

8. Historic and cultural heritage

Our vision

In 2034... the rich heritage of historic landscape, buildings, settlements and sites that characterise the Kent Downs' historic and cultural fabric are maintained in favourable condition and are enhanced to reflect their local character and significance. The environmental performance of historic buildings is enhanced in a way that is sensitive to their character. They are understood and cherished by local people and visitors alike for their intrinsic value and for their important contribution to quality of life and rural economy. Vibrant and exciting cultural interpretation and celebration of the Kent Downs is strongly supported.

8.1 Overview

Virtually every facet of the Kent Downs has been shaped by thousands of years of human activity – in the fields and woods, tracks and lanes and villages and hamlets, an indelible memory of past times has been left to us. While the landform and geology underlies its beauty, the Kent Downs AONB is very much a human landscape.



Chartwell

Table 11 - Heritage assets in the Kent Downs AONB

Kent Downs AONB	Number
Total number of Listed Buildings	2747
Grade I and II Buildings	249
Buildings at Risk	6
Scheduled Monuments at Risk	104
Monuments at Risk	9
Registered Parks and Gardens	21
Registered Parks and Gardens at Risk	1
Total Number of Heritage Assets (excl. Grade II listed buildings)	374
Total Number of Heritage Assets at Risk (excl. Grade II listed buildings)	16
% Heritage Assets at Risk (excl. Grade II listed buildings)	4.28%

English Heritage 2012

8.2 Historic and cultural heritage - special characteristics and qualities

There is a strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs landscape which adds to its distinctive, ancient feel. Glimpses of prehistory can be caught at various places across the AONB. Numerous Palaeolithic flints have been discovered in the AONB taking human activity back to the lower Palaeolithic period. Artefacts found on the higher land of the Kent Downs indicate the, probably occasional, presence of Mesolithic man. Notable traces of Neolithic culture are present in the lower Medway Valley in the form of megalithic burial monuments and structures which include Kit's Coty, Little Kit's Coty and the Coldrum Stones. There are also earthen long barrows, particularly in the Medway and Stour Valleys. Bronze Age round barrows are dotted across the landscape and the Iron Age saw the development of massive hill-forts like that at Oldbury Hill near Ightham as well as widespread farmsteads and rural settlements.

Kent was the scene of the Roman invasion of Britain in AD43 and almost 400 years of Roman occupation have left their mark. The Roman road network, stretching in straight lines across the landscape is still represented by, for example, Stone Street which connected Canterbury with the port at Lympne and sections of Watling Street linking Dover, Canterbury, Rochester and London. Indeed throughout history Kent has been a communications corridor with mainland Europe and this role has left an indelible print on the landscape expressed in routeways and castles.

The increasing sophistication and landscape impact of agriculture is recorded in the lynchets found throughout the Kent Downs. There is evidence that Roman and Iron Age field and settlement patterns have strongly influenced the landscape we see today.

Estate centres like Wye and Charing were established in the Anglo-Saxon period. From this time on the carving out of fields from woodland, known as assarting, and unenclosed wood pasture commons appeared in the Kent Downs landscape. Churches were also erected which formed the beginnings of the parochial structure that has continued to the present day. Droveways, connecting estate centres with summer pastures in the Weald have left their mark in the particularly distinctive north-east to south-west orientation of the road network across much of the Downs which provides a 'grain' to the landscape.

The commons or 'minnises' of the high clay caps of the Kent Downs are believed to have been established by the Anglo-Saxon or early medieval period and form distinctive open areas of rough grass, bracken, or sometimes heather and gorse. Many have now been enclosed but open minnises most notably Ewell Minnis near Dover and Stelling Minnis remain as important remnants of previously more widespread landscape features.



Birling village



Lynchets at Lydden

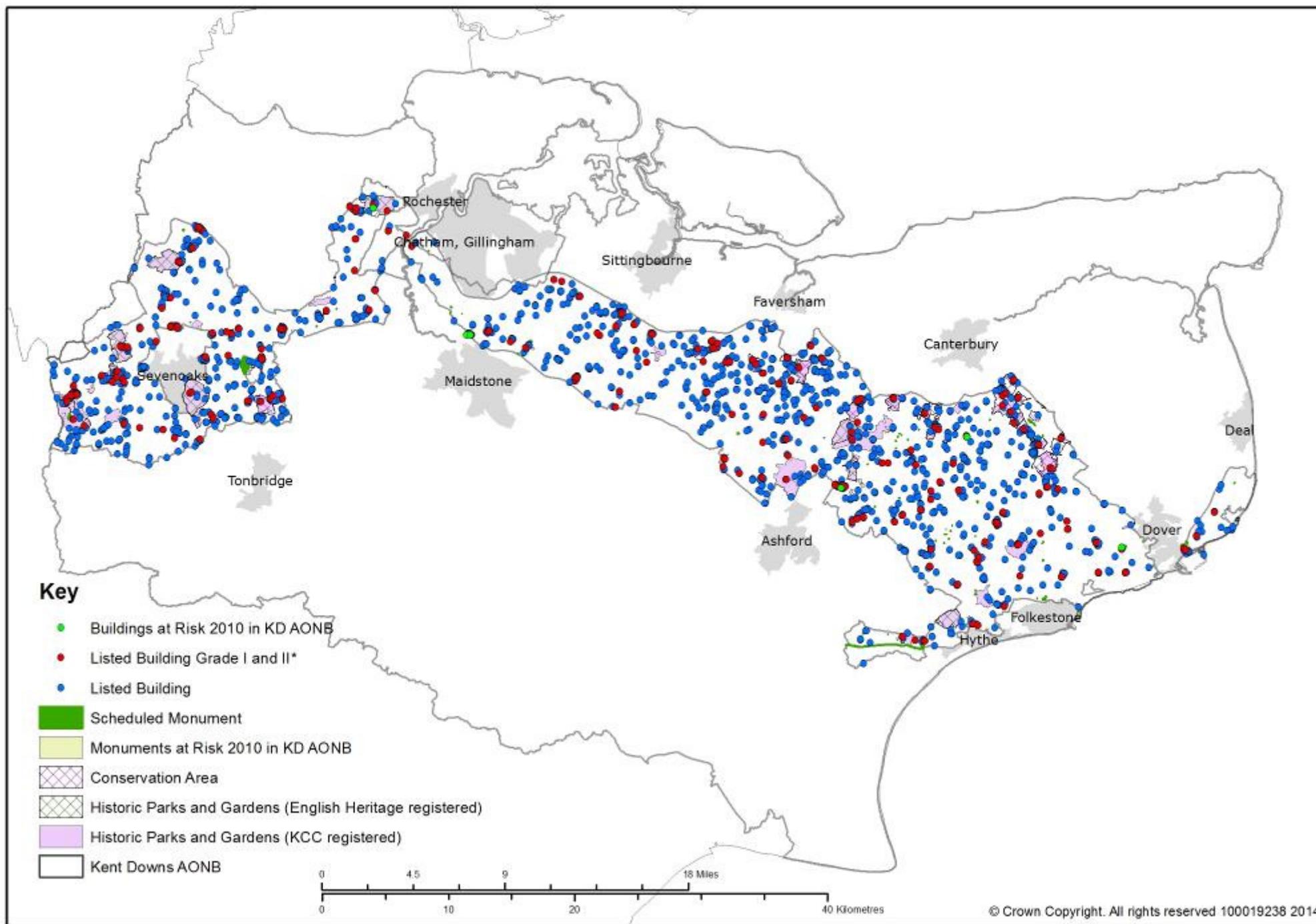


Belmont House



Castle Hill Folkestone motte and ditch

Figure 11 - Heritage features in the Kent Downs AONB



The Norman invasion saw the coming of the castle, varying in scale from that at Dover, the 'key' to England, to smaller structures of local lords, such as the ring-work and bailey at Thurnham. Villages grew into towns and churches were rebuilt in stone. Ecclesiastical interest in the countryside is witnessed by monastic houses and the palaces of the Archbishop of Canterbury for example at Otford and Charing, both of which are located on the 'Pilgrims Way' or old road, itself an ancient route linking England to the continent. Local man John Kempe established the medieval college at Wye, in 1447 when he was Archbishop of York.

The character of the Kent Downs landscape was well established by the Tudor period. There were many nucleated villages clustered around flint and brick churches and greens, as well as linear settlements along river valleys and routeways and spring line settlements at the base of the escarpment. Land was cultivated and grazed throughout the AONB and the many isolated farmsteads bear testimony to this agricultural history. It is believed that complex patterns of enclosure, particularly in the more fertile areas, have been created in part by the influence of the Kentish custom of 'Gavelkind' inheritance where property was divided equally rather than being allotted to the oldest heir, producing a multiplicity of holdings.



Godmersham Park

The selling off of church lands following the Reformation led to the growth of country estates with their parks and gardens which cover an important part of the AONB. Designed landscapes in the Kent Downs include Godmersham and Chilham in the Stour Valley, Doddington and Belmont Parks in the mid Kent Downs and Bourne Park and Higham Park on the River Nailbourne.

Along the White Cliffs Heritage Coast, facing as it did potential attack from mainland Europe, there is a rich heritage of defence structures, including Dover Castle and the Western Heights, 19th century Martello towers and the concrete and brick remains of anti-invasion structures of the two World Wars.

Aside from these grand and dominant historic sites and structures, the multitude of smaller cultural and historic features also help characterise the landscape of the AONB. These are the traces of ordinary people who have worked the land for centuries and have shaped its special character. Networks of ancient hedgerows which still provide enclosure for livestock; wood and field banks which marked boundaries between different manors or estates, picked out with pollarded or 'stubbed' ancient trees; field patterns and lynchets revealing ploughing patterns from centuries ago; hollow ways and sunken lanes, now often byways, carved into the land by millennia of



Little Kit's Coty Neolithic monument

Jonh Miller

passing feet and hooves; and dene holes (deep excavations into the chalk) and borrow pits where rock and minerals were excavated.

The Kent Downs has a rich tradition of half-timbered and weather-boarded buildings. There is also a legacy of locally distinctive architecture in locally derived building materials such as Ragstone, flint and chalk. Soft red bricks and peg-tiles lend colour and here and there long-straw thatching can be seen. The conservation and enhancement of these diverse buildings requires local sources of building materials, as well as skilled craftsmen who understand and respect the building traditions of the past and the architectural vernacular.

There is still much to discover, for example, the Kent Downs continually reveals archaeological surprises, often of national importance.

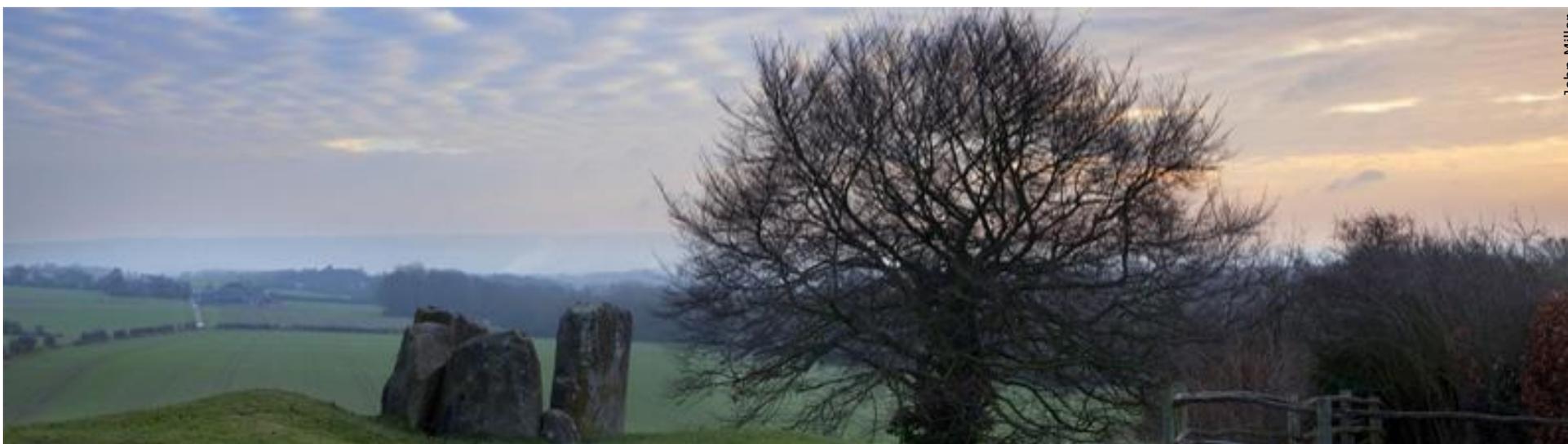
The important role that the landscapes of AONBs have in the conservation and sustainable management of the historic environment is recognised in a Joint Statement made between English Heritage and the National Association of AONBs.

◆ Historic Landscape Characterisation

'Every place, like every person, has its distinctive character, in large measure determined by its inherited features such as streets, hedges, archaeological sites, buildings or place names. Understanding this character is one of the starting points for deciding a place's future, the first step in working out how places can be made better in the future' (English Heritage).

Historic Landscape Characterisation describes landscape character based on historical attributes surviving in the present landscape. Kent was one of the first counties to prepare a historic landscape character map on a county wide basis. The mapping is intended to provide broad scale and overall assessment of historic character.

The Kent Downs AONB is made up mainly of a 'field pattern' historic landscape type, covering approximately 63% of the area. Whilst this historic landscape type is further defined into subcategories, there is no predominant field type. Woodland landscape types also feature heavily with some large tracts being present in the east of the AONB. Also notable are the presence of a large number of areas of parkland, indicating the importance of the managed estates within the landscape.



John Miller

Coldrum Stones Neolithic long barrow

◆ Artistic, cultural and scientific importance

The Kent Downs have been influential to many people, places and events of great artistic and cultural importance. These include the ancient Pilgrims Way from Winchester to Canterbury, paintings by Samuel Palmer in the Darent Valley and the writing and paintings of Winston Churchill at home in Chartwell. The Dover and Folkestone white cliffs and coastline have left an indelible mark on British culture and psyche, particularly through Shakespeare's play King Lear, Turner's paintings, Matthew Arnold's poem Dover Beach and Vera Lynne's famous wartime song.

Jane Austen frequently visited her brother at Godmersham Park, and Charles Dickens had many connections with the Downs, including the village of Cobham which featured in the Pickwick Papers. Bishopsbourne was sometime home to novelist Joseph Conrad, as was the village of Kingston to world renowned sculptor Henry Moore between 1935 and 1940.

Charles Darwin's family home, Down House, and surrounding countryside in the western Kent Downs, is a proposed World Heritage Site. It is recognised for its international significance as Darwin's home-base from which he developed his scientific theories and the writing of On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection. The North Downs was the 'landscape laboratory' for Darwin's theory on evolution by natural selection.

There is strong contemporary interpretation and artistic celebration of the Kent Downs AONB. In Kings Wood, Stour Valley Arts are a long standing company which has commissioned artists to make sculptures within the forest and also other kinds of artworks. Along the National Cycle Route 2, a series of commissions for Sustrans and local partners forms the Chalk and Channel Way; from sculpture to poetry, artists have been inspired by the dramatic coastline between Folkestone and Dover. In urban centres just outside the Kent Downs the arts are at the heart of regeneration efforts; the Arts Council England's Strategy 'Achieving Great Art for Everyone' recognises the role for the arts as a 'focus of urban and rural regeneration, bringing renewed vitality to neighbourhoods, cities and regions across England' and seeks to balance focus for the arts between urban and rural areas.

The Kent Downs landscape continues to be influential and inspirational to contemporary artists and cultural life, and this quality needs to be celebrated, linked to regeneration activities and promoted more widely.



Cottage in Brasted



View towards Canterbury



Weather-boarded church tower



Interpretation along the Chalk and Channel Way

8.3 Historic and cultural heritage - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. The need to increase understanding, engagement, awareness of, and inspiration from, the historic, artistic, built and cultural heritage; and to encourage greater opportunities for the historic heritage to inform contemporary decisions, landscape management, regeneration and place making.
- b. The need to conserve and protect the historic environment, both above and below ground. Issues include the effect of deep ploughing, the introduction of (deep rooting) energy crops and arable conversion on sites containing buried archaeological remains, heritage crime, and development affecting or in the setting of historic buildings.
- c. Recognition and reinforcement of special historic landscape character and the local distinctiveness of settlements, farmsteads, ancient routeways, buildings and design in the Kent Downs landscape through the statutory planning process as well as in, detailed historic characterisation, Neighbourhood Plans, Village Design Statements and Conservation Area Appraisals.
- d. Dearth of skills and local sustainably sourced materials for historic building conservation.
- e. The recognition that this plan period will witness both the commemoration of the centenary of the First World War and the passing of many of the generation involved in the Second World War, both of which have a particular resonance for the Kent Downs AONB.
- f. The opportunity to work collaboratively with the Arts Council, Heritage Lottery Fund and cultural regeneration programmes in Kent to secure new artistic and cultural activity to celebrate the landscape of the Kent Downs and support rural and urban regeneration.



Dover Castle

8.4 Historic and cultural heritage - aims

A landscape in which:

1. The principal special characteristics and qualities of the historic character of the Kent Downs landscape, the sites and features, field and settlement patterns, villages, hedgerows, routeways, woodlands and parklands are recognised, valued, conserved and enhanced.
2. The economic and 'quality of life' benefit of living and working in an historically-rich, artistically and culturally inspiring environment is recognised and actively supported.
3. New developments respect and reinforce the traditions of the past, whilst integrating sustainable technologies and sensitive new design.
4. The landscape context and setting of all historic buildings, features and settlements is protected, conserved and enhanced.
5. Restoration and conversion of the built heritage reflect local character and will meet high environmental standards, using sustainably sourced, locally derived materials and skilled workers.
6. Communities are engaged and involved in the historic environment of the Kent Downs through methods such as conservation area management planning, village design, neighbourhood planning, place making and interpretation.
7. Vibrant and contemporary artistic and cultural celebration of the Kent Downs supports the conservation, enjoyment, understanding and enhancement of the landscape.

8.5 Historic and cultural heritage - policies

The Sustainable Development section (3) identifies guiding and recurrent themes for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. These themes and the Management Plan policy responses should be considered before referring to specific policies set out below.

- HCH1 The protection, conservation and enhancement of the historic character and features of the Kent Downs landscape will be pursued and heritage-led economic activity encouraged.
- HCH2 A wider understanding of the cultural, scientific and artistic importance of the Kent Downs landscape and its historic character will be supported in part to inform the interpretation and management of the AONB.

HCH3 The preparation and use of best practice guidance for adapting the historic and cultural environment to climate change will be supported.

HCH4 Opportunities to develop contemporary artistic, historic, cultural and scientific interpretation and celebration of the landscape and people of the Kent Downs will be pursued.

HCH5 The application of high standards of design sympathetic to cultural heritage within the AONB, identified in guidance including the AONB Landscape Design Handbook, Kent Downs Farmstead Guidance and any relevant Village Design Statements and Neighbourhood Plans, will be pursued.