

## 3.0 Mid Kent Downs

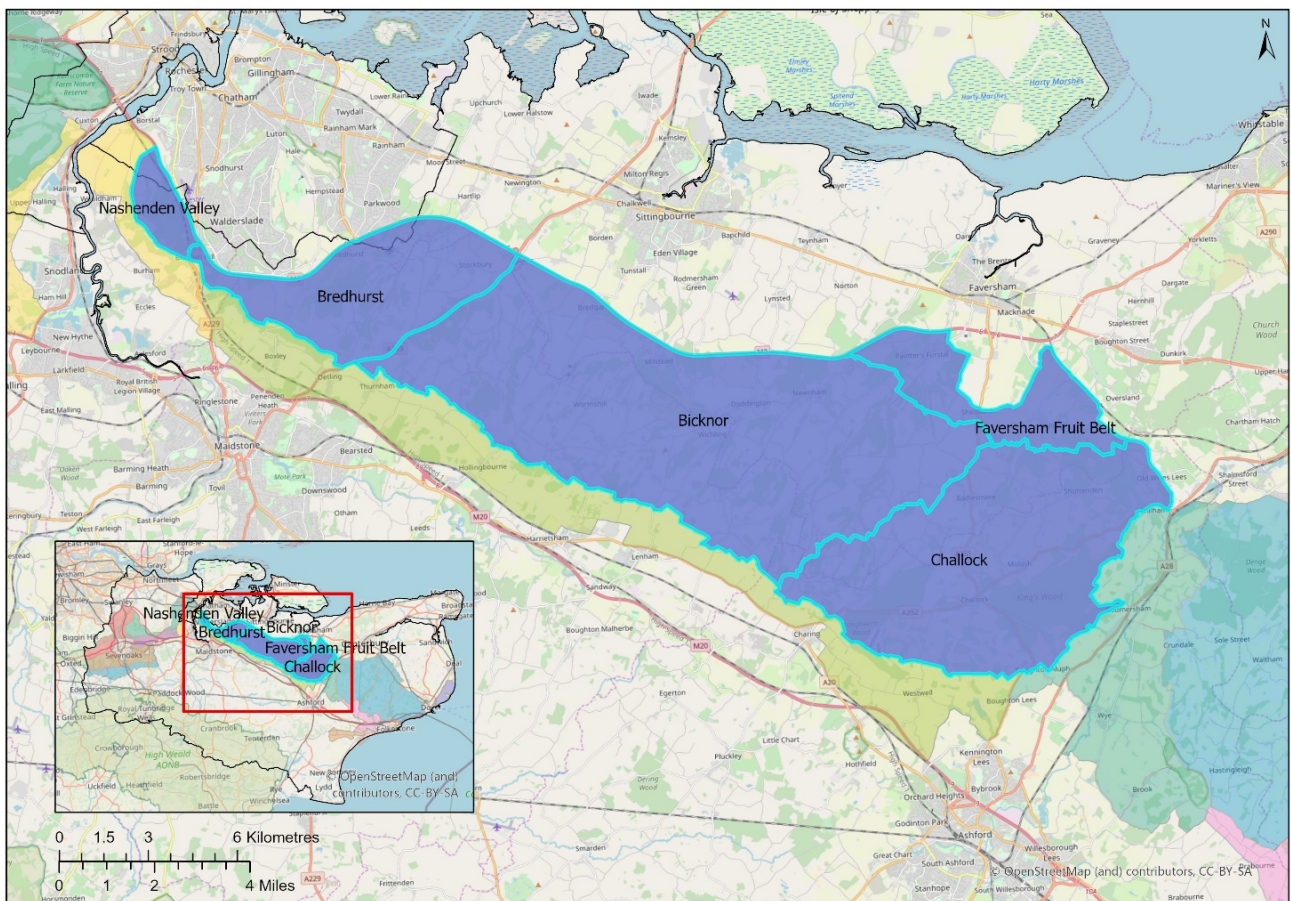
### Landscape Character Area 1B

**Landscape Character Type 1:** Chalk Downs

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Ashford; Maidstone; Medway; Swale; Tonbridge and Malling

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** This relatively large LCA is located in the central part of the Kent Downs AONB, between the Medway Valley LCA (to the west) and the Stour Valley LCA (to the east). The northern edge of the LCA follows the AONB boundary, and to the south is the Hollingbourne Scarp and Vale LCA. It includes several villages, the largest of which is Challock.



*Location map for West Kent Downs LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Bredhurst, Bicknor, Challock and Faversham Fruit Belt*

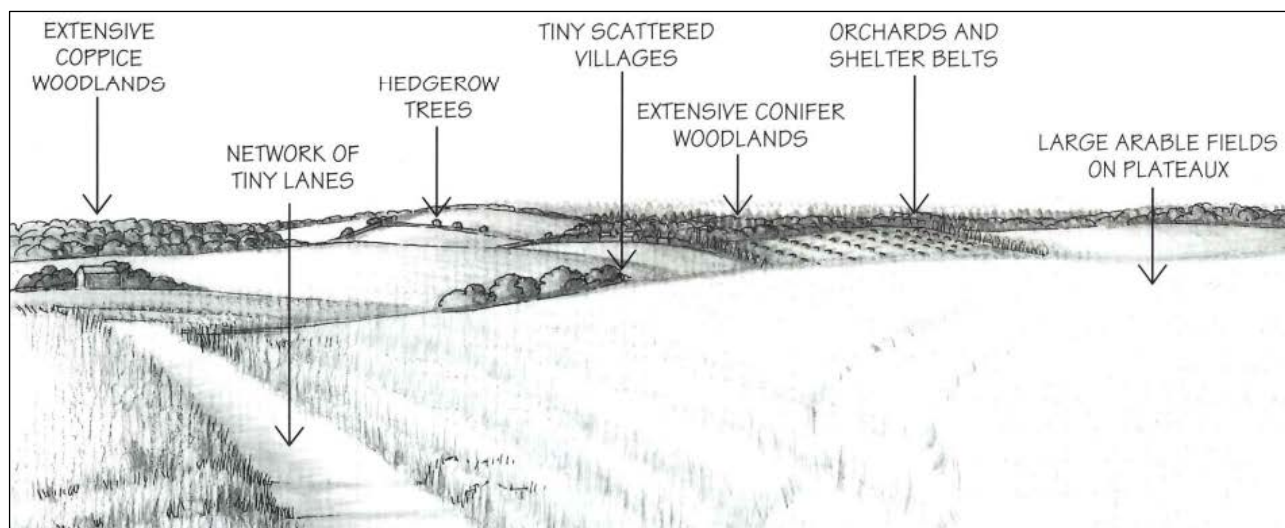


*A typical view in the Mid Kent Downs, near Bredhurst. The landscape comprises a series of plateaux and valleys, with fields interspersed with large blocks of woodland.*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Cretaceous upper chalk, with occasional exposures of middle chalk in valleys. Above the chalk is a thin sticky clay soil derived from weathered chalk, which contains many flints.
- Landform of gently rolling chalk plateaux forming dip slope. Interspersed with relatively steep dry valleys mostly running SW-NE. Surface water mostly confined to dew ponds, but important aquifers held within chalk.
- Large blocks of woodland, particularly on higher land and ridge tops. Mostly deciduous (including extensive areas of chestnut coppice) plus some conifer planting.
- Land uses are predominantly arable farmland and woodland, with significant pockets of parkland and orchards.
- Fields are often large, reflecting late enclosure and historic use for sheepwalks. Smaller enclosure pattern around settlements, and a distinctive regular pattern with high hedges in orchard areas.
- Semi-natural habitats include woodland, shaws and chalk grassland.
- Landscape features including lanes, tracks, churches, villages and farms date back to the medieval period or earlier. Place names and road names tell part of the landscape story.
- Relatively sparsely settled, with a scattering of villages and hamlets, and isolated farms. Brick and flint buildings are common.
- A network of enclosed narrow lanes, often following dry valleys, with occasional main roads. M2 follows northern edge.
- A relatively large-scale landscape, with a sense of openness, particularly on the plateaux and ridge tops. In orchard areas the landscape has a clear, regular patchwork pattern, and seasonal changes in vegetation are very apparent.
- Despite its proximity to urban areas, much of the LCA has a strongly rural and peaceful feel, and a sense of isolation from the settlements nearby.
- The wooded slopes and summit of Perry Wood form a local landmark. From the edges of the area there are long views over the surrounding landscapes: the river valleys, the Medway/Swale Estuary, and the chalk scarp and vale.





*Sketch of the Mid Kent Downs from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)*

### 3.1 Description

- 3.1.1 This large Landscape Character Area comprises the dip slope of the Kent Downs running in a long spine between the Medway Valley in the west and the Stour Valley in the east. Although there are local variations in the appearance of the landscape, there is a strong underlying pattern to the landform which imparts an overall character to the region. Throughout the length of the chalk ridge a series of narrow, steep-sided dry valleys carve their way down the gentle northern dip-slope of the downs to the flatter land of the north Kent fruit belt, around Sittingbourne and Faversham.
- 3.1.2 Historically, this was a sparsely-settled and impoverished area, largely due to the stiff clay-with-flints soils, which overlie the solid chalk. Despite their striking, rich-red colour, these soils are relatively poor and difficult to cultivate, especially as they occur on the exposed upper plateaux of the downs. Edward Hasted, writing in 1798, consistently describes the area in terms such as *"an unpleasant dreary country, the soil of which is very poor, being chalky, and much covered with flint-stones"*. In his day the land was used widely for sheep grazing, interspersed by arable on the lower slopes and large blocks of woodland. Today appreciation of the landscape has changed, and the remote, undeveloped ridges and valleys are considered one of the most beautiful features of the AONB. Although mechanised farming over the last hundred years has seen an increase in the extent of arable land, much of the original ancient woodland survives, walling-in the arable plateaux and enclosing the rounded valley bottoms. Extensive areas of woodland are managed as chestnut coppice, providing posts and rails for traditional fencing. Traditional country sports have also shaped (and continue to shape) the landscape. For example, the shaws on the steep upper slopes of the dry valleys have sometimes been retained as ideal cover for game birds, which can be flushed from this cover to provide challenging 'high birds' for the guns below. Similarly, several of the large estates (e.g. Doddington, Belmont, Torry Hill) retained woodland specifically for hunting.
- 3.1.3 Although the area has been sparsely settled in the past, it still contains a rich landscape history. The network of lanes, villages, isolated churches and scattered farms has largely been in place since the medieval period, and there is a sense of timelessness about much of the landscape. Extensive coppice woodlands stretch along the upper slopes of the valleys and there are several large expanses of conifer woodland. The evocative road names tell the story of the landscape: Coldblow Lane, Scragged Oak Road, Hogbarn Lane, Plumford Road. The narrow lanes often have a confined

feel, either because they are sunken, or because of the seasonal growth of verges (which are often valuable wildlife habitats). Many traditional buildings reflect local building materials, such as St James' Church at Bicknor built of clunch (hard chalk) dressed with flints. The area contains several isolated churches, for example Stalisfield, with churchyards offering valuable habitats for wildlife. Traditional houses and farm buildings are often constructed of flint, weatherboard or red or grey brick, often with small white-framed casement windows and long clay-tiled roofs known as 'cat slide roofs'. Settlements are generally small, reflecting the historic lack of settlement in this area. Old Chalk pits and deneholes (underground chalk workings radiating out from a central shaft) dot the landscape. There are localised detracting influences from main roads, including local small industry, leisure use of land, and surrounding settlement, but much of the area feels extraordinarily remote and peaceful, particularly given its proximity to large conurbations. Occasional and sometimes dramatic views north over the industry of the Medway/Swale Estuary add to the sense of detachment, and the contrast heightens the rural feel of the Mid Kent Downs.

- 3.1.4 Within the broad pattern of fields and woodland there are pockets of other land uses, such as orchards (particularly in the north and east of the area), estate parklands. Local variation in landscape character is reflected in the five Local Character Areas. There are seasonal and annual variations in crops which create changing colours, textures and patterns in the landscape. These can sometimes be quite dramatic, for example the bright yellow of oil seed rape.



*Sheep graze in historic cherry orchard near Stockbury, with distant views of the Medway/ Swale Estuary beyond*



*Chalk caves at Fisher Street (photo Pippa Palmar)*



*Inside a denehole, Badlesmere (Pippa Palmar)*



## 3.2 Local Character Areas

### Nashenden Valley

- 3.2.1 This Local Character Area is located to the west of Walderslade, between the M2 and the top of the eastern scarp of the Medway Valley. The main body of the area comprises a gently-sloping plateau containing a series of tiny, steep valleys which run north-east into the Nashenden Valley. The M2 motorway, which cuts along the north side of the valley, forms the boundary between the AONB and Rochester. Together with the adjacent HS1 railway line, it has some influence on the landscape, but this influence is lessened to the south. This is an open, sweeping landscape of large fields and large blocks of dense, deciduous woodland. Much of the woodland is ancient, although some has been replanted, and there are some small pastures and clearings along wooded edges. In recent years the area has seen extensive grassland restoration through arable reversion. The dominant landform and continuity of woodland create a strong sense of place. From the top of the ridge at the western edge of the area there are long views over the Medway Valley.
- 3.2.2 Despite the proximity of the motorway and Rochester, this area still retains a strong rural character. Nevertheless, the long views within the valley make it vulnerable to development as there are few hedges or shaws to provide screening. The lack of roads within this area make it particularly inaccessible except on foot or cycle/ horseback.



*A typical scene within the Nashenden Valley Local Character Area, showing large fields framed by blocks of deciduous woodland.*

### **Bredhurst (formerly known as Chatham Outskirts)**

- 3.2.3 This landscape is a mosaic of deciduous woodland (much of it ancient), large arable plateaux and steep, rolling valleys. There are also pockets of grassland (including Queen Down Warren Nature Reserve) and some surviving orchards including distinctive old cherry orchards, although many have been lost in recent years. Much of the arable plateaux are intensively farmed, with few hedges, and visually contained in the distance by belts of woodland. Traditionally woodland has been located on ridges. Roadside hedgerow species include blackthorn, field maple, hawthorn, hazel, holly and sycamore, but some field boundary hedgerows have been lost and replaced with fences.
- 3.2.4 The influence of the urban edge is stronger in this part of the Mid Kent Downs than elsewhere, but its influence is still localised, and much of the Bredhurst Local Character Area is of high landscape quality. Examples of localised issues include dereliction, dumping, security fencing, urbanised road frontages and boundary treatments and horse pastures divided by white tape and electric fencing. Small-scale industry, pylons and low-level motorway noise also have localised effects. The historic airfield at Detling is now an industrial estate, and the Kent County Showground is close by. Large-scale agricultural buildings are visible in the landscape in some areas.
- 3.2.5 Woodlands perform an important function in screening urban edges, and provide a buffer between the M2 and adjacent built-up-area. Other sections of the motorway are unscreened. In sharp contrast to the motorway, a network of steep and narrow lanes connects the farms and villages within the AONB. Other historic features include ancient trackways, Medieval castles at Binbury and Stockbury, and several deneholes dug to extract chalk. There are some distinctive vernacular buildings, particularly in villages. Yellow stock brick, red brick, flint, Kent brick tiles and weatherboarding are characteristic building materials, and traditional buildings add to the sense of place.



*A typical view in the Bredhurst Local Character Area, looking towards the ancient woodland of Bredhurst Hurst*

## Bicknor

- 3.2.6 The large-scale landscape has a pattern of wide, arable fields contained by dense belts of woodland, which run along the upper slopes of the dry valleys. Ancient woodland is a characteristic feature, although it varies from broadleaf to plantation to chestnut coppice. There are occasional pockets of chalk grassland, such as around the Hucking estate. A network of small, often sunken, single-track lanes connects tiny, scattered villages, giving a timeless, settled feel to the landscape. Hedgerows (often rich in hazel) follow the lanes. Tile-hung oast-houses are a common feature and there are a number of fine examples of historic parkland. There are pockets of orchards, particularly significant around Bicknor, where apple and cherry orchards grow within a distinctive grid pattern of shelterbelts and create a strong sense of place. Orchards and occasional hop gardens along the northern edge of the area mark the gradual transition from the Downs to the fruit belt.
- 3.2.7 This is a coherent, sparsely-settled area with arable farmland and woodland which reflect the chalk and clay soils of the plateau. Urban fringe influences are less here than in the Bredhurst Local Character Area. Villages are small, but often contain fine flint churches and historic buildings displaying vernacular features such as brickwork in Flemish bond with dark headers. Dry valleys are a particular feature of the landform. Views from the plateau are often restricted by topography or woodland, but glimpsed views out do occur, including long views across to the Medway/Swale Estuary.



*A typical view in the Bicknor Local Character Area, looking north from the Hucking Estate towards the Medway/Swale Estuary.*



## Faversham Fruit Belt

- 3.2.8 The character of the fruit belt is strongly evident along the northern edge of the Downs in this area. There are some remnant hop gardens and many orchards here (mostly modern, but some traditional), sheltered from the wind by lines of tall, regular alder or poplar trees, which create an unusual and highly distinctive landscape of small, square, outdoor ‘rooms’. It is these distinctive landscapes that, in part, give Kent its reputation as the ‘Garden of England’. In contrast, the intensively cultivated arable fields which surround the orchards are rolling and open, with few hedges and only infrequent blocks of woodland. Much of the area was part of an open field system which never has been enclosed, so there has not been loss of hedgerows. There are some surviving examples of ‘hopper huts’ where seasonal workers lived whilst hop picking. Many of these workers were families from the East End of London, who came to Kent for a ‘hop picking holiday’.
- 3.2.9 Seasonal changes are particularly apparent in the orchard landscapes, with spring blossom and the autumn fruiting especially noticeable in the ‘traditional’ crops such as hops, cherries, apples, pears and plums. The distinguishing features of the orchards, shelterbelts and large farmsteads are relatively recent additions to the landscape. Although settlement patterns and highways are historic in location (including some roads and tracks that would have originated as drovers’ roads), there is not a particularly strong sense of time-depth to the landscape, and this is enhanced by the fact that orchard landscapes change on a regular basis depending on the crops planted. For example, over several years, a compartment may contain apple trees, then polytunnels for soft fruit, then apples again. An exception is traditional orchards, where widely-spaced trees reach maturity and are under grazed by sheep. However, traditional orchards are now relatively rare and are facing new diseases as well as an uncertain economic future.



*A typical view in the Faversham Fruit Belt Local Character Area, with piles of apple boxes, and apple and pear trees divided by shelterbelts into a series of compartments.*



## Challock

- 3.2.10 To the east of Doddington, the open arable plateaux take on an increasingly important role in shaping the character of the landscape. Many of the fields have no clear boundaries between them, forming instead great sweeps of cultivation, through which the tiny lanes pass almost unnoticed. This sense of exposure, however, produces an airy, invigorating landscape. Topography and woodland limit views beyond the area except from the highest points, which are often panoramic. In the south-east, the huge expanse of Challock Forest, still managed largely as coppice, blankets the slopes above the Stour Valley.
- 3.2.11 In the north of the Local Character Area, the acidic sand and gravel deposits of the Thanet Beds have given rise to the steep, heathy pine and bracken-clad slopes of Perry Wood, which stands out from the gently undulating farmland and contains a significant iron-age earthwork. Perry Wood is a local landmark with fine views and provides a sense of orientation in the surrounding countryside. It has been used for centuries as an observation post, and was part of a shutter semaphore line which could relay messages from London to Deal within minutes.
- 3.2.12 Between Challock and Perrywood there is a distinctive and contrasting pattern of trimmed hedged and hedgerow trees, interspersed by small orchards. This area can be described as traditional Kentish countryside, with a rolling landscape enclosed by an abundance of orchards and associated shelterbelts, and scattered traditional buildings. It has a strong, rectilinear character formed by a mosaic of orchards framed by shelterbelts, mixed hedgerows and beech hedges close to existing settlements. Vernacular buildings contain local details such as patterned flint and brick, and several settlements contain village greens. The area remains well wooded, and there are also pockets of historic parkland and avenues of trees associated with country estates. As in other parts of the Kent Downs, vineyards are becoming an important part of the landscape.



*A typical view in the Challock Local Character Area, showing Perrywood on the horizon, and a mosaic of fields, woodland, orchards and vineyards.*





*A typical example of a narrow dry valley (near Hucking) with valley-side woodland, and valley-floor grassland.*



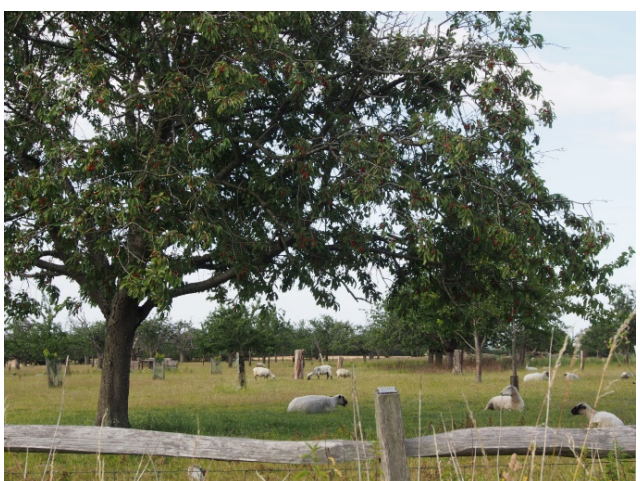
*A typical plateau scene (near Wormshill), with arable fields and undulating topography. Woodland blocks are visible on the horizon.*



*Managed coppice woodland, King's Wood near Challock*



*Surviving 'hopper huts' (now part of a private residence) near Selling.*



*Sheep graze in a traditional cherry orchard (now a community orchard) near Stockbury*



*Perrywood has a history of occupation from prehistoric times, and is a prominent local landmark with excellent views. (See also view on previous page)*



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

- 3.3.1 This is a relatively large Landscape Character Area, with a number of different influences and variations within it. It is therefore not surprising that the condition of the landscape varies across the Landscape Character Area. This variation was noted in the 1995 and 2004 Assessments, as well as more recent landscape assessments by Local Authorities. The Assessments note that in general, landscape condition is poorer in the west of the Mid Kent Downs (due to the influence of nearby urban areas and associated traffic, fly tipping, horse grazing, small-scale industry, etc.) and in the north (due to the decline in orchards). This pattern is still broadly true today, although the negative influences are localised, and the landscape character and sense of place remain strong throughout the entire Landscape Character Area.
- 3.3.2 Since 1995 there have been a number of positive landscape management initiatives in the Mid Kent Downs, including community orchard projects; reversion of arable land to grassland; grassland and woodland creation at White Horse Wood Country Park; Woodland Trust management at the Hucking Estate; active coppicing at Kings Wood, and improved accessibility and interpretation at the viewpoint at Perrywood. It is unlikely that there has been any further loss of hedgerows or shaws since 1995, but there has been some ploughing of land previously used as pasture. There has also been extensive replacement of modern orchards with arable, particularly around Bicknor. The number of hop gardens has declined (they are described as ‘frequent’ in the 1995 Assessment) and orchards are also declining although replanting is now more active. Vineyards are becoming more common, continuing to provide regular patterns of poles and trellises in the landscape, albeit with coloured tree-guards temporarily creating an impact. In orchard areas, the landscape is so directly related to its land use that the area is particularly sensitive to changes in farming practice. There are pockets of often poorly managed equestrian land use (especially around settlements) but the rate of increase appears to have slowed in recent years. Wood lotting has been and to some extent continues to be an often-detracting feature of the mid Kent Downs woodland ownership structure. this can make management of woodlands as a whole difficult and has made the inclusion of woodlands in grant schemes difficult.
- 3.3.3 Incremental changes are taking place in terms of development and infrastructure such as pylons, and larger farm buildings (including fruit stores). Some recent smaller-scale building fits into the landscape fairly well, but there are some examples of poorly-sited developments, new ribbon development and large suburban-style gates and boundary treatments which look particularly out of place. Historically, this area has not been densely settled, so villages are small in size and well-spaced. Development on the plateaux is particularly noticeable because the elevation increases visibility, and because, traditionally, settlements have been in more sheltered locations. Development outside the AONB also impacts on views from within it.
- 3.3.4 The following photos show a Mid-Kent Downs scene near Stockbury in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below). In the intervening 22 years, the hedgerow planting along the A249 has matured, as has the orchard on the far valley side. There is new infrastructure on the valley side, which has replaced the farm storage on the valley floor. Several fields which were under grass in 1995 are now ploughed, currently growing maize, and there appear to be some new/ replanted hedgerows in the upper valley. As the Landscape Character Assessment is being updated, substantial proposals to change J5 of the M2 could have major detracting impacts on this area.



*Mid-Kent Downs scene near Stockbury in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below).*

<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i></b>
Development	<p>There is considerable development pressure within and around the AONB (including a large proposed substantial development on open land within the AONB and junction 5 modifications on the M2. The Kent County Showground contains several large permanent buildings, as well as temporary structures such as marquees, but these are fairly well-contained visually by landform and vegetation. There are occasional examples of buildings on plateau areas, which appear particularly prominent, and an increasing trend for larger agricultural buildings. Vertical features such as pylons, poles and masts are noticeable, especially in plateau areas, where they appear against the skyline. Occasional new ribbon development, incongruous property boundary treatments, particularly ostentatious gates and gateways are noticeable and at odds with the built character of the landscape. There is considerable development pressure in the setting of the AONB (particularly around existing settlements to the north, and along road corridors). Should development occur its likely to impact on views from within the AONB. Examples of sensitive setting areas on the periphery of settlements include the prominent ridgeline to the north of the M2 at Nashenden scarp, and the Capstone Valley north-west of Bredhurst.</p>



<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i></b>
Urban-fringe influences	These tend to occur around larger settlements and along road corridors, and include increased traffic speed and frequency; fly tipping (including illegal dumping of trade waste); occasional industrial land uses; informal signage and hoardings; the presence of motorway and main roads; security fencing and poor-quality equine management. The combined effect is that parts of the landscape appear less cared-about. Urban fringe influences are particularly noticeable on open plateau areas in the western part of the area near urban areas and around settlements.
Access and transport	There are a variety of transport-related issues within the area. Motorways and main roads have localised visual, noise and light pollution impacts, especially on the peripheries of the area. These may be increased by future road infrastructure projects such as improvements to M2 J7 at Brenley Corner and substantial changes to M2 J5. The new Lower Thames Crossing is likely to put increased pressure on local roads. Management of highways corridors is also a concern, including poor management of verges and hedges, which leads to reduced biodiversity and loss of character. Increasing traffic volumes and speeds are a concern throughout the Mid Kent Downs, but particularly in the west and closest to large settlements. There is also pressure to widen lanes to accommodate larger and faster vehicles, resulting in loss of character. Cold store and fruit-packing developments can exacerbate traffic issues on narrow lanes. Off-road vehicles can create localised problems in fields and on the public rights of way network, and in some areas a lack of bridleways means that horses must be ridden on roads.
Woodland and trees	<p>Secondary woodland is continuing to emerge following widespread loss of woodland and trees in the 1987 storm. Woodland condition is variable within this Landscape Character Area. Some woodlands are in poor condition due to lack of management and decline in coppicing. Elsewhere, woodland is in active management. Extensive areas of new woodland have been planted, especially around the Hucking Estate. Ash Dieback is having an impact across the LCA and other tree disease is a concern particularly in coppice monocultures.</p> <p>Trees outside woodland are important but occasional parts of the landscape, hedgerow trees are often ash and are often impacted by Ash Dieback.</p>

<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i></b>
Farming and land management	<p>20<sup>th</sup> Century intensification of farming has led to ploughing of grassland, the loss of hedgerows, shaws and in-field trees in some areas, and the fragmentation of grassland and woodland habitats. However, whilst there have been recent further losses of permanent grassland in recent years, there have also been some grassland restoration projects, such as Nashenden Farm Reserve.</p> <p>The decline in soft fruit, orchards and hop gardens (especially in the east and north) can result in loss of landscape structure, particularly where shelter belts are lost. Recent years have seen an increase in new land uses, particularly vineyards and polytunnels, which change the pattern, texture and colour of the landscape. Poorly located or screened large farm buildings can be detractors in otherwise open landscapes. Some new horticultural practices no longer rely on the local soils, removing the link between produce and soil type. Viticulture is likely to continue to expand in the future, given the soil conditions and warming temperatures associated with climate change. Agricultural intensification and land-use change also impacts on wider ecosystems, for example through soil loss, impacts of pesticides and herbicides on species diversity, and the nutrient-enrichment of groundwater and watercourses.</p> <p>The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape.</p>
Recreation	<p>Use of land for horse-pasturing is noticeable in some parts of the area, especially around settlements. There are wide variations in how well it's done, with white tape and electric fencing, subdivision of pastures, new lighting and buildings particularly noticeable. Some orchards are being damaged through use as horse pasture, and ménages with artificial surfacing and flood lights appear particularly out of place, as well as contributing to light pollution. Recreation in woodlands can be damaging, particularly activities such as quad biking, mountain biking (for instance at Perry Wood) paintballing, etc.</p>
Climate change and tree disease	<p>Climate change brings a risk of increased drought during hot spells, but also increased risk of surface-water flooding during intense storms. These impacts on the types of trees and crops which can thrive within the Landscape Character Area. Warmer temperatures provide conditions for pests and diseases to thrive, which may affect crops, orchards and woodlands. Ash Dieback is a particular concern at the moment, with an increasingly dramatic impact on woodlands and hedgerow trees throughout the Landscape Character Area.</p>
Water resources	<p>The aquifers within the chalk are a vital resource for water supply. They are threatened by over-abstraction, and pollution from agricultural run-off. As well as impacting on water supplies, changes to aquifers affect water flows in rivers and springs (which may be outside this Landscape Character Area) and also water quality, which in turn affects the health of river ecosystems. Loss of surface water features such as dew ponds is a further concern.</p>





*Arable crops in a compartment formerly occupied by an orchard, near Selling*



*The M2 and HS1 pass close to Nashenden Down Nature Reserve*



*Fly tipping is not an uncommon sight, particularly in the western part of the area*



*Damage to orchard trees caused by grazing ponies*



*Some forms of recreation can damage woodlands and other sensitive habitats.*



*Vineyards are replacing arable crops and orchards in some parts of the Mid Kent Downs. The arable fields in this picture were grassland in the 1980s.*

### 3.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

#### **Aspirational Landscape Strategy**

The landscape is in good condition across the entire Character Area, including in the vicinity of larger settlements and road corridors. Communities from settlements north of the M2 are engaged with the AONB and encouraged to visit. The area retains its traditional rural character and sense of peacefulness, despite its proximity to urban areas. Local communities are thriving and there is a network of well-served villages. Any new development respects the special character and qualities of the area, and is of a scale, form and character which enhances its rural feel and traditional settlement patterns. This includes built development, but also associated roads and boundary treatments. The open skylines, particularly in plateau areas and along scarp tops, are particularly sensitive and treated accordingly.

Woodlands and trees (large and small) are well managed, and connected by a network of hedgerows and shaws. Woodland trees are diverse, and include oak, beech, yew and coppiced chestnut. The landscape mosaic includes areas of arable land, grassland, woodland, orchards and parkland, with the balance of the mosaic reflecting local variations in landscape character. Agricultural land is well managed, and offers integrated corridors for wildlife. Watercourses and aquifers are in good health. Where farm diversification occurs, it takes place within the existing landscape framework of hedges, woodlands and shelter belts.

#### **Protect**

- Protect the remote, rural quality of the landscape which typifies the Mid Kent Downs, for example through retaining the traditional, quiet narrow lanes, and the small-scale nature of settlement.
- Protect undeveloped skylines, particularly in plateau areas, and along the top of the scarp above Hollingbourne Vale.
- Protect historic buildings and structures and their settings, and seek alternative uses for redundant traditional farm buildings.

#### **Manage**

- Manage farmland with a 'catchment wide' approach to land uses, encouraging local production of food, but without detriment to water supplies or the wider environment. Where land use change is taking place (for example establishment of vineyards) refer to best practice guidance to facilitate integration into the landscape.
- Manage surviving hedgerows, hedgerow trees and shaws, retaining them as features within the landscape. Encourage planting of new hedgerows and shaws, linking them with woodland to create wildlife habitats and corridors. Standard trees in hedgerows should be encouraged, with ash standards affected by Ash Dieback replaced with appropriately chosen native species as necessary.
- Manage woodland to promote age and species diversity, particularly where trees have been lost to Ash Dieback. Encourage planting of locally-distinctive species within the woodland mix where appropriate, such as beech and yew within the Bredhurst Local Character Area. When conifer plantations reach maturity, encourage replanting/ reversion to a diverse and resilient deciduous woodland, especially at woodland margins. Continue to keep coppice sites in active management, and actively seek new/ alternative uses for products. Work with managers of woodland recreation sites to minimise or remove damage from quad bikes, paintballing etc. Encourage the sustainable, coherent management of woodlands where there has been a history of lotting. Restore woodland on ridges, which is particularly apparent in the Bredhurst Local Character Area, and conserve the distinctive small pastures/ clearings along wooded edges in the Nashenden Valley.



- Manage grassland sites through appropriate cutting and/ or grazing, encouraging reversion of arable land to species-rich grassland where appropriate. Promote wildlife corridors through arable areas, for example using field margins to connect grassland sites and the re-establishment of in field trees. Promote new hedgerows/ roadside trees from existing hedge stock.
- Encourage the retention of existing 'compartment' shelter-belts from orchards and hop gardens and their incorporation into future-appropriate land uses in order to retain the landscape structure and character.
- Manage historic parkland, making sure that parkland management plans are in place, and that specimen trees and avenues are replaced or re-planted if necessary to ensure their continued presence in the landscape.
- Manage trees and verges along road corridors, removing hoardings, informal signing and other detractors, encouraging appropriate screening and other mitigation measures. Use cutting techniques and timing to maximise verges' biodiversity value, and to create healthy, robust hedges, whilst still considering the safety of pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.
- Promote and encourage the adoption of best practice equine land management guidance and restrain further development.
- Manage recreational routes to minimise conflicts between off-road vehicles and legitimate users.

#### Plan

- The size, scale, location of new development must fit with landscape character and with existing settlement patterns. Avoid development in prominent locations, particularly on plateau-tops and further ribbon development. Use carefully-designed planting to help integrate new development into its landscape surroundings, and to provide recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat.
- New development should consider any impact on the setting of historic buildings and settlements.
- Encourage and, where covered by planning control, enforce sympathetic boundary treatments to residential properties, particularly avoiding large suburban-style gates and gateways. Simple, rural boundary treatments should be promoted.
- Work with communities to the north of the M2, promoting awareness of the AONB, and creating a positive and inclusive relationship. Encourage schools and other community groups to engage with and visit the AONB.
- Explore opportunities to retain and enhance local community facilities such as pubs, schools and shops to support rural communities and reduce the need for car travel. Ensure that communities within the area are not 'left behind' when compared to those outside it.
- Explore opportunities to extend, connect and enhance the Public Rights of Way network, particularly in areas where it is currently sparse, and where there are opportunities to provide connections from adjacent settlements into the countryside.
- Work with water companies and farmers to minimise water abstraction and pollution from agricultural chemicals.
- Work with highways authorities to minimise the impacts of road projects on views, and mitigate current impacts to landscape character, tranquillity and light pollution levels. Look at opportunities to reduce traffic volumes on rural lanes (for example discouraging use by non-local traffic).
- 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.

- Within the setting of the Landscape Character Area, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape integration, and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for any lost qualities.
- Consider addressing future climate change through significant new woodland planting on plateaux and ridge tops informed by landscape character and qualities.