

4.0

BASELINE CONDITIONS

4.4

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER CONTEXT

4.4.1

INTRODUCTION

The term ‘landscape’ commonly refers to the view or appearance of the land as perceived by people. Landscape applies to any natural, rural, urban, peri-urban areas, in land water and seascape areas.

Landscape character is the combination of both natural / physical, cultural / social and perceptual / aesthetic influences, which give rise to a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse and which define the ‘sense of place’. The landscape is not therefore simply a visual phenomenon.

Individual landscape receptors and elements all influence landscape character. The following sections set out the landscape character framework of the study area from the national and regional level through to county and district scale based upon existing character assessments undertaken by Natural England, West Sussex County Council and Arun District Council. The descriptions provide information on the characteristics of the contextual landscape to the Site.

4.4.2

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

The Site and the main study area lie wholly within National Character Area (NCA) 126 South Coast Plain (refer to Figure 4.4). This NCA forms: “... a narrow strip running along the Hampshire and Sussex coast from the edge of Southampton in the west to Brighton and Hove in the east... The Arun, Adur... rivers drain south from higher ground of the Downs, through this NCA to the coast, along with other smaller streams and rifes...” The key characteristics pertinent to the study area include the following:

- “The plain slopes gently southwards towards the coast. From the coastal plain edge there are long views towards the sea and the Isle of Wight beyond.
- The underlying geology of flinty marine and valley gravels extends several miles inland to the dip slope of the South Downs and the South Hampshire Lowlands. This gives rise to deep and well-drained high quality soils.
- In places, streams and rivers flow south from the higher land of the Downs to the sea.
- Coastal inlets and ‘harbours’ contain a diverse landscape of narrow tidal creeks, mudflats, shingle beaches, dunes, grazing marshes and paddocks. These include the internationally important Chichester, Langstone, Portsmouth and Pagham harbours, the Hamble Estuary and the recent coastal realignment site at Medmerry between Chichester Harbour and Selsey.
- There are stretches of farmed land between developed areas, often with large arable fields defined by low hedges or ditches.
- There are isolated remnants of coastal heath in the west.
- The area has significant urban development, with settlements along the coastline dominated by... suburban villages and seaside towns including Bognor Regis, Littlehampton and Worthing linked by major road and rail systems.”

The Statements of Environmental Opportunity relevant to the study area includes:

SEO 2: Plan for the creation of a strong landscape framework within and around major settlements and identified growth areas, while managing and enhancing existing greenspace and access, and balancing the needs of agriculture, communities and the natural environment.

EO 3: Manage and significantly enhance the area’s rivers and chalk streams and their wetland valley habitats to provide resilience against climate change and improve flood protection and water quality, particularly in the internationally designated sites such as Chichester and Pagham harbours, for the benefit of local communities and wildlife.

SEO 4: Manage the rich archaeological and historic resource and geological exposures within the farmed, coastal and peri-urban landscape, including the longstanding associations of horticultural and maritime industries and the military, enhancing a strong sense of place.

Value: low to medium.

The Site and study area lies within the landscape setting of NCA 125: South Downs (refer to figure 4.5) The key characteristics of pertinent to the study area are described as:

- “A broad elevated east–west chalk ridge with a predominantly steep northfacing scarp slope and a gentle southerly dip slope, breaking into a series of hills in the west and terminating in distinctive chalk cliffs in the east.
- Woodland a feature of the central downs and, to a lesser extent, the western downs, also concentrated on the steep scarp slopes, consisting of both broadleaved, mostly ancient, woodland with beech, veteran trees, ash and sycamore, and conifers, with some large plantations. Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve (NNR) contains a wealth of yew woodland.
- Several different types of heathland habitat, including wet heath,wooded heath and chalk heath dependent on loess soils.
- The eastern downs characterised by large open arable and grassland fields, mostly enclosed by the 16th century, with a general absence of woodland and hedgerow boundaries, creating an open, exposed landscape. To the west of the River Arun, where holdings were smaller and ‘sheep-and-corn’ farming less important, hedgerows enclose medium to large irregular fields between the woodlands and designed parkland landscapes, the latter a particular feature of the central areas.
- Distinctive fragments of semi-natural chalk grassland dotted with chalk springs on scarp and combe slopes, with important associated habitats including rare chalk heath and species-rich chalk scrub.
- Roads and villages concentrated in the river valleys, the more elevated areas sparsely settled with scattered farmsteads.
- Flint, brick and timber frame conspicuous in the built environment in walls, buildings, churches and barns, while roofs are of tile, slate or traditional thatch. The South Downs was once lined with windmills, some of which survive.
- Bronze-age round barrows and prominently sited iron-age hill forts, such as Cissbury Ring are notable prehistoric features of the scarp and hill tops.
- Public rights of way following drove roads and ancient routes along the accessible downland tops, benefiting from panoramic views across the downs and the Low Weald NCA. Roads and lanes striking across the downs perpendicularly and

following historic tracks that originally brought livestock to their summer grazing.”

Value: High

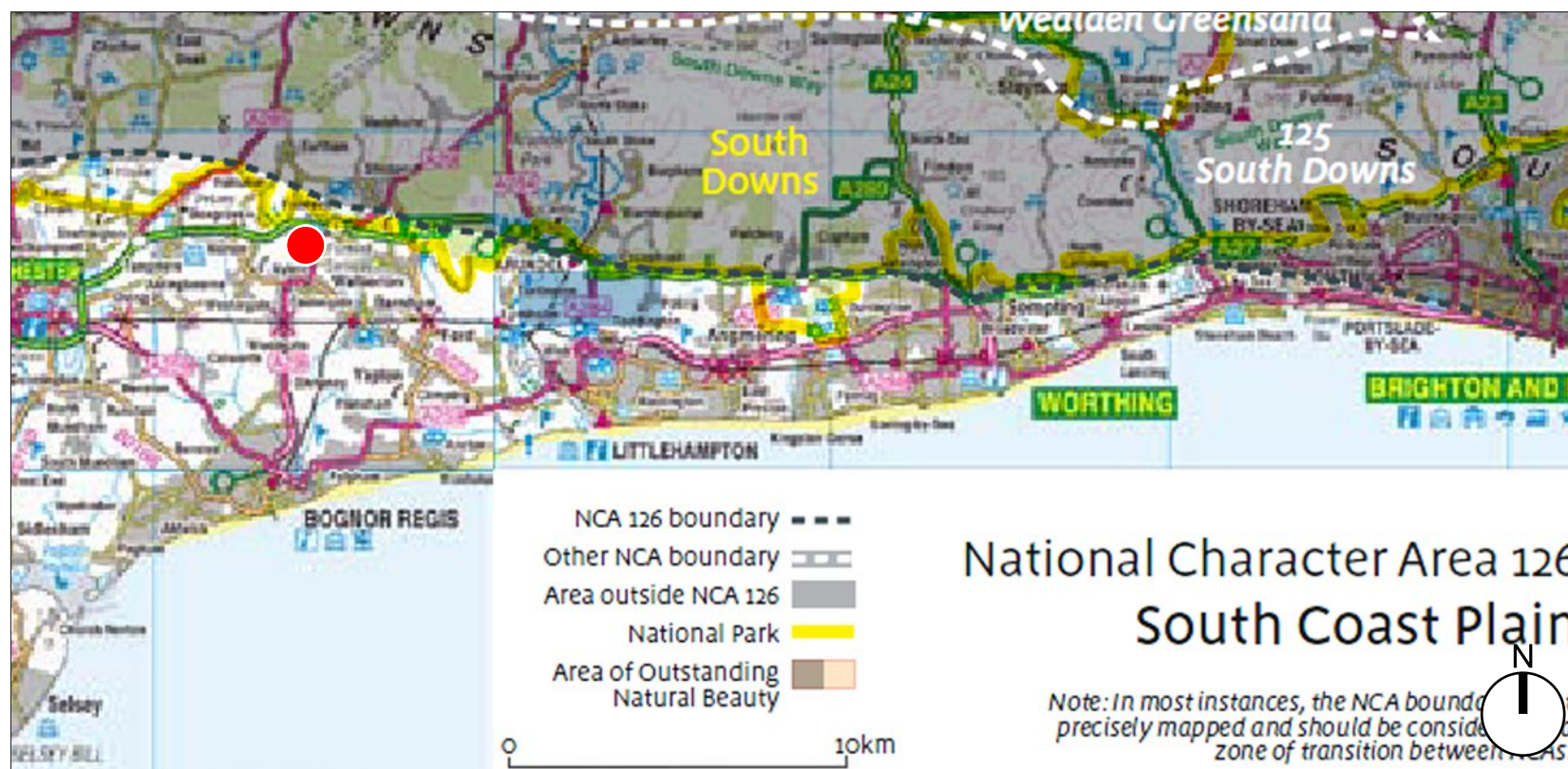


FIGURE 4.4 – EXTRACT FROM THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT HIGHLIGHTING THE WIDER LANDSCAPE CLASSIFICATION TYPE FOR THE STUDY AREA (2014).

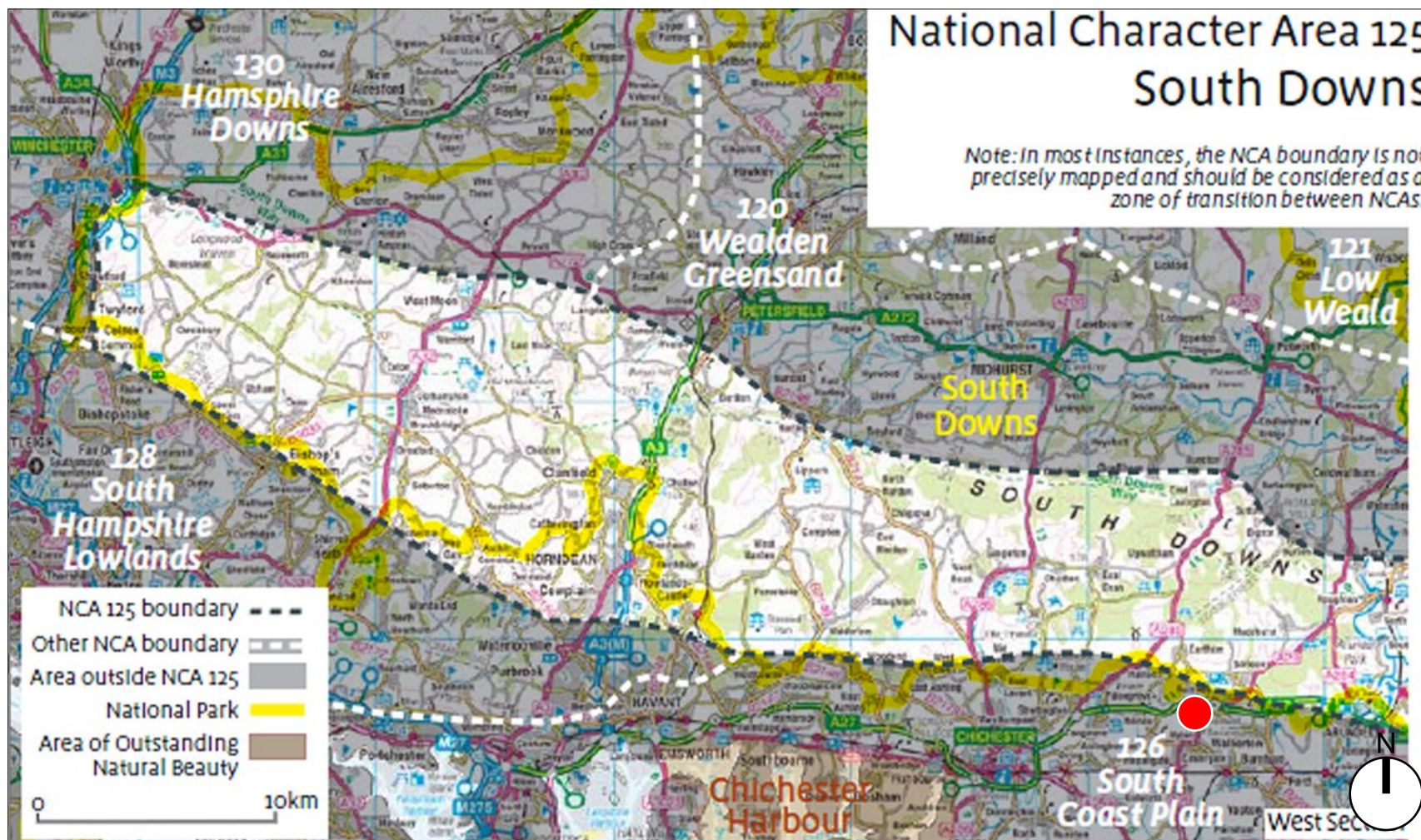


FIGURE 4.5 – EXTRACT FROM THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT HIGHLIGHTING THE WIDER LANDSCAPE CLASSIFICATION TYPE FOR THE STUDY AREA DIRECTLY NORTH OF THE STUDY AREA (2015).

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4.4.3 REGIONAL / COUNTY CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Sussex County Council - Sussex Historic Landscape Characterisation Project (2010)

Sussex Historic Landscape Characterisation Project (2010) has been used as a tool to prepare the ‘South Coast Plain local distinctiveness guidance’. The overall character of the coastal plain pertinent to the study area is described as: “*The South Coast Plain is predominantly a flat and open landscape which provides a diverse range of habitats... The fertile soils in this character area have given rise to a dense pattern of large productive arable fields, market gardening and a predominance of glasshouses set around expanding settlements which enjoy the benign climate. The landscape is exposed in places to sea winds and floods and arable land is defined by poplar shelter belts, low hedgerows and rife and ditch drainage systems. Although woodland is not a dominant feature in the landscape there is localised remnant seminatural broadleaved woodland as well as windswept oak trees and scrub. Large Elm trees which where once common features in the landscape have now been lost to Dutch Elm Disease. To the east the area becomes increasingly dominated by sprawling seaside towns and leisure developments and as the line of the Downs narrows the coastal strip rural/urban fringe issues have an increasing impact. Looking north from the Coastal Plain there are long views to the sweeping slopes of the South Downs balanced by long panoramic views from the hill tops and slopes of the Downs over the flat Coastal Plain and out to sea.*”

The overall strategy is to ‘protect, conserve and enhance’ the following key landscape characteristics relevant to the study area which include:

- “*The tranquil and open character of the landscape*
- *Qualities of the fine long views from the slopes of the Downs to the coast and vice versa*
- *Woodlands and copses*
- *The hedgerow framework, restoring where necessary, and retaining oak standards and other hedgerow tree*
- *Re-establish large trees to replace the Elm trees lost due to Dutch elm disease and storms*
- *Reedbeds, streams and deep drainage ditches (rifes)*
- *Mill sites and mill ponds, recreation lakes, ponds and coastal lagoons*
- *The network and character of narrow winding lanes and minor roads*
- *Narrow field entrances and traditional gates”*

In terms of the historic landscape, the following are identified:

- “*Veteran trees*
- *Remains of the Chichester to Arundel Canal*
- *Windmills, watermills and piers”*

In terms of the key settlement characteristics, the following is pertinent:

- “*Overall existing pattern: The South Coast Plain’s wealth of resources has made it an attractive area for settlement and this has produced a settlement pattern that can be traced back to the prehistoric period. The fertile soils, temperate climate and seaside location has always offered high agricultural yields, fishing, transport,*

trading opportunities and, more recently, varied leisure opportunities. During the early medieval period there developed an historic settlement pattern of dispersed large isolated farms and large manorial complexes, associated with areas of woodland and coppice and an evolving agricultural landscape from large open field systems to medieval field enclosure to large modern field patterns. Compact hamlets and early medieval market villages were predominantly sited along trading routes, the coastline and coastal inlets.”

The assessment recommends to maintain, protect and enhance where possible:

- “*The existing pattern of dispersed farmsteads and associated agricultural land and woodland*
- *The sense of remoteness of small coastal and coastal inlet settlements*
- *The scale, vernacular style, massing and materials of rural and village buildings*
- *Existing country houses and their settings while avoiding further erosion of the rural character, use and pattern of the landscape*
- *Conservation areas, listed buildings and their settings*
- *The sympathetic integration of larger settlements into the landscape, allowing open views out where the existing pattern allows*
- *Green gaps between the coastal towns and village*
- *Rural character of the local road network through sensitive and appropriate design and signage”*
- *The assessment goes on to describe the typical patterns of towns, villages and hamlets, farmsteads and dwellings and sets out some precedents in terms of materials palette both for the built form, boundary treatments and the public realm.”*

In terms of villages and hamlets these are described as:

- “*Location: predominantly along the coast, coastal inlets, the base of the Downs and along estuaries, often next to natural harbours*
- *Distribution: dispersed and common*
- *Origin: early medieval/medieval*
- *Circulation pattern: both linear and nucleated occur*
- *Pattern: hierarchy of buildings with church or farm as the largest*
- *Open spaces: private gardens, occasional large verges and small greens sometimes with a pond; occasional cricket grounds*
- *Edge character: soft edges formed by gardens, usually complex and indented lacking long straight lines”*

Value: Medium

West Sussex County Council Landscape Character Assessment (2003)

A landscape character assessment of the county was carried out by West Sussex County Council in 2003. The Site sits within the SC8: Ashlings, Halnaker and Fontwell Upper Coastal Plain, see Figure 4.6. Key characteristics pertinent to the study area are described as:

- “*A transitional landscape.*
- *Clear views to the higher ground of the Downs to the north.*
- *A good cover of woodland and trees, with a high percentage of ancient woodland.*
- *Mainly gently undulating farmland enclosed by woods with numerous hedgerows. Pattern of small to medium sized pastures, arable fields, livestock farming and market gardening.*
- *Winterbourne chalk streams emanate from this area.*
- *Wealth of historic landscape features including historic parklands, many ancient woodlands and earthworks.*
- *Area is well settled with scattered pattern of rural villages and farmsteads.*
- *Leafy or wooded settlements.*
- *Winding hedged or wooded lanes.*

Land Management Guidelines

- “*Conserve and manage distinctive habitats including meadows, heathland, chalk grassland, stream sides and woodland.*
- *Seek, where appropriate, the restoration of gravel workings to grassland, woodland and scrub habitats, including restoration of field edges and hedgerows.*
- *Promote management of existing woodland, especially where under pressure from gravel working or urban fringe development.*
- *Conserve and enhance the character and setting of small villages and hamlets.*
- *Promote good management of important village and roadside trees. Plant new tree features in villages.*
- *Encourage careful woodland design to screen new housing and other visually intrusive landscape elements, for example, pig farms, communication aerials.*
- *Consider the cumulative impact on landscape character of small developments and land use change.*
- *Avoid the introduction of suburban styles and materials.*
- *Ensure any new development is well integrated into the wider landscape. Use new woodland and hedgerow planting as appropriate.*
- *Conserve ancient semi-natural woodland as an historical, landscape and wildlife feature.*
- *Encourage good management of existing woodland and tree groups, including planting up edge areas.*
- *Conserve hedgerows and allow for the growth of hedgerow trees.”*

Value: Medium.

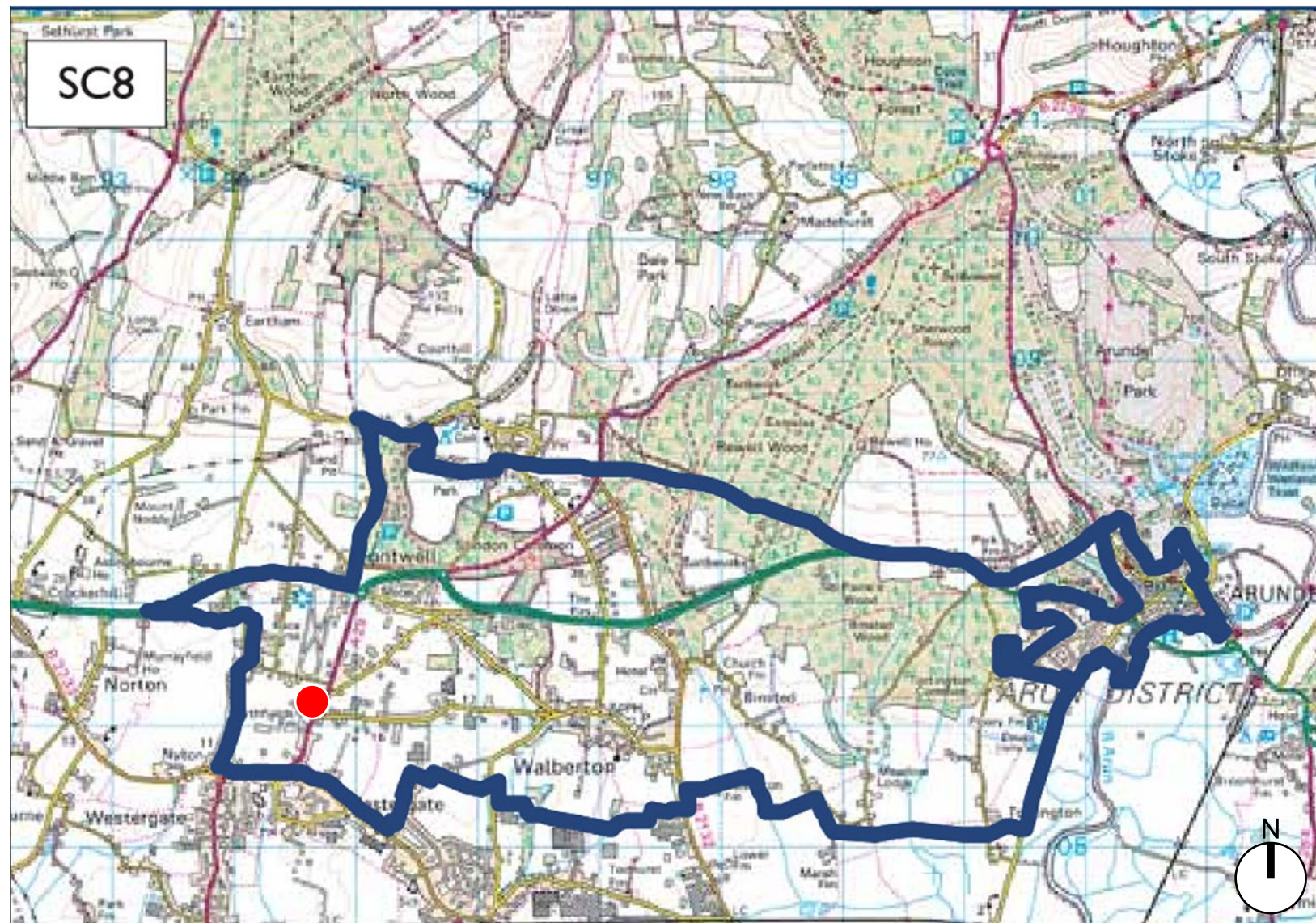


FIGURE 4.6 – EXTRACTS FROM THE WEST SUSSEX LANDSCAPE LAND MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES HIGHLIGHTING THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER FOR THE STUDY AREA. (NOVEMBER, 2003).

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ARUN DISTRICT COUNTY COUNCIL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT (2006)

A landscape character assessment was undertaken by Hankinson Duckett Associates (2006) for Arun County Council. The Site sits within the LCA 16: Fontwell-Eastergate Mosaic (refer to figure 4.7). The descriptive text associated with this character area is:

- “Small-scale patchwork of paddocks, pasture, horticulture (including glass houses and remnant orchards) and small-holdings associated with linear, post-war, low density development;
- Abuts settlement edges of Westergate/Eastergate, Barnham, Walberton and Fontwell;
- Fontwell Race Course;
- Woodland at north-west corner, both well-established and newly planted (associated with estates of large houses).”

Value: medium

The following information has been taken from the Arun Green Infrastructure Study (2012) and highlights key landscape sensitivities and landscape recommendations for the study area.

Landscape Sensitivities

- “An existing structure of mature vegetation could compliment development proposals and aid in ensuring separation between north and south settlements.
- Fragmentation and loss of hedgerows and connections between hedgerow and woodland.
- Replacement of mature treescape.”

Landscape Recommendations

- “Create a new (and maintain and strengthen existing), large scale tree and hedgerow framework which complements the open intensively farmed landscape, whilst maintaining significant views of Chichester Cathedral, the South Downs and local features.
- Restore and strengthen the landscape of the gaps between settlements - Establish landscape management plans for urban edges to enhance the distinction between the urban and rural landscape.
- Encourage and promote land management schemes to increase species rich grassland areas and to create wetland habitats
- Maintain and enhance the landscape and biodiversity of rifes and other existing habitats. Re-profile banks and encourage more diverse flora by lengthening clearance cycles.”

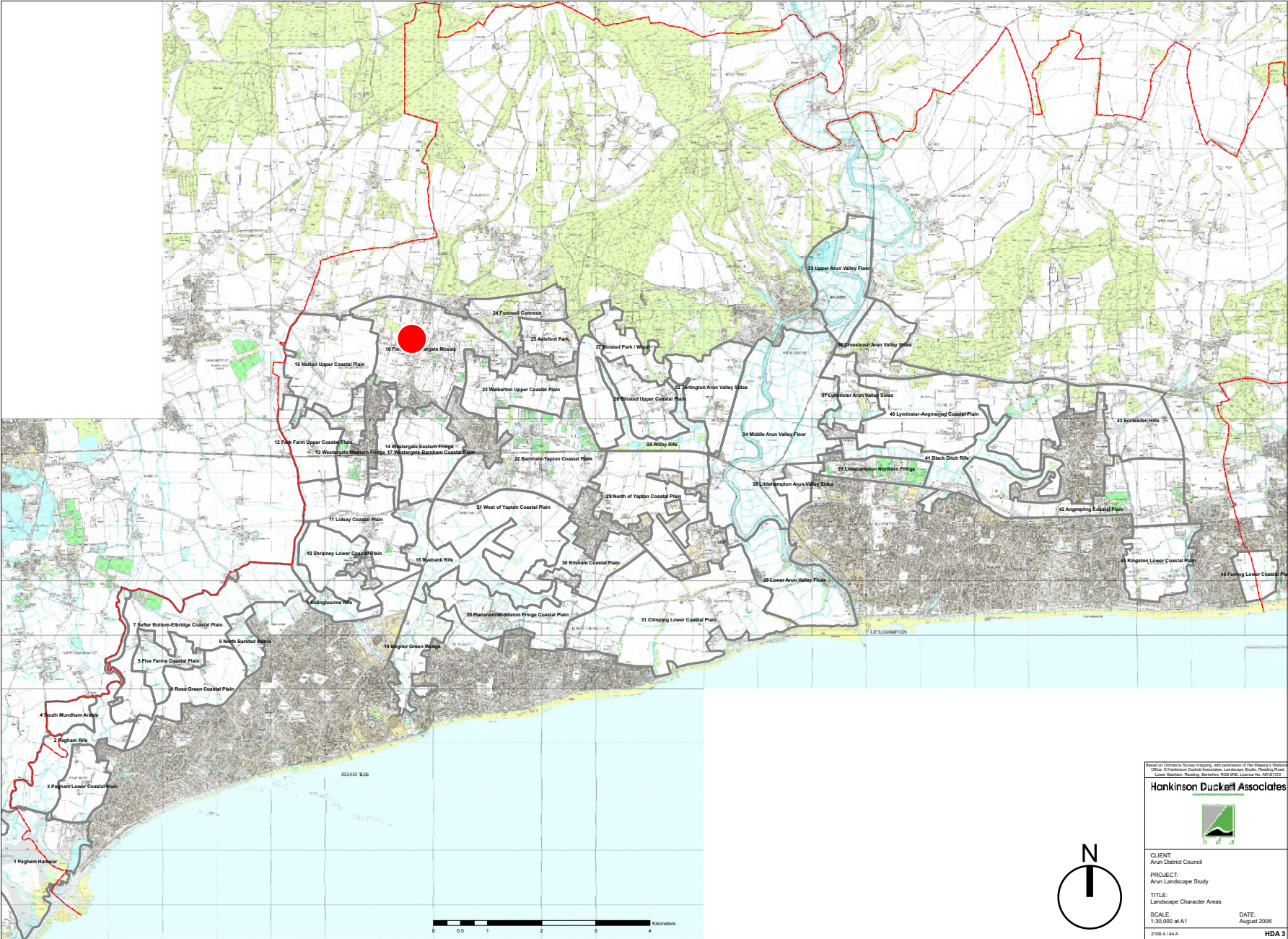


FIGURE 4.7 – EXTRACT FROM THE WEST SUSSEX LANDSCAPE LAND MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES HIGHLIGHTING THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER FOR THE STUDY AREA. (NOVEMBER, 2006)

LEGEND

● APPROXIMATE SITE LOCATION

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4.5 SITE DESCRIPTION

4.5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Site is bound by Bayard Stables to the north-west; the road corridor of Level Mare Lane which leads to Fontwell Park Racecourse beyond to the north; the approved planning scheme, 'Land West of Fontwell Avenue' to the east; Northfield Cottages and the access road to Northfield Farmhouse to the south; and woodland / pastureland and outbuildings associated with Northfield Farm and Northfields Country House to the west.

Surrounding the Site boundary, clusters of mature trees and mature hedgerows enclose the Site, with an exception to the north-western boundary which is partially open to the adjacent dwelling and stables.

Figure 4.8 shows the existing characteristics of the Site.

4.5.2 TOPOGRAPHY

Consistent with Fontwell, the Site is situated on the coastal plain. The Site topography slopes gently southwards from approximately 19.5m AOD in the northwestern corner to 16.5m AOD in the southeastern corner.

Value: Low

4.5.3 LAND USE

The Site comprises pastureland (currently used as a horse paddock), contained by mature, tall hedgerows, trees and shrubs to the north, south, east and part in the west. The Site is defined by electric fencing dividing the Site up into smaller fields for horse grazing. The Site boundary also extends to include sections of the neighbouring road corridor of Mare Lane and the approved development Fontwell Avenue.

Value: Medium

4.5.4 VEGETATION

Vegetation / Grassland and fringes

A range of semi-mature to mature trees and hedgerow shrub species follow the Site boundary (with exception to the north-western boundary) with variations in thickness and with occasional gaps. The northwestern boundary is partially open pastureland with a section of low rise native hedgerow. The remaining Site boundaries contain native trees and shrub understorey species. The species include scrub and tree groups with various species such as; *Aesculus hippocastanum*, *Acer pseudoplatanus*, *Fagus sylvatica*, *Acer sp*, *Tilia sp*, *Cupressus macrocarpa*, *Fraxinus excelsior*, *Castanea sativa*, *Populus sp*, *Ilex aquafolium*, *Crataegus monogyna*, *Pinus radiata*, *Pinus sp*, and mixed native species Tree Group.

The interior of the Site comprises grassland, with a backwards 'L' shaped clipped native hedgerow of *Crataegus monogyna*; with a single evergreen specimen tree

Pinus sp. present in the western section of the Site

Tree Survey

Fifteen trees are subject to a Tree Preservation Order (see figure 4.8 opposite). The tree survey identifies that there is an even mix of high to low quality trees/ tree groups, ranging from Category A (high Quality) to Category U (low quality) along the Site boundary and to the north-west of the Site. The majority of Category A trees are located along the eastern and northern Site boundary. This includes a range of species including; *Fagus sylvatica*, *Acer sp*, *Tilia sp*, *Cupressus macrocarpa* and *Fraxinus excelsior*. The remaining trees within the Site are category B and C trees. Category B trees are located throughout the northern, eastern and southern Site boundary, with category C trees located mainly to the eastern Site boundary. The evergreen specimen tree *Pinus sp* in the north-west of the Site is category B and the 'L' shaped native hedgerow of *Crataegus monogyna* is category C. There is one category U tree, this is located to the centre of the eastern boundary.

Refer to Arboricultural Report by Lizard Landscape Design and Ecology consultants as submitted with the application.

Value: Medium - High

4.5.5 LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- The Site's main features includes:
- The gently sloping landform on the coastal plain;
 - The internal 'L' shaped native hedgerow and individual mature specimen tree;
 - The vegetated boundaries - the hedgerow and trees following the boundaries; and
 - The open pastureland.

Value: Medium - High

4.5.6 SKYLINE:

The skyline is predominately formed by the mature vegetation situated along the boundary edges. To the north-west, the two storey dwelling at Bayard Stables sits down below the vegetated skyline in the views across the Site.

Value: Low

4.5.7 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The above elements combine to inform landscape character. The Site's landscape character is that of a typical horsiculture and settlement fringe site.

The key landscape characteristics of the Site are the mature vegetation boundary and pastoral grazing grassland within the Site boundary with electric fencing dividing the field into smaller parcels which is a detracting element.

Value: Low

LEGEND

-  SITE BOUNDARY
-  EXISTING TREES
-  TPO
-  EXISTING CLIPPED HEDGE
-  EXISTING UNDERSTOREY VEGETATION
-  GATE
-  TIMBER POST & RAIL FENCING
-  Paddock Fencing
-  CONTOUR LINES (0.5M INTERVALS)



FIGURE 4.8 – PLAN SHOWING THE EXISTING SITE LANDSCAPE (FABRIK, 2021)