

Hassocks Parish Landscape Character Assessment

Introduction

The National planning Policy Framework, 2012; *Relevant landscape polices are reproduced in Appendix 1.*

The landscape character of the district of Mid Sussex is described in *The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005*. The Landscape Character Assessment of Mid Sussex has been prepared to help protect and enhance the distinctive character of the District, to manage change and inform other strategic documents and can be found on the following link:

[A Landscape Character Assessment for Mid Sussex.](#)

The following is a more detailed assessment of the Parish of Hassocks at a local scale.

Area A – Oldlands Greensand

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hurst Scarp Footslopes. This character area is more accurately described as the clay vale between the open foot slopes and the greensand ridge which crosses the area from west to east and on which the villages have historically grown outwards.

Description

This is an area of open arable fields and pasture which slopes gently south from the east west ridge between Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks. The greensand ridge is a continuation of the higher ground which supports the villages of Hurstpierpoint, Hassocks and Keymer and swings north between Keymer and Ditchling to form the distinct crest at Lodge Hill. A small stream runs along the southern edge of this area and disappears into the gardens in Damian Way before passing under Ockley Lane and through the village to join the Herring Stream. A spring fed stream emerges at the base of Lodge Hill runs down the eastern boundary of the area and into this stream. The fields to the south are heavy clay and waterlogged for much of the winter. The south eastern part of the area was an old nursery and is now the grounds of a large house and is enclosed by high fences. The suburban developments of Damian Way and Ockley Lane are set back in gardens with trees and hedges which help to soften and define the edges that these areas have with the countryside. This area forms part of the countryside gap between Hassocks and Ditchling.

Specific characteristics

The white painted Oldlands Mill is a dominant feature on the ridge which can be seen in wide views from the Downs and the footpath which crosses the area from west to east. The fields in the south eastern part of the area are enclosed by tall well treed hedges. There are many mature and ancient oak trees on the boundary with the built up edge and along the south eastern boundary of the area. The fields to the east of Ockley Lane are more open and afford long views across to Lodge Hill and the windmill. Mature ash trees are also a feature on the field boundaries along with one fine hornbeam. Tawny owls frequent and breed in the trees around the old nursery site at Pattendens.

Views

There are views across the area and to the suburban edges of Keymer from the ridge to the north and Lodge Hill in Ditchling. There are wide views across the area from Ockley Lane.

Amenity Value

The area is within the South Downs National Park and it is crossed by the main footpath link from Hassocks to Ditchling. Oldlands Mill is a popular local attraction on visitor days and events. This character area is of **high** amenity value.

Character Sensitivity

The historic structure of the landscape is largely intact and some ancient field boundaries remain intact. There has been some loss of this historic structure in the larger fields to the north and intrusion of ribbon development along Ockley Lane. The character of this area is considered to be of **moderate to high** sensitivity.

Visual sensitivity

The area forms the backdrop to Keymer Church and Conservation Area in long views from the downs. There are key local views across the area from Oldlands, Lodge Hill and Ockley Lane. The area is of **moderate to high** visual sensitivity

Area B – Lodge Farm Footslopes

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hurst Scarp Footslopes. This is an area of open arable fields and pasture at the foot of the downland scarp and which slopes gently north from Underhill Lane, , to the urban edge of Hassocks. The fields are larger and tend to be in more intensive arable use, with some loss of historic landscape structure. The area is crossed by the very straight New Road which is probably not, as the name suggests, an ancient routeway. The fields to the north of New Road tend to be more enclosed with hedged boundaries and mature oak trees. The southern built up edge of Hassocks village is set back behind large gardens with trees and hedges which soften the edge. The large and modern buildings of Downlands and Windmill school sites are a dominant feature softened to some extent by intervening vegetation. The school sports pitches form part of this open landscape on the edge of the built up area of the village.

Springs arise at the base of the scarp and flow north to converge at the Herring Stream and run through the centre of Hassocks. The area sweeps across a clay vale up to the urban edge of Hassocks and there is generally a well-defined boundary between the village and countryside.

Specific characteristics

The village and Conservation Area of Clayton with its listed historic church and some fine houses and farmsteads is nestled in the south west corner of the area. The farmed landscape supports a large dairy farm, mixed arable and sheep farming. The landscape is more enclosed and intimate between New Way Lane and to the edge of the village with some fine mature oak trees.

The man made reservoir at Whiteland's has been formed from the Millbrook spring. This is a local landscape feature surrounded by trees and which attracts herons and cormorants to the area. A stream arises in Clayton village has been dammed to create a linear lake in a garden to the south of Clayton.

Views

There are fine views to the scarp slope of the downs from most of the area. The key views are from the churchyard in Keymer, which looks across the new extension of graveyard to the downs and from the footpath on Lodge Lane which has wide views to the Jack and Jill windmills and Wolstonbury Hill. There are views back across the area towards the village from the footpath at Halfway.

Amenity Value

The area is entirely within the South Downs National Park. Footpaths cross the area to give access to the downs and as part of a circular walk around the village. The area is considered to be of **high** amenity value.

Character Sensitivity

The open and flat character of the landscape would make it of **high** sensitivity to change for much of the area with some less sensitive areas closer to the urban edge. There are few intrusive features in this landscape. The large milking sheds associated with Lodge Farm are part of the farm stead unit and do not particularly stand out as intrusive features in this open landscape.

Visual sensitivity

The wide open views within much of the areas and the expansive views across the area from the downs make it of **high** visual sensitivity.

Area C – Clayton Scarp

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Clayton Scarp. The scarp slope of the downs rises steeply up above Underhill Lane from the west to the east of the parish. The scarp slope in this area has a patchwork of both open and wooded areas. There are scattered residential dwellings nestled close to the base of the slope and some creep of horse paddocks and garden type uses which detract from the wildness and naturalness of the scarp.

Specific characteristics

The Jack and Jill windmills are highly distinctive features which define the character of Clayton and Hassocks. There is a large and secluded coombe on the east side of the scarp and close to the parish boundary. The western side of this is covered by the dense woodland of Clayton Holt, which is frequented by buzzards wheeling and crying overhead. a bridleway runs up the scarp from Clayton and a metalled tank track runs up from a small car park to the top where there is a timber sign to mark Keymer post. The landscape on this part of the scarp is sculpted by old flint workings, deep furrows and pillow mounds.

Views

There are long views across the low weald to the North Downs from the scarp slope. The built up area along the Greensand Ridge of Hassocks and Keymer is very prominent in these views. The lower greensand ridge line villages of Hassocks and Keymer generally fit well within the landscape as a result of a wooded urban environment. One or two more recent developments are prominent due to the type of building materials and layout, notably Stafford Way and Clayton Mills.

Amenity Value

The area is of **high** amenity value as a key feature of the South Downs National Park and due to the access it gives to the wider downland.

Character Sensitivity

The distinctive character of the scarp slopes would make the area of **high** sensitivity to change.

Visual sensitivity

The area is of **high** visual sensitivity as it can be seen from a wide area of the weald.

Area D - Clayton Downs

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Clayton Downs. This is small part of the southern extent of the parish where the rolling downland falls away from the scarp towards the coastal plain. The area is classic downland landscape with areas of species rich chalk grassland at the top of the scarp slope and expansive views in all directions. This is a very open landscape of rolling farmland which changes from arable to grassland on a rotational basis and depending on current agricultural subsidies. There are only scattered areas of scrub along fence lines and few trees.

Specific characteristics

The highest point in the parish is found in this area on the South Downs Way and to the north of Keymer post at 234m. Other features are a dew pond and various pillow mounds and tumuli as well as an airman's grave near the windmills.

Views

There are wide views over the coastal plain to the south and the weald to the north. The lower greensand ridge line villages of Hassocks and Keymer generally fit well within the landscape as a result of a wooded urban environment. One or two more recent developments are prominent due to the type of building materials and layout, notably Stafford Way and Clayton Mills.

Amenity Value

The amenity value of the area is **high** as the area is in the National Park and the South Downs Way crosses the area.

Character Sensitivity

The character sensitivity of this area is very **high** due to the open downland character.

Visual sensitivity

The visual sensitivity of the area is very **high** due to the long views across the area from the surrounding downland.

Area E – West Wooded Footslopes

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hurst Scarp Footslopes. This area is characterised by several large and ancient woodland blocks interspersed by a patchwork of fields. The land slopes gently away from the scarp of the downs to a narrow flat clay vale and then rises northwards onto the lower greensand ridge. The field units are generally smaller than those of Area B and the landscape more undulating. The land use is mostly pasture with predominantly sheep grazing with a few horse paddocks surrounding the farmsteads. The area is severed by the London to Brighton railway and the extensive areas of ancient woodland at Lag and Butchers Wood sit to the east of this. The London to Brighton Road also crosses the area from north to south. The area between the road and the railway has mixed uses which include the Tate's Garden Centre, Hassocks Football Club ground and some holiday lodges. Clayton woodland burial ground site lies to the south of Bonny's Wood. The suburban edge of the village is softened in this area by the extensive woodland and tree cover.

To the west of the road the landscape is a patchwork of medium sized fields with hedged field boundaries and woodland. Scattered veteran oaks are characteristic of the area, probably as remnants of former woodland or ancient field boundaries.

Specific characteristics

The area is well served by public footpaths which provide opportunities to get access between villages and into the woodlands. Lag Wood has permissive access and is locally valued for the shallow and accessible woodland stream. Butchers Wood also has public access as a Woodland Trust woodland. The intimate pastoral character of the area to the west of London road is unspoilt and tranquil. Urban fringe influences are more evident between the road and the railway, however the heavily wooded landscape tends to mask this in local views.

Views

There are views from much of the area to the downs to the south and Wolstonbury Hill dominates these, particularly from the countryside to the west of the area.

There are views from the higher ground to the west of Ockenden's Wood back towards Hassocks.

There are views from the Downs and notably Wolstonbury Hill across this area, Tate's Garden centre stands out as a dominant and detracting feature in these views. The lower greensand ridge line developments along the Hurst Road to Hassocks ridge generally fit well within the landscape as a result of a wooded urban environment, however the garden centre and masts at the football club are intrusive in views from the downs.

Amenity Value

The value of the area is **high** due to the public access afforded to the woods in the east and the accessible rural landscape to the west. Most of the area is in the South Downs National Park, with the exception of the areas close to the urban edge. Built development and other urban fringe uses such as paddocks stables and a small plant nursery have extended out from the village edge.

Character Sensitivity

The area is generally of **high** landscape character sensitivity due to the ancient woodland, hedgerows and trees. The areas outside the National Park are of **low** landscape character sensitivity as these areas have been subject to development and change.

Visual sensitivity

The area is of **moderate** visual sensitivity from within as the woods and hedges break up long views across the area. The views across the area from the Downs are of **high** sensitivity to changes which would extend the built up edge of the village and detract from the current rural view.

Area F –Ham Fields Greensand ridge

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hurst Scarp Footslopes. This area slopes gently northwards from the built up ridge which connects Hurst and Hassocks. The ribbon development on the Hurst Road ridge is of large houses in long north sloping gardens. The land falls to an enclosed vale and a stream which runs west to east and under London Road to join the Herring Stream. The north of the area is enclosed by a spur of lower greensand which supports the small settlement at Hurst Wickham Farm. The southern part of the area is a pastoral landscape of small grazed fields which are enclosed by ancient hedgerows and mature oak trees. The houses on London Road back onto the area and the built up edge is softened by vegetation in these gardens and by the low siting of the houses in a dip running alongside and between Ham Fields and the A273. The houses on Hurst Road are large properties set back in large gardens to form a soft suburban edge to the south of the area. The area forms part of the local countryside gap between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint.

Specific characteristics

The area has a high degree of enclosure compared with the open landscape to the south of the greensand ridge. The northern part of the area is the designed parkland landscape of Belmont and Hurst Wickham on the west and the golf course to the east.

The lane and bridleway along the western boundary has an ancient character as it is lined by mature oaks and coppiced trees. There are several ponds and wetter boggy areas along the stream.

Barn owls are often seen hunting the fields in this area.

Views

Views looking north are enclosed by the greensand ridge at Hurst Wickham and the artificial bunds of the golf course landscape there is a wide view north across the area from the footpath which runs north south from London Road. Views to the south are largely enclosed by the Hurst Road ridge and

there is a key view from the edge of the Hurst Wickham ridge which affords views south across the area and beyond to the downs.

Amenity Value

The area is of **moderate to high** amenity value as well used public footpaths cross the area and there is informal public access from the properties on London Road. Belmont Road recreation ground is linked to this informal access to the countryside and the footpath network.

Character Sensitivity

The character of the area is of **moderate to high** sensitivity as much of the historic field structure and unimproved grassland is intact. The area is part of the local gap between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint.

Visual sensitivity

The area is of **moderate** visual sensitivity as there are views across much of the area from public footpaths and houses on London Road. There are some views into the area from the downs, but the open areas are not prominent in long distance views due to the wooded character of the area. The urban edges are softened by intervening trees and vegetation.

Area G - Clayton Priory Weald

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hickstead Low Weald. The greensand ridge at Hurst Wickham slopes down to this more open and flat low weald landscape. The area is divided in two by the continuation northwards of the straight and ancient track that extends for the Hurst Road to Hammonds Mill Farm. To the east of the track are large open fields with low tight clipped hedges and a few scattered remaining oak trees. To the east of the track the golf course has imposed an artificial landscape of bunkers and gentle mounding with tree planting following the layout of fairways. This part of the golf course is subtly different to the area of the golf course to the south of Hurst Wickham and this division is emphasised by the presence of a large artificial bund. To the north of the golf course the fields are smaller and more enclosed by trees and woodland, part of which is the plantation which is on the site of the now closed Mill nursery. There are no urban intrusions into this area and settlement is scattered farmsteads and cottages. There are modern buildings associated with the golf club and Mill Road Nurseries. The area forms part of the local countryside gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

Specific characteristics

The distinct north south track is lined by ancient trees and coppice and is evidently an ancient track or drove road, known locally as Hog Pudding Lane. The listed Clayton Priory and associated parkland overlook the area from the north and this large house is a prominent landmark in views from the Downs. The notable farmstead settlements and listed buildings at Hammonds Mill and Friars Oak House.

The Herring Stream (Mill Race) flows across the north of the area from east to west in a tree lined sinuous channel which has significant mature alder trees and breeding kingfishers.

There are several large ponds which have taken advantage of the wet and low lying landscape at Hammond's Mill Farm and also Hammond's Mill Cottages. These support wild and domestic water fowl. The block plantation of tall conifers of mixed species is a distinctive feature on the site of Mill Nursery.

Views

Views out of this area are contained by the higher ground to the north and south as well the extensive tree cover. There are occasional long views to the downs from higher ground in the golf course. The Burgess Hill ridge dominates views to the north. There are wide views across the flat fields to the west of Hog Pudding Lane to Hurstpierpoint College Chapel. Views south from this area are to the Hurst Wickham ridge.

Amenity Value

The amenity value of the area is **moderate to high** due to the public footpaths and bridleways which provide access. The variety of experience of varied landscapes, the historic track and river side walk enhance the value of the area.

Character Sensitivity

The character sensitivity of the majority of this area is **moderate** as it is a landscape which has been subject to change in more recent years and modern interventions. The parkland landscape to the north of Herring Stream and associated with Clayton Priory is historic designed landscape and is of **high** sensitivity.

Visual sensitivity

The visual sensitivity of the eastern part of the area from the public rights of way and the golf course and views are generally localised and are of **low** to **moderate** sensitivity. The more open fields to the west of the Hog Pudding Lane are of **moderate to high** sensitivity due to the wide open vistas

Area H – Friars Oak Weald

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hickstead Low Weald. A gently undulating landscape which rises eastwards from the valley and flood plain of the Herring Stream. The high embankment of the London to Brighton railway severs to the area from the similar landscape which lies to the east of the railway. The fields are small with well-defined hedged field boundaries. The mature vegetation along the river valley and the wooded railway embankment give the area a wooded and enclosed character. The area has a mix of uses including the designed landscape and farmland associated with New Close Farm in the north and Allwoods Nursery with its polytunnels and greenhouses in the central area. The southern fields have been out of agricultural use and unmanaged for several years and have a natural appearance where willow scrub is encroaching in some areas. The Friars Oak Hotel sits on the southern boundary of the area and some modern houses in large gardens are located outside the village edge to the north of the pub. The urban edge of Hassocks has crept northwards as Shepherds Walk where remaining mature oak trees help to soften the urban edge with the countryside. The area forms part of the local countryside gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

Specific characteristics

The fast flowing and winding Herring Stream flows in a deep channel for south to north and is a focal point of the area. Mature trees along the stream channel, notably willows and alders, enhance the visual and wildlife value of the river. The river has been exploited to create a dramatic weir and lake at New Close Farm. Another stream arises in the adjacent Area I – (Ockley Weald), from a spring just to the north of Manor Avenue and under the railway across the north of the area to feed this lake.

The well-defined field boundaries, with ancient hedgerows and mature oak trees indicate an intact historic landscape especially in the north of the area.

Views

There are localised views across the area from the residential properties on Shepherds Walk. The footpath which crosses the area from west to east has similar views across the fields in the southern part of the area. There are views from London Road into the north of the area and east across to the water tower, which is just outside the Parish boundary. These views are obscured by the riverside vegetation in the southern part of the area. There are views across the area from the public open space which is just outside Hassocks Parish on the southern edge of Burgess Hill. The urban edge of Shepherds Walk is visible in these views. The area is not prominent in views from the downs.

Amenity Value

The southern part of the area is valued by local people as it has been used for permissive access for several years. The public footpath gives access and there are circular walks around the field from this. The area is of **moderate to high** amenity value in the southern section and of **moderate** value in the remaining areas.

Character Sensitivity

The historic landscape structure and natural stream channel with its flood plain would be sensitive to change and the area is of **moderate** character sensitivity.

Visual sensitivity

The area is of **low** visual sensitivity as there are few long views across the area and views into the area from public roads are curtailed by intervening tree and tall hedgerows. There are limited views into this area due to the low lying topography and tree cover. The more northern parts of the area are open to views from the downs and the public open space to the north and are of **moderate** sensitivity in this context.

Area I – Ockley Weald

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hickstead Low Weald. A gentle clay vale bowl which is enclosed by the built up area of Hassocks to the south, the railway embankment to the west and the higher ground of a lower greensand ridge to the north and east. The area has much larger fields than the land to the west of the railway, which suggests that some of the historic field structure has been lost. The farming is a mix of sheep grazed pasture and large arable fields. There are also fewer mature trees than other areas to the north of the village and these are concentrated on the northern and southern

boundaries. The urban area of Hassocks has extended north into this countryside as the estate of Manor Avenue and in more recent years as Clayton Mills estate. The area includes the newly created open spaces which have been retained as a buffer between the new development at Clayton Mills and the countryside. The area forms part of the local countryside gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

Specific characteristics

The open rural character and sweep of landscape up to the ridge is a particular feature. The impression is of a strong countryside gap between the settlements of Burgess Hill and Hassocks.

The woodland on and adjacent to the railway embankment supports many significant mature oaks and bluebell carpets. Pines and other mature garden trees associated with Woodside Grange. The ponds at Woodlands Cottage and in the south west corner of the area are also local features. A spring arises just to the south of Manor Avenue and flows north as crystal clear water across the footpath.

Views

There are views from the railway across the area to the urban edge of the village which are a last glimpse of countryside before arrival at Hassocks railway station. There are wide views across the area from the public footpath which crosses the area from east to west. There is a view south across the area and beyond to the downs from the footpath just south of the water tower, which is the northern edge of the parish. There are views across the area for drivers going north up Ockley Lane. The new houses on the Clayton Mills estate are poorly screened in these views and present a hard edge to the countryside.

Amenity Value

The area is of **moderate** amenity value as views across much if it can be enjoyed from the public rights of way, the railway and Ockley Lane.

Character Sensitivity

The northern more rural farmland is of **moderate** character sensitivity as relatively unspoilt countryside. The openness and lack of historic field structure would make the area particularly sensitive to change. The fields and open space which are not actively managed farmland close to the urban edge are of **low** character sensitivity.

Visual sensitivity

The visual sensitivity of the area is **moderate** in local views from the residential areas and footpaths. There are long views to the open northern part of the area from the downs and these more visible parts are of **high** visual sensitivity in this context.

Area J– Broadlands Weald

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hickstead Low Weald. This is an area of undulating landscape which forms the side

slopes of the Lodge Hill greensand ridge which runs north towards Burgess Hill. The area has a patchwork of small irregular fields with well-defined field boundaries. The southern part of the area has low clipped hedges with mature trees dotted along them. This is in contrast to the area north of Broadhill which has tall, dense unmanaged hedgerows. There are patches of small woodlands and a strip of ancient woodland runs along the west side of Ockley Lane. There are several large houses on either side of Ockley Lane with associated grounds and exotic trees. The farmland is mainly laid to pasture with sheep grazing giving the area a pastoral and well managed character. The area forms part of the local countryside gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

Specific characteristics

The large houses and designed grounds of varying periods indicate that this area was considered a desirable place to build a home over the ages. The listed Ockley Manor is one of the most significant and striking buildings in the parish, the garden walls, sweeping drive and summer house add to the charm of this property. Weald House is surrounded by designed grounds and mature exotic trees including pines. Broadhill Place was built by a Bond Street jeweller in 1901, it has a distinct turret and large detached orangery. Wellhouse Lane leading to Wellhouse Farm is dotted with large houses in grounds with mature and varied tree specimens. Broadhill workshops on the Broadhill estate provide a rural employment opportunity in the parish.

Views

There are few long views across the area as the tree cover and hedgerows enclose much of the area from views in. There are glimpses across the area from Ockley Lane and Mill Lane and from the bridleway which runs up the eastern side.

Amenity Value

The area is of **moderate** amenity value as the pleasant countryside setting for several houses and as a countryside gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

Character Sensitivity

The area is of **moderate** character sensitivity to change as pastoral rural landscape. There may be areas which would be able to accommodate some change as the area has been developed over the centuries, but change would need to be in character with the existing large houses in substantial grounds.

Visual sensitivity

Much of the area is not seen from public viewpoints and are of **low** visual sensitivity from public areas. The open pastures which slope southwards from Broadhill are attractive rural countryside of **moderate** visual sensitivity.

Appendix 1 NPPF; Relevant Policies

109. The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;
- recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
- minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; and
- remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

115. Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.

116. Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
- the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and

170. Where appropriate, landscape character assessments should also be prepared, integrated with assessment of historic landscape character, and for areas where there are major expansion options assessments of landscape sensitivity.