



**L: Wealden Farmland and Heath Mosaic**



# LANDSCAPE TYPE L: WEALDEN FARMLAND AND HEATH MOSAIC

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- L.1 The *Wealden Farmland and Heath Mosaic* lies on the sandstones of the Folkestone Formation, to the north of the chalk escarpment of the South Downs. The geology gives rise to a well drained, sandy lowland landscape supporting a mosaic of oak-birch woodland, conifer plantations, open sandy heaths, and rough grazed pasture.

## DESCRIPTION

### Integrated Key Characteristics:

- Flat or gently undulating lowland 'plateau' landscape on outcrops of sandstones of the Folkestone formation.
- Well-drained sandy, acidic soils support a mix of nationally important heathland habitats including open heather heath, acid grassland, bracken, gorse, woody scrub, and oak-birch woodland.
- Small to medium sized fields of rough grazed pasture and horse paddocks bounded by hedgerows with gorse and bracken and hedgerow oaks. Clusters of oak trees and Scots pine trees form visual accents.
- An irregular and intimate mix of semi-natural habitats and agriculture creating valuable foraging and over-wintering sites for a range of bird species.
- Ponds, mires and wet grassland in low lying areas.
- Commons (traditionally used for rough grazing or heath-cutting) often covered by woodland plantations, but some remnant unenclosed commons providing open access.
- Settlement is relatively late, typically comprising isolated farmsteads of 18th-19th century origin set within areas of recent enclosure, and 'squatter' settlement on the edges of the common land. Building materials include local sandstones.
- Generally straight lanes and tracks provide access to heathland and heath edge settlements.
- Numerous Bronze Age barrow cemeteries are signs of a prehistoric ritual landscape.
- Large number of sand pits indicating the economic value of the sands of the Folkestone Beds.
- Views limited by dense woodland cover.

### Physical Landscape

- L.2 The *Wealden Farmland and Heath Mosaic* is underlain by sandstones, of the Folkestone and Sandgate Beds, which form slightly elevated, flat topped plateaux with

undulating sides. The plateaux are drained by small streams along which are deposits of river terrace gravels and downwash deposits ('Head') which mask the underlying bedrock.

- L.3 The plateaux are associated with well-drained sandy soils which support an irregular patchy mosaic of open heathland, oak-birch woodland, coniferous plantation, acidic grassland, gorse and bracken scrub, and rough grazing land.
- L.4 A number of water bodies are present – many of these are former mill ponds, decoy ponds or sand pits. The sands of the Folkestone Beds are of economic value and the landscape is therefore pitted with active and disused quarries.

### **Perceptual/Experiential Landscape**

- L.5 This is a distinctive landscape with a mix of various elements juxtaposed to form an organic mosaic. The presence of many trees, including tall conifers which cast dark shadows, gives the landscape an almost overpowering sense of enclosure in places. However, this can also be a colourful landscape – when swathes of heather turn purple in summer.
- L.6 The *Wealden Farmland and Heath Mosaic* is essentially a quiet landscape with a high sense of 'naturalness' deriving from the mix of woodland and heathland. There is very little overt human impact, although there are some active sand pits hidden within the woodland. Settlement tends to be located around the edges of the heaths and commons and these areas are perceived as remote and tranquil.
- L.7 The *Wealden Farmland and Heath Mosaic* typically has good public access as a result of a number of Registered Commons, Open Access Land, and a good public rights of way network.
- L.8 The sandy heaths have received less attention than the neighbouring downland landscapes by writers and artists. However, some of the earliest descriptions of the Forest came from Gilbert White, a naturalist who lived in Selborne in the late 18th Century. Flora Thompson (1876 – 1947) wrote of Weavers Down '*Out in the lanes and upon the open heath the broom in flower is a glorious sight. Upon Peverel there are large, long established thickets of it... All down the tough, dark stems the pea-shaped blossoms hang, like a myriad of golden butterflies poised for flight*'. In her guide to the Liphook area (1925) she articulates the views from this landscape, sandwiches between the chalk downs and Greensand hills: '*...a perfect panorama of beauty. Forestmere Lake (Folly Pond) lies like a mirror in the woods directly beneath; to the south is the blue ridge of the South Downs; to the north the heathery heights of Hindhead*'. Hilaire Belloc noted the '*bunches of pine trees, making a peculiar note in the landscape*' in his book *The County of Sussex* (published in 1936).

### **Biodiversity**

- L.9 The sandy soils have given rise to a diverse mix of heathland habitats including open heather heath, acid grassland, bracken, gorse, woody scrub, oak-birch woodland, some sweet chestnut coppice and conifer plantation. These often extensive areas of lowland heath support a range of characteristic plant species, and important invertebrate and bird populations, including uncommon species such as woodlark, nightjar and Dartford warbler. Woolmer Forest SAC/SPA is the best area of

lowland heath outside the New Forest and is the largest area of heathland existing on Folkestone beds in southern England.

- L.10 Occasional areas of acid bog also occur, for example at Hurston Warren SSSI, and provide additional ecological interest. This site is considered to be one of the best examples of its type in the southeast and supports many locally notable plant species, such as cranberry and hare's tail cotton grass.
- L.11 Areas of arable land also occur scattered throughout, and within the heavily wooded landscape these open areas create valuable foraging and over-wintering sites for a range of bird species, particularly when managed appropriately e.g. over-wintering stubble.

<b>Key Biodiversity Features</b>	<b>Importance</b>
Significant areas of heathland habitat, including dry and wet heath, acid grassland, scrub, woodland, bog and open water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many plant species associated with heathland habitat have a locally restricted distribution.</li> <li>• Extensive areas lowland heath support populations of Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark of European significance.</li> </ul>
Intimate mix of semi-natural habitats and agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides important habitat mosaics of benefit to a wide range of faunal species, including foraging and over-wintering birds.</li> </ul>
Significant woodland cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive areas of plantation woodland form an important component of the heathland/woodland mosaic, and buffer sensitive heathland habitats.</li> </ul>

### **Historic Character**

- L.12 The generally low fertility and marginal character of the sandy soils is evident in a historic land-use dominated by woodland and heathy unenclosed commons. The presence of a number of Bronze Age barrow cemeteries (all now Scheduled Ancient Monuments) indicates that the marginality of this landscape is largely the result of human activity. The original hazel 'wildwood' was cleared for farming, but the soils quickly became impoverished, leading to the creation of heathland.
- L.13 The landscape is characterised by large areas of commonland, originally cleared in the prehistoric period, and utilised for centuries by communities based on more favoured soils (generally to the south along the foot of the downland scarp) as pasture (particularly for sheep), wood pasture and as a source of fuel. Woolmer Forest formed part of a Royal Hunting Forest during the medieval period. Most of the commons have, since 1800, been appropriated for plantations, many of them coniferous. These, together with a scatter of earlier blocks of ancient (probably medieval) woodland, produce the overwhelmingly wooded character of the landscape. Relatively small areas of unenclosed common still survive.
- L.14 Some of the better land within the landscape was enclosed for agricultural use – these areas are evident today as medieval assarts or early enclosures. However, most of the enclosures are either recent enclosures of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century date of former commonland scattered in and around the extensive woodland, or large areas of modern fields, which themselves represent modifications of pre-existing field systems (both early and recent enclosures, with the latter probably predominant).

These enclosures represent a fundamental change in the last few centuries, with several millennia of communal use and access to the heathlands being replaced by private ownership.

- L.15 There are no traditional examples of designed landscapes, i.e. gentry houses and landscape parks, testifying to the lack of a wealthy population in the past and the traditional dependency of the area on the surrounding lowland zone.

<b>Key Features of the Historic Environment</b>	<b>Importance</b>
Marginal nature of the landscape	Provides a continuing sense of remoteness
Numerous Bronze Age barrow cemeteries	Prehistoric ritual landscape indicating that marginal nature of the area is of some antiquity and caused by human action
Extensive areas of post-1800 woodland plantations covering areas of former commonland	Indicates the location of areas of former common which would have been open/less wooded
Remnant unenclosed common	Provides an indication of historic land use e.g. survival of small area of commons
Extensive recent and modern enclosures around woodlands	Evidence that landuse history remained one of common grazing until relatively late in the post-medieval period

### **Settlement Form and Built Character**

- L.16 The settlement pattern of the *Wealden Farmland and Heath Mosaic* is characterised by a high density of dispersed settlement. This conforms to English Heritage's rural settlement designation of Weald Sub-Province within the South-eastern Province. The typical settlement form is relatively late in origin, and comprises isolated farmsteads of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century origin set within areas of recent enclosure derived from former commonland, together with irregular small-scale agglomerations of common-edge settlement representing 'squatter' settlement on the edges of the commonland.
- L.17 Building materials are typically local sandstones which vary in colour from light yellow to dark purple-browns. Also typical is red brick detailing, particularly around windows and doors. Locally distinctive cowdray yellow window sills and doors feature in parts of this area. Timber boarding is frequently used on agricultural buildings. Clay tile is the most typical roofing material.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Sensitivity**

- L.18 This landscape has some sensitive natural, cultural and aesthetic/perceptual features that are vulnerable to change. Key landscape sensitivities include:
- Nationally important lowland heathland that requires active management.
  - Rich biodiversity and perception of 'naturalness' provided by oak-birch woodland, lowland heath and pasture on acidic grassland.
  - The intimate mix of semi-natural habitats and agriculture creating valuable foraging and over-wintering sites for a range of bird species.

- Relative absence of settlement limited to isolated farmsteads of 18th-19th century origin and 'squatter' settlement on the edges of the common land which form a distinctive settlement pattern and indicate the late settlement of the area. This pattern is especially vulnerable to infill and consolidation creating a more compact solid settlement character.
- The consistent use of building materials - local sandstones, red brick detailing, particularly around windows and doors, timber boarding on agricultural buildings and clay tile.
- The numerous Bronze Age barrow cemeteries which provide signs of a prehistoric ritual landscape which are hidden in the landscape by woodland or have been covered by trees.
- Remnant unenclosed commons which are important in providing a sense of time depth, a high perceived naturalness, opportunities for countryside access, and a rich biodiversity.

L.19 The high proportion of woodland cover limits visual sensitivity. However, the landscape's inter-visibility with adjacent upland areas increases its visual sensitivity.

## **Change – Key Issues and Trends**

### ***Past Change***

L.20 There have been considerable changes to this landscape in the past few centuries. These relate mainly to the change in communal use and access to the heathlands being replaced by private ownership. Changes include:

- Enclosure of former common land for agricultural use in the 18th-19th century.
- Modifications of pre-existing field systems into larger modern enclosures as well as more recent sub-division of fields associated with horse grazing.
- Planting of coniferous plantations on former common land in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, in recent years plantations have become more diverse.
- Quarrying of sand.
- Invasion of scrub and bracken onto remaining areas of heathland in areas of low grazing pressure.
- Decline in traditional woodland management techniques as forestry has concentrated on coniferous rotations and spread of introduced invasive species such as rhododendrons, laurel which thrive on the acidic sandy soils, within deciduous woodland.
- Increase in hobby farming or private stables resulting in sub-division of fields with additional fencing, tracks, hardstanding, jumps and other paraphernalia.

### **Future Landscape Change**

- L.21 In the short term (5 years) it is likely that tree cover will continue to change, particularly in relation to commercial forestry plantations. Felling may provide an opportunity for reinstating heathland commons resulting in positive change. Pressure for quarrying of sand is likely to continue. The designation of the landscape as AONB, and future designation as a National Park (if confirmed) is likely to limit pressure for built development.
- L.22 It is difficult to be prescriptive about long term change (20 years) as this will be dependent on prevailing policies and incentives. The South Downs Management Plan will be a key tool in managing change and ensuring a positive future for the landscape. Some potential changes and key vulnerabilities within the *Wealden Farmland and Heath Mosaic* are outlined below.

**Climate Change:** Potential adverse change could include change in the species composition of habitats, including heathland and acidic grassland, although inappropriate management is a bigger threat to these heathlands. Warmer, wetter winters may result in spread of bracken on lowland heaths. Wind damage, due to increases in severe gales is another concern in this wooded area, although wind blow of conifers may be beneficial, prompting quicker removal. Future improved management of woodlands for fuel may be a positive benefit.

**Agricultural Change and Land Management:** In this landscape positive landscape change could result from ongoing work to restore, manage and link heathland sites. A greater threat to heathlands is inappropriate management, by under-grazing. There may also be regimes to promote enhanced environmental management of woodland. In this area of low fertility sandy soils, it is possible that marginal farms may cease active agricultural production. The land is likely to be vulnerable to purchase as hobby farms, for horse grazing, or for other uses such as golf courses and these uses will require active management to ensure the rural character of the area is retained.

**Development:** The designation of the area as a National Park is likely to limit pressure for built development. However, there may be potential demand for expansion and infill of the loose common edge 'squatter settlements' and over 'gentrification'. This would change the original character of settlement and could result in increases in artificial lighting, expansion of villages, and increases in traffic pressures on the rural roads. There may also be continued pressure for quarrying of sand, although there are generally strict environmental assessments required before proposals for sand extraction can go ahead. Restoration of former sand extraction sites will be a positive landscape change.

### **Broad Management Objective and Landscape Guidelines**

- L.23 **The overall management objective should be to conserve the distinctive heathy character of this landscape and aim to create new inter-connected open heathlands, within a mixed mosaic of pasture and woodland.**

### ***Landscape Management Considerations***

- Conserve and manage areas of unenclosed common land which are important in providing a sense of time depth, a high perceived naturalness, opportunities for countryside access, and a rich biodiversity.
- Manage existing heathland to prevent excessive encroachment of scrub and assess potential for creating new, interconnected heathlands, particularly on former common land. Restoration of coniferous plantations and sand quarries to heathland is a key opportunity.
- Consider opportunities to re-instating common grazing to restore the historic and cultural character of the landscape and secure the ongoing management and conservation of the commons.
- Promote an informal and irregular mosaic of oak-birch woodland, lowland heath, gorse and bracken scrub, and acid grassland which contribute to a rich biodiversity and the perception of 'naturalness'.
- Promote appropriate management of arable farmland to create a wildlife-rich habitat supporting farmland birds, including retaining areas of fallow land, maintaining an unploughed margin around arable land, and management of existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Conserve, and consider planting of new, clusters of oak trees and Scots pine trees as visual accents.
- Reduce the impact of forestry by encouraging sensitive forestry practices, for example mixing different species and felling small coupes – this could also minimise risk of damage as a result of increased storms and high winds. Encourage replanting of conifer plantations with broadleaved species (where heathland recreation is not appropriate) and encourage re-introduction of traditional woodland management techniques.
- Promote interest in, and marketing of, local wood products, including wood for fuel.
- Plan for climate change, researching appropriate species mixes and designing woodlands to minimise damage as a result of increased storms, for example by ensuring stands of trees of mixed ages.
- Encourage and support the development of soil management plans to reduce soil erosion.
- Encourage the creative restoration of redundant sand quarries, exploiting the potential for geological interest, nature conservation, and recreation.
- Conserve the historic Bronze Age barrow cemeteries which provide a sense of time depth and evidence of a prehistoric ritual landscape. Maintain these sites free of trees, enhance their settings and open up views to the sites.

### **Development Considerations**

- Conserve the characteristic settlement pattern of dispersed isolated farmhouses and loose agglomerations of common edge settlement. Extensions and infill would change the historic pattern.
- Ensure recreational facilities, such as horse riding centres and golf courses, do not erode the rural character of the landscape. Avoid use of excessive lighting, signage and 'suburban' features.
- Encourage active management of land which is no longer farmed to ensure the rural character of the area is maintained.
- Use woodland to screen unsightly developments and quarries. Ensure heathland restoration programmes consider possible adverse visual impact resulting from the exposure of existing buildings, particularly industrial buildings.
- Maintain a consistent palette of building materials including local sandstones, which vary in colour from light yellow to dark purple-browns, red brick detailing (particularly around windows and doors), timber boarding, and clay tile.
- Conserve the rural character of the villages and their setting through design guidance to discourage the introduction of suburban features such as artificial lighting, concrete kerbs, Leylandii hedges, and suburban style fences.

#### **Character Areas**

There are three distinct areas of *Wealden Farmland and Heath Mosaic*. These are all located on the Folkestone and Sandgate Beds of the Lower Greensand.

L1:	Parham Farmland and Heath Mosaic
L2:	Rother Farmland and Heath Mosaic
L3:	Woolmer Forest/Weaver's Down

# LI: PARHAM FARMLAND AND HEATH MOSAIC

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## DESCRIPTION

### Location and Boundaries

LI.1 The *Parham Farmland and Heath Mosaic* forms two elevated undulating 'plateaux' divided by the River Stor. It is a small area which is separated from the *Rother Farmland and Heath Mosaic* (area L2) by the River Arun – its western boundary is therefore clearly defined by the floodplain of the River Arun. The southern boundary is defined by a public right of way which represents a transition to the scarp footslopes to the south. The northern and eastern boundaries are defined by the designated National Park boundary which also coincides with a change of character to a much more settled landscape.

### Integrated Key Characteristics:

- Slightly elevated plateaux formed from sandstones of the Folkestone and Sandgate formations, 35m at Northpark Wood.
- Well-drained sandy soils support a mix of nationally important heathland habitats, including open heather heath, acid grassland, bracken, gorse, woody scrub, and oak-birch woodland.
- Areas of wetland mire and bog, for example at Parham Park SSSI and Hurston Warren SSSI, support many locally notable plant species.
- Large areas of modern woodland plantations and enclosures are of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century date covering areas of former commonland illustrating the change from communal use to private ownership.
- Open canopied mature oak woodland supports one of the richest epiphytic lichen floras in southeast England.
- Surviving early enclosures around Wiggonholt on better agricultural land located on an outcrop of Gault Clay.
- An intimate mix of semi-natural habitats and agriculture create valuable foraging and over-wintering habitat for a range of bird species.
- Numerous Bronze Age barrow cemeteries at Rackham Plantation are signs of a prehistoric ritual landscape.
- Settlement is relatively late, comprising isolated farmsteads of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century origin set within areas of recent enclosure and modern recreational buildings associated with West Sussex Golf Club.
- The plateau is drained by small streams which flow into the River Stor and River Arun – a large pond, Wassell Pond, is located close to Wiggonholt Common.

- Sand pits on the edge of the Arun Valley indicate the economic value of the sands of the Folkestone Beds.

### **Specific Characteristics Unique to the Parham Farmland and Heath Mosaic**

- LI.2 The Folkestone and Sandgate Beds underlying the *Parham Farmland and Heath Mosaic* form an undulating plateau reaching 35m at Northpark Wood. In this character area most of the commons have, since 1800, been appropriated for plantations or enclosed in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century for agricultural use. This illustrates the change from communal use to private ownership that has occurred in this landscape - there are no unenclosed commons with open access remaining. Opportunities for countryside access are therefore more restricted in this character area than others of the farmland and Heath Nosiatic type.
- LI.3 The character area is well wooded, although much of this woodland is mixed plantation and has suffered from replanting with exotic species. However, the area also contains ancient oak *Quercus robur* woodland. The open canopied mature oak woodland is particularly notable for supporting one of the richest epiphytic lichen floras in southeast England. Some of the dilapidated wooden fencing in the area also supports rare lichens.
- LI.4 Although most of the enclosures are of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century date, a block of early medieval enclosures survive around Wiggonholt, indicating an area of better agricultural located on an outcrop of Gault Clay. The plateau is drained by small streams which flow into the River Stor and River Arun. The character area also contains a large pond, Wassell Pond, close to Wiggonholt Common as well as other notable habitats, including bog and alder carr. Areas of arable agriculture and improved pasture grassland, together with semi-natural habitats are important areas for foraging and over-wintering birds.
- LI.5 To the north of the character area is Hurston Warren SSSI, a site that comprises a range of heathland habitats including wet and dry heath, open water and bog. The bog is considered to be to be one of the best examples of its type in the southeast and supports many locally notable plant species, such as cranberry and hare's tail cotton grass. However, part of the area is now used as a golf course and public rights of way. Elsewhere public access is limited.
- LI.6 The settlement form in this character area is typical of the landscape type, being relatively late in origin, and comprising isolated farmsteads of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century origin set within areas of recent enclosure derived from former commonland. However, there are no common edge squatter settlements or registered Common Land in this character area. The northern part of the character area contains localised groupings of modern recreational buildings associated with the golf course at Hurston Warren.

### **Sensitivities Specific to the Parham Farmland and Heath Mosaic**

- LI.7 All of the landscape and visual sensitivities listed in the landscape type evaluation apply to this character area. Specific to this character area are:
- Former commons surviving only as place names;

- Surviving early enclosures around Wiggonholt;
- Wassell pond and other smaller ponds which support aquatic and marginal plants and have associated invertebrate interest.
- Areas of wetland mire and bog, for example at Parham Park SSSI and Hurston Warren SSSI.
- The area's inter-visibility with the Chalk scarp to the south.

### **Change Specific to the Parham Farmland and Heath Mosaic**

LI.8 Past change specific to this area includes:

- Enclosure of former common land during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Creation of a golf course and associated buildings at Hurston Warren in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Planting of conifer plantations and development associated with forestry during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, e.g. the sawmill at Northpark Wood.

LI.9 In the future it is likely that tree cover will continue to change, particularly in relation to commercial forestry plantations.

### **Landscape Management/Development Considerations Specific to the Parham Farmland and Heath Mosaic**

LI.10 In addition to the generic landscape management and development considerations for this landscape type, the following landscape management considerations are specific to this character area:

- Encourage the restoration of former areas of heathland.
- Conserve the area of early enclosures around Wiggonholt.
- Aim for diversification of plantation woodland by creating a more diverse age and species structure, and increasing open areas. Promote reversion of areas of coniferous plantation to heathland.
- Continue to manage the existing ponds e.g. Wassell Pond.

LI.11 The following development considerations are specific to this character area:

- Ensure that any further built development is integrated into its landscape context using native vegetation.
- Ensure any change in this area takes account of views from the Chalk scarp to the south.



Well drained sandy soils, support a variety of woodland types.



Sandy, narrow tracks cutting through the woodland.



Birch woodland.



Local sandstone is a traditional building material.



Pastoral fields with individual field trees dotted throughout.



Well wooded, although woodland suffers from the introduction of exotic species.

## L2: ROTHER FARMLAND AND HEATH MOSAIC

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### DESCRIPTION

#### Location and Boundaries

- L2.1 The *Rother Farmland and Heath Mosaic* forms an elevated 'plateau' lying immediately to the south of the River Rother. It is located between the Wealden landscapes to the north and the main chalk ridge of the South Downs to the south. The boundaries of this area form transitions with adjacent farmland landscapes and therefore areas on the edge may share characteristics with adjacent landscapes. The northern boundary represents a transition to the open sandy arable farmland along the River Rother while the southern boundary represents a transition to the *Mixed Farmland and Woodland* on Gault clay. Boundaries have been drawn to follow the nearest convenient field boundary or woodland edge.

#### Integrated Key Characteristics:

- Slightly elevated, flat topped plateau formed from sandstones of the Folkestone formation, reaching 65m at Ambersham Common.
- Well-drained sandy soils support a mix of nationally important heathland habitats including open heather heath, acid grassland, bracken, gorse, woody scrub, and oak-birch woodland.
- Large areas of modern woodland plantations covering areas of former commonland and earlier blocks of ancient (probably medieval) woodland.
- An intimate mix of semi-natural habitats and agriculture creating valuable foraging and over-wintering sites for a range of bird species.
- Numerous Bronze Age barrow cemeteries are indicative of a prehistoric ritual landscape.
- Roman roads and a posting station at Hardham reinforce the historic function of the area as a landscape to traverse rather than settle.
- Settlement is relatively late, comprising isolated farmsteads of 18th-19th century origin set within areas of recent enclosure, and 'squatter' settlement on the edges of the common land.
- Includes the planned medieval market town of Midhurst, constructed from local sandstones.
- Remnant unenclosed commons are of cultural and historic significance and provide open access for recreation.
- Large number of sand pits indicating the economic value of the sands of the Folkestone Beds.

## Specific Characteristics Unique to the Rother Farmland and Heath Mosaic

- L2.2 The Folkestone Beds underlying the *Rother Farmland and Heath Mosaic* form a slightly elevated, flat topped plateau in this area. The highest points are at Ambersham Common (65m AOD), Trotton Common (63m AOD), and West Heath (60m AOD). The plateau becomes fragmented to the west with outliers such as West Heath and Heath Common standing as ‘islands’ amongst the lower lying farmland. This character area contains surviving areas of unenclosed common at Iping, Heyshott, and Lavington.
- L2.3 The well-drained sandy soils of this character area support an irregular, organic mosaic of open heathland, oak-birch woodland, acidic grassland, gorse and bracken scrub, and rough grazing land – this intimate mix of semi-natural habitat and agriculture contributes to the overall ecological value of the character area. In total five nationally important heathland sites occur in this character area, at Ambersham Common SSSI, Burton Park SSSI, Coates Castle SSSI, Iping Common SSSI and Lavington Common SSSI. These sites support a range of characteristic heathland communities, such as wet and dry heath, bog and scrub, and provide important habitats for a number of notable plant and animal species. Coates Castle SSSI, for example, supports the only known native British population of field cricket *Gryllus campestris* (field crickets have been and are planned to be introduced to a number of other sites within the area). These habitats are set within a context of coniferous plantation which casts dark shadows and gives the landscape an almost overpowering sense of enclosure in places.
- L2.4 Areas of arable land also occur throughout, and within the heavily wooded landscape. These open areas create valuable foraging and over-wintering sites for a range of bird species, particularly when managed appropriately e.g. as over-wintering stubble. Although most of the enclosures are of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century date, some of the better land within this character area, typically along the margins of the Rother valley, was enclosed for agricultural use at a much earlier date. Examples include a block of characteristically lobate medieval assarts at Coldwaltham, and an extensive area of surviving early enclosures around Pythingdean and Pallingham.
- L2.5 This is essentially a quiet landscape with a high sense of ‘naturalness’ deriving from the mix of woodland and heathland. Opportunities for countryside access are provided by a number of Registered Commons and an extensive network of public rights of way.
- L2.6 The plateau is drained by small streams which flow into the Rother – plus a large pond at Burton which was part of the Wealden iron industry, formed by damming one of the streams. It later fed an 18<sup>th</sup> century mill for corn milling (no longer operational).
- L2.7 The settlement pattern in this character area is generally typical of the landscape type (a high density of dispersed settlement comprising farmsteads of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century origin and irregular small-scale agglomerations of common-edge settlement). The exception to the dispersed pattern is the medieval market town of Midhurst. This was a deliberately planned settlement established at a strategic location after the Norman Conquest by the new Norman overlord, Roger de Montgomery. Its location seems to have been determined mainly by military considerations (it had a

suitable knoll upon which to site a castle) rather than any pre-existing locational factors. Two small and lately established landscaped parks occur at Coates Castle and Nyewood House. The northern part of Burton Park also lies within the character area and is listed on English Heritage's Register.

- L2.8 This character area contains evidence of Roman activity, comprising a mansio (posting station) at Hardham and two Roman roads – the Chichester to London Road and the Chichester to Silchester Road. These sites reinforce the marginal nature of the area as a landscape to traverse rather than settle. Active and disused quarries occur, hidden within the woodland, indicating the economic value of the sands of the Folkestone Beds.

### **Sensitivities Specific to the Rother Farmland and Heath Mosaic**

- L2.9 All of the landscape and visual sensitivities listed in the landscape type evaluation apply to this character area. Specific to this character area are:

- Surviving areas of unenclosed common at Iping, Trotton, Heyshott, and Lavington.
- The medieval assarts at Coldwaltham, and an extensive area of surviving early enclosures around Pythingdean and Pallingham.
- Burton mill pond and 18<sup>th</sup> century mill.
- The wet and dry heath, bog and scrub, of Ambersham Common SSSI, Burton Park SSSI, Coates Castle SSSI, Iping Common SSSI and Lavington Common SSSI which support a range of characteristic heathland communities.
- The small parks at Coates Castle and Nyewood House, and part of Burton Park, which provide a sense of historic continuity.
- The mansio (posting station) at Hardham two stretches of Roman road which provide evidence for Roman activity in the area.
- The area's inter-visibility with the Greensand hills to the north and the Chalk scarp to the south.

### **Change Specific to the Rother Farmland and Heath Mosaic**

- L2.10 Past change specific to this area includes the extensive quarrying of sand and expansion of built development on the edge of Midhurst during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- L2.11 In the future it is likely that there will continue to be pressure for sand extraction in this character area. The existing designation of the area as AONB and, if confirmed, the future designation as National Park, is likely to limit extensive built development. However, since this character area contains the settlement of Midhurst, lies on the edge of Petersfield, and is located close to the A272, there is likely to be some pressure for built development in the future, particularly on the outskirts of Petersfield, Midhurst, Coldwaltham and Fittleworth. Pressure for expansion could threaten the medieval assarts on the edge of Coldwaltham, or the extensive area of surviving early enclosures around Pythingdean and Pallingham. There may also be pressure for a bypass around Midhurst.

## **Landscape Management/Development Considerations Specific to the Rother Farmland and Heath Mosaic**

L2.12 In addition to the generic landscape management and development considerations for this landscape type, the following landscape management considerations are specific to this character area:

- Maintain the surviving areas of unenclosed common at Iping, Trotton, Heyshott, and Lavington, and consider opportunities for creating further unenclosed commons within the area.
- Manage existing heathland to prevent excessive encroachment of scrub and assess potential for creating new, interconnected heathlands.
- Conserve the extensive area of surviving early enclosures around Pythingdean and Pallingham.
- Conserve Burton mill pond and its 18<sup>th</sup> century mill and their landscape setting. Ensure that the impressive views of South Downs across the pond are maintained.
- Manage heathland sites at Ambersham Common, Burton Park, Coates Castle, Iping Common, Trotton Common and Lavington Common, and aim to link these sites through new heathland creation.
- Conserve the landscape features of the small parks at Coates Castle and Nyewood House, and the northern part of Burton Park, to ensure these parks continue to provide a sense of historic continuity.
- Conserve the mansio (posting station) at Hardham and stretch of Roman road as features in the landscape.

L2.13 The following development considerations are specific to this character area:

- Ensure that any further built development is integrated into its landscape context using native vegetation.
- Conserve the medieval assarts on the edge of Coldwaltham.
- Ensure any change in this area takes account of views from the Greensand hills to the north and the Chalk scarp to the south.



Open heathland at Iping Common.



Management of heathland is a key issue in this area.



Sandstone, red brick and clay tiles are typical building materials.



Deciduous woodland forms part of the mosaic.



Rural roads are unmarked, with sandy verges. Scots pine is characteristic.



The chalk scarp forms a backdrop to Buriton Mill pond.

## L3: WOOLMER FOREST/WEAVER'S DOWN

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### DESCRIPTION

#### Location and Boundaries

- L3.1 The *Woolmer Forest/Weaver's Down* landscape character area forms an elevated undulating 'plateau' located to the west of Liphook. The western boundary of this area is quite clearly defined and has been drawn along the woodland edge. The southern boundary represents a transition to the Greensand hills and has been drawn along the mainline railway. This landscape character area continues northwards beyond the designated National Park boundary at Bordon.

#### Integrated Key Characteristics:

- Undulating 'plateau' formed from sandstones of the Folkestone formation, reaching 155m at Weaver's Down.
- Well-drained sandy soils which support extensive tracts of conifer plantations, oak-birch woodland, lowland heath and bog.
- Internationally important ecological resource, represented by extensive area of lowland heathland habitats.
- Settlement is relatively late in origin, comprising isolated farmsteads of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century origin set within areas of recent enclosure, and localised groupings of modern military buildings.
- Recent and modern enclosures around the edge woodlands are evidence that landuse history remained one of common grazing until relatively late in the post-medieval period.
- Numerous Bronze Age barrow cemeteries are indicative of a prehistoric ritual landscape.
- Remnant unenclosed commons, formerly used for common grazing, are now used by the military as firing ranges.
- Extensive areas of post-1800 woodland plantations covering areas of former commonland indicate the location of areas of former common (now open access land) and contribute to a great sense of enclosure.

#### Specific Characteristics Unique to Woolmer Forest/Weaver's Down

- L3.2 The Folkestone Beds underlying the *Woolmer Forest/Weaver's Down* form an undulating 'plateau' reaching 155m at Weaver's Down. The areas around Polecat Hill, to the north-east, and The Wylds/Forest Mere to the south, are underlain by softer sandstones of the Sandgate Beds, a formation of soft yellow sandstones which form a gently rolling relief at slightly lower altitude. The eastern part of the area, around Foley Manor, is underlain by the more resistant cherts and sandy limestones

of the Hythe Beds. These underlying bedrocks give rise to some variety across the character area.

- L3.3 The very well drained acid sandy soils of this character area support extensive tracts common land, most of which have been appropriated during the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century for coniferous plantations that make up Woolmer Forest. The presence of vast expanses of conifer forest gives rise to a simple and unified landscape on a large scale. The presence of tall conifers also gives the landscape an almost overpowering sense of enclosure, which is only broken by the presence of clearings at Woolmer Pond, Palmer's Ball, and Weaver's Down where areas of oak-birch woodland, lowland heath, acid grassland, and low-lying bogs and pools occur. This extensive area of lowland heathland, supports three breeding bird species in numbers of European importance, namely nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler, as well as being of national value for its heathland flora, and invertebrates. Woolmer Forest SAC/SPA is also the only site in Britain known to support all 12 species of native reptile and amphibian.
- L3.4 Typically of the *Wealden Farmland and Heath Mosaic* landscape type, this character area has good public as a result of a number of Registered Commons, Open Access Land, and public rights of way. A large proportion of Woolmer Forest, Longmoor Inclosure and Weaver's Down is designated as open access land, and there are also a number of Registered Commons including Weaver's Down, Griggs Green, Holm Hills and Holly Hills, which allow open public access. However, in practice public access is restricted to some of these areas by the army who use Woolmer Forest as a training ground although access is permitted when not in use. Access to Wheatsheaf Common is restricted to users of the golf course.
- L3.5 The south eastern part of the area, overlying the Hythe Formation of the Lower Greensand, is a small area of recent and modern enclosures which represents better quality commonland enclosed for agricultural use. Although there are no traditional examples of designed landscapes, *i.e.* gentry houses and landscape parks, this area contains two small and lately established parks at The Wylde and Foley Manor.
- L3.6 The plateau is drained by small streams which flow southwards into the River Rother and northwards into the River Wey. There are several large ponds, for example Woolmer Pond (created as a result of former peat cutting), Folly Pond (forms part of Forest Mere SSSI), Cranmer Pond and The Lake.
- L3.7 Although the settlement pattern is typical of the landscape type (characterised by dispersed farmsteads of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century origin), the area now contains localised groupings of modern military buildings. The area is in close proximity to a large number of people, close to the settlements of Bordon, Liphook and Liss. Despite this the landscape is seemingly devoid of human settlement. However, the presence of the A3(T) and overt human impact due to the presence of army camps, and industrial buildings, impinge on the sense of remoteness and tranquillity in localised areas.

### **Sensitivities Specific to Woolmer Forest/Weaver's Down**

- L3.8 All of the landscape and visual sensitivities listed in the landscape type evaluation apply to this character area. Specific to this character area are:

- Surviving areas of common at Weaver's Down, Griggs Green, Holm Hills, Holly Hills, and Wheatsheaf Common.
- Lowland heathland that supports populations of Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark of European importance.
- The small parks at The Wylds and Foley Manor which provide a sense of historic continuity.
- Ponds e.g. Woolmer Pond, Folly Pond (part of Forest mere SSSI) and The Lake.
- The area's inter-visibility with the *East Hampshire Greensand Terrace*.

### **Change Specific to Woolmer Forest/Weaver's Down**

L3.9 Past change specific to this area includes:

- Expansion of built development associated with military use of the area in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Introduction of industrial development along the A3 corridor in the last 70 years.
- Increase in invasive species in woodland, such as rhododendrons and laurel, which thrive on the acidic sandy soils, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- A3 road improvements in the early 1990s.
- Enhancements to Woolmer Pond resulting in an increase in natterjack toads and the re-establishment of sand lizard.

L3.10 If the designation of the National Park is confirmed, this is likely to limit extensive built development. However, the location of this character area close to the settlements of Bordon, Liphook and Liss, and its location along the A3 corridor, means it is likely that pressures for built development are also likely to continue, including possible requirements for additional industrial and military buildings. Bordon and Whitehill are likely to be redeveloped when they are released by the MOD.

### **Landscape Management/Development Considerations Specific to Woolmer Forest/ Weaver's Down**

L3.11 In addition to the generic landscape management and development considerations for this landscape type, the following landscape management considerations are specific to this character area:

- Maintain the surviving areas of commonland at Weaver's Down, Griggs Green, Holm Hills, Holly Hills, and Wheatsheaf Common, and maintain through grazing.
- Aim for diversification of plantation woodland by creating a more diverse age and species structure, and increasing open areas. Promote reversion of areas of coniferous plantation to heathland.

- Continue to manage the existing ponds e.g. Woolmer Pond, Folly Pond, Cranmer Pond and The Lake.
- Conserve the landscape features of the small parks at The Wylds and Foley Manor to ensure these parks continue to provide a sense of historic continuity. Control invasive areas of rhododendrons and laurel where it poses a threat to semi-natural habitats

L3.12 The following development considerations are specific to this character area:

- Consider views from the East Hampshire Greensand Terrace in relation to any change in this area.
- Use woodland to screen existing development and quarries. Ensure heathland restoration programmes consider possible adverse visual impact resulting from the exposure of existing buildings, particularly industrial or military buildings.
- Ensure that redevelopment of Bordon and Whitehill (when released by the MOD) do not impact on the tranquil and rural character of this area.



Tall coniferous trees provide a sense of enclosure.



Champney Forest Spa is a recreational use of the area.



Clearing at Woolmer, containing birch, lowland heath and acidic grassland.



Woolmer pond.



Track cutting through oak and beech woodland and heathland at Longmoor.



Heathland at Longmoor.