

Area: High ground to east of Medway valley in narrow band from Yalding to Sutton Valence, then eastwards through Broomfield and Kingswood to Platts Heath

Landscape Character

This area is distinguished from the Greensand Fruit Belt, both by the dramatic change in topography on its southern boundary and by its extensive woodland. It is a flat to gently sloping plateau with poor to medium-quality soils, on the dip slope of the Hythe Beds. It is distinguished by the presence of 20th century villages: Coxheath, Langley and Kingswood, and the fragmentation of woodland via residential development or large-scale arable cropping. Although there are some residual orchards, there has been a move towards pasture and paddocks, and the overall character is of rather dis-unified 20th-century encroachment on an older landscape fabric. This is further emphasised by the extensive views of Maidstone that can be obtained in some parts above the dwarf rootstock orchards that have replaced traditional orchards in many parts of this area, as elsewhere.

Landscape Designations

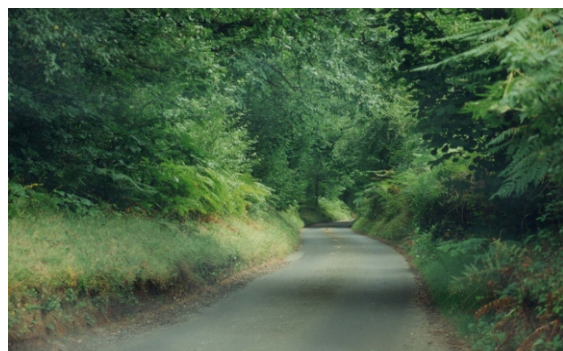
Most of this area lies outside the SLA designation, which is focused on the Greensand scarp immediately to the south rather than the plateau. However, the SLA does extend into parts of the southern edge of this area. The relevance of this designation, and its impact upon potential development, is discussed below.

Physical Influences

This Greensand plateau is elevated above the clay vales to north and south but this is only apparent at the scarp edge to the south, due to the extensive woodland and shelter belts which block wide views. The poor to medium-quality soils support woodland and arable cropping, formerly orchards.

Historical and Cultural Influences

This area is not as rich as the Greensand Fruit Belt in parkland and extensive gardens. Only Loddington House and Kingsbrook, Kingswood are described in the *Kent Gardens Compendium*. This reflects its mainly 20th century character, imposed on the mixed agricultural and wooded landscape that typifies this area and the many oasts that reflect its previous agricultural/industrial history.



A level lane winding through chestnut woodland



View of Low Weald from top of Greensand scarp at Linton

Buildings and Settlement

Coxheath and Kingswood are the only settlements of significant size in this area. Both are largely 20th century in origin, lacking the typical Kentish vernacular architectural tradition and displaying a variety of building styles, layout and materials. Kingswood is a smaller settlement nestling within extensive woodland. Most development is found along the B2163, which strides in a straight line along the Greensand ridge between Five Wents and Quarry Wood and becomes a major through-route at rush hour, contrasting strongly with the tranquillity of the wider countryside. Ragstone is used for walls, farm buildings and the oasts that are characteristic of this area.



Ragstone oast conversion

Landcover and Biodiversity

Two land uses dominate this area - woodland and arable cropping. Pasture and paddocks are also locally present, but the Abbey Wood/King's Wood complex is the largest area of woodland within the Borough, notwithstanding the fragmentation of Abbey Wood to south and east. This SNCI contains fragments of dry sessile oak woodland among pure sweet chestnut coppice and mixed conifer plantations, together with relict mixed broadleaved woodland with ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) and bell heather (*Erica cinerea*) along the rides. Other ground cover includes bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), wood spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*), wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria majalis*).

Quarry Wood, Farleigh (SNCI) lies at the western end of this area above the Medway valley. This ancient mixed broadleaved woodland has been partly converted to chestnut or conifer plantation, but retains large alder and elm stools along a woodbank and supports bluebell and early purple orchid (*Orchis mascula*).

Nut platts are also found locally and represent a now extremely rare traditional resource.



Hazel platt near Cock Street

Key Characteristics:

- ragstone walls to churches and farm buildings;
- oasts at east end;
- medium scale;
- high but flat to gently sloping Greensand plateau. Abrupt change from plateau to scarp slope, with clearly defined southern boundary;
- part densely wooded, but subject to fragmentation;
- orchards and shelterbelts replaced by large-scale arable and paddocks on the plateau, with pasture on the slopes;
- mixed 20th century development lacks unity;
- level lanes with no verges, tall shelterbelts and raised banks, sometimes with no hedges; occasionally wide undulating roads, neatly hedged;
- dramatic framed views over Weald from rather enclosed landscape;
- orange tone to soil;
- nut platts.

Landscape Condition

Condition

Detracting features: fragmentation of woodland
 Visual unity: low
 Cultural integrity: modified
 Ecological integrity: fragmented
 Functional integrity: fragmented

Robustness

Pattern of elements: disparate
 Consistency of pattern: low
 Distinctive features: 20th century residential development
 Historic continuity: modified
 Impact of landform: low except on southern boundary
 Extent of tree cover: extensive
 Extent of visibility: variable

CONDITION	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		Weak	Moderate	Strong
		ROBUSTNESS		

Landscape Guidance: improve and restore

Principles

- conserve and strengthen the character of the coppice woodlands through appropriate management. particularly along the edges of settlements and roads such as the B2163, where fragmentation has become an issue. Where proposed development abuts an area of coppice woodland, seek to reflect both the species mix and management in planting proposals, especially for road frontages;
- contain and separate settlements by retaining and reinforcing local characteristics, such as orchard boundaries, to reinforce the structure, variety and enclosure of this area. Shelterbelts around orchards are usually tall in this area, so future management should reflect this, and appropriate species, such as poplar and hazel, should be selected for planting;
- in the preparation of any planning application, consider the impact of the proposed development on other areas. Avoid any fragmentation of existing woodland or blocking existing views, especially down the Greensand Ridge to the south;
- the few remaining nut platts in the Borough are the last vestiges of a traditional and characteristic land use in Kent. They represent a valuable historic resource and should be conserved;
- extend the principle of securing management agreements for high quality habitats.

Practical Measures

- where proposed development includes a new access onto a rural lane, avoid the use of materials such as concrete kerbing, which would add an inappropriate urban character;
- existing paddocks have already altered the character of this area. Hedgerow planting of characteristic species, such as hazel and hornbeam, would assist in blending this land use more readily into the area;
- proposed paddocks require planning permission and appropriate measures should be included in any application to ensure that the proposed development, including new planting, will not adversely affect the rural character of this area;
- residential buildings in this area are largely 20th century in date, and of a great variety of styles. New development should reflect the traditional vernacular style found in neighbouring areas, especially in the use of ragstone, in order to bring some unity to the built environment. Planning applications for multiple housing should normally include sufficient boundary planting to act as a screen, especially along the B2163;
- many of the oasts in this area have been converted to residential occupation. Where new conversion is proposed, hard detailing around the building should reflect local styles and materials and a boundary planting of native and

locally characteristic species may be used to screen more ornamental planting around the building, where a more low-key, non-ornamental approach is not adopted;

- species characteristic of this area include pedunculate oak, chestnut coppice, and a hornbeam/ash/hazel mix. Downy birch, silver birch, aspen, alder, blackthorn and willow are typical species of damper areas.

Landscape Sensitivity

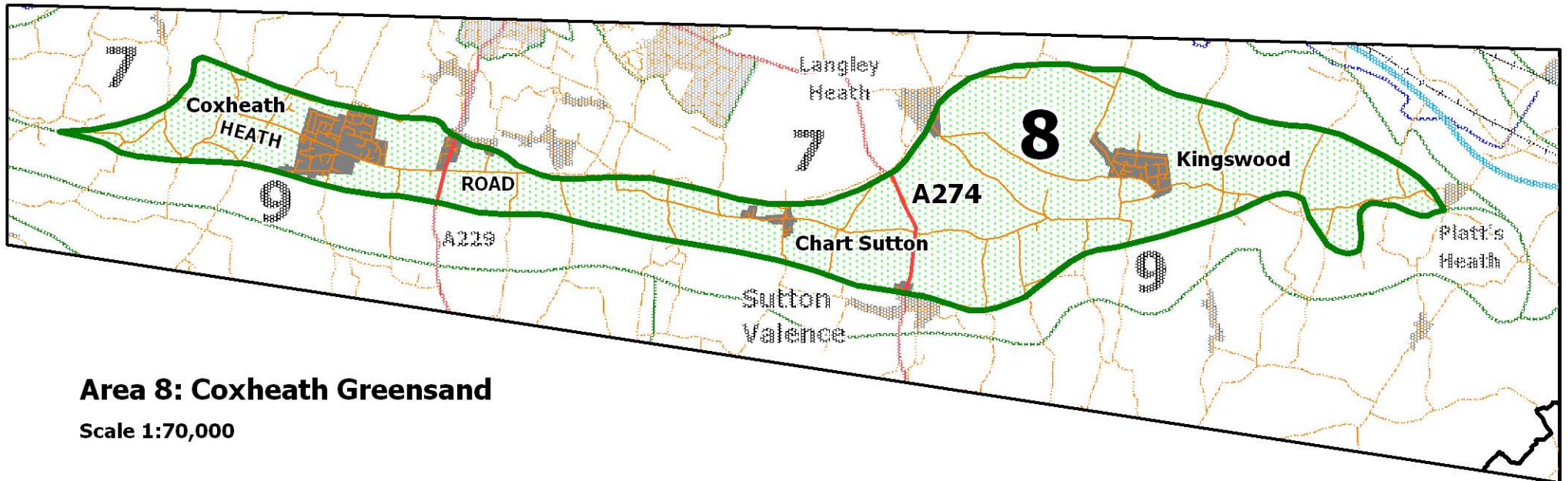
This area has already suffered a fragmentation of its landscape character, particularly along the main routes through it, where woodland edges have been eroded. It is of a fairly robust nature, as demonstrated by the extensive woodland and apparent enclosure. Despite the lack of topographical variation, the integration of development could be achieved by reflecting the local landscape pattern and avoiding the diminution of woodland cover. Particular attention should be paid to road frontages and the appearance of paddocks, whose detailing can dilute rural character with a whiff of urban fringe use. The area is too sensitive to support large-scale development, and other scales of development would have to respect rural character and ensure that the transport infrastructure could support it, without detriment to its rural lanes and hedgerows.

Typical Planting Mixes (Area 8: Acid sands)

<i>Woodland:</i>			
Beech	20	Ash	40
Field Maple	25	Hazel	40
Hazel	20	Hornbeam	20
Pedunculate Oak	30		
Yew	5		
	100%		100%

<i>Hedges:</i>		<i>Shelterbelts:</i>	
Beech	10	100% hazel or poplar	
Field Maple	10		
Hawthorn	80		
	100%		

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Area 8: Coxheath Greensand

Scale 1:70,000