

## 13.0 Lympne Greensand Escarpment

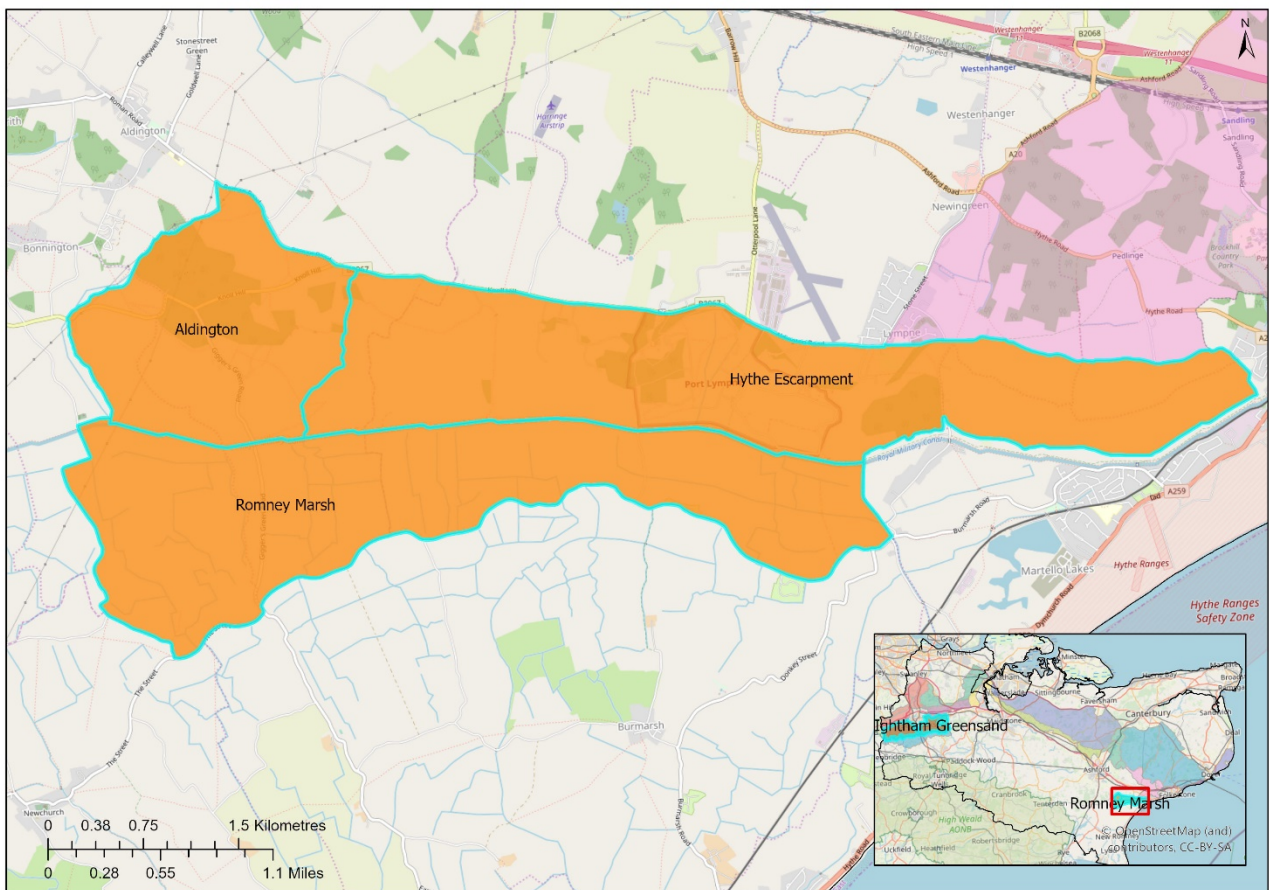
### Landscape Character Area 5B

**Landscape Character Type 5:** Greensand

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Ashford; Shepway

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** Romney Marsh (the Fifth Continent) Landscape Partnership

**Location and Context:** This LCA forms a southern spur of the Kent Downs AONB. It comprises the Greensand Escarpment between Aldington and Hythe, as well as a small area of Romney Marsh below the escarpment, and some of the wooded land above it.



*Location map for Lympne Greensand Escarpment LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Romney Marsh, Aldington and Hythe Escarpment*

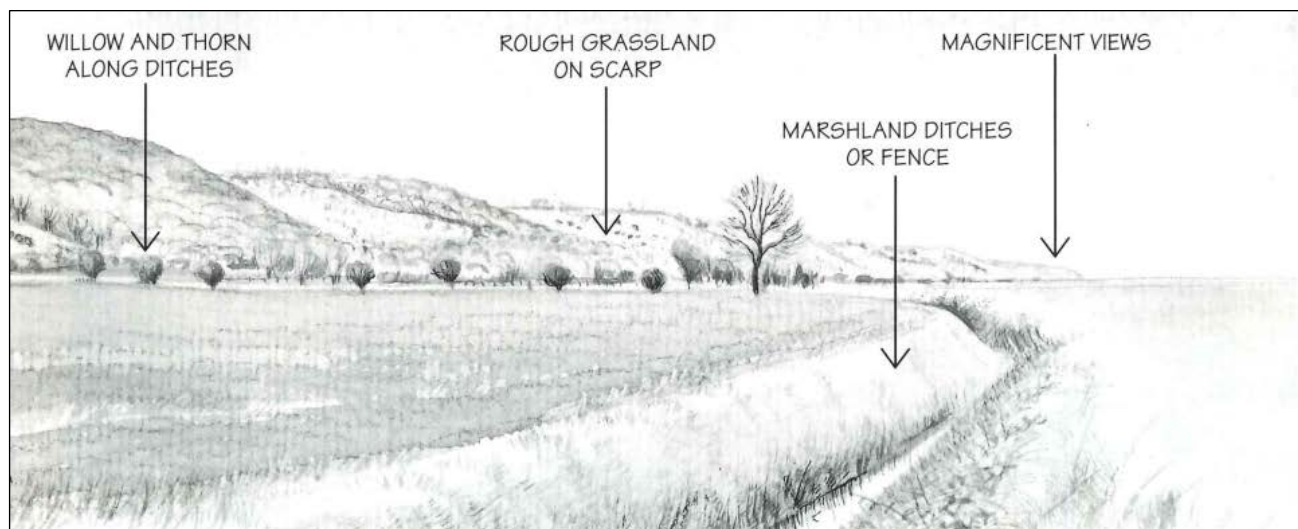


*Hythe escarpment as seen from Botolph's Bridge on Romney Marsh*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of the escarpment is Greensand, with layers of clay causing it to slump. Soils on the escarpment are generally pitted and unstable.
- Landform dominated by a sloping south-facing escarpment (a former cliff line), with undulating land above, and the flat, artificially drained land of Romney Marsh below.
- Spring-fed streams flow down the escarpment into the Royal Military Canal at the base. This constructed watercourse and the associated Canal Cutting help to drain Romney Marsh.
- Woodland and scrub on the escarpment, with denser woodlands to the west, and strong lines of trees (including pollards) following the Royal Military Canal and other watercourses.
- A range of land uses, including pastoral and arable agriculture, nature conservation and recreation. Fields generally irregular in shape, and bounded by hedgerows on the scarp, and by ditches on Romney Marsh.
- Semi-natural habitats include extensive grassland (The Roughs) and woodland blocks (mainly in the west). Also watercourses, scrub and hedgerows.
- Rich archaeological and cultural heritage, particularly related to coastal defence, including Lemanis Roman fort, Lympne Castle, Royal Military Canal and sound mirror.
- Roman road along top of escarpment, and winding lanes on Romney Marsh.
- A strongly patterned and textured landscape, showing variations in different parts of the LCA.
- Popular for recreation, with Royal Military Canal Path providing easy access from Hythe. Port Lympne is a popular visitor attraction.
- Spectacular views across Romney Marsh from the top of the escarpment. The escarpment forms the backdrop to views inland from Romney Marsh.





*Sketch of Lympne Greensand Escarpment from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)*

## 13.1 Description

- 13.1.1 The most southerly part of the AONB extends from Hythe west to Aldington. The character area includes part of the Hythe escarpment, and the section of Romney Marsh immediately below, which it overlooks. Until the early Middle Ages, this scarp formed the edge of a large, marshy lagoon. Gradually, however, the lagoon was reclaimed, through a combination of the natural accumulation of silt and shingle, the construction of sea defences and sustained drainage. The resulting land of Romney Marsh now forms one of the most fertile areas of Kent, with a particularly long growing season.
- 13.1.2 Most of the Hythe escarpment is the eroded face of the greensands and in particular of the calcareous Kentish Ragstone. Over the centuries the surface has gradually slipped to form a steep, uneven slope, enclosing the northern edge of the marsh. The vulnerability of the coast to attack has left a long legacy of old military defences scattered across the area, from the tumbled walls of the Roman fort of Lemanis, to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Royal Military Canal at the foot of the escarpment and the last of the inter-war 'sound mirrors' behind Burmarsh, 'listening' for approaching aircraft. In addition to the grassland and scrub habitats of the escarpment, the lower parts of the character area contains an ecologically-rich network of drainage ditches (often lined with pollarded willows and reeds) and the Royal Military Canal which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Local Wildlife Site.
- 13.1.3 The scarp is highly visible from the flat marsh, forming a long hillside of rough grassland, dotted with scrub with arable fields on the lower slopes towards Aldington. Several large deciduous woodlands break up the sweep of the landform, being more characteristic in the west around Aldington. From the areas between these woodlands, there are spectacular views across Romney Marsh and the English Channel.
- 13.1.4 One of the key characteristics of this area is its historical sense of change and impermanence. These stem from the visible evidence of past change in the landscape - the ancient cliff line stranded miles from the sea; the tumbled walls of the Roman fort; the landslips on The Roughs, and the flat reclaimed landscape of Romney Marsh.

- 13.1.5 Settlement is sparse throughout the area. It is largely limited to isolated properties along the top of the scarp, and scattered farms along the roads which snake through Romney Marsh. As a result, much of the area feels remote and isolated, and is sensitive to development and change.
- 13.1.6 The Royal Military Canal, which runs at the base of the scarp, acts as the 'backbone' of the area. Originally built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century as a combined defence and drainage project, it is still important to the drainage of Romney Marsh. It is also a key wildlife and recreational corridor. The Royal Military Canal Path, which extends from Hythe to Rye, follows the old military road alongside the canal and is part of the Saxon Shore Way long distance route. The Wild Animal Park at Port Lympne is also a popular tourism and recreation destination; new tourist accommodation on the site has interrupted the relatively undeveloped nature of the scarp.
- 13.1.7 The contrast in topography between the scarp and the marsh is key to the area's character, and also to the magnificent and uninterrupted views between them. From the top of the scarp the views encompass Romney Marsh to Dungeness and beyond, Fairlight cliffs and the Weald. In clear conditions, France is visible across the Channel.



*Landslip landform at The Roughts*



*Pollarded willows at the base of the Hythe Escarpment*



*Lympne Norman church and castle. The blockwork extension on the top of the castle dates from WW2.*



*Sinuous, reed-fringed road across Romney Marsh, originally a salt-marsh creek which was embanked as part of the drainage process in Saxon times*



*Panoramic view across Romney Marsh from Lympne churchyard. Dungeness power station is visible on the horizon*



*Tranquil scene on the Royal Military Canal, looking across to Romney Marsh*



## 13.2 Local Character Areas

### Hythe Escarpment

- 13.2.1 The Hythe Escarpment is an ancient cliff line, now stranded several miles from the sea following the reclamation of Romney Marsh. The scarp is topped by a wide band of open arable land which extends to the AONB boundary along the Roman Road. The Hythe Escarpment, unlike the chalk face of the Downs, is furrowed throughout its length by small streams, which emerge from the sandstone high up on the hillside, and run down into the Royal Military Canal. To the east of the Port Lympne Wild Animal Park, most of the scarp face is botanically rich rough grassland, with a considerable amount of scrub encroaching up the slopes. The sparse vegetation and the pitted, unstable soils produce a bleak, wild landscape, reflecting its exposed location. Landslips are evident in the uneven landform of The Roughs at the eastern end of the Local Character Area, which is designated SSSI for its grassland habitats. To the west, the scarp becomes shallower. Remnant hedgerows are still evident across the slopes, which, together with the woodlands and shaws, form a network of trees. To the west of Port Lympne, some of the woodland and unimproved pastures on the scarp are Local Wildlife Sites. Many of the buildings, including the spectacularly-sited Lympne Castle and Lympne church, are built in the local ragstone.
- 13.2.2 The simplicity and integrity of this landscape and its high visibility from much of Romney Marsh mean that any developments or changes which take place on its slopes will have major effects not only on the immediate landscape but also on the wider setting of Romney Marsh. There are notable and unique ancient and historic sites within this landscape, including Lemanis Roman Fort (originally built as a coastal fort to defend a long-gone harbour); Lympne Castle (its medieval successor at the top of the scarp); Lympne Church (parts of which date from the 11<sup>th</sup> Century); the chapel to the Holy Maid of Kent (a Henry VIII dissenter) and Burmarsh Sound Mirror. Historic farmsteads and more recent buildings also follow a distinct pattern towards the top of the escarpment, further contributing to the sense of place.
- 13.2.3 Trees and woodlands on the scarp are often dominated by ash, and Ash Dieback is therefore having a significant impact on the wooded appearance of the scarp. It is also having an impact on the more open landscape at the top of the scarp, as many of the limited roadside and hedgerow trees in this area are ash.



*Hythe Escarpment as seen from the Royal Military Canal, showing grassland and woodland habitats. The tumbled remains of Lemanis Roman Fort are in the centre of the picture, with Lympne castle on the horizon to the right.*

## Aldington

- 13.2.3 In the extreme west of this area, the underlying sandstones gradually give way to the heavy Weald Clay, resulting in softer, more rounded slopes. This change is also reflected in the high proportion of deciduous, ancient woodland which dominates the scarp at Aldington. Broadleaf and coppice woodland provide widespread semi-natural habitats, and there are some splendid isolated oak and ash trees. The gentle topography of the lower slopes, however, allows some arable cultivation and as a result the wild, bleak appearance of the eastern sections is lost. There are occasional isolated residential properties, usually set back from the road and surrounded by grounds and woodland. From the top of the scarp there are spectacular views across Romney Marsh and the English Channel.
- 13.2.4 Aldington knoll is reputedly a Roman burial mound site which may have later been used as a beacon, and as a gathering site for smugglers from the Romney Marsh. It is the subject of poem by Ford Madox Ford, entitled 'Aldington Knoll: The Old Sailor Speaks'

*Al'ington Knoll it stands up high  
Guidin' the sailors sailin' by  
Stands up high for all to see,  
Cater the marsh and crost the sea.*

*Al'ington Knoll, when we was cubs,  
Use 'ter mark where we'd sunk the tubs:  
Get it in line with Romney Church,  
They revenue chaps was left in the lurch.*

*Al'ington Knoll's a mound a-top,  
With a dyke all round – an' it's bound to stop:  
For them as made it in them ol' days  
Sees to it well that theer it stays...*



*View south from the scarp at Aldington, showing deciduous woodland and garden planting. There are spectacular views across Romney Marsh visible in the gaps between the trees.*



## Romney Marsh

- 13.2.5 The AONB includes a small part of the vast, flat expanse of Romney Marsh, which stretches down to Rye. This area forms the foreground and setting to views from the adjacent scarp, and is therefore strongly associated with it both physically and visually. The name 'marsh' is misleading, as this area is now highly productive arable land (although it was famous sheep pasture for many centuries, until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century). Nevertheless it still retains an extensive network of drainage ditches or 'sewers' which regulate the water table, and support characteristic fringes of feathery reeds between the fields. There are almost no hedges on the Marsh, and the occasional scrubby, windblown trees which dot the landscape are largely the result of 19<sup>th</sup> Century attempts to create shelter. This is an ancient landscape with a pattern of lanes, settlement and fields established in the Saxon period, and the long history of drainage of the Marsh can still be read in the landscape today. The winding, sinuous lanes raised above the surrounding fields reflect their origins as salt marsh creeks which were embanked to aid drainage in Saxon times. The name of the lane along the AONB boundary ('Wall Lane') is a typical example. The winding older creeks contrast with the straight watercourse, defensive ditches and road associated with the Royal Military Canal, which runs along the base of the scarp. It was constructed as both a defence and to aid drainage of the Marsh.
- 13.2.6 The flatness and remote qualities of the Marsh make it very vulnerable to the intrusive effects of development, which are often worsened by inappropriate measures to conceal the damage, such as conifer shelterbelts. Its position at the base of the scarp also means that any development here is visible from above.



*The Royal Military Canal and Romney Marsh as seen from Hythe Dam*



### 13.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 13.3.1 The landscape appears to be in good condition, and is generally well-managed. The 1995 Assessment raised suburbanisation as a concern within this landscape, but this seems to be less apparent today, possibly because of the screening effects of vegetation which has grown up in the intervening 22 years. However, the presence of pylons and power lines is noticeable around Aldington, and the Little Cheyne Court Windfarm on Romney Marsh (outside the AONB) is visible from many viewpoints on the scarp and the Marsh. Tourism accommodation at Port Lympne is visible from the Romney Marsh and encroachment of scrub remains a concern. Limited changes have taken place on the Hythe Escarpment, mostly in relation to the Port Lympne Wildlife Park where various new enclosures and other structures have been built, some of which are quite obvious in views from Romney Marsh. A caravan park within the AONB on Romney Marsh is also visible.
- 13.3.2 Comparison of photographs from 1995 and 2017 shows that the landscape is very similar, but that some changes have taken place. There are more structures associated with the Wildlife Park today, and the density of scrub growing on the scarp has increased. Buildings near the top of the scarp are less obvious as trees have grown up around them. In the 1995 photo the treeline on the ridge has gaps in, probably resulting from the 1987 storms. By 2017 new tree growth gives the impression of continuous tree cover on the ridge.



*'Then and now' photographs of the Lympne Escarpment. 1995 (above) and 2017 (below)*

<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i></b>
Intervisibility	<p>The close visual relationships between the scarp and the marsh at its foot mean that changes in one will be visible from the other. Visible changes may result from new development (e.g. large buildings) but also from changes in land management (e.g. lack of grazing).</p> <p>There are a number of Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings on the scarp, and any changes to their settings will be visible from both the scarp and from Romney Marsh.</p>
Recreation	<p>There are two key recreation sites within this LCA - Port Lympne Wildlife Park, and the Royal Military Canal. In recent years, expansion of the Wildlife Park has seen more isolated and ad-hoc structures visible in the landscape, including enclosures, a holiday village and tree houses.</p> <p>Footpath condition is variable. Less popular routes can be overgrown, but there is a concentration of walkers and cyclists using the path alongside the Royal Military Canal.</p> <p>As the population of the local area increases following new development then there will be further recreational pressure on this landscape. This will require careful management to avoid detriment to its ecology, character and qualities.</p>
New development and infrastructure	<p>The potential new town site at Otterpool, and an industrial land use allocation are adjacent to this LCA, beyond the AONB boundary to the north. They are likely to impact on views from the AONB and its setting, as well as potentially affecting tranquillity, light pollution and recreational pressure.</p> <p>Developments on Romney Marsh (including for example large agricultural buildings, and solar farms) would impact on views from the scarp. In such a flat and distinctive landscape, it is important to note that poor attempts to screen new buildings (such as planting Leylandii hedges) can exacerbate the problem.</p> <p>Skylines on the summit of the scarp are particularly vulnerable, as changes here can have a dramatic impact on surrounding views.</p> <p>The existing wind farm at Little Cheyne Court, and the pylon lines emanating from Dungeness demonstrate how prominent vertical features can be in this flat and highly visible landscape.</p> <p>The character of rural lanes may be lost if traffic increases require widening, straightening or other insensitive highways measures.</p>
Climate change and natural forces	<p>The broadleaved woodlands and hedgerow trees on the scarp are very vulnerable to Ash Dieback.</p> <p>Romney Marsh is exceptionally low-lying and is therefore especially vulnerable to flooding. The risk of flooding from both the sea and from rivers is likely to be exacerbated by climate change and associated increase in frequency and intensity of storms. Climate change may also impact on crop choices and farming cycles.</p> <p>Natural processes of land slippage and soil movement are part of the character of the dynamic scarp. They affect the appearance of the landscape in this area, particularly following heavy rain, and can impact on archaeology, buildings and vegetation.</p>



<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i></b>
Land management changes	<p>Romney Marsh is currently intensively farmed arable land. Soil exhaustion is a problem, as is ground shrinkage following desiccation of peat soils. Lowering land surfaces means ditches must be dredged in order to function properly, and this reduces wildlife habitats associated with stream and wetlands. In addition, use of fertilizer on pasture changes the grass and wildflower species present, as many grasses only grow on nutrient-poor soils. This in turn reduces the number of insects and birds which they can support. Farms on Romney Marsh are currently coming out of Entry Level Stewardship schemes for positive land management. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape. International trade arrangements are likely to also affect the landscape, for example the arrangements for lamb exports will impact on the viability of sheep farming, which will in turn affect grazing levels on grasslands.</p> <p>Continued scrub growth may impact on archaeology and wildlife value if unchecked. Larger agricultural machinery can result in damage to verges and historic bridge structures.</p> <p>Fragmentation of woodland ownership and management ('woodlotting') can result in loss of coherent and effective woodland management.</p>
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*Vertical poles stand out in the flat landscape of Romney Marsh, and the caravan park is visible from the scarp as well as across the Marsh. Deciduous woodlands and hedgerow trees on the scarp are vulnerable to Ash Dieback.*

## 13.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### **Aspirational Landscape Strategy**

The landscape retains its unique character and strong sense of place. It still has a timeless quality, is well managed, and is able to cope with the demands for recreation within it.

A network of wildlife corridors runs throughout the landscape. On the scarp, well-managed woodlands are linked by hedgerow corridors, and grasslands are appropriately grazed and linked. On Romney Marsh, watercourses form a focus for wildlife corridors within the agricultural landscape.

The loss of trees from the landscape is mitigated by new planting and natural regeneration. both in woodlands and associated with trees outside woodlands.

Development within the landscape is minimal, and is carefully sited and designed so that it does not visually intrude. Roads retain their distinctive characters, and road corridors retain their rural feel. Views both towards and from the scarp are conserved and enhanced.

#### **Protect**

- Protect historic sites and monuments, and their settings, taking account of the intervisibility between scarp and marsh.
- Protect skylines and the scarp slope (particularly the top of the scarp) from development, and look at removing and mitigating intrusive features such as poles, power cables and structures. Aim to retain the scarp's open grassland and scrub character.
- Protect historic landscape features which may not be otherwise designated, such as the ancient road and ditch networks on Romney Marsh.
- Protect long views across Romney Marsh from the scarp, considering how developments on the Marsh will appear when viewed from above and avoid or mitigate impacts, for instance with careful advance planting.
- Protect the historic features and distinctive vegetation along the Royal Military Canal.

#### **Manage**

- Manage woodlands, encouraging coherent management plans to retain the scale and unity of broadleaf woodland coverage, including coppice woodland. Look at replacing trees affected by Ash Dieback with alternative species if this becomes necessary. Link woodlands, copses and hedgerows to create a robust network.
- Manage grasslands, promoting appropriate grazing to avoid scrub growth and encourage diversity of grasses and herbs.
- Manage farmland areas, encouraging wildlife corridors along ditches and field margins. Consider reintroducing grazing into the agricultural cycle to improve soil quality.
- Manage watercourses to combine effective drainage with wildlife habitats (e.g. through stepped-profile banks) in accordance with Internal Drainage Board bylaws. Establish new willows (future pollards) and field margins along ditches.
- Continue to manage pollarded willows, oak and ash. Plant new trees where old trees are becoming over-mature so that they remain a feature of the landscape. Promote new hedgerow / roadside trees from existing hedge stock.
- Manage recreation, including positive management of the rights of way network, to minimise damage from walking and cycling.



## Plan

- Develop strategies for partnership working, for example for woodland and farmland management.
- Utilise Green Infrastructure corridor opportunities, particularly along the Royal Military Canal.
- If proposed developments in the vicinity come to fruition, engage with their designers at an early stage to achieve the best possible edge treatments, landscape integration and building design, as well as investment in landscape management for recreation and landscape conservation.
- Use offsite contributions from developments where they are approved in the vicinity to sensitivity enhance recreation provision and improve wildlife habitat networks within and connecting to this LCA.
- Avoid further suburbanisation, for example through use of sympathetic building materials and styles, and ensure any new buildings (including farm buildings) are well integrated using trees and woodland. Seek the use of sympathetic local materials such as brick, tile and ragstone.
- Work with Highways Authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Ensure new tree establishment associated with climate mitigation respects and enhances landscape character and qualities.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for lost qualities.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental/ landscape limits in planning and plan making.