



Landscape Character Areas

Q1 South Downs Upper Coastal Plain

Q: Upper Coastal Plain

LANDSCAPE TYPE Q: UPPER COASTAL PLAIN

Q.1 The *Upper Coastal Plain* is a gently undulating landscape lying at the foot of the chalk dipslope along the southern edge of the South Downs. Only a small part of the *Upper Coastal Plain* lies within the designated National Park boundary.

DESCRIPTION

Key Characteristics:

- Low lying undulating landscape at the foot of the chalk dipslope forming a transition between the chalk downs and the flat lower coastal plain.
- The underlying geology (upper chalk) is masked by drift deposits of 'Head' (weathered and broken up material) at the foot of the dipslope which gives rise to stony fertile soils.
- Drained by a series of streams running southwards towards the sea, some dammed to form ponds.
- A strong network of hedgerows, hedgerow oaks and woodlands create structure – woodlands form links with the wooded downs to the north.
- Mixture of field sizes and shapes supporting a mixture of pasture and arable - regular rectilinear fields represent reorganisation of earlier field systems and recent enclosure of former commons.
- The coastal plain is well settled - nucleated historic towns and villages are located along the foot of the dipslope. Characteristic building materials include flint and brick.
- Extensive and complex sub-surface archaeology indicates that the fertile upper coastal plain has been intensively exploited by numerous farming settlements.
- A wealth of historic features including historic parklands, ancient woodlands (of medieval origin), irregular assarts and prehistoric earthworks.
- The plain is crossed by a large number of roads – many of which continue up the dipslope of the chalk onto the chalk downs.
- Sand and gravel pits indicate the economic value of the underlying drift deposits.

Physical Landscape

Q.2 This transitional, gently undulating landscape is underlain predominantly by upper chalk forming a smooth, gently undulating topography. However, the solid geology is masked by thick deposits of Head which give rise to well-drained flinty, silty and clayey soils known as agyilic brown earths. These fertile soils give rise to good agricultural land (Grade 3 in DEFRA's agricultural land classification) which supports arable cropping, pasture and woodland.

- Q.3 There is a range of field shapes and sizes – from vast open arable fields to small irregular pastures. Woodland tends to be in small copses, although larger woodlands are found towards the dip slope of the downs.
- Q.4 There are few water courses in this landscape due to the underlying chalk. However, there are occasional springs and ponds on the southern edge where the chalk meets impermeable clays.

Perceptual/Experiential Landscape

- Q.5 Where hedgerows are intact and woodland remnants survive the landscape is perceived as secluded and rural. However, where modern enclosures dominate, the landscape has a more regimented open character.
- Q.6 The presence of undulating fields, hedgerows, woodlands and parklands give this area a rural character. However, the sense of tranquillity is eroded by the presence of sand and gravel pits, plus traffic on the A27.
- Q.7 Parts of the *Upper Coastal Plain* are accessible by car and on foot due to the presence of some rural roads and footpaths. However, many areas are inaccessible, notably the large scale arable landscapes and the private parklands. Opportunities for public access are provided by the public footpaths and bridleways that extend up onto the adjacent downs.

Biodiversity

- Q.8 This character area is dominated by arable land, together with scattered small blocks of woodland, including some of ancient origin, as well as areas of broadleaved, mixed and plantation woodland. Many of these woodlands are connected to a relatively intact hedgerow network, which includes frequent standard oaks. Occasional areas of neutral grassland, drains, ponds and streams, provide important ecological features in the local context.

Key Biodiversity Features	Importance
Small woodland blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes ancient woodland which supports notable woodland ground flora and breeding birds
Good hedgerow network with standard oaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides additional ecological interest within the arable dominated landscape.
Occasional neutral grassland, ponds and streams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide refuge for a range of plant species, and invertebrates.

Historic Character

- Q.9 Prehistoric and Romano-British occupation of the character area is likely to have been extensive. However, surface traces of settlement are non-existent, having been completely removed by centuries of ploughing, with the exception of artefact scatters in ploughed fields and cropmarks/soilmarks visible in aerial photographs. Excavation has proved the survival of extensive and complex sub-surface archaeology. The various classes of evidence strongly indicate that the coastal plain was intensively exploited by numerous farming settlements, some of which were nucleated in nature, set within complex systems of fields and droveways. This

carving up of the landscape culminated dramatically during the later Iron Age with the creation of the Chichester dykes, a series of linear boundaries delineating an area of high status settlement, a site known as an *oppidum*. Part of this system, known as the Devil's Ditch, lies within the *Upper Coastal Plain*.

- Q.10 The fertile soils were identified by the Anglo-Saxons, who established a string of nucleated settlements along the foot of the Downs and across the coastal plain. Some of these early settlements were located in areas formerly occupied by Roman villa estates.
- Q.11 By the medieval period, the *Upper Coastal Plain* formed an integral part of a sophisticated and efficient agrarian landscape based around sheep-corn husbandry. Nucleated villages were established along the fertile soils of the character area. The villages were surrounded by open fields, with woodland and downland pastures towards the extremities of the parishes. The open arable fields were manured by sheep flocks brought from the downland sheepwalks at night.
- Q.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. Much of the common grazing land was enclosed in the 18th-19th century, and is recognisable on earlier maps as isolated blocks of regular rectilinear fields surrounded by irregular earlier enclosures, the generally poor quality of the land reflected in names such as Hungerdown. Much of this earlier landscape has now been swept away by modern reorganisation into large arable fields.
- Q.13 Much of the surviving woodland is of pre-1800 date, probably reflecting surviving medieval woodland.

Key Features of the Historic Environment	Importance
Nucleated settlements	Indicative of medieval manorial system based around open fields.
Early enclosures	Indicative of relative prosperity of character area, allowing early response to changing economic and social conditions
Modern enclosures	Evidence for major reorganisation of landscape of more productive soil

Settlement Form and Built Character

- Q.14 The settlement pattern in the *Upper Coastal Plain* is characterised by nucleated settlements located along the foot of the chalk downs. This conforms to English Heritage's rural settlement designation of East Wessex Sub-Province within the South-eastern Province. 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. 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.
- Q.15 Building materials are typically flint, red brick, timber and clay tiles.

EVALUATION

Sensitivity

- Q.16 This landscape has many sensitive natural, cultural and aesthetic/perceptual features that are vulnerable to change. Key landscape sensitivities include:
- The rural character of the landscape which could be vulnerable to further built development and quarrying.
 - The wetland habitats associated with springs and streams.
 - The strong network of hedgerows, hedgerow oaks and small woodlands which form important visual and ecological links with the wooded downs to the north and could be vulnerable to lack of management.
 - Former common land which still has remnant of former character even if only in place name.
 - Early field enclosure patterns which could be vulnerable to field expansion.
 - Nucleated historic villages exhibiting local building materials including flint and brick whose character and settings are vulnerable to change.
 - Avenues, parkland trees, and woodland associated with historic parklands which contain key ecological features and which are vulnerable to ageing and piecemeal change.
 - Archaeological features such as the 'Devil's Ditch' which could be vulnerable to intensive farming methods.
 - The rural character of the unmarked roads which could be vulnerable to 'improvements'.
- Q.17 The occurrence of tree cover and hedgerows limits visual sensitivity in parts of this landscape. However, the visibility of this landscape from the adjacent downs, for example from the viewpoint at The Trundle, increases the visual sensitivity of this landscape.

Change – Key Issues and Trends

Past Change

- Q.18 Observable changes in the past include:
- Enclosure of former commons in the 18th-19th century.
 - Workings associated with gravel extraction leading to loss of habitat and leaving scars into the landscape in the 20th century.
 - Reorganisation of earlier landscapes into large open fields during the 20th century. Loss of some field boundaries due to decline in hedgerow management.

- Decline in woodland management resulting in declining condition of some woodlands during the 20th century.
- More recent development of horse paddocks leading to introduction of inappropriate 'ranch' style fencing and overgrazing of pastures.

Future Landscape Change

- Q.19 In the short term (5 years) change is likely to be on a small-scale basis. Although the possible future designation of the area as National Park would be likely to limit pressure for significant new built development, there may continue to be local change in relation to individual properties such as introduction of external lighting or (sub) urban style fencing and boundaries. There may also be changes in patterns of crops in the arable areas - some of these crops can have a sudden impact e.g. oil seed rape adds bright splash of yellow. There may be decline in the structure of woodlands that are not in active management and it is likely that there will be continued pressure for development of horse paddocks, particularly on the edges of farms and settlements.
- Q.20 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 *Upper Coastal Plain* are outlined below.

Climate Change: Periods of drought could affect the wetland habitats around springs and streams. The increasing temperatures may result in introduction of different crop types on mixed farms, such as sunflowers, which could change the visual character of the landscape. In response to climate change, the pursuit of renewable energy may result in demand for growth of biomass crops. The demand for wood fuel as a source of renewable energy could result in improved management of woodlands.

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 soils it is likely that agricultural production will continue to intensify with amalgamation of farms and potential new large scale farm buildings. On the other hand land that is more marginal for farming will be vulnerable to purchase as hobby farms or for horse grazing and these uses will require active management to ensure the rural character of the area is retained. Positive landscape change could result from regimes to promote enhanced environmental management of hedgerows, hedgerow trees, and woodland, as well as restoration of former quarries.

Development: The possible future designation of the area as a National Park would limit pressure for built development within this area. However, since this landscape contains many village settlements, it is likely that the *Upper Coastal Plain* will see some additional built development over the next 20 years. This could result in increases in artificial lighting, expansion of villages, erosion of the rural character of the landscape and increases in traffic pressures on the rural roads. There may also be changes as a result of the cumulative impact of many small-scale changes to individual properties over the 20 year period.

Broad Management Objective and Landscape Guidelines

- Q.21 **The overall management objective should be to conserve the rural setting to villages and historic features of the landscape, and enhance the condition of the network of hedgerows, hedgerow oaks and small woodlands that link with the wooded downs to the north.**

Landscape Management Considerations

- Conserve and manage wetland habitats and seek to extend unimproved meadow grassland.
- Manage the hedgerows, re-planting where necessary, to conserve an intact hedgerow network. Monitor regeneration of hedgerow trees and consider re-planting where necessary.
- Consider re-introducing traditional woodland management techniques, such as coppicing and thinning, to woodlands. This will also ensure a diverse species and age structure and minimise risk of damage as a result of increased storms and high winds. Maintain visual and ecological links with the wooded downs to the north.
- Promote interest in, and marketing of, local wood products, including wood for fuel.
- Restore disused gravel workings to grassland, scrub, woodland and wetland habitats.
- Conserve the irregular medieval enclosures around the medieval nucleated settlements and isolated farmsteads which provide a sense of historic continuity and landscape texture – avoid field expansion in these areas.
- Conserve historic designed landscapes, and their settings, encouraging the management/ restoration of permanent pasture, parkland trees, avenues and clumps of trees.
- Conserve and manage prehistoric and later earthworks, such as the ‘Devil’s Ditch’, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity.
- Resist road ‘improvements’ that would threaten the rural character of the unmarked roads.
- Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries and avoiding overgrazing of pastures.

Development Considerations

- Conserve the nucleated form and rural character of historic villages. Promote the use of local building materials (notably flint and brick) to retain sense of consistency through the character area.

- Monitor the effects of incremental change to buildings – develop design guidance to help resist suburban style garden boundaries, kerbs, and lighting that could erode the rural character of the area.
- Integrate built development on the edges of villages or farms into the landscape using native planting of broadleaved species and maintain the rural setting to settlements.
- Take account of views from the adjacent downs in association with any change in the coastal plain.

Character Areas

The *Upper Coastal Plain* landscape is represented by one character area in the South Downs – this area occurs along the southern boundary between Funtington and Slindon.

Q1:	South Downs Upper Coastal Plain
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Q1: SOUTH DOWNS UPPER COASTAL PLAIN

Location and Boundaries

Q1.1 The *South Downs Upper Coastal Plain* character area is a narrow strip of land on the southern boundary of the National Park between Funtington and Slindon. It forms a transition between the chalk downs to the north and the lower coastal plain to the south (outside the National Park). The northern boundary of the area therefore represents a transition and is drawn along the representative features such as roads and field boundaries. The southern boundary of the character area is formed by the National Park boundary, but in reality the *South Downs Upper Coastal Plain* landscape extends beyond the National Park boundary.

Integrated Key Characteristics:

- The northern edge of the low lying, undulating, fertile strip of land between the dipslope of the South Downs and the sea.
- The underlying geology (upper chalk) is masked by drift deposits of 'Head' (weathered and broken up material) at the foot of the dipslope which gives rise to stony fertile soils.
- Drains, ponds and streams around Ashling, including the source of the Bosham Stream, and designed ponds at Ashling Park, provide important ecological features in the local context.
- Mixture of field sizes and shapes supporting a mixture of pasture and arable – vast fields between East Lavant and Halnaker are reminiscent of the medieval open field landscape that formerly existed here.
- A strong network of hedgerows, hedgerow oaks and small woodlands create structure – woodlands form important visual and ecological links with the wooded downs to the north.
- Blocks of recent enclosure mark areas of former common e.g. at Slindon.
- Nucleated historic towns and villages e.g. Funtington, West Ashling, East Ashling, Mid Lavant, and East Lavant, are located along the foot of the dipslope. Characteristic building materials include flint and brick.
- Historic parklands at Ashling, Goodwood and Slindon, contribute landscape features such as avenues, parkland trees, and woodland.
- A wealth of archaeological features indicating the long history of the landscape, including the 'Devil's Ditch', a series of Iron Age linear boundaries defining an area of high status settlement on the outskirts of Chichester.
- Crossed by narrow rural roads, many of which continue up the dipslope of the chalk onto the chalk downs.
- Sand and gravel pits indicate the economic value of the underlying drift deposits.

Specific Characteristics Unique to the South Downs Upper Coastal Plain

- Q1.2 The *South Downs Upper Coastal Plain* character area is typical of the landscape type, comprising a gently undulating landscape on lower chalk, masked by deposits of 'Head' which give rise to well drained flinty, silty and clayey soils that support a mixture of arable cropping, pasture and woodland. South of Funtington is a spring and several associated ponds, as well as small areas of neutral grassland, which mark the source of Bosham Stream – these provide important ecological features in the local context. This rural landscape forms a setting to the chalk downs to the north.
- Q1.3 The range of field shapes and sizes is represented, in this character area, by vast open arable fields between East Lavant and Halnaker and small irregular pastures around West Ashling. The vast open arable fields represent modern reorganisation of earlier enclosures, but are reminiscent of the medieval open field landscape that formerly existed here. The area of small, hedged fields and woodland remnants around West Ashling, by contrast, is perceived as secluded and rural. The sense of tranquillity on the *South Downs Upper Coastal Plain* is eroded by the presence of sand and gravel pits, traffic on the A27, and the noise of aircraft and cars at Goodwood airfield and motor racing circuit.
- Q1.4 Woodland tends to be in small copses, although there is a particularly large area of ancient woodland at Slindon Park, which is designated as a SINC. Woodland is also associated with the historic parklands at Ashling and Goodwood. Towards the north of the area, larger woodlands merge with woodlands and plantations on the dip slope of the downs. Here there are numerous public footpaths and bridleways up onto the adjacent downs, and parking provision at Slindon Estate (managed by the national Trust), which provide countryside access.
- Q1.5 The settlement pattern in this character area is typical of the landscape type, characterised by strings of nucleated settlements along the foot of the downs. In this character area this pattern is represented by the nucleated villages of Funtington, West Ashling, East Ashling, West Lavant, and East Lavant. These villages comprise nucleated groups of former farmsteads situated around the church and manor house, and are indicative of the former medieval manorial system based around open field farming.

Sensitivities Specific to the South Downs Upper Coastal Plain

- Q1.6 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 wetland habitats around Ashling, including the spring, ponds, and neutral grassland which mark the source of Bosham Stream, and designed ponds at Ashling Park.
 - Former common land e.g. at Slindon, which still has remnant of former character even if only in place name.
 - Archaeological features such as the 'Devil's Ditch' which could be vulnerable to intensive farming methods.

- Nucleated medieval villages of Funtington, West Ashling, East Ashling, West Lavant, and East Lavant, and their secluded, rural settings formed by small, hedged fields and woodland of medieval origin.
- Areas of historic parkland and woodland at Slindon Park, Ashling Park and Goodwood Park.
- The visibility of this landscape from the adjacent downs, for example from the viewpoint at The Trundle.

Change Specific to the South Downs Upper Coastal Plain

QI.7 Past change specific to this area includes:

- Enclosure of former commons e.g. Slindon.
- Introduction of suburban style development at Mid Lavant which has introduced suburban features into a rural landscape.

QI.8 The possible future designation of the area as a National Park is likely to limit pressure for built development within this area. However, it is likely that the area will see some additional built development associated with Funtington, West Ashling, East Ashling, West Lavant, and East Lavant, over the next 20 years. There may also be changes as a result of the cumulative impact of many small-scale changes to individual properties over the 20 year period.

Landscape Management/Development Considerations Specific to the South Downs Upper Coastal Plain

QI.9 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:

- Conserve and manage wetland habitats around Ashling and the source of the Bosham Stream, including meadows and marsh. Seek to extend unimproved meadow grassland.
- Conserve the Devil's Ditch, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in its vicinity.
- Conserve and enhance the historic parklands and woodlands at Slindon Park, Ashling Park and Goodwood Park through woodland management, replacement tree planting and the restoration of parkland pasture.

QI.10 The following development considerations are specific to this character area:

- Conserve the nucleated form and rural character of historic villages of Funtington, West Ashling, East Ashling, West Lavant, and East Lavant.
- Integrate built development on the edges of villages or farms into the landscape using native planting and conserve the small scale medieval field patterns and secluded, rural character of landscape setting to the villages.

- Encourage sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, hardstanding, jumps and other paraphernalia that are associated with hobby farms or private stables and that fall outside planning control.



A low lying, undulating, fertile strip of land between the dipslope of the South Downs and the sea.



Fencing surrounding paddocks.



Vast fields between Lavant and Halinaker are reminiscent of the medieval open field landscape that formerly existed here.



Historic parks contribute landscape features such as parkland trees.



There are views over the coastal plain from the adjacent downs e.g. The Trundle.



A strong network of hedgerows, hedgerow oaks and small woodlands creates structure.