

Folkestone & Hythe District Heritage Strategy

Appendix 1: Theme 1b Landscape – North Downs & The Greensand Vale

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(1b) North Downs & Greensand Vale

1. Summary

The North Downs and Greensand Vale constitute a diverse and unique landscape with many elements that are iconic features of the county, such as the White Cliffs of Dover, Folkestone Downs and Elham Valley. Many of these landscapes are also of national significance for their conservation value both for the diverse wildlife and habitats supported here as well as for their geological importance. The North Downs and Greensand Vale can also boast an exceptionally rich historic environment with a number of heritage assets that are nationally significant and that also make key contributions to the local character and sense of place. In particular, these relate to the religious, farming and defence heritage of the area.

2. Introduction

The topography of Kent is broadly based on major geological features that are determined by a series of ridges and formations running from west to east across the county. Rocks which are exposed at the surface date to between the Cretaceous and Tertiary age (140 to 50 million years ago) and are a thick sequence of sands, clays and limestones that are gently folded into an upfold (anticline) which is known as the Weald Dome. The dome is made up of a series of geological strata that were laid down during the Cretaceous period, the youngest of these being the Chalk that was laid down during the Upper Cretaceous. The older strata that lie in successive layers below are largely alternating clays and sandstones that were laid down during the Lower Cretaceous. These are namely the Upper Greensand, Gault Clay, Lower Greensand, Weald Clay and Hastings Beds.

Subsequent erosion has virtually flattened the dome and produced a series of hills and vales. On the surface the strata that comprised the dome now form a series of concentric circles shaped like a horseshoe with the more resistant chalk and sandstones forming hills and ridges such as the distinctive North and South Downs. Between them the weaker clays form vales such as the Low Weald and the Vale of Holmesdale. The more resistant rocks of the Lower Greensand, in particular the Hythe Beds, have prominent escarpments that form an arc around the northern edge of the Low Weald and runs parallel to the south of the chalk escarpment of the North Downs. This stretch of Greensand is more commonly known as the Greensand Ridge.

Greensand Vale

The Greensand Vale referred to in this paper covers an area at the foot of the North Downs escarpment. It is a relatively narrow band of land that runs between the Downs to the north and the Romney Marsh to the south and takes in the geologies of the Gault Clay, Lower Greensand (Folkestone Formation, Sandgate Formation, Hythe Formation and Atherfield Clay) and the Wealden Clay. A further escarpment at the southern edge of the Greensand Vale runs in an arc around the rear of the Romney Marsh. This is known as the Lympe Escarpment and represents a relic coastline that originally defined a large saltwater lagoon which was gradually silted and reclaimed to later form the Romney Marsh.

The Weald Clay Formation is a Lower Cretaceous sedimentary rock that underlies areas of south east England and is part of the Wealden Group. It is variable and generally comprises finer sediments that are less resistant to erosion. It has created a lowland area approximately 8-10 kilometres wide that is disrupted in places by minor ridges of discontinuous limestone and sandstone, known as the Vale of Kent. It lies between low escarpments of the Tunbridge Wells Sand to the south and the Lower Greensand to the north.

The Lower Greensand, also known as the Greensand Ridge, is predominantly arenaceous sandstone that was laid down in the later part of the Lower Cretaceous. It extends in a slight ellipse around the Wealden rocks to the south from a narrow exposure near Folkestone where the Folkestone Beds form the main exposure. It then runs through Ashford where the Sandgate Beds are more prominent to a substantial exposure near Maidstone where the Hythe Beds are predominant and then narrowing again towards Sevenoaks. The Hythe Beds, which are a hard and sandy limestone, produce Kentish Ragstone which was extensively used during the Roman and Medieval periods as building material.

Overlying and overstepping the Lower Greensand is the Gault Clay which forms part of the Vale of Holmesdale. The Vale is a narrow valley that lies at the foot of the North Downs and stretches from Sugarloaf Hill in Folkestone through to Guildford in neighbouring county Surrey. It is largely comprised of Gault Clay and Upper Greensand although the Lower Chalk area at the foot of the Downs is also included. Its name comes from the Holm Oak that was once common in the area and its soils are generally heavy and clayey. The Gault Clay marks a widening of the ancient seaway as sea levels began to rise dramatically. This geology is especially viewable from Copt Point at Folkestone and the Gault Clay also contains a wide range of fossils, particularly of ammonite species.

The Greensand Vale takes in areas of the District that include Folkestone, Hythe, Lymington, Westenhanger and Sellindge. A section of the Vale is also included in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the eastern part of the North Downs that covers nearly a quarter of Kent from the White Cliffs of Dover across to Surrey and the London borders.

North Downs

The North Downs are a ridge of chalk hills that extend from Farnham in western Surrey to the Kent coast at Dover. The Lower Chalk exposure is a relatively narrow belt at the base of the North Downs escarpment whereas the Middle and Upper Chalk form the prominent scarp and dip slope of the North Downs which at Dover forms the famous and highly distinctive White Cliffs. The North Downs form the highest escarpment in Kent, reaching around 250 metres at Sevenoaks and is further intersected by the valleys of a series of rivers such as the Darent, Medway and Stour rivers. A number of prehistoric river valleys that are now dry also cut across the Downs at Lymington and Hawkinge within the District, and a number of smaller dry valleys further dissect the dip slope. These valleys are cut into both the scarp and dip slope of the Downs which also plays an important role in the hydrology of the region being the main aquifer in Kent.

In Kent the Downs, as well as parts of the Greensand Ridge, Romney Marsh and Heritage Coast (Folkestone and Dover), form the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which covers around 878 sq km. They are the result of a long process of geological deposition and coastal erosion that goes back around 140 million years to the Early Cretaceous period. During this time the south east of England was predominantly swamp that was being gradually deposited with layers of sands, silts and clays. The geological unit that was formed from these early deposits is known as the Hastings Beds and comprises the core of the High Weald along the border of Kent and Sussex. The Hastings Beds make up the geological formations of the Ashdown Formation, the Wadhurst Clay Formation and the Tunbridge Wells Sand Formation. The term “Hastings Beds” has since been superseded and the formations are included in the Wealden Group.

This period of deposition continued for around 30 to 40 million years by which time the sea flooded in and brought with it further layers of sands and clays. This formed the greensand and was then followed by the thick and calcareous sediment that would form the chalk. Around 100 million years ago the central part of the region began to rise and as a result pushed the soft chalk into a dome that became the Weald Dome. This softer and younger layer of chalk was gradually eroded to reveal the sandstones beneath. The North Downs and South Downs are the remaining outer “shell” of the eroded Weald Dome.

The topography of the North Downs primarily consists of the Chalk Group, often just called the Chalk, which is a lithostratigraphic unit that contains the late Cretaceous limestone succession in southern and eastern England. It is composed almost entirely of chalk and is formed of three parts; the Upper Chalk, Middle Chalk and Lower Chalk or Coombe Rock. Flints are more common in the Upper Chalk and then less so moving towards the Lower Chalk. Layers of Clay-with-Flints also cover large areas of the Downs and are significant in reducing drainage sufficiently on the Chalk dipslopes to allow for fruit growing on the Downland, especially around the Medway and Stour rivers, and woodland to develop where the plateau is more exposed east of the Stour Valley. The Chalk is most commonly exposed on slopes or as cliffs, most notably the White Cliffs of Dover, where the overlying strata have either been quarried or eroded. The buried upper surface of the Chalk is often eroded into pipes, gulleys and pinnacles which are sometimes visible during road cutting and quarrying. The Upper Greensand marks the southern boundary of the North Downs.

Originally most of Kent was covered in dense, deciduous woodland and there is evidence for prehistoric human occupation at a number of sites across the county, including along the North Downs and into the Greensand Vale. Within the Kent Downs AONB that lies within the District, evidence for human occupation can be dated as far back as the Lower Palaeolithic period (800,000 BP – 250,000 BP). This evidence primarily consists of Acheulian hand axes that were found around the Lympne, Elham, Folkestone and Hawkinge areas. These finds are particularly concentrated within the Elham Valley around Dreal’s Farm and can be attributed to *Homo Heidelbergensis* who were known to have used this tool technology extensively. Evidence for occupation during the Middle Palaeolithic (250,000BP – 40,000BP) has been found at Folkestone where a Mousterian hand axe was discovered. Perhaps most notably a burin worked flint was identified during the

Channel Tunnel Rail Link excavations at the Saltwood Tunnel which is rare evidence for occupation during the Upper Palaeolithic (40,000BP – 10,000BP).

Evidence for a Mesolithic occupation around the Kent Downs area within the District is sparse and primarily concentrated to areas around Folkestone, Elham, Saltwood, Hawkinge and Lyminge. Moving into the beginning of the Neolithic period around 4500 years ago, hunter-gatherer ways of life were changing as settlements became more permanent and farming practices began to develop. This has resulted in an increased amount of archaeological material including tools, pottery and earthwork sites such as long barrows. Neolithic finds of flint implements have been found along the Downs near Acrise, Hawkinge, Folkestone, Lyminge and Swingfield. Whilst there is no evidence for permanent Neolithic settlements within the District, important ceremonial sites have been identified. One of the megalithic long barrows belonging to the Stour group is located at Elmstead and there is also evidence that may suggest there is a causewayed enclosure close to Summerhouse Hill near Folkestone.

Moving into the early Bronze Age, the building of monuments becomes far more prolific as influences from across the channel bring with it changes in burial practices, new material culture and novel metal technology. The most common monument was the round barrow, and a significant number of these can be found across the District both on the Downs and Greensand Vale. Whereas many from other areas in Kent have been ploughed flat, many the barrows within the district survive as partially upstanding mounds which is reflected in the number of designated barrows within the District as compared with other areas of Kent (approximately 40% of the county's designated Bronze Age barrows are located within Folkestone & Hythe District). The three barrows that were excavated at the Castle Hill site in Folkestone are an important example.

Other sites around Folkestone such as at Holywell Coombe have produced further valuable evidence for a Bronze Age occupation along the North Downs (more detail will be provided in the later *Archaeology* theme paper). Later Bronze Age and Iron Age occupation is evident at Folkestone and Hawkinge through several features relating to settlements. An important Iron Age site is located at East Wear Bay in Folkestone overlooking the East Cliff and Warren Country Park and Heritage Coast. The site is primarily known for its Roman Villa, but there is also evidence that it was an important trading post and rotary quern production site from around the second century BC. It is believed that the quern stones were manufactured from the local Greensand stone on an industrial scale, and examples of these locally produced stones have been found throughout Kent, the Lower Thames Valley and in East Anglia.

The North Downs also offers important evidence for the continued occupation of Iron Age sites into the Romano-British period following the Roman invasion and annexation of Britain in 43 AD. Sites at Hawkinge such as Dolland's Moor and the Hawkinge Aerodrome reveal evidence for continuous occupation across these two periods. Further evidence for Roman occupation has been found at Lyminge, Folkestone, Lympne, Pedlinge and Saltwood.

There are a number of significant Anglo-Saxon sites across the district, in particular those that relate to its religious heritage. Perhaps the most notable of these has been found at Lyminge. Not only has a substantial Jutish cemetery been excavated here, but it is also a nationally important monastic site where one of the earliest religious buildings following the conversion to Christianity in 597 AD was located. The *Lyminge Archaeological Project* has continued to work at the site and has uncovered significant evidence of an important Anglo-Saxon settlement. Other areas across the Downs within the district that reflect Anglo-Saxon occupation include Folkestone, Saltwood and Newington.

Of the medieval castles within the District, Saltwood Castle and Lympne Castle are located within the Kent Downs AONB, and Westenhanger Castle and Sandgate Castle within the Greensand Vale. They are important evidence of new Norman nobility settling within the country following the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the change that came about to defensive structures at this time. Castles were not only intended as strategic fortified militant buildings to be used in the defence of the realm, but they also played an important role in demonstrating the power and status of its owner. In fact, only a few castles can be considered as purely militant in function within Kent such as Rochester and Dover castle. A number of medieval churches can also be found throughout the Kent Downs and Greensand Vale that reflect the powerful and influential role of the church and religion within medieval society.

Post-medieval archaeology of the District is dominated by defensive sites primarily dating from the nineteenth century through to the twentieth century. Kent's proximity to the continent has historically made it vulnerable to a foreign invasion or attack and as such several defence strategies and fortifications now characterise parts of the Kentish coastline. The coastal landscape of the district has been the setting for many different forms of national defence across the centuries, ranging from the Roman Villa site at East Wear Bay and Saxon Shore Fort at Lympne through to the Napoleonic Martello Towers and World War pillboxes. They continue to play an important role in the local landscape and sense of place today.

The modern settlement patterns across the Kent AONB are believed to have developed primarily along river valleys and the sheltered scarp foot. Settlement of the poorer lands on the exposed upper Downs and stony Greensand Ridge followed more slowly until the Middle Ages when the basic network of settlement that is evident today had been established. The current landscape of the Downs has been significantly shaped by human action such as deforestation, farming practices and quarrying. The landscape is primarily used for arable farming, with pastoral farming being practiced to a lesser extent. Settlements continue to be dotted around the AONB primarily in sheltered valleys and at the foot of the scarp slope, known as spring line settlements. The east to west ridge of the Downs has continued to provide a natural transport route with much of the historic Pilgrims Way surviving and much more recently the M20 motorway and railway links. Overall, it remains a distinctive and highly valued landscape that continues to provide areas of outstanding natural beauty and biodiversity as well as a rich historic environment.

3. Description of the Heritage Assets

The historic landscape of the North Downs and Greensand Vale is a significant asset within the District that contains a number of distinct landscape character areas and various heritage assets such as the defensive fortifications and medieval churches that make important contributions to the local character and sense of place. In particular, its natural beauty and nationally significant habitats and wildlife make it a unique place to visit and live, as well as its scattered and intimate settlements that are predominantly nestled within the many valleys and scarp landscapes. Other areas of the North Downs and Greensand Vale are especially iconic, such as the White Cliffs of Dover and Folkestone Downs, and add significant weight to the local sense of place. Its urban centres such as Folkestone are also rich in heritage and can boast diverse landscapes, many again being of national importance. Overall there are several aspects that make the North Downs and Greensand Vale within the District an especially attractive and special place as well as being rich in heritage and important geology.

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Beauty

As mentioned previously, the Kent Downs AONB forms the eastern end of the North Downs that runs from Farnham in Surrey and ends at the cliffs of Dover. It roughly follows the southeast outcrops of chalk and greensand that run as parallel ridges to one another ending at the coast. Taking in parts of the Greensand Ridge, Romney Marsh and the Heritage Coast as well as the Downs, it covers 878 sq km across Kent and offers particularly attractive natural landscapes. It was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1968 for its distinctive character and natural beauty though it was not appropriate to designate the Downs as a National Park because extensive outdoor recreation provision would not be appropriate. The primary purpose of an AONB designation is to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape whilst also recognising the needs of the local communities and economy. For example, the needs of rural industries such as forestry and agriculture need to be taken into account and sustainable forms of social and economic development that also preserve and enhance the landscape should be sought. Recreational development should also be used that enables the conservation of the landscapes natural beauty whilst taking into consideration the needs of other local users.

The Kent Downs is the eighth largest AONB in England and Wales and together with the High Weald AONB covers 33% of the county's land area. It was classified into 13 distinct landscape character areas by the Countryside Commission (now Natural England) as part of a landscape assessment undertaken in 1995 that reflected local features and pressures within the landscape. These classifications are still used today of which 3 cover areas of the District; East Kent Downs, Postling Vale and Lympne. They each reflect distinctive landscapes that have been extensively shaped by human action as well as being considered to be naturally beautiful and diverse.

East Kent Downs Landscape Character Area

The East Kent Downs Landscape Character Area covers part of the District as well as going into the Dover District, Canterbury City and Ashford Borough. In the district, it takes in the eastern area of the District that includes Lyminge, Elham, Elmsted, Stelling Minnis, Acrise, Swingfield and part of Folkestone and its Heritage Coast. It is a remote and peaceful area of the Downland that ends in the dramatic White Cliffs of

Dover and Folkestone Downs. For the purposes of the Countryside Commission's Landscape Assessment (1995) and later guidelines produced by Natural England and the Kent Downs AONB Unit, the East Kent Downs has been further broken down into 3 areas; Petham, Elham and Alkham as will be shown in the below table.

Above the southern scarp the chalk hills are furrowed by a series of long, narrow parallel valleys that run north east. The western valley systems are intricate and branch across the landscape. The steep, rounded slopes are crossed by overgrown hedges and uncultivated banks or shaves are found on the open valley bottoms. Large arable fields along the ridge-top plateau are visually contained by long strips of deciduous, ancient woodland along the valley sides or ridge-top conifer forests west of Elham. Towards the coast the landscape then becomes more exposed and there is less woodland that gives way to a more linear pattern of parallel ridges and valleys.

The landscape is criss-crossed by small single-track lanes that go between widely scattered villages which are traditionally built of local flint, brick and tile. Many of these villages are still small and have experienced limited development which is an important characteristic of this character area. Elham for example is a particularly picturesque and historic village at the heart of the Elham Valley. For much of its history it has been a small market town and now retains many of its historic buildings. A number of later medieval timber-framed houses have survived as well as two market places in the square and the Grade I Listed church of St Mary. Within the village there are 43 Listed Buildings and its overall character is still largely medieval.

The Elham Valley is a particularly unspoiled and tranquil part of the Kent Downs AONB within the District. Its chalk valley was carved by the River Nailbourne (Little Stour) and today contains the settlements of Elham, Etchinghill, Lyminge, Barham, Kingston, Bishopsbourne and Bridge. The Elham Valley Way recreational walking route runs for 22.5 miles through the valley beginning at Hythe and ending at Canterbury Cathedral. It is a particularly popular walking route that takes in the diverse landscapes of the Elham Valley and Kent Downs AONB.

This area's association with the defence of the realm also dominates its character with several widely scattered pillboxes and gun-emplacements throughout as well as the coastal defences such as the Martello Towers at Folkestone. Kent's proximity to the continent has for many centuries meant that a number of defence strategies and fortifications have been placed along the Kentish coast, and a number of these can be found within the District.

Below follows a table that highlights the main features of the character areas that make up the East Kent Downs Landscape Character Area.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Key Characteristics</i>
Petham	• Intimate rolling valleys. • Areas of traditional chalk grassland. • Hedges and hedgerow trees. • Blocks of deciduous woodlands on ridges. • Extensive views into secluded coombes. • Scattered farmsteads.

	• Frequent redundant oast houses. • Almost no hop gardens still in production.
Elham	• Pockets of historic parkland and orchards on northern valley slopes. • Heavily wooded plateau to the west with conifer plantations and ancient woodlands. • Predominantly large, intensively cultivated arable plateau to the east. • Hedgerow trees. • Open views and narrow roads along the ridgeline. • Stelling Minis (common land) – key landscape feature. • Loss of hedgerow network.
Alkham	• Exposed chalk cliffs and tumbled, scrub covered rock-falls. • Dominant long ridges and isolated valleys. • Scattered woodlands on steep valley sides (some of significant conservation value). • Small pockets of scrub. • Decaying hedges.

The *Landscape Assessment* of the East Kent Downs (Countryside Commission 1995) has informed later publications and guidelines produced for this area, such as the *Landscape Design Guidelines* written by the Kent Downs AONB Unit (2006). These guidelines have identified landscape character objectives that will support the ongoing conservation and management of this areas unique landscape character. Ongoing management and strategies should seek to:

- Maintain the existing woodland cover, increasing the proportion of deciduous woodlands and to restore the hedgerow network.
- Maintain the remote, undeveloped qualities of the valleys.
- Maintain small scale and isolated settlement pattern.
- Seek the use of sympathetic local materials such as brick, tile and flint.
- Conserve and enhance the wild character and vegetation of the cliff tops.
- Maintain and conserve biodiversity of fauna and flora.
- Conserve open landscapes and views.

Postling Vale Landscape Character Area

The Postling Vale Landscape Character Area covers part of the District continuing on eastwards from the East Kent Downs area as well as going into part of the Ashford Borough. It takes in areas that include Saltwood, Newington, Pedlinge, Postling and Stowting. The *Landscape Assessment* by the Countryside Commission

(1995) and later guidelines divide the Postling Vale into 3 local character areas that include the Folkestone outskirts, Saltwood and Stowting. The landscape here is dominated by major roads such as the M20 and A20 as well as part of the Channel Tunnel Terminal. These significant landscape developments are set against a backdrop of dramatic steep scarps and rich chalk grassland, such as Summerhouse Hill that dominates the Postling Vale. The rough grassland on the scarp is also species rich and supports important wildlife.

The southern edge of the AONB here is situated just above the urban centre of Folkestone and lies at the foot of the Downs. The development of Folkestone has largely been constrained by its physical setting at the most easterly end of the greensand belt which is contained in the north by the Downs and in the south by the flat expanse of the Romney Marsh.

A series of remote coombes in the scarp towards Etchinghill overlook the now rare coppiced ash woodlands of Asholt Wood. Scrub extends up some of the lower slopes and thin hedges highlight the Pilgrim's Way that runs along the scarp foot. Magnificent views can be enjoyed from the scarp slopes across large fields, gently undulating landscape and scattered blocks of woodland. Further south towards the outskirts of Hythe the open and large-scale landscape gives way to more intimate countryside characterised by steep stream valleys, small woodlands and pasture. In the west around Pedlinge tracts of mixed woodland enclose flat arable fields that form the edge of intensively cultivated farmland that extends beyond the AONB.

Below follows a table that highlights the main features of the character areas that make up the Postling Vale Landscape Character Area.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Key Characteristics</i>
Folkestone Outskirts	• Views from scarp are dominated by transport corridors. • M20 and Channel Tunnel Terminal dominate the southern boundary. • Series of steep enclosed coombes and prominent downs. • Hedge and shaw field boundaries.
Saltwood	• Intimate and enclosed valleys. • Deciduous woodland along the valley sides. • Small pastures surrounded by dense hedgerows and hedgerow trees. • Most hedgerow field boundaries replaced by wire fence in the east. • Extensive views across Saltwood town and out to sea. • Saltwood castle and farm buildings have a strong positive impact on views promoting a localised vernacular style.
Stowting	• Predominantly grassland scarp. • Large arable fields surrounded by small shaws or overgrown hedges. • Occasional blocks of deciduous woodland on the scarp. • Motorway and pockets of suburbanisation along the

	scarp foot. • Significant amount of hedgerow loss.
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Ongoing management and strategies should seek to:

- Maintain open sweeps of species rich chalk grassland on the scarp, allowing the landform of the Downs to dominate.
- Restore landscape features such as hedgerows and shaws on the scarp foot, which emphasises the bold scale of the surrounding landform.
- Restore and replace decaying hedgerows and hedgerow trees around the outskirts of Hythe.
- Seek to use sympathetic local materials such as flint, tile, flint and Ragstone.
- Conserve historic character of the built form.
- Conserve views of dominant rounded chalk hills.

Lympne Landscape Character Area

The Lympne Landscape Character Area covers part of the District as well as part of the Ashford Borough. It takes in areas that include Lympne, West Hythe and also covers a section of the Royal Military Canal. The southern edge of the Lympne Landscape Character Area also enters the Romney Marsh above Burmarsh. The *Landscape Assessment* that was completed by the Countryside Commission (1995) as well as later guidelines divide this area into 3 further localised character areas; Hythe escarpment, Aldington and Romney Marsh.

Until the Middle Ages, the Lympne scarp formed the edge of a large saltwater lagoon that was gradually reclaimed through a combination of natural accumulation of silt and shingle as well as the construction of sea defences and active drainage of the reclaimed land. The resulting land now forms the fertile and distinctive Romney Marsh. Most of the Hythe escarpment is the eroded face of the greensands and Kentish Ragstone. Over the centuries the surface has slipped to form a steep and uneven slope that encloses the northern edge of the Romney Marsh.

The scarp is highly visible from the flat landscape of the Romney Marsh and forms a long hillside of rough grassland dotted with scrub. Several large deciduous woodlands break up the sweep of the landform. Between these woodlands there are spectacular views of the Romney Marsh and English Channel. As with the East Kent Downs and Folkestone Downs, the legacy of coastal defence is evident across the Lympne Landscape Character Area. Remains of the Roman fort of *Portus Lemanis* are found at Lympne through to the nineteenth century Napoleonic Royal Military Canal that runs along the foot of the escarpment.

Below follows a table that highlights the main features of the character areas that make up the Lympne Landscape Character Area.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Key Characteristics</i>
Hythe Escarpment	• Botanically rich rough grassland scarp-face. • Sparse vegetation. • Remnant hedgerows across the slopes. • Unimproved agricultural grassland.
Aldington	• Spectacular views across the Romney Marsh and English Channel. • Deciduous ancient woodland dominates the scarp. • Arable cultivation on the lower slopes. • Elements of suburbanisation.
Romney Marsh	• Extensive network of historic drainage ditches and “sewers”. • Productive arable land and pasture. • Occasional windblown scrubby trees.

Ongoing management and strategies should seek to:

- Conserve and enhance views to and from the scarp.
- Retain the open natural scrub and grassland character of the scarp and discourage further suburbanisation of properties.
- Maintain and enhance the distinctive ditches of the remote undeveloped quality of the Marsh.
- Conserve and manage wooded rough and pastoral grassland.
- Conserve the historic features and vegetation along the Royal Military Canal.
- Seek the use of sympathetic materials such as brick, tile and Ragstone.
- Conserve the large-scale field pattern divided by historic drainage ditches and occasional thorn hedges on the Romney Marsh.
- Conserve and manage aquatic vegetation.

Folkestone Downs

The Folkestone Downs is an area of chalk downland above the urban centre of Folkestone that takes in Castle Hill, Round Hill, Holywell, Sugarloaf Hill and Cheriton Hill. It is protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as part of the Folkestone-Etchingill Escarpment SSSI, a Special Area for Conservation (SAC) and also forms part of the Kent Downs AONB. These designations have been awarded given the geological and biological significance that the site holds as well as its extensive biodiversity. The Folkestone Downs is one of the largest areas of unimproved chalk downland in Kent and supports flora and fauna species that are typically rare or unusual elsewhere. These include rare species of orchid such as the Late Spider orchid and Early Purple orchid. The Late Spider orchid is one of Britain's rarest orchids and is specially protected. The locations of these plants are not shared

so as to avoid criminal activity and unauthorised picking. In 1990 there were as few as 6 on the Folkestone Downs which has increased to 220 in 2010 since grazing was re-introduced. The chalk grassland also provides important habitats for many species of birds and insects. The area is particularly notable for its butterfly and moth species such as the Adonis Blue butterfly and Annulet moth.

Much of the Folkestone Downs is currently owned by Eurotunnel and managed by the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership (WCCP). Open access to the public is provided over most of the site, and the WCCP regularly organises guided walks and children's events within the Folkestone Downs. It is a particularly striking scarp landscape that provides magnificent views across the Downs, over the District and out to sea. It is also an important historic landscape, particularly Castle Hill, Sugarloaf Hill and Holywell where important archaeological sites and finds have been made. Perhaps the most well-known is "Caesar's Camp" on Castle Hill which has produced evidence of Bronze Age barrows as well as a later earthwork fortification probably dating to the early medieval period. It has also been suggested that there may be evidence of an Iron Age Hillfort here which is significant as there are no other examples within the District.

The Folkestone Downs stretches for around 5 kilometres from the East Cliff and Warren Country Park in the east to Peene Quarry in the west. Some of the views from the scarp are now dominated by development such as the Channel Tunnel Terminal which lies at the foot of the Downs with the British portal being directly below the slopes of Castle Hill. Despite this, it remains a striking landscape that rises steeply above Folkestone and is a distinctive area of the Kent Downs AONB.

Heritage Coast

The South Foreland and Folkestone-Dover Heritage Coast is an important part of the Kent Downs AONB which features one of the most iconic landscapes in Kent, the White Cliffs of Dover. Unlike National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coasts are not a statutory designation but are a defined agreement between the relevant Local Authority and Natural England. They were established to conserve the best stretches of undeveloped coast across England and Wales and are protected through development control with the planning system. Heritage Coasts further aim to conserve, protect and enhance the natural beauty of the coastline, their terrestrial, coastal and marine flora and fauna as well as their heritage features. Environmental management measures maintain and improve the health of inshore waters affecting the coast and its beaches as well as engaging with the local communities and stakeholders to enjoy, understand and appreciate these areas.

The Heritage Coast at Folkestone is designated as an SSSI, known as the Folkestone Warren SSSI. This designation has been made because of the nationally important wildlife and geology that the site features, in particular for its insects such as rare moth and butterfly species. It also has rich communities of flowers, seaweeds and birds, and is also important for its geology which reflects coastal erosion and the continued process of coastal formation.

Folkestone Warren

The Folkestone Warren is a key feature of the Folkestone-Dover Heritage Coast as well as being part of the Kent Downs AONB. It is of considerable biological, geological and physiographical interest and as such has been designated as an SSSI. The site encompasses a range of marine and terrestrial habitats that are associated with the chalk cliffs, underlying Gault Clay and Lower Greensand. A number of plant and wildlife species are supported here that are of national importance and some which are also rare in the country. The site is particularly rich in insect species that have only been recorded at the Warren, such as the Grayling butterfly which is only found here within Britain.

The Warren was designated as an SSSI for its old chalk grassland which is rich in wild flowers and invertebrates. However, this landscape has changed significantly over the past 100 years and continues to be at risk from factors such as coastal erosion, climate change and criminal or anti-social activity like fly-tipping, fires and unauthorised camping. The Warren was originally formed through a series of landslips that had taken place over the past 200 years. The last significant landslide was in 1915, since which time the sea defences to protect the Folkestone – Dover railway line have stabilised the coast. Photographs of the Warren in 1920 suggest that it was predominantly chalk grassland with virtually no trees. In 1924 it was then gifted to the Corporation of Folkestone by Lord Radnor with the stipulation that there would be no grazing animals. This allowed shrubs and trees to grow and much of the open chalk grassland was lost.

Today there are still patches of chalk grassland that are rich in flora and fauna. The WCCP assisted by volunteers are working to maintain these areas as well as creating grassy corridors for important habitats and wildlife along these footpaths. Funding through Environmental Stewardship schemes have also been offered to begin a trial grazing scheme which will help in reclaiming the important chalk grassland.

A section of the Warren forms part of the **East Cliff and Warren Country Park** that is also protected as an SSSI and has been declared as a County Park and Local Nature Reserve. The park takes in the East Cliff, East Wear Bay as well as part of the Warren and is especially valued for its wildlife and dramatic land form which offers spectacular views of the famous White Cliffs and out to sea. Today the parts of the park that are closest to Folkestone town centre feature a Pitch & Putt golf course, bowls club, children's playground and wide-open lawns that are all overlooked by the 3 Napoleonic Martello Towers. There are also a number of walking trails that pass through the park and Warren such as the Saxon Shore Way and North Downs Way that link Folkestone to Dover and allow people to enjoy this distinctive and rich landscape.

Views and Vistas

As well as the natural beauty, important geology and significant flora and fauna of the North Downs and Greensand Vale, a particular asset relating to this theme is the panoramic views and vistas that are available throughout this landscape. Many of the views also take in diverse landscapes such as the lush Elham Valley with its small and scattered settlements and sweeping valley which is a dramatic contrast to the striking White Cliffs and Heritage Coast at Folkestone. Spectacular views across

the Romney Marsh can also be had from several points along the Kent Downs AONB as well as steep scarp landscapes such as the Lympne or Hythe escarpment. The Folkestone Downs also offer excellent vantage points for views across the Romney Marsh, Heritage Coast and out to sea, and at many points along the Kent Downs views across the District can be enjoyed.

4. Statement of Significance

The North Downs and Greensand Vale is an exceptionally rich historic landscape with a diverse and special local character. Its evolution has resulted in a number of striking and varied landscapes that range from the famous White Cliffs along the Heritage Coast to the sweeping and tranquil Elham Valley. Its rich habitats and supported wildlife are of national importance and are often incredibly rare. This is reflected in the designations that protect the vast majority of the land covered in this theme and the extensive conservation work that is being done to restore, preserve and enhance many of these assets. The panoramic views and contrasting landscapes continue to create a unique sense of place that is highly valued by its local communities as well as large numbers of visitors. Within this landscape there are also several significant heritage assets that represent important histories and events that have each shaped the landscape of the North Downs and Greensand Vale. For these reasons, the assets relating to this theme should be considered to be of **outstanding significance**.

Evidential Value

There are a number of ways in which the assets explored in this theme will be able to reveal further information regarding the landscape and past human activity. The Heritage Coast and Folkestone Warren will continue to reveal important information regarding coastal formation and evolution. Other parts of this landscape may also have the potential to reveal important geological information and add to understandings of geomorphological processes. There is also the continued potential for the discovery of further archaeological remains from particular lithostratigraphic units such as the Gault Clay at Folkestone and Chalk along the Downs.

Historical Value

There are many heritage assets within the North Downs and Greensand Vale that evoke strong connections to various historical events and aspects of life. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the legacy of defence heritage that is dotted throughout the Downs and Greensand Vale. Pill boxes and gun emplacements can be found throughout this landscape which highlights the District's role during the World Wars. Kent's proximity to the continent and its need for fortification in order to repel a foreign attack or invasion is primarily evident along the coast. Fortifications that range from a Saxon Shore Fort at Lympne through to the Napoleonic Martello Towers at Folkestone and Royal Military Canal clearly represent the need for coastal defence and the area's important role in this.

Other assets such as farmsteads and medieval churches reflect aspects of historical life throughout the North Downs and Greensand Vale. Many settlements such as Elham have retained their historic character and pattern, and still boast a valuable collection of historic buildings that illustrates historic life within these settlements and wider society. They continue to make an important contribution to the local landscape character and also provide a strong experience and illustration of past

lives. The agricultural heritage across the North Downs and Greensand Vale is clearly evident in traditional farmsteads, pastures and field patterns. Again this evokes powerful connections to past lives and activities that would have taken place here.

Aesthetic Value

The North Downs and Greensand Vale have enormous aesthetic value. They contain areas of outstanding natural beauty as well as iconic and dramatic landmarks such as the Chalk Downs, White Cliffs of the Heritage Coast and Folkestone Downs. For travellers entering or leaving the country the White Cliffs of the Heritage Coast is an iconic and famous landmark visible from the sea as well as from viewpoints inland. They leave lasting impressions and also contribute to a unique local character. The Folkestone Downs also add to the unique character of the landscape along the coast at Folkestone with its dramatic slopes and distinctive features such as Castle Hill.

Other areas of the North Downs and Greensand Vale are also incredibly valuable for their aesthetic significance. The Chalk Downs are another iconic landmark as well as a popular walking route from the coast at Dover along the ridge and leaving Kent around Sevenoaks. The North Downs Way and historic Pilgrim's Way provide a route along this special landscape that takes in various features such as the many sweeping valleys and dramatic scarp slopes. Within the AONB the Elham Valley is a particularly attractive natural landscape that is characterised by small and isolated settlements and open views. Other views and vistas from various vantage points throughout the Kent Downs AONB and Greensand Vale take in unique and distinctive areas of the District such as the Romney Marsh and Folkestone Warren that further adds to its aesthetic appeal.

Communal Value

Various elements of the Kent Downs AONB and Greensand Vale provide a strong sense of place for both the local communities and visitors. The recreational potential of these areas highlights the importance of reconnecting with the landscape and appreciating the natural and historic environment. This also creates opportunities for communal events and activities such as guided tours and workshops that instil a sense of ownership and pride of place. A number of local initiatives such as the WCCP demonstrate how communal engagement can help to conserve, protect and enhance the local landscape as well as encouraging local involvement. Many of the sites also offer a fantastic resource for the local economy and tourism.

5. Vulnerabilities

There are several factors that can negatively impact on the assets from this theme and cause them to be vulnerable. The landscape is especially distinct for its natural beauty but has also been extensively affected by human action. Intensive farming practices and cultivation can result in alterations and loss of traditional features in the landscape such as hedgerows and woodland areas. This is already the case in areas such as the Elham plateau and Aldington where extensive agricultural activity is evident. Whilst an AONB designation seeks to support local needs such as agriculture and industries including forestry, care must also be taken not to alter the fundamental character of an area too far and to enhance rather than detract from the traditional landscape.

A lack of maintenance of the local landscape and the mechanisms that have sustained it will also put assets at risk. This is especially evident at the Folkestone Warren where the lack of grazing animals since 1924 has resulted in substantial losses of the botanically rich chalk grassland. Initiatives are now in place to reverse this, but it highlights how the loss of biodiversity and important landscape can occur if continued management and conservation is not practiced.

Other human actions such as urban development can further put the assets from this theme at significant risk. Aspects such as the local and wider landscape setting, colour pallet and traditional building character are key components to the local landscape character as well as to the sense of place. Actions that would either alter or detract from these will have negative impacts on the landscape character and diminish an areas sense of place. Alterations to existing buildings and dwellings for example should seek to utilise local materials wherever possible so as not to lose traditional features in the built landscape and also to maintain the local colour pallet and overall appearance and pattern of local settlement. Removal or planting of trees and other plants should also aim to be in keeping with the local character such as hedgerows and deciduous woodlands. It is also important to maintain open landscapes wherever possible and to avoid creating barriers to the distinctive views and vistas that can be had throughout the North Downs and Greensand Vale.

Urban development will also impact on the landscape in other ways that will make it vulnerable. Light pollution and raised noise levels will diminish the tranquillity and peacefulness of this area and will also decrease the amount of dark skies at night which this area is well known for. Significant increases to the number of people living here will also impact the landscape negatively if the need for greater infrastructure was needed to support increasing urbanisation. The scattered, small and isolated settlements throughout the Kent Downs AONB are a key characteristic and efforts should be made to retain this important feature. Developments on the fringe of the AONB and Greensand Vale may again have negative impacts and put the natural landscape character at risk.

Development and recreational pressures are evident at Capel-le-Ferne where a caravan park is now located just outside of the Warren. Whilst this caters to the local tourism offering it also has negative impacts on the landscape, particularly on the views of the Warren and White Cliffs from the sea and surrounding vantage points. Development of infrastructure is also a big issue for this theme, most notably the construction of the M20, Channel Tunnel and Folkestone-Dover railway line at Folkestone which has dramatically altered the landscape around the Folkestone Downs and Folkestone Warren. The setting and views of the North Downs and Greensand Vale are a key characteristic of the local landscape and efforts should be made to retain these as far as possible.

Anti-social behaviour and criminal activity is a factor that is affecting areas such as the Warren in Folkestone. This is a nationally important SSSI for its biodiversity and geology and so significant risk can be posed by negative human activity. Problems with fly-tipping, fires and unauthorised camping are putting the habitats and wildlife at the Warren at risk and steps should continue to be taken to police and stop this. Activities like this could also affect other areas of the Kent Downs AONB and

Greensand Vale and would seriously detract from the landscape character whilst also eroding its natural beauty.

Final vulnerabilities result from natural factors such as coastal erosion and climate change. Areas such as the Warren and Folkestone Heritage Coast may be vulnerable to coastal erosion. At East Wear Bay for example, cliff falls are resulting in the loss not only of the cliff face but also of the archaeological remains of the Roman Villa site that lies close to the cliffs edge. This will be a significant loss if the whole site is eventually lost and will also alter the coastal landscape here. Climate change may also cause significant damage to coastal and terrestrial environments. This will put at risk the important habitats and wildlife that the North Downs and Greensand Vale supports as well as its local landscape character. This is of particular concern in areas such as the Warren where certain species found there are extremely rare and their loss would be devastating.

6. Opportunities

There are a number of important opportunities relating to the assets from this theme. The diverse and attractive landscape of the North Downs and Greensand Vale offers valuable opportunities for visitors and local communities to reconnect with the landscape and to instil a greater sense of place and wellbeing. Being outdoors and engaging with the natural environment has important benefits for improving mental as well as physical wellbeing and can also result in a better quality of life. Engaging with the local environment can also help to encourage a greater sense of ownership and ongoing conservation work that will ensure the preservation and enhancement of these landscapes.

The diverse landscapes throughout the Kent Downs AONB and Greensand Vale also offer several opportunities for recreational activities such as walking, horse riding and cycling. Walking routes such as the Saxon Shore Way and North Downs Way connect parts of the landscape character areas across the District as well as into neighbouring Local Authorities and provide opportunities to explore, enjoy and engage with the rich natural environment. Other activities that are led by groups such as the WCCP and Kent Downs AONB Unit offer further opportunities to gain a better understanding about the landscape and the flora and fauna that it supports as well as becoming involved in natural conservation and the management of these special landscapes.

Initiatives run by organisations such as the WCCP and Kent Downs AONB Unit further create important opportunities to conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs AONB and Greensand Vale. Design guidelines and workshops for example promote landscape character conservation in ways such as utilising local materials in building work, maintaining flora that is in keeping with the wider landscape setting and preserving the historic character of an area. This will be important in avoiding development, alterations or adaptations that will detract from the landscape and overall setting that is so key to the local landscape character.

7. Current Activities

There are several activities and initiatives that offer valuable opportunities to promote and engage with the landscape of the North Downs and Greensand Vale. The White Cliffs Countryside Partnership (WCCP) organises regular events such as guided

walks across the Downs and children's events (the Green Gang) in the Folkestone Downs. Collaboration with other initiatives such as the Green Gym offers further opportunities for members of the local communities to become involved in the natural conservation of the Downs. Activities include habitat management and clearing footpaths for better public access and landscape management.

The "Up on the Downs" scheme which will finish this year (2017) has worked to conserve and celebrate the Downs landscape. It is a partnership between WCCP, Kent Wildlife Trust and the National Trust and has involved projects such as chalk downland restoration, mapping and surveying local twentieth century military heritage with the Canterbury Archaeological Trust and building an education shelter at Samphire Hoe. Community engagement has been a large element of the scheme in order to encourage a better understanding and appreciation for the landscape and heritage in the scheme area. Apprentices in Environmental Conservation have been employed to continue to the work that was started by the scheme and it is hoped that the members of the public that were involved in the scheme will also now help in the ongoing conservation and enhancement of the Downs.

The Kent Downs AONB Unit also organises and runs a number of events and activities throughout the year that include study days, workshops and guided walks. These many events offer important opportunities for people to engage with the landscape as well as its assets such as the important wildlife here or the historic environment. It also encourages a better understanding of the area and what is involved in its conservation and ongoing management. The events are open to all audiences and will help to build a better appreciation and understanding of the AONB and Kent Downs area.

The recreational provision within the Kent Downs also offers opportunities for activities such as cycling, walking, horse riding and fossil hunting. This is important to continue allowing people to appreciate, enjoy and explore the diverse landscape here as well as build an understanding of its heritage and evolution. The North Downs Way, Pilgrim's Way and the Saxon Shore Way are prominent walking routes that take visitors through the varied landscape here and will continue to attract large numbers of visitors each year. Engaging with the outdoors and becoming involved in activities such as the communal activities offered by the WCCP and Kent Downs AONB Unit or independent activities like cycling and walking will also have significant benefits for mental and physical wellbeing.

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