

5.0 Kemsing Scarp and Vale

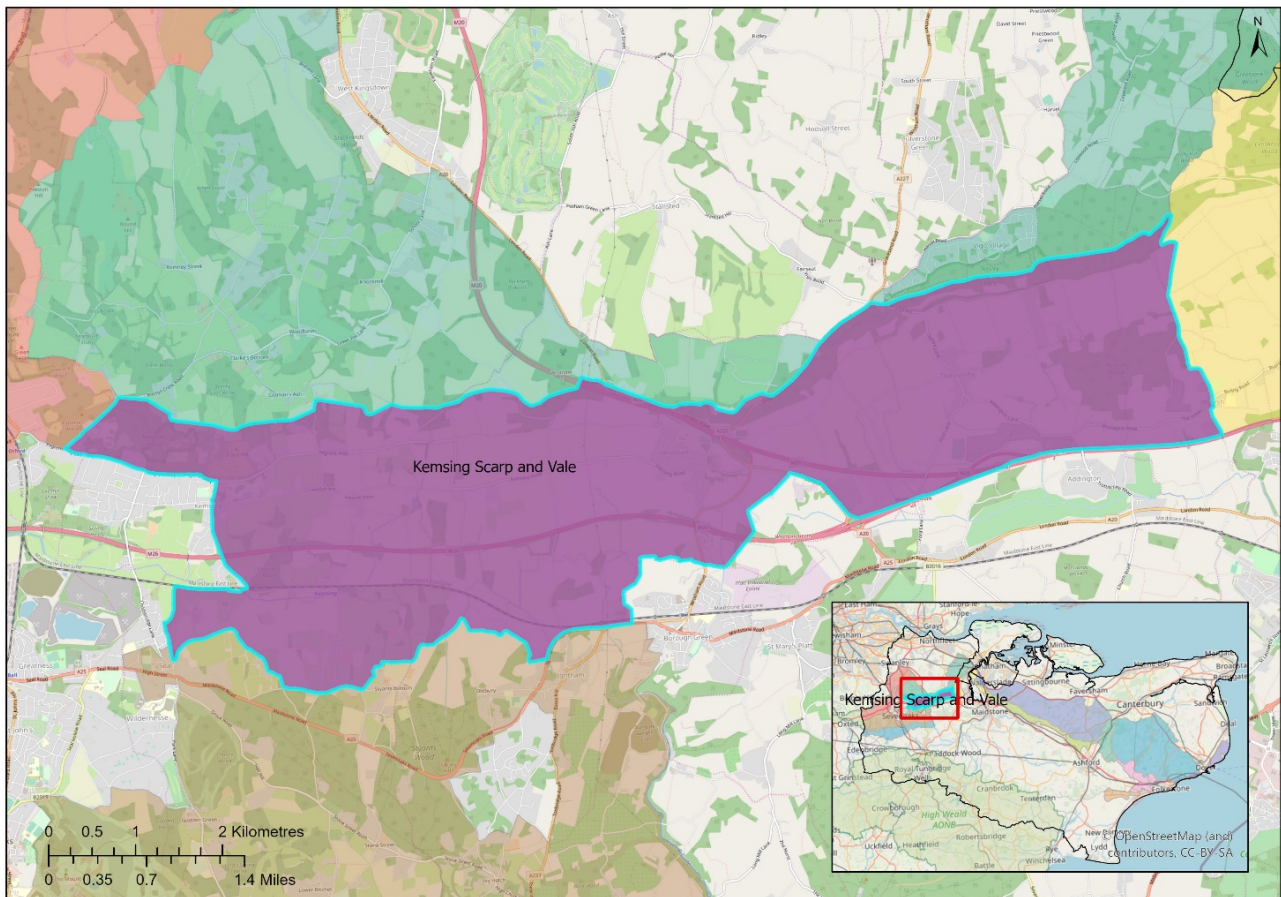
Landscape Character Area 2A

Landscape Character Type 2: Chalk Scarps and Vales

Districts/ Boroughs: Sevenoaks; Tonbridge and Malling

Landscape/Countryside Partnerships: Darent Valley Landscape Partnership, Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and West Kent Countryside Partnership

Location and Context: This LCA is located towards the west of the Kent Downs AONB, in the valley between the West Kent Downs LCA, and the Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge LCA. It extends from Kemsing in the west to Ryarsh in the east, and includes the villages of Wrotham and Trottiscliffe.



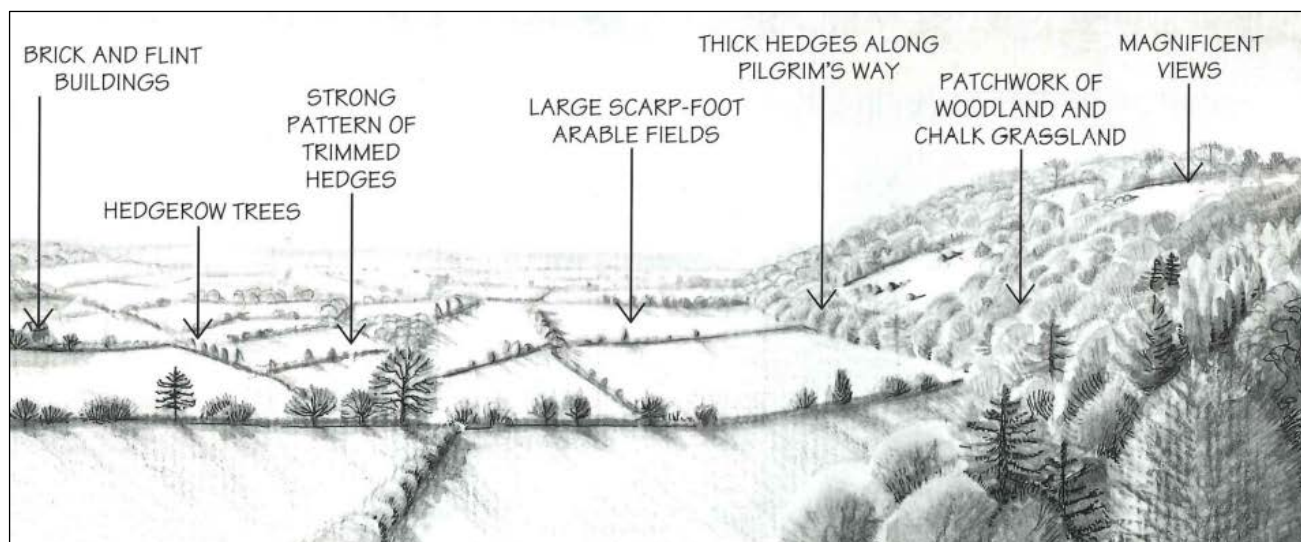
Location map for Kemsing Scarp and Vale LCA



A typical view in Kemsing Vale. A narrow lane (the route of the Pilgrims' Way) runs along the foot of the scarp, and marks the boundary between the rough-textured woodland and grassland of the chalk scarp, and the open, regular fields on the fertile ground at the scarp foot. A mature ash tree overhangs the lane.

Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Cretaceous chalk on the scarp, and mudstone in the vale. Head deposits of clay, sand and gravel on the valley floor include alluvial deposits and material derived from chalk weathering.
- Landform comprises a steep south-facing chalk scarp rising to 235m and running broadly east-west, with a gently undulating vale to the south.
- Springs, pools and streams in vale. Central watershed, with streams in the west flowing into the Darent, and in the east into the Medway.
- Woodland blocks and shaws on scarp, including ancient yew woodland, secondary woodland, and scrub. Wet woodland in vale, and linear planting associated with transport corridor.
- Land use predominantly arable in vale, and grassland/ woodland on scarp. Large regular fields at base of scarp, becoming more irregular in valley floor, and more open on the scarp.
- Extensive and valuable chalk grassland and ancient woodland semi-natural habitats. Also patches of scrub, parkland and wet woodland.
- A long-settled landscape, with prehistoric features including barrows and trackways. Later estates comprising large houses in parkland grounds (some with distinctive estate buildings) have a strong influence on the landscape.
- Historic settlement comprises large houses/ farms at base of slope, and a line of springline villages, generally nucleated in form and containing many historic buildings.
- Historic pattern of roads/ tracks running east-west along base and top of scarp, and occasional roads crossing the vale north-south. East-West motorway and rail corridor superimposed on older landscape.
- Contrasting textures and patterns between the irregular outlines of woodland and grassland on the scarp, and the hedged fields of the vale. Seasonal changes in colour, particularly in woodlands.
- Lanes, tracks and remote historic villages and houses have a strong sense of tranquillity, despite the nearby transport corridors.
- Outstanding views southwards from the scarp across the vale and beyond. The scarp forms a distinctive backdrop to views within the vale.



Sketch of the Kemsing Vale and Scarp from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)

5.1 Description

- 5.1.1 The Kemsing Scarp and Vale Landscape Character Area comprises the chalk scarp and scarp-foot vale between the villages of Kemsing in the west and Ryarsh in the east. It includes the villages of Wrotham, Trottiscliffe and Heaversham, and parts of Kemsing and Ryarsh.
- 5.1.2 The character of this area is shaped by the strong, linear features of the chalk scarp and scarp foot, and by the open patchwork of the vale below. The chalk scarp visually dominates the area, but there are also views along the vale, and across to the Greensand Ridge to the south. Historic routes are now followed by the North Downs Way and the Pilgrims' Way. The Wealdway crosses the Vale running north-south.
- 5.1.3 The scarp in this area is steep and narrow, with an almost continuous blanket of woodland along the top. These woodlands are dominated by beech, yew and whitebeam but ash is also a component. The woodlands are interspersed in places by tracts of rough, unimproved chalk grassland. Following damage in the 1987 storm, younger trees have become established in gaps in the woodland, including ash trees which are now exhibiting ash dieback. Much of the woodland and grassland is of national nature conservation importance (SSSI), supporting a wide variety of scarce flora and fauna including orchids and rare butterflies. This pattern of wood, scrub and rough grass gives the slopes a strong 'untamed' and natural quality. Their rough textures, irregular outlines and varied colours contrast with the tidy, square fields of the vale.
- 5.1.4 The large, regularly-shaped and intensively-cultivated arable fields of the fertile scarp foot are surrounded by narrow, trimmed hedges interspersed with hedgerow trees. Along the northern boundary of these fields, the thick overgrown hedges of the Pilgrims' Way stand out, seasonally festooned with swathes of white Old Man's Beard (*Clematis vitalba*).
- 5.1.5 The gault clay of the valley bottom is relatively difficult to access, but supports a patchwork of mixed farmland and a network of ditches, streams and pools. Individual mature trees and woodlands are very important in this low-lying landscape, giving scale and interest to the otherwise flat countryside. Other valley floor land uses include sand extraction (both active and former sites) and small industrial estates. The M20-M26 runs east-west along the valley floor, with the M20 climbing the valley side as it heads north near Wrotham.



Valley floor scene near Kemsing, showing irregular fields, wet pastures & mature vegetation

- 5.1.6 This is a landscape with a long history of occupation, and it contains one of the oldest archaeological sites in the Kent Downs. Coldrum Long Barrow is a Neolithic burial chamber and is the easternmost of the Medway Megalithic Monuments. Today, settlement within Kemsing Scarp and Vale comprises a series of historic spring-line villages. The largest villages are Trottiscliffe and Wrotham, but there are also smaller hamlets and isolated farms such as Trosley Court. There are some notable ragstone buildings – including churches- and distinctive stone walls laid in a diamond pattern which may be associated with the Birling Estate. Buildings are constructed of varied materials, including flint, brick, timber framing, hung tiles and weatherboarding. Most roofs are of clay tiles, and there are also several oast houses and historic farmsteads. Estate houses, set within parkland, are also characteristic of Kemsing Scarp and Vale. They are generally located where the chalk scarp/ Greensand Ridge start to flatten out. The St Clere and Birling Estates are still significant landowners within the Vale, and influence how land is managed.
- 5.1.7 From the top of the Kemsing Scarp there are spectacular views south across the vale to the Greensand Ridge. The elevated slopes have a sense of tranquillity, and the panoramic views and relative height add to the sense of detachment from the settlements and roads below.
- 5.1.8 Landscape character is relatively consistent throughout Kemsing Scarp and Vale, so it has not been divided into Local Character Areas.



The Kemsing Scarp as seen looking north from the Greensand Ridge. The white chalk of the scarp is a feature of views within the vale.



Chalk grassland, Kemsing Down Nature Reserve



Ancient woodland containing beech and yew, Kemsing Down



Coldrum Long Barrow, near Trottiscliffe



Heaverham – one of the historic springline settlements within Kemsing Vale



St Clere, set within gardens and parkland at the foot of the scarp



Contrasting textures and colours between the open, smooth scarp foot fields and the woodland and rough grassland of the scarp

5.2 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 5.2.1 The 1995 Assessment raises a number of issues affecting the Kemsing Scarp and Vale landscape. These include the impact of the M20 and M26 motorways, which break up the sweep of the landscape and the field pattern. Field corners cut off by main roads, motorways, and highways fences, increase the sense of disowned, urban-edge landscape. The impacts of the 1987 storm are also noted, as many trees on the scarp were lost. Other forces for change recorded in 1995 include loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees (threatening the pattern of the landscape and its ability to absorb the motorways) and quarrying. The 2004 Assessment records the Kemsing Vale landscape as being in good condition, but notes some causes for concern, including urban development, transport routes, intensive arable cultivation, parkland becoming indistinct, and vulnerable mature vegetation.
- 5.2.2 Many of these forces for change remain true today. The exceptional visibility of both valley sides and valley bottom in long views mean that any new features, or loss of existing landscape features such as hedgerows or grassland, are visible over a wide area. This includes features which are outside the AONB to the south, and the landscape is therefore vulnerable to development within the setting of the AONB, particularly around motorway corridors and nearby settlements. Polytunnel development in the setting is particularly visible. The landscape of Kemsing Scarp and Vale is also vulnerable to small but incremental changes which may have a large cumulative effect across the area.
- 5.2.3 In the intervening years since the 1995 Assessment was undertaken, the motorway planting has matured, and the scars where the M20 cuts through the chalk have greened-over. The motorways are still apparent in today's landscape, but less so than they were in 1995. It is important to note however that many of the screening trees may be susceptible to disease and/or climate change impacts. The landscape still exhibits a clear landscape pattern and has a strong sense of place. Landscape management projects are in place (particularly on the chalk scarp) such as the 'Old Chalk New Downs' and Darent Valley Landscape Partnership projects to clear scrub and promote and connect chalk grassland.
- 5.2.4 Comparing photos of the view from Kemsing Down from 1995 and 2017 shows the extent of tree growth in the vale, both along transport routes, and along the boundaries of Kemsing Down. There are also some new larger farm buildings on the far valley side, but field patterns appear to be largely unchanged.



The view looking south from Kemsing Down in 1995 (above) and in 2017 (below).

Issue	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Large scale development in the setting of the AONB	There are several proposed developments in the vicinity of the AONB, including a garden village near Borough Green. Such developments could impact on the area's rural character and views, and may also affect habitat links across the valley.
Ad-hoc residential development	There are isolated examples of incongruous development within Kemsing Vale, such as the linear development which extends towards the scarp near Trottiscliffe. Such development should not be seen as a precedent for further similar development. There are also examples of the redevelopment of former farms or small estates into gated residential complexes which sit uncomfortably and alter the character of the area. New housing on village edges can appear stark, so it is important that any new development in villages is well-integrated into the surrounding landscape and enhances the settlement edge.
Industrial influences	There are extensive historic and ongoing sand extraction sites both within and outside the AONB, with further sites proposed. Most are currently fairly well hidden in wider views, but nevertheless can have an impact on landscape character, tranquillity and accessibility. There are also several small industrial

	<p>estates within and outside the AONB which create a more urbanised character, particularly if they are of standard design or poorly screened. The existing solar farm is well-contained visually, but there is potential for any future solar schemes to be more intrusive in views, especially if sited where they can be seen from above.</p>
Motorways and transport infrastructure	<p>The M20, M26 and railway line form linear features in the landscape, which split the valley visually and restrict access. The visibility of motorways is lessening as planting matures and scars mellow, but they are still visible and may become more visible again with the advent of tree disease. In addition, gantries, lighting and vehicle noise are apparent in the landscape, detracting from the tranquillity. Wrotham village is on an 'island' between two motorways. It is likely that new development will focus on motorway corridors, particularly around junctions. Rural lanes are at risk of becoming urbanised and heavily used, especially around junctions with main roads.</p>
Recreation pressures and anti-social behaviour	<p>Visitor pressure (including potential increase in visitors from proposed new residential developments) may impact on fragile habitats and tranquillity. Management of Public Rights of Way is not always good, and there are particular issues with traffic on the Pilgrims' Way which is used by walkers. There is occasional roadside fly-tipping and illegal use of 4x4 vehicles within Kemsing Vale. There is also an issue with fly-grazing.</p>
Loss of chalk scarp habitats	<p>A lack of co-ordinated management of chalk grassland and woodland habitats along with poor economic returns means that they are vulnerable to decline and fragmentation. Scrub growth on chalk grassland sites has increased in recent years following a decline in sheep grazing and lack of grassland management. Woodland is also vulnerable through lack of traditional management, which affects the composition of tree and understorey species. Some native species such as yew are exceptionally slow growing and therefore take a long time to recover after loss.</p>
Intensification of agriculture and changing land uses	<p>Past removal of hedgerows, and lack of management of existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees in arable areas, risks a decline in landscape pattern, and in ecological corridors. Valley floor streams and wetland areas may also be lost. Existing alternative land uses include horse paddocks, polytunnels and game shooting, which affect the character and composition of the landscape if they are not carefully sited and managed. It is also likely that viticulture will expand into this area in coming years, particularly as global warming continues. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape.</p>
Maturity of parkland vegetation	<p>There are many mature parkland and in-field trees within Kemsing Vale, which risk being lost from the landscape through over-maturity, disease or storm damage.</p>
Climate change and natural forces	<p>Climate change is likely to result in longer, hotter summers (potentially affecting beech trees, which are not tolerant to drought) and an increase in the intensity and frequency of storm events, which may also affect trees and woodlands. Tree disease, particularly Ash Dieback, is already affecting woodland and hedgerow trees.</p>



New industrial estate on the edge of the AONB near the M20/ A20 junction



Sand quarry within the AONB south of Trottiscliffe. Motorway planting (and gantries) can be seen beyond.



New gated residential development on a former farm site



Poster warning against fly-grazing



An example of a gappy hedgerow, resulting in loss of the regular landscape pattern



Ash Dieback in scarp woodland

5.3 Landscape Management Recommendations

Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The strong and distinctive pattern of the landscape is protected and enhanced. The mosaic of nationally-rare chalk habitats including grassland and ancient woodland are well managed and connected, and support a diversity of native species.

Historic settlements and farmsteads retain their distinctive character and are within attractive landscape settings. Consideration of development within and outside the AONB takes account of its impacts in views, and there is a wider awareness of the importance of the setting of the AONB. Major roads are integrated into the wider landscape, and their impact is lessened.

Farmland and parkland within the vale is positively managed to enhance the structure of the landscape (for example through hedgerow reinstatement, woodland management and tree planting) and also for its ecological value.

Quiet recreation is encouraged within the landscape. Users of long-distance paths and lanes are safe from speeding traffic, and visitors can continue to enjoy the wildlife and views on the scarp at Trosley Country Park and Kemsing Down Nature Reserve.

Protect

- Protect and enhance the contrasting, undeveloped landscape patterns between the chalk scarp, regular scarp-foot fields and irregular valley-bottom fields.
- Protect skylines, particularly along the top of the scarp and keep ridgelines free from development and other structures.
- Protect the open, large scale of the landscape and views.
- Protect archaeological sites and their settings, and non-designated historic features such as ancient trackways.
- Protect the distinctive character of historic villages and farmsteads, and enhance their landscape settings.
- Protect the rural character of lanes, resisting urbanisation in the form of (for example) hard kerbs, metal fencing, unnecessary signage and other clutter.

Manage

- Actively manage chalk grassland, using appropriate grazing where possible, or cutting to prevent scrub growth. Aim to manage sites on a landscape scale, and reduce fragmentation of habitats.
- Actively manage woodland and shaws, using traditional techniques such as coppicing where appropriate. Promote locally-distinctive woodland species including beech, yew and whitebeam.
- Work with landowners, including estates, to promote good management and reinstatement of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Promote new hedgerow and roadside trees from existing hedge stock. Encourage fallow fields to be used for wildflower habitats, and connect grassland habitats using field margins.
- Support production of parkland management plans and planting of replacement parkland trees so that they can remain a feature of the landscape. Encourage retention of estate features such as driveways, avenues, boundaries, and distinctive estate architecture, and retain/ enhance the settings of estate houses.

- Encourage recreation on sites with appropriate infrastructure, such as Trosley Country Park and Kemsing Down Nature Reserve. Manage vegetation to enable long views to be retained.
- Manage Public Rights of Way, including long distance routes, and provide imaginative interpretation, possibly as part of a wider project relating to the Pilgrims' Way. Discourage large vehicles on narrow lanes which are followed by long distance routes.

Plan

- Investigate opportunities for sustainable chalk grassland restoration, working with delivery partners such as the 'Old Chalk New Downs' project. Also seek opportunities to extend and connect areas of chalk grassland, which may involve clearance of secondary woodland.
- Within the setting of the LCA work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to avoid detracting developments and achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for lost qualities.
- New development should incorporate open space to reduce recreation pressure on the wider landscape, but access between new development and the surrounding countryside should also be provided.
- Continue to reduce the impact of motorways and integrate transport corridors into the landscape through landscape management and woodland, shaw and hedgerow planting, whilst respecting the scale and pattern of the landscape.
- Work with Highways Authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Ensure that any new development on the edges of existing settlements fits with the traditional settlement form and is carefully integrated into the landscape (for example through planting native hedgerows, trees and copses, and creating/ enhancing other characteristic landscape features such as ponds and ditches). It should respect the scale, design and materials of existing buildings, which include red brick, hung tiles, flint, weatherboarding and ragstone. Resist new development which does not conform with the valued character and qualities.
- Encourage the adoption of equine management good practice and contain the extent of pony paddock development to retain a rural, farmed landscape.
- 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 placemaking.
- Use the existing and valued landscape characteristics and qualities to design new tree establishment as part of climate change mitigation