

## 7.0 Postling Scarp and Vale

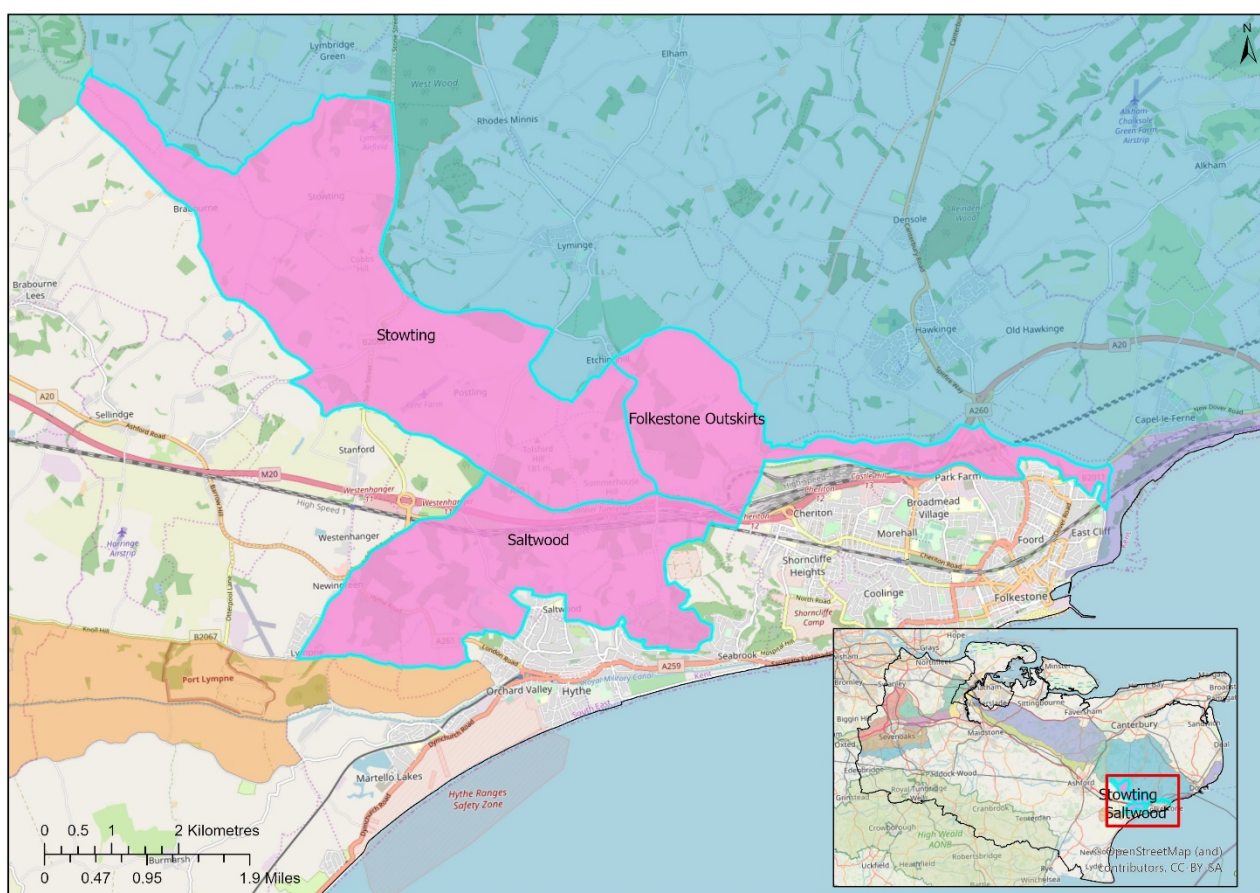
### Landscape Character Area 2C

**Landscape Character Type 2:** Chalk Scarps and Vales

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Ashford; Shepway

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** White Cliffs Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** This LCA is located in the east of the Kent Downs AONB, south of the East Kent Downs LCA, and north of the Lympne Escarpment LCA. It extends from the village of Lympne in the west, to the scarp north of Folkestone in the east. Villages within the LCA include Stowting, Postling and parts of Etchinghill.



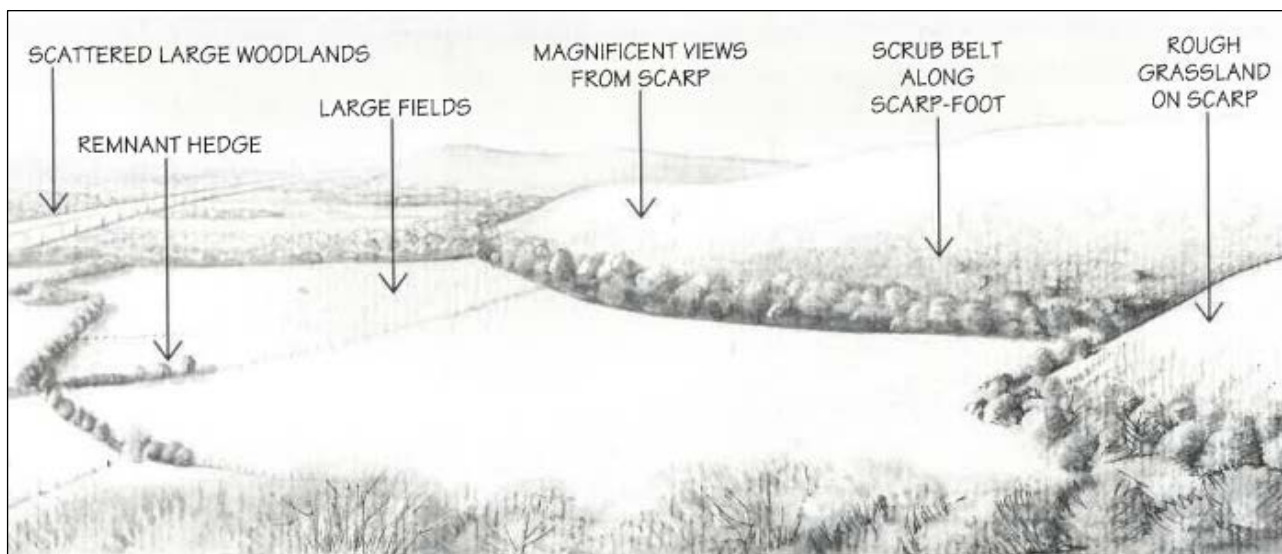
*Location map for Postling Scarp and Vale LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Stowting, Saltwood and Folkestone Outskirts*



*A typical view near Etchinghill, showing steep grassland combes and smooth skylines of the scarp, with lower land of the clay vale in the foreground. In the middle of the photo is Asholt Wood.*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology comprises layers of Cretaceous chalk forming the scarp, with mudstone in the vale, and sandstone in the south around Sandling. Vale has areas of deposited sand, gravel, clay and alluvial material.
- Soils on the chalk scarp are thin and dry. Those in the vale are more fertile and often sticky.
- Landform comprises a strongly-crenellated and steep south-facing scarp, with an undulating landscape to the south. Isolated conical hills are distinctive features. Springs and ponds occur at the base of the scarp.
- Woodland blocks and shaws throughout the vale, and a distinctive band of trees and shrubs at the base of the scarp slope. Large numbers of ash trees.
- Land use predominantly agricultural, with arable and pastoral fields. Also pockets of woodland, parkland, recreation and transport uses.
- Extensive semi-natural habitats including chalk grassland, scrub and woodland.
- Archaeological sites concentrated on scarp and hill tops. Strong estate influences in the south of the LCA.
- LCA is adjacent to urban areas, but within the LCA, settlement limited to scattered farms, and small historic springline villages with a dispersed pattern. Vernacular buildings constructed of red brick, tile, ragstone and flint.
- Network of historic lanes and tracks, with east-west motorway and rail corridor superimposed.
- Contrasting textures between the smooth outlines of the scarp and the wooded farmland at the base. Distinctive landforms of hills add to sense of place.
- Outstanding views from the scarp and hill tops across the patchwork of fields and woodlands in the vale to the south.
- Popular for recreation and walking, with the North Downs Way, Saxon Shore Way and Elham Valley Way crossing the LCA.
- Sense of tranquillity away from large settlements and transport infrastructure.



*Sketch of Postling Scarp and Vale from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)*

## 7.1 Description

- 7.1.1 This LCA comprises the crenellated south-facing chalk scarp between the Stour Valley and Folkestone, and the lower-lying land at its foot. Around Folkestone, the landscape is dominated by major roads and the Channel Tunnel Terminal, situated on the edge of the AONB between north Folkestone and the Downs. Folkestone lies at the most easterly end of the greensand belt, on a narrow tongue of land contained by the Downs in the north, the coast to the south and the flat expanse of Romney Marsh to the south-west. These physical constraints have resulted in a considerable amount of activity and development being confined within a small area, on the very edge of the AONB.
- 7.1.2 These developments are set against the dramatic backdrop of the steep scarp, which supports botanically rich chalk grassland (designated SAC) and creates distinctive landforms of steep slopes, coombes and outlying hills, becoming more gently rounded in the west. A band of trees and scrub follows the base of the scarp for much of its length. The scarp is rich in history, with archaeological sites dating from the Mesolithic period through to WW2, and the more recent Folkestone White Horse a particularly visible feature on the hillside. Tolsford Hill BT tower was constructed in 1957, and its reinforced concrete design means that it is a prominent feature over a wide area.
- 7.1.3 A series of remote coombes in the scarp towards Etchinghill overlook the coppiced ash woodlands of Asholt Wood, one of the best examples of ash *Fraxinus excelsior* coppice in Kent (part of the SAC), although now significantly affected by Ash Dieback. Scrub extends up some of the lower scarp slopes and thick hedges draw attention to the route of the Pilgrims' Way along the scarp foot. At the base of the scarp, springs emerge between the chalk and Gault clay, and feed streams which then cut through the underlying Greensand as they flow towards the coast. Fields below the escarpment tend to be either arable or cattle-grazed, and the landscape is gently undulating, with large fields and substantial blocks of woodland. A series of attractive spring-line villages lie at the foot of the scarp, and give the landscape a settled feel. These villages have strong physical, cultural and perceptual links with the scarp.



- 7.1.4 Further south, around the outskirts of Hythe, this open, large-scale landscape gives way to a more intimate countryside of steep stream valleys, small woodlands and pasture. In the west, around Pedlinge, estate landscapes include tracts of mixed woodland enclosing flat arable fields, which form the edge of a larger area of intensively cultivated farmland, extending beyond the AONB.
- 7.1.5 The landscape contains a network of public rights of way, including ancient trackways along the ridge. Today these are part of the North Downs Way and the Saxon Shore Way, which both run through this Landscape Character Area. The Elham Valley Way, which incorporates part of the old railway line from Folkestone up the Elham Valley, is also within this LCA. There are modern transport links cutting through the LCA (High Speed Rail, motorway and main roads) but also a network of narrow, winding lanes, which over centuries of use have hollowed-out the hillsides where they descend and climb the scarp.
- 7.1.6 A characteristic of this Landscape Character Area is its long, panoramic views. These can be experienced from the scarp, looking over the patchwork patterns of the surrounding vale area, and also looking north towards the dramatic scarp landform. Some of the best views of the eastern part of the scarp can be experienced from within Folkestone, from parks, streets, homes and buildings. One of the best views is from the multi-storey ASDA carpark, and everyday views such as this mean that the scarp is an important component of local identity.



*View from the scarp above Brabourne across Postling Vale towards Lympne*



*The White Horse on the scarp behind houses in Folkestone*

## 7.2 Local Character Areas

- 7.2.1 There are three Local Character Areas within Postling Scarp and Vale. **Folkestone Outskirts** includes the steep scarp and adjacent land which form the backdrop to Folkestone, and are most influenced by the surrounding development. **Saltwood** (to the south of the A20) includes the estate-dominated landscapes and to the east and west of Saltwood, furthest from the scarp. **Stowting** includes the western part of the scarp and adjoining slopes, and is a strongly rural but settled vale landscape with small springline villages at the scarp foot.

### Folkestone Outskirts

- 7.2.2 The downland here is folded into a series of steep, enclosed coombes and prominent hills, dominating the landscape and the outskirts of the town. The extraordinary conical shapes of Sugarloaf Hill and Summerhouse Hill and the skyline earthworks of Castle Hill are key local landmarks. Caesar's Camp on Castle Hill is of particular landscape interest, changing over the years from Bronze Age barrow to Norman Ringwork and Bailey (of which it is an excellent example). Along the scarp slope are a series of exceptional views, and its generally well-managed grassland contains a wide variety of flowers, including rare orchids and insects. Barrows occur along the ridge, and Holywell Combe with its spring was an important Beaker settlement. 20<sup>th</sup> Century archaeology includes a wide v-shaped 'tank trap' which runs along the escarpment from Peene to Dover Hill, and is particularly noticeable at Castle Hill.
- 7.2.3 North of Asholt the scarp is managed by the MoD. Here, it becomes wider, and the landscape is less affected by proximity to urban areas and transport networks. The landscape has a more deeply rural feel, and is easily accessed by the North Downs Way and the Elham Valley Way.
- 7.2.4 The Channel Tunnel Terminal and the M20/A20 motorway extend into the AONB, at the foot of the scarp, and have a major impact on the landscape. Views southwards from the scarp are now dominated by these developments and Folkestone has been severed from the AONB and its villages by the transport corridor. Nevertheless, the scale of the landscape is such that the scarp is still the dominant feature in views.
- 7.2.5 Parts of the landscape are well-wooded, particularly around Asholt Wood at the base of the scarp, but Ash Dieback is a major concern within this LCA, having major landscape impacts in woods, along hedgerows and damaging in-field and roadside trees.



*View of Sugarloaf Hill and Castle Hill from Wingate Hill, above Folkestone.*



## Saltwood

- 7.2.6 Around Saltwood, the landscape takes on a more intimate and enclosed character. There is a significant amount of deciduous woodland, especially along the valley sides, and the small pastures are surrounded by dense hedges and hedgerow trees. There are also occasional orchards. The mixed arable and pastoral landscape is strongly influenced by estate planting, with blocks of deciduous woodland. The historic landscape has some unique elements which contribute to a strong sense of place. For example, Saltwood Castle, with its distinctive towered gatehouse, built in ragstone from former quarries at Hythe, stands in a tiny area of ornamental parkland on the edge of a typical unspoilt valley.
- 7.2.7 These little valleys bring valuable pockets of rural landscape up the very edge of the town. The high, open land above the Sene Valley offers long views across the town and out to sea. To the west of Saltwood, the historic landscape of Sandling Park (a registered historic park and garden) comprises parkland, woodland and agricultural land, as well as estate buildings. Further designed landscape has been incorporated into Brockhill Country Park. The landscape remains well-treed, but is affected by Ash Dieback. There has been some localised loss of field boundaries. .



*View near Saltwood. The towers of Saltwood castle can be seen on the left of the picture, and the lower part of the scarp slope is visible on the right-hand edge. In the distance are the woodlands of Sandling Park.*

## Stowting

- 7.2.8 West of Tolsford Hill and Summerhouse Hill the scarp and adjacent vale form a more open, intensively farmed agricultural landscape, which extends out of the AONB towards Ashford. Large arable fields are surrounded by small shaws or overgrown hedges, or by trimmed remnant hedges. Ecologically-rich grasslands and small woodlands on the scarp combine with open arable fields at the scarp foot to give a moderate ecological value to the area. Although the scarp is largely grassland, there are occasional blocks of deciduous woodland on the top, such as Postling Wood, and Brockman's Bushes on Tolsford Hill. The rounded chalk hills contribute to the sense of place, which is also influenced by characteristic woodland, beech stands and cross-contour roads. These distinctive features draw the eye away from scarp-foot developments such as the motorways, and provide a means of orientation in the landscape. In the west, towards Brabourne, the scarp becomes shallower and some parts of its sweeping curves have been cultivated. Recently, vines have been planted on some lower, south-facing slopes.
- 7.2.9 The landform is a dominant element in the view, and visibility is very high over the open landscape. From the scarp there are magnificent views over the surrounding vale. There is an historic time-depth to the landscape elements and pattern, although field boundaries are becoming less distinct in places. Linear or dispersed villages are nestled at the foot of the scarp; their mellow-coloured houses blending into the landscape, and their distinctive churches forming landmarks. New houses and extensions have generally been integrated successfully and, away from the main transport corridor, the landscape has a timeless feel.



*Stowting village nestles at the foot of the scarp, with its church tower forming a landmark.*

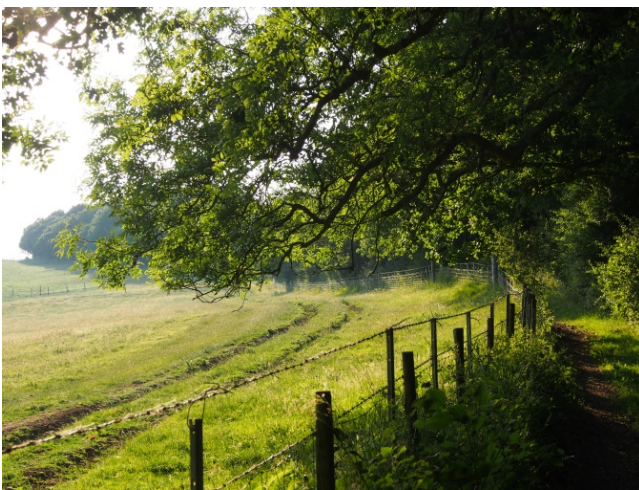




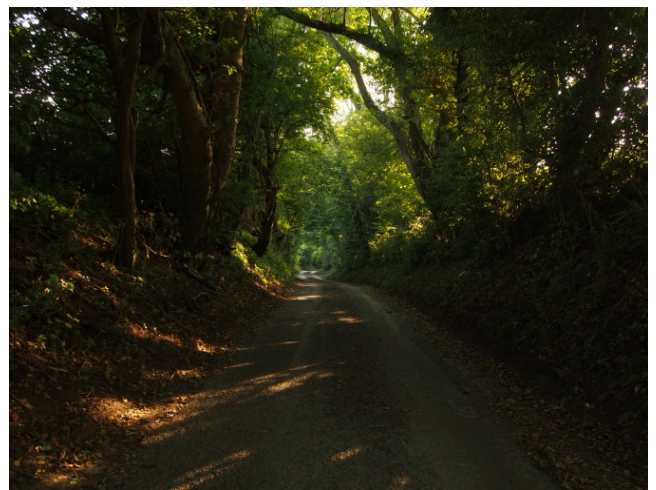
*Orchids, Castle Hill*



*Deciduous woodland in Sandling Park*



*Ridge-top trackway, part of the North Downs Way, above Brabourne*



*Sunken, tree-lined Lane, Stowting*



*Earthworks, Castle Hill*



*Postling village*



## 7.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 7.3.1 The landscape has a coherent pattern of elements with very few detracting features within the AONB. Ecologically-rich grasslands and woodlands contribute to the area's ecological value. Within the past 10 years a positive change has taken place on parts of the scarp around Stowting, Brabourne and Postling, where arable land has been reverted to grassland under Higher Level Stewardship.
- 7.3.2 This LCA is particularly sensitive because of the strong intervisibility between the scarp and the vale below. Views from the scarp mean that development and land management changes taking place below are visible from above. Similarly, any changes affecting the face or skyline of the scarp are visible from below.
- 7.3.3 Parts of this LCA are much more affected by nearby development than others. In the eastern part, around Folkestone, views from the scarp are affected by developments around Folkestone and associated with the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. The transport corridor which contains the railway line and motorway has a localised influence on views from the central part of the LCA. Away from the development areas and transport corridors, the LCA has a setting of fields and farms which feels rural but is not static. Unsurprisingly, the 1995 and 2004 Assessments both note the impacts of the adjacent infrastructure. It appears that the visual impact of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, whilst still dominating, is gradually lessening, as screen planting grows and concrete mells (see 'then and now' photos below). However, the sounds of traffic and night-time impacts from the lighting remain an issue. Light and air pollution, and localised litter/ fly tipping, are also a cause for concern within this LCA.
- 7.3.4 The photos below show a slight increase in the amount of scrub on the scarp slopes, but field patterns and woodland appear unchanged. Also the overhead gantries associated with construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link are no longer visible on the right of the image.



*Chalk scarp and Summerhouse Hill as seen in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below). Note- it is not currently possible to access the exact location of the 1995 viewpoint.*

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</b>
Infrastructure and new development	<p>The landscape is sensitive to the impacts of development and infrastructure within and beyond the AONB boundary. Current proposals within the setting of the AONB and which will be visible from it include Otterpool Park new town. A transport corridor containing High Speed Rail Line, the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, M20 and A20 crosses the LCA east-west. As well as visual impacts on the landscape, the corridor also reduces tranquillity and increases light pollution and air pollution.</p> <p>The Channel Tunnel Rail Link is very visible below the scarp north of Folkestone both day and night. From some viewpoints, the track and gantries are becoming less obvious as screen planting matures, but from other viewpoints (such as Castle Hill) it is very prominent.</p> <p>Pylons and wires run along the face of the scarp near Stowting and Postling, and march across the vale landscape. There are several communications masts in prominent positions on the top of the scarp, with Tolsford Hill the most impactful. Lighting means that these structures are also noticeable at night. The provision of security fencing and corridor management, particularly of HS1, is locally very impactful with little attempt to mitigate through planting.</p>



<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Land Management	<p>In recent decades, ploughing has taken place on shallower scarp slopes (as recorded in the 1995 Assessment) but in the last 10 years there has been some reversion from arable to grassland. A small number of south-facing arable fields within the LCA have recently been replanted with vines. In recent years there has also been an increase in equestrian land uses, which is particularly noticeable in the winter months. Changes in land use affect the appearance and character of the landscape, and are often apparent over a wide area. The management of grassland is variable within the LCA. Some areas are well managed and contain a range of wildflower species. Other areas (such as Creteway Down) are currently undergrazed, with rank grasses and scrub becoming dominant. If this continues, it will result in a much more vegetated scarp slope, and loss of botanically-rich chalk grassland.</p> <p>The 1995 and 2004 Assessments note hedgerow loss in the southern part of the LCA, resulting in a loss of landscape structure and gaps in the habitat network. Hedgerow loss has now largely stopped, and some areas such as Sandling Park have seen planting of hedgerows and successional parkland trees.</p> <p>The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape. At present, a considerable amount of land (including chalk grassland on the scarp) in this LCA is owned and well-managed by the Ministry of Defence.</p> <p>Although estate grounds and parklands appear to be well-managed, estate buildings have been abandoned. It will not be long before they are lost as features within the landscape.</p>
Recreation pressure and anti-social behaviour	<p>The proximity of parts of the LCA to urban areas means that it is vulnerable to anti-social behaviour such as fly tipping and littering. . These reduce the visual quality of the landscape and create an impression that the area is not valued. The presence of a large and growing local population can also put pressure on recreation facilities within the landscape, such as public footpaths, which can result in erosion and damage. Brockhill Country Park is currently a popular recreation resource.</p>
Natural forces and climate change	<p>Ash Dieback is a concern across the LCA and a particular concern at Asholt Wood, an SSSI and one of the best examples of ash coppice, but now with a large proportion of trees affected by Ash Dieback. The disease has affected trees in other woodlands, hedgerows, along lanes and in fields – the replacement of such trees should be seen as a priority.</p> <p>Climate change is likely to lead to hotter drier summers, and warmer, wetter winters. This will affect soil conditions (both drought and flooding) and the types of trees, crops and habitats which can be supported.</p>



*Large-scale arable fields and pylons on the scarp near Stowting*



*Channel Tunnel Rail Terminal as seen from Castle Hill*



*Ungrazed grassland and scrub on Cretaway Down, above Folkestone*



*Asholt Wood, showing evidence of Ash Dieback*



*Newly-planted vines on the scarp foot at Brabourne*



*Abandoned estate lodge, Sandling Park*



## 7.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The landscape and the habitats within it are managed in a co-ordinated way to promote wildlife value and enable access for recreation where appropriate. Infrastructure is a minimal barrier to enjoyment of the countryside and the ability of people and wildlife to move around it. The distinctive landforms and skylines of the scarp remain an integral part of the local landscape, and are appreciated by both residents and visitors.

The built and planted features associated with historic designed landscapes are well managed and looked after. There is good local awareness of the historic features of the landscape.

The impacts of Ash Dieback are minimised through careful woodland management, and through replacement tree planting, to ensure that trees and woodlands remain a key feature of this landscape.

#### Protect

- Protect the open and rural character of the northern part of the LCA.
- Protect skylines, particularly where the scarp forms the backdrop to views.
- Protect archaeological sites, keeping scrub and tree growth to a minimum, and raise awareness of defence heritage.
- Protect sensitive views from the scarp, including those towards the distinctive rounded chalk hills.
- Protect the distinctive local character of built form and seek the use of sympathetic local materials including brick, tile and ragstone, and also flint around Folkstone.

#### Manage

- Maintain open sweeps of species-rich chalk grassland on the scarp, allowing landform to dominate. Manage grassland, aiming for consistently good and co-ordinated management along the scarp, and the connection and expansion of grassland sites. Seek opportunities to extend areas of chalk grassland on scarp slopes, including reversion of arable land to grassland.
- Manage woodland, aiming for a linked network of woodland, shaws and hedgerows, and replace dead ash with alternative species as appropriate. Restore landscape features such as hedgerows and shaws at the scarp foot, and beech stands on the hill tops (around Stowting) which emphasise the bold scale of the surrounding landform.
- Continue to encourage restoration of the small-scale field pattern in Saltwood, using dense hedgerows, and encouraging new areas of woodland.
- Manage the loss of hedgerow and infield trees resulting from Ash Dieback by conducting a programme of replacement and promotion of trees from hedgerows and natural regeneration.
- Manage recreation, aiming to direct visitors away from vulnerable 'honeypot' areas and to disperse recreational pressure, providing high quality, well managed alternatives particularly where new development is planned.
- Work with landowners to retain/ reinstate field boundaries, and to enhance habitat links.
- Manage streams and watercourses to enhance biodiversity and native species, and to promote integrated flood management.

- Manage historic landscapes, including estate buildings and roads. Historic parkland management plans should make detailed recommendations for parkland management and ensuring that the parkland remains a feature of the landscape in the future.
- Involve local people and partnerships in the management and maintenance of landscapes, particularly around urban areas, to foster a sense of care and ownership, and hopefully a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

#### Plan

- Develop a strategic approach for the identification and management of Green Infrastructure corridors, linking habitat networks and encouraging recreational provision.
- Promote access links where the landscape is currently bisected by road and rail infrastructure.
- Improve the settings of existing settlements, particularly around Folkestone, for example through new woodland and shaw planting.
- Work with interest groups (e.g. including Parish Councils, the MOD, local history groups and national organisations such as the National Trust) to develop co-ordinated plans for landscape management and planning purposes, and to raise local awareness of history, archaeology and wildlife.
- 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.
- Work with Local Planning Authorities and transport agencies to reduce and minimise light pollution and other tranquillity impacts from transport and infrastructure.
- Work with Highways Authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Continue to reduce the impact of motorways and integrate transport corridors into the landscape through landscape management and tree/ hedgerow planting.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the LCA. Consider environmental/ landscape impacts of planning and placemaking.
- Use the existing and valued landscape characteristics and qualities to design new tree establishment as part of climate change mitigation