of the public via the High Weald AONB Unit's website alongside the consultation on the Management Plan.

Appendices

Appendix A - Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation

Appendix B - Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area

Appendix C – Dungeness Special Area of Conservation

Appendix D - Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Special Protection Area and Ramsar Site

Appendix E - Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation

Appendix F – Pevensey Levels Special Area of Conservation and Ramsar Site

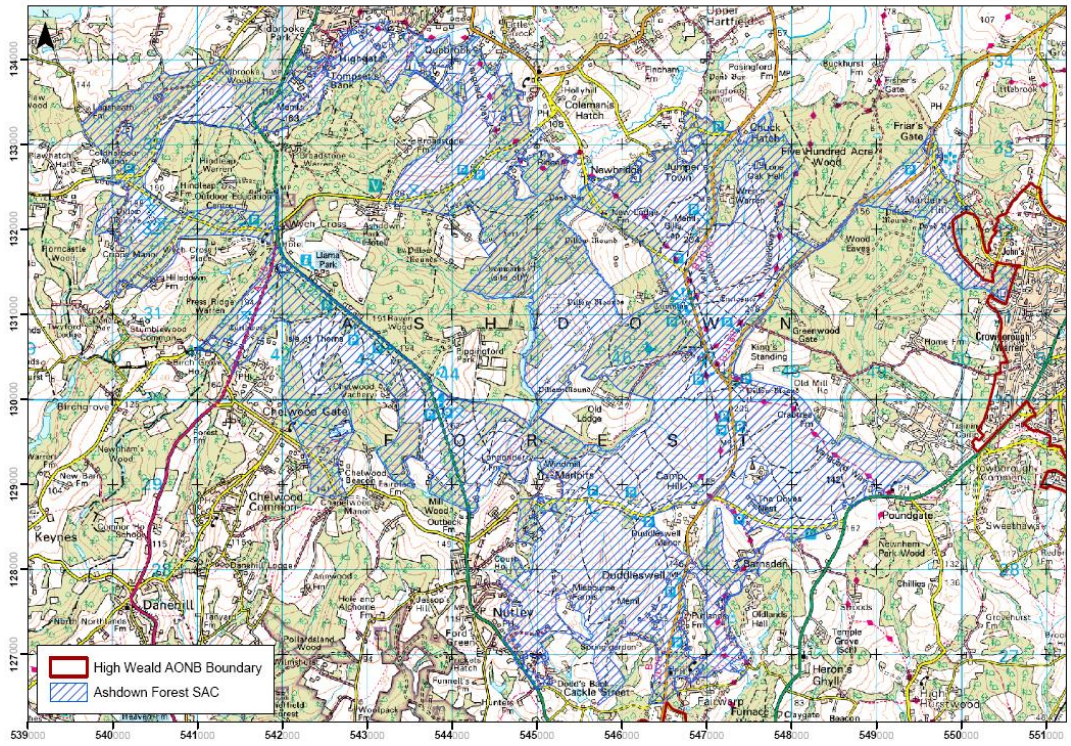
Appendix G - The Assessment Matrix of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029*

*note: this is a separate document

Appendix A - Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation

Designation: **SAC**
Grid reference: TQ450300 (site centroid)
Area: **2729** (ha)
Local Authority: **Wealden District**
Amount of site within AONB: **Whole Site**

Site Map



SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (April 2012)

Ashdown Forest SAC Description

Ashdown Forest received its SAC status in 2005. It is an open heathland occupying the highest sandy ridge-top of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It was designated because it contains one of the largest single continuous blocks of lowland heath in South-East England with both European dry heaths and, in a larger proportion, North Atlantic wet heath, covering over two thousand hectares combined. The survival of the forest's extensive heathlands has become more important when set against the large-scale loss of English lowland heathland over the last 200 years; within the county of East Sussex, heathland has shrunk by 50% over the last 200 years, and most of what remains is in Ashdown Forest. The damming of streams, digging for marl, and quarrying have produced several large ponds in a number of areas of the forest.

The site also supports a significant presence of great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*, although this is not a primary reason for site selection, as well as supporting important assemblages of

beetles, dragonflies, damselflies, and butterflies, including the nationally rare silver-studded blue *Plebejus argus*, and birds of European importance, such as European nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata* and Eurasian hobby *Falco subbuteo*.

General site character

Heath, Scrub, Maquis and Garrigue, Phygrana (60%)
Mixed woodland (40%)

Qualifying Features

H4010 Northern Atlantic Wet Heaths with *Erica tetralix*

The vegetation community M16 *Erica tetralix – Sphagnum compactum* wet heath element provides suitable conditions for several species of bog-mosses *Sphagnum spp*., bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, common cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, marsh gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* and marsh clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata*.
M16 wet heath is characteristic of drier climates in the south and east, and is usually dominated by mixtures of *Erica tetralix, Calluna* and *Molinia*. The bog-moss *Sphagnum compactum* is typically abundant. In the south, species with a mainly southern distribution in Britain, such as marsh gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe*, brown beak-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca* and meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, enrich wet heaths. Wet heath constitutes approximately 54.5% of the total habitat within Ashdown Forest.

H4030 European Dry Heaths

European dry heaths typically occur on freely draining, acidic to circumneutral soils with generally low nutrient content. Ericaceous dwarf-shrubs dominate the vegetation. The most common is heather *Calluna vulgaris,* which often occurs in combination with gorse *Ulex spp*., bilberry *Vaccinium spp.* or bell heather *Erica cinerea*, though other dwarf-shrubs are important locally.
The European Dry heath in Ashdown Forest is an extensive example of the south-eastern H2 *Calluna vulgaris – Ulex minor* community. This vegetation type is dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and dwarf gorse *Ulex minor*, with transitions to other habitats. It supports important lichen assemblages, including species such as *Pycnothelia papillaria*. This site supported the most inland remaining populations of hairy greenweed *Genista pilosa* in Britain, but it has not been recorded on the Forest since the 1970s.

S1166 Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*

The great crested newt is the largest native British newt, reaching up to around 17cms in length. Newts require aquatic habitats for breeding. Eggs are laid singly on pond vegetation in spring, and larvae develop over summer to emerge in August – October, normally taking 2–4 years to reach maturity. Juveniles spend most time on land, and all terrestrial phases may range a considerable distance from breeding sites.

The great crested newt is also fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended), making it a 'European Protected Species'.

Ashdown Forest SAC Conservation objectives[1]

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species rely;
- The populations of qualifying species;
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

Existing baseline condition of Ashdown Forest SAC

The majority of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) units which cover the SAC designated heathland habitat of the Ashdown Forest including both wet and dry heath are in unfavourable recovering condition, with a smaller number in either unfavourable declining or favourable condition.

Ecological requirements of qualifying features and species

H4010 Northern Atlantic Wet Heaths is a community that requires acid, nutrient poor soils that are at least seasonally water logged. Wet heath often occupies areas of impeded drainage on lower valley sides and less-steeply sloping ground. Drainage is a key factor. Wet heath can occur naturally, due to abiotic factors such as soil acidity, low nutrient status and waterlogged soil conditions, which impedes succession to woodland.

Wet heaths require relatively high rainfall and an even spread of rain throughout the year. Relative humidity is required to remain moderately high with winters not too cold and summers not too hot. Mild winter temperatures are important for many of the individual plant and animal species.

H4030 European dry heaths typically occur on freely draining, dry acidic to calcareous soils with generally low nutrient content. Nearly all dry heath is semi-natural, being derived from

[1] European Site Conservation Objectives for Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation Site code: UK0030080, Natural England: http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/UK0030080-Ashdown-Forest-SAC_tcm6-31864.pdf

woodland and developed through grazing and burning. Dry heaths vary in their flora and fauna according to climate, and are also influenced by altitude, aspect, soil conditions (especially base-status and drainage), maritime influence and grazing and burning intensity.

Great crested newts rely on waterbodies for breeding but otherwise they spend much of their lives on land. They over winter on land, normally hibernating underground and emerge soon after the first frost-free days in January or February to begin the migration to breeding ponds. Movement on land occurs almost exclusively at night and their progress is dependent on factors such as evening temperatures and rainfall, favouring wet or damp conditions with temperatures above 5^{o}C. Great crested newts require quite specific pond conditions for breeding. Ponds ideally need to have neutral to alkaline water (pH 6 or above) with areas of open water and well vegetated margins.

Breeding ponds tend to be nutrient rich, not too shaded, free of fish with not too many waterfowl present. They require suitable refuges to use in extreme weather and during daytimes, such as large pieces of rotting deadwood, rubble piles or disused mammal burrows.

Vulnerability[1,2]

Lack of appropriate management

Lowland heathlands are created mostly through human management by grazing, cutting, and burning. If they are left to natural processes, they then lose their open character and disappear under thick scrub or secondary forest. However, some fluctuations and variations from year to year are normal and acceptable. Factors that reduce the area of open heath are damaging. Several bryophyte and lichen species require open bare ground that is wet in winter but dry in summer.

Lack of management is the main threat to the site (insofar as the absence of management would result in succession from open heathland to woodland). Most of the SAC is managed sympathetically by the Conservators of Ashdown Forest and a current and agreed management plan is in place[2]. However, there is a high demand on resources for scrub clearance, bracken mowing etc., particularly in ungrazed areas. A lack of resources can make appropriate and sustainable management difficult.

Grazing

The optimum site management is grazing, however only approximately a third of the SAC is grazed. There is ongoing liaison with the Conservators and other landowners/managers to increase the area of grazed heathland. Obstacles to grazing include public opposition to fencing, availability of graziers/suitable livestock, and constraints on dog walkers. In general, public access is not a threat to the SAC, unless it prevents expansion of the grazed area.

1 European Site Conservation Objectives: Supplementary advice on conserving and restoring site features. Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Site Code: UK003008

[2] Ashdown Forest Vision and Management Strategy: https://ashdownforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Ashdown-Forest-Vision-2021-31.pdf

The optimum management for the site is grazing with some other mechanical measures. However, only approximately a third of the site is grazed. The lack of grazing is now being addressed by the grazing strategy. However, obstacles to grazing exist including a need for fencing, constraints on dog walkers and other forms of recreation, the availability of appropriate livestock, the fragmentation of heathland blocks within the site and land ownership insofar as land in private ownership is not grazed. Public access is not considered to be a threat to the SAC unless it prevents grazing.

Bracken and undesirable species

The spread of bracken and invasive or non-native species such as rhododendron and Japanese knot weed, and black cherry are threats to the SAC.

The spread of bracken Pteridium aquilinum is a problem on many lowland heathlands. The unpalatable nature and density of bracken as a tall-herb fern, and its decomposing litter, can smother and shade out smaller and more characteristic heathland vegetation. Usually, active management of bracken is required to reduce or contain its cover across this habitat feature. But this fern has also some nature conservation value, for example on sites where fritillary butterflies occur and utilise bracken litter habitat.

Undesirable non-woody and woody vascular plants species may require active management to avert an unwanted succession to a different and less desirable state.

Pollution

Exposure to atmospheric pollutants, for example, nitrogen deposition is a potentially significant threat to the structure and function of wet and dry heaths.

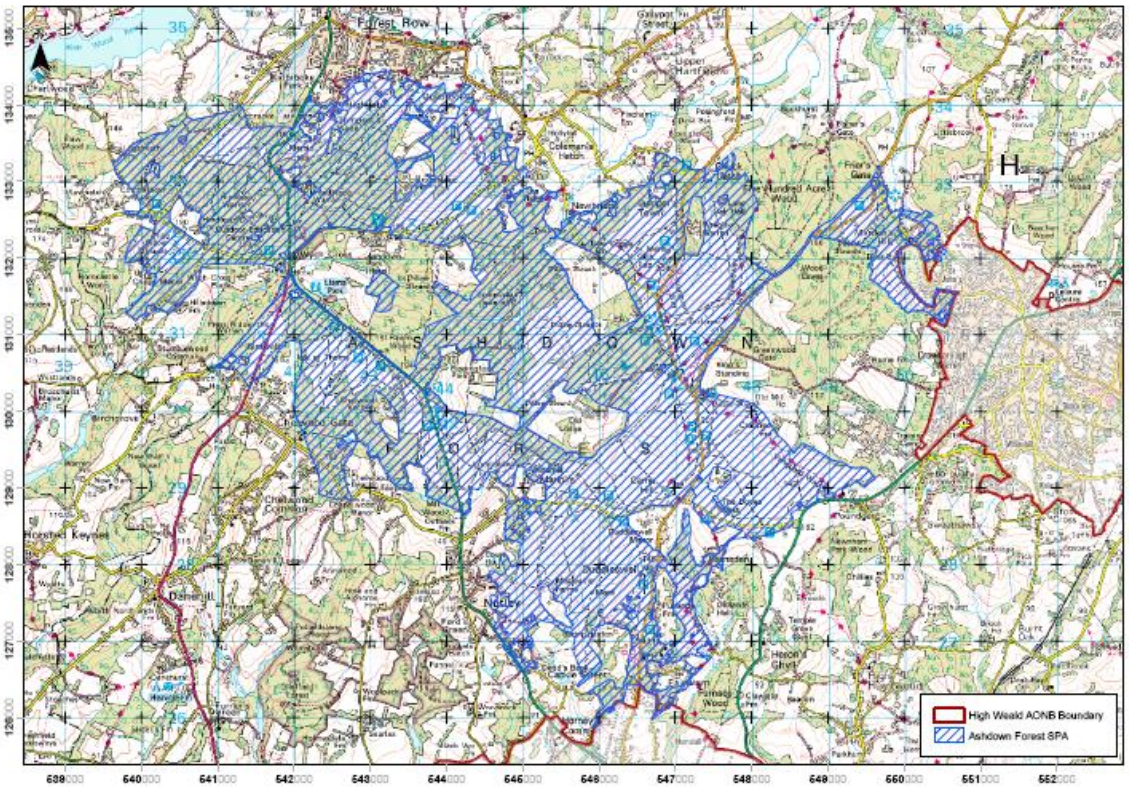
This habitat type is considered sensitive to changes in air quality. Exceedance of these critical values for air pollutants may modify the chemical status of its substrate, accelerating or damaging plant growth, altering its vegetation structure and composition and causing the loss of sensitive typical species associated with it.

Relevant plans, projects, and assessments

Wealden Core Strategy Local Plan 2013-2027 (2013)
Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031
Local Authority Habitat Regulations Assessment of Local Plans
Transport studies for Local Plans
East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton and Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan 2013, and Sites Plan 2017
East Sussex Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 (Lpt 3)
Kent Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering growth without gridlock 2016-2031 (Lpt 4)
West Sussex Transport Plan 2011-2026 (Lpt 3)
Surrey Transport Plan 2011-2026 (Lpt 3)

Appendix B - Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area

Designation: **SPA**
Grid reference: TQ450300 (site centroid)
Area: 3205.64(ha)
Local Authority: **Wealden District**
Amount of site within AONB: **Whole Site**



SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (June 2012)

Ashdown Forest SPA description

Ashdown Forest is in the High Weald of East Sussex in south-east England, where valley mires, heath and damp woodland have developed on soils derived from Hastings Sands (Lower Cretaceous). Once a royal hunting forest, reduced grazing has resulted in the accelerated development of woodland and encroachment of bracken over former heath. Nevertheless, some fine examples of heathland habitats remain, with humid or wet heath predominating, dominated by Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Bell Heather Erica cinerea and Cross-leaved Heath *E. tetralix* in the dampest conditions. Where drier heaths occur, they are dominated by heather in association with Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Dwarf Gorse *U. minor*. Stream sides and mires add further variety, with *Sphagnum* mosses, Cottongrass *Eriophorum sp*., Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* all characteristic plants. The woodlands are also varied, with Birch *Betula sp*. typically establishing first over heath, followed by Oak *Quercus robur*, Willow *Salix sp*. and Pine *Pinus sp*. in places, eventually forming dense and shaded areas with sparse ground flora. Breeding birds of heath, scrub and woodland are

associated with the varied mosaic of their respective habitats, distributed over the higher slopes and valleys of the High Weald.

Together with the nearby Wealden Heaths SPA and Thames Basin Heath SPA, Ashdown Forest forms part of a complex of heathlands in southern England that support breeding bird populations of European importance.

Qualifying features

Ashdown Forest qualifies under Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) as it is used by 1% or more of the Great Britain population of species of European importance During the breeding season this includes:
Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*, 20 pairs representing at least 2.1% of the breeding population in Great Britain.
Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, 35 pairs representing at least 1.1% of the breeding population in Great Britain.

Ashdown Forest SPA Conservation Objectives

With regard to the individual species and/or assemblage of species for which the site has been classified (the 'Qualifying Features' listed above); The conservation objective for Ashdown Forest SPA is: **Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), by maintaining or restoring:**

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features (Dartford warbler / nightjar);
- The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features (Dartford warbler / nightjar);
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features (Dartford warbler / nightjar) rely;
- The populations of the qualifying features (Dartford warbler / nightjar);
- The distribution of the qualifying features (Dartford warbler / nightjar) within the site.

Targets for Ashdown Forest SPA
<u>Nightjar</u>
Maintain the size of the breeding population at a level which is above 35 pairs, whilst avoiding deterioration from its current level.
To achieve favourable condition the nightjar requires an abundance of night flying insects; open ground with predominantly low vegetation bare patches and sparse woodland/scrub cover; reduction of displacement of birds; extent and distribution of habitat area.
<u>Dartford warbler</u>
Restore the size of the breeding population to a level which is above 20 pairs whilst avoiding deterioration from its current level.

The Dartford warbler requires large unbroken dwarf-shrub layer of heather with scattered gorse; abundance of shrub layer invertebrates; mix of heather trees and gorse amongst

heathland vegetation; reduction or displacement of birds; extent and distribution of habitat area to achieve favourable condition.

Ecological requirements

Nightjar

The nightjar is a summer migrant from sub-Saharan Africa, arriving in Britain in April to mid-May and returning in August or September. Nightjars are nocturnal and they are rarely seen in the day, staying still, and camouflaged as they roost. Their nests are usually located in bare or sparsely vegetated patches on the ground, mainly on free-draining sandy soils within areas of mature dry heathland, young forestry plantations or in woodland clearings of over 1.5 hectares. Nightjars often rear two broods a season where normally two eggs are laid from mid-May to mid-July. Chicks hatch after about 19 days and fly at about 17 days old, then are reliant on the parents for about four weeks. Nightjars feed on seasonally available suitable prey consisting of flying insects (such as moths, beetles, and flies), being most active at dusk and dawn and in some circumstances well into the night.

The nightjar will travel an average of 3km from nest sites to feed on a range of habitats such as heathland, deciduous or mixed woodland, orchards, diverse plantations, riparian habitats, freshwater wetlands, and gardens.

Nightjar status

Between surveys in 1968-72 and 1992 there was a decline in UK range of 52%, and now the species breeds mainly in southern England, with scattered populations as far north as central Scotland. Lowland heathland and young forestry plantations are now the most important habitats. An increase in forestry clear-fells because of major storms and forest management have assisted recent increases, with over 50% of the total population found in this habitat in the 1992 survey.

Sussex typically holds 20% of the country's nightjars. The Ashdown Forest nightjar population grew by almost 29% from 1997 – 2004, while the national population increased by 35% between 1992 and 2004. However, there was a decline in the 2005 population by 21.7% based on the 2001 figures. The reasons for this are not known but could relate to weather conditions, survey coverage, or increasing disturbance from visitors or other activities.

Vulnerability

Loss of nesting habitat

The area of heathland in the UK has undergone a dramatic reduction during this century due to agricultural land claim, afforestation and built development. For example, it is estimated that 40% of England`s lowland heathland has been lost since the 1950s. Threats continue from housing and infra-structure developments and where heathland lacks appropriate management, it will become unsuitable as nesting habitat due to invasion by bushes and trees.

Loss of feeding habitat

Nightjars require extensive areas of suitable feeding habitat, especially uncultivated land, therefore the loss of such habitats within a few kilometres of the nesting area may result in a decline in the number of birds.

Decline in food availability
It is possible that a decline in the availability of large insects caused by changes in agriculture (such as the indirect effects of pesticides) and/or climatic change, may have affected nightjar populations.

Disturbance by humans and recreational activities
Nightjars are ground nesting birds and can be disturbed by humans and dogs who may range into heather dominated areas and may flush birds from their nest.

Ecological requirements

Dartford warbler
The Dartford warbler is resident on the lowland heathlands of southern Britain, where it favours mature heather dominated dry heathland with dense bushes of gorse where it feeds on invertebrates. Gorse provides the predominant feeding habitat for Dartford warbler, as it is richer in invertebrate food than heather, therefore management is primarily aimed at maintaining gorse of various age and structure amongst a mainly heathland habitat. Invasive scrub and bracken need to be controlled. Dartford warblers hold territories of between 2 - 6 ha in size (depending on habitat quality) and nests are located in either dense gorse or deep heather. Scattered gorse cover of 5% is optimal and should be of a range of ages to provide a continuum of suitable bushes. Larger blocks of dense gorse have been shown to be especially important during periods of snow, when the birds retreat to them.

Dartford warbler status
The Dartford warbler almost died out in the UK in the severe winter of 1962 and 1963 when the population dropped to just 10 pairs. Since then, populations have increased. In 1974 the total national population was estimated to be 557 pairs; however, the distribution had moved further west. The species is very susceptible to cold winters. In 2006, the UK population was estimated at 3,214 territories representing an increase of 70% since 1994.

The Dartford warbler re-colonised Ashdown Forest in 1989 (one pair) and has since expanded. There were twelve pairs by 1993 and 26 by 1994. However, since 2005 there has been a decline in populations of 57.6%. The reasons for this are not known but could relate to weather conditions, survey coverage, or increasing disturbance from visitors or other activities.

Vulnerability
loss of habitat
Lack of management, and succession of gorse, and loss of heathland to woodland. Pressure on resources makes sustainable management difficult. Habitat fragmentation is also an issue for the heathland.

Recreational disturbance
Most recreation on the site is informal, such as walking, dog walkers and horse-riding. There are areas where intense use is resulting in damage to some rights of way and disturbance to the Forest. The use of the Forest as an area of greenspace to facilitate new development is putting increased visitor pressure on the site.
[Source: JNCC/Natural England]

Severe winters and cold
Dartford Warblers are susceptible to climatic factors such as prolonged periods of snow cover in winter and cold, damp spring weather. Survival and productivity appear to be enhanced when patches of dense gorse are available when provide protection from bad weather.
Dartford warbler numbers within Ashdown Forest declined following the particularly harsh winters of 2008-09 and 2009-10.

Relevant Plans, Projects and Assessments for Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA:

Wealden Core Strategy Local Plan 2013-2027 (2013)
Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031
Wealden District Council Habitat Regulations Assessments
Ecological Monitoring at Ashdown Forest: Considering the Current and Future Impacts on the SAC caused by Air Quality and Nitrogen Deposition., WDC (2018)
East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan 2013 and Sites Plan 2017
River Ouse Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)
River Medway Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)
Ashdown Forest Vision and Management Strategy 2021-2031
SANG Sites established or proposed by Local Planning Authorities
Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMM), Mid Sussex DC, (2019)

Appendix C - Dungeness Special Area of Conservation

Designation: **SAC, SPA and Ramsar Site**
Grid reference: TQ920118
Area: **3223.56**(ha) *entire site* (SAC)
Local Authority: **Rother & Shepway Districts**
Amount of site within AONB: None of the SAC extends into the AONB but does partially follow the AONB boundary on the western side.

Site map SAC

SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (June 2012)

Site Description (SAC)

Dungeness is the UK's largest shingle structure. The site retains very large areas of intact parallel ridges with characteristic zonation of vegetation. It has the most diverse and most extensive examples of stable vegetated shingle in Europe, including the best representation of scrub on shingle, notably prostrate forms of broom *Cytisus scoparius* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. A feature of the site, thought to be unique in the UK, is the small depressions formed within the shingle structure, which support fen and open-water communities.
The Dungeness foreland has a very extensive and well-developed shoreline, although with sparse vegetation. The strandline community on this site comprises Babington's orache *Atriplex glabriuscula*, which occurs mostly on the accreting eastern shoreline, although it is also present on the eroding southern shoreline.
This extensive site also hosts a large and viable great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* population in a range of natural and anthropogenic habitats. These include natural pools and those resulting from gravel extraction and other activities. Terrestrial habitat of importance for feeding and shelter is provided by a range of open shingle vegetation with scrub in the vicinity of some of the waterbodies.

General site character

Tidal rivers/estuaries/mud flats/sand flats/lagoons (20%)
Salt marshes/pastures/steppes (1%)
Shingle/sea cliffs/islets (64%)
Coastal sand dunes, Sand beaches, Machair (2%)
Inland water bodies (standing/running water (2%)
Bogs/marshes/water-fringed vegetation/fens (10%)
Conifer woodland (1%)

Qualifying features

1210 annual vegetation of drift lines

This habitat type occurs on deposits of shingle lying at or above mean high-water spring tides. The types of deposits involved are generally at the lower end of the size range of shingle (2-200 mm diameter), with varying amounts of sand interspersed in the shingle matrix. These shingle deposits occur as fringing beaches that are subject to periodic displacement or overtopping by high tides and storms. The distinctive vegetation, which may form only sparse cover, is therefore ephemeral and composed of annual or short-lived perennial species.

1220 perennial vegetation of stony banks

Shingle structures develop when a sequence of foreshore beaches is deposited at the limit of high tide. More permanent ridges are formed as storm waves throw pebbles high up on the beach, from where the backwash cannot remove them. Several beaches may be piled against each other, and extensive structures can form. The ecological variation in this habitat type depends on stability, the amount of fine material accumulating between pebbles, climatic conditions, width of the foreshore, and past management of the site. The ridges and lows formed also influence the vegetation patterns, resulting in characteristic zonation's of vegetated and bare shingle.

Site SAC Conservation Objectives

is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying habitats and habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

Existing baseline condition of Dungeness SAC

The majority of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) units which cover the SAC designated vegetated shingle habitat of the Dungeness are in favourable condition, with a few in either unfavourable recovering of unfavourable no change condition.

Vulnerability

Climate change
The site was assessed in 2015 by Natural England as highly vulnerable to climate change, e.g., rising sea levels, due to the sensitivity, fragmentation, and topography of the habitats at the site.

Fragmentation
The site is vulnerable to fragmentation through contraction in the habitat range. This reduces the overall area and local diversity, as well as undermining the resilience of the site to future environmental changes.

Access
Intentional and unintentional public (pedestrian) access as well as vehicle access causes unnecessary disturbance to the site, due to the unconsolidated nature of shingle. Shingle ridges are easily damaged by access.

Relevant Plans, projects, and assessments

Rother Core Strategy (2014)
Ashford Local Plan to 2030
East Sussex Local Transport Plan 2011 to 2026 (LPT3)
Kent Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock 2016–2031 (LTP4)
East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan (2013) and Sites Plan (2017)
Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013-30
Rother & Romney Catchment Flood Management Plan, EA (2009)
South Foreland to Beachy Head Shoreline Management Plan (2006)
Don and Rother Abstraction Licensing Strategy (2013)
National Character Area Profile:123 Romney Marshes (NE499) (2013)

Appendix D - Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Special Protected Area and Ramsar Site

Designation: **SPA and Ramsar**
Grid reference: TQ982229 (site centroid)
Area **4010.29**(ha) *entire terrestrial site* (SPA)
Area: **6377.63**(ha) *entire site* (Ramsar)
Local Authority: **Rother & Shepway Districts**
Amount of site within AONB: **Partial Site –**The Eastern end of the SPA and Ramsar designation is within the AONB, following the 'Pett Levels'. Both designations extend much further to the east outside of the AONB, and the bulk of the SPA is an offshore designation.

Site Map (Ramsar site turquoise stripe, SPA yellow stripe)

SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (April 2023)

Site description for the SPA

Dungeness, Romney Marsh, and Rye Bay SPA are located on the south coast of England between Hythe in Kent crossing the county border of East Sussex to Norman's Bay. This is a large area with a diverse coastal and marine landscape comprising a number of habitats, which appear to be unrelated to each other. However, all of them persist because coastal processes have formed and continue to shape a barrier of extensive coastal shingle beaches and sand dunes across an area of intertidal mud and sand flats. The site includes the largest and most diverse area of shingle beach in Britain, with low-lying hollows in the shingle providing nationally important saline lagoons, natural freshwater pits, and basin fens. Rivers draining the Weald to the north were diverted by the barrier beaches, creating a sheltered saltmarsh and mudflat environment, which was gradually infilled by sedimentation, and then reclaimed on a

piecemeal basis by man. This area is fringed by important intertidal habitats, and contains relict areas of saltmarsh, extensive grazing marshes and reedbeds.

Qualifying features

A021 *Botaurus stellaris*; Great bittern (Non-breeding)
A037 *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*; Bewick's swan (Non-breeding)
A056 *Anas clypeata*; Northern shoveler (Non-breeding)
A081 *Circus aeruginosus*; Eurasian marsh harrier (Breeding)
A082 *Circus cyaneus*; Hen harrier (Non-breeding)
A132 *Recurvirostra avosetta;* Pied avocet (Breeding)
A140 *Pluvialis apricaria*; European golden plover (Non-breeding)
A151 *Philomachus pugnax*; Ruff (Non-breeding)
A176 *Larus melanocephalus;* Mediterranean gull (Breeding)
A191 *Sterna sandvicensis*; Sandwich tern (Breeding)
A193 *Sterna hirundo*; Common tern (Breeding)
A195 *Sterna albifrons*; Little tern (Breeding)
A294 *Acrocephalus paludicola;* Aquatic warbler (Non-breeding)
Waterbird assemblage

Dungeness, Romney Marsh, and Rye Bay SPA supported on average tens of thousands of individual waterbirds in the non-breeding season, including wildfowl and waders. This assemblage is of both European and international importance. In the context of SPA qualification the assemblage includes the wintering and passage species of European importance as listed above, as well as species whose numbers exceed 1% of the GB wintering or passage populations i.e.: European white-fronted goose *Anser albifrons albifrons*, wigeon *Anas penelope*, gadwall *Anas strepera*, pochard *Aythya ferina*, little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, coot *Fulica atra*, sanderling *Calidris alba*, whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and common sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*. Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* are also present in sufficient numbers to warrant their being listed as a major component species of the assemblage, since their numbers exceed 2,000 individuals.

Site SPA Conservation Objectives

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely
- The population of each of the qualifying features, and,
- The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.

Site Ramsar designation

site qualifies for Ramsar designation under criterion 1 because it contains representative, rare, or unique examples of natural or near-natural wetland types:

- Annual vegetation of drift lines and the coastal fringes of perennial vegetation of stony banks (Ramsar wetland type E – sand, shingle, or pebble shores)
- Natural shingle wetlands: saline lagoons (Ramsar wetland type J – coastal brackish/saline lagoons), freshwater pits (Ramsar wetland type K – coastal freshwater lagoons) and basin fens (Ramsar wetland type U – non-forested peatlands).

The site further qualifies under Criterion 2 because it supports threatened ecological communities and vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species:

Greater water-parsnip *Sium latifolium*, Warne's thread-moss *Bryum warneum*, water vole Arvicola amphibius, aquatic warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*, great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*, medicinal leech *Hirudo medicinalis*, a ground beetle *Omophron limbatum*, marsh mallow moth *Hydraecia osseola hucherardi*, De Folin's lagoon snail *Caecum amoricum*, Mute swan *Cygnus olor*, Shoveler *Anas clypeata*.

Vulnerability

Coastal erosion
The site itself is vulnerable to coastal erosion. The birds for which the site is designated are at risk from predation by foxes, mink, and badger – localised pest control is in force. The site is well protected from visitor disturbance, but leisure activities can be a problem, so the area is zoned to try to control this activity.

Land management practises
The site provides a diverse coastal landscape which is vulnerable to changing agricultural practices, particularly the ploughing of grasslands for crops. Changes to turf production may also affect the bird population. Management agreements are addressing the issue of lowering water levels.

Relevant Plans, Projects, and Assessments

Rother Core Strategy (2014)
Ashford Local Plan to 2030
East Sussex Local Transport Plan 2011 to 2026 (LPT3)
Kent Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock 2016–2031 (LTP4)
East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan (2013) and Sites Plan (2017)
Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013-30
Rother & Romney Catchment Flood Management Plan, EA (2009)
South Foreland to Beachy Head Shoreline Management Plan (2006)
Don and Rother Abstraction Licensing Strategy (2013)
National Character Area Profile:123 Romney Marshes (NE499) (2013)

Appendix E - Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation

Designation: **SAC**
Grid reference: TQ856110 (site centroid)
Area: **182.47** (ha)
Local Authority: **Hastings Borough**
Amount of site within AONB: **Whole Site**

Site Map

SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (June 2012)

Site Description for SAC

Hastings Cliffs are an area of actively eroding soft cliff that includes the most southerly exposures of the lower Hastings Beds. The site contains three valleys cut into the strata, which support woodland and scrub habitats with an unusual 'Atlantic' bryophyte flora. Closer to the sea the maritime influence stunts the trees, but other bryophytes become important here, with one species, *Lophocolea fragrans*, at its only south-east England locality. Maritime scrub and coastal heathland are found closer to the cliff edge, with grassland supporting maritime species such as thrift *Armeria maritima*. The clay cliff slopes are eroding and support a range of habitats from bare ground and flushes to maritime grassland and scrub, reflecting the successional development of vegetation following cliff-falls.

General Site Character

Coastal sand dunes, sandy beaches and machair (1%)

Shingle, sea cliffs, and islets (30%)
Inland water bodies (5%)
Bogs, marshes, water fringed vegetation, Fens (2%)
Heath, scrub, maquis and garrigue, phygrana (13%)
Dry grassland, Steppes (8%)
Improved grassland (10%)
Broad-leaved deciduous woodland (25%)
Mixed woodland (1%)
Inland rocks, screes, sands (5%)

Site Conservation Objectives

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the qualifying natural habitat
- The structure and function (including typical species) of the qualifying natural habitat, and
- The supporting processes on which the qualifying natural habitat rely.

Qualifying Features:

<u>H1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts</u>

Hastings Cliffs are an area of actively eroding soft cliff on the south coast of England. They include the most southerly geological exposures of the Lower Hastings Beds. The site contains three valleys cut into the strata, which support woodland and scrub habitats with an unusual Atlantic bryophyte flora. Closer to the sea the maritime influence stunts the trees, but other bryophytes become important here, with one species, *Lophocolea fragrans* fragrant crestwort, at its only south-east England locality. Maritime scrub and coastal heathland are found closer to the cliff edge, with grassland supporting maritime species such as thrift *Armeria maritima*. The clay cliff slopes are eroding and support a range of habitats from bare ground and flushes to maritime grassland and scrub, reflecting the successional development of vegetation following cliff-falls.

Existing baseline condition of Hastings SAC

The majority of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) units which cover the SAC designated vegetated sea cliff habitat of Hastings Cliffs are in favourable condition, with one unit in unfavourable declining condition and another in unfavourable recovering condition.

Vulnerability

Public access
Most of the SAC can be accessed by visitors through Hastings Country Park, so the number of visitors could potentially have an impact on the cliffs.

Erosion

Hastings Cliffs is a short section of almost natural coastline of dramatic eroding cliffs. The very nature of this soft eroding material results in extensive landslides, with vegetation changing from year to year. The cliffs are known to support a good population of bryophytes, particularly sensitive to changes in water and air quality. The effect on the rate of erosion by surrounding coastal protection measures and offshore activities is unknown but may have an impact.

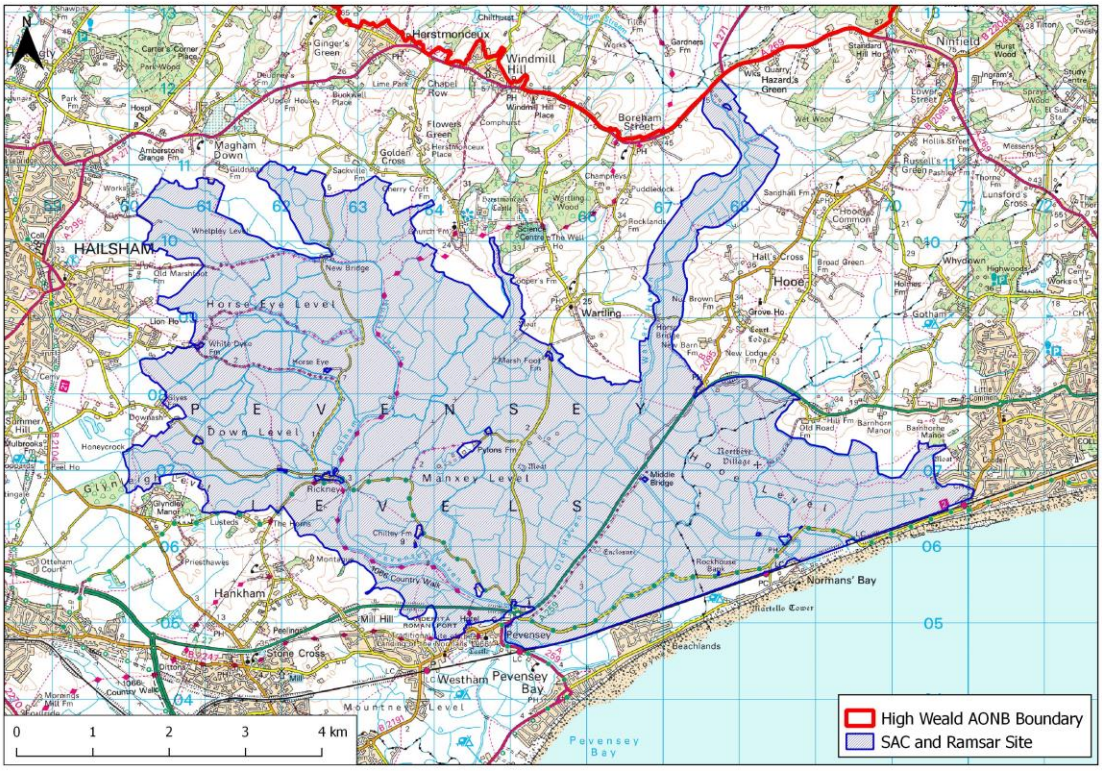
Relevant Plans, Projects, and Assessments

Hastings Planning Strategy (2014)
Hastings Local Plan Habitat Regulations Assessment, HBC (2020)
East Sussex Local Transport Plan 2011 to 2026 (LPT3)
Kent Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock 2016–2031 (LTP4)
East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan (2013) and Sites Plan (2017)
Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013-30 (2016)
Hastings Country Park Nature Reserve Management Plan (2020-30)
Rother & Romney Catchment Flood Management Plan, EA (2009)

Appendix F – Pevensey Levels Special Area of Conservation and Ramsar Site

Designation: **SAC and Ramsar**
Grid reference: **TQ649074 (site centroid)**
Area: **3585.38 (ha)**
Local Authority: **Wealden District**
Amount of site within AONB: **None but watercourses originating in the AONB flow into the Site.**

Site map



SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (June 2012)

Site description (SAC)

Pevensey Levels is one of the largest and least-fragmented lowland wet grassland systems in southeast England. The low-lying grazing meadows are intersected by a complex system of ditches which support a variety of important wetland communities, including nationally rare and scarce aquatic plants and invertebrates. The site also supports a notable assemblage of breeding and wintering wildfowl. A small area of shingle and intertidal muds and sands is included within the site.

The site also supports an outstanding assemblage of wetland plants and invertebrates including many British Red Data Book species. The site supports 68% of vascular plant species in Great Britain that can be described as aquatic. It is probably the best site in Britain for freshwater molluscs, one of the five best sites for aquatic beetles Coleoptera and supports an outstanding assemblage of dragonflies Odonata.

General site character

Inland water bodies (Standing water, Running water) (2.5%)
Humid grassland, Mesophile grassland (97.5%)

Site SAC objectives

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

Qualifying SAC Features:

S4056 *Anisus vorticulus*; Little whorlpool ram's-horn snail

This is a small freshwater whirlpool ram's-horn snail. Comparatively little is known about the ecology of this species, however it is likely that its requirements reflect those of the freshwater flora and fauna assemblage which is better. This species occurs across a range of sites in southern and eastern England. Pevensey Levels is a large and expansive grazing marsh that supports *Anisus vorticulus* in both a wide spatial distribution and in good population density.

Existing baseline condition of Pevensey Levels SAC

The majority of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) units which cover the SAC habitats of fens, marsh and swamp of Pevensey Levels are in unfavourable recovering condition across the entire site.

Ramsar qualifying features:

Ramsar criterion 2
The site supports an outstanding assemblage of wetland plants and invertebrates including many British Red Data Book species.

Ramsar criterion 3
The site supports 68% of vascular plant species in Great Britain that can be described as aquatic. It is probably the best site in Britain for freshwater molluscs, one of the five best sites for aquatic beetles Coleoptera and supports an outstanding assemblage of dragonflies Odonata.

Vulnerability

Inappropriate Water Levels

The site is a complex managed hydrological system. Maintaining adequate water levels (0.3cm below ditch neck) is critical to the feature. This is currently being delivered through a Water Level Management Plan to achieve appropriate water levels, which should be adequately monitored and maintained. This is critical for the maintenance of the ram's-horn snail (*Anisus vorticulus*) habitat and control of pennywort.

Invasive Species

Floating pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* and Crassula have a known impact on freshwater invertebrate assemblages partly through intervention in ditch succession. There is over 45 km of floating pennywort across Pevensey, and it is likely to spread across the site unless appropriate control is in place. There are no known control methods, and trials are underway to identify suitable methods that could be implemented.

Water Pollution

Two sewerage treatment plants flow into the top of the catchment. Water quality analysis by the Environment Agency show that phosphorus (P) levels are higher than 0.1m/l downstream of these plants. Maximum levels of 0.1m/l P can be tolerated by freshwater invertebrate and plant assemblages (which includes ram's-horn snail).

Discharges from these two sewerage plants are not sufficiently diluted due to low flow. Secondly, the storm water tank of one plant sits directly on the site and during peak flows discharges filtered, but untreated, sewerage into the same location.

Relevant Plans, Projects, and Assessments

- Pevensey levels Water Level Management Plan review (2014)
- Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Abstraction Licensing Strategy V3 (2019)
- Wealden Local Plan (under production 2023)
- National Character Area Profile:124 Pevensey Levels (NE478) (2013)
- The Pevensey Bay to Eastbourne Coastal Management Scheme (in progress 2023)
- Site Improvement Plan Pevensey Levels (2014)
- Wealden & Rother Core Strategies Appropriate Assessment Hydrology Local to the Pevensey Levels (2010)
- Cuckmere and Sussex Havens Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)
- Wastewater Position Statement Hailsham North and Hailsham South Wastewater Treatment Works, Southern Water (2015)