Appendix N
Landscape Character Type N: Valley Farmland

The *Valley Farmland* is a distinctive open sandy arable landscape which is located on the Sandgate Beds of the Lower Greensand formation that occur along the Rother Valley to the north of the main spine of chalk that forms the South Downs.

Description

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-organisation 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

N.1 The *Valley 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

N.2 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.

N.3 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.

N.4 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.

N.5 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

N.6 This character type comprises the sandy valley sides and tributaries of the River Rother. The majority of the sandy valley sides are under intensive arable cultivation, with scattered although often defunct hedgerows. There are however occasional woodland blocks (some of ancient origin) and less frequent areas of good quality semi-improved grassland, which are both BAP Priority Habitats. Standard oaks and ash also provide key ecological features in this predominantly arable landscape.

N.7 Although the River Rother and its immediate floodplain falls within LCT H, some of its tributaries fall within the valley sides. The river, and its tributaries, is of significant ecological interest and is designated as a LWS for its aquatic flora and associated faunal interest. An area of low lying land at Fyning Moor comprises an area of wet alder woodland, marshy meadow and fen and as it designated as a SSSI.

Key Biodiversity Features	Importance
The tributaries of the river Rother and associated habitats	The river Rother LWS is notable for its aquatic flora and associated faunal interest.
Fyning Moor, containing wet meadows, marshes and wet woodlands (designated as a SSSI)	Nationally important habitats supporting notable and uncommon flora and nationally uncommon flies.
BAP Priority Habitats of deciduous woodland (some being ancient) and good quality semi-improved grassland on the valley sides.	Deciduous woodland, including ancient woodland, contains important canopy and ground flora. Semi-improved grassland is moderately species-rich and valued for its potential for habitat enhancement.
Standard hedgerow oaks	Provide important ecological features in the predominantly arable landscape.

N.8 Habitats across the valley farmland are not considered to be 'primary habitats' as part of Natural England's National Habitat Mapping Project and have therefore not been mapped. However, Network Enhancement Zones associated with the habitats found within the *Rother Floodplain* and the *Wealden Farmland and Heath Mosaic* to the south, include land within the Valley Farmland landscape. These areas of land are considered suitable in connecting existing habitats (deciduous woodland, good quality semi-improved grassland, lowland fens and lowland heathland) through the creation of new habitats.

Historic Character

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

N.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).

N.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.

N.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.

N.13 The character type now comprises large blocks of modern fields interspersed with occasional blocks of early and recent formal enclosure (15th-17th and 18th-19th centuries respectively and largely in the form of consolidated strip fields and planned private enclosure), hinting at the earlier landscapes which once existed here before being swept away during the 20th century.

N.14 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. To the north of the Rother, around the settlement of Rogate in the west, is an area of cohesive assarts; a field system created by the process of clearing woodland leading to semi-regular fields with wooded boundaries.

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 on 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

N.15 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 Historic England'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.

N.16 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. These are 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.

N.17 Building materials are typically local sandstone, flint and red and yellow brick, with clay tiles and thatch used for roofing.

Evaluation

Ecosystem Services in the Valley Farmland

N.18 Ecosystem services are the benefits people and society get from the natural environment. The *Valley Farmland* provides:

Provisioning	■ Food provision– mixed farming producing cereals and arable crops. Well-drained sandy soils enable easy working and spring cropping for agriculture. ■ Water availability – sandstone aquifer maintains springs and base flows into rivers. Freely draining soils means that winter rainfall is often readily absorbed, recharging aquifers and making an important contribution to water supplies.
Regulating	■ Regulating water flows – soils and underlying geology are permeable and able to absorb and store winter rainfall, helping to avoid accelerated water run-off and flooding. Floodplain of the Rother and its tributaries provides flood protection. ■ Regulating soil erosion – fertile and versatile soils though prone to compaction and erosion from wind and surface water run-off. ■ Climate regulation – carbon sequestration and storage benefits in soils and the occasional woodland blocks. Trees also contribute to flood alleviation, particularly along valley bottoms. ■ Air quality regulation – the occasional woodland blocks play an important role in regulating local air quality. ■ Pollination – unimproved and semi-improved grasslands are important nectar sources for pollinating insects.
Cultural	■ Tranquillity – tranquillity associated with the river, away from roads and built development. ■ Recreation – a network of public rights of way and remnant areas of common land provide some public access.
Supporting	■ Biodiversity - the River Rother and associated floodplain habitats support an extensive range of species and ecosystem services, including at nationally important Fyning Moor SSSI.

Sensitivities

N.19 This landscape type has many sensitive physical and aesthetic/perceptual features that are vulnerable to change, as set out in the table below:

Key Landscape Sensitivities
1. The unified landscape pattern and strong visual structure resulting from the geometric network of neatly trimmed hedgerows with hedgerow oaks.
2. The sunken lanes which are vulnerable to further erosion, widening or insensitive road improvements.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. The network of public rights of way that allow access to this, and adjacent, landscapes.
6. The low proportion of woodland cover and openness of the landscape makes this landscape visually sensitive.

Change – Key Issues and Trends

Past Change

N.20 Past change includes:

Past Change	
1.	Loss of field boundaries due to decline in hedgerow management, expansion/amalgamation of fields and erosion at field entrances, resulting in changes to the historic field pattern.
2.	Loss of hedgerow trees and woodland as a result of agricultural intensification and damage to the edges of woodlands.
3.	Creation of golf course and polo pitches changing the historic landscape pattern, while providing recreational opportunities.
4.	Increase in 'set-aside' land as a result of the Common Agricultural Policy, providing benefits for biodiversity.
5.	Intensive farming techniques resulting in erosion, diffuse pollution and silting of the river.

Future Landscape Change

N.21 Agricultural management will be driven by agricultural policy and is uncertain. However, the likely future changes are set out in the table below:

Future Change	
1.	Increased rainfall could lead to high water flow of the Rother and increased rates of erosion of the sandy soils, contrasting with periods of drought and low flows.
2.	Increased temperatures may result in changes to the species composition of habitats particularly affecting the ancient woodlands and grassland, and floodplain habitats along the River Rother. This could also lead to the formation of pathogens which in time could result in the decline in ability of woodland to regenerate and the loss of mature/significant landscape trees, including ash.
3.	In response to climate change, the pursuit of renewable energy may result in demand for growth of biomass crops which could alter the open character of the valley.
4.	Agricultural management will be driven by the changes in the world market and agricultural policy. In this area of fertile sandy soils, it is possible that the land may be vulnerable to further farm and field expansion resulting in the removal of hedgerows. 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.
5.	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.
6.	Pollution from agriculture is likely to be an ongoing pressure, affecting wetland habitats and water quality of the Rother.
7.	Small alterations to individual properties (such as artificial lighting, concrete kerbs, over-sized gateposts, Leylandii hedges, and (suburban style fencing) plus increased demand for leisure land uses such as horse riding and golf may cumulatively start to erode the perceived rural character of the area.
8.	Increasing traffic pressures may also have impacts on the narrow rural roads and sunken lanes with sandy verges and bracken-clad hedgebanks.
9.	Pressure for small-scale expansion associated with villages.

Broad Management Objective and Landscape Guidelines

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

Guidance for Landscape Management

A. Conserve and manage the network of hedgerows that give the landscape its structure - re-plant hedgerows that have been previously removed.

B. Encourage regeneration of hedgerow oak trees. Implement new tree planting in hedgerows denuded of trees.

C. Protect edges of woodland from damage from farm machinery and consider opportunities to extend and link broadleaved woodland.

D. Encourage and support the development of soil management plans to reduce soil erosion. Take measures to keep soil in-situ including low or no-tillage systems, and ensure there is good vegetative cover, avoiding over grazing and compaction from mechanised activities.

E. Buffer strips alongside watercourses and hedgerows should be a priority to enhance biodiversity and create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.

F. Create habitats along streams and rivers in agricultural landscapes to reduce diffuse pollution and run-off.

G. Be alert to potential new pests and diseases and plan for their management. Continue to monitor native species to assess changes in numbers and distribution. Monitor and control the spread of invasive species which are a cause of decline in native habitats, such as Giant hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum* in the River Rother. Refer to the SDNP INNS Strategy.

H. Seek to minimise water pollution from agriculture through sensitive land management practices, including restoration of buffer strips along watercourses to minimise run-off.

I. Maintain and develop the rights of way network and creation of new green infrastructure to better link communities with their surroundings.

Guidance for Integrating Development into the Landscape

A. Integrate existing and new built development into the rural landscape, using new planting to enhance the visual and ecological character diversity of the landscape.

B. 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 and associated dark skies, taking account of the technical guidance note dark skies technical advice note: https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/TLL-10-SDNPA-Dark-Skies-Technical-Advice-Note-2018.pdf.

C. 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.

D. Conserve the character of the ancient sunken lanes – resist pressure for road improvements which would alter the experience of travelling through the landscape.

E. Consider opportunities to further mitigate the impact of major transport corridors on the rural character of the landscape through screen planting using broadleaved species.

F. 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.

G. Monitor the effects of incremental change to buildings and minimise such change by providing design guidance and encouraging applicants to enter into discussions at an early stage in the preparation of their proposals.

H. 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.

I. Consider views over the area from the chalk scarp to the south and the Greensand Hills to the north. Refer to guidance in the View Characterisation and Analysis.[1]

Woodland strategy and suitable species

N.23 The LCT is an area where arable agriculture has long dominated the fertile soils, with limited woodland and hedgerows lost to modern field amalgamation. Woodland cover extends to 5.84km2, covering approximately 11% of the LCT, consisting of remnant ancient woodlands and mature standard oaks within denuded hedgerows. Ash is also typical of this type. The LCT has the potential to increase woodland cover, extending and creating links between areas of broadleaved woodland. Reinstating and thickening hedgerows on arable land is a further opportunity.

N.24 Avoid the introduction of non-native plant and animal species and monitor occurrence and abundance of new pests and diseases. Appropriate plant species may be informed by the National Biodiversity Network Gateway, relevant Biodiversity Action Plans and biological records from the relevant Biological Records Centre.

N.25 Ensure any purchased plant stock is through reputable nurseries, operating the Plant Health Assurance Scheme (once it has been trialled) to protect against the risk of *Xylella fastidiosa* and other plant health risks.

Character Areas There is only one geographical area of *Valley Farmland* located on the Sandgate beds in the South Downs National Park. This occurs along the northern banks of the River Rother.	
N1:	Rother Valley Farmland

[1] LUC. 2015 *South Downs National Park: View Characterisation and Analysis*

N1: Rother Valley Farmland

Location and Boundaries

The *Rother Valley 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.

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 and mature ash 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 Rother Valley Farmland

N.26 The *Rother Valley Farmland* is the only character area of this landscape type. It lies to the north of the River Rother which flows eastwards to join the River Arun near Pulborough. Although the river itself is in an adjacent character area, a number of tributaries of the Rother flow down these valleys slopes and these tributary corridors are of significant ecological interest and designated as part of a LWS for its aquatic flora and associated faunal interest. Fyning Moor SSSI occurs in this character area, comprising an area of wet alder woodland, marshy meadow and fen. A potential 'network join' has been identified in Natural England's National Habitat Mapping Project around Wakeham Farm between parts of the River Rother LWS, which would help link up existing clusters of habitat patches (deciduous woodland).

N.27 The Anglo-Saxons established settlements along the banks 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.

N.28 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 Historic England 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.

N.29 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, picnic facilities and 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 Rother Valley Farmland

N.30 All of the landscape and visual sensitivities listed in the landscape type evaluation apply to this character area. Specific sensitivities to this character area are included in the table below.

Key Landscape Sensitivities	
1.	Presence in views from the chalk scarp to the south and Greensand hills to the north.

Change Specific to the Rother Valley Farmland

N.31 In addition to the generic changes listed in the landscape type evaluation, specific changes to this area are set out in the table below.

Forces for Change	
2.	Pressures for additional built development close to Rogate, Easebourne and Petworth.
2.	Further erosion of soil and run-off from intensively farmed land polluting the River Rother.
3.	Spread of small-holdings and large detached houses with gardens, particularly in the north of the character area and along the B2070.
4.	Potential loss of large or veteran trees within the landscape, driven by specific pathogens impacting on species health or long-term viability, exacerbated by the impacts of climate change e.g. mature ash and oaks.

Landscape Management / Development Considerations Specific to the Rother Valley Farmland

N.32 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:

a. Consider opportunities to re-create waterside grassland along the tributary streams to the Rother to increase landscape diversity and biodiversity.

b. Monitor water quality and seek to minimise water pollution from agriculture and support for the production of Nutrient, Manure and Crop Protection Management Plans.

c. Encourage regeneration of oak and ash trees as visual features in this predominantly arable landscape.

N.33 The following development considerations are specific to this character area:

a. 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.

b. Take account of views from the Greensand Hills to the north and Chalk Scarp to the south in relation to any change within the valley.

c. Consider opportunities for undergrounding the electricity pylons that cross the Rother Valley in the future.

d. Conserve the rural landscape settings to Petersfield, Rogate, Stedham, Midhurst, Easebourne, Lodsworth, Tillington and Petworth – avoid 'suburbanisation' of the landscape.

e. Continue the use of distinctive deep yellow paint of the Cowdray Estate as a feature of buildings.