

High Weald AONB Unit Report

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# A landscape approach to field system assessment

Towards an assessment framework for fields in the planning system

Field Systems in the High Weald

March 2017



Historic England



The High Weald: an outstanding medieval landscape

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## Acknowledgements

The project team would like to thank the Project Steering Group, High Weald Officers' Steering Group and local authority colleagues for their comments and assistance.

# 1. Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to help **identify and conserve the most important fields in the High Weald** in line with the purpose of AONB designation. It focuses on groups of fields at a landscape and site scale, and utilises Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) to assist the interpretation of field system character. The importance of understanding the history of fields and their relationship with other historic landscape features is emphasised.

Decisions involving fields, whether at a planning policy or development control level, or in land management require a wide range of issues to be considered. This guidance focuses on a preliminary desk-based assessment method drawing on readily available data sets. It has been written for:

- **Planning officers, developers and agents** to inform housing and development site allocations, sustainability appraisals, landscape and visual impact assessments (LVIA's), individual site plans and design masterplans.
- **Communities** to inform neighbourhood plans.
- **Landowners and land management advisors** to inform decisions about the management of fields and their boundaries.

## Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)

Mapping field systems at a landscape scale provides the ability to consider the historic character of fields at an appropriate scale within settlement planning and land use policy.

**Linked documents** – This guidance is supported by the High Weald Fields Systems Character Statement which explains the character and origin of fields in the High Weald; Case Study Report: Earlye Farm Heritage Assessment which describes the method for undertaking field and archive survey to produce a historic environment assessment of an individual farm or large site; Fields in the High Weald: An overview of their social, ecological and economic value which sets out the range of ecosystem benefits fields provide to society.

Definitions:

**Field:** *An area of land, often enclosed, used for cultivation or the grazing of livestock*

**Field system:** *A group or complex of fields sharing a common character that appear to form a coherent whole [In the High Weald this is usually results from the influence of topography and land use, but also historic tenure]*

**Boundary:** *The limit to an area as defined on a map or by a marker of some form*

Source: Monument Type Thesaurus, Historic England <http://thesaurus.historicengland.org.uk/>

**Landscape Character:** *A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one area different from another rather than better or worse*

Source: *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition, Landscape Institute, 2013*

## 2. The planning and policy context

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places good design, local character and the conservation of the natural and historic environment at the heart of sustainable development and good planning in the countryside. Fields have a role to play in all these processes. The NPPF stresses the importance of:

1. Recognising and conserving the inherent character and beauty of the countryside.
2. Conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation.
3. Conserving biodiversity, promoting the restoration of ecological networks and protecting valued soils.
4. Using up to date and relevant information to support plan making and decision taking.

The importance of fields in determining the character of the countryside and the setting of rural settlements underlines the need to understand fields and field systems. Landscape character assessments, national character area profiles and, in designated landscapes, AONB and National Park management plans are identified by Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) as useful tools to assist this process.

Paragraphs 115 and 116 of the NPPF refer specifically to designated landscapes, including AONBs. Para 115 states that **'Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and natural beauty'** in these areas. Para 116 states that 'Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated landscapes except in exceptional circumstances'. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of the detrimental effects of the proposed development on the AONB landscape.

### **Many natural and historic environment values are recognised by statutory designation. Those relevant to fields include:**

- *Scheduled Monuments including Registered Parks and Gardens and Registered Battlefields*
- *Listed and curtilage farm buildings that will have had a functional relationship with field systems*
- *International and nationally designated sites important for fieldscape biodiversity - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Ramsar Site, Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area for Conservation (SAC) and National Nature Reserves NNR)*

### **Other undesignated assets relevant to fields whose value needs to be taken account of for planning purposes include:**


- *Local heritage listings, usually available on the Historic Environment Record for the area.*
- *Sites of national archaeological significance (treated in the planning system as designated assets, NPPF paragraph 139)*
- *Priority species and habitats*
- *Hedgerows protected from removal by the Hedgerows Regulations 1997*
- *Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) – also known as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) or Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)*
- *Flood Zones, Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZ) and Drinking Water Safeguard Zones.*

### 3. Fields, landscape character and natural beauty

Fields are a direct result of the organisation of land in order to produce food by people from prehistory to the present day. The shape and form of fields (the enclosure pattern) and boundary features tend to be specific to an area, representing the response of farming to local environmental constraints, cultural practices and land ownership patterns. Farming units were laid out in order to grow crops and fatten livestock, and in the High Weald other resources such as timber and minerals were also exploited. The relationship between fields and the farmstead; the woodlands, pits and ponds supplying resources for the farm operation, and the tracks connecting them give rise to distinctive landscape patterns that define the character of the area.

Protected landscapes, National Parks and AONBs, were set up by legislation in 1949 to **conserve and enhance the natural beauty** of our finest landscapes. The factors that contribute to natural beauty are considered by Natural England to mirror those set out in landscape character guidance to indicate landscape value<sup>1</sup>. Fields will play a similarly important role in natural beauty as they do in landscape character, with the specific nature of the contribution defined by the statutory **AONB management plan**.

Statutory policy relating to AONBs also requires the significance of fields in relation to landscape character and historic and wildlife value to be considered. Responsibility for AONBs lies primarily with local authorities and public bodies who jointly produce the AONB Management Plan. Under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 all public bodies are required to have regard to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty in all aspects of their operations that affect land in an AONB.



**High Weald AONB Management Plan:**

Small, irregularly shaped and productive fields bounded by hedgerows and small woodlands are a key component of the High Weald's natural beauty.

AONB policy seeks to conserve the pattern of small fields, enhance their ecological function, protect their historic assets and secure their productive use for local markets.

### 4. The character of fields in the High Weald AONB

The essentially medieval field pattern is identified as a key component on natural beauty in the AONB Management Plan. The key characteristics of this field pattern, its history and features are described in more detail by the [High Weald Fields Systems Character Statement](#).

<sup>1</sup> Guidance for assessing landscape for designation as National Parks or AONBs, Natural England, 2011

### High Weald AONB Field Systems Character: summary statement



The High Weald is a small scale landscape hewn by hand from woodland and wood pasture. Its medieval character remains remarkably intact; not yet overwritten by large-scale modern development or industrial farming and forestry. Far reaching views reveal a matrix of small, irregularly shaped fields surrounding dispersed historic farmsteads, interlaced with thick hedgerows, woodland and a radiating network of sunken lanes and gill streams; all draped over a ridged and faulted landform of sandstone and clay.

#### Field systems:

- Field systems are intermixed with woods and small settlements.
- Individual fields are generally small (< 3 hectares) and irregular or semi-regular in shape.
- High proportion of field systems created by assarting (woodland clearance) with a smaller proportion of regular and irregular non-assarts and formal planned fields.
- Dominant fieldscape character originates from medieval farming in severalty: land held by individuals rather than in common.
- Historic farmsteads are surrounded by their own fields, and can have more than one field system associated with them.
- Sinuous mixed woody boundaries and thick hedges are common with many veteran trees and ancient woodland indicator species.
- Topography has a strong influence with many field systems aligned to or 'hanging' from (at right angles to) linear features such as watercourses or ancient ridge-top routeways.
- Ditch and bank boundary features are typical, topped with hedges or along the woodland edge.
- Fields are mostly used for grazing livestock or horses with some small-scale horticulture and cropping.
- Relic unimproved grassland is rare but floristically rich semi-improved grassland is more widespread.
- Fields preserve evidence of past land use.

Source: High Weald Field Systems Character Statement

## 5. Using the guidance

Depending on the planning or land use decision to be made, fields will need to be considered in terms of their contribution to landscape character or natural beauty (e.g. NPPF, para 115 & 116; CROW Act 2000, Section 85); their value as a heritage asset (e.g. NPPF, para 17) or their ecosystem service value (e.g. NPPF, para 109). This guidance is divided into three parts and sets out the decision process to be taken for each purpose.

- 1: Fields and landscape character
- 2: Assessing heritage significance
- 3: Assessing other environmental, social and economic values

## 6. Fields and landscape character

Initial assessment of field systems involves understanding:

- The landscape setting of the fields to be assessed and the extent to which the fields contribute to (are typical of) the defining characteristics of the area as set out in a baseline landscape assessment (principally, in the case of an AONB wide assessment, the **AONB Management Plan** and supplementary documents). *Rare field types may still be significant to local landscape character or may be heritage or environment assets in their own right.*
- The relationship of fields to historic farmsteads and other related historic features
- The extent of historic change to the fields and field boundaries
- The presence of characteristic features which enhance individual field character

At this stage an initial assessment can be made using readily available data sets without the need for specialist knowledge.

### Applicable to:

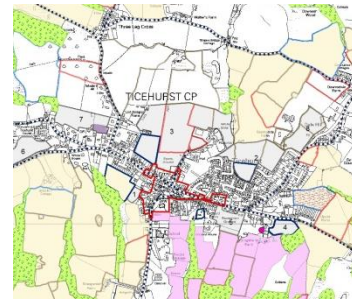
- Demonstrating that a site's impact on landscape has been assessed (PPG, Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA, Methodology Stage 2) and the character of green field allocations have been taken into account (NPPF para. 17, Core planning principles)
- Identifying and evaluating groups of fields that are part of the defining character of the area to inform local and neighbourhood plans (NPPF para. 58).
- Explaining how fields proposed as Local Green Space reflect local character (NPPF para. 77).
- Demonstrating that the most significant field systems, in terms of AONB landscape character and scenic beauty, have been identified and given great weight (NPPF para. 115).
- Assessing detrimental impact (of development, woodland creation or another change) on the defining characteristics of the AONB landscape (NPPF para. 116 and Section 85, CROW Act 2000)
- Identifying field systems as **landscape receptors** for the purpose of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

The **significance** of an area of fields in relation to landscape character is a measure of the value of the contribution made by fields and their inherent features to that character. Assessment requires a judgement to be made based on consideration of multiple values (criteria).

**Fields make a significant contribution to AONB character if they are:**

**Typical** (characteristic) or representative of the area.

*Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) or informed observation of historic maps and aerial photographs can be used to compare fields to a **landscape character baseline** such as the AONB Management Plan or a Landscape Character Assessment.*



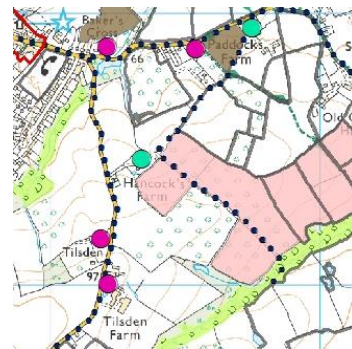
Medieval fields (orange and pink from HLC) are typical of the High Weald AONB

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**Their significance may be enhanced if:**

The relationships between fields and related features such as farmsteads, routes, pits and tracks, remain legible in the landscape suggesting that the historic landscape character remains coherent.

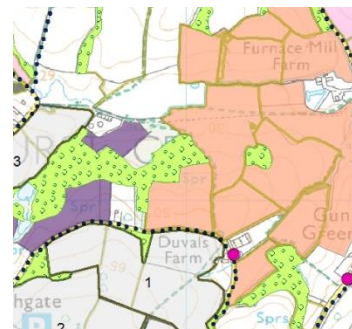
*Data layers for Historic farmsteads, ancient woodland, historic communication routes, pits and ponds can be laid over HLC showing fields from a similar period and a visual judgement of the prevalence of associated features made.*



Medieval fields (pink) are closely associated with historic farmsteads and ancient routeways

Historic field boundaries remain relatively intact (whatever their current quality or state of management)

*Historic boundary data (available from the High Weald AONB Unit) or estimates of boundary loss included in HLC typology can be used to indicate the intactness of field boundaries. Alternatively current aerial photographs and historic maps can be compared.*



Historic boundary data (yellow) shows medieval fields (pink) are intact

Fields contain extant features consistent with their character or illustrative of a particular quality worthy of attention.

*LiDAR, local historic environment and biodiversity data sets can be used to identify characteristic features such as ditch and bank systems, pits and ponds, veteran trees and wildflower grassland*



Veteran trees, unimproved grassland and ant hills are consistent with the character of small medieval Wealden fields

## 6.1 Data sources for landscape character

Within the AONB, the process of identifying the components of character that need be afforded ‘great weight’ in planning decisions (NPPF, para 115) should be carried out using the **AONB Management Plan**, as should consideration of the detrimental effects of development on an AONB (NPPF, para 116). Local **Landscape Character Assessments** will provide useful supplementary information on locally distinctive features and other visual or perceptual qualities.

Outside of an AONB, or when applying other NPPF paragraphs relating to local landscape character, other characterisation approaches can be used as a baseline for assessment. These include county or district landscape character assessments supplemented by historic landscape characterisation, or the **National Character Area** profiles published by Natural England. To be effective as a baseline for field system assessment a study will need to identify *key landscape characteristics* at an appropriate scale, particularly typical and representative field systems, and their historic context.

It is important to note that the value of a particular field or field system to landscape character may vary with scale and so care should be taken to select a landscape character baseline appropriate to the purpose of the assessment. For example, field systems contributing to the natural beauty of an AONB may be different from those identified as valuable by a local community who may select individual fields important for their local spiritual, celebratory or recreational value.

Once the landscape character baseline has been established, desk-based assessment of significant field systems require the use of readily available data sources including **Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)**, **aerial photographs** and historic maps, primarily **OS County Series 1<sup>st</sup> edition**. Additional useful data includes local and national data on ancient woodland; historic farmsteads; historic communication routes; quarries, pits and ponds; additional historic maps including Tithe and estate maps; LIDAR, County Historic Environment Records; Veteran tree and key species records from Biological Records Centres or the National Biodiversity Network (NBN).

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is a valuable source of information on character at a landscape scale for strategic planning purposes. It identifies the surviving historic character still visible in the present-day landscape along with its historical period of origin. HLC deals with areas rather than specific features and can provide an indication of how rare or commonplace a character type is.

### **AONB Management Plan character components and the ‘medieval’ field layer**

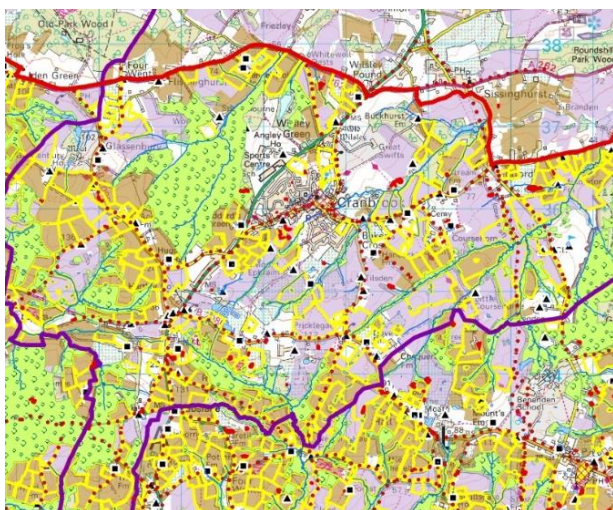
The AONB Management Plan identifies five key components of character that have persisted relatively intact since the medieval period and combine to make the High Weald a distinctive and different landscape from the surrounding areas.

Spatial data layers are provided for each component. The spatial data layer for fields is derived from selecting medieval field system types from HLC, supplemented by historic boundary data (HW AONB Unit derived data) and unimproved grassland data (Natural England and HW AONB Unit derived data).

**Historic Landscape Characterisation** is a GIS-based assessment using expert judgement informed by selected data sets and historic maps. It allows relatively intact historic field systems and field systems that are typical of a given landscape character to be identified and considered. Although HLC's tend to be county based, the use of national character types allows for improved consistency across larger areas such as the High Weald AONB which straddle administrative boundaries. *As a desk based assessment HLC is not intended to be definitive at a field level. Assessment of a field for its historic environment value will still require further work including site surveys and archive research.*

## 6.2 Assessment Examples

### 1. Preparation of a parish Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment – screening for AONB constraints



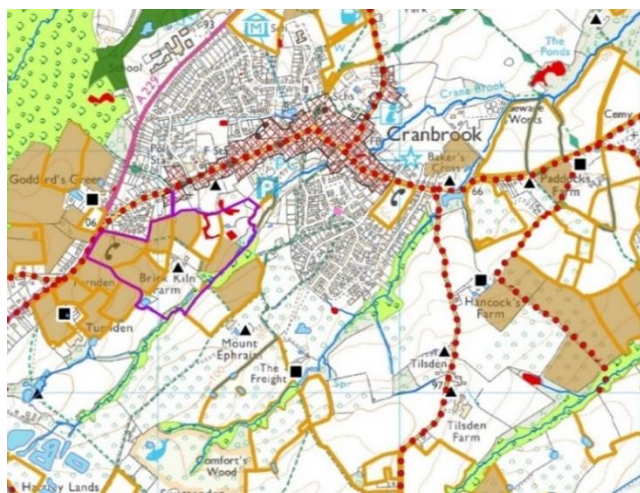
**Data sources:** HLC for Cranbrook parish, selecting medieval fields, together with AONB component data – historic field boundaries, ancient woodland and historic routeways.

NB: some data sets not available for land outside the AONB boundary

#### Summary AONB assessment

- Typical (characteristic) medieval field systems are present across the area contributing to AONB character and natural beauty, and show a clear association with historic settlement, ancient woodland and other characteristic features.
- The South West of the parish is highly significant with a high concentration of surviving medieval fields, in close association with related features of similar age in origin, creating a coherent and legible area of ancient countryside typical of the High Weald AONB. Field boundaries within this area are substantially intact. This area will be highly sensitive to change.
- The area is characteristic of the mosaic and small scale nature of the AONB landscape, average field size 5 acres, which has survived relatively intact for 700 years but remains vulnerable to damage from large scale and/or rapid change.
- The proportion of small fields of medieval or earlier in origin appear to decline into the Low Weald but larger scale enclosures and modern field amalgamations may still contain valuable biodiversity, archaeology, or evidence of earlier origins.

## 2. Assessing the impact of a proposed housing site allocation on AONB character



**Data sources:** HLC for Cranbrook parish, selecting medieval fields, together with AONB component data including surviving historic boundaries.

### Key

High Weald AONB boundary	Historic farmsteads (known medieval)
Brick Kiln Farm allocation site	Historic farmsteads (other)
<b>AONB - characteristic fields</b>	
Medieval	Historic settlement core (Epoch 1 c.1860)
Intact historic field boundaries (Epoch 1 c.1860)	Historic communication routes (Epoch 1 c.1860)
Wildflower grassland	Ancient woodland
Parkland, Late post-medieval	Rivers and streams
	Ponds
	Historic extraction sites

### Summary AONB assessment:

- The site is likely to be sensitive to change with typical early post-medieval fields in close association with other characteristic AONB features dating to the medieval period or earlier - the adjacent historic routeway, ancient gill woodland, historic medieval farmstead and settlement core. Damage to these features will have a strong negative impact on the AONB.
- Historic boundary data suggests that many field boundaries remain relatively intact
- Medieval fields themselves and significant historic boundaries should be identified as landscape receptors in any Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).
- Fields that have been more heavily and recently modified are also present but these may still contain medieval features.
- The historic landscape interest of the site suggests further investigations should be carried out.

## 7. Assessing heritage significance

The AONB Management Plan stresses the importance of protecting the archaeology and historic assets of fields (Objective FH4). As well as contributing to the character of rural places, individual fields and field systems can be heritage assets in their own right. This might be as a result of the archaeology they contain or the historical significance of the field systems themselves.

### Applicable to:

- Demonstrating that the significance of fields as heritage assets have been taken into account (NPPF para. 17, Core planning principles).
- Describing the significance of any field related heritage asset affected by proposed development and any contribution made by its setting (NPPF para. 128).
- Demonstrating the use of up-to-date evidence and how it can be applied to assess the significance of heritage assets, and to predict the likelihood that currently unidentified heritage assets may be discovered in the future (NPPF para 158 and 169).

Heritage information can be obtained from readily available data, such as local listings, and using historic maps and LiDAR, but interpretation may require specialist and local knowledge. A more comprehensive assessment will require field survey and archive research to identify land parcels and their associations with settlements; the extent of surviving historic farm holdings; the extent and antiquity of boundary features; presence of veteran trees and other natural environment features associated with antiquity.

The **significance of a heritage asset** for planning purposes is the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest (derived not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting)<sup>2</sup>. The scope of heritage values that should be considered is outlined in 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment, English Heritage, 2008, which also stresses the importance of an understanding of the history, origin and character of places.

#### **Identifying heritage significance in a national or local context**

In addition to their contribution to landscape character the significance of fields will be heightened if they also have other values including:

##### **Historical/ Evidential value**

- Fields are particularly old or rare (regardless of quality)
- Fields have considerable time-depth (layers of history that may be visible) and/or the potential for as yet undiscovered archaeology
- Fields can tell the story of the landscape and provide a clear illustration of the link between past and present either through the existence of physical remains and/ or extensive written records; or are associated with a notable person or cultural activity
- Fields provide the setting for designated archaeological features of national or local importance; or are part of surviving historic parkland

##### **Aesthetic / Communal value**

- Field system/ field is recognised for its aesthetic value and/ or has a strong meaning for local people which can be commemorative, symbolic, inspirational, recreational or social.

## **7.1 Example of a heritage assessment: Earlye Farm**

Full details are provided in the [Case Study Report Earlye Farm Heritage Assessment](#).

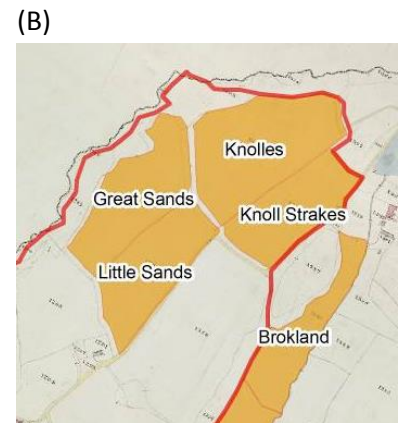
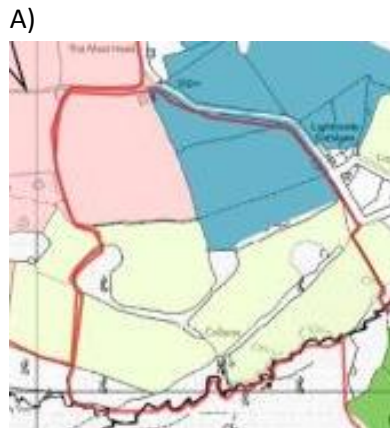
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<sup>2</sup> *National Planning Policy Framework*. DCLG, 2012, p56.

## Historic / Evidential Value:

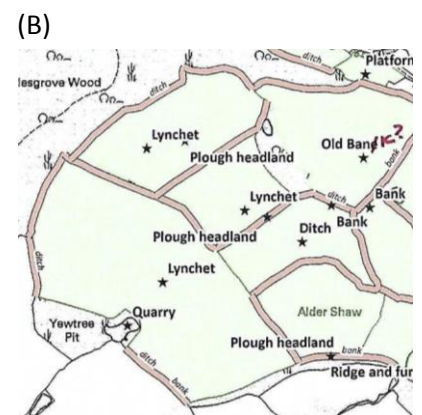
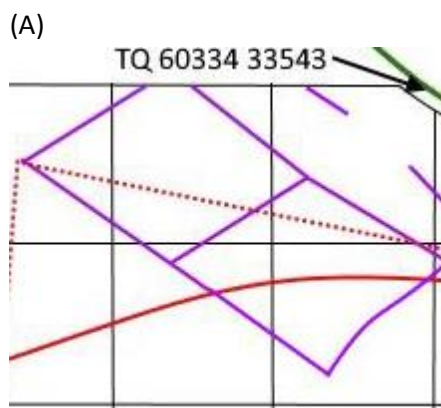
### Fields are particularly old or rare (regardless of Quality)

- (A) Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) shows part of a co-axial field system (pink), rare in the High Weald, visible to the north of Pocksgate (HLC),
- (B) The survival of the medieval field name 'Sands' (Sourced from archive records) through to the Tithe maps (c1830) indicates the antiquity of the field system



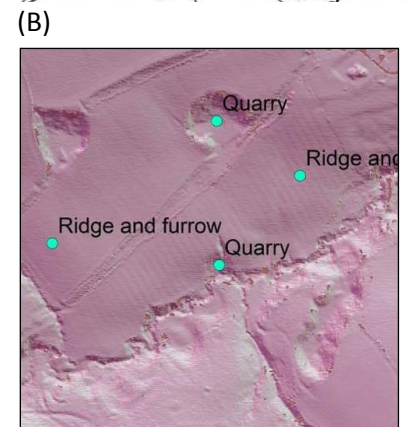
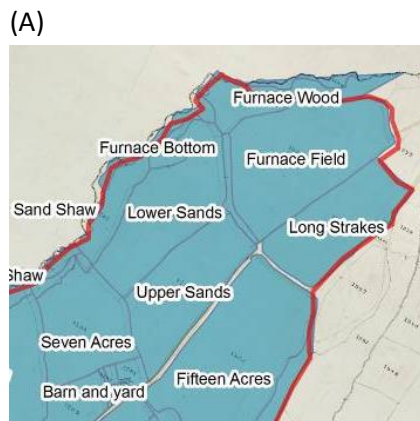
### Fields have considerable time depth

- (A) Magnetometer survey reveals part of an older field system in Furnace field
- (B) Field survey reveals remnants of earlier farming systems within more modern fields



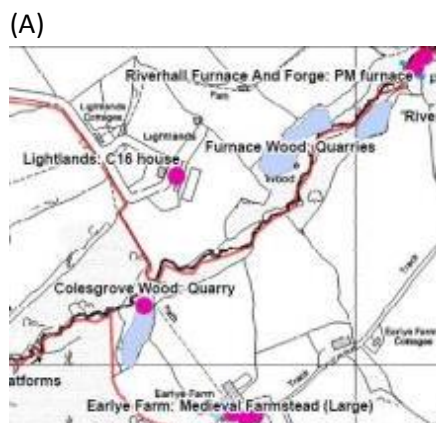
### Fields can tell the story of the landscape

- (A) Field names from the Tithe map indicate the proximity to iron working (Furnace Field)
- (B) LiDAR shows extraction pits likely to be for iron, an abandoned routeway and ridge and furrow (requiring additional explanation)



### Fields provide the setting for designated archaeological features

- (A) The Historic Environment Record (HER) shows quarries, furnaces and forges in the vicinity of the ironmasters house at Lightlands



## 8. Assessing other environmental and socio- economic values

The AONB Management Plan stresses the importance of enhancing the ecological value of fields (Objective FH3) and maintaining their productive capacity Objective (FH1). Natural environment and other socio-ecological information can be obtained from readily available data, such as magic.gov, National Biodiversity Network and Environment Agency but interpretation may require specialist and local knowledge. A more comprehensive assessment will require field surveys and investigations by specialists.

### Applicable to:

- Demonstrating that valued soils and biodiversity have been identified and protected (NPPF para.109).
- Demonstrating proactive planning of biodiversity and green infrastructure networks through identifying fields with multiple historic and natural environment values that can form network nodes (NPPF para. 114 and 117).
- Providing context and evidential information to assist dating of hedges under the Hedgerow Regulations
- Preparing an ecosystem services assessment for an area of fields.

Fields are intimately associated with other habitats which form part of the enclosure systems laid out over soils, topography and water catchments. Thus they are central and critical to the delivery of all the regulating, provisioning and cultural benefits ecosystems provide - genetic and ecological diversity, flood alleviation, carbon storage, food production, and peoples' enjoyment of the countryside. Fields are home to one of our most rare and precious habitats – wildflower meadows – which, together with species rich hedgerows, are vital for the insects that pollinate our fruit and vegetable crops.

### Ecological value

- The fields and field boundaries contain a high proportion of semi-natural habitat with high biodiversity and/ or rare and fragile habitats or species, or the fields have a varied physical habitat structure determined by natural processes, and lie within a well-connected ecological network

### Ecosystem regulating value

- Field management regime maximises soil health and carbon storage; minimises soil erosion and supports the natural functioning of water systems

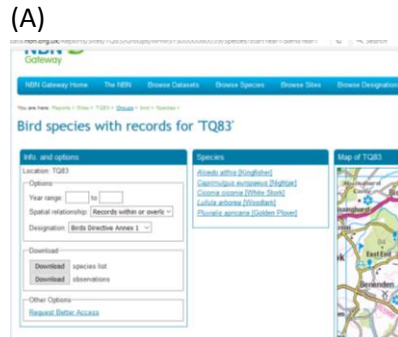
### Socio-economic value

- Fields remains in productive use, primarily producing food and supporting rural employment
- Fields provide opportunities for recreation and enjoyment

# 8.1 Example: Fields in the High Weald: An overview of their social, ecological and economic value\*

## Ecological value

- (A) Information from the county Biological records centre or National Biodiversity Network (NBN) can highlight known priority species and habitats.
- (B) Field survey and ecological assessment will be necessary to identify the contribution fields make to local biodiversity.

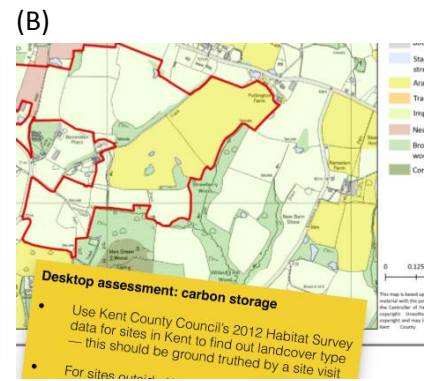


(B)

Rough hawkbit		
Ox-eye daisy		
Fairy flax		
Birds-foot-trefoil spp.	A	
Wood-rush spp.		
Common cow-wheat		
Corky-fruited waterdropwort		
Narrow-leaved waterdropwort		
Adders-tongue		(C, D, E, F)
Common lousewort		
Mouse-ear hawkweed		
Burnet-saxifrage		
Milkwort spp.		
Tormentil		
Salad burnet		
Cowslip		

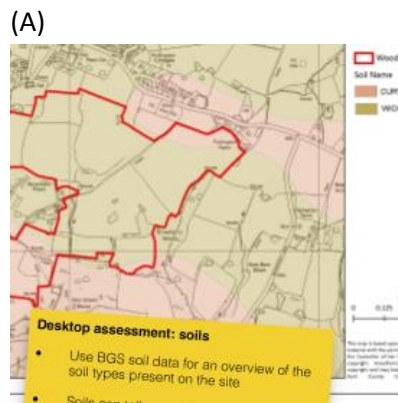
## Ecosystem regulating value

- (A) Field investigations will be needed to assess soil health; soil erosion and its effect on water quality
- (B) A simple calculation can provide an estimate of carbon storage potential



## Socio-economic value

- (A) Soils in the High Weald vary across short distances and even agricultural land Grades 3 and 4 can be highly productive in the hands of experienced farmers and growers
- (B) Landscapes provide the visual setting for settlements and the viewpoints for experiencing the High Weald on foot.



\*Summarised from

Fields in the High Weald: An overview of their social, ecological and economic value

## 9. Capacity and site design issues

### 9.1 Fields and development

Fields that are significant in relation to landscape character are vulnerable to change that materially affects the fabric of the field, the pattern of boundaries or the relationship between the fields and related landscape features. This is likely to include fields which directly abut the historic core of small settlements. The development of these fields will not normally be consistent with conserving the natural beauty of the AONB.

Fields judged as less significant in terms of landscape character may still have high value as a heritage asset and may have the potential to contain buried archaeology. Further investigation and recording may be required in support of a planning application; to inform the development of a scheme or as a condition to ensure a proper archaeological record of the site is made before works commence.

The small scale nature of the High Weald fieldscape and the relatively late development of its villages orientated around trade and craft suggests anything other than small scale development is likely to be detrimental to the area's character.

Where a Landscape and Visual Assessment<sup>3</sup> is required, significant and sensitive fields should be identified as landscape receptors regardless of their role as the setting for footpaths or viewpoints.

**In order to minimise impact on the AONB, where development does occur on fields, site design should:**

- Seek to minimise the footprint of built development and hard surfaces and maximise the retention of natural land cover and the operation of natural processes
- Recognise and respect fields surrounding individual farms and the separation these represent between settlements
- Maintain and restore historic field boundaries, veteran trees and other characteristic fieldscape features such as ponds
- Reflect the character of historic communication routes and their relationship with historic fields and settlement in the layout of access roads and junctions
- Be informed by the layout, form and massing of local traditional buildings and their spaces, including the juncture between fields and settlements
- Utilise materials that reflect the character of local fieldscapes
- Consider how curtilages can reflect the form and character of fieldscapes
- Minimise external lighting to reduce the impact of lighting on adjacent fields
- Maximise the opportunities for restoring lost biodiversity through green infrastructure planning and the use of local provenance and nectar producing plants.

<sup>3</sup> Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third edition, Landscape Institute and IEMA, 2013

## 9.2 Fields, agricultural change and woodland planting

Some land management changes will be subject to planning and the impact of development on productive fields may need to be assessed. Not all change is damaging and fields in the High Weald have accommodated a significant amount of change in the last 700 years without significant erosion of their character - farming regimes have changed; new crops have been introduced and abandoned; and the extent of woodland has grown and retreated depending on the relative economic value of crops and timber. Current pressures on fields include government targets for new woodland planting and renewable energy generation; reduction in agri-environment support for small meadows; contract farming and the demand for new crops requiring larger machinery.

**Future changes to land use or the management of fields will be better accommodated without damaging AONB character if they seek to:**

- Avoid boundary removal within medieval field systems and minimise it elsewhere
- Restore and maintain boundary features – hedgerows, coppice, veteran trees, ditch and bank systems, wildflower verges and early/ late nectar sources
- Restore and maintain other characteristic fieldscape features such ponds
- Minimise physical damage to the field surface
- Minimise loss of soil or operations that encourage soil erosion
- Avoid operations that impair soil health or its ability to store carbon
- Manage unimproved grassland appropriately and protect semi-improved grassland
- Undertake further investigation such as a geophysical study if below ground archaeology is suspected
- Minimise physical damage to gates and access points
- Minimise changes that restrict the capacity for land management
- Avoid reduction in species diversity or biomass

## 10. Further information

### Fields and the landscape

English Heritage 2011. *Introduction to Heritage Assets: Field Systems*

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-field-systems/>

English Heritage 2008. *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-principles-sustainable-management-historic-environment/>

Landscape Institute and IEMA, 2013. Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third edition <http://www.landscapeinstitute.org/knowledge/GLVIA.php>

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2014 (and supporting data). High Weald AONB Unit <http://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan.html>

## Historic Environment data

East Sussex Record Office, The Keep <http://www.thekeep.info/>

West Sussex Record Office <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/leisure-recreation-and-community/history-and-heritage/west-sussex-record-office/>

Kent Records Office <http://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/history-and-heritage/kent-history-and-library-centre>

## Natural environment and wildlife data

Geographical information about the natural environment <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

National Biodiversity Network Gateway <https://nbn.org.uk/>

Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre <http://www.surreywildlifetrust.org/SBIC>

Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre <http://www.kmbrc.org.uk/aboutus/index/index.php>

Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre <http://sxbrc.org.uk/>

AONB data