



CUCKFIELD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

CUCKFIELD AND HAYWARDS HEATH DISTINCTIVENESS

Prepared by

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for

Cuckfield Parish Council

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Plan HDA1 Cuckfield and Surrounding Settlements

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Instructions

Hankinson Duckett Associates was appointed by Cuckfield Parish Council to consider the distinctiveness, in landscape character terms, of Cuckfield and Haywards Heath, in relation to the importance of preserving separation between the two settlements. This brief report will form part of the evidence base for the Cuckfield Neighbourhood Plan, which has been prepared in response to the 2012 Localism Act.

1.2 Location

Cuckfield and Haywards Heath are located towards the centre of Mid Sussex District, the easternmost district of West Sussex. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) borders the northern and western edges of Cuckfield, and covers the majority of the northern half of the district.

2 MID SUSSEX

2.1 Landscape Character

2.1.1 The Countryside Agency's Countryside Character Initiative divides England into 159 national 'character areas'. Mid Sussex is divided north to south by three of these character areas. The northern and central parts of the district are within the 'High Weald' character area (area 122), while the majority of the south of the district is within the 'Low Weald' character area (area 121). The southernmost part of Mid Sussex includes part of the South Downs (character area 125).

2.1.2 Cuckfield and Haywards Heath, towards the centre of Mid Sussex, are within the southern part of the High Weald. The Countryside Agency's Countryside Character Initiative describes key characteristics of the High Weald including the following:

- A well-wooded landscape rising above the Low Weald and deeply incised in many places to give a complex pattern of ridges and steep stream valleys.
- Main roads and settlements are sited along the prominent ridge-lines with a dense network of small, narrow, and winding lanes linking scattered villages, hamlets and farms.
- High forest, small woods and copses, and a network of hedges and shaws link small, irregular fields created from cleared woodland. Many of these contain flower-rich meadows bordered by species-rich hedgerows. Heavy clay soils have reduced the impact of agricultural change in the area and it is still, in the main, a quiet pastoral landscape with mixed farming predominating.
- Distinctive red tile, brick, local stone and timber building materials, often including hung tiles and white weatherboarding, are characteristic of the historic settlements, farms and cottages. Local building materials characterise the area but recent

'suburbanisation' of farmstead buildings is eroding the distinctive local style in many places.

2.1.3 The Mid Sussex Landscape Character Assessment was published in 2005 and subdivides the national character areas within the district into 10, more local, distinct landscape character areas, strongly related to the underlying geology. Cuckfield and Haywards Heath are located in the assessment's 'High Weald Fringes' character. Descriptions of this character area include:

- Wooded, often confined rural landscape of intimacy and complexity partly within the High Weald AONB.
- South and east-draining gills and broad ridges sweeping gently down to the Low Weald.
- Western part drained by the headwaters of The River Arun, eastern part around Scaynes Hill by the River Ouse.
- Long views over the Low Weald to the downs.
- Contains the township of Haywards Heath and the large medieval villages of Cuckfield and Lindfield.
- The landscape shares many of the characteristics of the High Weald proper, but is generally lower and gentler.

2.1.4 Whilst less dramatic than the High Weald to the north, and the South Downs to the south, the High Weald Fringes include undulating landscapes contained by hedgerows and shaws along with large tracts of pastural and arable landscape. There is a high degree of perceived naturalness and a well defined relationship between the rural landscape and settlement pattern. These are distinctive landscapes which contribute to the AONB, and the setting of towns and smaller settlements within the district.

2.2 Settlement

2.2.1 The Countryside Agency's Countryside Character Initiative identifies that the High Weald is characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern including medieval settlements and larger towns. A number of villages dating from the medieval period occupy elevated positions, on ridge tops within the wider complex topography of the High Weald. Larger towns in the High Weald, many with new housing developments on their fringes, are a contrast to the traditional character of the High Weald's smaller, more nucleated settlements.

2.2.2 The Mid Sussex Landscape Character Assessment describes the settlement form of the High Weald Fringes and states that: "The typically dispersed historic settlement pattern of the area reflects that of the High Weald proper".

2.2.3 Dispersed villages of the High Weald Fringes include the medieval village of Cuckfield and the smaller villages of Ansty, Bolney, Scaynes Hill, Staplefield and Warninglid, mostly with limited suburban development. Haywards Heath is a more recent town which has expanded significantly and now abuts the village of Lindfield to the northwest. The Mid Sussex Landscape Character Assessment identifies a number of notable historic buildings in the area, including examples of timber framing and Wealden stone, such as the 15th Century Ockenden Manor in Cuckfield. Cuckfield and Lindfield have churches with shingled spires and there are church towers at Haywards Heath, Bolney and Scaynes Hill.

2.2.4 The London to Brighton main line railway cuts broadly north-south through the High Weald Fringes and has been influential in the development of settlements in the area. The line was opened in 1841 with a station at Haywards Heath serving Cuckfield to the west and Lindfield to the east. Development around the station was initially modest, but by the late 19th century, Haywards Heath had expanded considerably, ultimately outgrowing both Cuckfield and Lindfield. Haywards Heath grew across an area of relative low-lying weald associated with a minor valley feature, to adjoin with Lindfield to the north-east. Cuckfield, located on distinct high ground to the west, remained a separate settlement to the west of Haywards Heath.

3 HAYWARDS HEATH

3.1 Landscape Structure

3.1.1 Haywards Heath is a large town to the east of Cuckfield, and north of Burgess Hill. The majority of the town is located within a relatively low-lying area within the High Weald Fringes, outside of the AONB. There is a minor valley feature which runs into the centre of the town from the wider Ouse valley to the northeast. Most of the town sits on complex topography which generally slopes inwards towards the valley features in the middle of the settlement (see plan HDA1).

3.1.2 The exception to this generally inward facing settlement pattern is the south-western portion of the town to the south of the A272, including the recent development at Bolnore, which extends south over a minor east-west ridge which forms the boundary between the Ouse/Scrase catchment to the north and the Adur catchment to the south-west. The land falls south from this ridgeline, on to a broad valley floor, before gradually rising again towards Burgess Hill to the south-west of Haywards Heath. Here the land consists of a mixture of pasture, arable fields, apparently unmanaged land and woodland, which helps separate Haywards Heath from Burgess Hill.

3.1.3 East of Haywards Heath the land generally slopes away from the settlement towards the wider Ouse Valley and largely consists of small scale pastoral fields. Lindfield on the northeast corner of Haywards Heath lies adjacent to the Ouse River valley sides. The wider valley, to the northeast, contains a mixture of parkland, recreation, woodland and pasture.

3.1.4 A ridgeline to the north of Haywards Heath contains the town from the wider landscape with the existing settlement situated on the lower south-facing slopes of this ridgeline along with an area of undeveloped land on similar topography. This area, to the east of the railway line, mainly consists of a large block of woodland, a golf course and some smaller pastoral fields adjacent to Haywards Heath.

3.1.5 To the west of the railway the ridgeline continues west towards Cuckfield. Here there is a mixture of arable fields, woodland, pasture and recreation adjacent to the settlement, with a significant area of intact parkland at the Borde Hill Estate to the northwest of the town.

3.2 Urban Character

3.2.1 Haywards Heath is a suburban town with Victorian origins. The town grew rapidly by the late 19th century due to the London and Brighton main line railway, which attracted commuters, trade and industry. With its relatively recent origins, there are few listed buildings and monuments in the town.

3.2.2 The Haywards Heath Historic Character Assessment, prepared in 2005 by Roland B Harris as part of the Sussex Extensive Urban Survey, identifies that Haywards Heath has little in the way of vernacular architecture. The report comments that even though Haywards Heath is of interest as a town of the railway age, little survives from the two decades after the arrival of the railway, with the railway station rebuilt twice and many associated buildings demolished. Utilising the numerous local brickfields, most post-railway buildings are brick. The assessment identifies 9 historic urban character areas. The majority of these are considered to have 'low' vulnerability, and none are higher than 'medium to low' vulnerability.

3.2.3 The growth of Haywards Heath accelerated during the 20th century, with extensive interwar development, mostly to the east of the railway which extended the town to connect with Lindfield. Development to the west of the railway line has been less extensive, reaching as far as Paige's and Penlands Woods by the 1970s. Recently the town has extended westward at Bolnore, with a large modern housing and relief road development.

4 CUCKFIELD

4.1 Landscape Structure

4.1.1 Cuckfield is a large village located approximately 2.5km to the west of Haywards Heath, approximately 4km to the east of the A23, and 6km to the north of Burgess Hill. The village adjoins the High Weald AONB to the north and west.

4.1.2 Typically for villages in the Weald, Cuckfield sits on a high point within the wider landscape (see plan HDA1), at the convergence of an east-west ridge and several spurs which separate the Ouse/Scrase catchment to the north-east from the Adur catchment to the south-west. The majority of the village is located on a southwards-projecting spur off the main east-west ridge. South Street and the village church are at the lowest part of the village at approximately 93m AOD. The main street steadily climbs to about 100m AOD at the junction of High Street and Broad Street. Thereafter the High Street follows the crest of the spur. Residential areas extend east and north from the village centre, with linear low density development extending beyond the main 'built up area', southeast along the B2184.

4.1.3 The characteristic ridge-top 'hour glass' form of the settlement is a result of the amalgamation with Whitemans Green to the north. This settlement form allows the rural valley landscape to the east, to penetrate into the heart of the village and provides open views out, and across the rural landscape, to the South Downs.

4.1.4 Unlike Lindfield, which adjoins the town of Haywards Heath, Cuckfield has remained a separate ridge top village, despite recent westward expansion of Haywards Heath.

4.1.5 To the north of Cuckfield, the landform falls to the wide valley feature of the River Ouse which cuts east-west through the weald, before rising again to the High Weald further north. To the south, the landscape falls to the wide Adur valley before reaching the foothills and iconic elevated downland of the South Downs, part of the recently designated South Downs National Park.

4.1.6 To the east and west of the village, the land falls away steeply into typical gills orientated to the south-west and south-east. Due to intervening undulating topography and vegetation, the rooftops of Haywards Heath to the east can be glimpsed from a relatively limited number of locations surrounding Cuckfield.

4.2 Urban Character

4.2.1 Cuckfield has a long history, with records of a settlement dating from the late 11th century. The village grew as a market town and by the early 19th century was an important

coaching stop on the London and Brighton turnpike route. Growth of the village came to a halt by the mid to late 19th century, with the focus of more recent growth in the area switching to Haywards Heath, due to its location on the railway line. Since then, Cuckfield has seen relatively modest growth compared to Haywards Heath.

4.2.2 The majority of Cuckfield's urban character reflects its long history and relatively limited recent growth. The village has nearly 100 listed buildings and monuments, including the Grade I listed Holy Trinity Church to the south of the village.

4.2.3 The Cuckfield Historic Character Assessment, prepared in 2005 by Roland B Harris as part of the Sussex Extensive Urban Survey, describes the surviving historic buildings and their building materials. Pre-1500 buildings are identified as timber framed often with sandstone plinths. Buildings from the 16th century continue to use timber frames, with the exception of the sandstone school. Although timber frames are still prevalent amongst surviving 17th century buildings, sandstone was increasingly used. By the 18th century brick is the dominant building material. The Cuckfield Historic Character Assessment identified 6 historic urban character areas. Half of these areas are considered to have either 'high' or 'relatively high' vulnerability.

4.2.4 Cuckfield has seen modest growth since the start of the 20th century, with small Edwardian and interwar developments, and low density ribbon development. Since 1970 there have been some infill developments and minor extensions.

5 SEPARATION

5.1 Landscape

5.1.1 Countryside between Cuckfield and Haywards Heath, is undulating, falling from generally east-west running ridges and spurs, towards the Scrase Stream and lower land to the east. The landscape consists predominately of small to medium scale grass pastoral fields with an intact network of boundary hedgerows, hedgerow trees, tree groups, woodland blocks, and riparian vegetation along the Scrase Stream and its tributaries. A number of fields are formed from Medieval assarts (fields cut from the original Wealdon woodlands), and there are areas of semi-ancient woodland.

5.1.2 Human influence within the landscape between Cuckfield and Haywards Heath is limited to the occasional scattered farmstead and low-key farming, resulting in a peaceful, relatively tranquil landscape. To the south of this area there are low density dwellings with large gardens along part of A272, and other scattered urban influences further south including a recreation ground.

5.1.3 Despite the elevated position of Cuckfield, there are limited views of Haywards Heath from Cuckfield. The intervening undulating landscape with its woodland, hedgerows, and trees, forms effective physical and visual separation, preventing coalescence between the two settlements. Low density dwellings along the B2184, which extend from the southeast of Cuckfield towards Haywards Heath, have reduced the sense of separation in this area, although physical separation remains in the form of fields either side of the A272 further east.

5.2 Biodiversity

5.2.1 The landscape which separates Cuckfield from Haywards Heath has a rich biodiversity, as noted in the Biodiversity Assessment completed for the Cuckfield Neighbourhood Plan (Cuckfield Parish Council, 2012). The Borde Hill Millennium Wood, Blunt's Wood and Paiges Meadow Local Nature Reserve, further identified ancient woodland and the surrounding fields and hedgerows within this area hosts plentiful wildlife, both flora and fauna.

5.2.2 The Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre (SBRC) Inventory contains numerous rare species which are noted within the Cuckfield area, and within the gap between Cuckfield and Haywards Heath. This includes examples of species that are in decline:

- Nightingales were recorded in Blunts Wood and Millennium Wood by authoritative observers in both 2012 and 2013, the first observations so recorded for a great many years. This is a bird causing national concern because of its rapid fall in numbers. A further six birds that are red-listed (and therefore in danger) in breeding bird surveys and by the SBRC have been observed in the Cuckfield area.
- Butterflies in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan are listed under Section 41 of the 2006 NERC act on species of principal importance, which are a material consideration in the planning process. Five of these species are recognised by Sussex Butterfly Conservation as being present in the Cuckfield area. Two of these – the rare Purple Emperor and the uncommon Brown Hairstreak have been observed annually in, respectively, Millennium Wood and Blunts Wood in the course of 2011-2013.

5.2.3 The Biodiversity Assessment highlights numerous biodiversity examples similar to above. These make a significant contribution, and add to, distinctiveness of the area, and are an integral and important part of the landscape in which they have evolved. Not only would direct loss of habitat occur through development of the gap between Cuckfield and Haywards Heath, but also the ability for wildlife to move across the wider countryside would be impaired through deterioration of the habitat corridor currently present.

6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Haywards Heath is a large town which has grown in modern times to cover undulating landform which generally falls inwards towards a valley, within a low lying area of the High Weald Fringes. The town extends northwards to meet the village of Lindfield and has spread southwards over a ridge spur. Haywards Heath has extensive inter and post war housing development and limited vernacular architecture.
- 6.2 Cuckfield on the other hand, is a ridge top village with medieval origins, numerous historic buildings, and relatively limited modern expansion. It is typical of villages in the area which are located on high points within the surrounding Wealden landscape. Cuckfield's 'hour glass' pattern is strongly related to converging ridges and spurs, with the extent of the village general limited to the upper parts of the ridges and spurs.
- 6.3 Urban analysis of Cuckfield has identified the majority of the settlement as vulnerable to future development. The settlement would be adversely affected by the loss of separation from Haywards Heath.
- 6.4 Separation between Cuckfield and Haywards Heath is maintained by the rural landscape to the east of Cuckfield, with its intact patchwork of pasture, trees, woodland, hedgerow network, limited human influence and rich biodiversity. The landscape between Cuckfield and Haywards Heath separates the two settlements both physically and visually, helping to preserve their distinct identities.
- 6.5 Further development within the countryside forming the separation between Cuckfield and Haywards Heath would significantly erode the settlements' distinctiveness, separate identities and sense of separation. Existing and already planned development has reduced this area to its limit of effectiveness. Therefore, to prevent long-term coalescence of the two settlements, new development should be resisted.

