

Countryside Character
Volume 7:
South East & London

*The character of
England's natural and
man-made landscape*

South Downs



Key Characteristics

- Prominent Chalk outcrop rising gently from the South Coast Plain with a dramatic north-facing scarp and distinctive chalk cliffs formed where the Downs end abruptly at the sea. A chalk landscape of rolling arable fields and close-cropped grassland on the bold scarps, rounded open ridges and sculpted dry valleys.
- Lightly settled landscape with scattered villages, hamlets and farmsteads – flint is conspicuous in the buildings, walls of villages, farms and churches.
- Roman roads and drove roads are common and characteristic features and the area is rich in visually prominent prehistoric remains, particularly Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows and prominent Iron Age hillforts.
- In the east, rivers from the Low Weald cut through the Downs to form river valleys and broad alluvial floodplains with rectilinear pastures and wet grazing meadows – a contrast with the dry uplands. Above these valleys, the high, exposed, rounded uplands of white chalk have a simple land cover of few trees, an absence of hedgerows, occasional small planted beech clumps, and large arable areas and some grassland.
- The eastern Downs have a distinctive escarpment which rises prominently and steeply above the Low Weald. It is indented by steep combes or dry valleys.
- Woodlands – both coniferous and broadleaved – are a distinctive feature of the western Downs.
- In the west, large estates are important features with formal designed parkland providing a contrast to the more typical farmland pasture.

Landscape Character

The South Downs are a long prominent spine of chalk which stretches from the chalk downland of Hampshire, eastwards across West Sussex until it is sheared off at precipitous coastal cliffs in East Sussex. The steep, northward-facing

chalk escarpment of Sussex overlooks the patchy mosaic of fields, woods and heathlands of the Low Weald and, further west in Sussex, the Wealden Greensand. The western edge of the Downs flows into the chalk of the Hampshire Downs and, to the south, the Downs dip giving way to the narrow wedge of coastal plain and farmland which separate them from the English Channel.

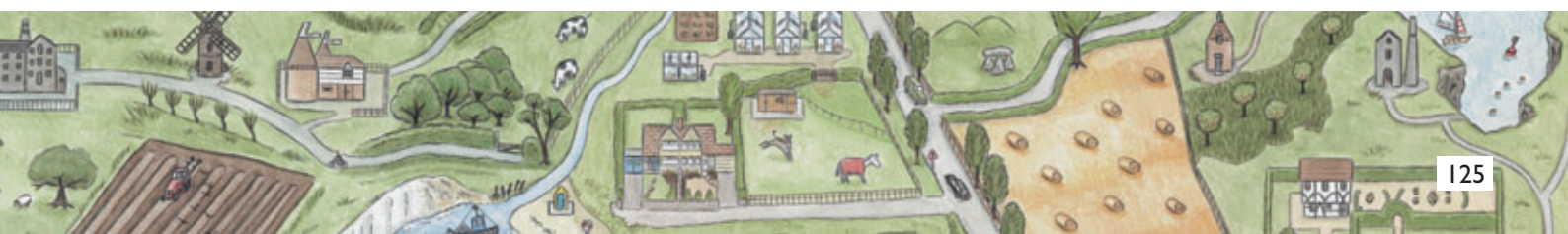


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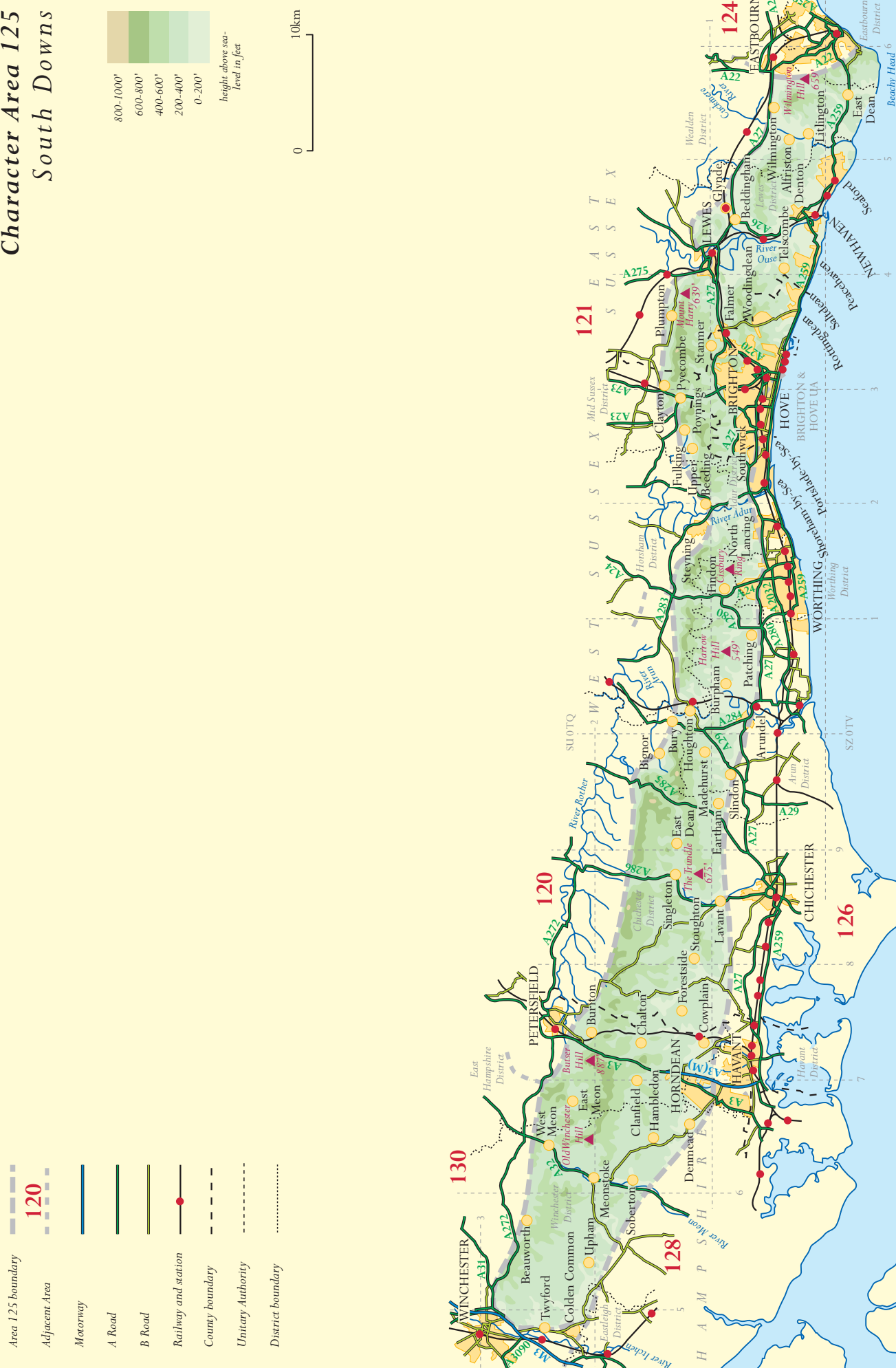
The white cliffs of the Severn Sisters, Beachy and Seaford Heads mark the spectacular eastern end of the South Downs where they join the sea.

The Downs are a dramatic and well defined Chalk outcrop with an elevated, open and expansive character. Traditionally the Downs have been an important arable asset with, now in limited places, a sweep of rolling close-cropped chalk grassland or woodland on many of the scarp slopes. This uniform and informal landscape is often covered in a large-scale pattern of grass leys and cereals, giving a regular but often fragmented appearance. The Downs still have a 'wild', exposed, and remote character, greatly valued in the heavily populated south.

Within this simplified overall pattern there are important contrasts. In the west in Hampshire, the landscape is open and dominated by agriculture and grassland. The steep



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scarp slopes fade in prominence beyond Beacon Hill to St Catherine's Hill and Twyford Down where they meld into the open chalk landscape of the adjoining Hampshire Downs. The axis here of the ridge is less noticeable and the east/west alignment is visibly lost and becomes more complex as the Downs diminish. Moving east, extensive woodland creates a more enclosed character as the Downs pass into West Sussex. Further east still, the dry, rolling uplands are cut through with major valleys as the rivers from the Low Weald meander through wet meadow pastures to the English Channel.

On the main scarp in the east, mature woodland sits on the lower slopes while the rough texture of chalk downland turf, often patchy with scrub, dominates the landform and contrasts strongly with the pastoral lowlying patchwork pattern of the Low Weald. The scarp face has few articulating features (although Mount Caburn and Beddingham Hill are noted exceptions) and dominates in southerly views from the Low Weald. In the west the scarp is often clothed in continuous woodland which enhances the linear landform and disguises undulations in landform. The trees on the skyline give scale and definition to the scarp face which means that the deceptive sense of great height is lessened.

Physical Influences

The east-west Chalk ridge of the South Downs is the southern remnant of a once extensive dome of Chalk. The central Wealden portion was eroded during the Tertiary period leaving two ridges – now known as the North Downs and the South Downs. The South Downs have a gentle but broad rolling dip-slope inclined to the south, with a dramatic north-facing escarpment.

Butser Hill, Beacon Hill and Old Winchester Hill form prominent ridges in Hampshire before the South Downs gradually diminish to the west. The escarpment in Sussex forms an undulating ridge along the northern margin of this character area, broken only where the principal river valley systems have eroded a route through to the coast. In other places, steep combes, as at Devil's Dyke, slice into the scarp. It is a steep but rounded slope, with combes cut back into the ridge line, whilst in other places spurs and chalk outliers protrude into the Low Weald below. Southwards from the main scarp, lines of hills and ridges form an intermittent but prominent secondary escarpment which result from variations in the resistance of the different Chalk outcrops. Ancient wave platforms, features of the dip slope, are also common and finally at the Seven Sisters - a range of white chalk cliffs between Eastbourne and Brighton - the South Downs drop abruptly to the sea.

The mass of Chalk in Sussex has been cut into separate blocks by the valleys of the principal rivers – Arun, Adur,

Ouse and Cuckmere – which flow through to the sea. Flat valley bottoms and a meandering river course enclosed by steep-sided slopes with minor cliffs, are, in many places, typical features of these river valleys. The valley floors provide a strong contrast to the surrounding open fields on the higher ground. The river Meon in Hampshire follows a similar course and cuts through the South Downs, the valley broadening in the adjoining coastal plain, until it reaches the sea.



JOHN TYLERSUSSEX DOWNS CONSERVATION BOARD

Broad alluvial floodplains, such as the Cuckmere Valley pictured here, consist of fertile pasture used for dairy cattle. Other river valleys such as the Ouse, Arun, Meon and Adur cut through the Downs and provide contrasting narrow belts of flat land within the rolling landscape of the chalk.

Historical and Cultural Influences

Extensive clearance of forest for grazing, and the first introduction of domestic animals and crops, occurred during the Neolithic period. The Chalk Downs were favoured for their light, easily cultivated soils, defensive advantages and relative accessibility as shown by evidence of Neolithic tracks. Clearance was aided by the locally available flint (from the chalk) for tools as evidenced by the Neolithic flint mines at Cissbury Ring and evidence at Old Winchester Hill. The Trundle, a causewayed camp of concentric rings and ditches prominently sited on the dip slope, is one of the best examples of Neolithic enclosure in the country used for holding stock, for ceremonies and trading.

There is evidence to suggest that, during the Bronze Age, there was a temporary change to a nomadic pastoral system, before a return to general mixed farming. The increase in woodland clearance and active management would have created open landscapes and extensive grasslands on the ridge of the Downs. The round barrows

of the Bronze Age are among the most common archaeological features found on the Downs including, for example, the burial mounds of the Devil's Jumps near Hooksway and those on Bow Hill above Kingley Vale and at Old Winchester Hill.

As agricultural communities became more nucleated and widespread in the Iron Age, the south facing dip-slope became covered with well-defined field systems (of small geometric fields bounded by lynchets), managed woodlands and pasture. Hillforts sited prominently in strategic locations, such as Cissbury Ring and Old Winchester Hill, reflected political and economic centres while other remaining earthworks such as cross dykes represented boundary demarcations or stock enclosures.



The South Downs consist of an archetypal chalk landscape of rolling hills, steep scarp slopes with dry valleys and a rich archaeological character. Centuries of sheep grazing on steep slopes have produced a network of tracks following the contours of the hills.

The Romans, further exploiting the light soils, created large arable estates and agricultural trade increased. By the 10th century, the availability of pasture on the Downs coupled with the fertile soils of the South Coast Plain enabled further enrichment of the estates. In some cases, these early estates gave rise to the large and rich estates of later centuries. The latter included impressive country houses, which were to share in the influencing of the English Landscape Movement, and the spread of parkland with its expansive pasture, clumps and follies.

By the 19th century, beech plantations had begun to appear and prosperous mixed farming of cereal and fodder together with sheep pasture characterised the Downs. However, this period was followed by a depression caused by cheap imports from abroad which led to a decline in grazing and cereal production. Farm buildings, hedgerows and woodlands all became neglected.

The present day concentration of woodland in the central part of the Downs is partly due to land ownership by large estates, coupled with the more sheltered inland location. Large-scale timber production had historically been linked to the navy at Portsmouth and had tended towards the thinner soils of the upper slopes, thus changing the inherent vegetation pattern.

Buildings and Settlement

With the exception of the major north-south routes which cut through the open Downs, there are few roads within the Downs themselves and, where they do occur, they are small and rural. Settlement is sparse, being confined to scattered villages, hamlets and moderately large, isolated farms with traditional barns.

The eastern end of the Downs is hemmed in by the coastal plain conurbations; these are less intrusive in the west, but pylons, telecommunications masts, road traffic, glass houses and recreation grounds are widespread throughout the area. The urban area itself is visually very intrusive in the east, along the southern edge of the dip-slope, particularly where there are densely built-up areas on relatively elevated land.

On the lower parts of the Downs there are scattered groups of modern farm buildings tucked into the dry valleys of the dip slope, or clustered along the foot of the escarpment. The remainder of the Downs has limited settlement and few buildings.

The traditional buildings are of brick or flint, brick quoins and window details and roofs, of tile or slate. Apart from the large flint barns on the open sites in the Sussex Downs, there are generally few buildings or roads on the open spurs and the often isolated farm buildings are reached by long chalky tracks.

Many villages nestle in the valleys, alongside a stream. They tend to be small clusters of traditional flint and brick buildings, set within mature trees and sometimes surrounding a village pond. Such villages are commonly associated with the parkland estates which are evidenced by the presence of well-built enclosing walls of flint. Single farmsteads, many with large modern buildings, are common here. On the south margins of the dip slope, villages tend to have a more diverse mix of buildings, the traditional flint interspersed with rendered and brick houses.

Notable exceptions to the traditional built character include the urban extension of Worthing, Brighton and Peacehaven, and the dual carriageways of the, M3, A24, A3 and A23. One of the more recognisable, recent developments in the area is the ridgetop grandstand of Goodwood Racecourse which breaks the saddle of the skyline above Goodwood. Arundel Castle is an imposing building, sitting high above the Arun floodplain, it is one of the most distinctive landmarks in the area. Much of it is a relatively new

structure, though the original castle was a Norman motte and bailey.

Windmills with huge white sails were once a regular feature in the South Downs landscape. Now only a few remain such as the Jack and Jill windmills perched on the crest of the Chalk near Clayton and also the prominent Halnaker Windmill, above Goodwood, which can be seen from parts of the South Coast Plain.



JOHN TYLERSUSSEX DOWNS CONSERVATION BOARD

The A27 cuts through the downland on the northern fringes of Hove, introducing development pressures from the encroaching town.

Land Cover

The land use pattern of the South Downs is predominantly centred on cereals and sheep, and also woodland that has survived on the steeper slopes which were traditionally difficult to clear. However, extensive plantations exist on the enclosed uplands of the dipslope in western Sussex. Cereals are grown predominantly on the deeper soils of the less exposed lower slopes. The vivid colours of the crops and the texture of the chalk fragments in ploughed soils are a particularly noticeable feature on the Downs.

The grazing of sheep maintains open and homogeneous semi-natural chalk grassland habitats that are noted for their particularly rich botanic diversity. The chalk downland turf is seen as the traditional clothing of the Downs, especially those steeper scarp slopes in the east and far west where it has developed over centuries without cultivation or chemicals. The appearance of naturalness is enhanced by the diversity of plant species, some of them rare flowering herbs, which combine to form the soft springy turf. However, due to a decrease in sheep farming, chalk grassland now only remains in small areas which are often isolated and difficult to manage. As a result, downland farming is now mainly a combination of arable crops and improved grass leys. The lack of grazing has led to the invasion of scrub in most of the chalk grassland areas which detracts from the traditional smooth appearance of the South Downs landscape.

There are scattered copses on the skyline but generally there are few trees or woods in the eastern Downs. Hedgerows are rare but, where they occur, they tend to be sparse, narrow and sporadic, with a few stunted trees. They tend to be near isolated upland farmsteads or alongside ancient chalky tracks.

Tree cover creates a much more enclosed atmosphere in the centre of the Downs with intensive farming, enclosed by hedgerows with hedgerow trees, and scattered woodland. A number of designed parklands, sometimes altered by cultivation, are also found to the west.

The present day tree cover is either broadleaved woodland, with beech, ash and sycamore, or is mixed with conifers. There are also some large plantations of Corsican pine and western red cedar and isolated remnants of yew forest. The chalk ash or beech hangers on the escarpment of East Hampshire are notable features. English elm is now largely confined to areas around the coastal towns of East Sussex and the Cuckmere Valley.

The vegetation of the river valleys is markedly different. There are permanent semi-improved pastures providing grazing for cattle in late spring and summer. The pasture at the edges of the valleys is often enclosed by hedges and copses, lines of alder, and willow and poplar, some of which are pollarded. The alluvial soils – some of the most productive in the area – support crops and intensive dairying.

Many of the Downland footpaths and bridleways follow drove roads and transport routes which have been used for centuries along the accessible downland tops. The high parts of the Downs, including the South Downs Way, are the most important recreational features of the Downs. The escarpment tops and the coastal headlands are particularly popular places due largely to the panoramic views, ease of access and apparent sense of remoteness.

The Changing Countryside

- Past expansion of arable cropping, improved grass leys, intensive livestock systems and scrub encroachment have reduced the extent of chalk grassland since 1945. Most of what remains are isolated remnants restricted to the steep scarp slopes.
- More recently, there has been a reversion of significant arable areas to grassland and restoration of sheep grazing. Also fencing of significant areas of the Downs under the South Downs Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme.
- Afforestation, both coniferous and beech, has occurred since the 19th century but is less of an issue today.
- Loss and decline in quality of beech hangers/woodland in the central part of the Downs landscape due to lack of management and storm damage.



JOINT TYLERSUSSEX DOWNS CONSERVATION BOARD

Brick and flint cottages are characteristic of the few scattered villages and hamlets to be found in the South Downs.

- Modern drainage of the river valleys alters the traditional character, producing a more formal, regularly patterned landscape of arable fields – for example, significant areas of wet grassland in the Cuckmere, Arun and Ouse valleys are under pressure from drainage and lowering of the water table.
- The open landscape is vulnerable to change from new farm buildings, urban edge pressures extending from the heavily built-up coastal fringe onto the Downs and from prominent communication masts on exposed skylines.
- Pressures for road improvements often associated with major cuttings and/or tunnels in the Downs.
- Increasing recreational pressures including greater demands on public rights of way by walkers, horse riders, mountain bikes and from off-road vehicles. Visitors to honey pot sites and demand for formal recreation such as golf courses, are also increasing within the Downs.
- Damage to, and loss of, archaeological remains from agricultural and recreation uses.
- Winterbourns are becoming increasingly dry from continued over-abstraction of the chalk aquifer and lack of recharge due to successive dry years.
- Disused chalk quarries are visually prominent features within the downland slopes and have been utilised as major landfill sites.
- Loss of traditional boundaries such as hedgerows and flint walls to the increase in use of different types of fencing.

Shaping the future

- The management of wetlands and river valleys, possibly by use of natural processes, needs to be addressed.
- The protection of existing chalk grassland from agriculture or scrub invasion can be achieved through sympathetic grazing and scrub management regimes. This might include targeted reversion of arable to permanent pasture, in particular the creation of species-rich chalk grassland on the upper and the steeper slopes of the Downs and in parkland.
- The conservation and restoration of beech hangers and valley woodland on the escarpment needs to be considered.
- There is scope for tree planting on the edge of settlements adjacent to downland farms.
- There are opportunities to protect archaeological remains within their setting.

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Glossary

hanger: a wood on the side of a steep hill

leys: land put down to grass or clover for a limited period of years

South Coast Plain



Key Characteristics

- Major urban developments including Portsmouth, Worthing and Brighton linked by the A27/M27 corridor dominate much of the open, intensively farmed, flat, coastal plain.
- Coastal inlets and 'harbours' contain a diverse landscape of narrow tidal creeks, mudflats, shingle beaches, dunes, grazing marshes and paddocks. From the Downs and coastal plain edge there are long views towards the sea and the Isle of Wight beyond.
- Trees are not a dominant feature – there are some small woods and a few windswept individual trees in the farmland or the occasional poplar shelter belt.
- A pattern of large arable fields, defined by low hedgerows, are often interspersed by horticultural glasshouse 'estates' and isolated remnants of coastal heath.
- The complex series of creeks, mudflats and shingle beaches along the coastal edge becomes less apparent to the east with the intensively-farmed plain increasingly dominated by disordered seaside towns and leisure developments.

Landscape Character

The South Coast Plain lies between the dip slope of the, South Downs and the waters of the English Channel, Solent and part of Southampton Water. The Plain stretches from Southampton Water in the west, widening to about 10 miles across to form the Manhood Peninsula and Selsey Bill, before tapering eastwards towards Brighton. The coastline includes several inlets such as Chichester and Langstone Harbours which are particularly distinctive local landscapes.

The flat coastal plain has, in part, an intricately indented shoreline and, although rather exposed to south-westerly winds, temperatures are relatively warm, soils are high quality and the growing season is long. The area is thus intensively farmed and includes a prosperous horticultural industry with glasshouse, development and tourist trade.

The area exhibits one of the longest and most concentrated stretches of shoreline ribbon development in Britain and each coastal town or village has developed almost to the high water mark.

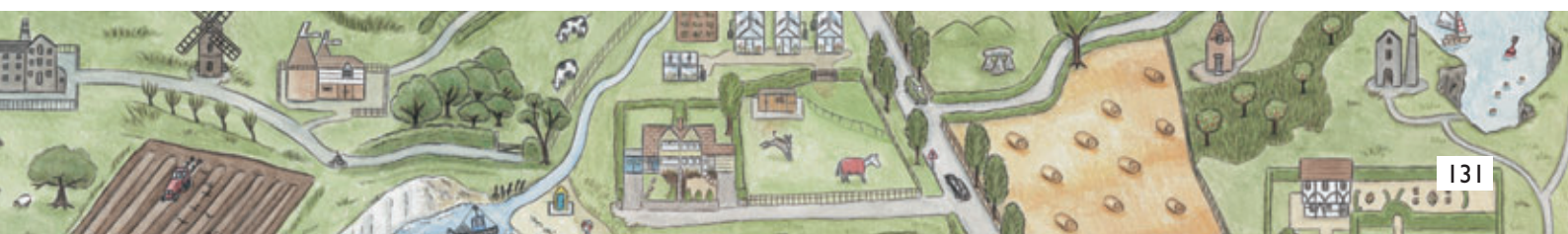
The Plain is broadly divided into the coastal margins which are heavily influenced by the sea, the expansive lower coastal plain which occupies most of the area, and the upper coastal plain. The latter forms the transitional area between the lower plain and the Chalk dip slope of the South Downs to the east and with the South Hampshire Lowlands further west.



JOHN TYLER/COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

Mud flats and salt marshes with characteristic inlets fringe the undeveloped harbours.

While large parts of the coastal margins have been urbanised by the spread of seaside towns and budget holiday accommodation, the remaining open coastline contains secretive inlets and enclosed harbours. The exposed shoreline is an exhilarating, open, linear landscape of shingle and sand with the great expanse of the sea itself as a backdrop. This shoreline is intermittently indented with inlets and estuaries where broad expanses of sheltered water are edged by an attractive mix of mudflats, marshes, wetland scrub and lowlying fields occasionally interrupted



*Character Area 126
South Coast Plain*



by small creeks. Chichester Harbour, for example, is one of the largest natural harbours along the South Coast Plain with a diverse, landscape of numerous inlets interspersed with fairly open agricultural peninsulas and wind-sculpted woodlands. Picturesque harbourside settlements are typically clustered around small boatyards and marinas while numerous moored sailing boats dot the harbour edge. Other inlets provide contrast to this scene such as Pagham Harbour which retains an overriding sense of remoteness. This is due in no small way to the extensive tidal mudflats fringed by marsh vegetation and populated by large numbers of migratory birds. In contrast to the relative peace and remoteness of the Sussex harbours, the highly developed and historical Portsmouth Harbour is constantly busy with sailing boats, Cross channel ferries and naval warships.

In the lower plain, the wide scale and treeless farmed landscape is dominated by large arable fields. Views north are contained by the rising dip slope of the Downs, but views seaward are without definition and tend to lack depth and perspective. The urban fringes of the sprawling seaside resorts are pronounced, as is all urban development in this flat landscape. Some smaller-scale landscapes also exist within this part of the Plain such as the quiet hamlets, traditional village centres, pastures, and minor roads. The chalk quarries of Ports Down are notable features and can be seen from some distance, both from the adjoining land and at sea.

To the north and east of the area, the upper coastal plain combines the flat, regular patterns of large fields with the gentle forms and patterns blending into the openness of the lower dip slope of the South Downs. The landscape is varied, incorporating both open arable farmland and low density settlements, with a more well-wooded and semi-enclosed (somewhat suburban) character locally, particularly to the west of Chichester. Hidden, intimate valleys and woods are a distinctive characteristic of the upper coastal plain to the east, such as the valley of Binsted with its steep slopes and winding lane, and the ancient woodlands of the Tortington and Titnore Lane area. The latter are on the southernmost flanks of the Chalk outlier of Highdown Hill which in itself is a unique and prominent feature on the plain.

Even where the plain is enclosed by a mixture of woodlands, the presence of windswept trees and occasional glimpses of the Isle of Wight reflect the generally open and exposed coastal location.

Physical Influences

Geologically, this landscape is part of a broad plain of flinty marine and valley gravels extending several miles inland to the dip slope of the South Downs and the South Hampshire Lowlands. The plain slopes gently southwards towards the coast becoming almost imperceptible; at Hayling Island the

landscape is flat, save for the undulating sand dunes. The continuity of the Plain is interrupted by many streams and rivers which flow to the sea – in the case of the river Hamble through a wooded valley. The superficial gravel deposits give rise to deep and well-drained brown earths which occur widely over much of the area while thinner chalky soils have formed over the distinctive Chalk outlier of Highdown Hill.

The coastal plain comprises essentially two units, a lower plain between 10 and 15 metres AOD and an upper plain between 30 and 40 metres. Each of these plains is underlain by clayey, sands, and gravelly deposits of raised beach, head gravel and brickearth deposits laid down when relative sea levels were higher than at present. The Upper Raised Beach Deposits contain unequivocal evidence of 'Boxgrove Man', his artifacts and an extensive mammalian fauna indicative of pre-Anglian glaciation (>450,000 years ago) age. Boxgrove Man therefore provides evidence for the earliest known human occupation of the British Isles.



IAN MCGOWAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Long linear shingle beaches and sand dunes are dominant features which are enjoyed by residents of the highly developed hinterland.

The wave-cut benches underlying the upper and lower coastal plains are cut into folded Chalk and Tertiary strata preserved in a series of en-echelon synclines and anticlines. One of the latter forms Ports Down which makes a prominent backdrop to the coastal plain in the west.

The lower plain is cut by southward-facing streams, locally termed 'rifes', each of which have dry headwater extensions over the upper plain and on into the Chalk dip slope of the South Downs. Towards the west, the lower coastal plain grades into terrace flats attributed to the 'Solvent river', present in the area during low sea-level events of the Ice Age.

The plain is crossed by rivers such as the Arun, Adur, Hamble and Meon which locally form wide alluvial floodplains. Now flooded, gravel pits comprise some of the largest areas of freshwater in the region. Over the superficial deposits lies a range of fertile soils which combine with the flat terrain and favourable climatic conditions to result in high quality agricultural land.



Picturesque waterside settlements are attractive features of the less developed harbours.

The sand and shingle beaches have been shaped by the complimentary processes of erosion and deposition since the last major change in sea level, forming spits across river mouths and inlets. Loose sand has gradually formed modest sand dune systems in some places. Around Selsey, outcrops of brickearth and chalk have been eroded to form low cliffs. Chichester and Pagham Harbours are submerged shallow valleys, dominated by mudflats built up through the deposition and stabilisation of silt and mud transported by streams.

The three harbours of Chichester, Langstone and Portsmouth are interconnected by narrow channels and together form the largest intertidal area on the south coast.

Historical and Cultural Influences

The coastal area (particularly in and around Langstone Harbour) has disclosed extensive palaeoenvironmental evidence of early exploitation. It was, however, the Neolithic forest clearance and grazing, with the introduction of domestic animals and crops when the climate was warm and the land lightly wooded and accessible, that began to open the landscape.

The Romans recognised the agricultural potential of the coastal plain as reflected by their establishment of Chichester between 43 and 61 AD as an important new market town and military centre. Important villa sites, now inland but once on the coast, are still evident as is the Roman fort at Portchester.

By the 10th century, a system of rich agricultural estates

was established to exploit the coastal plain's fertile soils, along with the pasture on the adjacent Downs and the timber and stock rearing of the Wealden fringe further north. By this stage the South Coast Plain would have been developing its reputation as one of the most fertile and intensively cultivated areas of Britain; the prevalence of market gardens and smallholdings on the coastal plain today in Hampshire bears witness to this long history of cultivation.

From 1066, the Norman period saw inland Saxon towns develop outports at New Shoreham and Littlehampton, from which goods could be traded more effectively. Agriculture was prospering and allowed the economy to diversify and the number of market towns to expand.

After an agricultural 'golden age' in the 19th century, cheap imports from America and southern Europe led to a decline in local cereal production and sheep grazing. The establishment of the railways brought new access to the coast and the seaside towns doubled in size by the end of the 19th century. Between 1837 and 1939 large parts of the coastline were built over as the tourist trade grew following the lead of Brighton. This had been prompted by contemporary writings on the health benefits of sea air and bathing. Originally served by paddle steamer from London, Brighton promoted the development of the railway and excursion fares from the capital. As demand increased so the smaller resorts such as Worthing, Littlehampton and Bognor Regis developed along with the rail link in the latter half of the 19th century.

Buildings and Settlement

Within the coastal margins, building materials were traditionally mixed largely reflecting the proximity of the sea for importing raw materials. Timber frames, flint, cob and thatch are all common. The medieval churches around the harbours are of flint and stone. Today, the character of settlement is mixed with traditional harbourside hamlets providing contrast with the recent holiday and residential villages that have sprung up along the shoreline and fringes of villages. Modern marinas and boatyards have also added to the harbour landscape. Urban expansion, industrial paraphernalia and caravan accommodation associated with the edges of seaside towns is prominent along the coastal margins.

On the lower coastal plain, settlements are dominated by suburban villages and the extensive seaside towns between Brighton and the edge of Southampton. Large reflective glasshouses, advertisement signs for farm shops, nurseries and equestrian facilities, golf courses, horse paddocks and industrial and institutional buildings all bring a suburban character, which confuses the definition between the urban centres and their rural hinterland.

The ancient market town and compact cathedral city of Chichester sits at the centre of this character area, with its, distinctive spire forming an important landmark. To the east, numerous villages form a fairly continuous residential sprawl, although this pattern includes some traditional flint hamlets and farm buildings. Along Southampton Water, smallholdings and bungalows are scattered but merge with the increasingly suburban outreaches of Fareham towards the Solent. Several large offices and residential tower blocks and gas holders in the larger towns dominate long-distance views.



PORTSMOUTH COMMERCIAL PORT

The natural harbours have lent themselves to development leading to a thriving maritime trade.

To the north at the base of the Chalk dip slope, settlement is more dispersed. A network of typically-winding secondary and minor roads, usually hedged or wooded, links together small flint villages, isolated dwellings and farm buildings, and the mixed housing styles of village fringes.

Many villages have retained their attractive medieval and late medieval core often arranged around a green or market area and the varied vernacular architecture displays strong relationships with its region.

Land Cover

Along the coastline itself, the vegetation is typified by a scanty covering of low growing, often mat-forming, specialised plants which can tolerate the saline conditions and mineral substrate. The shifting, dry shingle, mud and sands of the shoreline are particularly hostile to the establishment of vegetation and are generally devoid of cover, except where shingle-loving species and sand dune grasses have colonised naturally or by introduction. On the newly-formed ground of the mudflats in the inlets, pioneering intertidal marsh communities have colonised and these demonstrate a well-defined succession of plant types and species towards the land. Although not a dominant characteristic, scrub and small areas of wind-sculpted woodland persist on some coastal fringes, particularly around the sheltered inlets. Oldpark Wood, near Bosham Hoe, is a significant example.

Semi-natural communities occur almost as 'islands' within the arable land which project into the peninsulas from the lower coastal plain. This is a fertile area which supports intensive arable farming and horticulture, with some dairy, beef and poultry. Areas of medium-quality agricultural land where soils are shallow, stony and poorly drained, often support good quality permanent grassland such as the Arun floodplain.

The thicker gravel deposits support a mixture of high and medium quality soils which are intensively farmed where the soils are flintier. The area also supports mixed farming, including pig rearing, with horse paddocks and grazing on the poorer land.

The lower coastal plain, particularly in the west, is typically a homogeneous landscape of large open fields with few trees or hedgerows. Drainage ditches, wire fences or low banks are more usual as field boundaries. The sense of exposure within this open landscape is heightened by the odd stunted and windswept oak that stands along the lines of former hedges. A small number of isolated coastal heaths and woodlands occur on the open plain, with shelter belts of pine, oak or poplar shielding buildings from exposure to the wind.

In the upper coastal plain, tree cover varies. There is a strong network of small and medium-sized broadleaf woodlands, including some which are ancient and semi-natural, well-linked by hedgerows and garden exotics to provide an enclosed field framework. The landscape pattern comprises coniferous plantations, some ancient woodland, and a strong frame of small fields, woods and hedgerows. This quite high degree of vegetation cover is especially notable in contrast to the relatively treeless open lower coastal plain. In many places

woodland accentuates the prominence of elevated towns, as in the case of Arundel where the well-wooded landscape separates the town from the suburban villages to the west.

The Changing Countryside

- Mineral extraction, landfill and flooded gravel pits.
- Small villages engulfed by the expansion of urban coastal developments.
- Possible, pressure for new service areas along A27/M27 in the future.
- Ribbon development, holiday camps and caravan parks.
- Pressures for recreational uses and marina/harbour developments along the coast.
- Development of large modern glasshouses.
- Construction of rock islands as coastal protection measures immediately off the coast have a major visual influence.
- Coastal dredging operations may exacerbate erosion of the coastal edge resulting in the loss of distinctive landscape features such as coastal marshes.
- Future changes in sea level may become an important issue given that the South Coast Plain's flat low-lying nature makes it particularly vulnerable to rises in relative sea level.
- Loss of hedges and hedgerow trees owing to field enlargement.
- Recent significant loss of tree cover due to Dutch Elm disease and storm damage.

Shaping the Future

- The conservation of woodlands and new planting should be considered where appropriate.
- There are opportunities for the reversion of arable fields to grazing pasture.
- The conservation of wetlands – including those of the intertidal zone – is important to the area.
- There is scope for further restoration of field hedges and hedgerow trees under appropriate agri-environmental land management schemes.

- Coastal zoning and management would balance nature conservation, landscape and recreational interests.



Fertile soils are intensively farmed, with a prosperous market garden and horticultural trade reflecting the relatively warm temperatures and long growing season.

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Glossary

AOD: Above Ordnance Datum

en-echelon: arranged in a stepped formation in parallel lines

substrate: surface on which organism grows