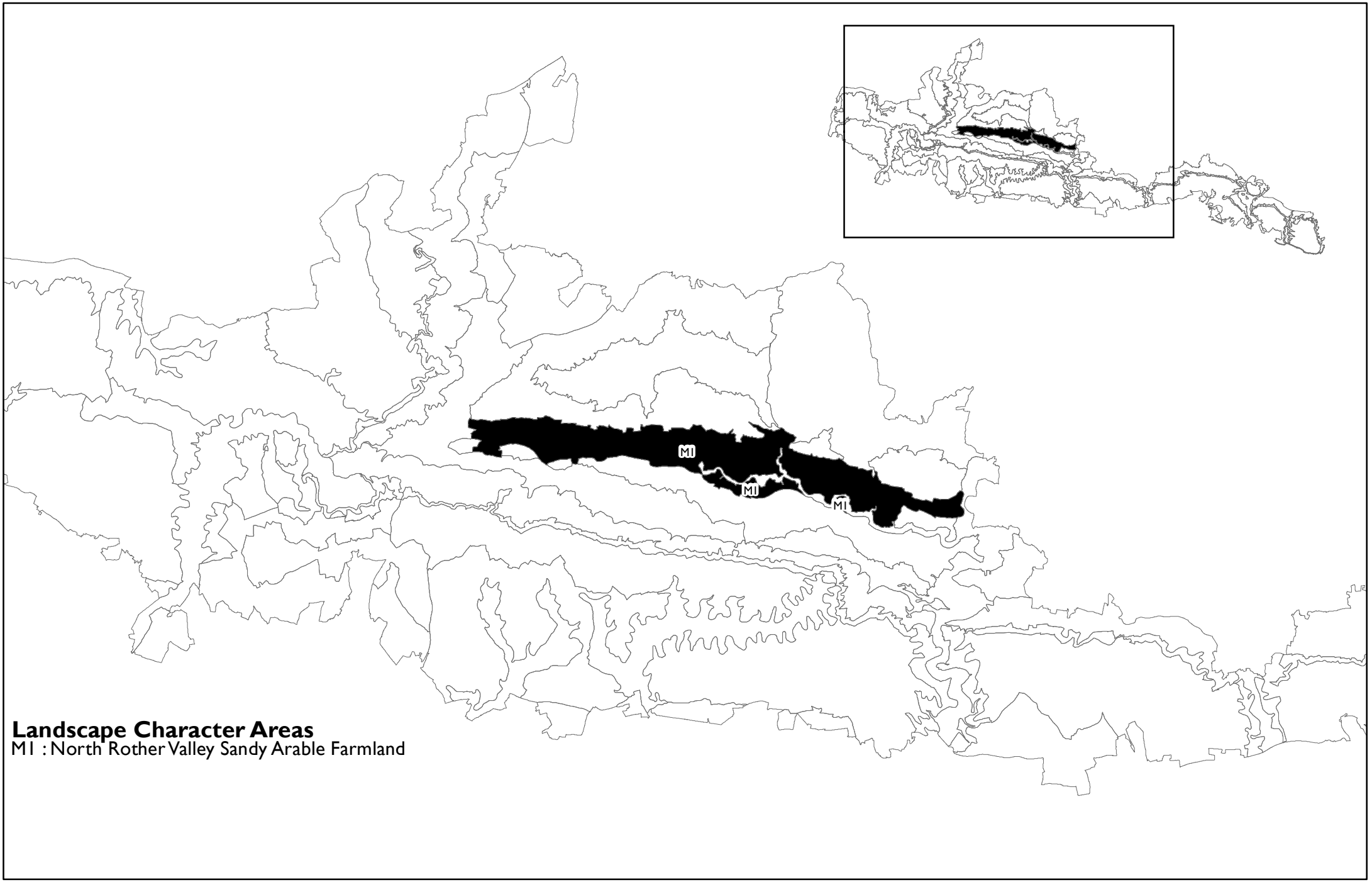
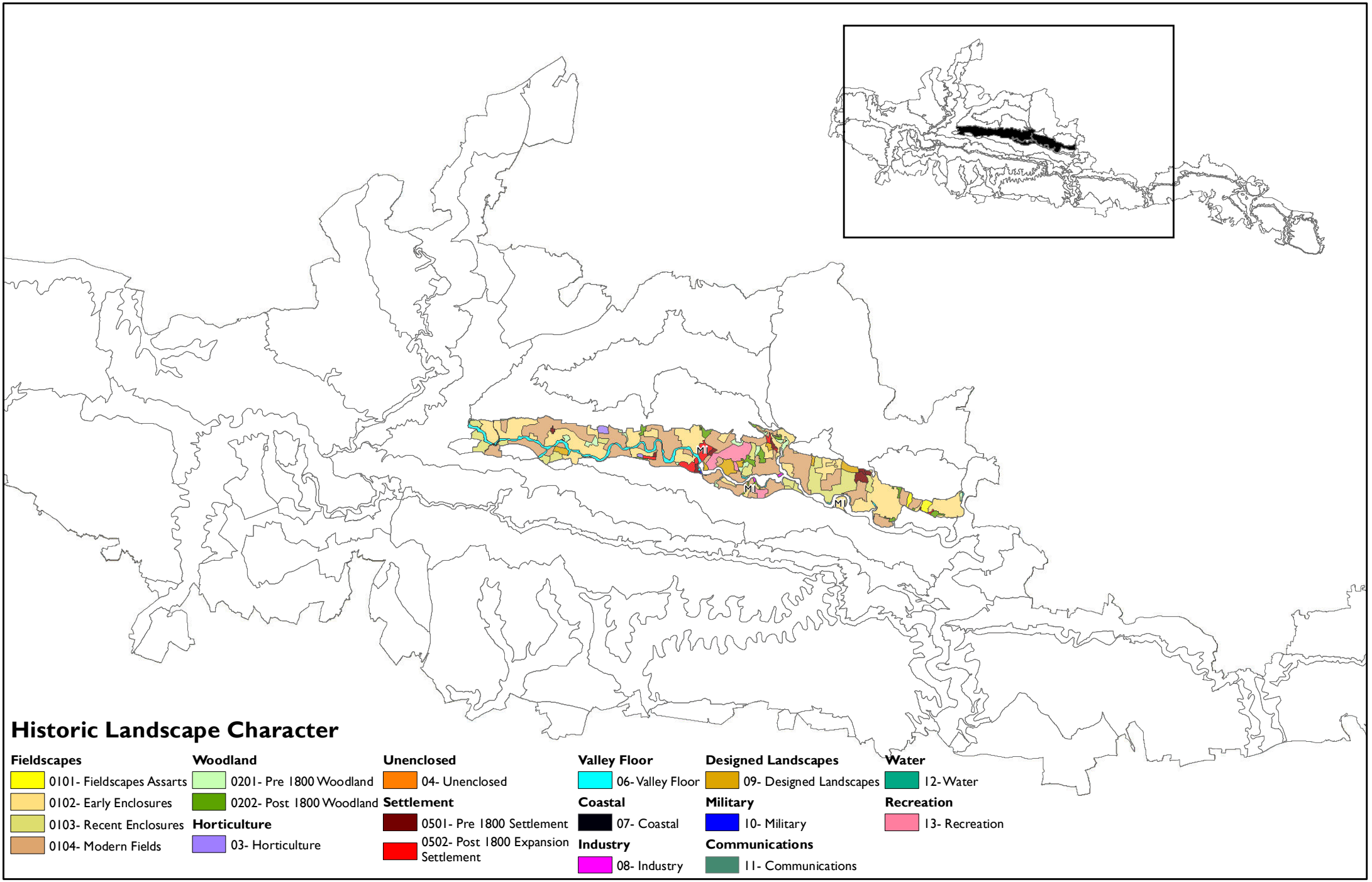


Landscape Character Areas
M1 : North Rother Valley Sandy Arable Farmland

M: Sandy Arable Farmland



Historic Landscape Character

Fieldscapes
- 0101- Fieldscapes Assarts
- 0102- Early Enclosures
- 0103- Recent Enclosures
- 0104- Modern Fields

Woodland
- 0201- Pre 1800 Woodland
- 0202- Post 1800 Woodland

Horticulture
- 03- Horticulture

Unenclosed
- 04- Unenclosed

Settlement
- 0501- Pre 1800 Settlement
- 0502- Post 1800 Expansion Settlement

Valley Floor
- 06- Valley Floor

Coastal
- 07- Coastal

Industry
- 08- Industry

Designed Landscapes
- 09- Designed Landscapes

Military
- 10- Military

Communications
- 11- Communications

Water
- 12- Water

Recreation
- 13- Recreation

M: Sandy Arable Farmland

LANDSCAPE TYPE M: SANDY ARABLE FARMLAND

M.1 The *Sandy Arable Farmland* is a distinctive open sandy arable landscape which is located on the Sandgate Beds of the Lower Greensand formation. The Sandgate Beds are soft yellow sandstones that occur along the Rother Valley, to the north of the main spine of chalk that forms the South Downs.

DESCRIPTION

Integrated Key Characteristics:

- Gently undulating lowland sandstone landscape with well-drained, easily eroded sandy soils.
- A simple, open arable landscape divided into large scale geometric fields representing 20th century re-organistion of the landscape. Fields are bounded by denuded hedgerows.
- Remnant blocks of early and recent enclosure (15th-17th and 18th-19th centuries respectively) hinting at the earlier landscapes which once existed here.
- Mature standard oaks and ancient woodland remnants are key ecological and visual features in this predominantly arable landscape.
- The river Rother and its associated floodplain habitats provide an important green corridor.
- Narrow eroded sunken lanes with sandy verges, bordered by bracken-clad hedgebanks, provide a sense of enclosure.
- Small nucleated sandstone villages, usually of mid-late Saxon origin, comprising nucleated groups of former farmsteads situated around the church and manor house.
- Historic parkland and estate cottages are characteristic features of this landscape.
- The relatively low lying nature of the landscape makes it a convenient route for road infrastructure.

Physical Landscape

M.2 The *Sandy Arable Farmland* is underlain by the Sandgate Beds, a formation of soft yellow sandstones which are part of the Lower Greensand deposits that form part of the Greensand and the Weald. The Sandgate Beds create a gently rolling relief with well-drained, easily eroded sandy soils which are almost exclusively used for arable farmland. The landscape is divided into large scale geometric fields bounded by broken and gappy hedgerows. Bracken is a feature of the hedgerows, reflecting the sandy soils. Mature hedgerow oaks are important visual features.

Perceptual/Experiential Landscape

M.3 The landscape has a large scale, open character as a result of the large arable fields, denuded hedgerow boundaries and limited woodland cover. The repetition of fields contributes to a uniform landscape pattern.

M.4 The intensive agriculture, presence of built development and traffic on the main roads contribute to visible human impact. However, away from these areas of heightened activity, the landscape is calm and still, particularly by the river.

M.5 This landscape typically provides relatively few opportunities for countryside access, although a network of public rights of way and remnant areas of common land provide some public access. However, recreational opportunities are provided by the golf course at Midhurst, polo fields, and fishing at Benbow Pond.

M.6 The arable farmlands of this area have not attracted artists and writers as have the adjacent Chalk downs and Greensand hills – there are therefore few recorded perceptions of this area.

Biodiversity

M.7 This character area comprises the narrow alluvial floodplain of the River Rother and its associated sandy valley sides. The majority of the sandy valley sides are under intensive arable cultivation, with scattered although often defunct hedgerows, together with occasional woodland blocks (some of ancient origin) and standard oaks providing key ecological features in this predominantly arable landscape.

M.8 The River Rother itself, however, is of significant ecological interest and is designated as a SNCI for its aquatic flora and associated faunal interest. In addition, the narrow floodplain supports occasional linear areas of wet woodland, marsh and wet meadow, many of which are designated as county wildlife sites and provide an important green corridor through the character area. Fyning Moor SSSI occurs to the west of the river corridor, comprising an area of wet alder woodland, marshy meadow and fen.

Key Biodiversity Features	***Importance (including reference to designated areas)***
The river Rother and associated floodplain habitats providing an important green corridor	• The river Rother SNCI with its notable aquatic flora and associated faunal interest • Occasional wet meadows, marshes and wet woodlands along the floodplain, including the nationally important Fyning Moor SSSI
Occasional ancient woodland blocks on the valley sides	• Scattered woodland, including some of ancient woodland, some of which carry SNCI designation.
Standard hedgerow oaks	• Provide important ecological features in the predominantly arable landscape.

Historic Character

M.9 The relatively fertile soils of this area are likely to have been exploited by prehistoric communities after the deterioration of the fragile sandy soils in the area to the south of the Rother, although evidence is scarce.

M.10 The same fertile soils were identified by the Anglo-Saxons, who established settlements, some as secondary settlements of the scarpfoot villages (*e.g.* Rogate was a sub-manor of Harting).

M.11 By the medieval period, the landscape probably supported a mixed agrarian landscape, on less productive soils than those of the chalklands. The villages were surrounded by open fields, with woodland and heathland pastures towards the extremities of the parishes. Isolated farmsteads also existed in the areas of early enclosure between the villages, with pasture fields supporting cattle.

M.12 The changing economic and social conditions of the later medieval period saw the decline of the open field system, and many of the remaining open fields were enclosed on a piecemeal basis, often beginning with the lords' demesne lands. Some of the richer landowners created landscape parks.

M.13 The character area now comprises large blocks of modern fields interspersed with occasional blocks of early and recent enclosure (15th-17th and 18th-19th centuries respectively) hinting at the earlier landscapes which once existed here before being swept away during the 20th century. Woodland is relatively scarce but largely confined to the areas of early enclosure, including small blocks of ancient woodland of pre-1600 date, as well as more recent plantations and game coverts.

Key Features of the Historic Environment	***Importance***
Nucleated settlements	Indicative of medieval manorial system based around open fields.
Early enclosures	Indicative of areas of less productive soil
Modern enclosures	Evidence for major reorganisation of landscape of more productive soil
Occasional pre-1800 woodland	Provides evidence of medieval and early post-medieval woodland exploitation, *e.g.* coppicing and charcoal burning

Settlement Form and Built Character

M.14 The settlement pattern is characterised by small nucleated settlements, interspersed with isolated farmsteads of medieval date set within areas of early enclosure. This conforms to English Heritage's rural settlement designation of East Wessex and Weald Sub-Provinces within the South-eastern Province, and marks the point where the two sub-provinces merge.

M.15 The typical settlement form is of mid-late Anglo-Saxon origin, and comprises nucleated groups of former farmsteads situated around the church and manor house, and set within groups of fields enclosed in the later medieval period but originally forming open fields farmed on a communal basis, interspersed with isolated farmsteads. Many of these settlements have grown into large villages. Scattered isolated farmsteads derive from more recent enclosures during the 18th-19th centuries, and are set within large regular field systems that have replaced earlier patterns.

M.16 Building materials are typically local sandstone, flint and red and yellow brick, with clay tiles and thatch used for roofing.

EVALUATION

Sensitivity

M.17 This landscape has many sensitive natural, cultural and aesthetic/perceptual features that are vulnerable to change. Key landscape sensitivities include:

- The unified landscape pattern and strong visual structure resulting from the geometric network of neatly trimmed hedgerows with hedgerow oaks.
- The sunken lanes which are vulnerable to further erosion, widening or insensitive road improvements.
- The consistent palette of building materials, including sandstone extracted from the local Greensands, red brick formed from local clays, and clay tiles, which provides a strong sense of place and unity.
- The remnant woodlands and commons (manorial wastes) which provide evidence of the historic landscape contribute to the perceived naturalness of the landscape and are of ecological interest.
- The network of public rights of way that allow access to this, and adjacent, landscapes.

M.18 The low proportion of woodland cover and openness of the landscape makes this landscape visually sensitive. However, the presence of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and rolling landform provide some opportunities for mitigation associated with small scale development.

Change – Key Issues and Trends

Past Change

M.19 Observable changes in the past include:

- Loss of field boundaries due to decline in hedgerow management, expansion/amalgamation of fields and erosion at field entrances.
- Loss of hedgerow trees and woodland as a result of agricultural intensification and damage to the edges of woodlands.
- Creation of golf course and polo pitches.
- Appearance of 'set-aside' land as a result of the Common Agricultural Policy.
- Erosion, diffuse pollution and silting of the river as a result of intensive farming techniques.

Future Landscape Change

M.20 In the short term (5 years) change is likely to be on a small-scale basis. Individual changes may not be immediately apparent or have a clear (visible) landscape impact. It is likely that there will continue to be pressure for small-scale expansion associated with villages.

M.21 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 area. Some potential changes and key vulnerabilities within the *Sandy Arable Farmland* are outlined below.

Climate Change: Potential adverse change could include changes in the flow of the river with high water flows and increased erosion contrasting with periods of drought and low flows. There is also likely to be increased incidence of soil erosion of these sandy soils as a result of periods of heavier rainfall. In response to climate change, the pursuit of renewable energy may results in demand for growth of biomass crops which could alter the open character of the valley.

Agricultural Change and Land Management: Agricultural management will be driven by the changes in the world market and the CAP. In this area of fertile sandy soils it is possible that the land may be vulnerable to farm and field expansion. The presence of a number of large settlements within, and adjacent to, the area may result in pressure for increased use of land for horse grazing. However, there may also be positive landscape change arising from regimes to promote enhanced environmental management of hedgerows, hedgerow trees, woodland and wet pastures/woodland alongside streams.

Development: The designation of the area as AONB and a National Park is likely to limit pressure for large scale built development within the this landscape. Small scale changes such as increases in artificial lighting, concrete kerbs, over-sized gateposts, Leylandii hedges, and suburban style fences may also continue to change the rural character of this landscape.

Broad Management Objective and Landscape Guidelines

M.22 **The overall management objective should be to conserve the simple structure of the landscape and strengthen the hedgerow, woodland and tree network.**

Landscape Management Considerations

- Conserve and manage the network of hedgerows that give the landscape its structure - consider re-planting hedgerows that have been previously removed.
- Encourage regeneration of hedgerow oak trees. Also consider new tree planting in hedgerows denuded of trees.
- Protect edges of woodland from damage from farm machinery and consider opportunities to extend and link broadleaved woodland.
- Encourage and support the development of soil management plans to reduce soil erosion.
- Buffer strips along side watercourses and hedgerows should be a priority to enhance biodiversity and create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.

Development Considerations

- Integrate existing and new built development into the rural landscape, using new planting to enhance the visual and ecological character diversity of the landscape.
- Ensure that any built development reflects the local vernacular - resist suburban style garden boundaries, kerbs, and lighting. Conserve the remote rural character of the landscape.
- Ensure new built development responds to the palette of distinctive materials of sandstone, flint and red/yellow brick with clay tiles and thatch used for roofing.
- Consider opportunities to further mitigate the impact of major transport corridors on the rural character of the landscape through screen planting using broadleaved species.
- Seek to reduce fragmentation of farmholdings for leisure use and provide guidance to new landowners raising awareness of the special landscape characteristics of the area.
- Monitor the effects of incremental change to buildings and minimise such change by providing design guidance and encouraging applicants to enter into discussions at and early stage in the preparation of their proposals.
- Conserve the rural character of the landscape setting to the villages in this area by providing guidance to help minimise the introduction of suburban features such as artificial lighting, concrete kerbs, over-sized gateposts, Leylandii hedges, and suburban style fences.

Character Areas	
There is only one area of *Sandy Arable Farmland.* This is located on the Sandgate beds that outcrop along the northern banks of the River Rother.	
M1:	North Rother Sandy Arable Farmland

M1: NORTH ROTHER VALLEY SANDY ARABLE FARMLAND

DESCRIPTION

Location and Boundaries

M1.1 The *North Rother Valley Sandy Arable Farmland* is located at the foot of the Greensand hills of the Weald. The northern boundary represents a transition to the dipslope of the *Greensand Hills* and is drawn along a combination of woodland edges, field boundaries and contour lines. The southern boundary represents a transition to the elevated sandy 'plateau' of the *Rother Farmland and Heath Mosaic* where changes in woodland cover and topography define the boundary.

Integrated Key Characteristics:

- Gently undulating sandstone valley lying between the Greensand hills of the Weald to the north and the elevated sandy 'plateau' of the *Rother Farmland and Heath Mosaic* to the south.
- Contains the course of the River Rother which flows east-west along a narrow floodplain, within a gently meandering course, with historic stone crossing points. The river is of significant ecological interest, supporting occasional linear areas of wet woodland, marsh and wet meadow.
- Well-drained, easily eroded sandy soils support arable farmland, a landscape divided into large scale geometric fields bounded by broken and gappy hedgerows.
- The large open arable fields, denuded hedgerow boundaries and lack of woodland create an open character with long views. Standard oaks are key ecological features in this predominantly arable landscape.
- Eroded sunken lanes are bordered by hedgerows. Bracken is a feature of the hedgerows, reflecting the sandy character of the soils.
- Occasional woodland blocks (including some ancient woodland remnants) on the valley side are key ecological features.
- The typical settlement form comprises a large number of small nucleated villages, usually of mid-late Saxon origin throughout the character area – as at Rogate, Lodsworth and Petworth, with a scatter of isolated farms.
- Characteristic building materials of sandstone extracted from the local Greensands, red brick formed from local clays, and clay tiles. Estate cottages associated with the Cowdray Estate display distinctive yellow paintwork.
- The valley forms a convenient corridor for the A272. It also contains the larger settlements of Easebourne and Petworth, with Petersfield and Midhurst on the boundaries of the area.

Specific Characteristics Unique to the North Rother Valley Sandy Arable Farmland

M1.2 The *North Rother Valley Sandy Arable Farmland* is the only character area of this landscape type. The most significant characteristic is the presence of the River Rother which flows eastwards to join the River Arun near Pulborough. The river is of significant ecological interest and is designated as a SNCI for its aquatic flora and associated faunal interest. In addition, the narrow floodplain supports occasional linear areas of wet woodland, marsh and wet meadow, many of which are designated as county wildlife sites and provide an important green corridor through the character area. Fyning Moor SSSI occurs to the west of the river corridor, comprising an area of wet alder woodland, marshy meadow and fen. The river is crossed in several places by historic stone bridges.

M1.3 The Anglo-Saxons established settlements along the floodplain of the Rother, positioned to exploit the varied forest and riverine resources. The sandstone and red brick settlements of Rogate, Easebourne, Lodsworth, and Petworth contribute warm colours to the arable landscape, for example Rogate is dominated by yellow sandstone and tile roofs. However, activity associated with the A272, A283 and A285, and the settlements of Rogate, Easebourne, Lodsworth, and Petworth, detract from the otherwise quiet character of the landscape.

M1.4 During the later medieval period, with the decline of the open field system, some of the richer landowners created landscape parks such as Cowdray (listed on the English Heritage Register). The influence of this estate is seen clearly in this character area today - Easebourne is a Cowdray Estate village constructed mostly of sandstone with the familiar Cowdray deep yellow paint a feature of the buildings.

M1.5 Parts of this working agricultural landscape are accessible via a network of public rights of way, including the long distance Sussex Border Path which crosses the area between West Heath Common and Durford Heath. There are parking and picnic facilities at fishing at Durford Mill and Benbow Pond, signed walks at Grittenham Farm, and two areas of land managed by the National Trust land – one on the edge of Rogate and another on the river bank between Stedham and Woolbeding. An area of common land at Egdean Common and small areas of Manorial waste alongside the A272 also permit public access to the landscape.

Sensitivities Specific to the North Rother Valley Sandy Arable Farmland

M1.6 All of the landscape and visual sensitivities listed in the landscape type evaluation apply to this character area. Specific to this character area are:

- The gently meandering course of the River Rother with its fields of pasture and historic stone bridges, and ecologically rich wet woodland, marsh and wet meadow.
- Long views across the Rother Valley resulting from the open character and rolling nature of the landscape.

M1.7 This landscape is visible from users of the A272, from Trotton Common, and from parts of the Greensand hills to the north. This inter-visibility with adjacent landscapes enhances its visual sensitivity.

Change Specific to the North Rother Valley Sandy Arable Farmland

M1.8 Past change specific to this area includes:

- Loss of watermeadows and river valley grasslands as a result of agricultural improvements.
- Introduction of electricity pylons and sewage works into the landscape.
- Upgrading of the A272.
- Expansion of settlements of Petersfield, Rogate, Stedham, Midhurst, Easebourne, Lodsworth, Tillington and Petworth.
- Intensive farming resulting in soil erosion and pollution run-off into the Rother.

M1.9 The designation of the area as AONB and as National Park is likely to limit pressure for large scale built development within the this landscape. However, since this character area contains the settlements of Rogate, Easebourne, and Petworth it is likely that the area will see some additional built development over the next 20 years. There is likely to be further erosion of soil and run-off from intensively farmed land polluting the River Rother. There may also be increased demand for leisure land uses such as fishing in the Rother.

Landscape Management/Development Considerations Specific to the North Rother Valley Sandy Arable Farmland

M1.10 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:

- Enhance biodiversity interest of riverside pastures and retain/extend rich wet woodland, marsh and wet meadow habitats.
- Control invasive species such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan Balsam along rivers.
- Consider opportunities to re-create waterside grassland along the Rother and tributary streams to increase landscape diversity and enhance biodiversity.
- Monitor water quality and seek to minimise water pollution from agriculture through the CAP cross-compliance rules and support for the production of Nutrient, Manure and Crop Protection Management Plans.

M1.11 The following development considerations are specific to this character area:

- Consider opportunities to further mitigate the impact of the A272 on the rural character of the landscape through screening by planting native broadleaved species and removal of unnecessary signs.

- Take account of the sensitivity of views from the *Greensand Hills* to the north in relation to any change within the valley.
- Consider opportunities for undergrounding the electricity pylons that cross the Rother Valley in the future.
- Conserve the rural landscape settings to Petersfield, Rogate, Stedham, Midhurst, Easebourne, Lodsworth, Tillington and Petworth.
- Continue the use of distinctive deep yellow paint of the Cowdray Estate as a feature of buildings.

The River Rother runs through the area, and is crossed at historic stone crossing points.

A simple, open arable landscape divided into large scale geometric fields bounded by hedgerow.

Building materials include sandstone, redbrick and clay tiles as seen here at Petworth.

Erosion of sandy soils is a key issue in this area.

Bracken is a feature of the hedgerows, reflecting the sandy character of the soils.

Hedgerows are low and gappy resulting in an open landscape with long views.