

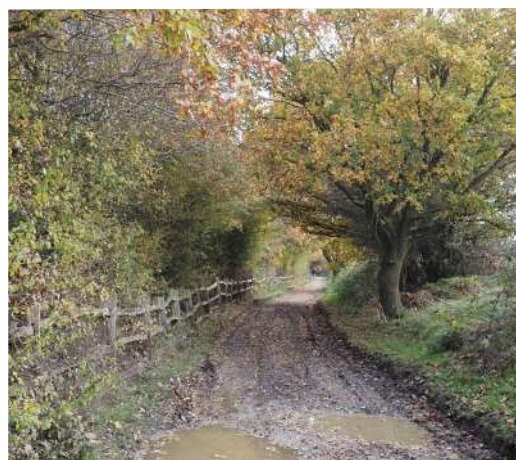


Kent Downs
National
Landscape

Kent Woods and Downs Candidate National Nature Reserve

Landscape Character Assessment For Kent Downs National Landscape

Final Report
May 2024




FIONA FYFE
Associates Ltd.

PART A: Introduction

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List of acronyms used in this document

CAMS	Cobham and Ashenbank Management Scheme
KDNL	Kent Downs National Landscape
LCA	Landscape Character Area
LTC	Lower Thames Crossing
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
NNR	National Nature Reserve
RIGS	Regionally Important Geological Site
RPG	Registered Park and Garden
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
WKDCT	West Kent Downs Countryside Trust

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the representatives of the various landowners and Candidate NNR partners who generously shared their time and local knowledge during site visits in November 2023, and through the consultation workshop in January 2024.

All photos have been taken by Fiona Fyfe unless stated otherwise.

A scenic landscape photograph showing a dirt path leading through a grassy field. A wooden fence runs along the path, and trees with autumn foliage are visible on the left. The sky is clear and blue.

Part A: Introduction

PART A: Introduction

1.0 Background

1.1 Commissioning and Purposes

This Landscape Character Assessment was commissioned Mike Philips of White Horse Ecology on behalf of the Kent Downs AONB in November 2023, and was prepared by Fiona Fyfe Associates between November 2023 and May 2024. Fieldwork was undertaken in November, January and April, to capture the seasonal changes in the landscape.

The brief states the requirement to produce a landscape character assessment for the Proposed National Nature Reserve (NNR) and its environs... The proposed NNR covers a range of current and historic landscapes. As such, there is a need to identify the different components of the landscape and how they interact with the surrounding land uses. The work would also need to complement the existing landscape character assessments for the area carried out by the Kent Downs AONB Unit and/or Kent County Council.

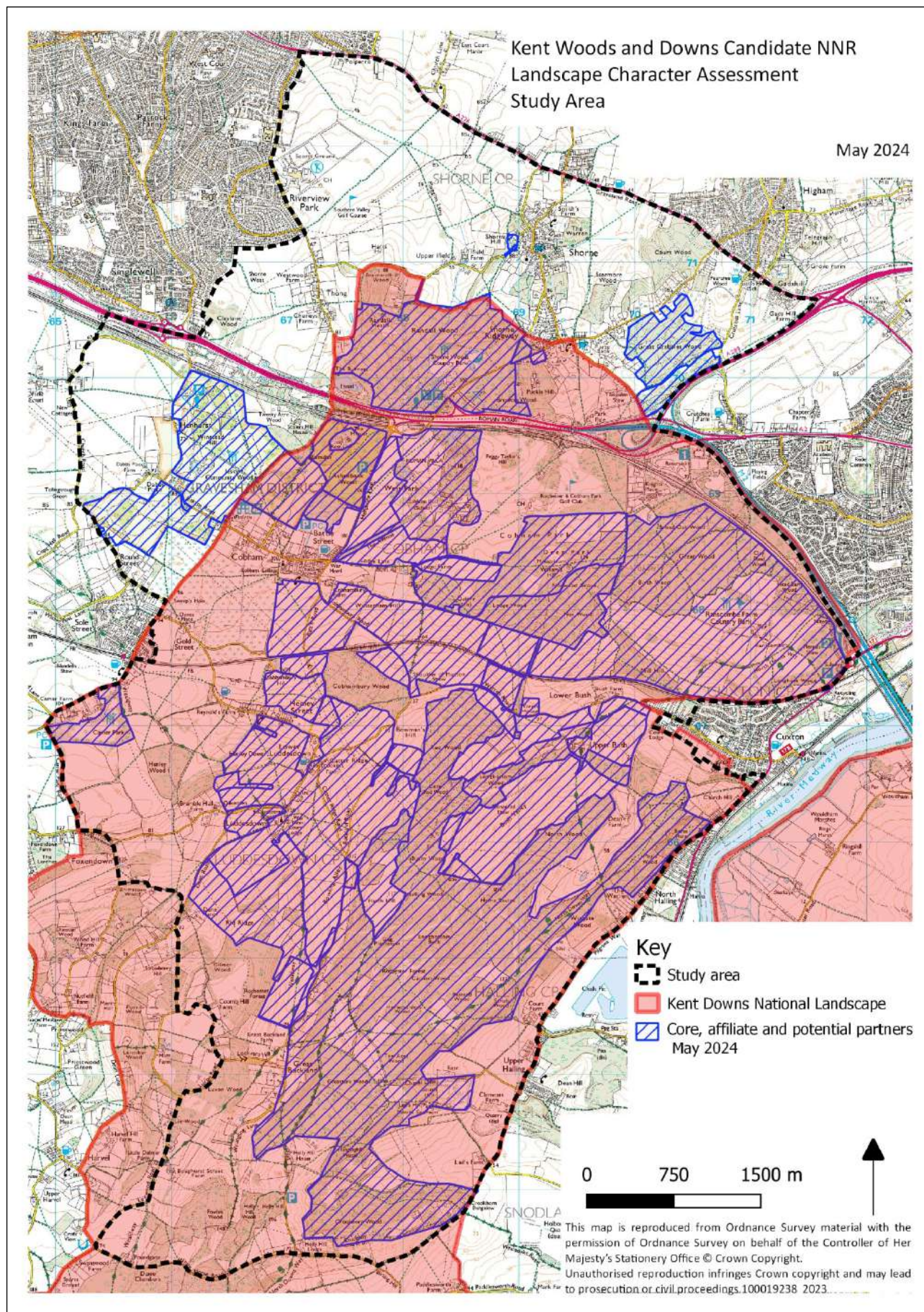
Because the Candidate NNR covers two different local authority areas, and also includes land within and outside the Kent Downs National Landscape, existing Landscape Character Assessments were not felt to provide a consistent level of detail and content across the study area. Some of the Assessments are also several years old and therefore do not reflect recent and ongoing changes within the landscape. This work was therefore commissioned to provide a detailed and up-to-date landscape assessment of the Candidate NNR and its immediate surroundings, in order to inform the future work of the Candidate NNR. The existing assessments have been referenced when producing this work, and each of the Landscape Character Area profiles in Part C contains a cross-reference table.

1.2 Structure of Report

The document is structured in three parts. Part A (Introduction) introduces the concept of landscape character assessment and the methodology employed. Part B (Landscape Story) summarises the landscape history of the study area, and outlines the key natural and cultural heritage designations found within it. Part C (Landscape Character Description) describes the six Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) found within the study area. It includes a map showing the LCAs, followed by a series of profiles which describe each of the LCAs and make recommendations for the future enhancement of their special qualities.

1.3 Study Area

The Candidate NNR is located in North Kent, between (and extending south of) the towns of Gravesend and Strood. It encompasses woodland, downland and farmland, as well as the Settlements of Shorne, Shorne Ridgeway, Thong, Cobham and Luddesdown. The project study area is shown in Map 1. It comprises the areas owned or managed by core, affiliate and potential project partners (as at May 2024), plus a surrounding margin out to the next road/track (or settlement edge). Where project partners' land terminates at a main road/railway or settlement edge, a margin was not included.



Map 1: Study Area

PART A: Introduction

2.0 Introduction to Landscape Character Assessment

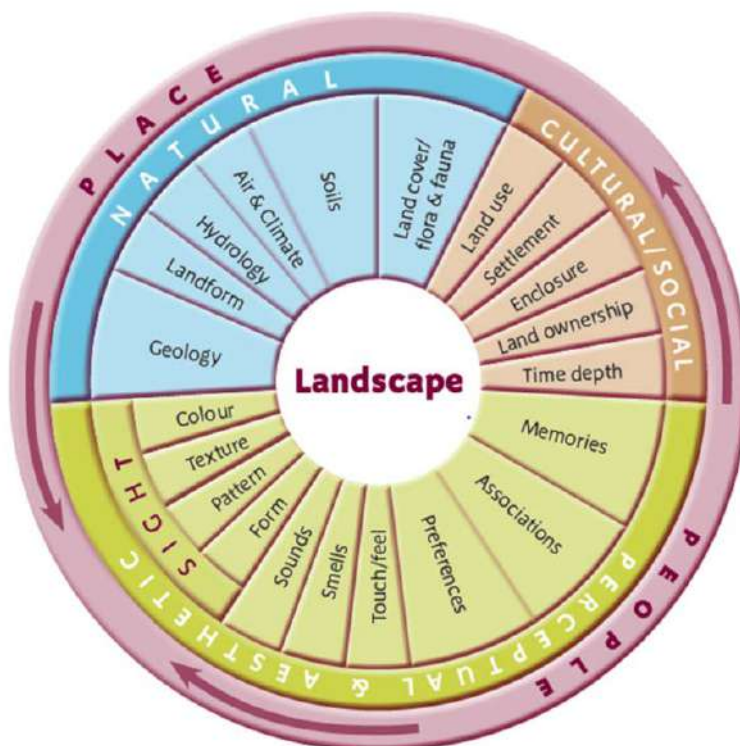
2.1 What is 'Landscape'?

The European Landscape Convention (ratified by the UK in 2007 and not affected by Brexit) defines 'landscape' as:

An area of land, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.¹

An holistic approach to landscape is a key principle of the thinking behind the European Landscape Convention, which acknowledges in its preamble:

- That landscape has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields, and constitutes a resource favourable to economic activity...
- That landscape contributes to the formation of local cultures...
- That the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality.
- That developments... planning... and infrastructure... are in many cases accelerating the transformation of landscapes.
- That the landscape is a key element of individual and social wellbeing and that its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone...
- The following diagram² explains the different elements of landscape which capture its natural, cultural and perceptual qualities. All are considered when undertaking landscape character assessment.



¹ European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe 2000 p.9

² From *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment* (Natural England, 2014 p.9)

2.2 Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape character assessment has been a recognised tool within the UK planning system for many years, used to inform the management of change and to deliver sustainable development. It provides a framework for people to think about what gives their area its unique sense of place.

Landscape character assessment is a tool to help understand what the landscape is like today, how it has come to be like that, and how it may change in the future. Its role is to help ensure that change and development does not undermine whatever is characteristic or valued about any particular landscape.³

Landscape character assessment is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive.⁴

Landscape Character Assessments identify and map the distinctive units which make up the landscape. These units are known as Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). Landscape Character Assessments can identify LCTs, LCAs, or both. Most of the Kent-based Landscape Character Assessments (including this one) focus on LCAs.

Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are generic types of landscape which can occur in different places. They have similar characteristics wherever they occur, and are called by a descriptive name (e.g. 'chalk downs').

Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) are geographically-unique areas, each with a distinctive 'sense of place' reflecting local distinctiveness. They are called by a place-based name (e.g. 'Luddesdown Downs').

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Approach

This Landscape Character Assessment was carried out by a Chartered Landscape Architect with extensive experience in landscape character assessment, and local knowledge of the chalk landscapes of the Kent Downs.

The project methodology is in line with the approach set out in the current Best Practice Guidelines for Landscape Character Assessment⁵ and Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment⁶.

3.2 Stages of Work

The project can be divided into five stages of work, as shown:

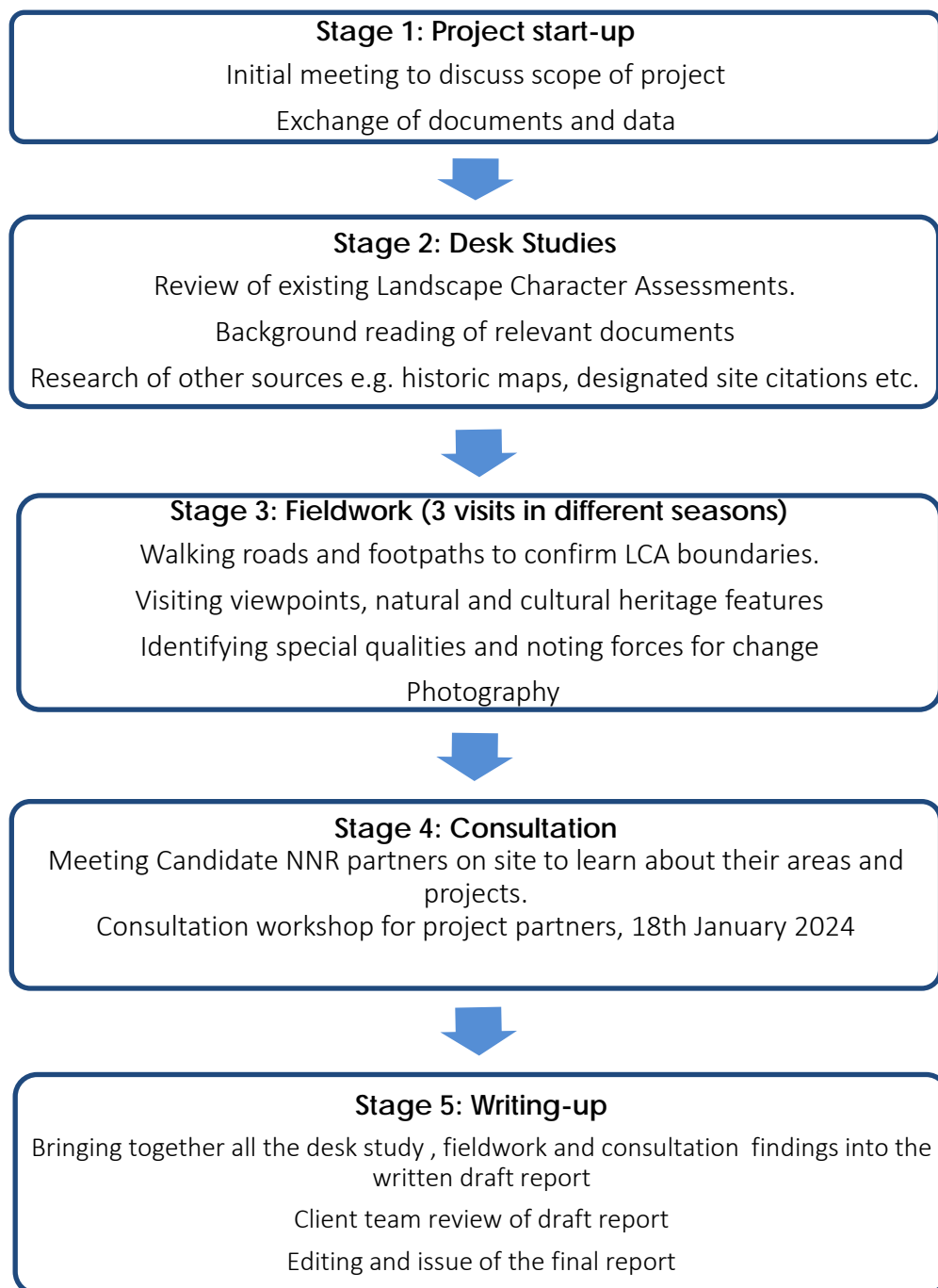
³ From *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland* Natural England 2002 p.3

⁴ *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment* Natural England, 2014 (glossary)

⁵ *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment* Natural England, 2014

⁶ *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition* Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013

PART A: Introduction



3.3 Consultation

There were two main phases of consultation in the preparation of this Landscape Character Assessment. The first took place in November 2023 and involved the author meeting on-site with Candidate NNR partners to find out about their projects, and the areas they look after. Site visits were held with representatives from The Woodland Trust, The National Trust, Forestry England, the West Kent Downs Countryside Trust, Shorne Parish Council, Plantlife and Shorne Country Park.

The second phase of consultation took the form of a workshop session in January 2024, attended by potential core and affiliate partners. Attendees were given the opportunity to comment on the draft boundaries and names for the LCAs (some of which were changed as a result), and to share their views on the special qualities of the LCAs, the forces for change which are occurring, and future visions and aspirations for the LCAs. These were then incorporated into this draft.

A photograph of a winter landscape. In the foreground, there is a dense thicket of bare, dark branches covered with small, bright red berries. Behind this, a shallow stream flows through a wooded area. The trees in the background are mostly bare, with some evergreens visible. The ground is covered with fallen leaves and some patches of snow or frost. The sky is a pale, clear blue.

Part B: Landscape Story

PART B: Landscape Story

4.0 Introduction

The landscape of the study area has evolved over millions of years, and has been shaped by natural processes and human activities. This section summarises its landscape story, and also briefly describes the designations which cover the best examples of the natural and cultural features. It is intended to be a short introduction to provide context for the LCA profiles which follow it. More detailed information by specialist ecologists, arboriculturalists, archaeologists etc. is provided in separate documents being produced in parallel with this Landscape Character Assessment.

5.0 Geology and Landform

5.1 Bedrock

The story of the North Kent Downs begins in the Cretaceous period (approx. 145-65 million years ago), when successive layers of chalk were laid down on top of each other. The chalk comprises calcium carbonate deposits from tiny marine organisms which gradually built up on the bed of a shallow, warm sea. Within the deposits were silica sponges, which were compressed and over time became nodules of hard flint (a type of quartz) within the chalk.

Later, in the Palaeogene period (approx. 65 to 23 million years ago) the area was a river delta, and deposits of sands, gravels and clays were laid down on top of the chalk. These are known as the Thanet, Harwich and London Clay formations, and today can be seen on the highest land around Cobham and Shorne.



Chalk exposed in a small quarry in Great Crabbles Wood



Gravels revealed in a worn path in Shorne woods.

5.2 Superficial Geology

Surface processes have led to geological layers occurring on top of the solid bedrock. A superficial geology known as 'head' occurs in some valleys within the study area, and comprises a range of materials (usually sand, clay and gravel) which have been washed down from higher ground.

A layer of clay-with-flints often occurs on top of chalk. When chalk is exposed to the elements for a long period of time (and particularly in cold conditions where it is constantly freezing and thawing), it weathers into a heavy, sticky clay. The flints do not weather, and so stay as hard nodules.

5.3 Escarpments and dip slopes

Massive uplifts of the earth's crust caused the chalk layers to tilt, and subsequent erosion caused the chalk to form a series of steep escarpments to the south, with shallower dip slopes to the north. The

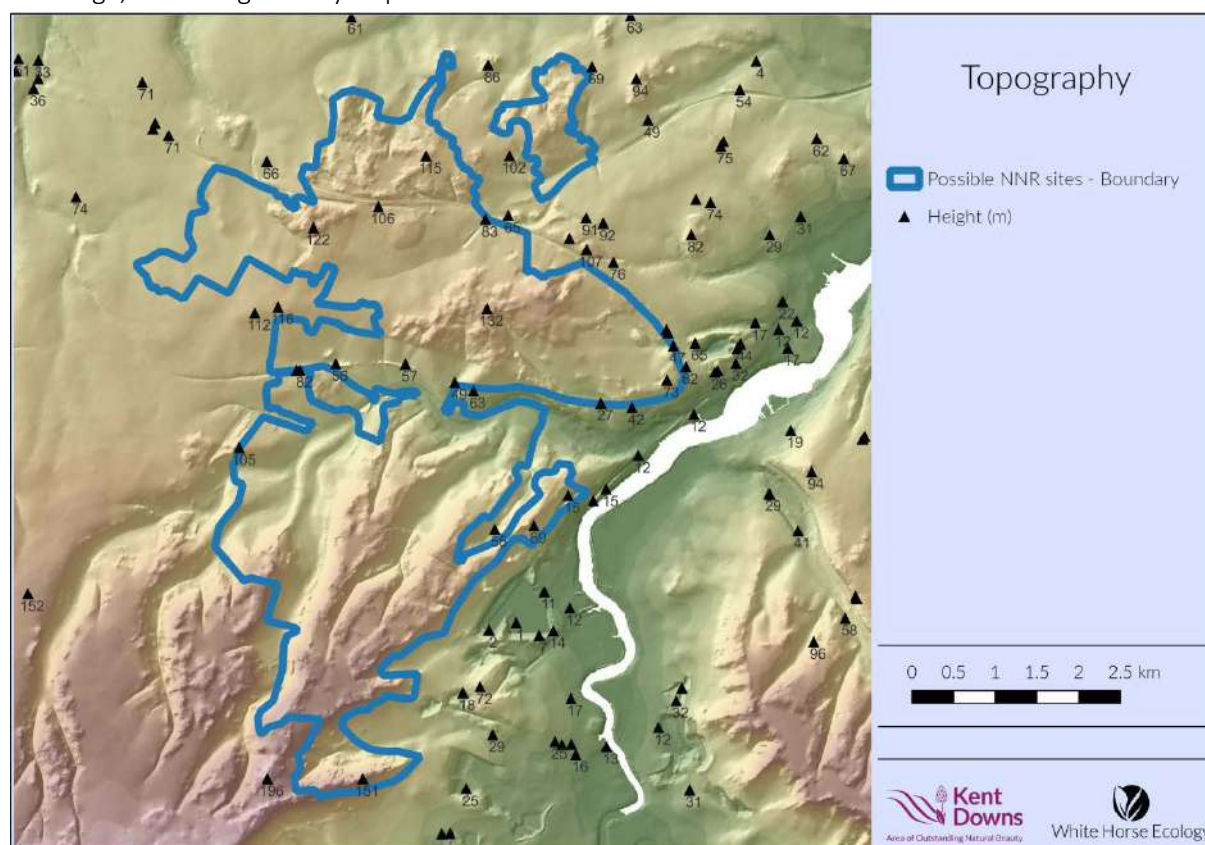
south-facing chalk escarpments are outside the study area, but the study area is within a broad chalk dip slope which falls gently towards the north. The highest point is in the south of the study area at Holly Hill (196m).

5.4 Valleys and ridges

Map 2 shows the landform of the study area. The highest point is at Holly Hill (196m), in the south of the study area. The southern part of the study area comprises a series of straight valleys running south-west to north-east, which have been created over thousands of years by smaller streams and weathering exploiting natural weaknesses in the dip slope of the chalk. They are separated by ridges of higher land, and the valleys are dry because water soaks into the porous chalk rather than flowing or pooling on the surface. These dry valleys run into the broad east-west Cuxton Valley, which drops down towards the Medway Valley in the east.

The south-eastern part of the study area is within the Medway Valley. This is the deepest and steepest valley, where the River Medway has cut through layers of chalk bedrock, leaving them exposed on the valley sides. These exposures have been extended by human quarrying activity. Those at Bores Hole designated as a Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS) for the quality and variety of the chalk exposures.

North of the Cuxton Valley the topography changes, reflecting the presence of Thanet, Harwich and London Clay formations on top of the chalk. The highest point (132m) is in Cobham Park (where the mausoleum is situated), and land drops away from here to create a dome shape. There is a further ridge of high land which runs roughly east-west towards the north of the study area. It includes the A2 and the settlement of Shorne Ridgeway, and has long been used as a transport route. North of this ridge, the land gradually slopes down towards the Thames.



Map 2: Topography

PART B: Landscape Story**6.0 Semi-natural habitats****6.1 Introduction**

The diversity of geology (the bedrock comprising chalk, and sands, gravels and clays, and the superficial deposits of clay-with-flints and head) has led to a diversity of soils. There are variations in soil depth, drainage, nutrients, and ease of ploughing. This in turn has influenced how the land has been used by people, and the habitats present.

6.2 Chalk grassland

Soils directly over chalk are shallow and light, so were the first focus of agriculture. They also support grazing sheep, which gives the right conditions for flower-rich chalk grassland habitats to develop. The chalky soils are not particularly fertile, which means that the vigour of plants growing in them is limited. They are also very dry, because chalk is porous so water does not pool on the surface or stay within the soil. Without vigorous growth, plants are less likely to outcompete others, and so a wide range of wildflower and grass species can co-exist. These in turn support many different species of insects, birds and reptiles. Chalk grassland habitats are therefore highly valued for their nature conservation importance, and may be designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). These designations are shown on Map 3.



Chalk grassland Crabbles Bottom



Chalk Grassland Crookhorn Wood

6.3 Woodland and woodpasture

In contrast to the light chalky soils of the valleys, the clay soils derived from clay-with-flints are heavy and difficult to plough. Ploughs capable of working them were not developed until the late medieval/early modern period, so these areas were left as woodland, and often still are. This is why woodland is often found on ridges, whilst farmland occurs in valleys.

The woodland within the study area is very varied, reflecting both underlying geology and soils, and past and present management. As shown on Map 3, the majority is Ancient Woodland, which has been continuously wooded since 1600AD. Often the distinctive wavy outlines of woodlands are one of the most consistent features on maps and in the landscape. Much of the woodland is also designated SSSI because of its importance as a habitat supporting a wide range of plant and animal species. Some is designated SAC because beech-yew woodland is recognised as a habitat of international importance. Other areas of woodland are productive coppice, usually chestnut with occasional large oaks. Coppice management is when trees are cut down and then allowed to regrow

on a short cycle (usually 7-15 years). The resulting narrow trunks were traditionally used for hop poles; now they are mainly used for fencing or firewood.



Beech-Yew woodland, Hanginghill Wood



Productive woodland, Brewers Wood

Also present is woodpasture, another traditional management method where large trees are undergrazed by animals. The grazing creates space around the trees, allowing them to grow in a more natural shape. Grazing of woodland by cattle is taking place in parts of Shorne Woods Country Park, and at Cobham Park. Where this is not practical, some trees are ‘halo cleared’ by hand, to achieve a similar effect.

6.4 Heath

The soils derived from bedrock comprising sands and gravels are often more acidic, which supports heathy vegetation such as bracken and birch. Many of these areas would historically have been common or wooded common, used for grazing animals, gathering wood for fuel, etc. Today the woodlands in these areas are exceptionally varied, particularly in their ground flora and the insects they support, reflecting the subtle variations in soils.

6.5 Veteran Trees

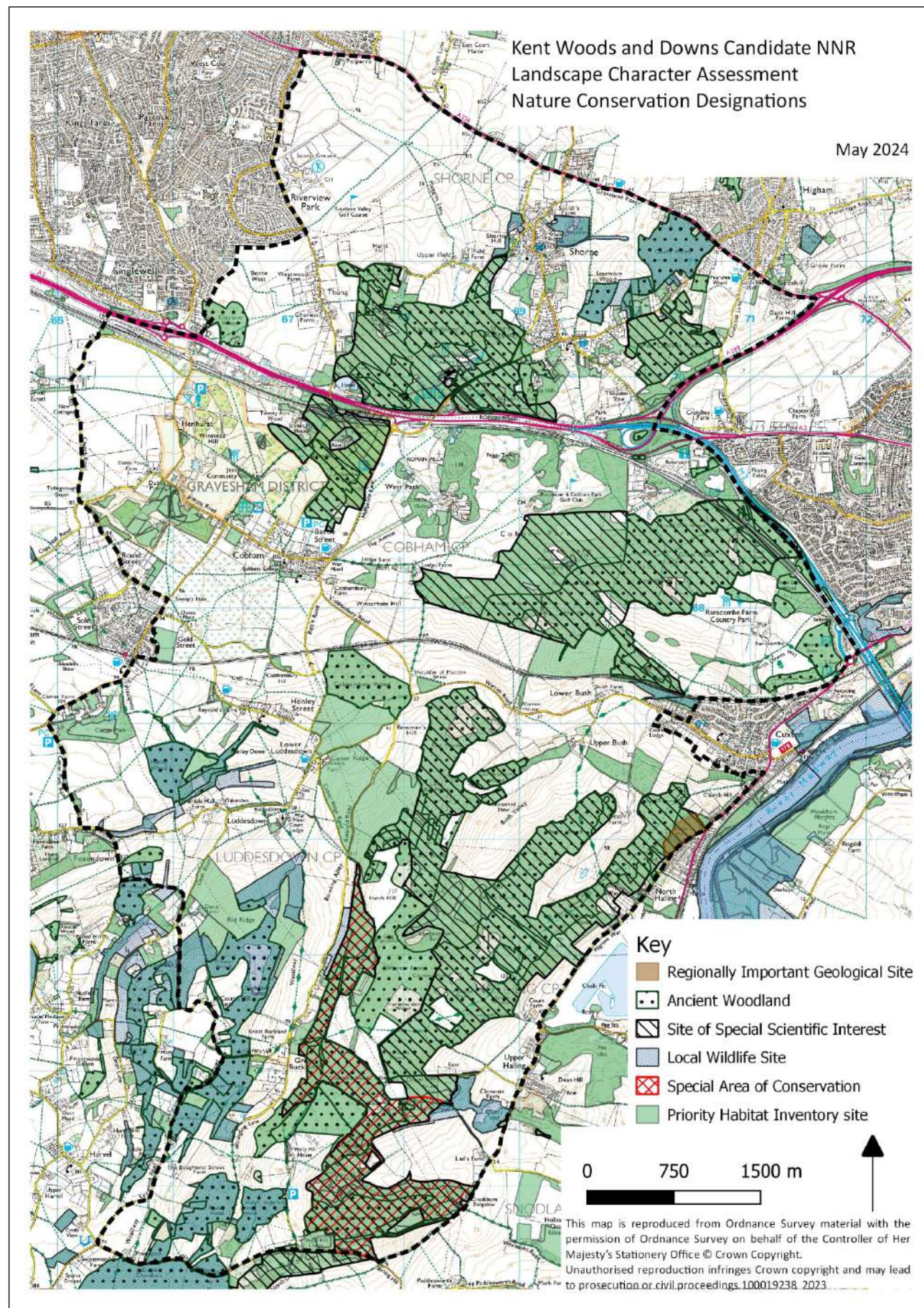
A veteran tree is defined by Natural England as ‘A tree that is of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of its age, size or condition.’ There are many veteran trees within the study area, including oaks, ashes, hornbeams, apples, yews and other species. Some of the oldest trees present in Cobham Park are likely to have originally been in the boundaries of medieval fields, before it was opened up as parkland.



Veteran hornbeam, Ashenbank Wood



Veteran oak in heathy woodpasture, Cobham Woods



Map 3: Nature Conservation Designations

7.0 Cultural Heritage

7.1 Prehistory

The oldest known site – a Palaeolithic tool-making site at Cuxton – is not visible within today's landscape, but still provides evidence of occupation, and of early humans using the resources of the landscape (in this case flints). Extensive flint scatters have been found at Shorne Woods and Ranscombe. Later prehistoric monuments are also visible, with a particularly good example of a Bronze Age barrow (burial mound) within Ashenbank Woods (a Scheduled Monument, shown on Map 4). Several of the roads/trackways still in use today are likely to have prehistoric origins, including the ridgeway through Shorne, the North Downs Way along the top of the Medway Valley scarp, and the Pilgrim's Way route along its base. Within the study area there are also many cropmarks of likely prehistoric sites which are not usually visible within today's landscape, but still provide evidence of occupation.

7.2 Roman

The modern A2 follows the line of the Roman road of Watling Street, which linked London and Dover, and may well have followed an earlier route. Not far from Watling Street, in what is today the northern part of Cobham Park, is the site of a Roman villa (Scheduled Monument).

7.3 Medieval

Many elements which make up today's landscape have medieval origins, and remain in use for their original purposes.

There are many farms and manors within the study area which can trace their history back to the medieval period. Many are nestled into sheltered folds of the landscape as protection against the elements, and constructed from locally-available materials including timber, flint and clay tile. They are linked by a network of winding lanes and tracks of great age. Many of the oldest and most interesting structures are Listed Buildings (shown on Map 4). Important medieval manors within the study area included Randall (now in Shorne Woods), Cobham, Cobhambury, Jeskyns, Vyaundes, North Court and Great Buckland. Manor owners included Sheriffs of Kent, barons, and constables of Dover castle. These manorial sites have the potential for extensive buried archaeology.



Dene Manor, south-west of Luddesdown



Cobham College, Cobham

Within the study area there are four villages with medieval churches, as well as areas of more modern settlement. The villages have different forms, reflecting their origins and evolution. Luddesdown is a dispersed village, with the church, manor and village hall in a cluster, and other houses, farms and pubs scattered over a fairly wide area. Cobham is a nucleated village set along a

PART B: Landscape Story

main street. It has strong associations with the de Cobham family, who have magnificent brasses and an ornate tomb in the church. Next to Cobham church is the New College – a medieval foundation which became almshouses and is now social housing. The village contains numerous historic buildings including the timber framed ‘Leather Bottle’ pub (described by Charles Dickens in ‘The Pickwick Papers’), and ‘Owletts’, a National Trust property. Cobham village is a Conservation Area (shown on Map 4). The historic core of Cuxton is just above the floodplain of the Medway Valley, but the village has expanded significantly in the 20th Century and now extends up the valley side. This dense modern development is outside the study area, but the church is within it. The village of Shorne, and the nearby settlement of Shorne Ridgeway, are located on high land in the north of the study area. Both are loosely grouped around village greens and within woodland, and it is likely that the original settlements expanded along roads onto nearby common land.

7.4 Post-Medieval

The post-medieval period saw the rise and evolution of Cobham Park from a medieval deer park into a fashionable designed landscape, adapting its planted and built features in accordance with changing tastes. The first mention of Cobham Park was in 1559, and by 1612 it was no more than 200 acres, although a larger area was used for hunting within the wider estate. By the late 16th Century, Cobham Hall was a mansion with an extensive walled garden, and by the late 17th Century a series of long, straight avenues radiated out from the house. These were mostly swept away in the redesign of the house and grounds by architect James Wyatt and landscape designer Humphrey Repton for Lord Darnley between 1780-1820. This phase saw the creation of sweeping drives, ponds and parkland, with pleasure grounds around the hall. As well as working on Cobham Hall, Wyatt designed a picturesque dairy, an aviary and –most strikingly – the Darnley Mausoleum at the highest point of the Park. At this point Cobham Park included the landscaped areas around Cobham Hall and the surrounding woodland (including that north of Watling Street) which was held in hand to provide income from timber sales and gaming rights. Lodge Farm would also have been part of the land held in hand, as the Home Farm supplying the estate. Beyond Cobham Park were tenanted farms which were also part of the Darnley Estate.



Brewers Ponds, reservoirs in Cobham Hall Park, remodelled by Humphrey Repton in 1803



Cobham Hall is largely hidden behind its C.18th surrounding ‘pleasure grounds’ and parkland trees. C.19th Wellingtonia are on the horizon.

7.5 19th Century

The Darnley Estate reached its greatest extent in the 19th Century, when its extensive areas of parkland, woodland and farmland extended north almost to the Thames at Chalk and south to the Bush Valley. It extended west to what is now the urban edge of Gravesend, and east to Cuxton and

what is now the urban edge of Strood (see Map 4). In the mid-19th Century conifers -including exotic species such as Wellingtonia (some of which survive today) – were planted in the pleasure grounds north of Cobham Hall, and by the 1860s there were large beds of rhododendrons, including in Shorne Woods. The carriage-drive which looped around the estate included a rhododendron-lined section through Shorne Woods.

Outside the Darnley Estate, improved infrastructure (railways and roads) led to an expansion of several villages within and on the peripheries of the study area.

7.6 20th and 21st Centuries

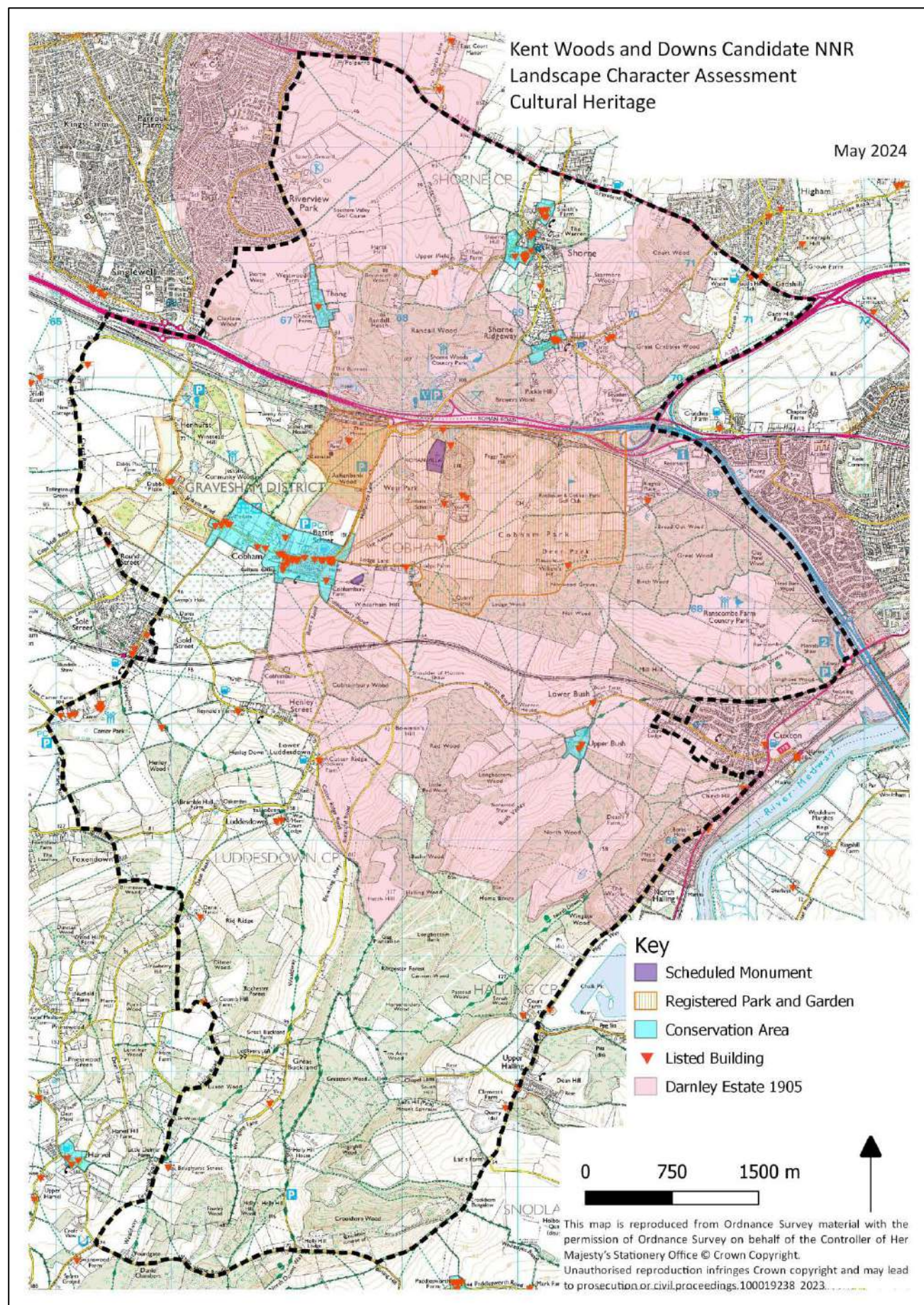
The 20th and 21st Centuries have seen continued residential development, particularly around the peripheries of the study area, and considerable development of road and rail infrastructure. The corridor created by the A2 and the HS1 rail route effectively severs the northern and southern parts of the Darnley Estate. Overhead infrastructure in the form of several high and low voltage power lines passes over the area, and there are also high pressure gas pipes underground. Large and small-scale mineral extraction took place in various parts of the study area, including chalk in the Medway Valley, clay in Shorne Woods, and sand at Shorne Ridgeway.

The area was strategically important for the defence of London in the Second World War. The site of an anti-aircraft battery near Cobham is a Scheduled Monument, and there were camps in Ashenbank Woods and Shorne Woods, linked to the airfield at Gravesend. The underground defensive bunkers from these camps are still in situ. The camps were occupied by displaced families for several years after the end of the war.

Some chalk grassland was ploughed for arable use during the war, and this contributed to the gradual decline of biodiversity as traditional farming methods were replaced by more intensive and mechanised methods, and the use of artificial fertilisers and pesticides. In some places hedges and trees were removed to make it easier to use large machinery, and field margins were narrowed. Land uses also changed, with a rise and then a fall in commercial orchards and hop gardens. Today farmland within the central part of the area is being used increasingly for viticulture (grapevines).

The Darnley Estate declined and was gradually sold off in the 1950s, with the hall itself becoming a school. A large part of Cobham Park became a golf course in the 1920s, and remains so. Many of the estate woodlands were sold and some (Lodge Wood and Nor Wood – today known as ‘Cuxton and Cobham Woods’) were subdivided into numerous small lots before being sold off. Parts of Cobham Park became infamous for anti-social behaviour, including joyriding and burning out cars, and the interior of the Darnley Mausoleum was severely damaged in an arson attack.

In the early 21st Century, establishment of CAMS (Cobham and Ashenbank Management Scheme) saw resources focussed on reviving the area. Anti-social behaviour declined, burnt-out cars were removed, and the Darnley Mausoleum was restored. Various conservation organisations became involved in positive management. Most of Ashenbank Wood is now in the care of the Woodland Trust; the National Trust own and manage Cobham Wood and the Mausoleum; The West Kent Downs Conservation Trust are active in Cuxton and Cobham Woods, and Plantlife manage Ranscombe Farm and its associated woods. Jeskyns Wood was planted as a community woodland on former farmland by the Forestry Commission, and Shorne Woods and Camer Park became Country Parks serving local urban populations. The Darnley Trail is a 10km circular largely off-road trail around the core of the former Darnley Estate, linking Shorne Country Park, Cobham Park, Ranscombe Farm Reserve, Ashenbank Wood and Jeskyns Community Woodland.



Map 4: Cultural Heritage

A large, gnarled tree with a thick, dark trunk and branches, some of which are covered in moss. The leaves are mostly yellow and orange, indicating autumn. The tree is situated in a forest with other trees in the background. In the foreground, there is a wooden fence made of horizontal rails and vertical posts, and the ground is covered with fallen yellow leaves.

Part C: Landscape Character Descriptions

8.0 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs)

8.1 LCAs within the study area

Six distinctive LCAs have been identified within the study area, shown on Map 5. The LCAs are as follows:

- 1. Thong Farmlands
- 2. Shorne Woodlands
- 3. Jeskyns Woodland and Orchards
- 4. Cobham Park and Ranscombe
- 5. Luddesdown Downs
- 6. Medway Western Scarp

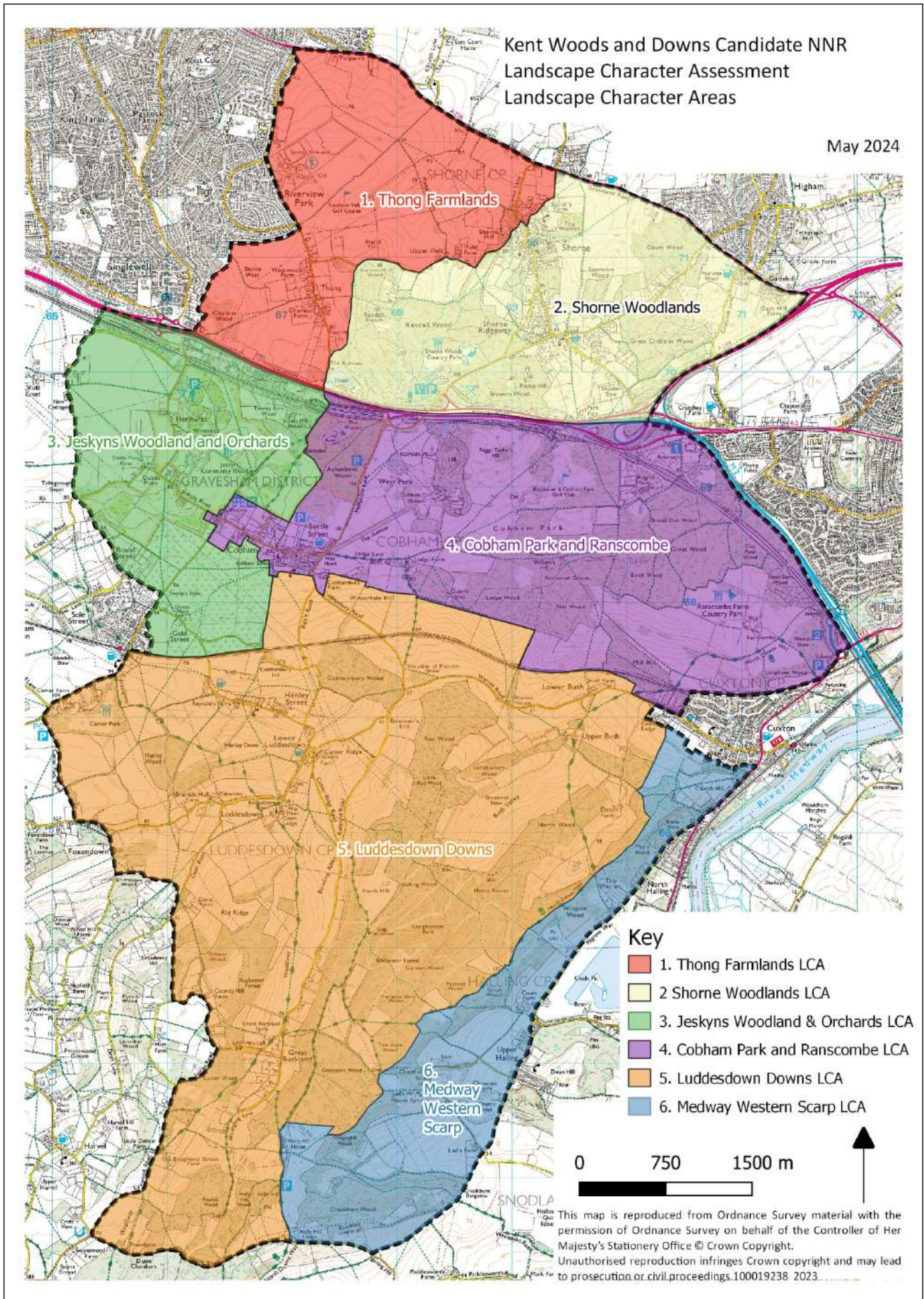
The following pages contain profiles for each of these LCAs, describing their key characteristics, special qualities, forces for change and recommendations for their enhancement.

The landscape of the study area has evolved over millions of years, and has been shaped by natural processes and human activities. This section summarises its landscape story, and also briefly describes the designations which cover the best examples of the natural and cultural features. It is intended to be a short introduction to provide context for the LCA profiles which follow it. More detailed information by specialist ecologists, arboriculturalists, archaeologists etc. is provided in separate documents being produced in parallel with this Landscape Character Assessment.

8.2 A note on LCA boundaries

Although LCA boundaries are shown as a clear line on maps, in reality the boundaries are often transitional, with a gradual change between LCAs. Therefore potential changes near LCA boundaries should be mindful of the special qualities of all LCAs potentially affected, and follow guidance for all the relevant LCAs.

It is also important to remember that in many cases there is intervisibility between LCAs, and therefore changes in one LCA will have impacts on views from another LCA.



Map 5: Landscape Character Areas

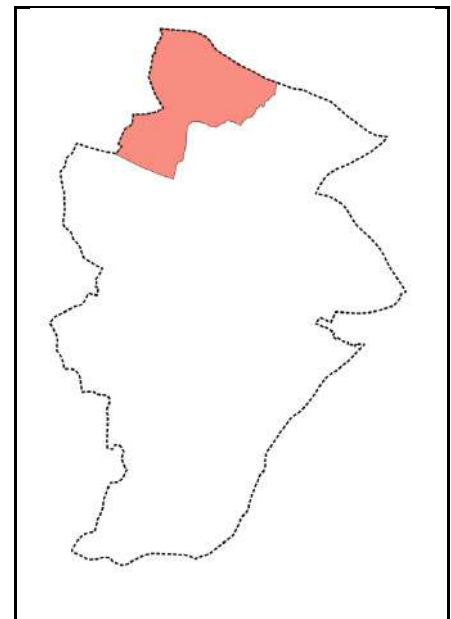
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA (LCA) 1: Thong Farmlands

Description

Location and Context

This LCA is located in the north-west of the study area, on the dip slope of the North Kent Downs. Its northern boundary is the A226, and its western boundary is the urban edge of Gravesend. The eastern boundary (with the Shorne Woodlands LCA) follows a series of lanes, and – in places – the woodland edge. These lanes are within a gradual transition in character, and the Shorne Woodlands LCA has strong visual associations with the Thong Farmlands. To the south (beyond the A2) is the Jeskyns Woodland and Orchards LCA.

The Thong Farmlands LCA contains the hamlet of Thong, and a small part of Shorne village. It is outside the Kent Downs National Landscape (KDNL), and is the proposed location for part of the Lower Thames Crossing, including its junction with the A2.



Summary Description

The Thong Farmlands LCA primarily comprises a series of large, open arable fields in the north-west of the study area, on the dip slope of the Kent Downs. It forms a transition between the urban areas of Gravesend and the Kent Downs. There are long views towards the urban edge of Gravesend and/or the Thames Estuary to the north and west. In views south and east the backdrop and sense of place are provided by the sinuous edges of Shorne Woods and Claylane Woods, which emphasise the landform created by the underlying chalk capped with sands and gravels. There are patches of ancient woodland on the peripheries of the LCA, and also historic settlements at Thong and Shorne.

As well as arable fields, this LCA contains a golf course (now closed) and a sports centre. This is the LCA which will be most affected by the Lower Thames Crossing should it be constructed, and so the landscape here is the most likely to change.

Landscape Character Areas identified in existing Landscape Character Assessments located within this LCA

The Character of England	<i>National Character Area 113: North Kent Plain</i>
Landscape Assessment of Kent	<i>Hoo Peninsula</i>
Gravesham*	<i>Higham Arable Farmlands</i>
Medway	<i>N/A</i>
Tonbridge and Malling	<i>N/A</i>
KDNL	<i>N/A</i>

*Detailed information on this area has also been produced in consequence of the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) proposals

Key Characteristics

- Chalk bedrock overlaid with Thanet formation sands on the highest ground, and a small amount of superficial head in dry valleys. Soils are freely-draining loam.
- Dip slope landform comprises a gently undulating series of dry valleys. It is flatter in the west and slopes gently down towards the west and north.
- Due to the underlying chalk there is little surface water.
- Dominant land use is arable agriculture, also a disused golf course and a sports centre with buildings and playing fields.
- Fields are generally large and semi-regular in shape. Some are bounded by tracks, and others by hedges (often thin). There is thicker vegetation alongside main roads and around the sports centre and former golf course. Paddocks (near settlements) are divided by timber rail fencing.
- Ancient woodland at Claylane Wood and deciduous woodland to the west of Thong Lane and to the west of Shorne (also LWS).
- Historic settlements at Thong and Shorne, including Conservation Areas and several Listed Buildings, including St Katherine's Chapel.
- Historic lanes along peripheries, and a good network of footpaths and tracks providing access into the LCA.
- Located on the eastern edge of Gravesend, with the urban area forming the western edge of the LCA. Otherwise sparsely settled.
- A generally large-scale landscape, with a sense of openness and exposure and a smooth texture. This contrasts with the adjacent woodland which provides a seasonally-changing backdrop.
- Contrasting views of woodland to the south and east, urban edge to the west, and the Thames to the north, combine to create a strong sense of place and context.
- The LCA is visible from the edges of Gravesend, the adjacent woodland (KDNL), roads, and when looking south from the Thames marshes.

Designated sites

Natural Heritage Sites		Cultural Heritage Sites	
Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	Shorne Pastures	Conservation Area	Thong, Shorne (part)
Ancient Woodland	Claylane Wood	Listed Buildings	White Horse Cottage (Thong); Cluster associated with St Katherine's Chapel (Shorne)



These houses within Thong Conservation Area were constructed as homes for servicemen in the 1920s, with adjacent barns and smallholdings



St Katherine's Chapel, a Listed Building in the northern part of Shorne Village



A typical autumn scene in the Thong Farmlands LCA, with Shorne Woods on the horizon. In the foreground and middle ground are large, open arable fields with a gently undulating topography and chalky soil.



The same scene in winter, with low sun highlighting the silhouettes of trees on the horizon, and the winter cover crop.



The same scene in spring. The foreground texture is changing as the crop grows, but the lack of trees and hedgerows in the foreground and middle ground mean that seasonal changes are less apparent than in other LCAs

The natural landscape

The Thong Farmlands LCA is part of a transitional area between the low-lying Thames Marshes to the north, and the chalk landscapes of the Mid Kent Downs to the south (which form the focus of the Candidate NNR). It is a natural continuation of the Candidate NNR area, as geologically it is also influenced by the underlying chalk (overlain with sands and gravels in the highest places). The characteristic rolling chalk topography is particularly noticeable in the eastern part of the LCA, which contains a dry valley. The soils are thin and free-draining, with lumps of flint and chalk visible on the surface.

The easily-worked soils and gentle gradients mean that the area has been in arable use for many centuries. However there are three surviving areas of woodland around the peripheries of the LCA, two of which (Shorne Pasture and woodland to the west of Thong Lane) are connected to larger woodlands in adjacent LCAs, and form part of core projects for the Candidate NNR. Shorne Pasture is also a Local Wildlife Site. Claylane Wood forms an isolated block of ancient woodland in the south-west. The woodland areas are identified as deciduous woodland in the Priority Habitat Inventory.

The cultural landscape

The landscape contains evidence of very early occupation in the form of Palaeolithic flint flakes found in the dry valley in the east of the LCA, and there are many cropmarks including probable prehistoric barrows and enclosures. Caves in the chalk along Muggins Lane are likely to have been dug in prehistoric times to access flint. Later archaeological sites include a Roman cemetery in the north of the LCA, and possible medieval buried features which may have been linked to Randall Manor (excavated within Shorne Woods). Randall Manor had connections with the Darnley Estate, which subsequently extended over much of this LCA.

There have been relatively few landscape changes within this LCA since the first edition Ordnance Survey map was published in 1823. Woods, lanes and settlements remain recognisable, and the routes of tracks shown on the historic map are still visible as paths or field boundaries. The 20th Century golf course and

sports ground were created on part of the former Gravesend Airport, following its closure in 1956. The remainder of the airport was to the west of Thong Lane, on land now occupied by housing. Racing aircraft were constructed at Gravesend Airport, and a customs house was built in 1933. It was taken over by the RAF in the Second World War, with some personnel accommodated in camps in Ashenbank and Shorne Woods.

There are two historic settlements wholly or partially within the LCA (the hamlet of Thong, and the northern part of Shorne village). Both are Conservation Areas containing Listed Buildings. The chapel of St Katherine in Shorne had its origins as a 14th Century chapel. It may have initially been used to shelter pilgrims en route to Canterbury, and was subsequently used as a malthouse, before being restored as a chapel in the 19th Century. Thong is a linear settlement set below Shorne Woods, originally a cluster of farms and cottages. Its northern part comprises smallholdings constructed in the 1920s for servicemen returned from WWI.

The greatest changes have taken place around the edges of the LCA, which has included extensive 20th Century expansion of Gravesend, and some 20th Century housing in Shorne. Expansion of the A2 corridor has also affected the southern boundary of the LCA.

Visual and perceptual qualities of the landscape

One of the most characteristic features of this LCA are the contrasting views from within it: looking south and east towards the sinuous edge of Shorne Woods on higher ground (within the KDNL and Candidate NNR), and looking north to sweeping panoramas over the Thames Marshes and estuary. The historic church at Chalk forms a notable feature within these views. The simple, open form and smooth texture of the farmland in the LCA provides a contrast and setting to the adjacent woodland, and the LCA forms a buffer between the KDNL and Candidate NNR, and the urban edge of Gravesend. There is a sense of exposure on the paths across open fields.

Special qualities to be retained and enhanced

- The smooth undulating chalk landform in the eastern part of the LCA.
- The strong visual relationship with the adjacent woodlands within the KDNL and the Candidate NNR. The oasts at Ifield Farm form a focal point in some of these views.
- Long views to and from the Thames Estuary.
- Pockets of woodland in the peripheries of the LCA (some designated Ancient Woodland or LWS).
- Historic settlements at Thong and part of Shorne (Conservation Areas, containing Listed Buildings).
- The transition between the urban area of Gravesend and the KDNL and the Candidate NNR at Shorne Woods.
- The existing footpath network (although there are opportunities to expand this).



Claylane Wood, as seen from the footpath from Thong



Listed Building in Thong Conservation Area



Chalk quarry (possibly prehistoric) along Muggins Lane



Footpath across fields from Shorne to Gravesend, looking west



The Oasts at Ifield Farm form a focal point in views



Long view north over the Thames Marshes towards Essex. Chalk church tower is a feature within the view

Forces for change and their landscape implications

Past and present

- The many overhead wires (on pylons and timber poles) which cross this landscape, introducing vertical features which distract from the natural sweep of the chalk landform. High voltage pylons have also required the cutting of corridors through Claylane Wood.
- Loss of hedgerows, some of which have been removed since the late 19th Century, and some of which are very gappy.
- 20th Century settlement expansion along the western edge of the LCA.
- Land use changes within the LCA from agriculture to recreation (sports centre and golf course) in the mid-20th Century. This may also have resulted in contaminated soil being brought into the area.
- Intensive agriculture resulting in a loss of hedgerows, and a loss of biodiversity due to use of fertilizers, pesticides, etc.
- Anti-social behaviour (e.g. use of motorbikes) in Claylane Wood.
- High volumes of traffic on rural lanes, which – combined with the lack of footpaths – makes accessing parts of this LCA difficult and dangerous.

Future

- The western and southern parts of this LCA may be profoundly impacted by the Lower Thames Crossing and the associated junction with the A2 (a new multi-level junction rising up to 17m above the existing ground level). The road itself, and the associated landscaping and public park, would change the character and visual focus of the LCA, particularly in the west and south.
- Continuing development pressure associated with population growth (potentially leading to impacts from built development and also additional recreational pressure).



The bright green grass and texture of scrub and trees on the abandoned golf course contrasts with the surrounding farmland



Numerous lines of overhead wires cross this LCA

Potential Core and Affiliate NNR Partners working within this LCA (May 2024)

Shorne Woods Country Park (small areas of peripheral woodland at Shorne Pastures, and west of Thong Lane)

Potential future NNR Partners working within this LCA

Private Landowners (of farmland and Claylane Woods)

National Highways

Owners/managers of the proposed associated public park (should LTC go ahead)

Recommendations

Aspirational Strategy

The LCA will continue to provide the immediate setting to the KDNL and the Candidate NNR, and the strong visual relationship between this LCA and Shorne Woodlands will be retained. In the eastern part of the LCA, the setting of the KDNL and the Candidate NNR will be enhanced through undergrounding of overhead wires, and through the integration of woodland and farmland by introducing shaws and new/restored hedges. Enlarging habitats such as hedges and field margins will provide benefits for both landscape and biodiversity and expand the reach of the Candidate NNR into the wider landscape.

Woodlands will be well managed, with management integrated with surrounding larger woodland areas. Claylane Wood will have its own management plan. Accessibility will be improved between Gravesend and Shorne Woods, including possible reinstatement of the original access via Thong Lodge.

If the Lower Thames Crossing is built, this LCA will be users' first view on emerging from the tunnel, and therefore will become a gateway into Kent. The western part of the LCA will become a much more 'designed' and potentially wildlife-rich landscape due to proposed planting and habitat creation associated with the road corridor. Parts will also have improved public access.

If the Lower Thames Crossing is not built, there is still potential to enhance the landscape in the western part of the LCA through habitat creation (e.g. woodland expansion linking Claylane Wood and Shorne Wood), and to improve accessibility. There is potential for chalk grassland restoration, other habitat creation, and increased public access on the golf course site.

Protect

- Open views towards Shorne Woods and the Thames, providing interpretation where appropriate.
- Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and their settings.
- The immediate setting of the KDNL.

Manage

- Woodland, including Claylane Wood (Ancient Woodland) and Shorne Pastures (LWS). Seek to extend and link woodland sites where possible, integrating management with the Candidate NNR.
- Hedges and hedgerow trees, seeking to reinforce existing hedges where they have become gappy, and to replace those lost through agricultural intensification, using historic maps to find their former courses. It may also be appropriate to add new hedges to reduce soil loss and flooding, and enhance the KDNL and Candidate NNR setting. Any new hedges should accentuate the visual sweeps of the landform, and will be most effective at slowing surface water if planted parallel to the contours. New hedgerow trees will add both visual interest and biodiversity value.
- Grassland and field margins, seeking to restore/recreate chalk grassland where practical.

Plan

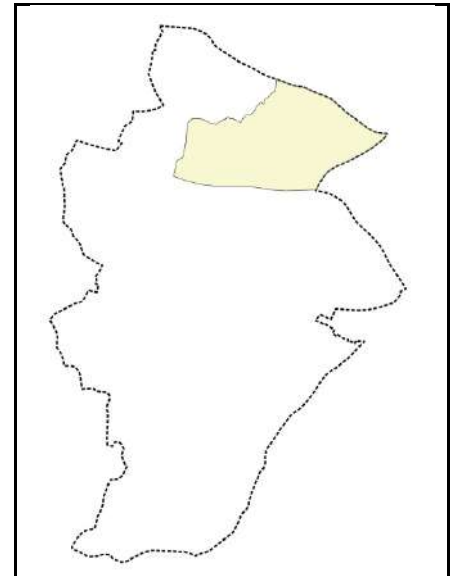
- Retain and improve the footpath and cycle network, including enhancement of links between Gravesend and Shorne Woods.
- Consider undergrounding the many wires supported on wooden poles where they run across fields, to improve the visual appearance of the area.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA (LCA) 2: Shorne Woodlands

Description

Location and Context

This LCA is located in the north-east of the study area. It is bounded by roads on all sides: The A226 to the north; the A289 to the east; the M2 and A2 to the south; and Thong Lane, Ifield Lane and Crown Lane to the west. The transition to the Thong Farmlands LCA to the west is fairly gradual. Although the boundary with the Cobham Park and Ranscombe LCA to the south follows the A2, historically the designed landscape of Cobham Hall extended north of the road, and remnant parkland and former estate woodland still occur on the north side of the A2. It is therefore a transitional boundary. The Shorne Woodlands LCA is partially within the Kent Downs National Landscape (KDNL). It contains the settlements of Shorne and Shorne Ridgeway, and clusters of buildings at Gadshill.



Summary Description

The Shorne Woodlands LCA comprises extensive blocks of woodland, and the surrounding farmland and settlements to the north of the A2. Just under half of the LCA is within the KDNL, including the area within Shorne Woods Country Park.

The land is relatively high, and the tree-clad ridge forms the backdrop in views from the north. The diversity of sands, gravels and clays overlying the chalk bedrock, combined with variations in historic land use and land ownership, is reflected in the diversity of woodland types and ground flora found in the LCA.

The historic settlements within the LCA (Shorne and Shorne Ridgeway) are characterised by their wooded setting and their form of loosely-clustered houses around greens and along roads. Outside of woodlands, the presence of settlements creates a more settled character to this LCA. The villages have treed settings, including woodland, parkland, wooded common, orchards, and ornamental planting, and most open areas are surrounded by woodland on two or more sides. There is therefore a strong presence of woodland within the landscape, and a resulting sense of enclosure.

Landscape Character Areas identified in existing Landscape Character Assessments located within this LCA

The Character of England	<i>National Character Area 113: North Kent Plain</i>
Landscape Assessment of Kent	<i>Shorne</i>
Gravesham	<i>Shorne Woodlands</i>
Medway	<i>N/A</i>
Tonbridge and Malling	<i>N/A</i>
KDNL	<i>West Kent Downs - Shorne</i>

Key Characteristics

- Chalk bedrock, overlain by sands, gravels and clays of the Harwich and Thanet Formations and (in the highest areas) London Clay. Soils are freely-draining acid loams, varying with the underlying geology, and appearing rich brown in winter.
- Landform comprises an undulating ridge, running broadly north-east to south-west.
- Several ponds and lakes within Shorne Woods Country Park, and a small number of narrow, seasonal streams/ditches.
- Land use is predominantly woodland (including extensive areas of chestnut coppice) with areas of farmland, settlements and orchards (commercial and traditional).
- Field pattern smaller around settlements (including paddocks) with medium-sized fields beyond. Most are bounded by thick hedges or woodland edges.
- Semi-natural habitats include ancient woodland, coppice, parkland, traditional orchards, heath, ponds and grassland. The diversity of geology is reflected in the varied vegetation and ground-flora.
- A long history of settlement, including the sites of a medieval manor in Shorne Woods, and historic settlements at Shorne, Shorne Ridgeway and Gad's Hill (home of Charles Dickens). Other historic features include 20th Century military and industrial archaeology.
- Main roads around the periphery of the LCA, but with a network of much older lanes, tracks and paths within it. Well-used path network within Shorne Woods Country Park, including accessible routes.
- Settlement pattern of historic settlements originally nucleated around village greens, but later extended in linear fashion along roads in areas of former common. Density is generally low, with many properties standing in large well-treed plots.
- Woodland and trees creates a small-scale and intimate landscape with few long views.
- Extensive deciduous tree cover creates seasonally-changing colours and textures.
- LCA is highly visible from the north, from where it forms the backdrop to views, appearing as a treed ridge with a distinctive sinuous edge.

Designated sites

<i>Natural Heritage Sites</i>		<i>Cultural Heritage Sites</i>	
Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	The Warren; stream east of the Warren; Starmore Wood; Court Wood	Conservation Area	Chestnut Green (Shorne Ridgeway); Shorne
SSSI	Group of woodlands associated with Shorne Wood Country Park; Great Crabbles Wood.	Listed Buildings	Cottages at Chestnut Green, and houses and farms in Shorne Village. Shorne Church listed Grade II*, and Gad's Hill Place Grade I
Ancient Woodland	Parts of Shorne Woods Country Park; Starmore Wood; Great Crabbles Wood; Court Wood; Brummelhill Wood		



Historic Parkland (formerly part of Cobham Park) on the north side of the A2, near Park Pale



A typical autumn scene within the Shorne Woodlands LCA, framed by large blocks of deciduous ancient woodland. It is taken from Warren Lane, on the eastern edge of Shorne village, looking east towards Court Wood and Starmore Wood.



The same scene in winter, when the textures and colours of the soil are much more apparent, and the bare branches of the trees create silhouettes



The same scene in spring, with trees and shrubs coming into leaf, and the fields greening-over as crops grow.

The natural landscape

The topography reflects a ridge in the underlying chalk which runs broadly north-east to south-west across the LCA. The highest parts of this chalk have been overlain by younger bands of sands and gravels, sometimes topped with London Clay. The variations in underlying geology support several distinct habitats (including woodland, heath, and chalk grassland). They also lead to localised variations in soil and ground conditions, enabling a diversity of ground flora and tree species (as well as insects) within relatively small areas. The variety and botanical interest of the woodlands is reflected in the extent of designations (SSSI and LWS). Much is also ancient woodland (containing many veteran trees), and its diversity is supported through sensitive management, particularly within Shorne Woods Country Park. Tree-based productive land uses within the LCA include native coppice, and traditional orchard (Crutches Bottom).

The cultural landscape

This is a wooded landscape with a long history of settlement and of exploitation of resources. The records are extremely thorough thanks to the work of the Shorne Woods Archaeology Group. The earliest finds are in the form of Mesolithic flint scatters found in Shorne Woods. Shorne church has Saxon origins, and the village was presumably sited here to take advantage of natural springs, and the range of soil types nearby. Many features remain unchanged from the 1819 Ordnance Survey Map, including the Ridgeway road, and the outlines of many of the woodlands. Historically, heaths with poor soils would have been common land, and it is likely that some of the roadside houses originated as 'squatter settlements' along common edges. Others may have been earlier farms. In villages, open countryside, and buried within woodland is evidence of medieval settlement and transport routes, including the site of Randall Manor and its associated fishponds (now in woodland in Shorne Woods Country Park), Shorne Manor, and many hollow-ways and tracks. There are also features originating from the Darnley Estate, including parkland north of the A2 east of Brewers Wood, estate cottages at Chestnut Green, and the course of a rhododendron-lined carriage drive through Shorne Wood. Randall Manor was also part of the Darnley Estate. More recent extractive industries

including sand and gravel pits, and a large clay pit, have left their mark on the landscape, along with WW2 camps and gun emplacements, and modern housing development.

At the eastern end of the LCA is Gad's Hill Place - an 18th Century neo-classical house (now a school) which was home to Charles Dickens and where he wrote several novels.

Visual and perceptual qualities of the landscape

Woodland and trees are a constant presence within this landscape, providing a seasonally-changing backdrop, including to the Candidate NNR. The woodlands, orchards, grasslands, heaths, farmland and ornamental trees create a wide range of colours and textures. Woodland and trees also form the setting to settlements and contribute to their character. They limit views out and create a strong sense of enclosure. However there are occasional glimpsed long views towards the Medway Valley and the Thames, and these add to the sense of place.

Shorne Woods Country Park is a hugely popular resource and enables many people to experience this landscape. There is also a good network of Public Rights of Way (often using historic trackways), although some woodlands do not currently have public access, and not all roads have pavements. National Cycle Route 177 runs along the southern boundary of Shorne Woods to Park Pale, where it crosses southwards over the A2 and continues eastwards into Rochester. The Timeball and Telegraph Trail passes through this LCA on its route between Deal and Greenwich.

Special qualities to be retained and enhanced

- The diversity of woodland cover and other semi-natural habitats (traditional orchard, chalk grassland, historic parkland, veteran trees, heath), reflecting the varied underlying geology as well as past land uses.
- Sites designated for their woodland and other valuable habitats.
- The sense of enclosure and relatively small scale of the landscape, resulting from the constant presence of trees and woodlands in the foreground, middle ground and/or background of views.
- Distinctive settlements, often located around greens or along roads, with vernacular buildings of brick, flint, timber and tile. The strong relationship between the settlements and the surrounding trees/woodlands adds to the sense of place.
- Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and their settings.
- The sense of history and time-depth within the landscape. Some are ancient features still in everyday use (such as roads and paths) whilst others are more subtle (such as the earthworks of Randalls Manor fishponds, and prehistoric flint scatter sites, within Shorne Woods).
- The dense network of public rights of way and opportunities to explore the landscape, including the network of paths (many of which are suitable for 'tramper' vehicles) within the popular Shorne Woods Country Park.



Accessible path through wood pasture and heath habitats, Shorne Country Park



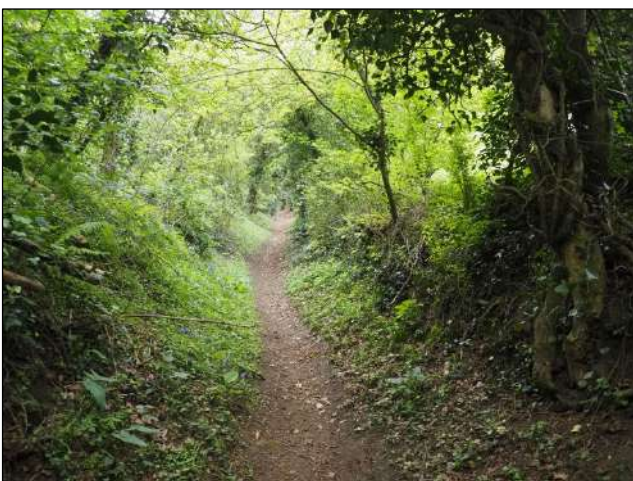
Traditional orchard at Crabbles Bottom, managed by Shorne Parish Council



Shorne Ridgeway, with rows of 18th/19th Century cottages, and chestnut trees on the village green.



Paddocks surrounded by woodland between Shorne and Shorne Ridgeway



Old hollow-way through woodland heading north from Shorne Woods



The unique visitor centre at Shorne Country Park is a popular local destination

Forces for change and their landscape implications

Past and present

- Anti-social behaviour (e.g. dumping of rubbish) in woods without formal public access.
- Increased traffic making narrow, fast roads without pavements dangerous for pedestrians. The problem is exacerbated by parking on roads.
- Development around villages which does not contribute to local distinctiveness or reflect the traditional forms of the settlements.
- Industrial development within historic parkland at Park Pale.
- Loss of trees within property curtilages, often felled so owners can have a view, or to reduce maintenance requirements. This changes the character of residential areas, which traditionally have contained many trees, and creates a less distinctive and more suburban feel.
- Damage to woodland when gardens back on to it (trampling, dumping rubbish, etc.).
- Loss of orchards (shown on 19th Century maps) and some field boundaries.
- Poles and overhead wires detracting from views of the landscape and setting of the Candidate NNR.
- Loss of trees through disease, including sweet chestnut gall wasp, phytophthora and ash dieback. Oak processionary moth is also a concern.
- Creation of Country Park (with landmark eco-building) at Shorne Woods and its subsequent management has been a positive change.
- Positive management of sites by Shorne Parish Council, and involvement of local community groups in archaeology, management of sites for biodiversity, etc.

Future

- Further loss of trees to disease and/or storm damage. Tree pests and diseases are likely to increase as a result of climate change.
- Lack of woodland management resulting in a lack of age and species diversity, increasing vulnerability to disease and climate change.
- Loss of surface/shallow archaeology which is vulnerable to changes in land management.
- Impacts of Lower Thames Crossing (if built) alongside A2. Also additional compensatory planting within this LCA, including a northern extension to Shorne Woods.
- Development and recreation pressure associated with population growth.



Garden waste dumped at entrance to Court Wood



Overhead wires crossing open fields east of Shorne

Potential Core and Affiliate NNR Partners working within this LCA (May 2024)

Shorne Woods Country Park Shorne Parish Council (Shorne Common Rough and Crabbles Bottom)

Potential future NNR Partners working within this LCA

Private landowners National Highways

Recommendations

Aspirational Strategy

The LCA will retain its strongly-wooded character, and its range of habitats. Wildlife linkages will be improved between woodland blocks through the creation of new hedges and tree shaws, scrubby areas and grass buffer strips. Links will be enhanced between the Candidate NNR and the surrounding countryside. Positive management of habitats will continue (including chalk grassland, traditional orchards, heath, wood pasture, woodland, coppice, parkland and veteran trees). Where necessary new management will be introduced to enhance biodiversity. Woodland will be managed to promote age and species diversity to try and minimise the effects of pests and diseases, and climate change.

The distinctive wooded influence on the character of built form will be maintained, for example through encouraging homeowners to retain/plant trees within domestic curtilages. The appearance of the landscape will be enhanced through the removal of poles and overhead wires and screening of industrial buildings.

Accessibility and safety will be improved through the creation of foot and cycle paths where needed, especially in and around villages. New off-road circular routes from settlements will enable access to Candidate NNR sites, including new permissive paths through woodland currently not publicly accessible.

The local community will continue to be involved in conservation management, for example orchard management, archaeological excavation, species surveys etc. Further opportunities will be developed for local people to access and engage with the Candidate NNR.

Protect

- The wooded character of the Candidate NNR and its setting.
- Trees within domestic curtilages, educating residents about the importance of trees and scrub to settlement character and biodiversity.
- The setting of settlements and the relationship between settlements, small fields and woodland.
- Surviving historic parkland, traditional orchards and related grassland habitats.
- Historic features (tracks etc.) contributing to the character and function of the Candidate NNR landscape.
- The immediate setting of the KDNL and Candidate NNR.

Manage

- Woodland for nature conservation, aiming for age and species diversity within the Candidate NNR. Seek opportunities to extend and link woodlands within and outside the Candidate NNR.
- Productive semi-natural habitats (such as traditional orchards and coppice).
- Grassland, parkland and wood pasture/heath habitats through appropriate grazing or cutting.
- Veteran trees and parkland to promote biodiversity. Plant the parkland trees of the future.

Plan

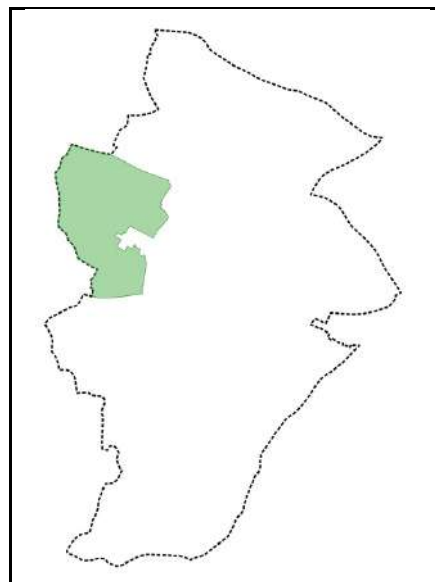
- Consider undergrounding poles and wires across open land to improve the area's visual appearance.
- Enhance the road and/or path network to improve safety of pedestrians and cyclists, particularly within/close to villages.
- Encourage planting of traditional orchards (on a community rather than commercial basis).
- Work with landowners to promote new permissive paths through woodland to encourage public access and new circular walks.
- Restoration of lost hedges/shaws and field boundaries to link habitats and improve resilience to climate change.
- Screen visually-intrusive industrial buildings using native tree and shrub species.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA (LCA) 3: Jeskyns Woodland and Orchards

Description

Location and Context

This LCA is located in the west of the Study Area, and forms a transition between the chalk landscapes of the Kent Downs and the flatter farmland to the west. It is bounded to the north by the A2, and to the south by a railway line. Both of these are clear features within gradual landscape transitions into the Thong Farmlands LCA and Luddesdown Downs LCA respectively. The western boundary follows the development edge at Sole Street, and lanes which form the study area boundary. The north-eastern boundary (with the Cobham Park and Ranscombe LCA) follows the edge of Ashenbank Wood and Cobham village. The south-eastern boundary (with the Luddesdown Downs LCA) follows the edge of commercial orchard planting and the railway line. The eastern part of the LCA is within the Kent Downs National Landscape (KDNL).



Summary Description

The Jeskyns Woodland and Orchards LCA comprises community woodland, orchards (community and commercial) and farmland to the west of Cobham village. The area is characterised by its gentle topography and relatively high proportion of young trees (including fruit trees and 21st Century woodland planting). The contrasts between the planted blocks of young trees and the open areas around them are also part of the character. From many of the open areas there are long views west towards London, and a sense of openness and exposure. The LCA can be appreciated from extensive access land and a range of Public Rights Of Way (PROW), including footpaths, byways and an equestrian route.

There are a small number of buildings within this LCA, but it is generally very lightly settled. The many and varied fruit trees create strong seasonal changes, with spring blossom particularly attractive and noticeable.

The eastern part (within the KDNL) is more strongly influenced by the chalk landscapes and Cobham Hall estate, while the western part is more influenced by the clay-dominated farmlands to the west.

Landscape Character Areas identified in existing Landscape Character Assessments located within this LCA

The Character of England	<i>National Character Area 113: North Kent Plain; National Character Area 119: North Downs</i>
Landscape Assessment of Kent	<i>Southfleet Arable Lands; Cobham – West Kent Downs; Luddesdown – West Kent Downs</i>
Gravesham	<i>Istead Arable Farmlands; Ashenbank and Cobham Parkland</i>
Medway	<i>N/A</i>
Tonbridge and Malling	<i>N/A</i>
KDNL	<i>West Kent Downs – Cobham; West Kent Downs - Luddesdown</i>

Key Characteristics

- Geology comprises Thanet Formation sands and Cretaceous Chalk, overlain by patches of sedimentary head deposits (clay, silt, sand and gravel). Soils are loamy, with varying levels of acidity and drainage properties.
- Landform is relatively flat, and generally slopes gently down towards the west, although Winstead Hill is a notable isolated feature.
- There are a small number of ponds within the area, but no streams or rivers.
- Land use comprises woodland with public access, grassland, farmland, private parkland, and community and commercial orchards. There are also carparking and visitor facilities.
- Fields are generally large. Where field boundaries remain they usually comprise high shelter belts (around commercial orchards) or low hedges (around fields).
- Semi-natural habitats include extensive areas of young woodland, traditional orchard and grassland, as well as smaller wetland and parkland areas.
- Historic features include Listed Buildings (house and granary) at Jeskyns Court and St Margaret's Church, Ifield. Also routeways.
- Roads and PROW. The A2 and HS1 run along the northern part of the LCA. Elsewhere country lanes run across and around the LCA. There are extensive areas of access land, and a good network of PROW.
- Settlement is limited to isolated properties along roads, and the northern edge of Sole Street.
- Extensive areas of commercial orchard create a strongly linear pattern in the south of the LCA. This contrasts with the more organic shapes of the designed woodland in the north.
- The presence of fruit and nut trees creates exceptionally strong seasonal change, and enables the landscape to be appreciated through senses of smell and taste.
- Views are often limited by vegetation, but in open areas, long views open up to the west.

Designated sites

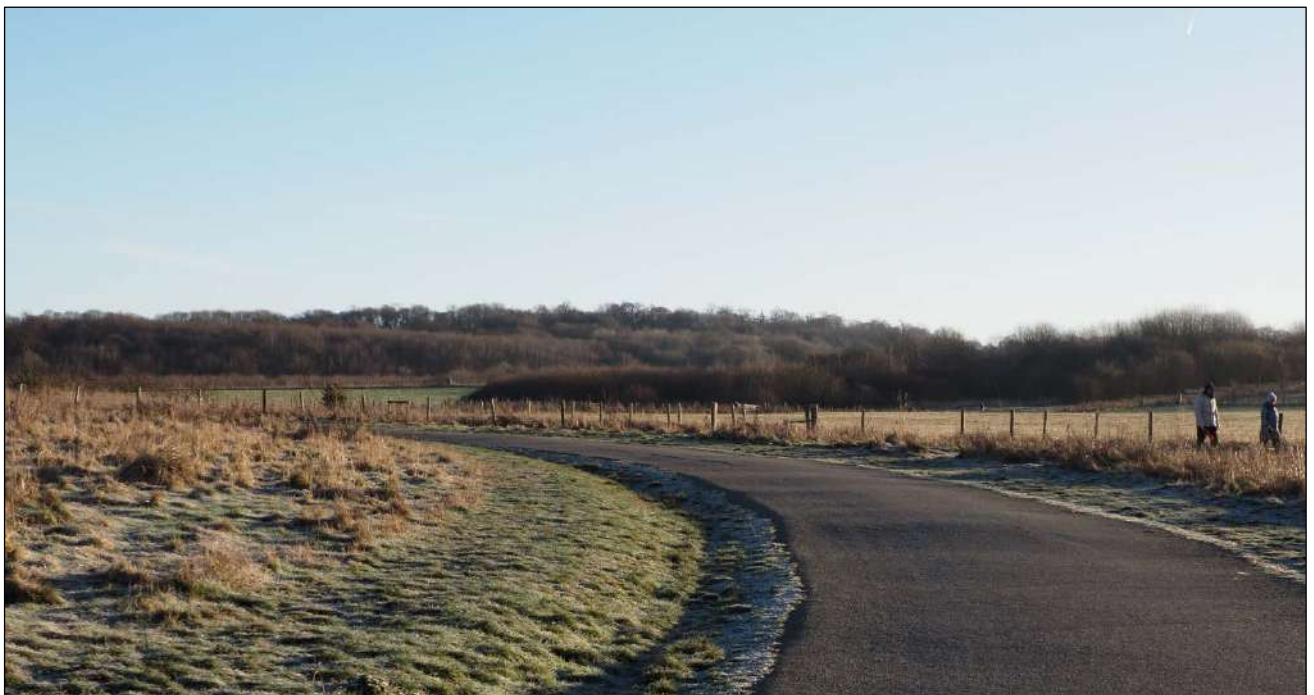
<i>Natural Heritage Sites</i>		<i>Cultural Heritage Sites</i>	
SSSI	Small part of Shorne and Ashenbank Woods in NE	Conservation Area	Contributes to setting of Cobham
		Listed Buildings	St Margaret's Church; House and granary at Jeskyns Court



View from community orchard, with cobnut in foreground, looking south-east towards commercial orchard.



A typical autumn scene within the Jeskyns Woodland and Orchards LCA. An accessible path leads through recently-planted woodland and open pastoral fields. On the horizon is the ancient woodland of Ashenbank Wood.



The same scene in winter, when the woodland structure can be more easily seen, and the frozen ground catches the eye.



The same scene in spring. Leaves and blossom on the fruit trees, and flowers in the verges add colour and vibrancy.

The natural landscape

This LCA covers the geological transition between the chalk of the Kent Downs (to the east) and the London Clay (to the west). It is the westward end of the east-west ridge on which Cobham Park is situated. As such, it is relatively high, but slopes gradually down towards the west and south. Winstead Hill forms a gentle outlier of higher ground in the centre of the LCA.

Much work has been done since 2000 to establish semi-natural habitats in the Jeskyns Woodland area. These include plantations of mixed native woodland, some monoculture tree areas (e.g. willow) and extensive areas of community orchard, including 600 different varieties of fruit (apples, pears, plums, and cherries) and nuts (cobnuts). There are also pockets of older woodland on the north-eastern periphery of the LCA, which includes historic chestnut coppice within the Shorne and Ashenbank Woods SSSI. These are currently in private ownership, along with adjacent parkland and paddocks.

The Priority Habitats Inventory identifies deciduous woodland and traditional orchards within this LCA.

The cultural landscape

Much of this LCA contains a relatively 'new' landscape, with community woodland replacing open farmland and strongly influencing its character, although in places retaining the open farmland feel was key to the design of the woodland. Its character will continue to evolve in the future as the trees establish, and the contrasts diminish between the young trees and the older trees in the adjacent ancient woodland.

Historic rural Listed Buildings reflect the LCA's rural character and the lack of settlement here. They include the house and granary at Jeskyns Court (a medieval manorial site), and St Margaret's Church, which has its origins in the 15th Century and stands largely isolated in fields. Although the building's present appearance

reflects 19th Century alterations, the churchyard yews indicate its considerable age. The LCA also contributes to the setting of Cobham village, a Conservation Area containing numerous Listed Buildings.

The LCA contains a number of historic routeways. The byways towards the eastern edge of the LCA can be seen in historic maps as roads connecting Cobham and Owlets with the ridge road (now the A2), Thong, and the Thames Marshes beyond. The Timeball and Telegraph Trail passes through this LCA on its route between Deal and Greenwich.

Visual and perceptual qualities of the landscape

The number and variety of trees (particularly the diversity of fruit and nut trees, and the different types of orchards) create varied textures, patterns and colours, with marked seasonal changes. People are encouraged to pick fruit for their own consumption from the community orchards, enabling appreciation of the smell and taste of the fruit, and enjoyment of the landscape with a greater range of senses than usual.

There is a marked contrast between the treed and open areas of the LCA in terms of land use, enclosure and views. The long views towards the west were considered when the community woodland was designed, and are emphasised through path layouts, seating and sculptures.

Special qualities to be retained and enhanced

- The variety of trees – especially fruit and nut trees – within this LCA.
- The accessibility of the landscape, through areas of public access and a strong Public Rights of Way network, including some ancient routes, and dedicated equestrian routes.
- The treed setting which the LCA provides for the KDNL, the Candidate NNR and the Conservation Area at Cobham.
- The sudden long views, which aid orientation and add to the sense of place.



Commercial fruit orchard near Gold Street



View east towards Jeskyns Community Woodland across adjacent open arable farmland



Horse rider using the equine trail in Jeskyns Wood



Cobnut trees in community orchard



St Margaret's Church, Ifield



Long view from open ground in Jeskyns Wood

Forces for change and their landscape implications

Past and present

- Loss of hedgerows and farmland biodiversity (particularly in western part of LCA) due to intensive agriculture from mid-20th Century.
- Expansion of infrastructure corridor (A2 road and HS1 railway line) along the northern edge of the LCA.
- Pylons carrying high-voltage power lines across the LCA.
- Recent removal of commercial orchards between Gold Street and the railway line.
- Planting of Jeskyns Community Woodland (native and orchard trees) on arable farmland in the early 21st Century was a positive landscape change.

Future

- Possible continued loss of commercial orchards.
- Potential positive change through nitrogen deposition mitigation and ancient woodland compensation planting for Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) in the fields to the west of Jeskyns Wood. This could also enable enhanced access, including footpaths and cycle routes, and contribute to nature recovery through tree and hedgerow planting, and habitat creation.
- Development and recreation pressure from potential population growth.



Site of recently removed commercial orchard south of Gold Street



HS1 infrastructure corridor along the northern edge of the LCA



Intensively farmed 'prairie fields' in the west of the LCA



Pylons carrying high-voltage lines cross the landscape

Potential Core and Affiliate NNR Partners working within this LCA (May 2024)

Potential future NNR Partners working within this LCA

Forestry England (Jeskyns Community Woodland)

Private landowners

National Highways

Recommendations

Aspirational Strategy

The LCA will continue to provide an attractive setting for the KDNL, Candidate NNR and Cobham Conservation Area. It will also continue to act as a repository for different species of trees, including fruit and nut trees.

The existing treed character will be expanded into adjacent arable farmland in the west of the LCA, where it will further enhance visual connections, habitats and wildlife corridors. Views will be retained so that the sense of place and orientation is not lost.

The landscape will remain accessible through its network of historic and more recent public rights of way. It will continue to be a place where local people can interact with nature using senses of taste, touch and smell, as well as sight and sound. Footpath connections with Gravesend will be enhanced in association with new planting in fields in the west of the LCA. Circular walks using sustainable transport options from Sole Street station and from urban areas of Gravesend will be promoted.

Protect

- The variety of native and commercial tree species present within the LCA.
- The immediate setting of the KDNL.

Manage

- Woodland, thinning and managing 21st Century planting to create a more varied woodland structure which can join seamlessly with more established woodland nearby.
- Orchards (community and commercial) to retain the diversity of species grown, and to expand to accommodate further species as appropriate.

Plan

- Retain and extend PROW. Promote circular foot and cycle routes from Sole Street Station, and from Gravesend (utilising the existing footbridge across the A2). Make the PROW across the open fields in the west of the LCA more interesting by integrating them with new proposed planting (see below).
- Extend woodland planting into adjacent farmland, supporting nature recovery by linking habitats where possible and enhancing biodiversity, for example through planting new hedges and trees, and widening field margins to accommodate grass buffer strips. This may be achieved through working with LTC's designers responsible for the nitrogen deposition mitigation and ancient woodland compensation planting. The design should incorporate the existing long views and take into account the sense of openness currently experienced here.

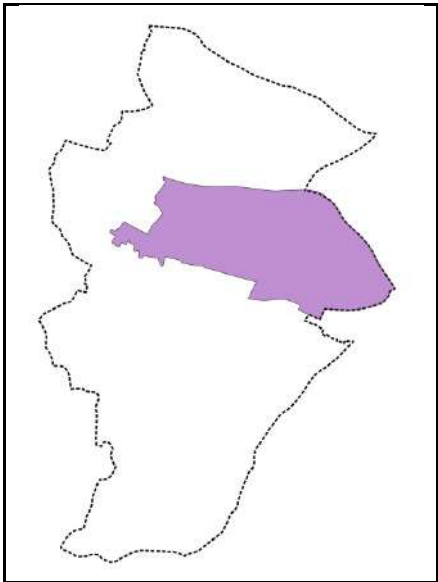
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA (LCA) 4: Cobham Park and Ranscombe

Description

Location and Context

This LCA is located in the central and eastern part of the study area. Its northern boundary runs along the A2, which now divides this LCA from Shorne Woods LCA to the north. The eastern boundary follows the edge of the study area along the M2 and railway line. The southern boundary follows woodland edges and field boundaries within the gradual transition to the Luddesdown LCA to the south, and includes all of Cobham village Conservation Area. The western boundary (with Jeskyns Woodland and Orchards LCA) runs along the edge of ancient woodland, and historic tracks.

The entire area is within the Kent Downs National Landscape (KDNL). It also includes all land owned/managed by environmental NGOs: the Woodland Trust, National Trust, Plantlife, and the West Kent Downs Countryside Trust.



Summary Description

The Cobham Park and Ranscombe LCA comprises the core of the Cobham Hall estate and contains numerous cultural heritage designations. It includes parkland, wood pasture, ancient woodland and farmland associated with Cobham Hall (Listed Grade I), as well as the historic village of Cobham. Cobham Hall (now a school) is an impressive Tudor house with later modifications and additions, and sits roughly in the centre of the LCA. Its grounds have a long history, and today contain natural and built elements from various stages of their evolution, including veteran trees originally in a medieval deer park, later formal planting, gardenesque designs by Humphrey Repton, extensive woodland and coppice, a 19th Century arboretum and a 20th Century golf course. It is a Registered Historic Park and Garden (Grade II*). The Grade I-Listed Darnley Mausoleum (a decorative and substantial stone structure designed by James Wyatt) sits at the highest point of the estate.

Today the Darnley estate is in multiple land ownerships, but it retains extensive areas of ancient woodland and wood pasture, and numerous fine examples of parkland and veteran trees which provide rich habitats for insects and birds. There are also areas of chalk grassland, rare arable field wildflowers, productive woodland and farmland. Most of the LCA is in active and positive management. There are long views within and out of the LCA, particularly from natural vantage points and the edges of woodland.

Landscape Character Areas identified in existing Landscape Character Assessments located within this LCA

The Character of England	<i>National Character Area 119: North Downs</i>
Landscape Assessment of Kent	<i>Cobham - West Kent Downs</i>
Gravesham	<i>Ashenbank and Cobham Parkland</i>
Medway	<i>Ranscombe Farm</i>
Tonbridge and Malling	<i>N/A</i>
KDNL	<i>West Kent Downs - Cobham</i>

Key Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Cretaceous chalk, with the highest parts overlain by sands, silts and clays of the Thanet Formation. There are some superficial deposits of Head and clay-with-flints.
- Landform is a dome shape, with the highest point (marked by the Darnley Mausoleum) close to the centre. At 130m Above Sea Level it is the highest point in the north of the study area.
- Occasional reservoirs and ponds, but no streams.
- Land use is primarily woodland and parkland, with smaller areas of agricultural land, a golf course, and a school.
- Fields mostly found in the eastern part of the LCA at Ranscombe, where they are large, and usually bounded by hedges and/or tracks.
- Great diversity of semi-natural habitats reflecting geology and history, including ancient woodland, wood pasture, veteran trees, chalk grassland and arable margins. Transitional habitats are particularly valuable.
- Wide range of designated historic features from pre-history to 2nd World War, dominated by those associated with the Cobham Hall/Darnley Estate. Cobham village contains many Listed Buildings and a Conservation Area.
- Roads concentrated around Cobham village and along the northern edge of the LCA. Historic routes within Cobham Park are now PROW. North Downs Way runs through Ranscombe Farm.
- Main settlement is historic linear village of Cobham. Elsewhere, settlement limited to scattered estate farms and Cobham Hall.
- Quite a large scale landscape, with extensive blocks of woodland and parkland, and occasional long views, especially from high land.
- Diversity of trees create seasonal changes in colours and textures.
- A strong sense of history, and opportunities to get close to nature, especially trees.
- An elevated and highly visible landscape, forming the backdrop and horizon to views from a wide area.

Designated sites

<i>Natural Heritage Sites</i>		<i>Cultural Heritage Sites</i>	
SSSI	Cobham Woods SSSI; Southern part of Shorne and Ashenbank Woods SSSI	Scheduled Monuments	Prehistoric Barrow; Roman Villa; WW2 gunsite
Ancient Woodland	Extensive areas, including Lodge Wood, Nor Wood, Great Wood, Birch Wood, Broad Oak Wood, Mill Hill, Longhose Wood, Merralls Shaw, Clay Pond Wood, and the southern part of Ashenbank Wood;	Listed Buildings	Numerous, associated with Cobham Park and Cobham village
		Conservation Area	Cobham
		Registered Park and Garden	Cobham Hall (Grade II*)



West Park, now owned by Gravesham Council



A typical autumn scene within the Cobham Park and Ranscombe LCA, taken from the drive to Lodge Farm. Parkland trees can be seen in the middle ground, with the wood pasture of Cobham Wood forming the backdrop.



The same scene in winter, which appears more open due to the lack of leaves on the trees.



The same scene in spring, with leaves on the trees and lush foreground vegetation creating a softer texture

The natural landscape

The diversity of sand and gravel deposits over the underlying chalk creates a range of soil conditions which in turn support a wide range of ground flora, fungi, insects and birds. This is reflected in the SSSI designations covering the larger woodlands. The range of species within the LCA is enhanced by the diversity of semi-natural habitats (deciduous woodland, ancient woodland, wood pasture, veteran trees, chalk grassland, scrub, and arable margins) and the transitions between them. Ranscombe is home to rare chalk arable plants, including Meadow Clary, which was first discovered there in 1699. Ashenbank wood and Cobham Woods contain exceptional veteran trees including hornbeam, oak, ash, field maple, beech and sweet chestnut trees. Most of the LCA is in active management to maintain and enhance the diversity of habitats and species.

The cultural landscape

The Cobham Park and Ranscombe LCA comprises the core of the Darnley Estate. The central part of the original Cobham Park is a Registered Historic Park and Garden and includes Cobham Hall and the Darnley Mausoleum. It was originally a medieval deer park, and some veteran trees survive from this time, when they would have marked field boundaries. Later, the grounds became more formal in design, including several straight avenues which radiated out from the house. The formal grounds were redesigned by Humphrey Repton c.1780-1810, although the earlier tree-lined avenue between Cobham Hall and Cobham village was retained and later replanted. Repton worked closely with architect James Wyatt and several elements of their work survive, including paths, the gardens around Cobham Hall, Brewers Ponds and pumphouse, the dairy, and the Darnley Mausoleum (a decorative but substantial stone structure at the highest point of the grounds). A smaller but equally unusual structure is the remains of the 'Toe Monument', erected by the widow of Edward Bligh, 5th Lord Darnley in 1835. Lord Darnley accidentally cut off his toe when working in Cobham Woods and died of tetanus four days later. The memorial marks the location of his accident.

Within Cobham Park and Cobham village are numerous Listed Buildings, including several Grade I: Cobham Hall, the Darnley Mausoleum, the 14th Century Cobham College, and the Parish Church of St Mary Magdalene (which contains a superb set of brasses and a decorative tomb of the de Cobham family). Cobham Village is a Conservation Area, and includes the National Trust property of Owletts. The LCA also has connections with Charles Dickens: his chalet was previously sited in the Darnley Estate, and the ‘Leather Bottle’ pub in Cobham was described in the *Pickwick Papers*.

In addition to Cobham Park features, there are Scheduled Monuments including a prehistoric barrow (burial mound) in Ashenbank Woods, a Roman villa site, and a Second World War gun site. Extensive Mesolithic flint scatters have been found at Ranscombe. There are also non-scheduled historic features from many different eras including ridge-top prehistoric sites, and Second World War defensive bunkers in Ashenbank Woods. Medieval manorial sites are known to have existed at Cobham (under the later Hall), Cobhambury and Vyaundes (south of Cobham College). Evidence of associated medieval field patterns within Cobham Woods can be identified using LiDAR.

Visual and perceptual qualities of the landscape

As the highest land within the northern part of the Candidate NNR, this LCA is highly visible, and forms an important backdrop and horizon to views. The natural topography would have been utilised by garden designers taking advantage of the long views within and outside the park. Natural rises at Peggy Taylor’s Hill and Windmill Hill were planted with tree clumps to catch the eye and form focal points in views. Most of these historic views are now blocked by vegetation. A new sculpted bench at Brockles Viewpoint on the edge of Nor Wood provides an opportunity to appreciate the view south and east. The landscape is quite large in scale, but very varied. The diversity of trees and flowers provide seasonal colours and rich textures.

The LCA has a strong sense of continuity with the past, despite the landscape changes which have taken place. Examples of historic features include ancient trees, old unmade roads which are now PRoW, and the distinctive wavy edges of woodland (unchanged from early 19th Century maps to the present day). In addition to numerous PRoW, many areas are open to the public, including Ashenbank Wood, Cobham Wood and Ranscombe Farm. Although previously associated with anti-social behaviour, this LCA is now popular for visits by local people and plays an important role in local environmental education and volunteering.

Special qualities to be retained and enhanced

- Distinctive historic features which add to the sense of place and history, such as the wavy edges of woodland, the network of historic tracks, and surviving designed landscape features.
- Relationships between historic buildings/structures and the surrounding landscape.
- High quality and unobstructed views within the LCA, and out over other parts of the Candidate NNR.
- Diversity of woodland, parkland, grassland and arable habitats, and the transitions between them.
- The combination of innovative and traditional management techniques.
- Public access into much of the LCA, and positive management by environmental NGOs.



Veteran hornbeam at Ashenbank Wood



Active chestnut coppice, Cuxton and Cobham Woods



Arable plant reserve, Ranscombe



Cobham village



Sculpted bench at Brockles viewpoint



The Darnley Mausoleum

Forces for change and their landscape implications

Past and present

- Sub-divisions of land as the Darnley estate was gradually sold off from the 1920s-1970s, leading to a lack of coherent management and decline of the designed landscape. This is a particular issue at Cuxton and Cobham woods, which were divided into 240 small lots known as ‘leisure plots’.
- Gradual loss of parkland trees, vistas and features, and change in character due to use as a school, golf course, etc. Historic views have been lost as vegetation has grown up.
- Past loss of orchards around Cobham village, affecting the village’s setting.
- Construction of the A2 and M2 roads and HS1 rail corridor, severing the estate.
- Significant anti-social behaviour in 1980s-90s – burnt out cars etc. including inside the mausoleum. CAMS was established to address anti-social behaviour and restore the woodland and mausoleum.
- Ongoing commercial foraging in protected woodlands.
- Ongoing anti-social behaviour, including vandalism of WW2 sites, illegal access, and off-roading electric bikes.
- Trees (including veteran trees) becoming more stressed due to climate change. Sudden oak decline is a particular concern, along with Ash Dieback.
- Land use changes (e.g. increase in vine growing) and associated infrastructure affecting views.
- Increasing wild deer population damaging trees and woodlands.
- Lots of positive management within the LCA – grazing, halo clearance around mature/veteran trees in woodlands, shifting saplings, coppicing, chalk grassland restoration, wildflower seed protection, green hay spreading, glades managed for orchids, tree surgery on dangerous trees. Collaborative management between landowners aids connectivity and biodiversity within the landscape.

Future

- Continued climate change, with many trees requiring assisted adaptation to new climatic conditions.
- Loss of surface/buried archaeology which is vulnerable to changes in land management.
- Opportunities to consolidate woodland management, especially in areas divided into multiple plots.
- Increase in nearby population may be positive (more volunteers) or negative (anti-social behaviour).
- Should the LCT go ahead, access from the north for walkers, cyclists and horses will be enhanced due to existing Brewers Rd and Thong Lane bridges being replaced with Green Bridges. The LTC will also result in National Cycle Route 177 being relocated along the south side of HS1, within this LCA.



Restored chalk grassland in orchard area of Cuxton and Cobham Woods, with long view to south.



Highland cattle grazing woodpasture in Cobham Woods (photo taken Sept. 2017)

Potential Core and Affiliate NNR Partners working within this LCA (May 2024)

Woodland Trust – Ashenbank Woods

National Trust – Cobham Woods

Plantlife – Ranscombe Farm

Gravesham Borough Council West Park

West Kent Downs Wildlife Trust – Cuxton and Cobham Woods

Potential future NNR Partners working within this LCA

Cobham Park School

Private landowners

Recommendations

Aspirational Strategy

The recommendations in the Cobham Hall Conservation Plan (2003) should be put into practise.

The LCA will remain an exemplar of positive management of woodland, wood pasture, parkland, golf course, chalk grassland, veteran trees and arable flowers. It will remain a place where innovative approaches to nature conservation are tried, which can be transferred elsewhere if they are successful.

Management will be more holistic across the LCA, and also within areas such as Cuxton and Cobham Woods which have been sub-divided into multiple ownerships. This will improve connectivity and biodiversity within the core of the Candidate NNR. The successful model of co-operation between different landowners in this part of the Candidate NNR will be expanded to include all landowners.

This LCA will be a large accessible area within the Candidate NNR, with an expanded role for volunteering and environmental education. People will continue to be able to access the areas currently open to the public, and the extensive network of PRoW. Opportunities will be explored for new/enhanced access points and routes, such as a more attractive and welcoming gateway into the Candidate NNR from Strood, and potentially new bridges over the A2 associated with the Lower Thames Crossing.

The area's rich historic legacy will be protected and celebrated, and Cobham village will retain its distinctive character and setting.

Protect

- Surviving features from medieval deer park (veteran trees) for their landscape and biodiversity value.
- Surviving historic designed landscape features, including those from schemes by Humphrey Repton and James Wyatt.
- Prehistoric archaeology (including flint scatter sites), particularly where it is vulnerable to land management changes.
- Historic buildings (including Listed Buildings, Conservation Area and their settings).
- Long-term distinctive features of the landscape which add to its sense of place and history, such as the wavy edges of woodlands, old unpaved roads, and lost medieval field patterns (often marked by ancient and veteran trees).
- Remaining orchards contributing to the setting of Cobham village, and expand them where appropriate.

Manage

- Woodland, in accordance with the specific circumstances and conditions of each of the woodland areas within the LCA.
- Chalk grassland pockets, managing invasive scrub/trees and encouraging grazing/cutting as required.
- Arable plants, continuing existing projects to extend their coverage and harvest seeds.
- Parkland, including planting new trees to eventually replace those which die, and enhancing biodiversity value. West Park has particular potential for this.
- Veteran trees and wood pasture, continuing existing management practises such as light undergrazing, halo-clearance, retaining deadwood habitats, etc.
- The golf course, particularly through encouraging parkland tree planting, and species diversity in rough areas.

Plan

- Continue to test alternative and innovative management practices, particularly those related to helping species adapt to changing climatic conditions and threats such as Acute Oak Decline.

PART C: Landscape Character Descriptions 4 Cobham Park and Ranscombe Landscape Character Area

- Aim for integrated management strategies and consider the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders to assist in the consolidation of woodland management, in particular for those areas divided into multiple plots.
- Develop co-operative land management strategies between all landowners within this LCA.
- Consider opening-up of historic views where vegetation is already relatively thin, and it can be done in a way which is beneficial to biodiversity.
- Investigate opportunities for improving access into the area from Strood, creating a more welcoming and attractive gateway over/under the M2, and work with LTC designers on enhancing accessibility. Opportunities for improving accessibility from Gravesend and the surrounding rural settlements should also be sought.



Bluebells in Ashenbank Wood



*View south from Mill Hill
towards the Luddesdown
Downs. Vegetation has been
managed to keep the view
open*

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA (LCA) 5: Luddesdown Downs

Description

Location and Context

This extensive LCA covers the chalk ridges and valleys which form the south-west of the study area. The southern and western boundaries follow lanes and tracks along the edge of the study area. To the north-west is the Jeskyns Woodland and Orchards LCA, with the boundary marked by the railway line and the edge of commercial orchard planting. To the north is a gradual transition into the Cobham Park and Ranscombe LCA; the boundary follows field and woodland edges within a broad dry valley which runs east-west. To the east is the Medway Western Scarp LCA, with the boundary following the top of the scarp. The Luddesdown Downs LCA contains the village of Luddesdown and the hamlets of Henley Street, Upper Bush and Great Buckland. It is entirely within the Kent Downs National Landscape (KDNL), and also includes Camer Park (a Country Park).



Summary Description

The extensive Luddesdown Downs LCA covers the attractive and tranquil chalk downland landscape which is typical of this part of the West Kent Downs. The underlying chalk has been eroded into a series of steep-sided dry valleys running roughly south-west to north-east. The highest land and steepest parts of the valley sides are generally wooded, with small but valuable pockets of chalk grassland also found on steep slopes. The woodlands and chalk grassland are designated at international, national or local level for their biodiversity importance.

Hedged fields cover the valley floors and shallower slopes. Traditionally these have been in pastoral use, with some arable. Today many of the agricultural fields are used for viticulture – a new landuse responding to the changing climate.

Historic farmsteads and hamlets nestle into folds in the landform in a sparse settlement pattern hardly changed in centuries. A network of narrow lanes and tracks follow ridge tops and valley floors, often lined by thick hedges and sometimes sunken where they cross valley sides. The topography and woodland mean that this is often an enclosed landscape, with most views along valleys. There are also views into this LCA from the north.

Landscape Character Areas identified in existing Landscape Character Assessments located within this LCA

The Character of England	<i>National Character Area 119: North Downs</i>
Landscape Assessment of Kent	<i>Luddesdown: West Kent Downs</i>
Gravesham	<i>Luddesdown Downs; Meopham Downs</i>
Medway	<i>Bush Valley and Dean Farm</i>
Tonbridge and Malling	<i>Luddesdown: West Kent Downs</i>
KDNL	<i>West Kent Downs - Luddesdown</i>

Key Characteristics

- Varied chalk bedrock, with some overlying clay-with-flints on higher land. Valleys contain shallow, freely-draining lime-rich soils; soils on ridges are more clayey and with impeded drainage.
- Landform comprises a series of marked dry valleys running roughly SW-NE, separated by ridges. The highest point in the study area is in the south of this LCA, with the topography flattening out towards the western edge.
- Little surface water due to underlying porous chalk geology. Occasional small ponds.
- Generalised land uses include pastoral farming and viticulture in steeper valleys, arable agriculture on flatter ground, and woodland on ridge tops. Some equine use.
- Field patterns very varied in both size and shape, but have changed little since the late 19th Century. May be bounded by hedges, woodland or lanes/tracks, sometimes supplemented with stockproof fencing.
- Very extensive semi-natural habitats (chalk grassland, scrub and woodland) with local, national and international designations. Woodland mostly deciduous with some lowland beech and yew.
- Numerous historic buildings (churches, farms, cottages and manor houses), many of which are Listed. Conservation Area at Upper Bush.
- Network of historic lanes and tracks, often following valley floors or ridge tops, with very steep sections on valley sides.
- Historic sparse settlement pattern comprising the dispersed village of Luddesdown, scattered hamlets and farms.
- Contrasts between wooded ridges and farmed valleys create a distinctive landscape pattern.
- Recreational opportunities at Camer Park (a Country Park), two Long Distance Footpaths, and other PROW.
- A tranquil landscape with a strongly-rural character.
- Long views along valleys, and excellent views of the area from the Cobham Park and Ranscombe LCA to the north.

Designated sites

<i>Natural Heritage Sites</i>		<i>Cultural Heritage Sites</i>	
Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	Numerous including grassland, scrub and woodland	Conservation Area	Upper Bush
Ancient Woodland	Most woodland within this LCA	Listed Buildings	Numerous, including church, manor houses, farms and cottages.
SSSI	Part of Halling to Trottiscliffe Escarpment		
Special Area of Conservation	Part of North Downs Woodlands		



View looking north up Bowling Alley valley



A typical autumn scene in the Luddesdown Downs LCA at Dean Valley. An historic farmstead sits at the bottom of a straight dry valley, surrounded by pastoral fields. The tops of the enclosing ridges are wooded.



The same view in winter. The valley forms a frost pocket, and the eastern valley side is still in shadow due to the low sun.



The same view in spring, with trees coming into leaf.

The natural landscape

This is a landscape dominated by its underlying chalk geology, which has been eroded over millennia to create a series of deep valleys, running roughly SW-NE. There are several different layers of chalk, with the oldest ones exposed in the valley floors where the younger layers have been eroded away. On the ridges, the chalk has weathered to create a layer of clay-with-flints. These heavy deposits are very difficult to plough, which is why they have historically been left as woodland. The lighter chalk soils found on the valley sides and valley floors are easier to work, and have therefore become the focus for farming. The highest point in the study area (196m) is found at Holly Hill, in the south of the LCA and was used historically as a beacon site. The topography flattens out slightly towards the western edge of the study area.

The deciduous woodlands, scrub and pockets of chalk grassland found in this LCA provide habitats for a wide range of plants, fungi, insects, birds, mammals and reptiles associated with chalk downland. These include rare orchids, moths, and many different woodland birds. This part of the Candidate NNR is valued for the mosaic of habitats found within relatively small areas, and the diversity of the woodland. There are extensive areas of deciduous woodland identified on the Priority Habitat Inventory, along with pockets of lowland calcareous grassland, and areas described as having 'no main habitat'. Most of the woodland in the LCA is Ancient Woodland, and the LCA contains woodland SSSI, as well as internationally-designated woodland SAC (covering the beech-yew woodland between Bowling Alley and Greatpark Wood). There are numerous Local Wildlife Sites covering smaller woodland, scrub and grassland sites.

The size of this LCA means that it has the potential to contribute significantly to the biodiversity and the bioabundance of the Candidate NNR. It also adjoins three other LCAs, with potential to link with them to enhance wildlife habitats and connectivity across the Candidate NNR.

The cultural landscape

This is a landscape which has changed relatively little in hundreds of years, with medieval (or older) roads, tracks, farms, fields and buildings still in everyday use. Much of the landscape therefore has a strong sense of timelessness. Although the area is very lightly settled, there are many Listed Buildings (houses, cottages and churches, including the Grade I-Listed Luddesdown Court) and a Conservation Area at the historic hamlet of Upper Bush. Historic parkland at the small estate of Camer Park (on the western edge of the LCA) is now a country park. The LCA also contains the site of the medieval manor of Great Buckland.

Most of the buildings are nestled into sheltered folds in the landscape and constructed of locally-available materials. They therefore blend into the landscape. They are linked by a network of historic lanes and tracks which run along valleys and ridges, and cut steeply down valley sides. Distinctive place names relate to the landscape's history. Recent years have seen a new land use (viticulture) developed within the historic landscape framework.

Visual and perceptual qualities of the landscape

This is a relatively accessible landscape on foot, with an excellent network of PROWs including two Long Distance Footpaths (the North Downs Way and the Wealdway), and a Country Park at Camer Park on the western edge of the LCA. However, lanes are narrow and there are few passing or parking places, and beyond the paths the landscape can feel very private. The lack of main roads and large settlements results in a tranquil, historic and strongly-rural feel to the landscape.

There is a marked contrast in colour and texture between the wooded ridgetops and the open valley sides and floors. The landscape pattern is enhanced by the thick mixed hedges and the wooded shaws which sometimes extend down the valley sides. Views are often contained within valleys, although there are magnificent long views of the area from the north, from within the Cobham Park and Ranscombe LCA.

Special qualities to be retained and enhanced

- The distinctive pattern of wooded ridges and more open valleys.
- The strong landscape structure created by woodland, shaws and hedges.
- The mosaic of ancient woodland, grassland and scrub habitats, and the transitions between them.
- Strong traditional relationship between buildings and landform, with historic buildings nestled into sheltered folds rather than in exposed locations.
- Historic landscape features and the resultant strong sense of time-depth.
- The strongly-rural, tranquil feel of the landscape.
- The appearance of this LCA when seen from popular viewpoints, particularly to the north.



Repeating pattern of wooded ridges and open valleys, as seen looking south from Brockles Viewpoint (Cobham Park and Ranscombe LCA)



Typical downland scene west of Luddesdown, looking west, showing dry valley landform, and landscape structure of woodland, hedges and shaws



Mosaic of grassland, scrub and woodland on valley side, Bowling Alley



Timber framed Listed Building at Coombe Hill Farm, originally dating from 16th Century



Historic parkland at Camer Park

Forces for change and their landscape implications

Past and present

- Past loss of chalk grassland as grazing land has been ploughed or 'improved' through fertilizer application.
- Today many of the agricultural fields in the northern part of this LCA are used for viticulture (grape vines). The landscape structure of woodland and hedges is largely unaffected by this new land use, but the vines, their supports and protective guards introduce new colours and textures into the landscape. It also affects the setting of Listed Buildings and potentially Conservation Areas.
- Associated with the increase in viticulture is organic management of the landscape, using animal grazing and traditional methods rather than chemicals or intensive/mechanised techniques.
- Horse paddocks and other facilities (ménage, stables etc.) have localised impacts on parts of the LCA.
- Invasive rhododendron spread in some woodlands, e.g. Greatpark Wood.
- Loss of trees to pests and diseases such as Ash Dieback and Sudden Oak Decline.
- Some denudation of hedgerows and shaws, reducing coherence of landscape structure.
- Erosion of verges and banks by vehicles on narrow lanes.

Future

- Potential future increase in vine coverage and associated infrastructure.
- Climate change affecting trees and woodland composition (e.g. loss of beech trees which are particularly susceptible to drought).
- Continued spread of tree disease, exacerbated by climate change.
- Loss of buried archaeology through changes in landscape management.
- Development pressure from population growth.
- A risk of suburbanisation, especially at the peripheries of the LCA, through (for example) highways works, changes to property boundaries or unnecessary signage.



Vines planted around Luddesdown village add new textures and colours to the landscape, and alter the settings of Listed Buildings, although the historic landscape structure is retained.



Invasive rhododendron in Greatpark Wood, along the North Downs Way

Potential Core and Affiliate NNR Partners working within this LCA (May 2024)

Gravesham Borough Council
 Silverhand Estate
 Tarmac

Potential future NNR Partners working within this LCA

Private landowners

Recommendations

Aspirational Strategy

The LCA will be closely integrated with neighbouring parts of the Candidate NNR in terms of management and connectivity of habitats, enabling enhancements at a landscape scale across the area. The diversity of habitats will be retained and expanded, with opportunities sought for chalk grassland restoration. New scrub and woodland habitats will also be encouraged where they fit with the landscape pattern and structure, and there will be greater public awareness of the habitats and species found within the LCA.

The LCA will retain and enhance its clear landscape structure, and distinctive pattern of woodland and open land. Any future expansion of vine coverage will respect and enhance the landscape structure (for example through hedgerow restoration), and will not result in loss of habitat. Innovative techniques will enable viticulture to be as sensitive as possible to its surroundings and to promote biodiversity.

Buildings will remain well assimilated into the landscape. They will be sensitively located and sited, and avoid isolated locations. The area will retain its strongly-rural character and sense of time-depth. Its landscape history will be researched and celebrated, for example through interpretation and trails.

Opportunities for sustainable access will be explored, and the LCA will be linked with other parts of the Candidate NNR, for example, through the creation of circular routes from Sole Street Station, and from car parks at Camer Park and Holly Hill. Care will be taken not to damage fragile habitats through increased visitor footfall.

Protect

- The landscape pattern and structure, particularly the clear contrast between wooded ridges and open valleys, with transitional areas of scrub and chalk grassland between them.
- The strongly-rural, historic and tranquil qualities of the landscape.
- The distinctive built heritage of the area, including Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and their settings.
- The relationship between buildings and landscape, where buildings are nestled within the landform and do not dominate it. Avoid siting new buildings in isolated locations away from existing buildings.
- Buried archaeological sites, including medieval manorial sites.

Manage

- Woodland, retaining diversity of species and age structure, and also the distinctive wavy edges of woodland. Encourage opening of glades and rides to create a variety of light conditions, and to increase the range of habitats. Continue to keep chestnut coppice productive, and remove invasive rhododendron.
- Chalk grassland, through grazing as appropriate, and monitor the species present.
- Arable farm land, encouraging biodiversity measures such as widening field margins and restoration of hedges.

Plan

- Seek to link habitats to improve wildlife corridors and increase resilience to climate change, both within this LCA and at a landscape scale through connecting with other parts of the Candidate NNR.
- Use wildflower and other species monitoring to develop techniques for more sensitive viticulture.
- Undertake place name research to understand the historic evolution of the landscape.
- Develop a range of waymarked routes from Sole Street railway station and existing car parks at Holly Hill and Camer Park. Include routes along quiet lanes which are suitable for road bikes and powered wheelchairs. These routes could be designed to pass different landscape features, habitats, and/or historic buildings.

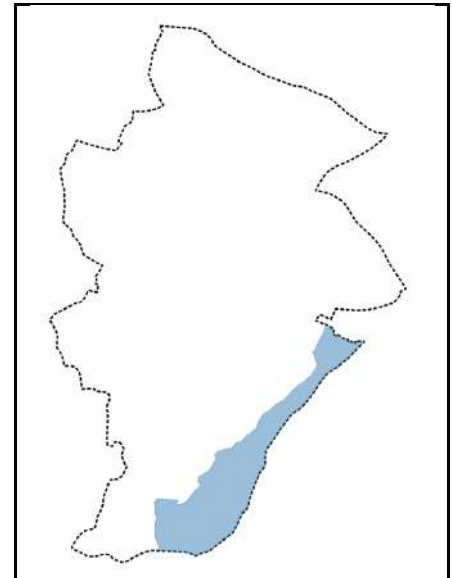
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA (LCA) 6: Medway Western Scarp

Description

Location and Context

This LCA is located in the south-east of the Study Area, and forms part of the Medway Valley. Its northern, eastern and southern boundaries follow the edge of Cuxton village, and roads and tracks along the edge of the study area. To the west is the Luddesdown Downs LCA; the boundary between them follows the top of the scarp as closely as possible along paths and woodland edges.

The entire LCA is within the Kent Downs National Landscape (KDNL). It includes some houses on the western side of Pilgrim's Road and the A228 within the villages of Cuxton, North Halling and Upper Halling. It forms a strong and distinctive edge to the Candidate NNR.



Summary Description

The Medway Western Scarp LCA comprises the steep western valley side of the Medway Valley. It forms the western setting to the Medway Valley and is highly visible from it. The combination of colours, patterns and textures on the valley side make this setting particularly distinctive. The chalk landform is so steep (due to a combination of natural processes and quarrying) that it appears as a white cliff-like band along the base of the slope, sometimes extending where larger quarries have been carved into the chalk. The upper parts of the valley side are covered by dense woodland, which occasionally extends down the slope. Below the woodland is a band of fields, sometimes separated from the woodland by an irregular margin of chalk grassland. At the base of the slope are a series of farms and small villages, one of which – Cuxton – has extended up the valley side towards Lower Bush.

There are impressive panoramic views from this LCA, particularly in the south where views from roads and paths are more open. From here there are long views across the Medway Valley to the east and over Kemsing Vale to the south.

Landscape Character Areas identified in existing Landscape Character Assessments located within this LCA	
The Character of England	<i>National Character Area 119: North Downs</i>
Landscape Assessment of Kent	<i>The Western Scarp: Medway; Medway Valley Lower</i>
Gravesham	<i>N/A</i>
Medway	<i>Halling Scarp West</i>
Tonbridge and Malling	<i>The Western Scarp: Medway</i>
KDNL	<i>Medway Valley – Western Scarp</i>

Key Characteristics

- Underlying chalk geology, with different layers of chalk visible in the scarp. Soils are heavy clays on highest land, and shallow, free-draining chalk soils elsewhere.
- Landform dominated by wavy-edged steep scarp slope on western side of Medway valley. This contains several large redundant quarries.
- Little surface water due to porous chalk geology.
- Land use comprises woodland on highest and/or steepest ground, and farmland on lower land and shallower slopes. Also pockets of parkland and old quarries.
- Diverse field pattern, generally smaller and irregular higher up, and larger and more regular below. Boundaries are usually hedged.
- Extensive areas of semi-natural habitats, including deciduous woodland (designated at national and international level for habitat importance), chalk grassland, scrub, parkland and former chalk quarries.
- Palaeolithic site at Cuxton is one of the earliest archaeological sites in Kent. Visible historic landscape features include woodland edges, historic farmsteads, lanes and Cuxton Church
- Ancient roads and tracks follow the top and base of the scarp. Several footpaths climb the scarp and one deep lane cuts through it.
- Farms and villages are located along the road at the base of the scarp. Cuxton (just outside the LCA) has expanded up the valley side.
- Contrasting colours and textures of woodland, scrub, grassland, farmland and chalk quarries create distinctive bands on the valley side. Woodland evergreens are particularly visible in winter.
- Strong visual relationship with the Medway Valley to the east and Kemsing Vale to the south. There are panoramic views over lower land from the scarp, and the scarp forms the setting to the adjacent valleys.

Designated sites

<i>Natural Heritage Sites</i>		<i>Cultural Heritage Sites</i>	
Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	Lad's Farm arable field; South Hill and Houlder Quarries	Scheduled Monument	Palaeolithic site on S. edge of Cuxton
SSSI	Halling to Trottiscliffe Escarpment (part)	Listed Buildings	Several (farmhouses and houses). St Michael's Church Cuxton Grade I
Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS)	Bores Hole, Halling		
Ancient Woodland	Most woodland within LCA		
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	North Downs Woodlands		



Contrasting textures between farmland and wooded scarp above Halling



A typical autumn scene in the Medway Western Scarp LCA. In the foreground are large fields on shallower slopes; above them are steeper fields, pockets of chalk grassland, and then (on the steepest land) deciduous woodland which forms a treed horizon. Chalk quarries form white scars and stripes on the valley side.



The same scene in winter. The yew trees in the scarp top woodland stand out when the deciduous trees are not in leaf, and there is also less screening of the redundant quarries.



The same scene in spring, with different soil colours showing through, and the trees in hedges and woodland creating a softer appearance to the landscape. The white of the chalk is just as vivid as at other times of year, particularly when it contrasts with the green of the adjacent chalk grassland.

The natural landscape

The underlying geology comprises three distinct layers of Cretaceous chalk, which were laid down on top of each other. The oldest (lowest) layer comprises rock of the Holywell nodular chalk formation. Above this is New Pit chalk formation, and at the top is Seaford and Newhaven chalk formation. During the Quaternary period the exposed upper surface of the chalk was weathered to create a layer of clay-with-flints, leading to heavy clay soil which is difficult to plough. The River Medway has subsequently eroded a deep valley which cuts through all three layers of chalk, revealing them in the steep escarpment. Subsequent quarrying has further steepened and indented the valley side in places, creating cliffs of chalk. Bores Hole Quarry is a Regionally Important Geological (RIGS) site for the chalk exposures within it. The soils which have formed on the valley sides are shallow, light and chalky; very different to the heavy weathered clays on the scarp top.

Landcover is contiguous with the adjacent Luddesdown Downs LCA to the west. Deciduous woodland occupies the steepest slopes and heaviest soils. Most of this is Ancient Woodland, and the southern part is within the North Downs Wood Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is internationally designated for its beech-yew woodland habitat. The scarp slopes also contain important pockets of other habitats: chalk grassland, scrub, parkland and exposed rock. The latter is of particular importance to reptiles. Hedges and shaws form connections between habitats.

The cultural landscape

This LCA contains one of the oldest identified occupation sites in Kent. Evidence of Palaeolithic production of hand axes (comprising finished hand axes, flint cores and flint flakes) was found in gardens on the southern edge of Cuxton. The site is now a Scheduled Monument. It is also likely that the routes now known as the 'North Downs Way' (along the scarp top) and the 'Pilgrim's Way' (along the scarp base) are of prehistoric origin, with the two routes used at different times of year, depending on the ground conditions. Quarrying activity has revealed a number of archaeological sites, particularly burials.

Along the base of the scarp are a series of historic farmsteads. Two are now Listed Buildings, along with St Michael's Church in Cuxton. The northern part of the LCA was historically part of the Darnley Estate. There has been relatively little change in woodland and field patterns since the 19th Century, although quarrying has occurred, and Cuxton village has expanded considerably up the valley side.

Visual and perceptual qualities of the landscape

The presence and visibility of the chalk geology is a dominant characteristic of this LCA. It appears as white linear bands on the valley side, and can also be appreciated from the deep lanes which have cut through the chalk, particularly Birling Hill. The chalk bands strengthen the distinctive landscape pattern of fields, meadows and woodland which form irregular horizontal stripes along the scarp.

This LCA has a very strong visual relationship with the adjacent lower land. It forms a distinctive green setting to the Medway Valley and Kemsing Vale, and there are panoramic long views from the scarp (particularly in the south of the LCA) over the Medway Valley to the east and Kemsing Vale to the south. It also functions as a clear and distinctive edge to the Candidate NNR.

Special qualities to be retained and enhanced

- The dominance of chalk geology.
- The distinctive landscape pattern of horizontal bands on the valley sides, caused by contrasting colours and textures of woodland, scrub, chalk grassland, farmland and former quarries. These land uses are closely related to topography.
- The diversity of habitats, designated at local, national and international level, and the variety of woodland due to different species and management.
- The function of the scarp slopes as a backdrop to the Medway Valley and Kemsing Vale.
- The panoramic views out over surrounding lower land.



Close-up of former quarry face at Lad's Hill



Thick hedge forming a habitat corridor connecting with valley-side woodland near Chapel Lane



Beech-yew woodland designated SAC in Hanginghill Wood



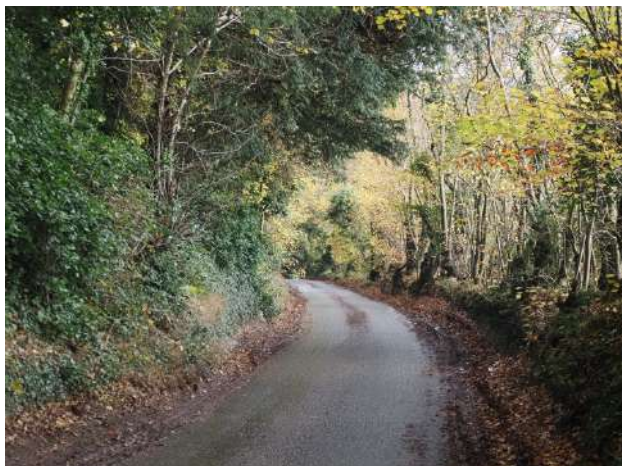
Valley side parkland, Holly Hill House



View east over the Medway Valley from Holly Hill



North Downs Way footpath along top of escarpment, above Halling



Sunken lane (Birling Hill) cutting through the escarpment at the southern edge of the LCA

Forces for change and their landscape implications

Past and present

- Extensive areas of past chalk quarrying, resulting in cliffs and deep pits. The quarried chalk faces form bright white scars on the valley side.
- Lack of grazing and management resulting in scrub growth on chalk grassland sites.
- Pheasant shoots in woodland potentially damaging woodland ground flora, and adding visible clutter such as feed bins and fencing.
- Ongoing issues with fly tipping, and measures to counteract it, such as parking machinery across field entrances.
- Denudation and loss of hedges as a result of increased intensification of farming, reducing habitat and wildlife connectivity.
- Positive schemes to restore chalk grassland through the Medway 'Valley of Visions' project.

Future

- Climate change affecting all habitats and the species which depend on them. Chalk soils are particularly vulnerable to drought, and the east-facing scarp is hot and dry. Beech trees are not drought-tolerant and so are at particular risk.
- Tree diseases affecting woodland composition and parkland and hedgerow trees.
- Potential future demand for chalk quarrying
- Development pressure, particularly associated with village expansion on the peripheries of this LCA.
- Loss of parkland habitats if trees reach over-maturity and there are no young parkland trees to take over their role.
- Pressure for additional communications infrastructure on the scarp top.



Fly tipping in a roadside passing place



Pheasant feeders in woodland, and scrub encroachment onto adjacent chalk grassland

Potential Core and Affiliate NNR Partners working within this LCA (May 2024)

Tarmac

Potential future NNR Partners working within this LCA
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Private landowners

Recommendations

Aspirational Strategy

The LCA will continue to function as a buffer between the core of the Candidate NNR and the more urbanised Medway Valley, and will remain a strong green setting to the Medway Valley and Kemsing Vale. It will be managed at a landscape scale, with seamless integration of habitats and land management between this LCA and the surrounding LCAs.

It will retain its distinctive combination of woodland, scrub, chalk grassland, parkland, farmland and quarry habitats. Farmland habitats will be enhanced and biodiversity corridors and connections improved through planting of replacement/new hedges and shaws. These will also help to enhance the visual structure of the landscape, and to reduce soil loss. Woodland will remain managed to promote age and species diversity, and its present variety will be retained, including areas of traditionally-managed productive woodland.

Footpaths and tracks will remain open and well-used. Sustainable travel will be encouraged, for example through developing waymarked routes between railway stations at Snodland, Halling and Cuxton. There are also opportunities for route connections across the Candidate NNR with the station at Sole Street.

Where views currently exist or have been recently lost they will be kept open through vegetation control.

Protect

- The distinctive landscape pattern of irregular horizontal bands of woodland, chalk grassland, scrub and farmland.
- The undeveloped skyline of the scarp top which is highly visible from the Medway valley floor and eastern side, and from Kemsing Vale.
- The setting of Listed Buildings
- The panoramic views, keeping them open, and avoiding detracting features within the views.

Manage

- Woodland, retaining areas in traditional coppice management, and aiming to promote age and species diversity, and provide habitats for a wide range of species. Work at a landscape scale with neighbouring landowners.
- Chalk grassland, including scrub removal where necessary.
- Parkland, aiming to enhance biodiversity of grassland, and to plant new parkland trees to ensure their continued presence in the landscape.
- Farmland, including promotion of arable plants, and enhanced connectivity of habitats through hedgerow restoration, enlarged field margins, etc. Seek suitable locations for new hedgerow planting to enhance landscape pattern and reduce soil loss. Explore opportunities to work with Plantlife at the nearby Ranscombe Reserve to expand arable plant habitats and diversify species.
- Manage viewpoints (for example looking east from Holly Hill), adding low-key interpretation and seating where appropriate.

Plan

- Identify and promote new circular walks from railway stations in the Medway Valley.
- Resist development in the LCA which would be detrimental to its role as a buffer between the core of the Candidate NNR and the more urban character of the Medway Valley.
- Encourage integrated, landscape-scale management of land and habitats through working with Candidate NNR partners, particularly adjoining landowners within the Luddesdown Downs LCA, and with Plantlife at Ranscombe Farm within the Cobham Park and Ranscombe LCA.