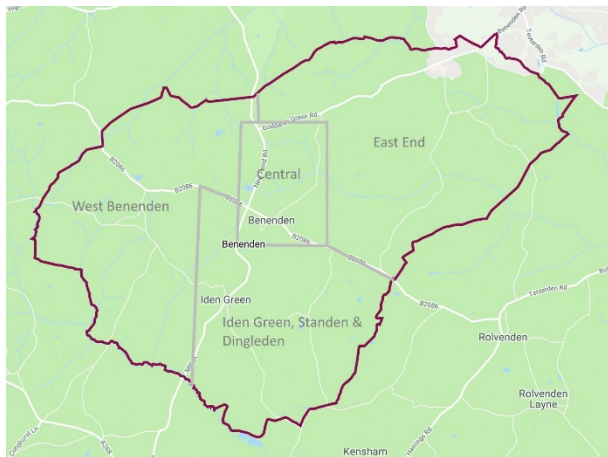


Supporting Document LEA2

Local Character Assessments 2018

Landscape

The parish of Benenden is a prime example of the High Weald Area of Natural Beauty. The medieval field structures and settlement patterns largely remain, modified through the centuries as the population has grown. It is peppered with outstanding views due to the ridged nature of the landscape. It enjoys rich biodiversity thanks to the largely unspoilt landscape where ancient woodland and gill valleys, some semi-improved grassland, ancient hedgerow and shaws provide vital habitats.



Central Benenden

The heart of the village clusters along The Street at the foot of the village green, with the church standing at the other end of the Green, on higher ground, as if watching over the village centre. This picturesque arrangement was largely designed in the 19th century by the Earl of Cranbrook, who cleared houses from around the church to do so.

A second unique feature are numerous notable trees, both ancient native and 19th and 20th century plantings from all over the world. Of the native trees, especially fine are the old oaks in the churchyard, round the Glebe Field and Recreation Ground, in the Beadle's Platt to the west of the church and on all sides in Hilly Fields.

The reason for the fine plantings of non-native trees is that the naturalist, Collingwood Ingram once lived at the Grange, on the Green. He planted the Monterey Pines on the Iden Green Road and many other magnificent trees. He was the man who re-introduced the flowering cherry to Japan where it had been lost for many years. He is revered in Japan to this day for this action. The original cherry, Tai Haku, or its direct descendant, which he used for the reintroduction, still stands in the grounds of the Grange. Almost every tree in his garden is protected by a Tree Preservation Order.

This area includes many footpaths offering incomparable views south over the Weald, such as that from Pullington or from Hilly Fields.

The centre of the village, because of its historic interest and architectural value, is designated a Conservation Area. The farmland around the centre includes two Local Wildlife Sites: St George's Churchyard and Nine Acre Wood and Gill which stretches from west of Walkhurst road and runs along wooded gills as far as Stepneyford Lane in the east. There is a Roadside Nature Reserve along the roadside path to Iden Green.

East End

The area is studded with old farmsteads such as Beston, Bishopsden, Pympe Manor, Mount le Hoe and Maplesden. It is criss-crossed with narrow lanes, often sunken and lined with ancient woodland. To the south lies the old drove road, now the main road from Rolvenden to Benenden while the oldest track is the west-east Roman road (which may well pre-date the Romans), which follows the line of the west-east sandstone ridge to the north of the area. Bronze Age items have been found near this track. This ridge was, and still is, the centre for top fruit growing in the parish. This area is home to four Local Wildlife Sites (Brogues Wood, Benenden hospital grounds, Beston Farm, Hemsted Forest) with a fifth site, the old Bramley orchard at Halden, sitting on its border with Rolvenden. Medieval tracks, often lined with moss-covered banks surmounted by the gnarled and ancient stumps of trees once laid as hedges, thread the area. The most notable are Dockenden Lane in Hemsted Forest and the bridle path from Mount le Hoe to Walkhurst Road. European Cycle Route no. 18 runs through the area, following narrow lanes from south to north.

West Benenden

The area north and south of the Cranbrook Road is largely farmland (a mixture of grazing and arable) and includes the parkland around Benenden School, once Hemsted Place. Though the Elizabethan house no longer exists, trees planted at that time remain, including a sweet chestnut tree thought to have been planted in 1588 to celebrate the victory over the Armada.

Like the rest of the parish this is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and includes long tracts of ancient woodland. There are two large areas of ancient woodland, White Chimney Wood and Parsonage Wood, which are both Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). Parsonage Wood is the only place in the parish to be designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) but abutting the western edge of the Parish is Cranbrook Wood, also an SSSI.

The area is dotted with mysterious ancient, man-made pits, often called marl pits, but which could also be the result of iron working or the mining of clay for bricks. Many of them are now filled with water and these numerous ponds and pits, often tree ringed and overgrown, provide a rich and diverse habitat for wildlife.

West Benenden is criss-crossed by a network of over a dozen footpaths, many of them with spectacular views over the Weald, such as from the footpath past the Jubilee Plantation. There are a number of sunken lanes or ancient drove roads and a Roman road runs north-south through the grounds of Benenden School. It is said to be the route taken by King Harold and his army on his way to Hastings. The High Weald Landscape Trail follows part of this track and Cycle Route 18 is marked on Nineveh Lane and Coldharbour Road.

Iden Green, Standen and Dingledden

These three ancient dens are sited amid an undulating rural landscape featuring small gill tributary streams, quiet sunken droveways and predominantly small scale, irregular fields. Many of the fields are bounded by woodland, copses, shaws and hedgerows all combining to create a distinctive landscape mosaic. Most of the fields within the area are grassland pasture grazed by sheep and horses; elsewhere there are several mature orchards producing mainly apples. There are numerous notable areas of Ancient Woodland including Iden Green Wood, Moor Wood, Standen Wood, Strawberry Wood, Seven Acre Shaw and Stone Quarry Wood, all of which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Strawberry Wood also contains an ancient culvert which is a structure of historic importance. The north-south Roman road crosses a stream at Stream Farm using a rare, still partially paved ford. This site is listed by Historic England.