

Revised Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan

Review of Policy 1 Burgess Hill Gap and Policy 2 Ditchling Gap and Hurstpierpoint Gap



October 2018



Contents

1. Introduction and MSDC Policy Context
2. Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan Regulation 16 Submission Version June 2016
3. Changes since 2016
4. Planning History
5. Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Common Neighbourhood Plan (February 2015)
6. Ditchling, Street and Westmeston Neighbourhood Plan (April 2018)
7. Burgess Hill Neighbourhood Plan (October 2015)
8. Desk Top Evidence Base – Overview
9. Landscape Character and Visual Amenity Assessments
10. Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Introduction and Policy Context

This paper has been prepared by David Withycombe CMLI¹ and Virginia Pullen CMLI on behalf the Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan Working Group (NPWG).

The Regulation 16 Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) included two Gap policies (Policies 1 and 2) consistent with the then Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) Local Plan 2004 (Policies C2 and C3).

The recently adopted MSDC Local Plan (March 2018) does not include specific Gap policies but does include reference to Gaps and Neighbourhood Plans under Policy DP13. Policy 13 states:

Policy DP13: Preventing Coalescence

Local Gaps can be identified in Neighbourhood Plans or a Site Allocations Development Plan Document...where there is robust evidence that development within the Gap would individually or cumulatively result in coalescence and the loss of the separate identity and amenity of nearby settlements. Evidence must demonstrate that existing local and national policies cannot provide the necessary protection”.

The purpose of this paper is to review Policies 1 and 2 of the Regulation 16 HNP (June 2016) against the requirements of Policy DP13 specifically to assess whether there is a need for a Gap Policy(s) in the updated HNP. This paper is set out as follows:

- Policies from the HNP Regulation 16 Submission Version June 2016
- Review of planning and development changes since 2016
- Planning History: Review of references to Gap policies in recent planning decisions
- Review of policies in neighbouring Neighbourhood Plans: Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Common (February 2015); Ditchling, Street and Westmeston (April 2018); and Burgess Hill (October 2015)
- Desk Top Evidence Base – Overview
- Landscape Character, Gap Function and Visual Amenity Assessments
- Conclusion and Recommendations

2. Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan Regulation 16 Submission Version June 2016

Two Gap policies were included in the Regulation 16 HNP. Policy 1 relating to the Hassocks/Burgess Hill Gap was consistent with Policy C2 of the 2004 MSDC Plan relating to Strategic Gaps.

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HNP Policy 1: Burgess Hill Gap

A Gap has been defined and will be safeguarded between Burgess Hill and Keymer/Hassocks (as defined on the Proposals Map), with the objectives of preventing coalescence and retaining the separate identity and amenity of settlements.

Development will be supported within the Burgess Hill Gap where:

- 1. It is necessary for the purposes of agriculture, or some other use which has to be located in the countryside;*
- 2. It is necessary for the purposes of the provision of formal/informal open space to serve the existing residents of Clayton Mills and new residents of development at land north of Clayton Mills and Mackie Avenue (Policy 15: Land to the north of Clayton Mills and Mackie Avenue);*
- 3. It makes a valuable contribution to the landscape character and amenity of the Gap and enhances its value as open countryside;*
- 4. It would not compromise individually or cumulatively the objectives and fundamental integrity of the Gap; and*
- 5. It would conserve and where possible enhance relative tranquillity, in relation to noise and light pollution and dark skies.*

Policy 2 of the Regulation 16 HNP related to Local Gaps and was consistent with Policy C3 of the 2004 MSDC Local Plan.

HNP Policy 2: Ditchling Gap and Hurstpierpoint Gap

Local Gaps have been defined and will be safeguarded between:

- a. Keymer/Hassocks and Ditchling; and*
- b. Keymer/Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint*

as defined on the Proposals Map with the objectives of preventing coalescence and retaining the separate identity and amenity of settlements.

Development will be supported within the Gap areas where;

- 1. It is necessary for the purposes of agriculture, or some other use which has to be located in the countryside;*
- 2. It makes a valuable contribution to the landscape character and amenity of the Gap and enhances its value as open countryside;*
- 3. It would not compromise individually or cumulatively the objectives and fundamental integrity of the Ditchling Gap and Hurstpierpoint Gap; and*

4. It would conserve and where possible enhance relative tranquillity, in relation to noise and light pollution and dark skies.

3. Changes since June 2016

A number of planning decisions have affected land within the proposed Gaps in the Regulation 16 HNP as shown on the HNP Proposals Map (Figure 1):

- Approval of development for up to 97 homes on land to the west of London Road (Ham Fields) ((APP/D3830/W/14/2226987) 16th March 2017). This site is located within the 2016 proposed Hassocks/Hurstpierpoint Gap.
- Adoption of Policy DP11 as part of the 2018 MSDC Local Plan for a strategic site allocation of approximately 500 homes on land to the north of Clayton Mills. The land lies within the 2016 proposed Hassocks Burgess Hill Gap.
- Planning approval was refused on appeal in relation to land at Friars Oak for development of up to 130 homes (APP/D3830/V/17/3166992). This site lies within the proposed Hassocks/Burgess Hill Gap Friars Oak

4. Planning History

A number of Planning Decision Notices and the Inspectors Report on the Examination of the MSDC Local Plan relating to Policy DP11 reference Gaps and the policy context. These are summarised below:

4.1 Hassocks/Hurstpierpoint Gap

Application for the development of up to 97 homes on land to the west of London Road (APP/D3830/W/14/2226987) 16th March 2017(Ham Fields)

The Inspector's decision included the following comments on the principle and function of the Gap.

Para 22. For the reasons given at IR209, the Secretary of State agrees that although policy C3 is out of date in so far as it impacts upon the supply of housing, it continues to serve an important planning function in preventing the coalescence of Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks and maintaining their separate identities and amenity, with no conflict with the thrust of the Framework.

Para 30. Local Gap policy continues to serve an important planning function in preventing the coalescence of Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks and maintaining their separate identities and amenity.

Para 32. the Secretary of State agrees that the scheme would materially reduce the amount of open undeveloped land able to perform the function of a Local Gap between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint, and that the site is within a relatively narrow

part of the Gap (IR245). However, he concludes, in agreement with the Inspector, that the development would comprise a fairly modest extension of the existing built form of Hassocks which would not reduce the area between the settlements that is currently unaffected by urban influences. He further concludes that there are mitigating factors that would limit the degree of resultant coalescence and harm to the amenity and identity of the settlements, and that the adverse impact would not be to the extent of an undermining of the purpose of the Local Gap and change its character.

Para 47. This Local Gap is already relatively small, some 0.9km when measured in a straight line from the rear gardens on College Lane to the rear gardens on London Road.

Application for the development of 81 dwellings on land off College Lane (APP/D3830/V/14/2211499) 4th September 2014

The Inspector's decision included the following comments on the principle and function of the Gap.

Para 14. With regard to policy C3 (and the policy of similar intent included in the emerging NP), the Secretary of State agrees with the Inspector (IR13.16-13.20)) that, although policy C3 is out of date in so far as it impacts upon the supply of housing, it continues to serve an important planning function in preventing the coalescence of the settlements of Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks and maintaining their separate identities and amenity, with no conflict with the thrust of the Framework. The Secretary of State has also carefully considered the arguments set out by the Inspector at IR13.21-13.23 and agrees with her conclusion that the proposed development would undermine the purposes of the Local Gap and change its character. He agrees that the Gap continues to serve a useful and much valued planning purpose (irrespective of the landscape capacity assessment of the site) and that an increase in built development would result in a small but nevertheless significant diminution of openness.

4.2 Hassocks/Burgess Hill Gap

Policy DP11 MSDC Local Plan Examination Strategic allocation on land north of Clayton Mills

Report on the Examination of the Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 (12th March 2018)

Para 84. Burgess Hill lies at no great distance from the north of Hassocks. The site cannot be seen from Burgess Hill and vice-versa owing to a well-treed rise, but travelling down the hill from Burgess Hill the built edge of Hassocks would be encountered sooner, and from the South Downs scarp the allocation would be seen to reduce slightly the gap between the two settlements. The allocation would therefore bring about a perceived reduction in the gap, but the effect would be small and enough open land would remain to avoid coalescence.

***Application for the development of up to 130 Homes on Land at Friars Oak Fields
APP/D3830/V/17/3166992***

The Inspector's decision included the following comments on the principle and function of the Gap.

70. With regard to the gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill, the development would slightly reduce the distance between the settlements, but that gap will be reduced anyway, by the approved housing development at Hassocks Golf Club. In that context, the Friars' Oak development would not encroach any further. The gap that remains will still be 1.34 km.

71. In any event, it is argued that the only part that would be seen would be the new access road, which would only extend the perceived threshold of the village by about 50m, and would still be within the existing transition zone⁷¹. Consequently the scheme would not diminish the perception of open countryside, and would not lead to coalescence.

Objections were received in relation to the inclusion of land at Friar's Oak within Policy 1 of the Regulation 16 HNP, although no substantive landscape assessment as to why the land should not be included within the area covered by Policy 1 was included in the objection.

4.3 Hassocks/Ditchling Gap

Objections were received in relation to the inclusion of land to the east of Ockley Lane within Policy 2 of the Regulation 16 HNP, although again no substantive landscape assessment as to why the land should not be included within the area covered by Policy 2 was included in the objection.

5. Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Common Neighbourhood Plan (February 2015)

The made Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Common Neighbourhood Plan (February 2015) includes Policy C3 relating to Local Gaps and Preventing Coalescence:

POLICY Countryside HurstC3 Local Gaps and Preventing Coalescence:

Development will be permitted in the countryside provided that it does not individually or cumulatively result in coalescence and loss of separate identity of neighbouring settlements, and provided that it does not conflict with other Countryside policies in this Plan. Local Gaps between the following settlements define those areas covered by this policy:

*Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks;
Sayers Common and Albourne;
Hurstpierpoint and Albourne;
Hurstpierpoint and Burgess Hill.*

The area covered by Policy C3 is shown on the Proposals Map (Figure 1)

6. Ditchling, Street and Westmeston Neighbourhood Plan (April 2018)

The made Ditchling, Street and Westmeston Neighbourhood Plan (April 2018) includes Policy CONS 7 relating to gaps between settlements:

CONS 7: Protect important gaps between settlements

1. Proposals for new development in the gap separating Ditchling and Hassocks/Keymer and Burgess Hill, either individually or cumulatively, will only be supported where they conserve and where possible enhance the open landscape character of the gap, and do not reduce the physical gap between settlements. This will be informed by the South Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment and relevant local landscape character assessments

The area covered by Policy CONS7 is shown on the Proposals Map (Figure 1).

7. Burgess Hill Neighbourhood Plan (October 2015)

The Burgess Hill Neighbourhood Plan Boundary does not extend to the Hassocks Parish Council, but is confined to the current settlement edge. The NP does not include a Gap policy but relies on the Gap Policy C2 of the then current 2004 MSDC Local Plan. The NP does include Policy G2 relating to the Green Circle Network which is described in the plan as *a series of footpaths, cycle tracks and bridleways linking the green sites to one another and to the town centre*. The extent of the network is not shown in the NP, but does extend to land on the southern edge of Burgess Hill bordering the Hassocks Parish boundary including Nightingale Lane Meadows and Batchelor's Farm².

8. Desk Top Evidence Base: Overview

The text below provides an overview of the Desk Top Study work above:

- Policy DP13: Preventing Coalescence allows for the identification of Local Gaps in Neighbourhood Plans
- There is no longer any reference to Strategic Gaps in the MSDC Local Plan
- The made neighbouring Neighbourhood Plans to the west and east have local gap policies which relate to gaps and prevention of coalescence with Hassocks
- The Secretary of State Decisions relating to land to the west of London Road and to the east of College Lane (within the Hassocks/Hurstpierpoint Gap) both state: *It (the Gap) continues to serve an important planning function in preventing the*

² <https://bh-green-circle.org.uk/>

coalescence of the settlements of Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks and maintaining their separate identities and amenity, with no conflict with the thrust of the Framework.

- The Inspectors Report on the MSDC District Examination recognises that *Burgess Hill lies at no great distance from the north of Hassocks* and the potential effects of development on coalescence.
- The Secretary of State decision relating to land at Friars Oak Fields acknowledged that development would *slightly reduce* the gap but the proposals would *not diminish the perception of open countryside, and would not lead to coalescence.*
- The approved development to the west of London Road (Ham Fields) will diminish the existing gap between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint by an estimated 15 % from 0.9 kilometres to 0.75 kilometres.
- The Strategic Allocation north of Clayton Mills will diminish the existing gap by up to 30% from 1.5 kilometres to an estimated 0.9 kilometres.
- The existing gap between Hassocks and Ditchling is an estimated 0.6 kilometres at the closest point.

9. Landscape Character and Visual Amenity Assessments

9.1 Hassocks/Hurstpierpoint Gap

The majority of the land within the Hassocks/Hurstpierpoint gap (within Hassocks Parish) lies within the Ham Fields Greensand Ridge Character Area as described in the HNP Landscape Character Assessment. The northern sections extend into Character Area G – Clayton Priory Weald.:

Area F –Ham Fields Greensand ridge

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hurst Scarp Footslopes. This area slopes gently northwards from the built up ridge which connects Hurst and Hassocks. The ribbon development on the Hurst Road ridge is of large houses in long north sloping gardens. The land falls to an enclosed vale and a stream which runs west to east and under London Road to join the Herring Stream. The north of the area is enclosed by a spur of lower greensand which supports the small settlement at Hurst Whickham Farm. The southern part of the area is a pastoral landscape of small grazed fields which are enclosed by ancient hedgerows and mature oak trees. The houses on London Road back onto the area and the built up edge is softened by vegetation in these gardens and by the low siting of the houses in a dip running alongside and between Ham Fields and the A273. The houses on Hurst Road are large properties set back in large gardens to form a soft suburban edge to the south of the area. The area forms part of the local countryside gap between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint.

Specific characteristics

The area has a high degree of enclosure compared with the open landscape to the south of the greensand ridge. The northern part of the area is the designed parkland landscape of Belmont and Hurst Wickham on the west and the golf course to the east.

The lane and bridleway along the western boundary has an ancient character as it is lined by mature oaks and coppiced trees. There are several ponds and wetter boggy areas along the stream.

Barn owls are often seen hunting the fields in this area.

Views

Views looking north are enclosed by the greensand ridge at Hurst Wickham and the artificial bunds of the golf course landscape there is a wide view north across the area from the footpath which runs north south from London Road. Views to the south are largely enclosed by the Hurst Road ridge and there is a key view from the edge of the Hurst Wickham ridge which affords views south across the area and beyond to the downs.

Amenity Value

The area is of moderate to high amenity value as well used public footpaths cross the area and there is informal public access from the properties on London Road. Belmont Road recreation ground is linked to this informal access to the countryside and the footpath network.

Character Sensitivity

The character of the area is of moderate to high sensitivity as much of the historic field structure and unimproved grassland is intact. The area is part of the local gap between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint.

Visual sensitivity

The area is of moderate to high visual sensitivity as there are views across much of the area from public footpaths and houses on London Road. There are views into the area from the downs and the present urban edge is softened by intervening trees and vegetation.

Area G - Clayton Priory Weald

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hickstead Low Weald. The greensand ridge at Hurst Wickham slopes down to this more open and flat low weald landscape. The area is divided in two by the continuation northwards of the straight and ancient track that extends for the Hurst Road to Hammonds Mill Farm. To the east of the track are large open fields with low tight clipped hedges and a few scattered remaining oak trees. To the east of the track the golf course has imposed an artificial landscape of bunkers and gentle mounding with tree planting following

the layout of fairways. This part of the golf course is subtly different to the area of the golf course to the south of Hurst Wickham and this division is emphasised by the presence of a large artificial bund. To the north of the golf course the fields are smaller and more enclosed by trees and woodland, part of which is the plantation which is on the site of the now closed Mill nursery. There are no urban intrusions into this area and settlement is scattered farmsteads and cottages. There are modern buildings associated with the golf club and Mill Road Nurseries. The area forms part of the local countryside gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

Specific characteristics

The distinct north south track is lined by ancient trees and coppice and is evidently an ancient track or drove road, known locally as Hog Pudding Lane. The listed Clayton Priory and associated parkland overlook the area from the north and this large house is a prominent landmark in views from the Downs. The notable farmstead settlements and listed buildings at Hammonds Mill and Friars Oak House.

The Herring Stream (Mill Race) flows across the north of the area from east to west in a tree lined sinuous channel which has significant mature alder trees and breeding king fishers.

There are several large ponds which have taken advantage of the wet and low lying landscape at Hammond's Mill Farm and also Hammond's Mill Cottages. These support wild and domestic water fowl. The block plantation of tall conifers of mixed species is a distinctive feature on the site of Mill Nursery.

Views

Views out of this area are contained by the higher ground to the north and south as well the extensive tree cover. There are occasional long views to the downs from higher ground in the golf course. The Burgess Hill ridge dominates views to the north. There are wide views across the flat fields to the west of Hog Pudding Lane to Hurstpierpoint College Chapel. Views south from this area are to the Hurst Wickham ridge.

Amenity Value

The amenity value of the area is moderate to high due to the public footpaths and bridleways which provide access. The variety of experience of varied landscapes, the historic track and river side walk enhance the value of the area.

Character Sensitivity

The character sensitivity of the majority of this area is moderate as it is a landscape which has been subject to change in more recent years and modern interventions. The parkland landscape to the north of Herring Stream and associated with Clayton Priory is historic designed landscape and is of high sensitivity.

Visual sensitivity

The visual sensitivity of the eastern part of the area from the public rights of way and the golf course and views are generally localised and are of low to moderate sensitivity. The more open fields to the west of the Hog Pudding Lane are of moderate to high sensitivity due to the wide open vistas

The photographs included in this report show that the land within the gap is widely perceived in views from public rights of way to the south within the Clayton Priory Weald. Viewpoints show that development on the eastern edge of Hurstpierpoint (on College Lane) is a feature of these views. The existing linear development on Hurst Road is not perceived from locations within the gap. There are limited views from locations within the more northerly parts of the gap (Ham Fields Greensand Ridge Character Area), although there are glimpsed views east and west from Belmont Lane from which development on the western edge of Hurstpierpoint and the fields forming the boundary to the proposed development at Ham Fields can be seen.

9.2 Hassocks/Burgess Hill Gap

Land within the Hassocks/Burgess Hill Gap falls broadly within three Character Areas as described in the HNP Landscape Character Assessment:

Area H – Friars Oak Weald

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hickstead Low Weald. A gently undulating landscape which rises eastwards from the valley and flood plain of the Herring Stream. The high embankment of the London to Brighton railway severs to the area from the similar landscape which lies to the east of the railway. The fields are small with well-defined hedged field boundaries. The mature vegetation along the river valley and the wooded railways embankment give the area a wooded and enclosed character. The area has a mix of uses including the designed landscape and farmland associated with New Close Farm in the north and Attwoods Nursery with its polytunnels and greenhouses in the central area. The southern fields have been out of agricultural use and unmanaged for several years and have a natural appearance where willow scrub is encroaching in some areas. The Friars Oak Hotel sits on the southern boundary of the area and some modern houses in large gardens are located outside the village edge to the north of the pub. The urban edge of Hassocks has crept northwards as Shepherds Walk where remaining mature oak trees help to soften the urban edge with the countryside. The area forms part of the local countryside gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

Specific characteristics

The fast flowing and winding Herring Stream flows in a deep channel for south to north and is a focal point of the area. Mature trees along the stream channel, notably willows and alders, enhance the visual and wildlife value of the river. The river has been exploited to

create a dramatic weir and lake at New Close Farm. Another stream arises in the adjacent Area I – (Ockley Weald), from a spring just to the north of Manor Avenue and under the railway across the north of the area to feed this lake.

The well-defined field boundaries, with ancient hedgerows and mature oak trees indicate an intact historic landscape especially in the north of the area.

Views

There are localised views across the area from the residential properties on Shepherds Walk. The footpath which crosses the area from west to east has similar views across the fields in the southern part of the area. There are views from London Road into the north of the area and east across to the water tower, which is just outside the Parish boundary. These views are obscured by the riverside vegetation in the southern part of the area. There are views across the area from the public open space which is just outside Hassocks Parish on the southern edge of Burgess Hill. The urban edge of Shepherds Walk is visible in these views.

Amenity Value

The southern part of the area is valued by local people as it has been used for permissive access for several years. The public footpath gives access and there are circular walks around the field from this. The area is of moderate to high amenity value in the southern section and of moderate value in the remaining areas.

Character Sensitivity

The historic landscape structure and natural stream channel with its flood plain would be sensitive to change and the area is of moderate character sensitivity.

Visual sensitivity

The area is of low visual sensitivity as there are few long views across the area and views into the area from public roads are curtailed by intervening tree and tall hedgerows. There are limited views into this area due to the low lying topography and tree cover. The more northern parts of the area are open to views from the downs and the public open space to the north and are of moderate sensitivity in this context.

Area I – Ockley Weald

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hickstead Low Weald. A gentle clay vale bowl which is enclosed by the built up area of Hassocks to the south, the railway embankment to the west and the higher ground of a lower greensand ridge to the north and east. The area has much larger fields than the land to the west of the railway, which suggests that some of the historic field structure has been lost. The farming is a mix of sheep grazed pasture and large arable fields. There are also fewer mature trees than other areas to the north of the village and these are concentrated on the northern and southern boundaries. The urban area of Hassocks has

extended north into this countryside as the estate of Manor Avenue and in more recent years as Clayton Mills estate. The area includes the newly created open spaces which have been retained as a buffer between the new development at Clayton Mills and the countryside. The area forms part of the local countryside gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

Specific characteristics

The open rural character and sweep of landscape up to the ridge is a particular feature. The impression of a strong countryside gap between the settlements of Burgess Hill and Hassocks.

The woodland on and adjacent to the railway embankment with many significant mature oaks and bluebell carpets. Pines and other mature garden trees associated with Woodlands Cottage. The ponds at Woodlands Cottage and in the south west corner of the area are also local features. A spring arises just to the south of Manor Avenue and flows north as crystal clear water across the footpath.

Views

There are views from the railway across the area to the urban edge of the village which are a last glimpse of countryside before arrival at Hassocks railway station. There are wide views across the area from the public footpath which crosses the area from east to west. There is a view south across the area and beyond to the downs from the footpath just south of the water tower, which is the northern edge of the parish. There are views across the area for drivers going north up Ockley Lane. The new houses on the Clayton Mills estate are poorly screened in these views and present a hard edge to the countryside.

Amenity Value

The area is of moderate amenity value as views across much of it can be enjoyed from the public rights of way, the railway and Ockley Lane.

Character Sensitivity

The area is of moderate character sensitivity as relatively unspoilt countryside. The openness and lack of historic field structure would make the area particularly sensitive to change.

Visual sensitivity

The visual sensitivity of the area is moderate in local views from the residential areas and footpaths. There are long views to the open northern part of the area from the downs and these more visible parts are of high visual sensitivity in this context.

Area J– Broadlands Weald

Description

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hickstead Low Weald. This is an area of undulating landscape which forms the side slopes of the Lodge Hill greensand ridge which runs north towards Burgess

Hill. The area has a patchwork of small irregular fields with well-defined field boundaries. The southern part of the area has low clipped hedges with mature trees dotted along them. This is in contrast to the area north of Broadhill which has tall, dense unmanaged hedgerows. There are patches of small woodlands and a strip of ancient woodland runs along the west side of Ockley Lane. There are several large houses on either side of Ockley Lane with associated grounds and exotic trees. The farmland is mainly laid to pasture with sheep grazing giving the area a pastoral and well managed character. The area forms part of the local countryside gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

Specific characteristics

The large houses and designed grounds of varying periods indicate that this area was considered a desirable place to build a home over the ages. The listed Ockley Manor is one of the most significant and striking buildings in the parish, the garden walls, sweeping drive and summer house add to the charm of this property. Weald House is surrounded by designed grounds and mature exotic trees including pines. Broadhill Place was built by a Bond Street jeweller in 1901, it has a distinct turret and large detached orangery. Wellhouse Lane leading to Wellhouse Farm is dotted with large houses in grounds with mature and varied trees specimens. Broadhill workshops on the Broadhill estate provide a rural employment opportunity in the parish.

Views

There are few long views across the area as the tree cover and hedgerows enclose much of the area from views in. There are glimpses across the area from Ockley Lane and Mill Lane and from the bridleway which runs up the eastern side.

Amenity Value

The area is of moderate amenity value as the pleasant countryside setting for several houses and as a countryside gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

Character Sensitivity

The area is of moderate character sensitivity to change as pastoral rural landscape. There may be areas which would be able to accommodate some change as the area has been developed over the centuries, but change would need to be in character with the existing large houses in substantial grounds.

Visual sensitivity

Much of the area is not seen from public viewpoints and are of low visual sensitivity from public areas. The open pastures which slope southwards from Broadhill are attractive rural countryside of moderate visual sensitivity.

The photographs in this assessment show that the gap is perceived from Footpath 5k and that the development on the land north of Clayton Mills will affect perception of the gap between the settlements. There are limited views from the public rights of way within Character Area J to the east of Ockley Lane, but the photographs show that this land retains

a strong rural character. The approved development on the Golf Course will reduce the gap, but a strong band of open countryside will be retained to the east and west of London Road.

9.3 Hassocks/Ditchling Gap

The gap between the settlement is just over 600 metres at its closest point.

All of the land within the Hassocks/Ditchling gap (in the Parish of Hassocks) lies within the Oldlands Greensand Character Area as described in the HNP Landscape Character Assessment:

Area A – Oldlands Greensand

The Mid Sussex District Council Landscape Character Assessment 2005 places this area within the character area Hurst Scarp Footslopes. This character area is more accurately described as the clay vale between the open foot slopes and the Greensand Ridge which crosses the area from west to east and on which the villages have historically grown outwards.

Description

This is an area of open arable fields and pasture which slopes gently northwards towards an east west ridge. The Greensand ridge is a continuation of the higher ground which supports the villages of Hurstpierpoint, Hassocks and Keymer and swings north between Keymer and Ditchling to form the distinct crest at Lodge Hill. A small stream runs along the southern edge of this area and disappears into the gardens in Damien Way before passing under Ockley Lane and through the village to join the Herring Stream. A spring fed stream emerges at the base of Lodge Hill runs down the eastern boundary of the area and into this stream. The fields to the south are heavy clay and waterlogged for much of the winter. The south eastern part of the area was an old nursery and is now the grounds of a large house and is enclosed by high fences. The suburban developments of Damien Way and Ockley Lane are set back in gardens with trees and hedges which help to soften and define the edges that these areas have with the countryside. This area formed part of the countryside gap between Hassocks and Ditchling.

Specific characteristics

The white painted Oldlands Mill is a dominant feature on the ridge which can be seen in wide views from the Downs and the footpath which crosses the area from west to east. The fields in the south eastern part of the area are enclosed by tall well treed hedges. There are many mature and ancient oak trees on the boundary with the built up edge and along the south eastern boundary of the area. The fields to the east of Ockley Lane are more open and afford long views across to Lodge Hill and the windmill. Mature ash trees are also a feature on the field boundaries along with one fine hornbeam. Tawny owls frequent and breed in the trees around the old nursery site at Pattendens.

Views

There are views across the area and to the suburban edges of Keymer from the ridge to the north and Lodge Hill in Ditchling. There are wide views across the area from Ockley Lane.

Amenity Value

The area is within the South Downs National Park and it is crossed by the main footpath link from Hassocks to Ditchling. Oldlands Mill is a popular local attraction on visitor days and events. This character area is of high amenity value.

Character Sensitivity

The historic structure of the landscape is largely intact and some ancient field boundaries remain intact. There has been some loss of this historic structure in the larger fields to the north and intrusion of ribbon development along Ockley Lane. The character of this area is considered to be of moderate to high sensitivity.

Visual sensitivity

The area forms the backdrop to Keymer Church and Conservation Area in long views from the downs. There are key local views across the area from Oldlands, Lodge Hill and Ockley Lane. The area is of moderate to high visual sensitivity.

The photographs included in this report show that the land within the gap is widely perceived from public rights of way which link Hassocks and Ditchling. Built form on the eastern fringes of Hassocks and Keymer is a feature of these views. Built form on the western edge of Ditchling is largely set behind Lodge Hill so is not widely perceived from viewpoints within the gap.

10. Conclusions Recommendations

MSDC Policy DP13 states:

robust evidence that development within the Gap would individually or cumulatively result in coalescence and the loss of the separate identity and amenity of nearby settlements. Evidence must demonstrate that existing local and national policies cannot provide the necessary protection

This paper concludes the following:

There is recognition of the importance of the gap between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint in the decisions relating to applications on land within the gap:

it continues to serve an important planning function in preventing the coalescence of Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks and maintaining their separate identities and amenity

The Inspector's report relating to the housing allocation north of Clayton Mills also recognises the existence of the gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill and references a *perceived reduction in the gap*. The Inspector's Decision with regard to the Friars Oak Fields application also assesses the effects on the Gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill.

There have been no applications for land within the Hassocks/Ditchling Gap.

Although referencing the MSDC policy and the existence of the Gap, this has not been a determinative issue in any of the decisions reached relating to the proposed developments within the Gap. As a consequence, both the Hassocks/Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks/Burgess Hill Gap will be substantially reduced as a consequence of the London Road and north of Clayton Mills site allocations.

Both neighbouring NPs have policies relating to the respective gaps between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks and Ditchling. If the Hassocks NP does not include a Gap policy it will substantially weaken these policies within made NPs. Both neighbouring NP policies relate to Local Gaps. There is no longer reference to a Strategic Gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill in the MSDC Local Plan.

The landscape and visual assessments within this report demonstrate that:

- The land within the respective gaps retains a strong rural character which reflects key characteristics as described in the HNP Landscape Character Assessment
- The land within the respective gaps is of importance in maintaining the setting and identity of the individual settlements

10.1 Recommendation

For the reasons set out above it is recommended that a single Local Gap Policy is retained in the HNP with the following wording:

Policy... Local Gaps

Local Gaps have been defined and will be safeguarded between:

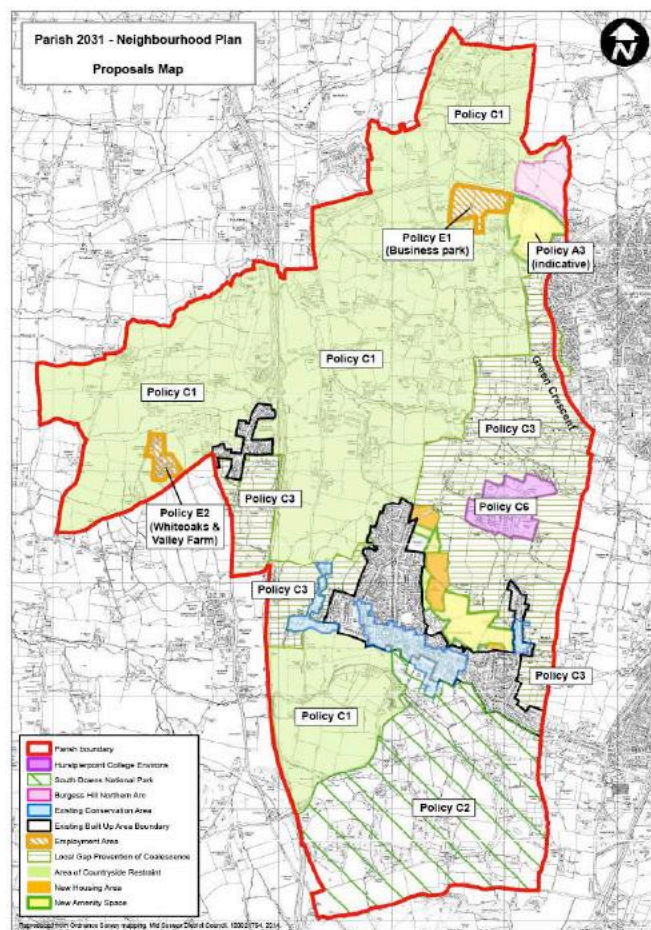
- a. Keymer/Hassocks and Ditchling; and
- b. Keymer/Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint
- c. Keymer/Hassocks and Burgess Hill

as defined on the Proposals Map with the objectives of preventing coalescence and retaining the separate identity and amenity of settlements.

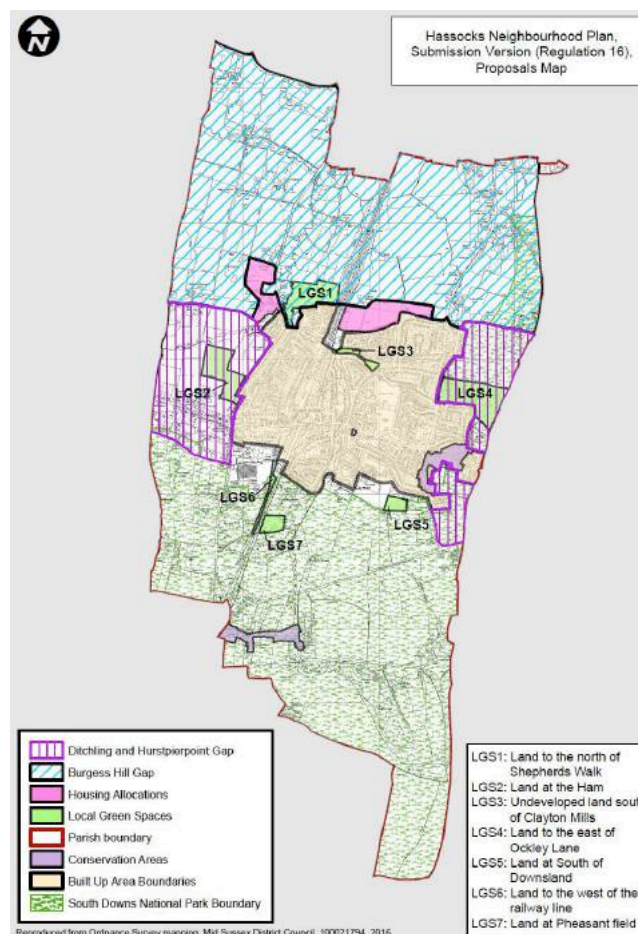
Development will be supported within the Gap areas where;

1. It is necessary for the purposes of agriculture, or some other use which has to be located in the countryside;
2. It makes a valuable contribution to the landscape character and amenity of the Gap and enhances its value as open countryside;
3. It would not compromise individually or cumulatively the objectives and fundamental integrity of the Ditchling Gap and Hurstpierpoint Gap; and
4. It would conserve and where possible enhance relative tranquillity, in relation to noise and light pollution and dark skies.

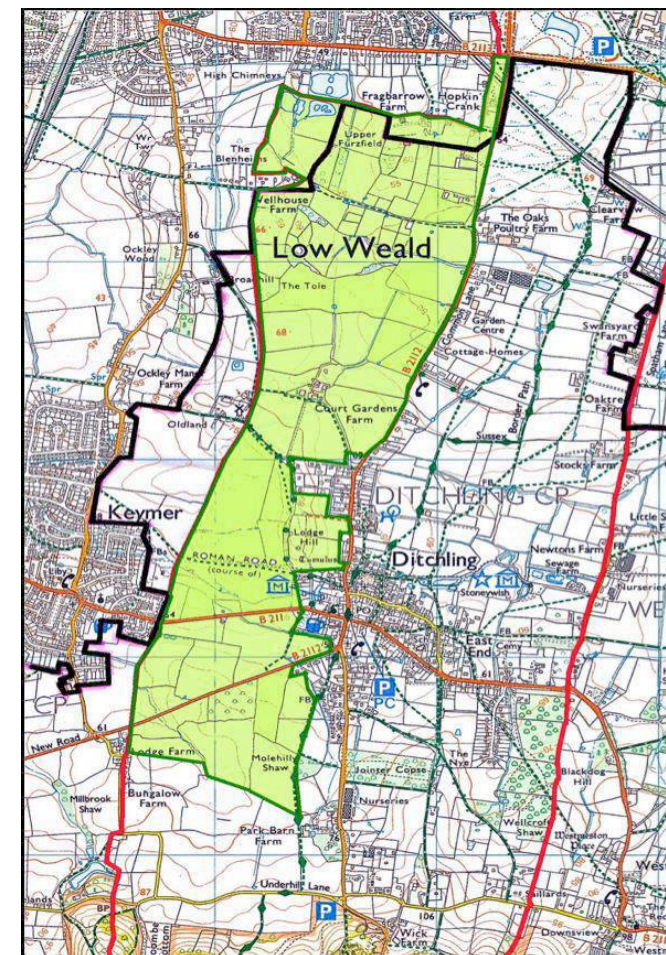
The revised area to be covered by the policy is shown on Figure 2.



Hurstpierpoint and Sayers common NP



Hassocks NP

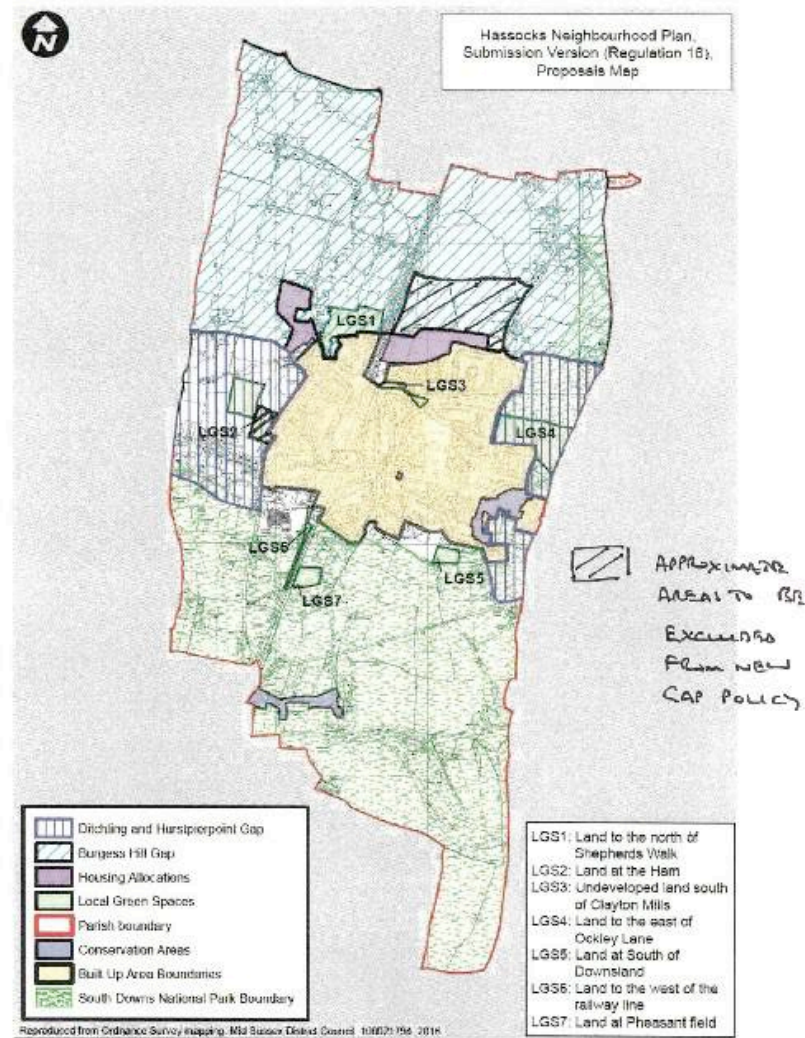


Ditchling and Street NP – Gap Policy

Figure 1: Current Neighbourhood Plan Proposals Maps



10. PROPOSALS MAP



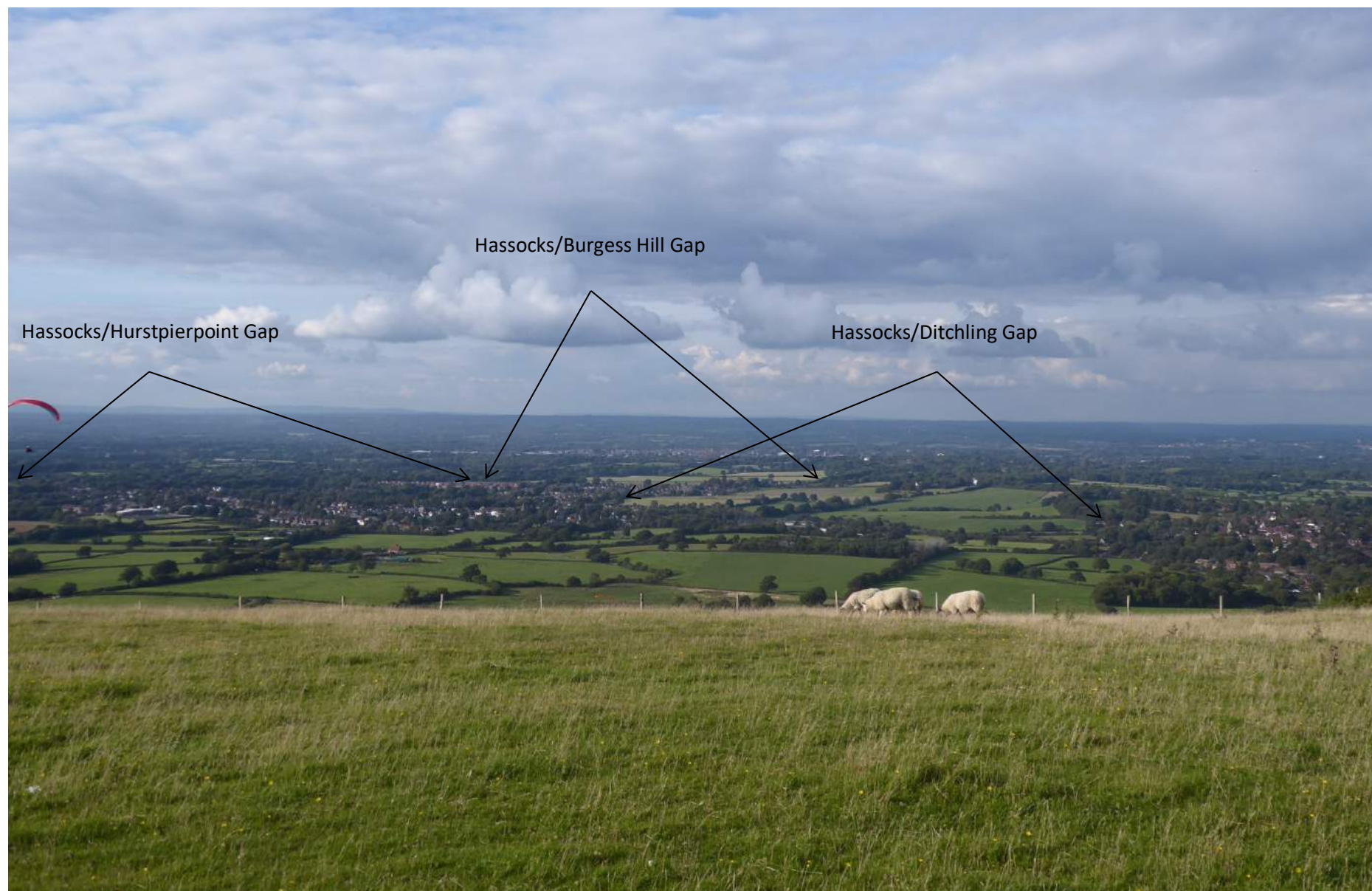
Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan, Regulation 16, Submission Version

Figure 2: Revised Proposals Map
19

Strategic Views of Gaps from the South Downs



View from Jack and Jill Windmills



Hassocks/Ditchling Gap Visual Assessment



View 1: View north from Footpath within the Hassocks to Ditchling Gap. This view illustrates the strong perception of rural character from land within the gap and shows Oldlands Mill, an important historic feature within the gap.



View 2: View south east from Footpath on Lodge Hill. This view shows the main extent of the Gap and the dramatic rural views gained across land within the Gap to the South Downs. Development on the eastern edge of Hassocks is visible in this view.

Hassocks/Burgess Hill Gap Visual Assessment



View 3: View over farmland to the east of Ockley Lane demonstrating the strong rural character of land within the Gap.



View 4: 180 degree view from Footpath 5K to the west of the Water Tower. This view shows the most sensitive remaining area within the gap. The land allocation to the north of Clayton Mills would be visible and prominent in the southern (left) sections of this view. Development on the southern edge of Burgess Hill is visible in the northern (right) sections of the view.

Hassocks/Hurstpierpoint Gap



View 5: View north from Footpath in the vicinity of Hurst College (within Hurstpierpoint Gap Policy area). Development on the eastern edge of Hurstpierpoint is visible.



View 5: View north from Footpath within the proposed Hassocks Gap policy area. This view demonstrates the strong rural character of the gap. Existing linear development on Hurst Road is not visible and does not influence the rural character of the Gap.



View 6: View east from Belmont Lane from land within the Gap. The proposed development at Ham Fields would extend to the second hedgerow boundary marked by the two mature oaks.



View 7: View west from Belmont Lane from land within the Gap. Development on the eastern edge of Hurst on College Lane is visible in this view.