



Development and Site Allocations Local Plan



Strategic Gaps

Background Paper

Rother District Council

Strategic Gaps Landscape Assessment

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The East Sussex County Council Environment Team has been commissioned to assist Rother District Council (RDC) in re-assessing the extent of the five identified 'Strategic Gaps (SG's) within the district.
- 1.2 A SG is an area of land which helps determine the separation of settlements and protect their individual character. The particular objectives of an SG are:
 - a. To maintain the separate identity and distinctiveness between settlements
 - b. To maintain the strategic settlement pattern
 - c. To prevent the coalescence of settlements

2.0 Planning Policy Background

- 2.1 Strategic Gaps have been regarded to be of strategic importance but vulnerable to development. Their protection through planning policy is an established policy tool. In the 2006 Local Plan, the five tracts of land in Rother were identified and defined.
- 2.2 Development within SGs is subject to strict criteria set out in the Local Plan (2006)¹; this can include agricultural buildings or replacement of an existing building. The principal of SGs has been carried forward in RDC's Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)², being the subject of policies for Hastings Fringes (Policy HF1) and Rye and Rye Harbour (Policy RY1).
- 2.3 Accordingly, there is a need now to review the actual extent of these areas, with the intention that up-to-date definitions will be included in the forthcoming development and Site Allocations Plan (DaSA).
- 2.4 It is noted that while the majority of SGs may serve one of the key functions of 'Green Infrastructure' and include recreational uses of land and facilities, such a purpose is not an inherent criterion for a SG. Furthermore, such activity should not compromise the open character of the gaps.
- 2.5 Some of the strategic gap areas are contiguous with open areas of landscape within Hastings Borough Council. Where these areas contribute to the character and perception of the SG the relevant policies in the Hastings Local Plan³ have been considered.

¹ www.rother.gov.uk/rotherdistrictlocalplan2006

² www.rother.gov.uk/corestrategy

³ www.hastings.gov.uk/environment_planning/planning/localplan/

3.0 Aim of Project

- 3.1 The clear aim of the project is to establish the current extent of the Strategic Gaps (SGs) within Rother to ensure coalescing between towns and villages does not occur. The report does highlight how the SGs presently contribute to the stated objectives and where appropriate, recommends refinements to these SGs.

4.0 Key outputs

- 4.1 To identify how the current landscape character and visual qualities of the landscapes of the five Strategic Gap areas contribute to the stated objectives:

- To maintain the separate identity and distinctiveness between settlements
- To maintain the strategic settlement pattern
- To prevent the coalescence of settlements

- 4.2 The outputs will include:

- a) An assessment of the landscape of each SG area to review the current quality, value and condition of the landscape. The sensitivity of the landscape to change and vulnerability to potential development pressure will be considered. This assessment will also consider whether areas of tranquillity contribute to the landscape perception of the gaps and the effect of existing settlement distribution within the gap areas.
- b) A visual analysis of the SG areas to include an assessment of the visual characteristics of the urban edges, views across the gaps and identification of visually intrusive elements which detract from the perception of the rural gap. The visual assessment will also identify landscape features which contribute to the visual experience of the gap landscape.
- c) The above outputs will inform an analysis of the effectiveness of the physical and visual state of the current SG boundaries. This will include an analysis of where these boundaries could be altered to reinforce the perception of the gaps and secure defensible boundaries.
- d) Guidelines for landscape management and enhancement which would strengthen the gap landscapes and reinforce their significance as protected landscape areas.

5.0 Methodology

- 5.1 The landscape character and visual assessments outlined above will be based on relevant and current guidance for landscape assessment. Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment Third Edition, 2013, (LI and IEMA).5.2 Desk top assessment

The assessment will include:

- a review of the published landscape character assessments
- topographical analysis to identify key viewpoints
- consideration of existing planning policy and environmental constraints for the gap areas.

5.2 Site Assessment

a) Landscape character assessment to establish:

- The current landscape character, condition, value and quality of the SG areas
- The experience of transition from urban to rural areas at the key entry and exit points
- The influence of the size of the respective settlements, the settlement edge characteristics and distance between the built up areas.

b) Site assessment from the key viewpoints:

- within the gaps looking out towards the urban areas
- from the urban edges across the gaps
- visual distance and separation between urban areas
- visually intrusive features including urban edges.

- 5.3 Recommendations will be made in line with the adopted Core Strategy.

- 5.4 Production of report including supporting maps and photographs which will:

- Summarise the findings of the landscape and visual assessment.
- Identify the extent and boundaries of each gap area.
- Make recommendations for modifications to the gap boundaries including future potential development sites.
- Provide landscape management guidance suggestions to conserve and enhance the SG landscapes.

6.0 Definitions

Definition of Gap areas and Boundaries

- 6.1 The inclusion of land within a particular gap is based upon its contribution to the visual or physical separation of settlements. The boundaries have been defined using topographical, landscape or man- made features to define those areas between settlements where further development would lead to the perception of coalescence when viewed:

- From the settlements themselves
- From an intervening road or other public right of way
- From a vantage point

Intervisibility

- 6.2 This is where the edges of both settlements and the space between can be experienced in one view and the gap forms the obvious and visible break between two built up areas. Settlements can be intervisible across a wide gap depending on the topography. Where settlements are not intervisible the boundaries of the gap are defined to maintain the perception of travelling through an essentially undeveloped, rural landscape between leaving one settlement and arriving at another.

Intravisibility

- 6.3 This is where both edges of the gap can be seen from a single point within the gap.

Gateways

- 6.4 Gap gateways are the access points to the gap areas when moving from the urban area into the open gap and vice versa. These may be located on roads or public rights of way. These may or may not provide the vantage points for the experience of leaving one settlement and arriving at another and for intervisibility between the gap edges.

7.0 Rye and Rye Harbour

Published Landscape character assessments

- 7.1 The landscape around the town of Rye, including this strategic gap, is within the National Landscape Character Area: 123. Romney Marsh (www.naturalengland.org.uk)

The County Landscape Assessment (CLA) for East Sussex places the gap in the Rye-Winchelsea Landscape Character Area 26.

General description

- 7.2 The gap separates the elevated citadel of Rye from the industrial area of Rye Harbour and the historic settlement of Rye Harbour Village (Rye Map 1). Rye citadel is separated by the railway and the A259 from the later developments of the town. The A259 defines the base of the citadel and more modern quay side buildings overlook the gap. The gap is approximately 0.5 km wide from north to south and 0.7 km wide from west to east. It is bounded by a tributary stream, Rock Channel, on the north side and associated boat yards, the flood banks

of the Rother to the east and the open marshland of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve to the west.

- 7.3 The gap area is reclaimed grazing marsh adjacent to the River Rother estuary. The flat open character is rather bleak and windswept. The boat yards and yachts give the northern part of the area a maritime character. The southern boundary is the industrial area of Rye Harbour with some large and intrusive development. There is a general air of lack of management and urban fringe character including small holdings, caravans, scattered informal shelters and fenced paddocks. The frequent large vehicles and fast traffic detract from the enjoyment of the cycleway/footpath along Rye Harbour Road. Whilst the landscape within the gap lacks defining character the surrounding features give the area a strong sense of place. The citadel, the river and the maritime character of the boat yards and even the large scale industrial developments of Rye Harbour contribute to the unique setting.
- 7.4 With reference to the contribution that the gap makes to the particular objectives of SGs, the open and largely undeveloped nature of the gap does maintain the separate identity of Rye and Rye Harbour. The gap is cramped and dominated by views to the large industrial buildings which encroach on the southern boundary. As the character of the two built up areas is very different the gap does maintain the strategic settlement pattern. The gap will continue to prevent coalescence only if strict control is enforced on the further development and change allowed within the gap.

Landscape Character Assessment

- 7.5 Detailed landscape character and visual assessments, including photographs are provided on the site assessment sheets in Appendix 1

Settlement and edges

- 7.6 The gap separates two important historic settlements of Rye town and Rye Harbour village. There is a large dwelling at the north end of the gap and on the south side of Rye Harbour Road. Otherwise the settlement on the south side is typically scattered caravans in rectangular plots. Settlement on the north side of the road is limited to a small holding with associated agricultural buildings and a modern church or Kingdom Hall.
- 7.7 The buildings on Rock Channel Road and Shipyard Lane form a hard urban edge to the Rye side of the gap. The boats in the moorings add character to this edge which could possibly be reinforced with avenues or groups of specimen tree planting. This could be located on the north side of the channel if incorporated with potential future redevelopment of the area. There may be scope for planting along the south side of the channel, but this would require the agreement of landowners and a source of funding. The southern boundary with the open marshes is softened by the scrubby vegetation around the small holdings. The boundary to the north is wide open to views across the river giving a bleak and windswept

character to this area. This openness is however characteristic of the open marshes between Rye and East Guildeford and should be protected. There is currently an area of land between the high tide mark of the River Rother and the northern edge of the strategic gap which is not protected by the gap designation. There are some moorings and jetties in the north western part of this area, but it is largely open salt marsh crossed by creeks. The boundary with Rye Harbour industrial estate has been softened with tree planting on the south side of the road (Viewpoint 4). The northern edge is more open allowing views to the industrial buildings. The existing tree screen could be gapped up in places on this boundary to reinforce and clearly define the gap boundary and mirror the planting on the south side of the road (Viewpoint 5).

Gateways

- 7.8 The western gateway is across the bridge over Rock Channel and past the boat yards. There is a distinct transition at this point from the built up area of Rye to the open landscape of the gap. The transition along Rye Harbour Road from this open landscape to the industrial area of Rye Harbour is also distinct.

Landscape Value and Character Sensitivity

- 7.9 The area is of low to moderate landscape value as there is no public access within the gap apart from along Rye Harbour Road. The open and exposed character of the area to the north of the road makes this area of high sensitivity to change. The more enclosed landscape of the southern half of the gap between the road and the gap boundary would be less sensitive to small scale changes.

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

- 7.10 The strategic gap area is very sensitive in local views from the historic citadel of Rye town and notably from Gun Gardens (Viewpoint 1). There are long views across the gap from this area. The trees and evergreen planting provide a screen both into and out of the gap from the open marshland of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve to the south.

Inter-visibility

- 7.11 The open nature of the landscape allows long views across the area from both north and south boundary edges. There are long and open views from the north side of Rye Harbour Road on the edge of the Rye Harbour industrial area to the quayside buildings in Rye and the citadel (Viewpoint 3).

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards

- 7.12 There are open views across the gap from within the part of the gap which is to the north of Rye Harbour Road. Views into the southern part tend to be localised glimpses through the

trees and scrub and occasionally to the open countryside towards Winchelsea. Views to the north are open towards the Rye citadel and the river bank.

Landscape Vulnerability to development pressure and scope for enhancement, reduction or extension of the gap

- 7.13 The area between Rye Harbour Road and the southern boundary of the gap would be vulnerable to pressure for small scale piecemeal development for permanent residential or business uses. The poorly defined boundary to the industrial area could lead to pressure for further industrial expansion into the eastern end of the gap. The perception and boundaries of the gap landscape could be strengthened with more planting on the eastern boundary to reinforce the boundary with the industrial estate. Some tree planting of individual specimen trees to the west of Rye Harbour Road, adjacent to the boatyard, would reinforce this gateway although space is limited. The area of land adjacent to the river could be vulnerable to incremental change and riverside development, particularly in the area at the mouth of the Rock Channel. The extension of the strategic gap boundary to the low tide mark on the river edge would protect this area from future development pressures and ensure retention of the open character of the landscape (Rye Maps 1 and 2).

Landscape management guidelines for the Rye - Rye Harbour gap including boundary treatments.

- 7.14 The landscape management guidelines from the County Landscape Assessment which are relevant to this area are outlined in Appendix 2, Part 1 under the Rye/Winchelsea Area.
- 7.15 The relatively small area of this gap and very open character would make it very sensitive to new development. If development is considered acceptable to replace existing buildings or temporary structures this should be on a similar scale to the existing buildings and no taller. Changes of use and land management initiatives should be encouraged to retain the open character of the area and maximise opportunities to enhance the wildlife value of the area.
- 7.16 The extension of the gap to incorporate the salt marsh and moorings adjacent to the River Rother on the northern side, as outlined in 7.13 above and on Maps 1 and 2.
- 7.17 Consideration should be given to strengthening the boundary with the sewage works with tree planting, as has been done on the south side of Rye Harbour Road. This would also reinforce this gateway to the gap. Public realm enhancements at the entrance to Rye Harbour Road where it crosses over the Brede Sluice would reinforce the entrance to the gap from the A259 (Viewpoint 2).

8.0 Fairlight and Hastings

Published Landscape character assessments

- 8.1 This strategic gap, is within the National Landscape Character Area: 122. The High Weald (www.naturalengland.org.uk)

The County Landscape Assessment (CLA) for East Sussex places the gap in the High Weald Coast Landscape Character Area 12.

General description

- 8.2 This is the strategic gap between Fairlight / Fairlight Cove and Hastings (Fairlight Map 1). It is bounded on the north side by the older part of Fairlight which historically was a small hamlet consisting of a cluster of houses and St Andrews Church. The settlement has expanded into The Close and a ribbon development of bigger houses in large gardens along Battery Hill. This joins up with the residential development of Fairlight Cove. The boundary to the west follows the Rother District boundary with Hastings Country Park. The gap is a maximum of about 1.2km from west to east and about 0.7 km from north to south.
- 8.3 This is a landscape of high scenic quality especially within the Hastings Country Park (CP) and near to the cliff top and coast. The cliff tops just to the south of the Strategic Gap are called the Firehills because of the frequent gorse fires. As the only coastal part of the High Weald AONB the area between Fairlight and Hastings has unique landscape qualities and characteristics and a strong sense of place. The historic tower of St Andrews church is a focal point and dominant feature which can be seen from much of the area. There are no landscape or visual detractors in the strategic gap.
- 8.4 With reference to the contribution that the gap makes to the particular objectives of SGs, the gap does maintain a distinct separate identity and distinctiveness between the Fairlight and Fairlight Cove. It also provides an important buffer between the built up areas of these villages and Hastings Country Park (CP). In this context the CP and the SG combined reinforce the separate identity of the large urban area of Hastings and these small settlements. The CP is of international significance for biodiversity and is in the High Weald AONB. This distinctiveness and the strategic settlement pattern could easily be eroded by further ribbon development between Hastings and Fairlight along the Fairlight Road. In this context the protection of the countryside between Hastings and Fairlight, which is within Hastings Borough, is critical to maintaining the strategic settlement pattern. The Hastings Fairlight SG does currently contribute to the prevention of coalescence between Fairlight and Fairlight Cove and this further reinforces the separation of these settlements with the urban edge of Hastings.
- 8.5 Detailed landscape character and visual assessments for the gap, including photographs are provided in Appendix 1.

Settlement and Edges.

- 8.6 There is scattered housing development of large houses in large gardens along Warren Road within the gap boundary. There are also some large houses within the eastern edge of the gap adjacent of the built up area of Fairlight Cove. The settlement of Fairlight is characterised by larger houses surrounded by extensive gardens most of which are on the ridge which falls away from Battery Hill. The Close is slightly more urban in character but not dissimilar to the development along Warren Road. This settlement defines the north side of the gap and because of the houses set in large gardens the area feels as if it is low density. This gives the ribbon development along the south side of Battery Hill a rural character. The Firehills Coastguard cottages are outside the gap but dominate views from the south east side of the gap. Fairlight hamlet including St Andrews Church, a group of farm buildings and the Country Park entrance, car park and visitor centre are separated from the main gap.
- 8.7 The settlement edges to the gap area are generally softened by vegetation in adjacent gardens. The houses along Hill Road and Battery Hill are set back from the edge of the gap to form a broken and softened built up edge. The edge of Fairlight Cove settlement is enclosed by woodland in the north. There are more exposed and hard edges adjacent to Meadow Way, Commanders Walk, Fyrsway and at Warren Farm where a large modern house has replaced the farm buildings on the edge of the gap.

Gateways

- 8.8 There are no clearly defined routes across the gap which would provide a sense of leaving one settlement and arriving at another. Warren Road does cross the gap, but as there is low density housing development strung out along the road, the experience of the gap in between is not obviously rural in character. There is a sense of leaving the village of Fairlight Cove and entering the gap on the public footpaths which give access to the Hastings CP.
- 8.9 The gap between Fairlight and Hastings is well defined and most of this is within Hastings Borough. The sense of leaving the suburban rural settlement of Fairlight Cove and entering the gap is distinct whether travelling on Fairlight Road or via the paths and cycle routes in Hastings CP.

Landscape Value and Character Sensitivity

- 8.10 The area is typical of the High Weald Coast landscape character area and as AONB countryside is of high landscape value. The character of the area is of moderate sensitivity in the more enclosed lower lying areas immediately to the west of Fairlight Cove. The area of the gap within Hastings CP is of high sensitivity.

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

- 8.11 The strategic gap area is sensitive in local views from the surrounding ridges and particularly from the houses and gardens on Battery Hill and from Hastings CP. There are no long views into the area from the wider AONB countryside. Views across the gap are enclosed and curtailed by the ridge of the Hastings Country Park to the west and Battery Hill to the north. There are long and open views out to sea to the south from the higher ground within the gap. Woodland vegetation within the gap obscures views across the gap from the lower ground.

Inter-visibility

- 8.12 There are views across the gap to the western and eastern boundaries from the open space at Wood Field there are panoramic views to the ridge at Battery Hill and Hastings CP (Viewpoint 1). These views are curtailed by the Coastguard Lane / Hastings CP ridge to the west and the Battery Hill ridge to the north. There are views to the large houses which are strung out along the ridge to the north and the tower of St Andrews church. The landscape in between is not visible from this point as it is heavily wooded and at a similar level to the viewpoint. Public views from Hill Road and Battery Hill are obscured by houses and garden trees but the properties on the surrounding ridges will have long views across the gap.
- 8.13 There are long views across the gap from Hastings Country Park (Viewpoint 2) which take in the other boundaries and edges as well as the central wooded valley. The new house at Warren Farm stands out starkly on the built up edge of Fairlight Cove illustrating the visual vulnerability of this area. From the top of Firehills on the edge of the gap there are long views across Fairlight Cove to Romney Marsh and Camber (Viewpoint 3). The built up area of Fairlight Cove is for the most part hidden as it is set low in the landscape and the gap boundaries are softened by vegetation.

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards.

- 8.14 Apart from the small area within the CP the only publicly accessible areas within the gap are along Warren Road and Coastguard Lane and views across the gap are obscured by woodland and buildings respectively from these locations.

Landscape Vulnerability to development pressure and scope for enhancement, reduction or extension of the gap

- 8.15 The enclosed fields on the edge of Fairlight Close, which would have been part of Warren Farm, are vulnerable to pressure for the expansion of this settlement. Viewpoint 3 illustrates the visual sensitivity of this area. The boundary of the gap could be reinforced on some locations to create a soft edge and notably in the recreation area of Wood Field. Improved

screening of the large modern house at Warren Farm would also strengthen the perception of the gap.

- 8.16 The area between the current northern edge of the gap and Battery Hill is outside the built up edges of the two settlements. This area of large gardens and small paddocks is potentially vulnerable to pressure for infill development, including ancillary development and loss of trees. The open character of the area between the road at Battery Hill and the edge of the gap, including the hamlet of Fairlight, contributes to the perception of the gap between Hastings and Fairlight Cove. If the gap were extended to Battery Hill to join the area around the church this would retain the low density residential character of this area (Fairlight Maps 1 and 2).
- 8.17 The substantial part of the gap between Hastings and Fairlight is in Hastings Borough Council control. This area is covered by policies for protection of the Country Park (EN3 and EN4), AONB (EN4) and the Special Area of Conservation (EN4).

Landscape management guidelines for the Fairlight- Hastings Gap including boundary treatments

- 8.18 The landscape management guidelines from the County Landscape Assessment which are relevant to this area are outlined in Appendix 2, Part 2 High Weald Coast.
- 8.19 New development on the edge of the gap bounding Fairlight Cove should be strongly resisted. Where this boundary has a hard built up to the gap around Wood Field then this should ideally be reinforced with tree planting to soften these edges. Infill development along Warren Road would erode the heart of the gap and should be strongly resisted. It is recommended that the gap is extended to include the properties and gardens along Hill Road and Battery Road to join with the separate SG area around St. Andrew's Church. These large gardens and other small plots of undeveloped land contribute to the sense of separation between the settlements.

9.0 Bexhill and St Leonards

Published Landscape character assessments

- 9.1 This strategic gap is within the National Landscape Character Area: 122. The High Weald (www.naturalengland.org.uk)

The County Landscape Assessment (CLA) for East Sussex places the gap in The Combe Haven Valley Landscape Character Area 10.

General description

- 9.2 This is the gap between the built up edge of Bexhill at Pebsham and the western edge of Hastings at St Leonards. The strategic gap between Bexhill and St Leonards is made up of two distinct local landscape character areas which are separated by a ridge line and the new hill of the restored landfill site. These are identified on the Bexhill Map 2 as Pebsham (CA1), and Combe Haven Valley (CA2). Both of these areas are almost entirely within the Combe Valley Countryside Park (CVCP). The distance between the two urban areas at the narrowest point from west to east is about 1km. and from north to south 2km. The southern part of the gap is a much altered landscape with various developments associated with business uses, waste and recreation. The northern part of the gap is rural in character and largely unspoilt due to much of the area being designated as Combe Haven SSSI and the SNCI of the disused railway line.
- 9.3 The Hastings Borough boundary wraps around the southern and eastern part of the gap separating the gap boundary from the built up edge of the linear settlement at Bulverhythe. The area of playing fields in Hastings, between the built up edge of Bulverhythe and the RDC boundary, is visually and physically contiguous with the gap and is part of the CVCP. The area of reed beds at Glyne Gap is the narrowest point between the two settlements and is an important visual and physical buffer between the built up areas. Glyne Gap is within Hastings Borough, apart from a small area in the south west corner. The reed beds are designated as a Local Wildlife Site.
- 9.4 The boundaries of the northern part of the gap currently extend from the Hastings Borough boundary on the east side at Filsham reed beds to the disused Bexhill to Crowhurst railway line which forms the western boundary of the gap. This area is the central part of the Combe Valley Countryside Park (CVCP) and is an area of unspoilt grazing marsh focused on the Combe Haven River and its tributary streams. The focal point is the river which runs west to east through the area. The southern boundary of the area is heavily wooded by the railway vegetation, Combe and Pebsham Woods. Many of the woods are semi-natural ancient woodland. The valley floor and flood plain are designated as the Combe Haven SSSI. The area of the gap to the east and in Hastings Borough is Filsham reed beds Local Nature Reserve. The area has an air of tranquillity despite its proximity to the urban areas of Bexhill and Hastings. The Combe Valley Way which crosses around the west and north of the valley has been designed with earthworks and noise barriers to minimise the impact on the tranquillity of the valley and Combe Haven SSSI.
- 9.5 With reference to the contribution that the gap makes to the particular objectives of SGs the two local character areas of this gap make distinct contributions to these objectives. The southern part of the gap does provide a clear separation between the residential settlement areas of Pebsham (Bexhill) and Filsham (St. Leonards) which are quite distinct in character. The settlement patterns on either side of this gap are very distinctive due to the layout and topography of the settlements. The various developments and urban fringe influences which

have crept into the southern part of the gap over the years (CA1) have eroded the strategic settlement pattern. By contrast the rural northern part of the gap (CA2) clearly meets all three of the stated objectives as a tranquil rural area with few intrusive features.

Landscape Character Assessments

- 9.6 Detailed landscape character and visual assessments, including photographs, for the two distinct parts of the gap are provided in Appendix 1.

Settlement and edges - Pebsham

- 9.7 The area is surrounded by the built up Pebsham suburb of Bexhill to the west, the linear settlement of Bulverhythe along Bexhill Road to the south and a large static caravan park to the east. The historic farmstead of Pebsham Farm supports converted traditional farm buildings alongside some more modern business units which have encroached into the edge of the gap. A garden centre with associated car parking is located in the south west corner. There are some large buildings within the gap associated with the various waste activities; these are concentrated around the Freshfields access road. At Bulverhythe the open edges of housing estates which are on the boundaries of the strategic gap are clearly visible across the exposed levels of Glyne Gap and the playing fields. The residential development of Pebsham has a hard edge to Glyne Gap which is more broken where it bounds the strategic gap adjacent to Pebsham Farm. The Combe Haven Caravan Park is a dominant feature climbing up the slope along the eastern boundary. The Combe Haven River SSSI runs between the urban edge of Filsham and the RDC boundary to the gap; this open buffer to the SG is protected by HBC environmental and CVCP policies.

Settlement and edges – Combe Haven Valley

- 9.8 Settlement in the Combe Haven Valley is typically scattered historic farmsteads on the higher ground overlooking the valley. The farms at Actons, Adams and Bynes historically had equestrian activities and have associated stabling. Several of the farm houses and associated barns are listed buildings. The valley floor is free from development as it is the floodplain. At Filsham the open edges of housing estates face onto the exposed levels of Filsham reed beds and this is emphasised by the rising ground. The Combe Haven Caravan Park is a dominant feature which climbs up the slope in the south east corner of the area. The south eastern edge of the area is bounded by the newly restored Pebsham landfill site and the waste water treatment works. The proposed residential development at Worsham Farm will form the new built up edge to this area and this also extends beyond the existing development boundary to the north of Pebsham Wood. . The proposed development will be largely screened from the countryside by the woodland of Combe Wood and the disused railway line. The south west corner of the gap is overlooked by the new business development at Glovers Farm and the new roundabout junction of the Combe Valley Way and the North Bexhill Approach Road.

Gateways – Pebsham

- 9.9 Freshfields is the main access point to the Pebsham area and recent enhancements to the environment and signage have improved the perception of an entrance to the CVCP. Although it is also noted that the A259 (Bexhill Road) runs parallel with the Glyne Gap field at the south of CA1 and adjoins Freshfields. Further enhancement of the CVCP, such as provision of a visitor centre, will provide an opportunity to enhance the gap and gateways to it. There are several other entrance points on public rights of way which cross the gap. These have also been enhanced with way marker posts and CVCP information boards. There are long views from the south western corner of CA 1 at Glyne Gap towards the SG which form a visual gateway linking Glyne Gap visually as well as physically to the SG.

Gateways – Combe Haven Valley

- 9.10 There are vehicular access points to the area at each end of the Combe Valley Way which are gateways to this countryside. There are several north south footpaths which emerge from the built up area of Bexhill and provide a clear transition from town to countryside. These include the 1066 country walk which arises in the Worsham Farm area. These are significant gateway points to the gap and the CVCP from the urban area.

Landscape Value and Character Sensitivity - Pebsham

- 9.11 As part of the CVCP this landscape has a potentially high value in the local context, in the wider context of the Combe Haven Valley it is of low value. The local significance of the gap will increase as the CVCP is further enhanced. The reed beds and the area surrounding Pebsham Farmhouse and pond are particularly sensitive to change. The open character of the playing fields and the restored tip contribute to the open undeveloped character of the gap. The existing waste uses do intrude into the gap, however these uses are concentrated in the central corridor and do not detract from the generally open character of the SG which is important in maintaining the perception of the gap between the built up areas.

Landscape Value and Character Sensitivity – Combe Haven Valley

- 9.12 As an area of accessible countryside with many tranquil areas within the CVCP this landscape is of high landscape value in the local context. The designated wildlife sites and new habitats created in associated with the Combe Valley Way enhance the value of this landscape. The significance of this landscape to the local population will increase as the CVCP is further enhanced. The valley floor of the Combe haven and its tributary valleys would be very sensitive to change as would the open slopes which surround the valley. The more wooded areas the west and south could potentially accommodate small scale change, however as many of these areas are ancient woodland they would be sensitive as a protected habitat.

Visual appraisal – Pebsham

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

- 9.13 The area is enclosed by ridges on three sides and overlooked by residential properties in the urban areas on the higher ground to the west and the east. The southern boundary is enclosed by properties on Bexhill Road. The open exposed areas of the extensive playing fields, Glyne Gap and the restored tip are visually sensitive despite the existing detractors in parts of this landscape character area.

Inter-visibility

- 9.14 There are long views across this part of the gap from public vantage points in Pebsham (Viewpoint 4) from the Filsham ridge and from the edge of Bulverhythe. From the southern eastern edge there are views across to the higher ground of the landfill site. The Pebsham ridge and the elevated landfill site obscure views to the northern part of the gap and the Combe Haven river valley (Viewpoint 1).

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards.

- 9.15 From within the Pebsham part of the strategic gap the views are curtailed by surrounding ridges (Viewpoint 2). The ridge at Pebsham visually separates the two character areas which make up this part of the gap. When the tip is fully restored there will be public access to a viewpoint at the top which will afford new views across the gap to Pebsham in the south and the Combe Haven Valley in the north.

Visual Appraisal – Combe Haven Valley

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

- 9.16 The area is very sensitive in long views across the area from the surrounding ridges due to the open nature of the landscape.

Inter-visibility

- 9.17 There are long views across this part of the gap from public vantage points on the Filsham ridge (Viewpoint 5) and long views back across the valley towards Filsham from the Glovers Farm area on the east side of Bexhill (Viewpoint 6). There is intervisibility across the gap from the surrounding ridges. There are long views from the higher ground and Crowhurst Road looking south to the urban edges of Bexhill (Viewpoint 9).

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards.

- 9.18 The area is enclosed by open countryside and ridges to the west, north and south giving the area a rural feel. The earthworks associated with the Combe Valley Way screen the road from many public vantage points within the area. The bridges over the new road provide

opportunities for long views across the area (Viewpoints 7, 7a and 8). There are long views to the built up edge of St Leonards from some vantage points within the eastern part of the gap (Viewpoint 8).

Landscape Vulnerability to development pressure and scope for enhancement, reduction or extension of the Bexhill / Hastings gap areas CA1 and CA2

- 9.19 The Pebsham part of the gap is vulnerable to change and pressure from new development. The corridor along Freshfields is particularly vulnerable to expansion of recreational facilities and potential waste developments. The gap boundaries need to be reinforced with bold tree planting to define the urban area and prevent further encroachment into the gap. Opportunities for landscape enhancement in the gap could be considered through future funding bids for the CVCP.
- 9.20 The area of the gap to the east in Hastings Borough is Filsham reed beds Local Nature Reserve which is protected by HBC policies for CVCP and designated wildlife sites (EN3). The open landscape area of Glyne Gap is predominantly in Hastings Borough and is protected by similar policies for CVCP and the reed beds are a Local Wildlife Site. The grass field to the south of the reed beds is in the CVCP boundary and a small part of this area, close to the built up edge of Pebsham, is in RDC. This grass field is the narrowest part of the gap between the two settlements and is vulnerable to pressure for development as it has historically been used for temporary activities such as circuses. It is recommended that the RDC strategic gap boundary is extended to include this field (Bexhill Map 1).
- 9.21 The playing fields within Hastings Borough, between the built up edge of Bulverhythe and the RDC boundary, are covered in the HBC Local Plan by its CVCP policy (EN3) and identified for sports pitches and playing fields (C12). The southern part of the SG within Rother's boundary is also in use as playing fields forming part of this wider open space and is also part of the CVCP. The current use as playing fields is consistent with the CVCP objectives and also meets the SG criteria, inasmuch as the area is open and unlit.
- 9.22 The southern edge of the part of the gap adjacent to the designated development areas of Worsham Farm and the waste water treatment works, are vulnerable to the expansion of the urban area in this location. There is an area of land at Pebsham, including Pebsham Wood which is outside, but immediately adjacent to, the north Bexhill development area and is not currently included in the strategic gap boundary. This area is in the CVCP, as is Pebsham Wood to the south and as the area will be enclosed by new development on the west side, it would make sense to include these areas in the gap boundary. It is recommended that the boundary of the gap is extended to Little Worsham Farm and the edge of the proposed urban expansion in this location (Bexhill Map 1).

- 9.23 The valley floor of the Combe Haven Valley (CA2) is less vulnerable to change due to the wildlife designations and regular winter flooding. The higher ground and ridges surrounding the valley floor could be vulnerable to change, especially in relation to pressure for farm diversification.
- 9.24 The north east corner around the junction of Queensway and the Combe Valley Way is under pressure from the expansion of Hastings. The northern edges are vulnerable to pressure for new development around Crowhurst Road and Crowhurst village. The current gap has a western boundary along the disused railway line where the viaduct once crossed the river valley. The construction of the Combe Valley Way and its associated landscaping has created a physical and visual link between north east Bexhill and the western edge of Hastings. The designation of the Combe Valley Countryside Park is a further unifying influence on this area. In this context it would make sense to extend the gap to include the extent of the road scheme and the CVCP to ensure the retention of the open landscape between the two towns (Bexhill Map 1).

Landscape management guidance for the Bexhill - St Leonards, Hastings gap including boundary treatments

- 9.25 The landscape management guidelines from the East Sussex County Landscape Assessment which are relevant to this area are outlined in Appendix 2, Part 3.
- 9.26 The semi-natural areas of the gap need to be managed to conserve and enhance the natural habitats of woodland ponds and wetlands. Future development in the Pebsham (CA1) area should be restricted to small scale built development which will fulfil the purposes of the CVCP. This may involve some built development such as a café / visitor hub or sports pavilions which would not detract from the open character of the strategic gap or the aims of the CVCP. The setting of Pebsham Farmhouse should be conserved and enhanced. The boundaries of the gap could be strengthened with bold tree planting where there are hard urban edges along the western boundary with Pebsham and the eastern boundary with St Leonards. Future pressure for farm diversification should not allow development which will encroach on the gap or detract from the tranquillity of the Combe Haven Valley.

10.0 Crowhurst and Hastings

Published Landscape character assessments

- 10.1 This strategic gap is within the National Landscape Character Area: 122. The High Weald(www.naturalengland.org.uk)

The County Landscape Assessment (CLA) for East Sussex places the gap in The Combe Haven Valley Landscape Character Area 10.

General description

- 10.2 The strategic gap between Hastings and the village of Crowhurst lies to the north of the Bexhill/St Leonards gap and is contiguous with it. Since the gap boundaries were defined the Combe Valley Way (Bexhill Hastings Link Road - BHLR) has been constructed and forms the southern boundary of this gap. The boundary at the northern edge of the gap is less clearly defined as it is contiguous with the Battle/Hastings gap and there are no obvious boundary features in this locality. The boundary of the character area follows a track which extends from the railway line at Crowhurst east to Park Farm. The eastern boundary is the Hastings Borough boundary and the disused Bexhill to Crowhurst railway forms the current western boundary. This leaves an area of open farmland between Crowhurst village development boundary and the SG. There is a landscape buffer between the borough boundary of the SG and Queensway, part of which supports the Marline Valley Woods SSSI and Local Nature Reserve. Recent business park development on the west side of Queensway has nibbled into this buffer. The gap is approximately 2km from north to south and 1km from west to east.
- 10.3 With reference to the contribution that the gap makes to the particular objectives of SGs, the gap does maintain the separate identity between the settlements. This is further reinforced by the retention of Marline Valley as green infrastructure. The strategic settlement pattern of this north west part of Hastings and the village of Crowhurst are clearly distinct. There are some scattered settlements and farmsteads within the gap which do not detract from the objective to prevent coalescence as they are characteristic of rural settlement in the high weald countryside.

Landscape Character Assessment

- 10.4 Detailed landscape character and visual assessments, including photographs, are provided in Appendix 1

Settlement and Edges

- 10.5 There is scattered development along Swineham Lane, which leads to the nucleated settlement at Green Street. Farmsteads are strung out along Crowhurst Road and on the north side of the Combe Haven Valley, often in prominent positions. The buildings at Upper Wilting and Horseshoe Farms are prominent from viewpoints in the south.

The boundary edges of this part of the gap are all open countryside and are therefore not clearly defined on the ground.

Gateways

- 10.6 Crowhurst Road crosses the west boundary of the gap at a sharp bend near Swineham Lane. Gateways into the area are limited to the where Crowhurst Road crosses the west and east boundary and Swineham Lane which turns into a track and footpath of Breadsell Lane at the eastern gateway. The deep cutting onto the Combe Valley Way from Queensway and the

railway bridge will form a dramatic new gateway to this gap. The Crowhurst Road gateway is at the bridge over the main line railway and the new BHLR overbridge as a distinct gateway into this part of the gap.

Landscape Value and Character Sensitivity

- 10.7 The northern part of the area is within the High Weald AONB and the southern part has similar characteristics to the high weald landscape and forms the buffer between the high weald and low weald landscape. The area is of relatively high value and there are several footpath links directly into and across the area from Crowhurst village.
- 10.8 The rolling and wooded nature of this countryside would allow for some limited change especially closer to Crowhurst Road. The rural high weald character of the area and distinct historic field patterns make the area sensitive to change. The more open areas on the slopes descending towards the Combe Haven would be more sensitive to change as they are exposed to long views from the urban area and down the Combe Haven Valley.

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

- 10.9 The area is of relatively low sensitivity from long views as there are few vantage points which look across the entire gap. Locally there are views into parts of the gap which would be sensitive to intrusive development. Visual barriers are formed by the rolling landform of ridge and valley and the extensive woodland cover.

Inter-visibility

- 10.11 There are few public viewpoints from around the boundaries of this area which afford views across the area to the opposite edges. There are glimpsed views across the area from vehicles on the Combe Valley Way, where it emerges from the Queensway cutting, and through gaps in the hedges on Crowhurst Road. The lack of open views across the area is partly because the edges are not built up and are soft or wooded features. The eastern boundary of the gap is the Hastings Borough administrative boundary which is the wooded track of Breadsell Lane. There are long views towards the gap from the urban edge of Hastings on Queensway (Viewpoint 10); these are curtailed by the ridge along the eastern boundary of the gap.

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards.

- 10.12 There are very limited opportunities for views from within the gap to the built up edges of Hastings as these are obscured by landform and woodland cover. There are long views across the area from the ridge at Green Street (Viewpoint 11). Views from here to the south look across the Combe Valley Way (BHLR), where it crosses the railway, to the urban edge of St Leonards, the Combe Haven Caravan Park and the newly restored Pebsham tip, similar views can be afforded from Crowhurst Road further south. There are views northwards from

Green Street over typical high weald countryside to the Battle Hastings ridge (Viewpoint 12). The urban edge of Hastings at Queensway is obscured from this view by the Breadsell ridge.

Landscape Vulnerability to development pressure and scope for enhancement, reduction or extension of the gap

- 10.13 The Combe Valley Way cuts across the southern edge of the gap. The alignment and landscape mitigation for the new road are designed to avoid visual severance of the countryside on either side. This area is vulnerable to change from expansion of the settlement of Crowhurst, which is characteristically ribbon development strung out along Crowhurst Road and Swineham Lane. There will be pressure for residential development to expand and infill these areas, especially as Crowhurst is served by a station. Agricultural diversification and pressure for alternative business use around existing farmsteads could also put pressure on the area. The gap boundaries to the north and south are generally robust as they are not urban edges which would be vulnerable to further urban expansion. The area between Crowhurst village and the gap boundary could be vulnerable to change and it is recommended that the gap boundary is extended up to the edge of the village built up area, as indicated on Bexhill Map 2 (Viewpoint 16). The land between the built up edge of Hastings at Queensway and the Rother district boundary is outside the High Weald AONB and is vulnerable to change. There are planned business developments being constructed in this area. The ancient woodlands and Marline Valley SSSI and Local Nature Reserve are protected by HBC environmental policy (EN3).

Landscape management guidance for the Hastings - Crowhurst gap including boundary treatments

- 10.14 The landscape management guidelines from the East Sussex County Landscape Assessment which are relevant to this area are outlined in Appendix 2, Part 4.
- 10.15 The gap boundaries are well defined both visually and physically to the west and east. The area to the east of Crowhurst between the village and the gap boundary does contribute to the objectives of the gap. It is recommended that the SG is extended to the built up edge of the village to include this area (Bexhill Map 1). It is appropriate for the north and south boundaries to be contiguous with the other strategic gaps as this reinforces the value of the gaps and the contribution that they make to the key SG objectives.

11.0 Battle and Hastings

Published Landscape character assessments

- 11.1 This strategic gap is within the National Landscape Character Area: 122. The High Weald (www.naturalengland.org.uk)

The County Landscape Assessment (CLA) for East Sussex places the gap in The Combe Haven Valley Landscape Character Area 10.

General description

- 11.2 This is rolling and heavily wooded countryside between the north west edge of Hastings and the town of Battle. The area is of typically broad rolling countryside as a setting for the town and Battle Abbey. Much of the area has an intimate and enclosed character with distinct field patterns and small fields divided by trees and hedges. There are a few detracting features including some intrusive farm sheds and pylons. There are areas where more intensive agriculture has removed the historic landscape structure to create large arable fields, particularly in the northwest part of the area. Woodland and open pasture are characteristic with a well wooded appearance and open pasture between. The transition from town to countryside is distinct on emerging from the suburban ribbon development along the Hastings Road. The area is typically gently rolling high weald countryside which is bounded by the Battle - Hastings ridge to the north and a ridge at Breadsell along the eastern boundary. The area is divided by a central north south ridge at Crowhurst Park. The strategic gap is about 2.3km from north to south at the widest point between Crowhurst and Battle and approximately 3km. at the widest point as the crow flies.
- 11.3 With reference to the contribution that the gap makes to the particular objectives of SGs; the gap does maintain the separate identity and clear distinctiveness between the settlements. This is further reinforced by the retention of areas of woodland between Queensway and the Hastings borough/SG boundary. Queensway no longer forms the boundary to the built up edge of Hastings where the housing developments have extended into the area to the south of Hastings Road and The Ridge. Despite this the strategic settlement pattern of this north west part of Hastings and the town of Battle is maintained by the gap and the settlements are clearly distinct. There are some scattered settlements and farmsteads within the gap but these do not detract from the objective to prevent coalescence. The western part of the gap to the west of Forewood Lane does not particularly contribute to the open landscape between Battle and Hastings as the main part of the built up area of Battle is set back from the junction of Forewood Lane and Hastings Road. Whilst the London to Hastings railway makes a convenient western boundary to the gap, a more logical boundary could be considered along Forewood Lane.

Landscape Character Assessment

- 11.4 Detailed landscape character and visual assessments, including photographs for the gap are provided as Appendix 1.

Settlement and edges

- 11.5 There are large farmsteads scattered across the area, often in prominent positions. The historic Crowhurst Park supports a large static caravan site and forest lodges. Ribbon development is typically strung out along Forewood Lane between Battle and Crowhurst. Despite the considerable amount of development scattered across the area the rural character has been preserved. There has been farm diversification and associated gentrification, notably on the Glengorse estate and at Loose Farm. Whilst these sites are not widely visible they do have an effect of gentrification on local landscape character.
- 11.6 The urban edge of Hastings is set back from the Rother district boundary and separated from the edge of the gap by open fields and woodland. The western edge of the character area and the strategic gap is defined by the Hastings to London railway and is bounded by open countryside on both sides. The urban edges to the gap are set back and are generally well screened. The urban edge of Battle on the north side of the gap is broken by large gardens and associated vegetation and is not a defined hard urban edge. The properties on the ridge are elevated and visible in long views across the gap from the ridge of Telham Lane.
- 11.7 The ribbon development along the ridge between Battle and Hastings does reduce the impression of the gap along this northern boundary. The urban edge of Battle is the ribbon development along Hastings Road through Telham. The break in this ribbon development between the edge of Telham and the Hastings borough boundary at Breadsell Farm is therefore very important to the integrity of the gap.

Gateways

- 11.8 Gateways into the gap by road are restricted to the country lanes and the public right of way that follows the eastern boundary. The A2100 runs along the northern boundary of the gap and there are gateways off this road into the gap at its junctions with Forewood and Breadsell Lanes. The ribbon development which extends along Forward Lane reduces the experience of leaving one settlement and arriving on another. This is deceptive as beyond the development the areas surrounding the lane are very rural in character. By contrast the many footpaths and bridleways which emerge from the built up areas into the gap become rural very quickly, e.g. Breadsell Lane.

Landscape Value and Character Sensitivity

- 11.9 The area is within the High Weald AONB and is of high landscape value. The area would be sensitive to change especially on the more open areas and the higher ground and ridges.

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

- 11.10 The area is of relatively low sensitivity from long views as there are few vantage points which look across the entire gap. Locally there are views into parts of the gap which would be sensitive to intrusive development. Visual barriers are formed by the rolling landform of ridge and valley and the extensive woodland cover.

Inter-visibility

- 11.11 There are few public viewpoints from around the boundaries of this area which afford views across the area to the opposite edges. This is partly because the edges are not built up and are soft or wooded features. For example the edge of the built up area of Battle is largely screened by intervening trees and topography (Viewpoint 12). The eastern boundary of the gap is the Hastings Borough administrative boundary and is the wooded track of Breadsell Lane. Development on the western side of Hastings is obscured in views from the gap by intervening trees and the ridge on the borough boundary (Viewpoint 13). There are views towards the gap from the urban edge of Hastings on Queensway these are curtailed by the ridge along the borough/Rother SG boundary (Viewpoint 10).

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards

- 11.12 There are very limited opportunities for views from within the gap to the built up edges of the Hastings as these are obscured by landform and woodland cover (Viewpoints 13 and 14). The urban edge of Battle is the ribbon development along Hastings Road through Telham. The edge is broken by intervening vegetation and is not a defined hard urban edge, but the properties on the ridge are elevated and visible in long views across the gap from the ridge of Telham Lane (Viewpoint 15). From this ridge, the landscape to the west of Forewood Lane is visually contiguous with the wider High Weald countryside and the urban edge of Hastings is completely obscured from this area. In this context this part of the current strategic gap area does not visually contribute to the perception of a gap between the two settlements.

Landscape Vulnerability to development pressure and scope for enhancement, reduction or extension of the gap

- 11.13 There will be pressure for residential development to expand and infill the area along Forewood Lane to the north of Crowhurst, especially as it is served by a station. The ribbon development area of Telham, which bounds the north edge of the gap, will be subject to pressures for infill development and expansion eastwards. Agricultural diversification and the need for alternative business use around existing farmsteads could also put pressure on the area. The western and southern gap boundaries are generally robust as they are not edges which would be vulnerable to further urban expansion. The eastern boundary could be vulnerable to further expansion of Hastings or pressure for diversification and change

particularly around Breadsell Farm. The open fields in Hastings Borough between the Rother DC boundary and Queensway are not protected by policies in the Hastings plan, however the woodlands are protected by policy EN3.

- 11.14 It is suggested that the western gap boundary is reviewed to follow an alignment along Forward Lane to be more specific to the core gap between Hastings and Battle (Bexhill Map 1). The current SG area to the west of Forewood Lane is more closely associated with the open high weald countryside to the south and west of Battle. In this context the extension of the gap west of Forewood Lane does not contribute to the three particular objectives of the SG, as set out in 1.2 in relation to the built up areas of Hastings and Battle.

Landscape management guidance for the Battle - Hastings gap including boundary treatments

- 11.15 The landscape management guidelines from the East Sussex County Landscape Assessment which are relevant to this area are outlined in Appendix 2, Part 4.11.16. The gap boundaries are well defined on the eastern and northern edges and there is little need to reinforce these. The southern boundary is contiguous with the Hastings/Crowhurst SG and the landscape management and planning controls should be similar across both areas. Infill development along Hastings Road and Foreword Lane should be resisted as this would erode the boundary edges and particularly along the ridge between Battle and Hastings.

12.0 Conclusions

Rye and Rye Harbour

- 12.1 The strategic gap between Rye citadel and Rye Harbour industrial area and village does provide an important function in retaining the separate and distinct identity of the two settlements. The area is fragile and vulnerable to encroaching development and incremental changes in landscape management. The retention and protection of this gap area is important to the conservation and enhancement of local landscape character and views. A small proposed extension to the gap to incorporate the fragile riverside area is recommended as this is contiguous with and inseparable from the gap landscape and views.

Hastings and Fairlight

- 12.2 The strategic gap between the Hastings borough boundary and the edge of Fairlight Cove provides an important function in defending the area between the Hastings Country Park and the edge of the settlements of Fairlight and Fairlight Cove. The area currently outside the strategic gap, between the gap boundary and Fairlight Road including The Close is vulnerable to incremental change and development around the edges of the settlements. The exclusion of the houses and gardens on the south side of Battery Road could leave this area vulnerable to infill development. It is recommended that these areas are included in the gap to conserve the open character of the gap between Fairlight and Fairlight Cove.

Bexhill and St Leonards

- 12.3 The strategic gap between Bexhill and Hastings has been subject to considerable change with the development of the Combe Valley Way releasing land for development for the delivery of the North Bexhill Masterplan. The establishment of the Combe Valley Countryside Park provides an opportunity to conserve and enhance the landscape character and visual amenity of the majority of the SG area. The expansion of Bexhill and the establishment of the Countryside Park create a need to review the strategic gap boundaries. In this context it would make sense to include the Combe Valley Way and CVCP in the SG boundary. It is recommended that the boundaries of the SG are extended to encompass the Combe Haven valley and its tributary valleys in order to protect the open landscape between the two settlements. The small area of land within Glyne Gap which is in Rother District should also be included in the SG boundary.

Crowhurst and Hastings

- 12.4 The SG between Crowhurst and Hastings does meet the particular objectives of strategic gaps as outlined in 1.2 above. The omission of the area between the built up edge of Crowhurst and the Hastings to London railway line would leave this area vulnerable to development. From a landscape character and visual perspective this land is an important part of the open area between the settlements and it is recommended that this is included in the SG boundary.

Battle and Hastings

- 12.5 The SG between Battle and Hastings does meet the particular objectives of strategic gaps as outlined in 1.2 above. The area to the west of Forewood Lane on the southern edge of Battle does not contribute to these objectives as strongly as the area to the east. This landscape is typical of the High Weald AONB and is clearly countryside outside the development area and therefore protected by countryside and AONB policies. It is recommended that the western boundary of the SG is reviewed to follow an alignment along Forewood Lane as this would not compromise the effectiveness of the gap between Battle and Hastings.

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1.0 Rye – Rye Harbour**National Character Area / Landscape Type: 122 Romney Marsh****COUNTY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA: 26 Rye / Winchelsea Area**

Local landscape character area description, including aesthetic factors and detractors.

This is an area of reclaimed grazing marsh adjacent to the River Rother estuary. It is bounded by a tributary stream, Rock Channel, on the north side and associated boat yards, the flood banks of the Rother to the east and the open marshland of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve to the west. The flat open character is rather bleak and windswept. The boat yards and yachts give the northern part of the area a maritime character. The southern boundary is the industrial area of Rye Harbour with some large and intrusive development. The scattered small holdings have horseculture elements such as informal shelters and fenced paddocks. There is a general air of lack of management and urban fringe character. The frequent large vehicles and fast traffic detract from the enjoyment of the cycleway/footpath along Rye Harbour Road.

Landform

The area is flat apart from the artificial river flood banks. The historic citadel of Rye town rises from the north boundary as a significant local feature rising out of the marshes.

Landcover

The area to the north of Rye Harbour Road is rough grassland and pony paddock with salt marsh in the tidal zone on the river banks. To the south of the road there is more tree and scrub vegetation cover. Some of this is associated with gardens and small holdings and has a high percentage of locally uncharacteristic evergreen high hedges and Lombardy poplar screens.

Landscape Condition

The landscape is generally in good condition where it is in positive management. There are areas where the management is sporadic and lack of grazing has allowed scrub encroachment.

Settlement (Buildings, densities, size of settlements), impact of urban edges on countryside.

On the south side of Rye harbour Road there is one large house at the north end and scattered caravans in rectangular plots. Settlement on the north side of the road is limited to a small holding with associated agricultural buildings and a modern church or Kingdom Hall.

Landscape Value

The area is of low to moderate landscape value as there is no public access within the gap apart from along Rye Harbour Road.

Landscape Sensitivity

The open and exposed character of the area to the north of the road makes this area of high sensitivity to change. The more enclosed landscape to the south of the road would be less sensitive to small scale changes.

Gateways

The western gateway is across the bridge over Rock Channel and past the boat yards. There is a transition from the built up area of Rye to the open landscape of the gap. The transition from this open landscape to the industrial area of Rye Harbour is also distinct.

Visual appraisal

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

The strategic gap area is very sensitive in local views from the historic citadel of Rye town and notably from Gun Gardens. There are long views across the gap from this area. The trees and evergreen planting provide a screen both into and out of the gap from the open marshland of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve to the south.

Inter-visibility

The open nature of the landscape allows long views across the area from the boundary edges.

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards.

Views from Rye Harbour Road into the southern part tend to be localised glimpses through the trees and scrub to the open countryside beyond. Views to the north are open towards the Rye citadel and the river bank.



Viewpoint 1: From Rye citadel the entire gap is visible for the town which affords long views across the gap to the industrial estate in the south. From this view all of the edges and boundaries of the gap are visible.



Viewpoint 2: At western gateway entrance to the gap the bridge is a rather poorly defined gateway to the gap as there is development and boat yards on the west side.



Viewpoint 3: Rye Harbour Road looking north across area. There are open views across the entire northern side of the gap to Rye citadel.



Viewpoint 4: Looking south from Rye Harbour Road to the edge of the gap and Rye Harbour industrial estate.



Viewpoint 5: Looking north from Rye Harbour Road to the edge of the gap and Rye Harbour industrial estate.

2.0 Fairlight /Hastings

National Character Area / Landscape Type: 122 The High Weald

County landscape character area: 12 High Weald Coast

Local landscape character area description, including aesthetic factors and detractors.

This is a landscape of high scenic quality especially within the Hastings Country Park (CP) and near to the cliff top and coast. The cliff tops just to the south of the strategic Gap are called the Firehills because of the frequent gorse fires. As the only coastal part of the High Weald AONB, the area between Fairlight and Hastings has unique landscape qualities and characteristics and a strong sense of place. The historic tower of St Andrews church is a focal point and dominant feature which can be seen from much of the area. There are no detractors in the strategic gap.

Landform

The High Weald Coast county landscape character area is where the rolling sandstone hills of the High Weald landscape meet the coast and tumble to the sea. The area of the strategic gap is a bowl formed from the valley which slopes gently down from Fairlight to Fairlight Cove.

Landcover

Grass land, woodland, gorse on the cliff tops and tree covered glens. Large gardens surround the houses which sit within and on the edge of the gap along Warren Road.

Landscape Condition

The landscape is generally in good condition. As with much of the woodland in the AONB, which is not commercially managed, the woods are unlikely to be in positive management. The management of the farm land associated with Warren Farm and other small holdings is uncertain especially as the Warren Farm buildings have been replaced with a large private house.

Settlement (Buildings, densities, size of settlements), impact of urban edges on countryside.

There is scattered housing development along Warren Road of houses in large gardens and some large houses on the eastern edge of the gap adjacent of the built up area of Fairlight Cove. The settlement of Fairlight is characterised by larger houses surrounded by extensive gardens, most of which are on the ridge which falls away from Battery Hill. This settlement defines the north side of the gap. The Firehills Coastguard cottages are outside the gap but dominate views from the south east side of the gap. The part of the gap which is separated from the rest of the gap by Fairlight hamlet includes St Andrews Church, a group of farm buildings and the Country Park entrance including the car park and visitor centre.

The settlement edges to the gap area are generally softened by vegetation in adjacent gardens. The houses along Hill Road and Battery Hill are set back from the edge of the gap to form a broken and softened built up edge. The edge of Fairlight Cove settlement is enclosed by woodland in the north. There are more exposed

and hard edges adjacent to Meadow Way, Commanders Walk, Fyrsway and at Warren Farm, a large modern house has replaced the farm buildings on the edge of the gap.

Landscape Value

The area is typical of the High Weald Coast landscape character area and as AONB countryside is of high landscape value.

Landscape Character Sensitivity

The area is of moderate sensitivity in the more enclosed lower lying areas immediately to the west of Fairlight Cove. The areas within Hastings CP are of high sensitivity.

Gateways

There are no clearly defined routes across the gaps which provide a sense of leaving one settlement and arriving at another. Warren Road does cross the gap but as there is low density housing development strung out along the road, the experience of the gap in between is not obviously rural in character.

Visual appraisal

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

The strategic gap area is sensitive in local views from the surrounding ridges including those in Hastings CP. There are no long views into the area from the wider AONB. The views are enclosed and curtailed by the ridges and the woodland vegetation within the valley obscures local views.

Inter-visibility

There are views across the gap to the western and eastern boundaries. These views are curtailed by the Coastguard Lane / Hastings CP ridge to the west and the Battery Hill ridge to the north. There are views to the large houses which are strung out along the ridge to the north and the tower of St Andrews church. The landscape in between is not visible from this point as it is heavily wooded and at a similar level to the viewpoint. There are long views across the gap from the ridges at Hastings Country Park and Fairlight which take in the other boundaries and edges as well as the central wooded valley. The new house at Warren Farm stands out starkly on the built up edge of Fairlight Cove illustrating the visual vulnerability of this area. The rest of the settlement is set low in the landscape and is less obtrusive in this view.

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards.

Apart from the small area within the CP, the only publicly accessible areas within the gap are along Warren Road and Coastguard Lane and views across the gap are obscured by woodland and buildings from these locations. Public views from Hill Road and Battery Hill are obscured by houses and garden trees but the properties on the surrounding ridges will have long views across the gap.



Viewpoint 1: Taken from within the gap on the edge of Fairlight Cove in Wood Field.



Viewpoint 2: From the edge of the gap in the Hastings CP looking east towards Fairlight Cove



Viewpoint 3: From the top of Firehills on the edge of the gap there are long views across Fairlight Cove to Romney Marsh and Camber. The built up area of Fairlight Cove is for the most part hidden as it is set low in the landscape and the gap boundaries are softened by vegetation.

3.0 Bexhill /St Leonards CA1 Pebsham

National Character Area / Landscape Type: 122 High Weald

County Landscape Character Area: 10 Combe Haven Valley

Local landscape character area description, including aesthetic factors and detractors.

This area is the southern part of the Combe Valley Countryside Park (CVCP) and is a rather bleak open exposed landscape. Most of the area is the activity area for the park and is laid out as football pitches. The area has historically been used as a location for waste type facilities including a household waste site, a waste recycling facility and waste water treatment works. These uses do detract from the character of this part of the gap as they require large buildings and regular large vehicle movements along Freshfields. The Pebsham landfill site to the north of the area is closed and when fully restored will be a new landscaped feature and focal point. The long term plan is to allow public access onto the new hill of the tip opening up new views across the area. This will only be possible once it is fully restored and when all risks associated with monitoring gases have been removed. Glyne Gap lies to the south of the area and is outside the strategic gap, but as an important green gap between the built up edge of Pebsham and Bulverhythe and should be considered to be contiguous with the strategic gap. This area also provides uninterrupted views from the A259 into the CVCP.

The key focal points and positive natural landscape features in the area are the Glyne Gap reed beds which are a Local Wildlife Site and Pebsham Pond. The large historic farm house at Pebsham Farm is also a focal feature which contributes to the character of the area.

Landform

With the exception of Glyne Gap, which is a natural low lying wetland area, the natural topography of the area has been significantly altered by various phases of landfill operations. The terraces of playing fields step up from the edge of Bulverhythe, north to the edge of the landfill. The landfill has been designed to create a new hill and ridge as a continuation of the Worsham Ridge.

Landcover

The landcover is primarily grass pitches and the landfill will be restored to grass. There are extensive areas of naturalistic planting around the edges of the pitches and across the landfill which provide shelter belts and break up the bleak open landscape.

Pebsham pond and the surrounding reed beds and wooded areas are a more sheltered secluded part of the area. Glyne Gap is mostly reed beds with encroaching scrub. There is an open grass field to the south of the reed beds which is sometimes used for outdoor events.

Landscape Condition

Most of this area is in reasonable condition as landscape managed as public open space and mown grass pitches. The reed beds in Glyne Gap are in reasonable condition however lack of management is allowing scrub to encroach. The reed beds have been grazed in the past but currently lack positive management and scrub is invading the wetland area.

Settlement (Buildings, densities, size of settlements), impact of urban edges on countryside.

The area is surrounded by the built up Pebsham suburb of Bexhill to the east, the linear settlement of Bulverhythe (Bexhill Road) to the south and a large static caravan park to the east. The historic farmstead of Pebsham Farm supports converted traditional farm buildings alongside some more modern business units which have encroached into the edge of the gap. A garden centre with associated car parking is located in the south west corner. There are large buildings within the gap associated with the various waste activities.

At Bulverhythe, Glyne Gap and Filsham the open edges of housing estates face onto the exposed levels of Glyne Gap and this is emphasised by the rising ground. The Combe Haven Caravan Park is a dominant feature climbing up the slope along the eastern boundary. The Combe Haven River SSSI runs between the caravan park and the RDC boundary to the gap, this buffer of green space to the RDC SG is protected by HBC council policies for CVCP and designated wildlife sites.

Landscape Value

As part of the CVCP this landscape has a potentially high value in the local context, in the wider context of the Combe Haven Valley it is of low value. The local significance of the gap will increase as the CVCP is further enhanced.

Landscape Character Sensitivity

The reed beds and the open green field to the south of these at Glyne Gap and the area surrounding Pebsham Farm house and pond would be particularly sensitive to change. The open character of the playing fields and the restored tip contribute to the open undeveloped character of the gap. The existing waste uses do intrude into the gap, however these uses are concentrated in the central corridor and do not detract from the generally open character of the SG.

Gateways

Freshfields is the main access point to the area and recent enhancements to the environment and signage have improved the perception of an entrance to the CVCP. Further enhancement of the CVCP, such as provision of a visitor centre, will provide an opportunity to enhance the gap and gateways to it.

There are several other entrance points on public rights of way which cross the gap. These have also been enhanced with way marker posts and CVCP information boards.

Visual appraisal

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

The area is enclosed by ridges on three sides and overlooked by residential properties on the higher ground in the surrounding urban areas to the west and east. The southern boundary is enclosed by properties on

Bexhill Road. The open exposed areas of the extensive playing fields, Glyne Gap and the restored tip are visually sensitive despite the existing detractors in parts of this landscape character area.

Inter-visibility

There are long views across this part of the gap from public vantage points in the Pebsham area of Bexhill and looking back from the Filsham ridge in Hastings and St Leonards. The open views from the A259 at Glyne Gap across fields and reed beds are an important window into the CVCP

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards.

From within the Pebsham part of the strategic gap the views are curtailed by surrounding ridges. The north part of the gap which is the Combe Haven River valley and levels can only be seen from the ridge on the northern edge of this character area. This ridge effectively cuts the gap in two visually.



Viewpoint 1: From the southern eastern edge there are views across to the higher ground of the landfill site. The Pebsham ridge and the elevated landfill site obscure views to the northern part of the gap and the Combe Haven river valley.



Viewpoint 2: From Freshfield Road looking east towards Combe Haven Caravan Park



Viewpoint 3: From the edge of the gap at the western edge of Bulverhythe there are views across the Glyne Gap and the Pebsham part of the strategic gap to the Pebsham ridge in the distance. The built up edge of Pebsham bounds the gap on the left and houses in Bulverhythe to the right.



Viewpoint 4: From the ridge at Pebsham Farm there are views across the gap to the Filsham Ridge and the Combe Haven caravan park in the centre of the photo. The top of the restored Pebsham tip is on the left.

4.0 Bexhill /St Leonards CA2 Combe Haven Valley

National Character Area / Landscape Type: 122 The High Weald

County Landscape Character Area: 10 Combe Haven Valley

Local landscape character area description, including aesthetic factors and detractors.

This area is the central part of the Combe Valley Countryside Park (CVCP) and is an area of unspoilt grazing marsh focused on the Combe Haven River and its tributary streams. The focal point is the river which runs west to east through the area. Historic and locally characteristic farm houses are located in prominent positions on the ridges overlooking the valley. The southern edge is enclosed by the now disused Bexhill to Crowhurst railway the embankments of which are truncated where a viaduct once carried it across the valley. The southern boundary of the area is heavily wooded by the railway vegetation, Combe and Pebsham Woods. Many of the woods are semi-natural ancient woodland. The valley floor and flood plain are designated as the Combe Haven SSSI. The area of the gap to the east and in Hastings Borough is Filsham reed beds local Nature Reserve. The area has an air of tranquillity despite its proximity to the urban areas of Bexhill and Hastings. The Combe Valley Way which crosses around the west and north of the valley has been designed with earthworks and noise barriers to minimise the impact on the tranquillity of the valley and Combe Haven SSSI.

Landform

The valley floor is flat and rises to the Pebsham ridge to the south, the Decoy ridge to the north and the built up area of Filsham to the east. The valley is enclosed by a series of ridges which are dissected by the Powdermill, Watermill and Decoy streams in north south valleys. The low lying area around the river floods in winter.

Landcover

The valley floor is grazing marsh with scattered scrub and occasional groups of trees. There are several blocks of ancient woodland on the ridges surrounding the valley some of significant size. Decoy, Bog and Monkham woods are on the north side. Combe and Pebsham Wood are on the south side and Great Henniker and Hanging Wood wrap around the west end of the valley.

Landscape Condition

The condition of the landscape is generally good and intact although the grazing marsh does suffer from lack of grazing which has led to an increase in scrub encroachment. The valley sides support mixed arable farming and grazing of cattle and sheep.

Settlement (Buildings, densities, size of settlements), impact of urban edges on countryside.

Settlement in the Combe Haven Valley is typically scattered historic farmsteads on the higher ground overlooking the valley. The farms at Actons, Adams and Bynes historically had equestrian activities and have

associated stabling. Several of the farm houses and associated barns are listed buildings. The valley floor is free from development as it is the floodplain.

At Filsham the open edges of housing estates face onto the exposed levels of Filsham reed beds and this is emphasised by the rising ground. The Combe Haven Caravan Park is a dominant feature which climbs up the slope in the south east corner of the area. The south eastern edge of the area is bounded by the newly restored Pebsham landfill site and the waste water treatment works. The proposed residential development at Worsham Farm will form the new built up edge to this area, but this will be largely screened from the countryside by the woodland of Combe Wood and the disused railway line. The south west corner of the gap is overlooked by the new business development at the Bexhill Enterprise Park (formerly Glovers Farm) and the new roundabout junction of the Combe Valley Way (Bexhill Hastings Link Road) and Mill View Street (the North Bexhill Approach Road).

Landscape Value

As an area of accessible countryside with many tranquil areas within the CVCP this landscape is of high landscape value in the local context. The designated wildlife sites and new habitats created in association with the Combe Valley Way enhance the value of this landscape. The significance of this landscape to the local population will increase as the CVCP is further enhanced.

Landscape Character Sensitivity

The valley floor of the Combe haven and its tributary valleys would be very sensitive to change as would the open slopes which surround the valley. The more wooded areas the west and south could potentially accommodate small scale change, however as many of these areas are ancient woodland they would be sensitive as a protected habitat.

Gateways

There are vehicular access points to the area at each end of the Combe Valley Way which are gateways to this countryside. There are several north south footpaths which emerge from the built up area of Bexhill and provide a clear transition from town to countryside. These include the 1066 country walk which arises in the Worsham Farm area. These are significant gateway points to the gap and the CVCP from the urban area.

Visual appraisal

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

The area is very sensitive in long views across the area from the surrounding ridges due to the open nature of the landscape.

Inter-visibility

There are long views across this part of the gap from public vantage points on the Filsham ridge (Viewpoint 5) and long views back across the valley towards Filsham from the Glovers Farm (Viewpoint 6) area on the east side of Bexhill. There is intervisibility across the gap from the surrounding ridges. There are long views from the higher ground and Crowhurst Road looking south to the urban edges of Bexhill.

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards.

The area is enclosed by open countryside and ridges to the west, north and south giving the area a rural feel. The earthworks associated with the Combe Valley Way screen the road from many public vantage points within the area. The bridges over the new road provide opportunities for long views across the area (Viewpoints 7,7a and 8). There are long views to the built up edge of St Leonards from some vantage points within the eastern part of the gap (Viewpoint 8).



Viewpoint 5: From Bunting Close across the Combe Haven Valley



Viewpoint 6: From Glovers Farm looking east across the valley and the Combe Valley Way.



Viewpoint 7: From the access bridge to Acton's Farm over the Combe Valley Way looking south towards Bexhill.



Viewpoint 7A: From the access bridge to Acton's Farm over the Combe Valley Way looking north towards High House Farm



Viewpoint 8: Looking south from Adams Farm across the Combe Haven Valley towards St Leonards



Viewpoint 9: From Crowhurst Road at Henleys Down looking south across Watermill stream valley towards Bexhill

5.0 Crowhurst and Hastings CA3 Green Street

National Character Area / Landscape Type: 122 The High Weald

County Landscape Character Area: 10 Combe Haven Valley

Local landscape character area description, including aesthetic factors and detractors.

This is rolling and heavily wooded countryside, forming the north side of the Combe Haven Valley. Much of the area has an intimate and enclosed character with distinct field patterns and small fields. Scattered farms on the ridge sides are often in prominent positions, e.g. Upper Wilting Farm. There are few detracting features, some intrusive farm sheds and pylons on the north side of the area. Views to the landfill site are dominant from much of this area however once this is fully restored it will appear as a natural green hill on the south side of the Combe Haven Valley.

Landform

Gently rolling high weald countryside with a central west to east ridge which turns south to form one of the wooded ridges on the north side of the Combe Haven Valley.

Landcover

Mix of arable and pasture land, pleasant pastoral landscape. Historic pattern of woods, hedges and shaws gives the impression of a heavily wooded landscape.

Landscape Condition

The condition is of generally well managed and farmed landscape. There is some pressure for agricultural diversification with derelict farm buildings and evidence of planning applications for conversion of these. There are typical horse related uses with divided paddocks, ménages and stabling.

Settlement (Buildings, densities, size of settlements), impact of urban edges on countryside.

The urban edges to this area are largely set back and well screened. The urban edge of Hastings is separated from the edge of the Rother DC part of the gap by extensive ancient woodlands in Marline Valley. The eastern edge is separated from the built up areas of Crowhurst village by grazed fields and woodland. The western boundary of the gap here follows the Hastings to London railway, thus leaving the area between the boundary and the built up edge vulnerable. It is suggested that the boundary should be extended to Crowhurst Road and the village edge in order to defend this field from future development.

Landscape Value

The northern part of the area is within the High Weald AONB and the southern part has similar characteristics to the high weald landscape and forms the buffer between the high weald and low weald landscapes. The area is of relatively high value and there are several footpath links directly into and across the area from Crowhurst village.

Landscape Character Sensitivity

The rolling and wooded nature of this countryside would allow for some limited change especially closer to Crowhurst Road. The rural high weald character of the area and distinct historic field patterns make the area sensitive to change. The more open areas on the slopes descending towards the Combe Haven would be more sensitive to change as they are exposed to long views from the urban area and down the wider Combe Haven Valley.

Gateways

Gateways into the area are limited to the where Crowhurst Road crosses the west and east boundary and Swineham Lane which turns into a track and footpath of Breadsell Lane at the eastern gateway. The deep cutting onto the Combe Valley Way from Queensway and the railway bridge will form a dramatic new gateway to this gap. The Crowhurst Road gateway is at the bridge over the main line railway and the new BHLR overbridge as a distinct gateway into this part of the gap. The gateways on these roads entering from the countryside to the west are less well defined. Crowhurst Road emerges at a sharp bend in the road where it bridges the disused railway line at the junction with Swineham Lane.

Visual appraisal

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

The area is of relatively low sensitivity from long views as there are few vantage points which look across the entire gap. Locally there are views into parts of the gap which would be sensitive to intrusive development. Visual barriers are formed by the rolling landform of ridge and valley and the extensive woodland cover

Inter-visibility

There are few public viewpoints from around the boundaries of this area which afford views across the area to the opposite edges. This is partly because the edges are not built up and are soft or wooded features. The eastern boundary of the gap is the Hastings Borough administrative boundary. The boundary is the public right of way and Breadsell Lane. There are long views towards the gap from the urban edge of Hastings on Queensway; these are curtailed by the ridge along the boundary of the gap.



Viewpoint 16 : From Crowhurst village looking east towards the edge of the gap and into the proposed area for extension of the gap.

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards.

There are very limited opportunities for views from within the gap to the built up edges of the Hastings as these are obscured by landform and woodland cover. There are long views across the area from the ridge at Green Street. Views from here to the south look to the urban edge of St Leonard's, the Combe Haven Caravan park and the newly restored Pebsham tip, similar views can be afforded from Crowhurst Road further south. There are views northwards from Green Street over high weald countryside to the Battle Hastings ridge. The urban edge of Hastings at Queensway is obscured from this view by the Breadsell ridge.



Viewpoint 10: Towards the gap and borough boundary from Queensway, the RDC/SG boundary is the other side of the ridge



Viewpoint 11: From Swineham Lane at Horseshoe Farm looking south. Also refer to Viewpoint 12 (character area CA4) looking north across the gap from this location.

6.0 Battle and Hastings CA4 Forewood Lane /Telham

National Character Area / Landscape Type: 122 High Weald

County Landscape Character Area: 10 Combe Haven Valley

Local landscape character area description, including aesthetic factors and detractors.

This is rolling and heavily wooded countryside between the north west edge of Hastings and the town of Battle. The area is of typically broad rolling countryside as a setting for the town and Battle Abbey. Much of the area has an intimate and enclosed character with distinct field patterns and small fields divided by trees and hedges. There are areas where more intensive agriculture has removed the historic landscape structure to create large arable fields, particularly in the northwest part of the area. There are large farmsteads scattered across the area, often in prominent positions. The historic Crowhurst Park supports a large static caravan site and forest lodges. Ribbon development is typically strung out along Forewood Lane between Battle and Crowhurst. There are a few detracting features including some intrusive farm sheds and pylons. Despite the considerable amount of development scattered across the area, the rural character has been preserved. There has been farm diversification and associated gentrification, notably on the Glengorse estate and at Loose Farm. Whilst these sites are not widely visible they do have an effect of gentrification on local landscape character. Woodland and open pasture are characteristic with a well wooded appearance and open pasture between. The urban edge of Battle on the north side of the gap is broken by large gardens and associated vegetation. The urban edge of Hastings is set back from the Rother district boundary and separated from the edge of the gap by open fields and woodland.

Landform

The area is characterised by gently rolling high weald countryside which is bounded by the Battle - Hastings ridge to the north and a ridge at Breadsell along the eastern boundary. The area is divided by a central north south ridge at Crowhurst Park.

Landcover

This is a mix of arable and pasture land, pleasant pastoral landscape. The historic pattern of woods, hedges and shaws gives the impression of a heavily wooded landscape.

Landscape Condition

The condition is of generally well managed and farmed landscape. There is evidence of pressure for agricultural diversification with some derelict farm buildings and applications for the conversion of these. There are typical horse related uses with divided paddocks, ménages and stabling.

Settlement (Buildings, densities, size of settlements), impact of urban edges on countryside.

The urban edges to this area are largely set back and well screened. The urban edge of Hastings is separated from the edge of the Rother DC part of the gap by areas of open fields interspersed with ancient woodlands in Marline Valley. The urban edge of Battle is the ribbon development along Hastings Road through Telham.

The edge is broken by intervening vegetation and is not a defined hard urban edge but the properties on the ridge are elevated and visible in long views across from the ridge of Telham Lane. The western edge of the character area and the strategic gap is defined by the Hastings to London railway and is bounded by open countryside on both sides.

Landscape Value

The area is within the High Weald AONB and is of high landscape value.

Landscape Character Sensitivity

The area would be sensitive to change especially on the more open areas and the higher ground and ridges.

Gateways

The most pronounced gateway is leaving the built up edge of Battle and arriving in Hastings on the Hastings Road where it merges with the Ridge. Other gateways into the gap by road are restricted to the country lanes and the ribbon development which extends along Forewood Lane reduces the experience of leaving one settlement and arriving on another. This is deceptive as beyond the development the areas surrounding the lane are very rural in character. By contrast the many footpath and bridleways which emerge from the built up areas into the gap become rural very quickly e.g. Breadsell Lane.

Visual appraisal

Visual sensitivity and visual barriers

The area is of relatively low sensitivity from long views as there are few vantage points which look across the entire gap. Locally there are views into parts of the gap which would be sensitive to intrusive development. Visual barriers are formed by the rolling landform of ridge and valley and the extensive woodland cover

Inter-visibility

There are few public viewpoints from around the boundaries of this area which afford views across the area to the opposite edges. This is partly because the edges are not built up and are soft or wooded features. The eastern boundary of the gap is the Hastings Borough administrative boundary and is the wooded track of Breadsell Lane. There are long views towards the gap from the urban edge of Hastings on Queensway views in to the Rother DC part of the gap are curtailed by the ridge along the borough / district boundary.

Intra-visibility from within the gap outwards.

There are very limited opportunities for views from within the gap to the built up edges of the Hastings as these are obscured by landform and woodland cover. The urban edge of Battle is the ribbon development along Hastings Road through Telham. The edge is broken by intervening vegetation and is not a defined hard urban edge, but the properties on the ridge are elevated and visible in long views across the gap from the ridge of Telham Lane. From this ridge the landscape to the west of Forewood Lane is visually contiguous with the wider High Weald countryside and the urban edge of Hastings is completely obscured from this area. In this context this part of the current strategic gap area does not visually contribute to the perception of a gap between the two settlements.



Viewpoint 12: From Green Street looking north to the Battle / Hastings ridge



Viewpoint 13: From the farm access to Breadsell Farm looking west towards Hastings.



Viewpoint 14: From the farm access at Loose Farm looking east towards Hastings



Viewpoint 15 : Looking north towards Battle from Telham Hill

Appendix 2

Landscape Management Guidelines

Extracted from the East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment Update 2015

Part 1 : Rye/Rye Harbour

The following are landscape management guidelines from the East Sussex County Landscape Assessment for the *Rye/Winchelsea Area* are relevant to this area.

- Conservation and re-creation of wet meadow/pasture habitats.
- Plant new small woods, wet woodland and tree belts to strengthen the landscape character and where this is appropriate habitat creation.
- Plant trees and woodland to contain existing and new built development.
- Enhance the biodiversity value of wet meadows, drainage and stream channels.
- Plan for flood management by conserving and enhancing the flood plains and managing water levels in ditches and drains.
- Resist further development in areas at risk of coastal flooding.
- Encourage the design of sensitive flood defence schemes which conserve and enhance the landscape and habitats
- Conserve and enhance existing man-made and natural drainage features.
- Maximise opportunities for the creation of SUDs schemes which contribute to local amenity and habitat creation.
- Enhance the condition of areas of horsiculture and small holdings through the restoration of an intact, well managed hedgerow or ditch network and retaining a diverse grass sward by preventing overgrazing.
- Encourage management of river and stream channels, especially conservation of riverside trees and vegetation.

Part 2: Fairlight Hastings

The following landscape management guidelines from the East Sussex County Landscape Character Assessment for the *High Weald Coast* are relevant to this area:

- Conserve hedges, trees and small woods. Maintain the mixed farmed character of the area.
- Protect and manage historic field patterns and conserve boundary features.
- Conserve and enhance byways and rural lanes
- Plan for and manage changes which may occur in the landscape due to changes in farm management brought about by economic influences and climate change.
- Actively manage trees and woodland through coppicing of sweet chestnut and replanting to create a diverse age structure.
- Plant trees and woodland to contain existing and new built development.

- Monitoring and management of these habitats to facilitate adaptation to coastal change through managed retreat.
- Plan for and manage recreational pressure on the countryside which could be affected by the increase in population in surrounding town of Hastings as well as the seasonal holiday makers
- Maximise opportunities for access away from sensitive habitats.
- Consider opportunities to create new green corridors and improve existing as safe ideally motorised traffic free recreational routes.
- Consider the opportunities and constraints for recreational use of the beaches due to cliff erosion and poor access
- Establish defined development edges to villages with new tree planting.

Part 3 : Bexhill /Hastings

The following landscape management guidelines from the East Sussex County Landscape Character Assessment for The Combe Haven Valley are relevant to this area.

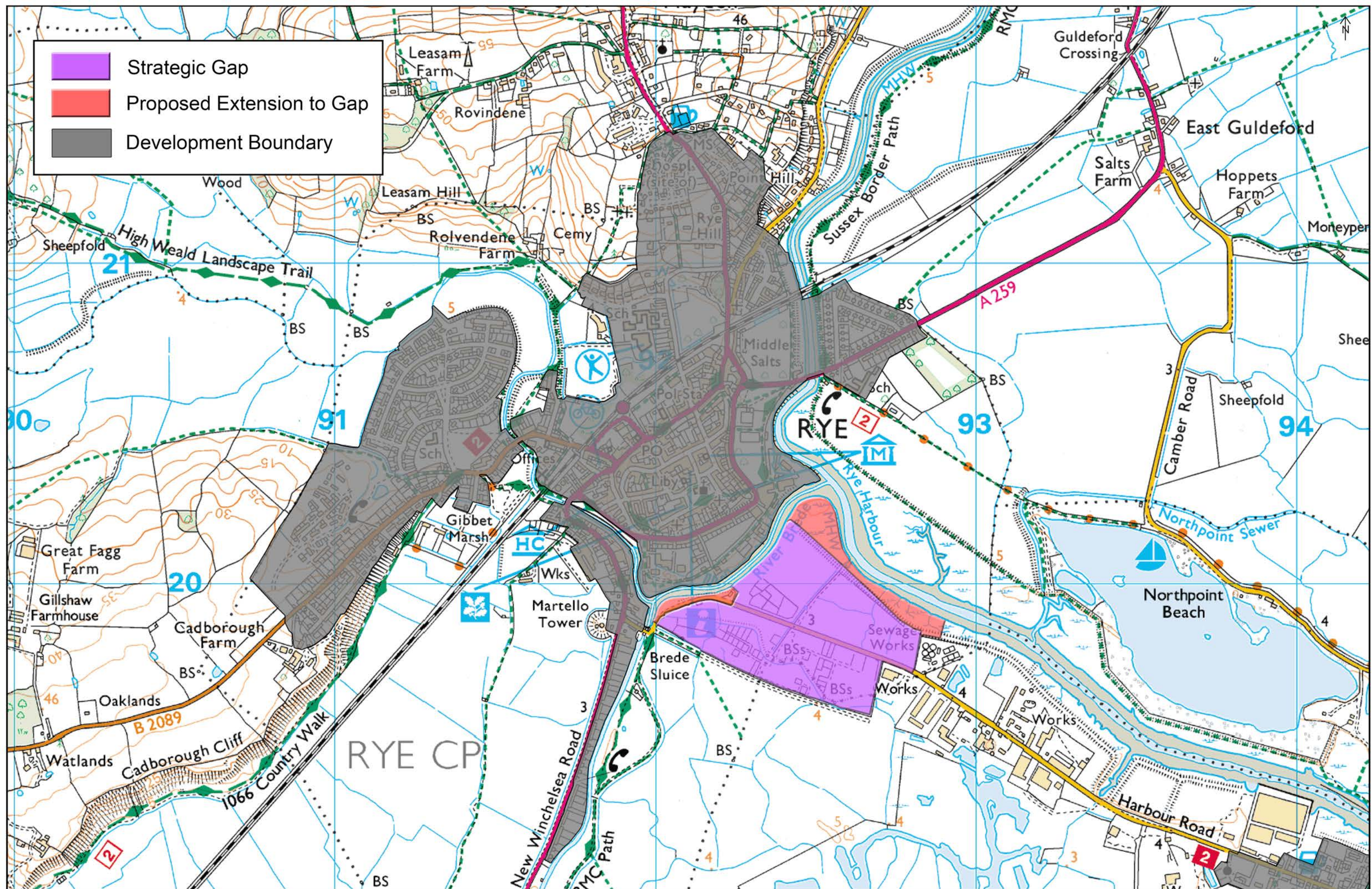
- Encourage establishment of farm conservation schemes to conserve the landscape structure of wetland, ditches and streams on the levels and encourage the retention of grazing.
- Conserve and manage hedges, trees and small woods on the higher ground.
- Use tree and woodland planting to screen intrusive farm buildings and caravan sites.
- Enhance the biodiversity value of wet meadows, drainage and stream channels.
- Plant new small woods, wet woodland and tree belts to strengthen the landscape character and where this is appropriate habitat creation.
- Conservation and re-creation of wet meadow/pasture habitats.
- Opportunities to maximise reed bed creation.
- Encourage measures to improve water quality.
- Plan for and manage recreational pressure on the countryside which could be affected by the increase in population in surrounding towns of Bexhill and Hastings as well as the seasonal holiday makers.
- Maximise opportunities for access away from sensitive habitats.
- Create new safe accessible bridleways, especially to link the urban areas with the countryside.
- Plan for flood management by conserving and enhancing the flood plains and managing water levels in ditches and drains.
- Conserve and enhance existing man-made and natural drainage features

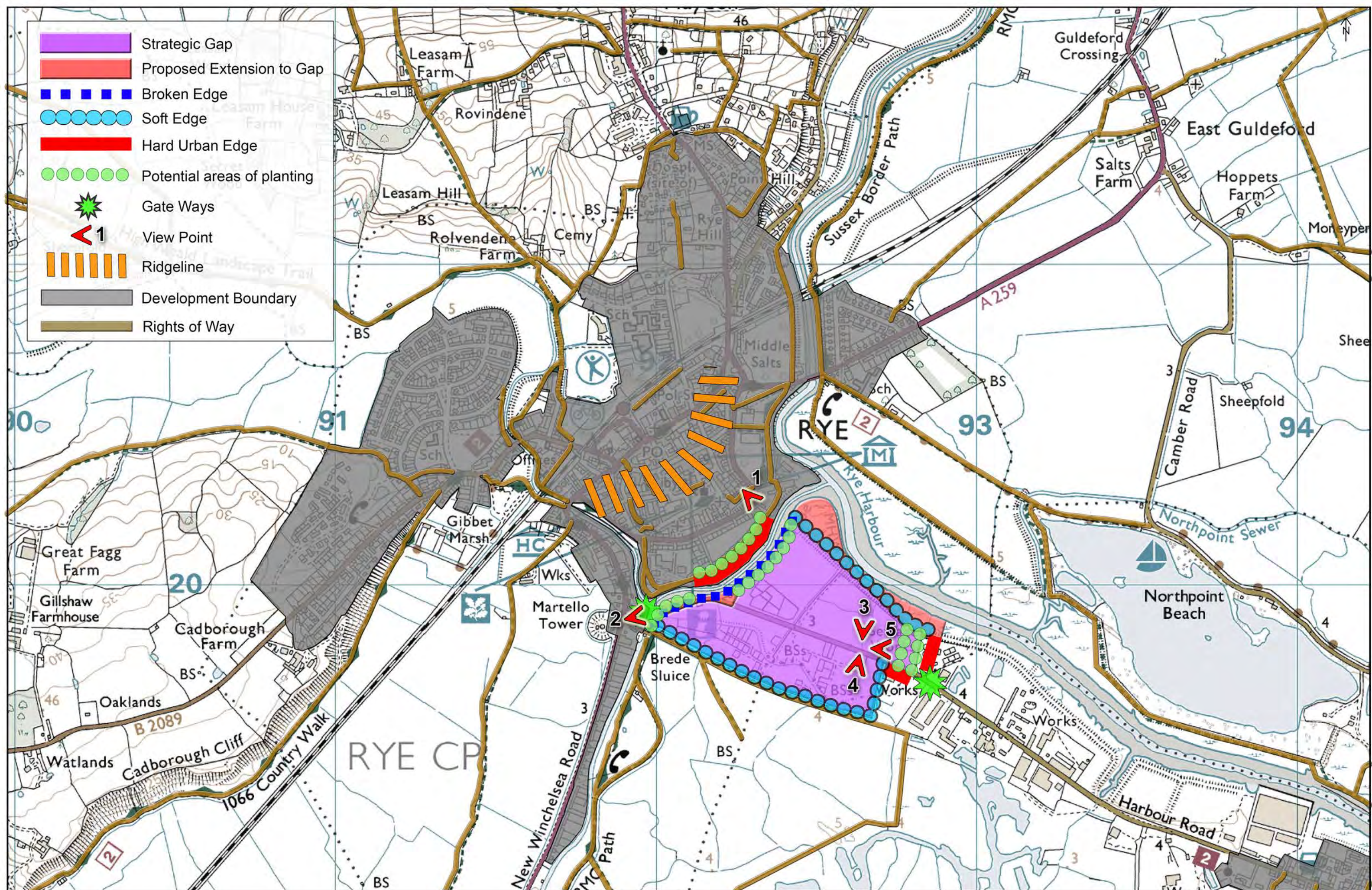
Part 4 Battle – Crowhurst – Hastings

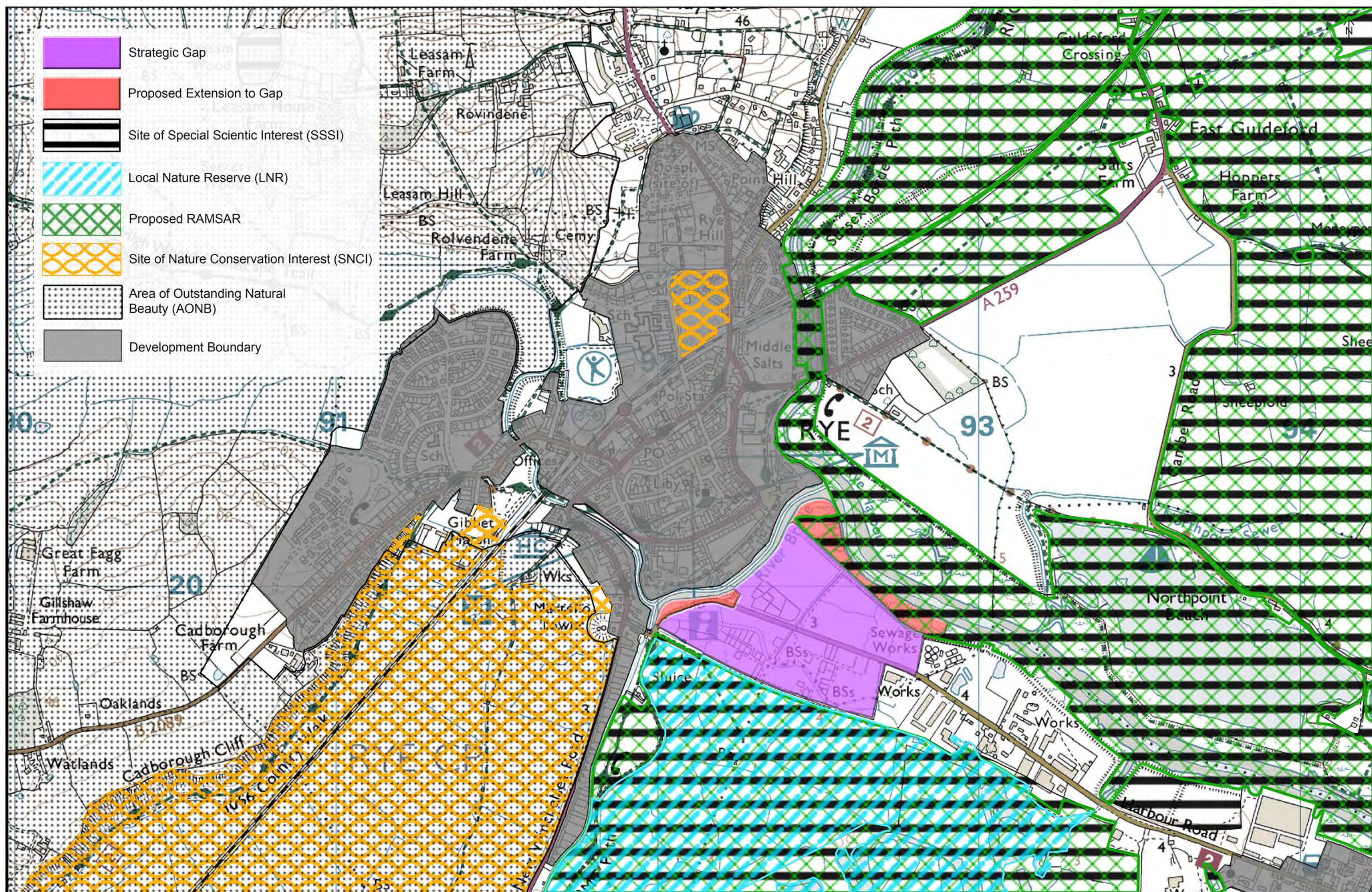
The following landscape management guidelines from the East Sussex landscape character area, *The Combe Haven Valley* are relevant to this area.

- Plan for and manage changes which may occur in the landscape due to changes in farm management brought about by economic influences and climate change.

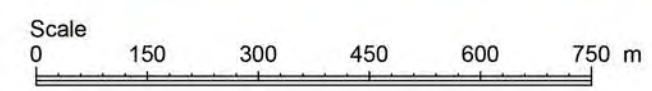
- Conserve hedges, trees and small woods on the higher ground.
- Maintain the mixed farmed character of the area.
- Protect and manage historic field patterns and conserve boundary features.
- Conserve and enhance byways and rural lanes. Use tree and woodland planting to screen intrusive farm buildings and caravan sites.
- Reduce the risk and incidence of soil erosion by encouraging the restoration of arable land to pasture.
- Actively manage trees and woodland through coppicing, pollarding of willows and replanting to create a diverse age structure.
- Consider the need to adapt to changes enforced by climate change, such as specific tree diseases and possible adaptation in species selection.
- Plan for and manage recreational pressure on the countryside which could be affected by the increase in population in surrounding towns of Bexhill and Hastings as well as the seasonal holiday makers
- Consider opportunities to create new green corridors and improve existing as safe ideally motorised traffic free recreational routes.
- Enhance the condition of areas of horsiculture and small holdings through the restoration of an intact, well managed hedgerow or ditch network and retaining a diverse grass sward by preventing overgrazing.
- Create new safe accessible bridleways
- Plan for new development in the villages to ensure it is designed to a high standard to reflect local character and sense of place.
- Establish defined development edges to villages with new tree planting.
- Consider traffic management on rural lanes



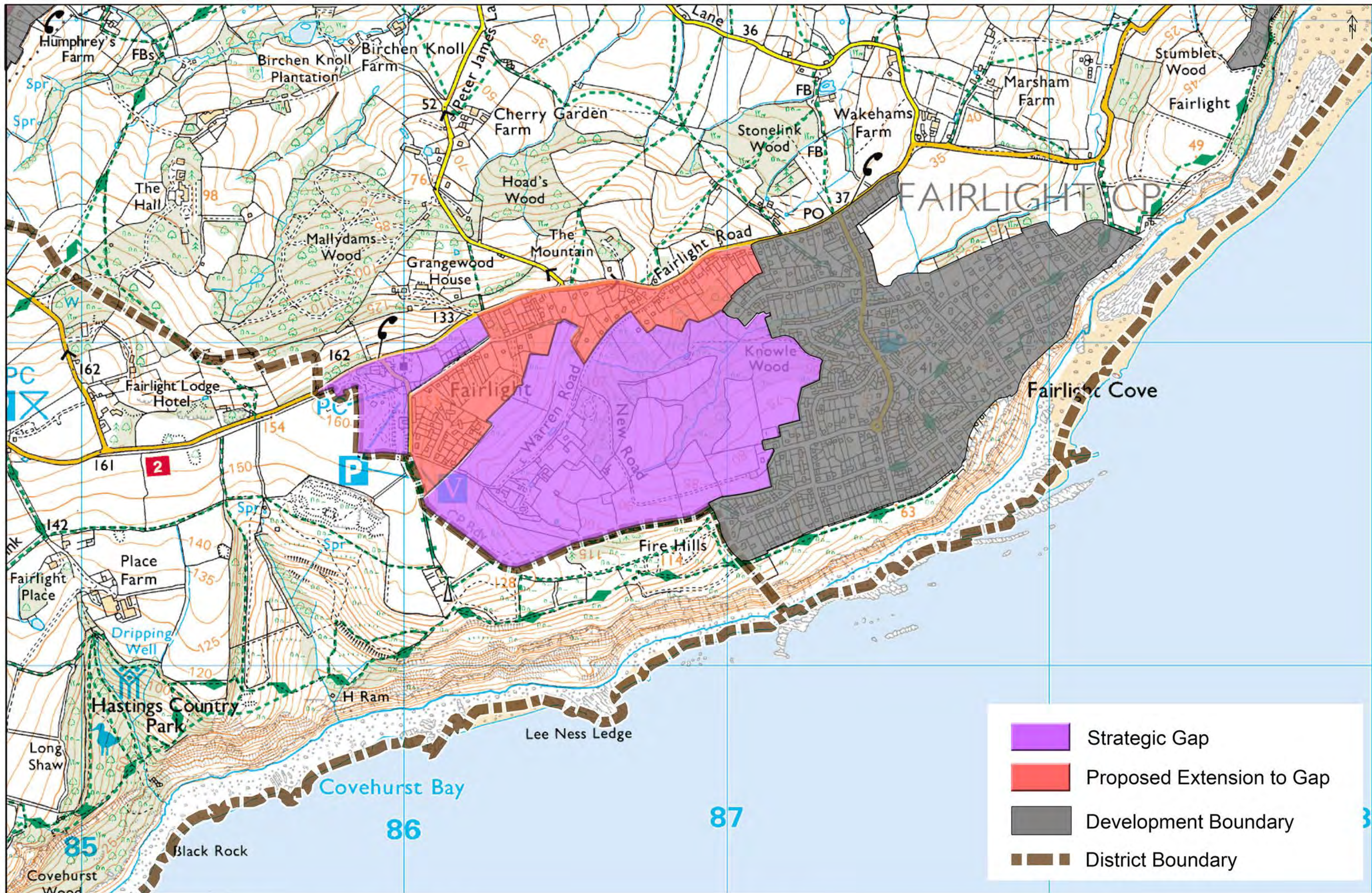


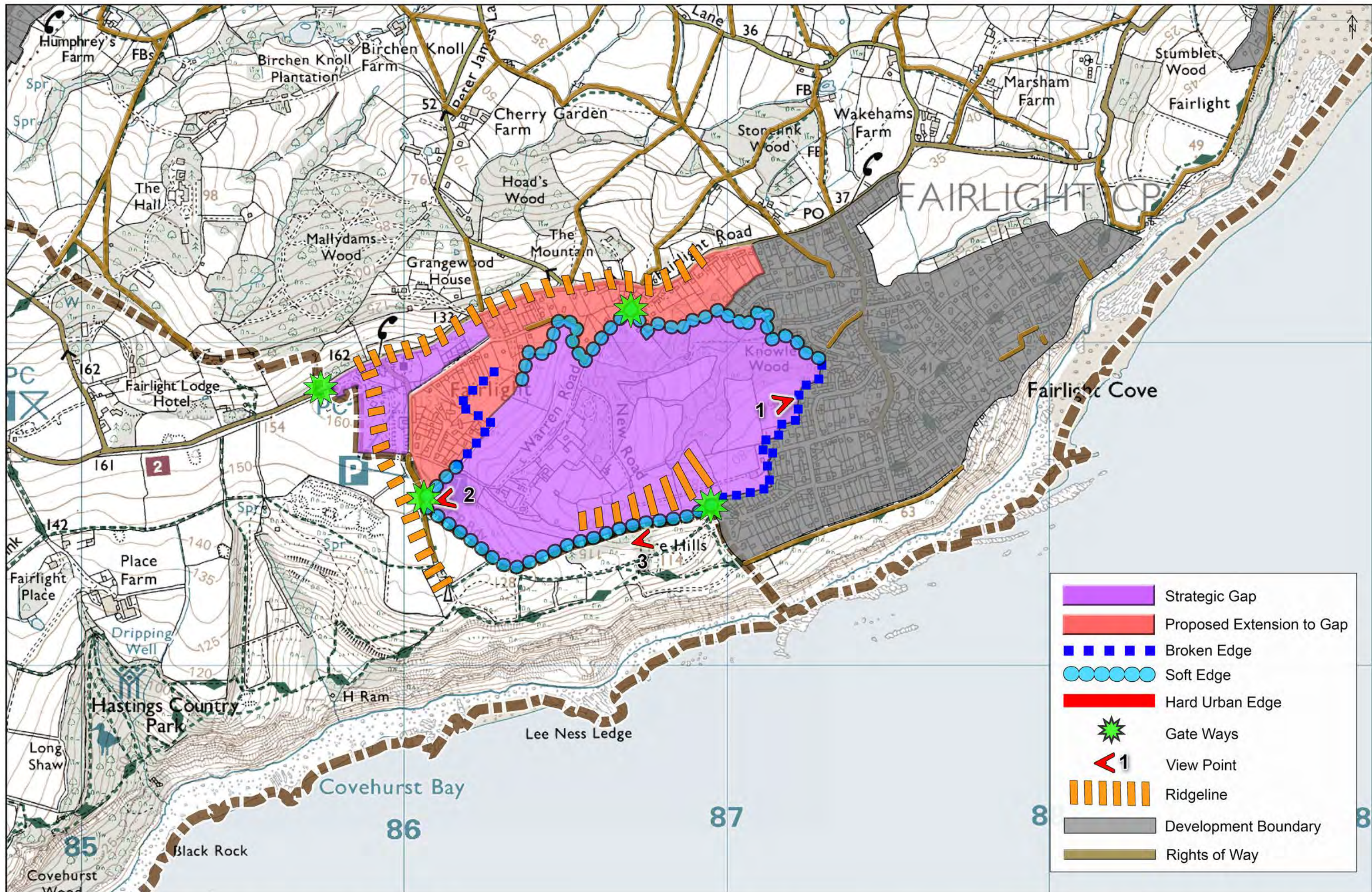


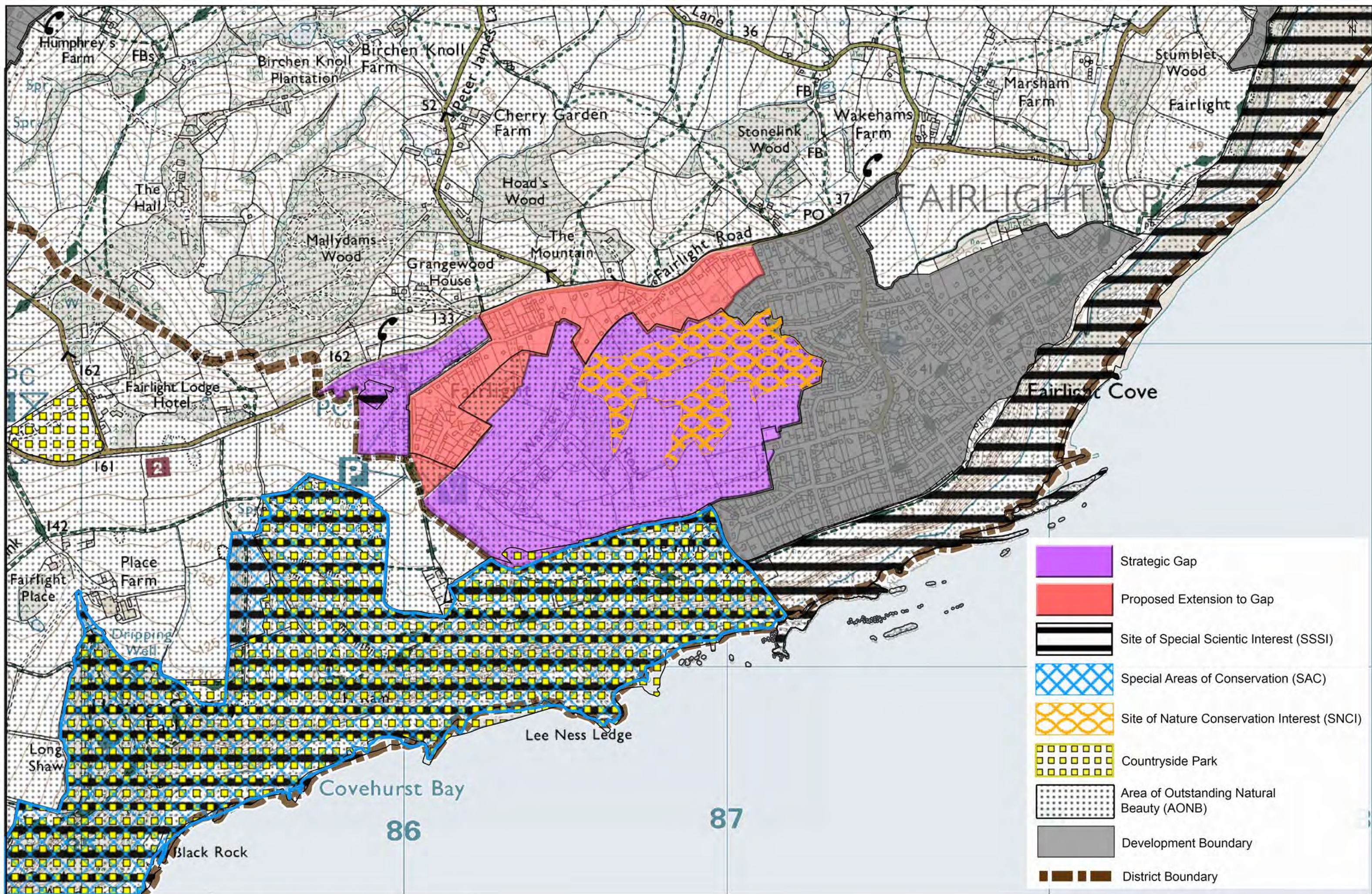
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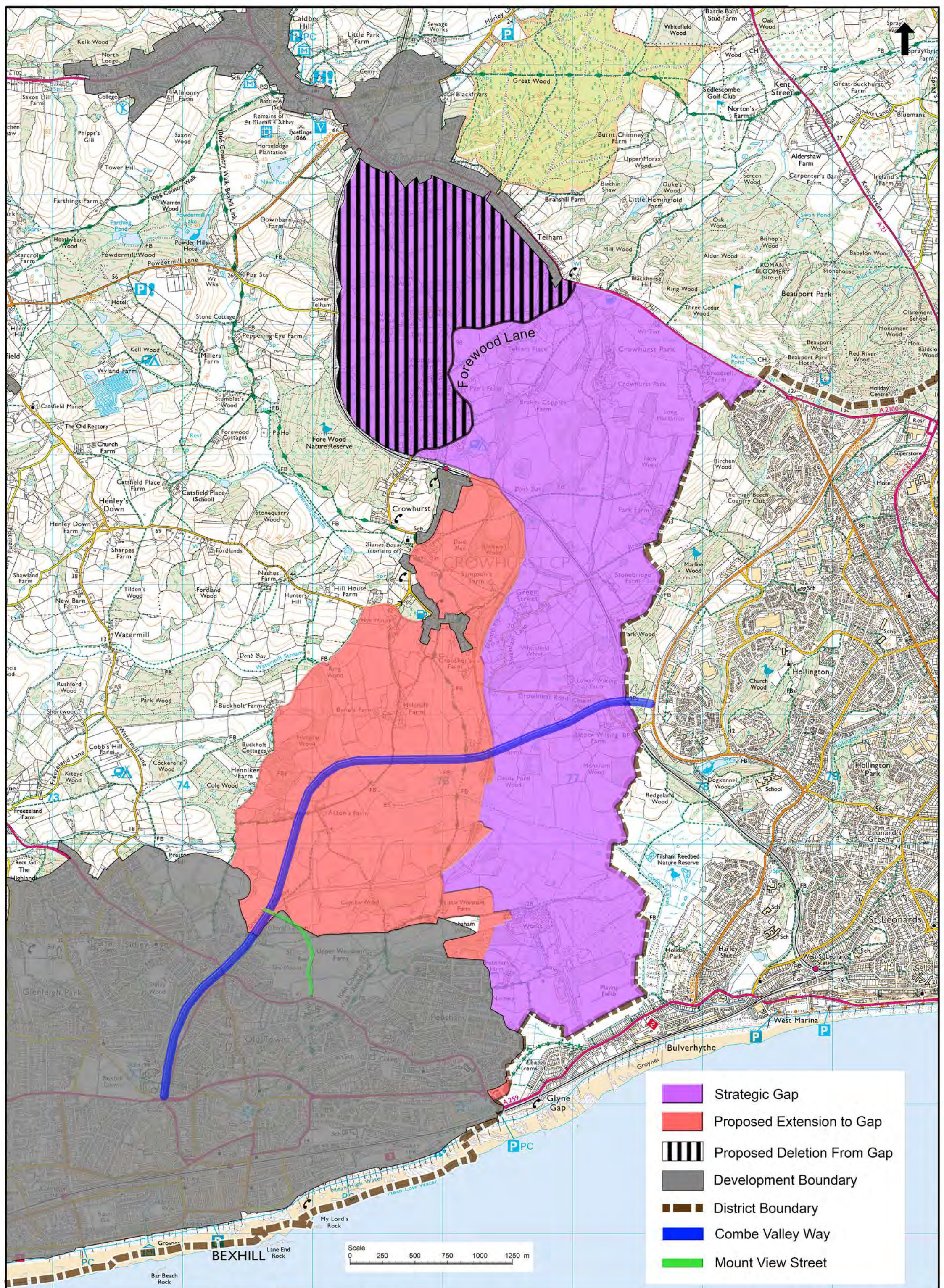


Rye Map 3









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