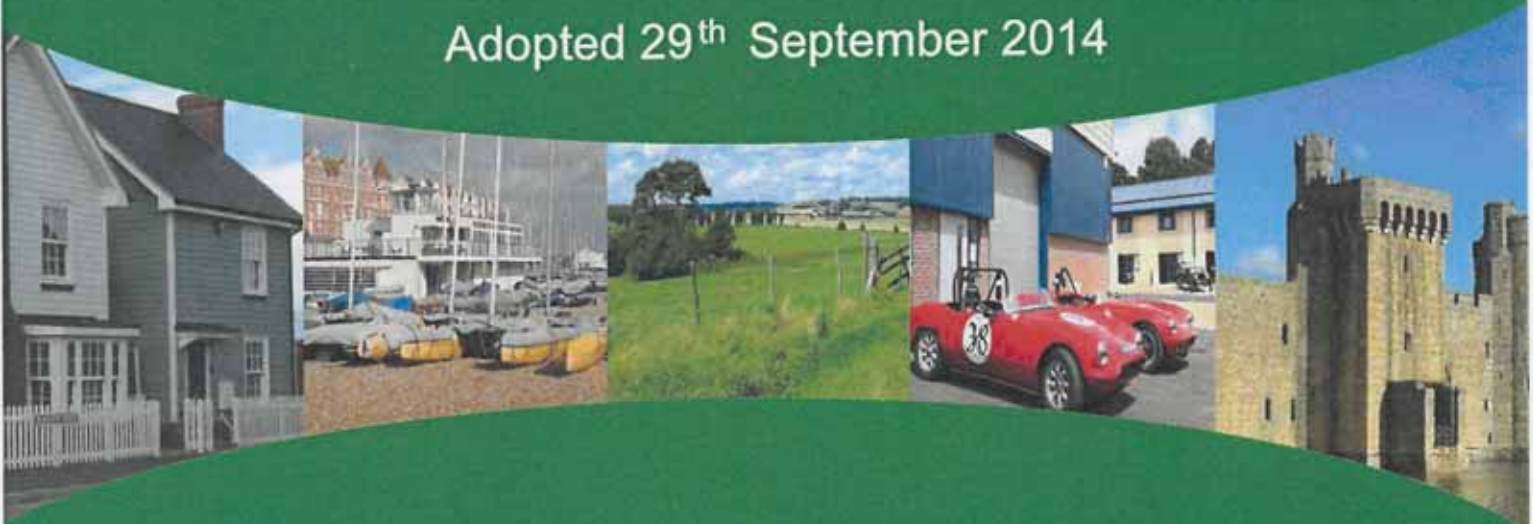


# Rother Local Plan

## Core Strategy

Adopted 29<sup>th</sup> September 2014



# 7 - Overall Spatial Strategy

## General development considerations

- 7.67 In addition to the above criteria, the suitability of a specific development proposal also needs to be considered in terms of the extent to which it delivers appropriately high standards that conserve landscape character and bio-diversity, makes most efficient use of finite water and energy resources, as well as fosters local identity and safeguard amenities.
- 7.68 All development should be capable of accommodating the reasonable expectations of likely occupiers, including in terms of indoor and outdoor space, personal safety and not be unduly affected by adjacent intrusive uses and buildings. They should cater for practical needs, such as parking and access, refuse and recycling facilities and open space.
- 7.69 At the same time, the amenities of neighbouring properties needs to be protected, in terms of loss of light and privacy, avoiding an overbearing presence and otherwise causing intrusion such as through noise, activity at unsocial hours, lighting, etc.
- 7.70 Environmental impacts need to be carefully addressed, such that landscape character is conserved, inappropriate fragmentation of the countryside avoided, important trees, woodlands and hedgerows retained, and where appropriate, supplemented by new landscaping, and wildlife habitats protected and encouraged.
- 7.71 Good design should respect the character of its setting, whether urban or rural, and make a positive contribution to reinforcing local distinctiveness. This relates not only the layout and design of buildings, but also the treatment of external areas, which should respect landscape character. Key design principles are set out in chapter 17.
- 7.72 Density standards are not advocated as development should respond to its setting and accord with the principles of good design. This includes looking at higher densities in more accessible locations. Minimum standards can also lead to inappropriate cramming, although unduly low densities may also be inappropriate in failing to make effective use of development land.
- 7.73 The need to ensure that infrastructure and facilities required to service development are available or will be provided is addressed in chapter 19, while drainage matters are covered in chapter 13, and meeting the transport and access demands created is addressed in chapter 18.
- 7.74 The following policy addresses those general development considerations concerned with 'fitness for purpose' and local amenities, and complement other policies relating to other factors. Such policies include policy EN1 relating to landscape, policy EN3 relating to design and policy EN5 relating to biodiversity.

# 7 - Overall Spatial Strategy

## Policy OSS4: General Development Considerations

In addition to considerations set out by other policies, all development should meet the following criteria:

- (i) It meets the needs of future occupiers, including providing appropriate amenities and the provision of appropriate means of access for disabled users;
- (ii) It does not unreasonably harm the amenities of adjoining properties;
- (iii) It respects and does not detract from the character and appearance of the locality;
- (iv) It is compatible with both the existing and planned use of adjacent land, and takes full account of previous use of the site;
- (v) In respect of residential development, is of a density appropriate to its context, having due regard to the key design principles.

- 12.41 'Potential new sites' in Figure 12 refers to sites expected to be formally allocated via the Development and Site Allocations Plan or Neighbourhood Plans. These will normally comprise development sites accommodating 6 or more dwellings.
- 12.42 Previously unidentified large sites (6 dwellings and over) in a village gaining planning permission before adoption of the relevant Plan may be deducted from the total 'Potential new sites' that an individual village is expected to achieve, depending on the stage reached and the suitability of other potential sites.
- 12.43 Developments of less than 6 dwellings, on currently unidentified sites, will count towards the overall rural housing numbers total as 'small-site windfalls'; an estimated allowance for them has been included for years 5-15. Therefore, to avoid double counting, they are in addition to the 'Potential new sites' for individual villages.
- 12.44 Affordable housing 'Exception sites' are typically between 6 and 14 dwellings. In common with small site windfalls, they are dealt with in a separate row on Figure 12. Hence, they cannot be deducted from the 'Potential new sites' totals for villages, since to do so would entail double counting. The estimated number of 65 dwellings on 'Exception sites' across the rural areas for the plan period is based upon figures derived from the Council's Housing Strategy.

## Countryside

- 12.45 As a predominantly rural district, the countryside of Rother district is a defining characteristic. The district's countryside is a productive landscape and the prime function of the countryside is agriculture and the production of food; with some 70% of the area of Rother district being classed as farmed land by DEFRA<sup>27</sup>. Indeed of the 35,500 farmed hectares in the district, some 60% is grass/pasture, with 25% crops and 10% woodland.
- 12.46 The countryside, including the undeveloped coast, also has high intrinsic amenity value, and is an important resource for nature conservation, leisure and tourism.
- 12.47 The term 'countryside' is used here for those areas outside of villages and includes not only farmland and woodland but also scattered development outside the main confines of villages.
- 12.48 The physical nature of the countryside today reflects both the diverse underlying geology and soils, and the human influences that have taken place upon it over a long period of time, in particular, agricultural practices and communication routes. In the High Weald, the land was traditionally used for mixed farming, pastoral and arable with the woodland being a managed and valued resource, whilst on the low-lying, reclaimed marshes the emphasis was on pasture. Much of the countryside we see today is a legacy from previous uses, resulting in historic landscape patterns which give the area its special qualities and character.

<sup>27</sup> Agricultural & Horticultural Survey of England, June 2007, DEFRA

# 12 - Rural Areas

- 12.49 The importance of Rother district's countryside in terms of its high quality landscape character and high ecological value is described in more detail in the Chapter 17 'Environment'. Indeed, some 82% of the district is designated as part of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Features which contribute positively to the landscape character of the district, in particular of the High Weald AONB, include field patterns, native-species hedgerows and ancient woodland, green lanes, and watercourses, along with the undeveloped coastal character of sandstone cliffs separated by deep glens around Fairlight and Pett, and the low-lying wetland levels leading to drifts of coastal shingle around Pevensey and Rye. Such features should be retained and preserved. 'Environmental Stewardship' is the main current agri-environment scheme, which offers payments to farmers and land managers in England for effective land management to protect and enhance the environment and wildlife.
- 12.50 Approximately 10% of the population of Rother live in the countryside outside of the villages and towns, with only 1.2% of the Rother's population currently being employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing. However, the countryside also provides employment opportunities through rural business units and workshops.
- 12.51 The strategy for the Countryside seeks to balance the many diverse pressures and competing demands on the countryside, whilst ensuring the maintenance of its farming capacity and of its attractive landscape character, to create a living, working countryside.



## **Policy RA2: General Strategy for the Countryside**

The overarching strategy for the Countryside is to:

- (i) **Maintain the farming capacity of the district, and support the agricultural industry, including diversification within farming;**
- (ii) **Encourage agricultural practices, land-based economic activities and woodland management, and related agri-environmental schemes, that reinforce local distinctiveness, landscape character and ecology;**
- (iii) **Strictly limit new development to that which supports local agricultural, economic or tourism needs and maintains or improves the rural character;**
- (iv) **Retain traditional historic farm buildings by continued agricultural use or by appropriate re-use, in accordance with Policy RA4;**
- (v) **Support rural employment opportunities in keeping with rural character and compatible with maintaining farming capacity;**
- (vi) **Support enjoyment of the countryside and coast through improving access and supporting recreational and leisure facilities that cannot reasonably be located within development boundaries, such as equestrian facilities, compatible with the rural character of the area;**
- (vii) **Support tourism facilities, including touring caravan and camp sites, which respond to identified local needs and are of a scale and location in keeping with the rural character of the countryside; and**
- (viii) **Generally conserving the intrinsic value, locally distinctive rural character, landscape features, built heritage, and the natural and ecological resources of the countryside.**

12.52 In applying this policy, it is important that the other parts of the Core Strategy are also referred to, in particular the opening sections of this chapter dealing with the introduction to rural areas and the villages (which deals with key services such as employment areas, ICT & broadband infrastructure, rural tourism, rural communities and services such as village shops, pubs, village halls, recreation & leisure, historic environment and accessibility). Cross-reference also needs to be made to the thematic chapters such as 15. Housing, 16. Economy and 17. Environment. Further consideration is given to development in the countryside, and specifically to the reuse of traditional farm buildings, in the following sections.

# 12 - Rural Areas

## Development in the Countryside

- 12.53 Farming and woodland management are the predominant land uses in the district's countryside. The agricultural land is of mixed quality; mostly grade 3, but with significant areas of higher quality grade 2 towards the east of the district along the Brede Valley and East Guldeford Level.
- 12.54 Agricultural production of food and by-products is a key economic function of the countryside; the support of British farming and sustainable food production is one of the three key priorities set out in DEFRA's Business Plan,<sup>28</sup> and a number of national initiatives are in place to support this objective<sup>29</sup>.
- 12.55 Changes in agricultural practices during the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a decline in traditional land and woodland management, with a consequent decline in skills in environmentally sensitive land management. Maintaining and developing such skills, and practices, offers opportunities for local employment and has a vital part to play in maintaining the district's distinct landscape character, especially in the High Weald.
- 12.56 Meanwhile the shift towards more sensitive environmental land management over the previous 10 – 20 years has helped support the farming industry and the conservation of landscape features and ecology. DEFRA's programme of agri-environmental schemes, through a structured programme of payments to farmers, remains an important way of ensuring effective land management to protect and enhance the environment and wildlife in the district.
- 12.57 Modern farming practices often require new agricultural buildings to meet specific needs. To ensure viable farming industries, these will be supported in principle, though whilst the size and mass of such buildings is inevitably dictated by their function, care is still needed in their siting, design and materials, to minimise the visual impact on the landscape character of the countryside.
- 12.58 Development pressures in the countryside arise from a number of demands; agricultural, economic/tourism, recreational, and residential. The National Planning Policy Framework recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
- 12.59 More generally, development in the countryside must have regard to impacts on both landscape character and natural resource management. 'Natural resources' in this context includes biodiversity, water resources, water quality, floodplains, coastline, air quality and minerals.

<sup>28</sup> Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Business Plan 2011-2015, November 2010

<sup>29</sup> including those supported by the Prince's Countryside Fund and the NFU 'Why Farming Matters' campaign

# 12 - Rural Areas

- 12.60 However, changing farming needs and development economics have meant that many former farm buildings, historic and modern, have become available for conversion and re-use. To support the rural economy in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, the policy presumption for such conversions is for uses which contribute to the local farming and rural economy, either by direct employment or by encouraging visitor spend. Such uses include workshops, farm shops or tourist facilities, and other employment uses such as offices. Buildings suitable for conversion should be generally in keeping with the rural character of the area in terms of scale, siting and appearance, be of permanent and substantial construction, and be capable of conversion without major or substantial reconstruction.
- 12.61 Occasionally, the replacement of such buildings for employment uses might be preferable to conversion where this would result in a development which is more acceptable in terms of landscape impact and visual appearance.
- 12.62 The range of activity operating within the district's countryside is wide; including food production, equestrianism, vineyards, horticulture, tourism and leisure, and a broad range of business activities. There is often high interdependency and mutual benefit between these industries. For example, a number of farmers markets and farm shops operate within the district, producing and supplying local foods and associated products. Vineyards, local food markets and plant nurseries help attract tourists into the district, while livery yards also offer rural employment opportunities, and help support wider industries such as vets, animal foodstuffs and also equestrian activities and events.
- 12.63 Tourism and recreation activities, such as holiday caravan and chalet developments, including the current trends for yurts and other forms of camping, equestrian facilities, and other recreational activities such as fishing, can add to the enjoyment and economic vitality of the district's countryside and rural communities, but can also lead to development and land-use pressures. For caravan and camping sites, the emphasis will be on improving the amenities of existing sites to maintain and enhance their tourism value, though consideration will be given to new small-scale provision to respond to modern market expectations, recognising environmental factors.



## 12 - Rural Areas

- 12.64 To protect the undeveloped and rural landscape of the countryside, new residential development, as for other forms of development in the countryside, must be limited to that which cannot be located in an urban area, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, and which positively contributes to maintaining the landscape heritage and character of the area. In particular, new dwellings may be essential for the proper functioning of land-based businesses (i.e. farming, forestry and equine-related activities). Such businesses should be demonstrably 'financially sound', which normally means that permissions will initially be on a temporary basis. Permanent dwellings will normally require the agricultural unit and activity to have been established for at least three years, have been profitable for at least one of them, be currently financially sound and have a clear prospect of remaining so. Careful consideration should also be given to the siting, size and design, as well as access. The siting of new dwellings should be well-related to existing farm buildings or other dwellings, wherever practicable. To ensure that a dwelling remains available to meet the recognised need, occupancy conditions will be applied.
- 12.65 The approach to the conversion and re-use of traditional historic farm buildings for residential use is discussed in the following section, and in Policy RA4. The conversion to residential use of modern or non-traditional farm buildings (normally considered to be post 1880) or of farm buildings requiring substantial or speculative reconstruction, would not serve to ensure the retention of features of acknowledged historic importance and value in landscape character. Therefore, this would not be an acceptable form of development in the countryside.
- 12.66 Changes to existing dwellings, be they extensions to dwellings, extensions to domestic curtilages into countryside, alterations to previously converted traditional former agricultural dwellings, ancillary works such as fences, walls and gates, or new outbuildings within curtilages, can, cumulatively, have a significant impact on the character of the countryside. It is therefore important to ensure that such proposals do not suburbanise the countryside, compromise the character, integrity or form of distinctive building typologies, nor compromise their contribution to the landscape character.
- 12.67 Similarly, replacement dwellings should not increase the visual prominence of the building in the countryside nor detract from the rural landscape character and local context of the area, and should take every opportunity to improve any existing adverse landscape impact.

## Policy RA3: Development in the Countryside

Proposals for development in the countryside will be determined on the basis of:

- (i) Supporting new agricultural buildings and other non-domestic buildings demonstrably needed to support farming, woodland and other land-based industries that are of appropriate size, siting and design and materials and directly related to the enterprise;<sup>30</sup>
- (ii) Supporting suitable employment and tourism opportunities in the countryside, including by the conversion, for employment use, of farm buildings generally in keeping with the rural character, and by the sensitive, normally small-scale growth of existing business sites and premises;
- (iii) Allowing the creation of new dwellings in extremely limited circumstances, including:
  - (a) Dwellings to support farming and other land-based industries. Normally, accommodation will initially be provided on a temporary basis for a period of three years. Both temporary and permanent dwellings will be subject to appropriate occupancy conditions, and all applications should comply with the following criteria:
    - i. Demonstrate a clearly established functional need, relating to a full-time worker primarily employed in the farming and other land-based businesses;
    - ii. Demonstrate the functional need cannot be fulfilled by other existing accommodation in the area;
    - iii. Demonstrate the unit and the agricultural activity concerned are financially sound and have a clear prospect of remaining so;
    - iv. Dwellings are of appropriate size, siting and design.
  - (b) The conversion of traditional historic farm buildings in accordance with Policy RA4;
  - (c) The one-to-one replacement of an existing dwelling of similar landscape impact; or
  - (d) As a 'rural exception site' to meet an identified local affordable housing need as elaborated upon in Chapter 15 – Local Housing Needs;

*(continued overleaf)*

<sup>30</sup> Conversion, replacement and extension of existing sites and premises all refer in this sense to buildings generally in keeping with the rural character of the area in terms of scale, siting and appearance, of permanent and substantial construction, and be capable of conversion without major or substantial reconstruction.

# 12 - Rural Areas

## **Policy RA3: Development in the Countryside** *(continuation)*

- (iv). Ensuring that extensions to existing buildings and their residential curtilages, and other ancillary development such as outbuildings, fences, enclosures, lighting and signage, would maintain and not compromise the character of the countryside and landscape;
- (v). Ensuring that all development in the countryside is of an appropriate scale, will not adversely impact on the on the landscape character or natural resources of the countryside and, wherever practicable, support sensitive land management.

## **Historic Farm Buildings**

- 12.68 Rother's countryside has a highly distinctive and important architectural character by way of settlement pattern and building typologies. The historic hamlets and farmsteads of the High Weald create a distinct and picturesque landscape, with the rolling pastureland and small ancient woodlands of the countryside interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofs of medieval houses, barns and oasts. Building typologies reflect locally distinct historic agricultural practices, for example the distinctive brick roundels of the hop industry's oast-houses, fine timber-framed barns and modest brick cowsheds and outbuildings.
- 12.69 Traditional historic farm buildings are a vital element in defining the distinctive character of the district's countryside, as well as being a valuable economic resource. They have cultural and archaeological value, not just in their fabric, but also their location and setting, to help our understanding of the historical development of farming in the district. Traditional historic farm buildings are generally considered to be those dating from pre 1880, though there may be other pre-war buildings, either late Victorian or Edwardian that are of interest in a farmstead or landscape context and may be worthy of retention.
- 12.70 English Heritage have analysed the character of rural settlement and farming in the South East, and particularly in the High Weald, within which the majority of the district's countryside falls, in their Farmstead Character Statement<sup>31</sup>. This highlights the historic typical small farm sizes, leading to small 'farmsteads' of mostly dispersed cluster plans or loose courtyards, and typically consisting of just the farmhouse, one large multi-purpose barn, and perhaps an oasthouse or a small open-fronted outbuilding.<sup>32</sup>
- 12.71 In accordance with English Heritage advice in the document 'Living Buildings in a Living Landscape: finding a future for traditional Farm Buildings', the priority uses for traditional agricultural buildings are to retain such buildings in continued farming-related uses, and secondly to convert for employment uses, including tourism.

31 Historic Farmsteads Preliminary Character Statement: South East Region English Heritage & The Countryside Agency 2006

32 Further research available in 'Farm Buildings of the Weald 1450-1750' David and Barbara Martin Heritage Marketing & Publications Ltd 2006

## Landscape Stewardship

- 17.9 Rother's landscape has great environmental and economic importance, as well as contributing to our sense of identity and well-being and providing inspiration. Though the landscape character is based in the distinct local geography and topography of the area, the landscape also charts the continuing history of the relationship between people and place.
- 17.10 Most of the Rother district falls into two of the [National Character Areas](#) defined by Natural England (formerly Joint Character Areas), that is [NCA 122 High Weald](#) and [NCA 123 Romney Marshes](#), though a small amount of the district also falls within [NCA 124 Pevensey Levels](#), and Natural England have provided detailed countryside and landscape character statements for each of these areas, identifying key characteristics.
- 17.11 Meanwhile the [ESCC Landscape Assessment](#) progresses this analysis at a more detailed level, seeking to improve understanding of our local landscape. This is in order to better manage change and to ensure that change and development do not undermine what is distinctive about landscape, as well as informing ways of enhancing character.
- 17.12 The Assessment identifies a number of areas of distinct landscape character within the Rother district, including:
- The High Weald
  - The Upper and Lower Rother Valley
  - The Brede Valley
  - The Darwell Valley & Combe Valley Basin
  - The Rye and Winchelsea Levels

and recommends specific Landscape Action Priorities tailored to the special characteristics and pressures facing each area. The document also identifies relatively remote areas within the district where current human impact is relatively limited, including the Upper Rother and Dudwell valleys, the Dallington-Ashburnham area and the Walland Marsh. Such areas contribute significantly to quality of life and local character.

- 17.13 The [High Weald AONB Management Plan 2014-2019](#) addresses the primary purpose of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - the conservation and enhancement of the special features that represent its natural beauty. In doing so it sets out key guidelines for the management of the landscape by defining "Natural Beauty" in terms of its key features. The principal components are: Geology and Water Systems, Settlement, Woodland, Routeways and Field and Heath, and their combined contribution to forming the cultural landscape of the High Weald.

# 17 - Environment

- 17.14 The [Rother Ancient Woodland Inventory 2010](#) identifies that 15.5% of Rother is ancient woodland, having been in continuous existence since 1600. This is the highest percentage of any district in the South East and provides a rich environment for a broad range of flora and fauna.
- 17.15 Meanwhile, English Heritage have produced a range of best practice guidance on Historic Landscape Characterisation and understanding the archaeology of landscapes, to help inform future management.

## Landscape Pressures

- 17.16 A particular challenge for new development in sensitive environments is maintaining the visual character of settlements in the landscape and in particular settlement edges. New development also brings the threat of suburbanisation of landscape character, with roads, light pollution, gentrification of buildings and loss of tranquillity.
- 17.17 Further pressures on landscape character come from recreational land-uses, including tourism and leisure. It should be recognised that such uses can create awareness of landscape management issues and provide investment to implement improvements, as well as being crucial for the wider rural economy.
- 17.18 Landscape character is also under pressure from changing agricultural practices, and from declining management of landscape features, including coppice woodlands, small ponds and meadows. This is addressed specifically in Chapter 12: Rural Areas.



## **Policy EN1: Landscape Stewardship**

Management of the high quality historic, built and natural landscape character is to be achieved by ensuring the protection, and wherever possible enhancement, of the district's nationally designated and locally distinctive landscapes and landscape features; including

- (i) The distinctive identified landscape character, ecological features and settlement pattern of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- (ii) The distinctive low-lying levels to the east of the district with particular regard to the landscape setting of Rye and Winchelsea;
- (iii) Nationally designated historic sites including listed Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and the Registered Historic Battlefield at Battle;
- (iv) The undeveloped coast;
- (v) Open landscape between clearly defined settlements, including the visual character of settlements, settlement edges and their rural fringes;
- (vi) Ancient woodlands;
- (vii) Tranquil and remote areas, including the dark night sky;
- (viii) Other key landscape features across the district, including native hedgerows, copses, field patterns, ancient routeways, ditches and barrows, and ponds and water courses

# 17 - Environment

## Design Quality

- 17.28 It is not just in historically sensitive areas that design is important; Planning Practice Guidance clearly indicates that design quality is a crucial planning consideration on all sites. High quality architecture and design has the power to inspire and enrich lives, through the creation of visually attractive, safe, accessible and characterful places that people enjoy living in and visiting.
- 17.29 Ensuring that design quality is a fundamental consideration in the planning process and to ensure constantly improving design standards, calls for development proposals to demonstrate standards of design against recognised criteria. This will also improve clarity of design assessment.
- 17.30 To this end, the Council has identified 'Key Design Principles' below, which should be seen as a critical starting point for any successful design project. The principles, which it is intended will be further developed through a Supplementary Planning Document, have been based on current best practice guidance, including the design objectives listed in By Design – Urban Design in the Planning System, and the 'Building for Life' Standard developed by CABI and HBF, and in Manual for Streets (DfT) and Streets For All: South East (EH & DfT).
- 17.31 The Council's Key Design Principles are identified as being:
- Character (Identity & Place-Making) & Legibility
  - Continuity & Enclosure
  - Quality of Public Realm & Ease of Movement
  - Diversity
  - Landscape Setting of Buildings and Settlements
  - Design in Context
  - Building Appearance & Architectural Quality
  - Sustainable Design
- 17.32 The principles are elaborated upon in Appendix 4. They can be met through a variety of aspects of development form including site layout, disposition of development, landscape structure, scale, height, massing, and careful consideration of building appearance in terms of details and materials. Additionally, a high quality design will rely on the skill of the designer to interpret site context and their design brief to create a robust architectural solution which contributes positively to the character of the site and surroundings.
- 17.33 The principles relate to development of all scales, whether a housing development of many units, or a modest extension to an individual building, though clearly some are more relevant in certain cases.

## Policy EN3: Design Quality

New development will be required to be of high design quality by:

- (i) Contributing positively to the character of the site and surroundings, including taking opportunities to improve areas of poor visual character or with poor townscape qualities, and
- (ii) Demonstrating robust design solutions tested against the following Key Design Principles as appropriate (expanded in Appendix 4), tailored to a thorough and empathetic understanding of the particular site and context:
  - (a) Character, Identity, Place-Making & Legibility
  - (b) Continuity and Enclosure
  - (c) Quality of Public Realm, Ease of Movement, and 'Secured By Design'
  - (d) Diversity
  - (e) Landscape Setting of Buildings and Settlements
  - (f) Design in Context (Understanding & appraisal of site and wider setting, and incorporation of existing site features into proposals)
  - (g) Building Appearance & Architectural Quality
  - (h) Sustainable Design and Construction

## Public Realm

- 17.34 It is important to recognise that the character of the built environment is informed by both the architectural qualities of individual buildings and the design and management of the spaces in between. The public realm can be considered to encompass open spaces, streets, pavements, and other routes, street furniture and equipment, signage, lighting, railings, and such other features. The quality of the public realm, in terms of circulation, connectivity, activity and visual appearance, is a key component of successful places, and is highlighted in the document 'Streets for All: South East'<sup>60</sup>, which promotes a coordinated approach to public realm management, the design of street furniture, and the reduction of street 'clutter', in particular road signage, within legislative requirements.

<sup>60</sup> 'Streets for All: South East' published by English Heritage & Department for Transport 2005



# 17 - Environment

- 17.35 Rother district is fortunate to possess a number of quality historic public realm features and surface treatments, including the listed cobbled streets of Rye, brick paving in Winchelsea and Robertsbridge, and raised pavements in Battle, which all are important in defining the special character and local distinctiveness of individual settlements. The retention and sensitive repair, and, where appropriate, reinstatement of such features is important in maintaining such character.
- 17.36 However, it's not just within the urban context that public realm is important in defining local character and sense of place. Rural areas can suffer suburbanisation through inappropriate creation of footways with raised kerbs, the loss of grass verges, and excessive road signage, while historic features such as milestones, historic fingerpost signs and red telephone kiosks and letterboxes contribute positively to the character of the rural public realm, and should be retained and restored as per central government guidance.<sup>61</sup>
- 17.37 Meanwhile new development and public investment offers the opportunity to create new public spaces and routes which can help meet regenerative and urban design aims of better connecting town centres, improving pedestrian circulation, providing venues for market place and street activity, and promoting local pride and sense of place.
- 17.38 The Council will liaise with the relevant agencies to maintain the amenity of the public realm and use its relevant enforcement powers to protect the amenities of the area.

## **Policy EN4: Management of the Public Realm**

**Priority will be given to working with the relevant agencies to:**

- (i) Apply the principles of 'Streets for All: South East', to ensure high quality management and maintenance of the district's public realm, with appropriate materials and strategic design vision, to ensure local distinctiveness in both urban and rural areas is respected, and historic features are retained;**
- (ii) Develop investment programmes in public realm improvements and enhancements, including reduction of street clutter and road signage;**
- (iii) Continue to bring forward programmes to enhance activity and the use of public space.**

<sup>61</sup> Department for Transport Traffic Advisory Leaflet 6/05 'Traditional Directional Signs', & English Heritage / Royal Mail Joint Policy Statement 'Royal Mail Letter Boxes'

## Biodiversity and Greenspace

- 17.39 Much of Rother district is covered with significant areas of biodiversity interest including coastal habitats and ancient woodland. This rich and distinctive natural environment functions as both an important ecological habitat and an attractive visual resource and amenity, important to both the tourism economy and the local community.
- 17.40 European and national legislation and national guidance set out how biodiversity will be protected and enhanced. Rother District Council aims to protect and enhance biodiversity in accordance with national guidance and have regard to the targets of the [Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan](#) (SBAP).
- 17.41 The internationally protected sites comprise the Pevensey Levels 'Ramsar' Site (Wetland of International Importance), the Dungeness to Pett Level Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Dungeness Special Area of Conservation (SAC). There are also proposals for new international habitat designations, namely Dungeness Romney Marsh and Rye Bay potential Special Protection Area (pSPA) and proposed Ramsar site. National designations include several Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). In addition, over 80% of the District is covered by the High Weald AONB, with Rother having one of the highest concentrations of 'ancient woodland' in the country, and the highest in the South East. Ancient woodland is a nationally important habitat. Local designations include Rye Harbour Local Nature Reserve and a number of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) across the District.

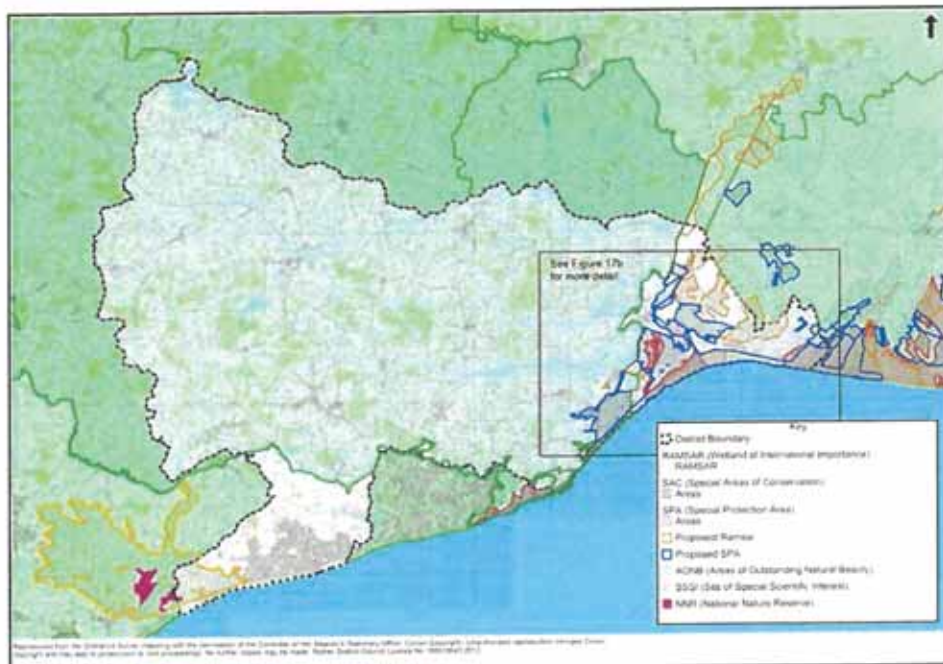
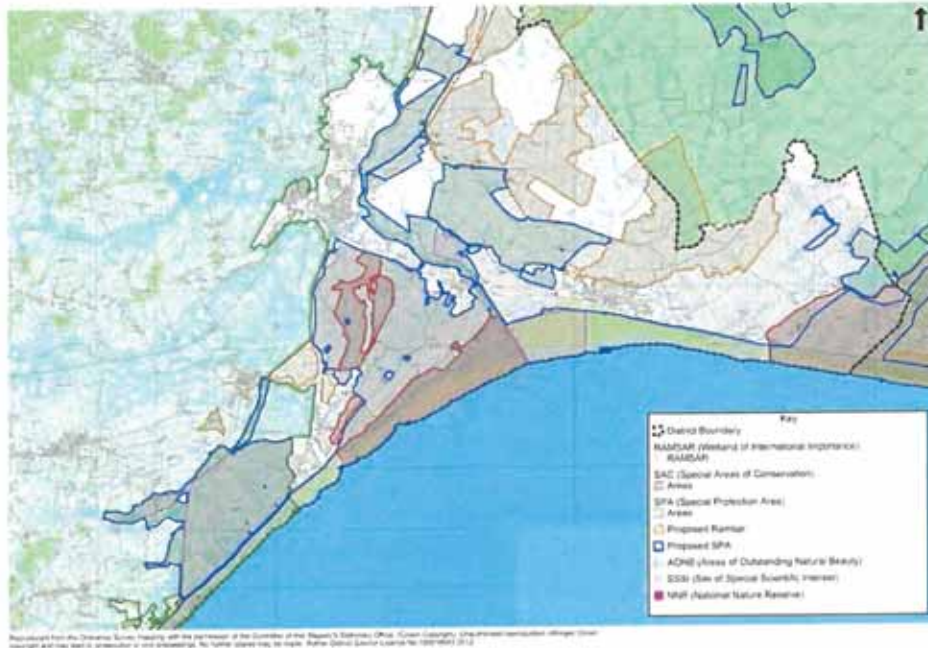


Figure 17a: Designated nature conservation sites in Rother District

# 17 - Environment



**Figure 17b: Designated nature conservation sites in Eastern Rother**

- 17.42 Rother has a number of designated sites of international significance within the district and is required to undertake an [Appropriate Assessment](#) (AA) to ensure that plans or projects either individually or in combination will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the international sites. The AA process has identified a number of potential impacts which have been addressed in the Core Strategy. There is a requirement for the sensitive management of tourism and recreational activity upon the International sites. To preserve the integrity of the International sites the Council alongside other agencies and stakeholders, will implement a Sustainable Access Strategy to monitor visitor numbers arising from all sources, and ensure responsible management of the Dungeness complex. Further elaboration can be found in Paragraph 10.21.
- 17.43 In addition to the above policy designations, the Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan also brings essential local context and complementary targets to support locally important habitats. 'Biodiversity Opportunity Areas' have been identified as the key areas for Biodiversity Action Plan habitat enhancement across the South East region and are set out in the South East Biodiversity Strategy.
- 17.44 An example of an initiative within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area is the 'Romney Marshes Living Landscape' project, Romney Marshes being a coastal wetland of regional-scale with potential for enhancement, restoration and re-creation of wetland habitats.

## Biodiversity and Greenspace

- 17.39 Much of Rother district is covered with significant areas of biodiversity interest including coastal habitats and ancient woodland. This rich and distinctive natural environment functions as both an important ecological habitat and an attractive visual resource and amenity, important to both the tourism economy and the local community.
- 17.40 European and national legislation and national guidance set out how biodiversity will be protected and enhanced. Rother District Council aims to protect and enhance biodiversity in accordance with national guidance and have regard to the targets of the [Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan](#) (SBAP).
- 17.41 The internationally protected sites comprise the Pevensey Levels 'Ramsar' Site (Wetland of International Importance), the Dungeness to Pett Level Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Dungeness Special Area of Conservation (SAC). There are also proposals for new international habitat designations, namely Dungeness Romney Marsh and Rye Bay potential Special Protection Area (pSPA) and proposed Ramsar site. National designations include several Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). In addition, over 80% of the District is covered by the High Weald AONB, with Rother having one of the highest concentrations of 'ancient woodland' in the country, and the highest in the South East. Ancient woodland is a nationally important habitat. Local designations include Rye Harbour Local Nature Reserve and a number of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) across the District.

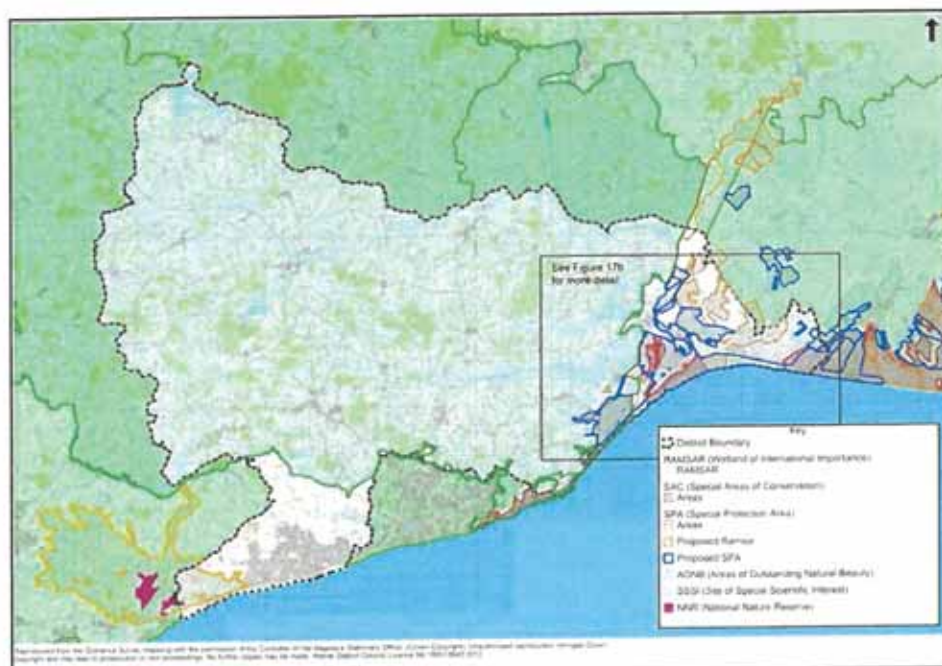
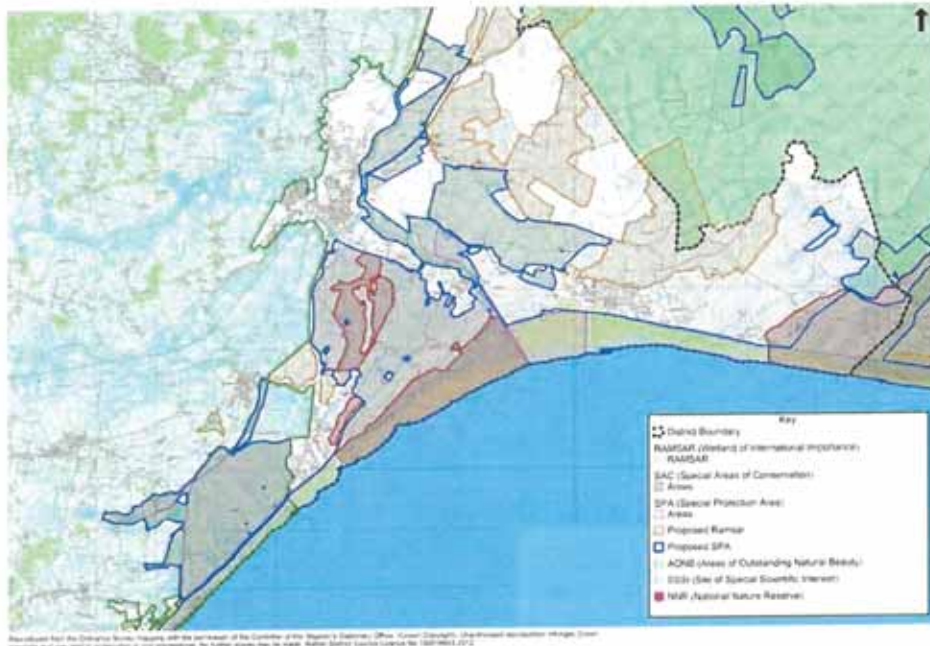


Figure 17a: Designated nature conservation sites in Rother District

# 17 - Environment



**Figure 17b: Designated nature conservation sites in Eastern Rother**

- 17.42 Rother has a number of designated sites of international significance within the district and is required to undertake an [Appropriate Assessment](#) (AA) to ensure that plans or projects either individually or in combination will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the international sites. The AA process has identified a number of potential impacts which have been addressed in the Core Strategy. There is a requirement for the sensitive management of tourism and recreational activity upon the International sites. To preserve the integrity of the International sites the Council alongside other agencies and stakeholders, will implement a Sustainable Access Strategy to monitor visitor numbers arising from all sources, and ensure responsible management of the Dungeness complex. Further elaboration can be found in Paragraph 10.21.
- 17.43 In addition to the above policy designations, the Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan also brings essential local context and complementary targets to support locally important habitats. 'Biodiversity Opportunity Areas' have been identified as the key areas for Biodiversity Action Plan habitat enhancement across the South East region and are set out in the South East Biodiversity Strategy.
- 17.44 An example of an initiative within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area is the 'Romney Marshes Living Landscape' project, Romney Marshes being a coastal wetland of regional-scale with potential for enhancement, restoration and re-creation of wetland habitats.

# 17 - Environment

- 17.45 New development provides an opportunity to create or restore habitats based on the targets set out in the SBAP and to contribute, on a smaller scale, to the formation of green infrastructure. It would be expected that developers integrate biodiversity into development schemes, by protecting existing habitats and features in development sites, and by enhancement to improve habitat and biodiversity, including measures to mitigate for any losses.
- 17.46 Effective management of habitats may be seen within a wider approach to 'green infrastructure'. This is defined as a strategic network of multi-functional green space which supports a wide range of purposes:
- The creation and enhancement of a sense of place,
  - Provision of recreation opportunities,
  - Preservation and enhancement of biodiversity,
  - Sustainable transport routes,
  - Improved water resources and flood management,
  - Contribution to climate change adaption and mitigation.
- 17.47 Areas of natural and semi-natural green space, and locally derived standards of provision in the district, are set out in the Council's [Open Space, Sports and Recreation Study 2007](#).
- 17.48 Regard is also had to targets set out in Natural England's standard for accessible natural green space (ANGSt) and East Sussex County Council's Strategic Open Space Study. The analysis in the Green Infrastructure Background Paper highlights the key strategic initiatives that will address local green space needs, including the proposed Combe Valley Countryside Park, further nature conservation initiatives in the Romney Marshes area, and at Bewl Water.



## Policy EN5: Biodiversity and Green Space

Biodiversity, geodiversity and green space will be protected and enhanced, by multi-agency working where appropriate, to:

- (i) Maintain and develop a district-wide network of green infrastructure where possible linking areas of natural green space;
- (ii) Protect and enhance the international, national and locally designated sites, having due regard to their status;
- (iii) Establish a major area of accessible open space at Combe Valley Countryside Park, between Bexhill and Hastings;
- (iv) Enhance the nature conservation value and multi-functional nature of the Romney Marsh Biodiversity Opportunity Area;
- (v) Support opportunities for management, restoration and creation of habitats in line with the opportunities identified for the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) and targets set out in the Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan;
- (vi) Continue to develop the wetland habitat at Bewl Water Reservoir, with compatible recreational uses;
- (vii) Increase accessibility to the countryside from urban areas, especially in the Hastings and Bexhill fringes;
- (viii) Ensure that development retains, protects and enhances habitats of ecological interest, including ancient woodland, water features and hedgerows, and provides for appropriate management of these features;
- (ix) Require developers to integrate biodiversity into development schemes by avoiding adverse impacts from development on biodiversity or habitat, or where wholly unavoidable, provide appropriate mitigation against or compensation for any losses. In any event, developers will also be expected to consider and promote opportunities for the creation and/or restoration of habitats appropriate to local context.