

# The Overall Character of the Coastal Plain

The South Coast Plain is predominantly a flat and open landscape which provides a diverse range of habitats, including the wide curved bays of shingle beaches, sand dunes, sinuous coastal inlets and creeks, tidal mudflats, salt marsh, grazing marsh and natural harbours. The fertile soils in this character area have given rise to a dense pattern of large productive arable fields, market gardening and a predominance of glasshouses set around expanding settlements which enjoy the benign climate. The landscape is exposed in places to sea winds and floods and arable land is defined by poplar shelter belts, low hedgerows and rife and ditch drainage systems. Although woodland is not a dominant feature in the landscape there is localised remnant semi-natural broadleaved woodland as well as windswept oak trees and scrub. Large Elm trees which were once common features in the landscape have now been lost to Dutch Elm Disease. To the east the area becomes increasingly dominated by sprawling seaside towns and leisure developments and as the line of the Downs narrows the coastal strip rural/urban fringe issues have an increasing impact. Looking north from the Coastal Plain there are long views to the sweeping slopes of the South Downs balanced by long panoramic views from the hill tops and slopes of the Downs over the flat Coastal Plain and out to sea.



Windswept oaks along the coastal inlets



Panoramic view from the South Downs looking south over the flat and sweeping Coastal Plain to the sea



Worthing Pier has been a landmark in Worthing since it first opened in 1862



East Head - sand dune and salt marsh habitats. The estuary is an internationally important area for birds

## Key Landscape Characteristics

Protect, conserve and enhance:

- The tranquil and open character of the landscape
- Qualities of the fine long views from the slopes of the Downs to the coast and vice versa
- Undeveloped sections of coastline to maintain gaps and links to the sea
- The intimate and remote quality of coastal inlets and natural harbours
- Woodlands and copses
- The character of tidal creeks, mudflats, shingle beaches, vegetated shingle, dunes, grazing marshes
- The hedgerow framework, restoring where necessary, and retaining oak standards and other hedgerow trees
- Re-establish large trees to replace the Elm trees lost due to Dutch elm disease and storms
- Reedbeds, streams and deep drainage ditches (rifes)
- Mill sites and mill ponds, recreation lakes, ponds and coastal lagoons
- Wooden and rock groynes and breakwaters
- The network and character of narrow winding lanes and minor roads
- Designed landscapes associated with large country houses and their settings
- Narrow field entrances and traditional gates

## Historic Landscape

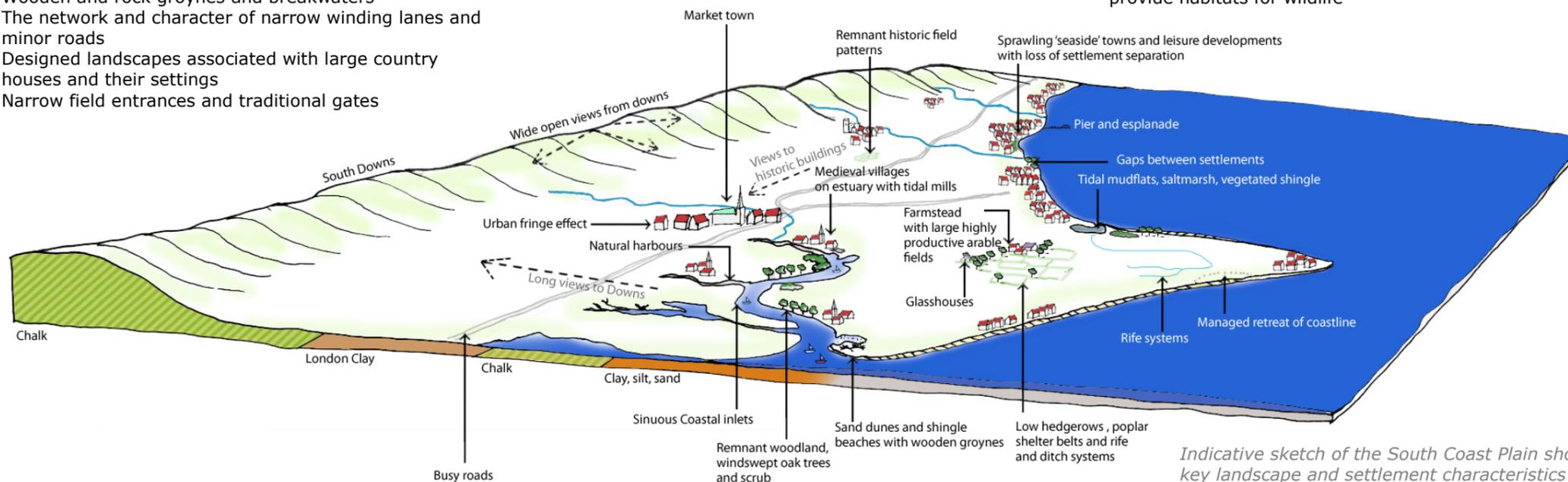
Protect, conserve and enhance:

- Historic character of shoreline
- Raised beaches
- Veteran trees
- Harbourside field patterns
- Remains of the Chichester to Arundel Canal
- Oyster beds, earthworks, old sea defences, quays, boatyards and harbours
- Timber groynes and beach huts
- Wartime defences
- Windmills, watermills and piers
- Victorian seaside relics
- Views of historic landmarks including Arundel Castle and Chichester Cathedral (the only Cathedral visible from the sea)
- Prehistoric - Roman settlement

## Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Protect, conserve and enhance the nature conservation value of:

- Undeveloped coastline - high ecological importance
- Vegetated shingle and sand dune habitats, many of national importance - as at Chichester Harbour
- Mud flats
- Coastal lagoons
- Areas of unimproved coastal grazing marsh - including salt marsh, acid grassland and rushy pasture
- Seasonally flooded pasture
- Broadleaved semi-natural woodland
- Oak woodland
- Reedbeds and deep drainage ditches (rifes)
- Coastal scrub
- Maritime cliff and slope
- Harbours of geomorphological significance e.g. Pagham Harbour
- The unique characteristics of historic buildings that provide habitats for wildlife



Indicative sketch of the South Coast Plain showing key landscape and settlement characteristics

# THE WEST SUSSEX LANDSCAPE Character Guidelines

## Local Distinctiveness The South Coast Plain Character Area



Local Distinctiveness is the essence of what makes a place special to us. It is what makes somewhere unique, a combination of the cultural landscape, wildlife, archaeology, history, geology, topography, traditions, buildings, materials, and crafts.

It is important to consider local distinctiveness within plans, policies and developments incorporating distinctive qualities and reflecting the county's sense of place.



Coastal towns in relation to landscape and settlement elements

'The Cultural Landscape is held together by the commonplace and the rare, the ordinary and the spectacular' (Common Ground)



SCP I

## Key Settlement Characteristics

### Overall existing pattern

The South Coast Plain's wealth of resources has made it an attractive area for settlement and this has produced a settlement pattern that can be traced back to the prehistoric period. The fertile soils, temperate climate and seaside location has always offered high agricultural yields, fishing, transport, trading opportunities and, more recently, varied leisure opportunities. During the early medieval period there developed an historic settlement pattern of dispersed large isolated farms and large manorial complexes, associated with areas of woodland and coppice and an evolving agricultural landscape from large open field systems to medieval field enclosure to large modern field patterns. Compact hamlets and early medieval market villages were predominantly sited along trading routes, the coastline and coastal inlets.

### The Attraction of the Seaside

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century the highly prized restorative powers of sea bathing and fresh sea air attracted many visitors, particularly from London. Several phases of development evolved former fishing villages into successful seaside resorts, such as Worthing and Bognor. Some of this development occurred in a piecemeal fashion and some through more conscious planning and composition. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries rows of terraced housing, late Georgian and regency buildings, crescent developments, squares and piers sprung up alongside the cobble/sandy beaches. Today the area still attracts many visitors particularly in the summer months.

### Maintain, protect and enhance where possible:

- The existing pattern of dispersed farmsteads and associated agricultural land and woodland
- The sense of remoteness of small coastal and coastal inlet settlements
- The scale, vernacular style, massing and materials of rural and village buildings
- Existing country houses and their settings while avoiding further erosion of the rural character, use and pattern of the landscape
- Conservation areas, listed buildings and their settings
- The sympathetic integration of larger settlements into the landscape, allowing open views out where the existing pattern allows
- Green gaps between the coastal towns and villages
- Rural character of the local road network through sensitive and appropriate design and signage



Quiet and intimate landscapes retain a sense of remoteness



Green open space on Littlehampton seafront

**Typical patterns** of settlement are described below [Note that the patterns are not exhaustive and further research should be carried out in relation to each site]

### Towns

**Location:** predominantly along the coast; on trading routes

**Distribution:** extensive, common and sprawling

**Origin:** former medieval market towns and fishing villages or early modern development with accelerated development in the early to late 20<sup>th</sup> century

**Circulation pattern:** both linear and nucleated occur

**Pattern:** a complex pattern created by centuries of gradual development. Rows of terraces; early examples face away from the sea; architectural compositions including crescents and squares

**Open spaces:** varied and suburban in style - private gardens, parks, occasional piers, esplanades, boating lakes and lidos, bowling greens, pitch and putt; the beach

**Edge character:** seaside towns are bounded by public open space with access to the beach and sea occasionally with esplanades. Soft edges formed by gardens, becoming progressively natural away from settlements



Vegetated shingle and coastal lagoon by coastal settlement



'World's longest bench', Littlehampton

### Villages and Hamlets

**Location:** predominantly along the coast, coastal inlets, the base of the Downs and along estuaries, often next to natural harbours

**Distribution:** dispersed and common

**Origin:** early medieval/medieval

**Circulation pattern:** both linear and nucleated occur

**Pattern:** hierarchy of buildings with church or farm as the largest.

**Open spaces:** private gardens, occasional large verges and small greens sometimes with a pond; occasional cricket grounds

**Edge character:** soft edges formed by gardens, usually complex and indented lacking long straight lines

### Farmsteads

**Location:** in close proximity to the fertile and drained soils

**Distribution:** widespread and common

**Origin:** some early medieval large farmsteads, early post medieval and 19<sup>th</sup> century

**Pattern:** mainly village based farmsteads (often now converted to dwellings), with loose courtyard plans, some large manorial complexes

**Materials:** thatch, clay tiles, Welsh slate, timber framing, barns clad in weatherboarding (rare)

**Relationship to landscape:** blank face of shed and barns to roads, associated hedgerows, shelter belts and large fields

### Dwellings

**Character:** small plots normally with a mix of detached, semi-detached and some terraces. Frontage continuous but often irregular in the centre of large settlements and broken into semi-detached and detached elsewhere. Front gardens are small except in large villages where there are none

**Relationship to road:** facing the front of the plot occasionally with some side on

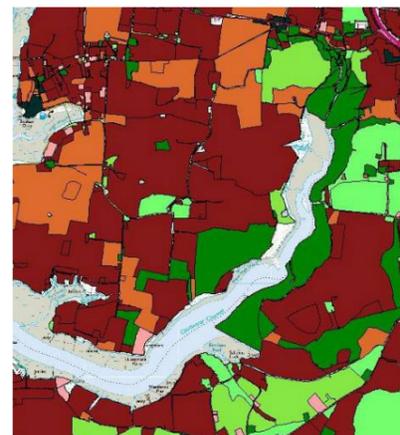
**Size:** normally two storey small scale cottages

**Walls:** multi/red brick sometimes with flared grey headers to create checkerboard pattern, timber framing (typically in the west), flint with occasional galleting, isolated examples of beach cobbles, hung tile less evident, sandstone (rare)

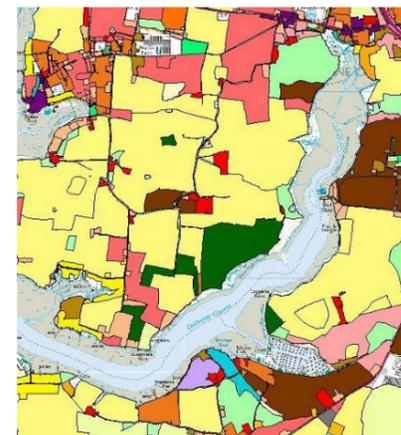
**Roof:** thatch, clay tiles, Welsh slate

**Enclosure:** hedges - typically hawthorn, yew, beech, hornbeam, box, privet, mixed native hedge; picket fences, hardwood post and rail, chestnut paling, flint and brick walls

## Historic Landscape Character Analysis (HLCA): The Age of the South Coast Plain Landscape



Map from the HLCA showing the age/period that the existing landscape has originated from



Map of the same area showing the existing historic land use type



Aerial photograph of corresponding area

**Key**

- Early Medieval (AD 410- 1065)
- Medieval (AD 1066- 1499)
- Early Post-Medieval (AD 1500- 1599)
- Late Post-Medieval (AD 1600- AD 1799)
- Early Modern (AD 1800- AD 1913)
- Early 20th century (AD 1914- AD 1945)
- Late 20th century (AD 1945- Present)

**Selected Key**

- Assart wood
- Consolidated strip fields
- Factories
- hamlet
- Irregular piecemeal enclosure
- Large Farmstead
- Market Town
- Market Village
- Modern field amalgamation
- Parliamentary Enclosure
- Mill ponds
- planned estate
- Planned private Enclosure
- Regular piece meal enclosure

The HLCA can be used to interpret how the landscape has changed due to human intervention over many historical periods. In the South Coast Plain isolated examples of medieval landscape exist but are rare; the landscape has changed significantly.

These maps of the Bosham area are for illustrative purposes only, for further information on the HLCA: [www.westsussex.gov.uk/character](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/character)

### Palette and Materials – Please note this guidance does not aim to inhibit innovative design or sustainable solutions



Thatch and flint cottage with hedge



Cobble cottages with brick wall



Flint cottage with slate roof



Multi/red brick with grey headers



Shingles on church roof



Multi/red brick cottage



Victorian seaside development



Laid hedge



Salt tolerant Tamarisk hedge by the coast



Flint wall with half round brick coping



Sea wall at Bognor with seaside motifs



Hazel wattle hurdles



Chestnut paling



Hardwood post and rail fencing



Domestic picket fence



Estate railing



Limestone (Dorset Purbeck) paving in larger settlement



New Cobble bus shelter in village. Timber shelters are also common



Rural angled kerb



The beach café at Littlehampton, modern use of form and materials



Edwardian seaside vernacular

**Further information:** West Sussex County Council – West Sussex Character Project [www.westsussex.gov.uk/character](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/character); Natural England – National Character Areas [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk); Chichester Harbour AONB [www.conservancy.co.uk](http://www.conservancy.co.uk); English Heritage – Historic Landscape Character [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk); Sussex Archaeological Society [www.sussexpast.co.uk](http://www.sussexpast.co.uk); Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre <http://sxbrc.org.uk>; Common Ground [www.commonground.org.uk](http://www.commonground.org.uk); Email: [environment.heritage@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:environment.heritage@westsussex.gov.uk)