

# LANDSCAPE

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## Landscape Character

- 8.63 A landscape assessment of Hastings Borough was undertaken by East Sussex Transport and Environment Department during the winter of 1994/95. The objective of this study was to define what makes Hastings special and to identify issues which the Local Plan should address, with policies designed to conserve and enhance the landscape of the Borough.
- 8.64 Eleven Landscape Character Areas within the Borough were identified as possessing character similarities or being defined by major topographic features or open spaces. They were defined on the basis of landscape character rather than history or architectural detail – for instance the seafront contains features of varying age and style, but can be identified as possessing a unity of space and landscape.
- 8.65 Within these areas, thirty smaller Landscape Tracts were identified as containing a ‘focus’ of character – e.g. an older built-up area, open space or strong feature, often influenced by the topography of the area.
- 8.66 A major finding was that the town’s distinctive landscape character and setting should be conserved and strengthened. The Council will give weight to this in assessing development proposals and will refuse permission for development which would substantially compromise the landscape character or setting of the town.

## POLICY L1

### Landscape Character

Planning permission will not be granted for development which would substantially compromise the distinctive landscape setting of the town, particularly the landscape structure of gills, woods

and open spaces, and the relationship and clear division between the unspoilt coastline of the Country Park and surrounding countryside and the built-up area.

## High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

8.67 This nationally designated area of protected landscape closely follows the Hastings built-up area boundary and extends in a generally north-westerly direction as far as Horsham in West Sussex (covering 560 square miles). The Hastings Country Park represents the best coastal section of the AONB, and the Borough Council recognises the importance of protecting this landscape.

8.68 The Government's planning policies for AONBs are set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 'The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development.' This has been supplemented by further ministerial guidance<sup>1</sup> indicating that AONBs should be afforded the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. Major development should not take place in such areas save in exceptional circumstances. Such developments will be subject to the most rigorous examination.

*<sup>1</sup> House of Commons written answer by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, dated 13th June 2000.*

8.69 The guidance states that proposals for major development in AONBs should be demonstrated to be in the public interest before being allowed to proceed. Consideration of any such proposal should normally include an assessment of:

- (i) The need for the development, in terms of national considerations, and the impact of permitting it or refusing it upon the local economy;
- (ii) The cost of and scope for developing elsewhere outside the area or meeting the need for it in some other way;
- (iii) Any detrimental effect on the environment and the landscape, and the extent to which that should be moderated.

In addition, the guidance states that any construction or restoration should be carried out to high environmental standards.

8.70 The Council recognises the national importance of the High Weald AONB. Any development which would adversely affect the natural beauty of the landscape will not be supported. Major development schemes will generally be inconsistent with the AONB designation and will be required to meet the above criteria demonstrating that they are in the public interest before being allowed to proceed. Proposals for the conservation and enhancement of the landscape will be encouraged.

## **POLICY L2**

### **High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

Planning permission will not be granted for development that would adversely affect the natural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Permission for major development proposals will not be granted unless there is a compelling case for them in the public interest.

## **Boundary of the Built-Up Area**

- 8.71 Hastings has a generally well-defined built-up edge to the town – being largely confined by the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to the north and east and the Combe Haven and Marline Valley Woods Sites of Special Scientific Interest to the west.
- 8.72 To limit the outward spread of development from the town's urban fringe it is intended that no further development will be allowed beyond the defined built-up area boundary shown on the Proposals Map. This physical limit to the town's development now relates to all types of development – having previously related to residential development only. The only exceptions will apply where the development proposed is small-scale (e.g. an addition to existing buildings), requires a countryside location, or can be demonstrated to be in the public interest.

## **POLICY L3**

### **Development Outside the Built-Up Area**

Planning permission will not be granted for development outside the boundary of the built-up area unless there is no suitable alternative site within it and the proposal either:–

- (a) Makes use of an existing building or is small scale and requires a countryside location; or
- (b) Is in the public interest.

## Combe Haven Valley Area

8.73 The Combe Haven Valley area is about 120 hectares of largely open countryside between St Leonards and Bexhill and includes Combe Haven Valley itself and part of the northern slopes, through Pebsham and Glyne Gap to the beach. The area extends across the Borough boundary. The most significant wildlife habitat of this area is the Combe Haven Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which is comprised of wetlands and reed beds on the valley floor, together with the Filsham Reedbeds Local Nature Reserve – and is recognised as one of the most important nature conservation areas within Hastings and Rother District. The Council will work towards managing the SSSI as a unified whole in recognition of its strategic importance.

8.74 The North Bexhill Strategic Framework 1993 emphasises the importance of this area:-

*“As a landscape feature, the Combe Haven Valley is of regional significance and recognised as a distinct landscape character area in the County-wide context.”*

8.75 The area has many of the diverse land use characteristics associated with urban fringe land. One of the most striking features is the refuse and landfill site at Pebsham which is largely beyond the boundary of the Borough but clearly has a dramatic effect upon the landscape. Associated with the urban fringe is the close proximity of houses along Filsham Ridge, the Combe Haven Holiday Park and areas of formal recreation, in addition to the farm at Upper Wilting which includes an area of the SSSI.

8.76 The Combe Haven Valley and Glyne Gap area perform an important function, maintaining a physical and visual gap between St Leonards and Bexhill. In accordance with the Structure Plan, the Borough Council will seek to protect this area as a strategic gap.

#### **POLICY L4**

##### **Strategic Gap**

**Development will not be permitted in the strategic gap between the built-up edge of St Leonards and the western boundary of the Borough.**

### **The Western Limit of the Built-up Area**

8.77 The 1995 Landscape Assessment prepared by East Sussex County Council states as a priority for action that:-

*“Development should not be allowed to extend along the northern slopes of the valley, and indeed, has just about reached its acceptable limit.”*

8.78 In order to prevent the spread of development into the open countryside at Combe Haven and Glyne Gap, a new boundary for the built-up area has been defined (Policy L3 refers). This closely follows the edge of existing development and reinforces the policy in protection of the strategic gap set out above.

### **Urban Fringe**

8.79 The Council is concerned to promote environmental improvements in line with the County Council’s Landscape Assessment, which identified various problem areas:-

- At Bulverhythe, Glyne Gap and Filsham, open edges of housing estates face onto the exposed levels of Glyne Gap and Filsham – emphasised by the rising ground and Combe Haven Caravan Park.

- At Castleham industrial estate, large factory buildings are visible on the crest of the ridge in views from the west.
- At the eastern end of The Ridge, the Ivyhouse Lane industrial estate and housing estates are widely visible in views from the north.
- In the Pinders Valley, open built-up edges face onto the valley.

8.80 The best solution to these problems is seen to lie in more tree planting, both within the urban fringe and also in the adjacent countryside and built-up area. The Council will bring forward tree planting and other environmental proposals to enhance the visual appearance of the urban fringe.

## **Farm Diversification**

8.81 The Council supports the principle of farm diversification subject to the proposed use being in keeping with the surrounding environment.

### **POLICY L5**

#### **Farm Diversification**

**Development associated with the diversification of an existing farm will be permitted provided:-**

- (a) The proposed use is compatible with the location in a rural area in terms of its environmental impact, accessibility, design, scale, servicing and parking requirements;**
- (b) Where possible, existing buildings are re-used; and**
- (c) Where appropriate, any new buildings are located close to existing buildings.**

## **Town Approaches**

8.82 The Landscape Assessment recommended carrying out environmental improvements along the three main road approaches to the town (the A21 and the A259 at the eastern and western entrances to the town). It is recommended that a bold new introductory feature be created beside each road with additional tree planting – which would highlight the town’s special character in an aesthetically pleasing style. The Council will pursue the implementation of these improvements, together with the removal of unsightly advertising hoardings and the screening of eyesores.

## **Street Trees**

8.83 Significant additional tree planting is proposed around the town and on the urban fringe. This could be part of a package of environmental improvement measures and linked to various traffic calming proposals. Tree planting will be included as part of environmental improvement schemes and traffic calming proposals. Various areas of the town particularly lacking in trees will be given priority – particularly the town centre, some other predominantly ‘hard’ urban areas such as Bohemia, parts of Ore and the more modern housing estates.

## Historic Parks and Gardens

8.84 The Landscape Assessment recommended that the Local Plan identifies and maps all public and private historic parks and gardens and includes a policy on the promotion and enhancement of their historic dimension. The Council will seek to conserve and restore the character of the town's historic parks and gardens – and will strengthen the tree structure and containment of open spaces in the context of their character.

### POLICY L6

#### Historic Parks and Gardens

**Planning permission will not be granted for development that would result in harm to the historic significance, character, appearance and setting of identified historic parks and gardens**

8.85 Alexandra Park and St Leonards Gardens are of particular historic interest. This is recognised by the fact that both are included on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England. English Heritage and the Garden History Society will be consulted on any planning application affecting the character of these areas. Proposals for development within and in the vicinity of Alexandra Park and St Leonards Gardens must have special regard to the design, layout, character and historic significance of these areas.

8.86 Other policies relating to the identification and protection of open spaces are included in Chapter 10b 'Open Space'.

## The Undeveloped Coast

8.87 The coastal area is important for recreation, tourism, landscape and nature conservation, and the beach plays a vital role in protecting the seafront buildings from flooding and damage from the sea.

- 8.88 Government planning guidance states that development should not be allowed on the coast if a coastal location is not essential, or in areas of eroding cliffs or land instability which would require coastal protection works.
- 8.89 A Coast Protection Strategy has been prepared for Hastings, the favoured option being to maintain the current standard of sea defence with shingle beach recharge.
- 8.90 The following policy seeks to preserve the landscape character and nature conservation interest of the coast. This is particularly important in the Hastings Cliffs area, most of which is designated as a candidate Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under EU regulations and is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## **POLICY L7**

### **The Undeveloped Coast**

**Development on or affecting the coast will only be permitted if:-**

- (a) A coastal location is essential and no suitable alternative site exists;**
- (b) The development is not in an area of eroding cliffs or unstable land;**
- (c) It would not result in the need for coastal protection works;**
- (d) There is no adverse off-shore impact;**
- (e) It would not be to the detriment of areas of significant nature conservation or landscape value; and**
- (f) It would not detract from the local landscape character.**

