

Introduction & Summary

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Introduction

As part of Natural England's responsibilities as set out in the Natural Environment White Paper,¹ Biodiversity 2020² and the European Landscape Convention,³ we are revising profiles for England's 159 National Character Areas (NCAs). These are areas that share similar landscape characteristics, and which follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision-making framework for the natural environment.

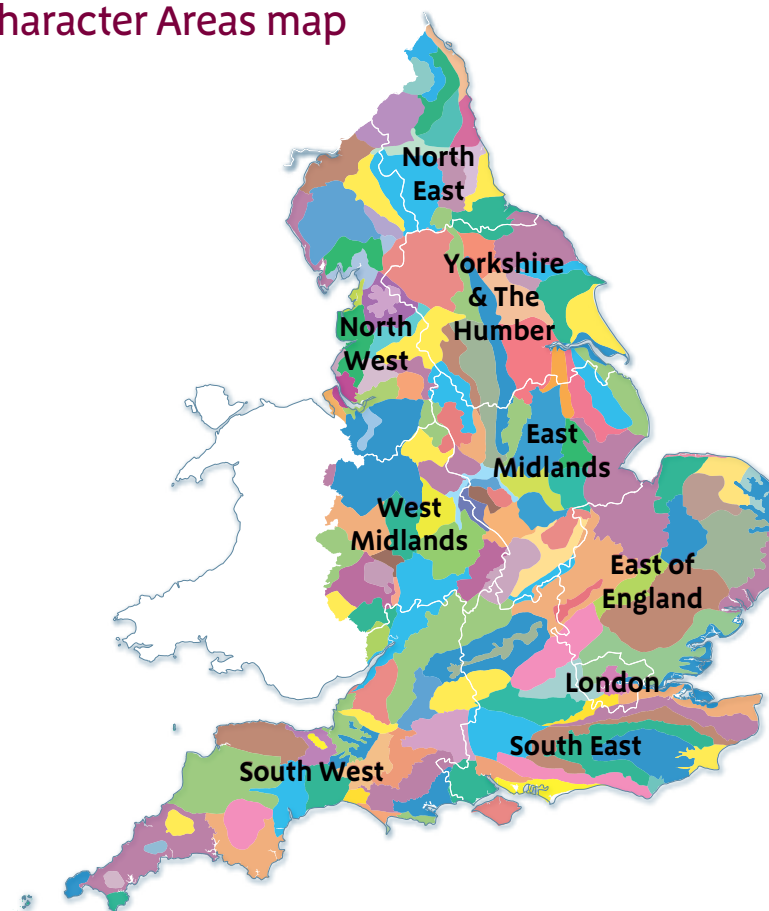
NCA profiles are guidance documents which can help communities to inform their decision-making about the places that they live in and care for. The information they contain will support the planning of conservation initiatives at a landscape scale, inform the delivery of Nature Improvement Areas and encourage broader partnership working through Local Nature Partnerships. The profiles will also help to inform choices about how land is managed and can change.

Each profile includes a description of the natural and cultural features that shape our landscapes, how the landscape has changed over time, the current key drivers for ongoing change, and a broad analysis of each area's characteristics and ecosystem services. Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEOs) are suggested, which draw on this integrated information. The SEOs offer guidance on the critical issues, which could help to achieve sustainable growth and a more secure environmental future.

NCA profiles are working documents which draw on current evidence and knowledge. We will aim to refresh and update them periodically as new information becomes available to us.

We would like to hear how useful the NCA profiles are to you. You can contact the NCA team by emailing ncaprofiles@naturalengland.org.uk.

National Character Areas map



¹ The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature, Defra (2011; URL: www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf)

² Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services, Defra (2011; URL: www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020-111111.pdf)

³ European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe (2000; URL: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/176.htm>)

Summary

The South Hampshire Lowlands National Character Area (NCA) is a low-lying plain between the chalk hills of the Hampshire and South Downs and Southampton Water. Its highest point is an outlying chalk ridge – Portsdown Hill – but the bedrock geology is mostly open marine, estuarine and freshwater Tertiary deposits. The NCA is dominated by the city and port of Southampton and its adjoining towns and suburbs – 29 per cent of the area is urban. In the more rural areas, it is a mixture of farmland, particularly pasture, and woodland.

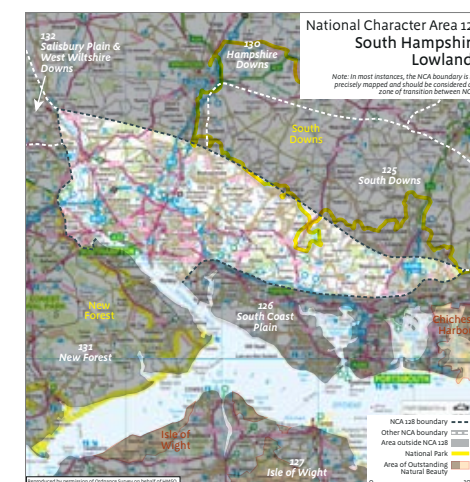
Some 18 per cent of the land cover of the NCA is woodland, of which almost half is designated ancient woodland, a legacy of the Forest of Bere, a Royal Hunting Forest that once covered the area. Today the most significant blocks of woodland are West Walk near Wickham, Botley Wood at Swanwick and Ampfield Wood near Romsey.

Although a high percentage of the area is urban, the NCA has considerable biodiversity interest. Southampton Water is internationally recognised for its importance for breeding and overwintering waterfowl and waders and for its wetland habitats such as mudflats and salt marshes. Three Natura 2000 designations cover parts of the area – Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site, Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area and Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation.

The NCA is drained by several rivers: the lower reaches of the Test and Itchen, the source and headwaters of the Hamble and the middle section of the Meon. These provide not only a refuge for species in decline elsewhere,

such as otters, but also examples of unusual habitats such as the estuarine woodlands on the Hamble. Both the Test and Itchen are important sources of potable water.

The NCA however faces many challenges, particularly ongoing development. This will need to be implemented sensitively in order to safeguard not only the designated sites within the NCA but also the important adjacent sites such as the New Forest and South Downs National Parks.



Click map to enlarge; click again to reduce

Statements of Environmental Opportunities:

- **SEO 1:** Promote creative and effective sustainable development – including a well-connected network of high-quality greenspace in and around Southampton, Romsey, Eastleigh and Havant – which benefits local businesses and communities, protects local distinctiveness, encourages public understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment, and helps to mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- **SEO 2:** Conserve, manage and enhance the semi-natural habitats of the river valleys, their estuaries and intertidal areas along the coast, to maintain water availability and flow, reduce flooding downstream, improve water quality, and enhance their biodiversity and landscape benefits.
- **SEO 3:** Protect, manage and enhance the area's historic well-wooded character – including its ancient semi-natural woodlands, wood pasture and hedgerows – to increase biomass provision, link and strengthen habitats for wildlife, and improve recreational opportunities.
- **SEO 4:** Conserve, manage, link and enhance the traditional mosaic of semi-natural grassland habitats – including chalk grassland, watermeadows and unimproved grassland – for the benefits they provide in protecting and regulating soils and water, climate change adaptation as well as recreational opportunities and improved biodiversity.



Swans on the River Itchen at Highbridge.

Description

Physical and functional links to other National Character Areas

The area is drained by four main river valleys – the Test, Itchen, Hamble and Meon – flowing from their origins in the Hampshire Downs and South Downs National Character Areas (NCAs) to estuaries running into Southampton Water. They function as key wildlife corridors, for example for otter and Atlantic salmon. They also feed wetland and European or internationally designated wetlands, such as the Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site and the Portsmouth Harbour Special Protection Area (SPA) (in the neighbouring South Coast Plain NCA), which are important for breeding and overwintering birds. Therefore, water quality and sediment load need to be carefully managed throughout the whole catchment.

There are wide views across Southampton Water from Southampton. However, the high-rise buildings and industrial areas of Southampton have an impact on the views from surrounding NCAs such as the New Forest and South Coast Plain. From Portsdown Hill, it is possible to see Portsmouth, the Solent and the Isle of Wight.

Southampton has several regionally and nationally important transport links, such as the M3 to London and the M27 along the south coast. A ferry service from the port connects the Isle of Wight to the mainland. Southampton Airport at Eastleigh on the outskirts of the city serves routes to the Channel Islands, European and international destinations.

Two National Parks, the New Forest and South Downs, in neighbouring NCAs are popular recreational destinations for people from the Southampton area and elsewhere within the NCA. Southampton and the coastal river valleys offer many water-based activities such as yachting and attract visitors from outside the NCA.



The view across Portsmouth Harbour from Portsdown Hill.

Key characteristics

- Low-lying, undulating plain abutting the chalk downs to the north and the coastal plain and Southampton Water to the south. An underlying geology of open marine, estuarine and freshwater Tertiary gravels. Soils over much of the area are heavy and clayey with localised pockets of more freely draining soils on higher land.
- Fast-flowing chalk rivers in wide, open valleys with watermeadows and riparian vegetation that provide valuable wildlife habitats for species such as breeding and overwintering birds, otter, water vole, Atlantic salmon, brown trout and the endangered, native white-clawed crayfish.
- Well-wooded farmed landscape (particularly to the east of Southampton), characterised by ancient woodland such as Botley Wood and West Walk, the remnants of the Royal Hunting Forest of Bere.
- Mixed agricultural landscape dominated by pasture with small pockets of horticulture and arable.
- An intimate and enclosed field pattern with many small and irregular fields generally bounded by mixed-species hedgerows or woodland.
- In parts, a very urban NCA dominated by the city and port of Southampton and other large towns such as Waterlooville and Havant. The more rural hinterland is characterised by small, loosely clustered or dispersed settlements, intermixed with isolated farmsteads.
- Fragmented by major transport links, including the M3 to London and the M27 to Portsmouth which cross the NCA.



The mudflats of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA support a wide assemblage of waders and waterbirds.

South Hampshire Lowlands today

The South Hampshire Lowlands National Character Area is a low-lying and gently undulating plain that lies between the chalk outcrops of the Hampshire and South Downs and Southampton Water. Wedge-shaped, to the west it melds with the New Forest NCA while to the east it tapers to a narrow point at Havant. The area is underlain by gently folded Tertiary sands, silts and clays in places overlain by more recent river-deposited sands and gravels. This has given rise to widespread, seasonally waterlogged, heavy, clay soils, with small areas of light, well-drained loams, for instance to the east of Romsey and the west of Chandler's Ford. Its highest feature, Portsdown Hill, is an outlying chalk ridge which forms a backdrop to Portsmouth and contrasts dramatically with the flatter countryside around it. It is the only area of chalk grassland within the NCA and supports a rich chalk grassland flora and diverse invertebrates such as the endemic early gentian, bee and fly orchids, and the chalkhill blue, small blue and brown argus butterflies.

The shoreline of the NCA is contained entirely within the inlet of Southampton Water and is heavily developed with the docks and city of Southampton. Despite being a busy waterway, Southampton Water is noteworthy for its international/European designations: the Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site, Solent and Southampton Water SPA and the Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for its wetland habitats and overwintering waders.

Several fast-flowing rivers are a significant feature of the landscape. The Test, Itchen, Hamble and Meon rivers drain the lowlands as they travel southwards from their origins in the Downs to their estuaries in Southampton Water. Their clear, spring water supports a rich aquatic flora and fauna and wildlife habitat that is now scarce elsewhere in England for species such as otter, Atlantic

salmon, white-clawed crayfish, brook lamprey and southern damselfly. Dry fly fishing is thought to have originated on the River Test and the Test and Itchen are now managed for angling along most of their length.

Along the chalk rivers lie meadows of species-rich flood plain grassland. Beside the Test these undergo a transition from neutral grassland through to brackish grassland, reedbed, fen and salt marsh. These flood plain grasslands are important for breeding wading birds and wintering wildfowl and invertebrates, supporting many nationally rare and scarce species. Small pockets of fen and fen grassland, important for their distinctive flora such as marsh helleborine and marsh orchids, are associated with calcareous springs that rise at the foot of the Hampshire Downs, for example at The Moors, Bishop's Waltham Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

To the north and east of Southampton lie the remnants of the Royal Hunting Forest of Bere, now a mosaic of grassland, wood pasture and woodland, a high proportion of which is designated as ancient woodland. The area has a relatively high density of traditional farmsteads and historic houses set within 18th-century and earlier enclosed fields. Within broadleaved woodland, oak with a hazel understory is the prevalent woodland type but in some areas (such as Everett's and Mushes Copses and the upper reaches of the Hamble) there are stands of small-leaved lime with wych elm. Along the upper reaches of the Hamble are estuary edge woods, some of the botanically most diverse in the NCA, which show an unusual transition from woodland through brackish marsh to salt marsh. Conifer plantations introduced in the Forest of Bere provide small-scale commercial forestry operations.



Baddesley Common.

Isolated patches of agriculturally unimproved grassland are scattered across the NCA such as Moorgreen Meadows and Hook Heath Meadows SSSI. Despite their fragmented nature, they are valuable for their rich flora and invertebrate assemblages.

The farmed landscape is typically pastoral in character but some arable farming also takes place, especially cereals and oilseed rape. Around the Meon Valley, soils are lighter and there are some small but intensive pockets of market gardening/horticulture as well as nurseries and garden centres. The field pattern is varied with some small and medium irregular fields, resulting in some cases from medieval enclosure and typically bounded by a low oak hedgerow.

A significant proportion of the NCA, about 29 per cent, is urban. Southampton is by far the most important city but there are also several other significant, large towns including Eastleigh, Havant, Romsey, Totton and Waterlooville. The rural settlement pattern is more dispersed and less strongly nucleated with some often loosely clustered villages, hamlets, isolated small farms and cottages set within medieval and later enclosed fields and linked by a network of minor roads and narrow lanes. A few large houses and estates are dotted throughout the landscape.

The area benefits from good transport links including the M3 to London and Southampton Airport. However, these have a significant visual and environmental impact on the area, fragmenting farmland and semi-natural habitats. Only 7 per cent of the area, mostly within the Forest of Bere, is identified as remaining tranquil/undisturbed, with 65 per cent being described as disturbed in 2006.

The landscape through time

The NCA lies within the Hampshire Basin to the south of the South Downs ridge. Chalk, which forms the outlying ridge of Portsdown Hill, represents the oldest geology in the NCA. The Chalk was deposited in the Upper Cretaceous (between 100 and 66 million years ago) in an extensive shallow sea which covered much of northern Europe. Overlying the Chalk is a sequence of Tertiary sands, silts and clays which represent fluctuating marine, estuarine and freshwater environments which dominated southern England and the Hampshire Basin from approximately 66–34 million years ago. Towards the end of the Tertiary, the formation of the Alps (about 15 million years ago) led to folding of rocks in southern England resulting in the gently tilted and folded chalk ridges and Tertiary sediments. During the Quaternary ice ages, the NCA lay to the south of the maximum ice sheet advance in a tundra-like environment. There are extensive river terrace deposits (along the Test and Itchen, for example) which document the river response to fluctuating climatic conditions during the Quaternary.

Prehistoric occupation of the area seems to have been concentrated around the river valleys and Portsdown Hill where there are the remains of Neolithic and bronze-age barrows. A possible bronze-age jetty at Testwood Lakes suggests that even at this early period trading links were important for the area.

The first urban centres were established under Roman occupation as small market towns at Havant and Wickham. A Roman fort was constructed at Clausentum, possibly at modern-day Bitterne, a suburb of Southampton.⁴ The remains of Roman villas as well as kilns have also been found across the NCA.⁵

In the 7th century, under the West Saxons, Hamwic, an important port and trading emporium, the forerunner of Southampton, was founded on the banks of the Itchen. By the 10th century, the threat of Danish raids prompted the inhabitants to rebuild it on the west bank of the Test where its proximity to the continent and the double tides of Southampton Water helped it to become a major port. Today, Southampton still retains parts of its original medieval walls and several fine examples of wealthy merchants' houses dating from the 12th century.

During this period, the Church also influenced the establishment of settlements such as at Bishop's Waltham, where the bishops of Winchester held an estate, and Netley and Romsey where abbeys were founded.

The modern Forest of Bere is a composite of the remnants of several Royal Hunting Forests – the forests of Melchet, Buckholt, Bere Ashley and the largest, the Forest of Bere Portchester. They were designated as Royal Hunting Forests by the Normans and were probably at their greatest extent during the 12th century. During the Middle Ages, the forests' value for hunting began to decline and the woodland began to be cleared for farmland. Timber from the forests was also in demand for ship-building at Southampton and later to fuel iron foundries for the construction of iron-clad ships.

⁴ Hampshire County Integrated Character Assessment, Part 2 An Overview of the Hampshire Landscape, Hampshire County Council (draft March 2010)

⁵ Hampshire County Integrated Character Assessment, Forest of Bere East, Hampshire County Council (May 2012)

From the 17th century onwards, watermeadows became a distinctive feature along the rivers Test, Itchen and Meon. Flooding the fields increased their fertility and prevented the ground from freezing, allowing livestock to be put out to graze earlier in the season. The system was abandoned from the early 20th century and the valleys have now become more wooded. The fast-flowing waters of the rivers Itchen and Test were also harnessed to power mills, particularly paper and silk mills.

The proximity of the area to the continent and its coastal location has meant that, throughout its history, it has been at risk of invasion. In the 19th century, a series of forts were built along Portsdown Hill, known locally as Palmerston's Follies, to protect the naval base at Portsmouth.

The arrival of the railways in the 19th century connected the port of Southampton to London and spurred the development of Eastleigh as a railway town. It also gave local market gardening a new outlet as perishable produce such as strawberries could now be quickly transported to London.

During the 20th century, Southampton emerged as the major starting point for cruise ships and it remains a major port today for both freight and passenger traffic with the port authority being the largest employer in the city. In the post-war period, other urban centres within the NCA, such as Waterlooville and Havant, saw a rapid expansion to provide housing for an increasing population. Southampton City Council became a unitary authority in 1997.



A veteran oak tree at Creech wood.

Ecosystem services

The South Hampshire Lowlands NCA provides a wide range of benefits to society. Each is derived from the attributes and processes (both natural and cultural features) within the area. These benefits are known collectively as 'ecosystem services'. The predominant services are summarised below. Further information on ecosystem services provided in the South Hampshire Lowlands NCA is contained in the 'Analysis' section of this document.

Provisioning services (food, fibre and water supply)

- **Timber provision:** The area has been historically important for timber and today provides fencing, poles and some higher-quality firewood.



The River Test.

- **Water availability:** A large proportion of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight as well as areas of Sussex are dependent on the groundwater and surface waters of the rivers Test and Itchen. All the main rivers within the NCA also supply wetlands of international importance, for instance the Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site within the NCA and the Portsmouth Harbour Ramsar site in the neighbouring South Coast Plain NCA.

Regulating services (water purification, air quality maintenance and climate regulation)

- **Regulating water quality:** The chemical quality of the groundwater is good. However, the picture for the surface waters is more mixed. The Meon is judged to have both good ecological and chemical quality. The Lower Test is judged to be of moderate ecological quality between Timsbury and Romsey and poor between Romsey and its estuary. It is not assessed for chemical quality. The River Itchen is classed as ecologically poor for diatoms and chemically poor for the presence of tributyltin compounds.
- **Regulating water flow:** Some areas within the NCA – such as Romsey, parts of Southampton and Eastleigh – are prone to flooding. Improving the ability of flood plains to store water and restoring natural meanders to the rivers where possible could make a contribution to safeguarding properties.

Cultural services (inspiration, education and wellbeing)

- **Biodiversity:** The NCA has three SAC, one SPA and one Ramsar site, reflecting its importance for biodiversity. Nearly 3 per cent of the NCA is designated as SSSI.

Statements of Environmental Opportunity

SEO 1: Promote creative and effective sustainable development – including a well-connected network of high-quality greenspace in and around Southampton, Romsey, Eastleigh and Havant – which benefits local businesses and communities, protects local distinctiveness, encourages public understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment, and helps to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

For example, by:

- Working with local authorities, government agencies, local enterprise partnerships and other partners to ensure that economic growth in the South Hampshire Lowlands National Character Area (NCA) recognises and enhances where possible the qualities and ecosystem benefits of the natural environment.
- Promoting the benefits of the natural environment for local communities and visitors in terms of quality of life, health and recreation; and contributing to the mitigation and compensation for adverse impacts on the natural environment.
- Ensuring that development and its associated infrastructure (including light, noise and air pollution) does not damage or intrude on the special qualities of any of the designated sites and protected landscapes that lie within and adjacent to the NCA, for example the New Forest National Park, the Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site, Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA), Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation (SAC), River Itchen SAC, Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), South Downs National Park and Chichester Harbour AONB.
- Ensuring that all new development is informed by an understanding of local character and distinctiveness and conserves significant historic features.
- Encouraging the use of neighbourhood plans and historic landscape character assessments to inform planning decisions.
- Ensuring that all new development meets the highest standards for energy efficiency as set out in the Code for Sustainable Homes.⁶
- Making all development permeable to wildlife through the use of greenspace and green corridors that can function as ecological networks.
- Encouraging the provision of a strong, coherent green infrastructure network and ensuring that all development meets the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt).
- Preserving and improving the tranquillity of the NCA, for instance ensuring that intrusion by development is minimised, providing new greenspace and improving the tranquillity of existing greenspace, buffering major roads with hedgerows or trees and encouraging the use of low-noise surfacing on roads.
- Seeking to encourage a softer transition between rural and urban landscapes through the planting of native trees around new development.
- Creating areas of well-managed broadleaved woodland to shield new development and major transport routes such as the M25 and provide corridors for sustainable links such as cycle ways and footpaths while also providing a potential wood fuel resource and buffering from traffic noise.
- Working with local planning authorities and public transport providers to ensure that viable public transport options are in place, particularly in areas of new development, to reduce the pressure of road traffic and reduce the impact of air pollution on European designated sites.

⁶ Code for Sustainable Homes, Department for Communities and Local Government (2006)

SEO 2: Conserve, manage and enhance the semi-natural habitats of the river valleys, their estuaries and intertidal areas along the coast, to maintain water availability and flow, reduce flooding downstream, improve water quality, and enhance their biodiversity and landscape benefits.

For example, by:

- Working with partners, such as the Environment Agency and water companies, to ensure that the planned increase in population does not cause deterioration in water quality or water availability, to maintain supplies of potable water and protect the wildlife that depends on the rivers and wetlands.
- Working with the farming community under the Catchment Sensitive Farming Programme to ensure that agricultural run-off is reduced.
- Encouraging the use of wide buffer strips and planting of hedgerows to prevent or reduce run-off; and improving water quality by reducing the amount of nutrients and silts entering watercourses.
- Working with industries that use the rivers – such as mills, fish farms and watercress farms – to minimise pollution of the rivers Hamble, Itchen, Meon and Test.
- Promoting water efficiency among the wider public, industry, agriculture and users both within the NCA itself and within neighbouring catchment areas.
- Ensuring that any new development is built to the highest water efficiency standards as laid out in the Code for Sustainable Homes.
- Maintaining and managing the open character of the river valleys of the Itchen, Meon and Test to conserve and enhance the long views over the surrounding landscape.
- Promoting awareness among the wider public of the problems of invasive species, supporting local volunteers and working with landowners and partners to control invasive species such as mink, Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and topmouth gudgeon which pose a serious threat to the biodiversity and economic viability of local rivers.
- Linking and extending lowland meadow habitats, where possible, along the rivers which will help to filter pollutants and increase flood water storage capacity as well as support biodiversity and increase habitat for pollinators and pest predators.
- Encouraging, where possible, the restoration of the traditional grazing of the historic watermeadows, particularly along the rivers Test and Itchen, to support biodiversity.
- Encouraging the planting and management of native vegetation and the removal of non-native vegetation alongside rivers to support wildlife such as Atlantic salmon and the southern damselfly.
- Working with landowners and partner bodies to ensure that a proportion of shade is present over key watercourses to prevent overheating during 'heat waves'.
- Working with the Environment Agency, angling groups and other partners to ensure that vegetation cover is managed for maximum biodiversity benefit while allowing access to the bank for recreational fishing.
- Removing weirs and helping fish to navigate impediments to migration, for instance by installing fish ladders.

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- Establishing new plantations in strategic locations to help manage water quality, water flow and soil quality.
- Restoring the natural morphology of rivers – especially along the Test and Itchen – to improve biodiversity and allow the river to channel excess water more efficiently and thus avoid flooding.
- Reconnecting rivers with their flood plains, protecting flood plains from development, and linking them, extending them and improving their condition so that they function effectively.
- Encouraging the careful siting of any development away from areas that are susceptible to fluvial, marine or groundwater flooding.
- Creating new wetland areas throughout both existing and approved new development as part of sustainable urban drainage systems that link into the heart of urban areas, significantly contributing to the alleviation of surface water flooding.
- Encouraging the use of permeable surfaces, green roofs and rain gardens in new development to reduce the risk of overland flows.
- Ensuring that the needs for high tide roost sites of birds and other needs on the Solent and Southampton Water SPA are taken into consideration when any development is planned.
- Encourage research within the Lower Test Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to help better understand the changes that may be occurring due to sea level rise and how the SSSI may best be managed to adapt to them.
- Work with partners and stakeholders for the Lower Test Valley SSSI to agree climate change adaptation actions and manage intertidal habitat roll-back.



Weirs on the chalk rivers can act as barriers to fish passage.

SEO 3: Protect, manage and enhance the area's historic well-wooded character – including its ancient semi-natural woodlands, wood pasture and hedgerows – to increase biomass provision, link and strengthen habitats for wildlife, and improve recreational opportunities.

For example, by:

- Linking areas of woodland, in particular ancient woodland, to improve landscape character and resilience and to reduce fragmentation.
- Strengthening ecological networks by seeking opportunities to link areas of woodland, particularly ancient woodland, through hedgerows and new plantations of trees native to the area.
- Seeking the replacement of conifers on ancient woodland sites with broadleaved trees indigenous to the area, to enhance biodiversity and landscape while also aiding climate regulation and providing a local source of wood products.
- Restoring and maintaining areas of wood pasture for their biodiversity value such as lichen and bryophyte communities.
- Improving the recreational experience of the Forest of Bere so that it can offer an attractive alternative to the neighbouring national parks by providing adventure activities, such as wild camping, as well as ensuring that it provides areas for quiet recreation.
- Promoting a market within the NCA for biomass fuels from locally grown sustainable wood.
- Encouraging local landowners to actively manage broadleaved woodland for woodland products.
- Managing, restoring and replanting the network of hedgerows and field boundary trees to strengthen field boundary patterns.
- Preserving remnant historic field systems, such as medieval assart fields, where appropriate through agri-environment schemes.
- Promoting interest and understanding in the history and land use of the Forest of Bere among the wider public.
- Improving and encouraging access to the Forest of Bere through sustainable transport such as better cycle and pedestrian links from urban areas.
- Ensuring that the rural character of the Forest of Bere is maintained and enhanced, for instance by minimising 'street clutter' and, where possible, reducing light pollution and other intrusion.

SEO 4: Conserve, manage, link and enhance the traditional mosaic of semi-natural grassland habitats – including chalk grasslands, watermeadows and unimproved grassland – for the benefits they provide in protecting and regulating soils and water, climate change adaptation as well as recreational opportunities and improved biodiversity.

For example, by:

- Restoring a regular grazing regime to the chalk grassland at Portsdown Hill to maintain and improve its landscape and biodiversity interest.
- Encouraging, where possible, the reversion to grassland from arable across Portsdown Hill to restore and link the chalk habitat – particularly on the south escarpment – to safeguard important biodiversity interest, such as the early gentian (an endemic species) and assemblages of rare butterflies, as well as protect the shallow, chalky soils.
- Promoting the reversion of arable to grassland and scrub removal where current land cover threatens the integrity of historic features such as important earthworks and remains, including bronze-age barrows and Saxon burial grounds on Portsdown Hill and remnants of medieval field systems on the river valley sides and bottoms such as those along the Itchen.
- Improving recreational access to Portsdown Hill and encouraging sympathetic use by local residents.
- Creating awareness among the local population of Portsdown Hill's historical legacy.
- Promoting the 19th-century forts on Portsdown Hill more widely as venues for day trips.
- Linking and re-establishing, where possible, areas of lowland heathland particularly around Baddesley, Hamble, Netley, Shedfield and Wickham commons.
- Conserving and restoring remnant ancient/historic field systems, such as assart fields found in the Forest of Bere, through traditional hedgerow boundary management and replanting, by encouraging uptake of agri-environment schemes.
- Linking and extending the mosaic of semi-natural grassland within the Forest of Bere to reduce fragmentation; and encouraging reversion to grassland from arable, where possible.
- Exploring the possibility of developer funding for establishing suitable alternative natural greenspace (SANGS) to relieve visitor pressure on the coastal sites and minimise the disturbance to the birds.
- Restoring grassland where possible for green infrastructure.
- Encouraging the restoration and creation of new ponds through agri-environment schemes.
- Encouraging the introduction of arable field margins and buffer strips on arable land to support pollinators and pest predators and to increase biodiversity.

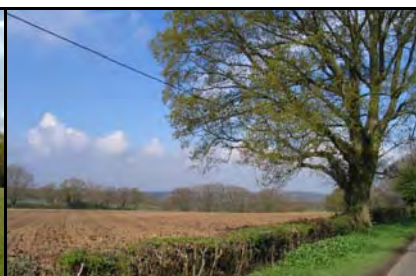
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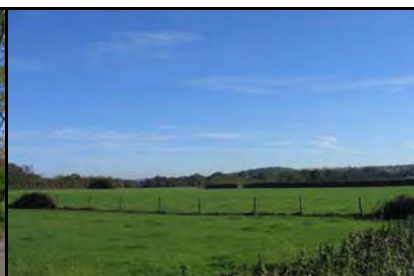
Assart Landscape of the core Forest of Bere typical of the Lowland Mosaic Medium Scale Wooded landscape – Biddenfield Lane



Remnant open commons- popular locally accessible landscapes - Shedfield Common.



Low hedges with mature often -ancient isolated oak Lowland Mosaic Small Scale Wooded – nr Durley.



Lowland Mosaic Open (Hamble Valley in background) – Boorley Green.



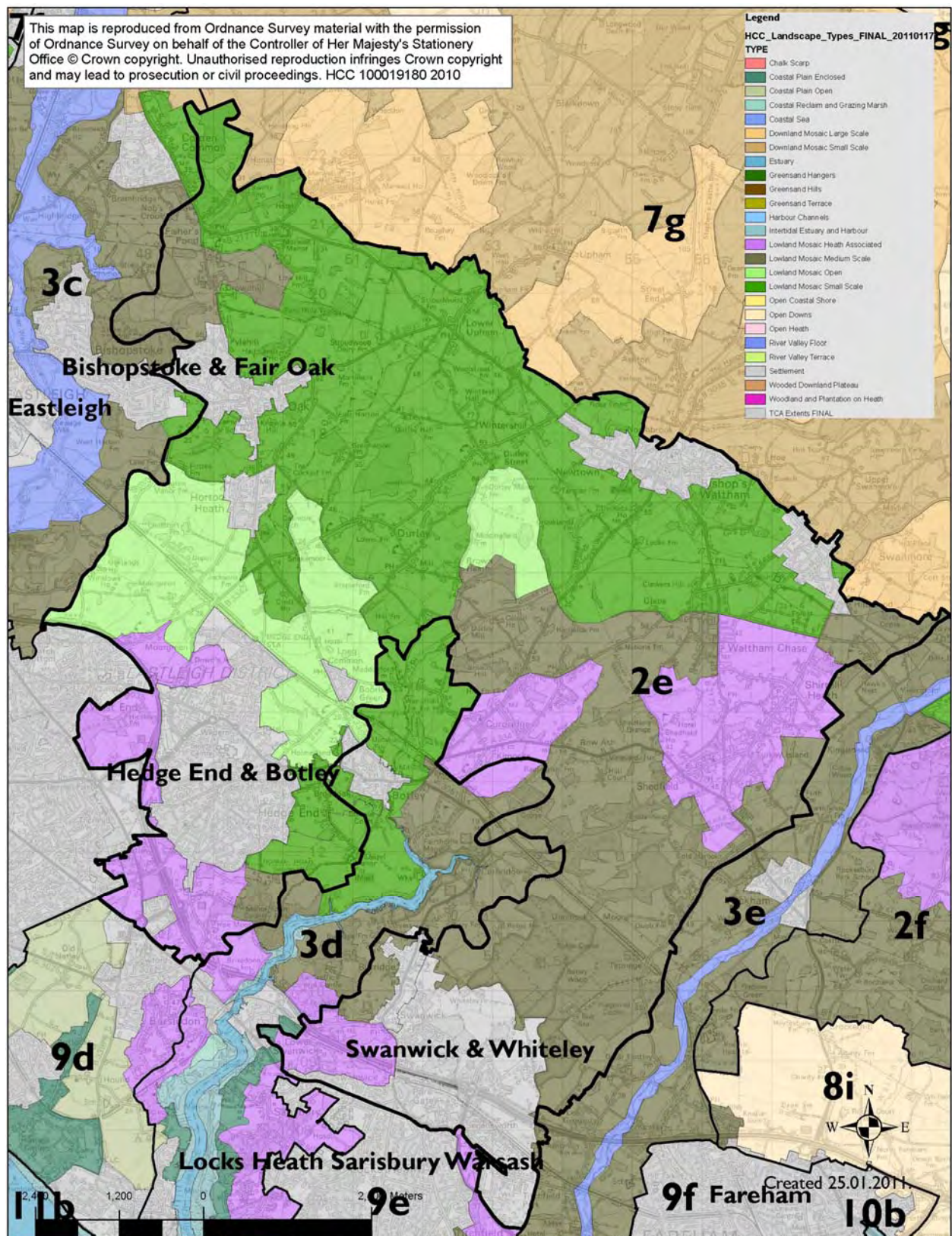
Botley Wood © P&K Larcombe



Late 19th early 20th century ribbon development and infilling on former commons – Shedfield.



Significant areas of rural urban fringe from mid-late 20thC expansion - Hedge End ©Google Earth



I.0 Location and Boundaries

- I.1** This character area encompasses the lowlands of the Hampshire Basin, bounded by higher chalk of the Hampshire Downs to the north and Portsdown Hill and the Coastal Plain in the south west and south east respectively. Whilst the Meon Valley forms the western boundary the east is drawn on the County boundary. The LCA in Hampshire narrows and joins almost exactly with the Funtington to Highdown Farmlands in West Sussex. The Forest of Bere East shares some of its characteristics with its W Sussex counterpart close to the border north of Westbourne but is essentially different.



I.2 Component County Landscape Types:

Lowland Mosaic Medium Scale Wooded, Lowland mosaic Small Scale Wooded, Significant sized settlement

I.3 Composition of Borough/District LCAs:

Winchester CC:

Whiteley Woodlands
Shedfield Heathlands
Durley Claylands

Fareham BC:

Burridge/Swanwick/Whiteley
North Sarisbury Fringe
Titchfield Corridor

Eastleigh

Botley Farmlands and Woodlands
M27 Corridor
Horton Heath Undulating Farmland
Oaklands Woodland and Parkland
Knowle Hill Farmland and Woodland
Bishopstoke – Fair Oak Woodland and Farmland
Stroundwood Levels

There are strong similarities with the County landscape types and the Winchester assessment. There are some similarities with the Fareham assessment and a strong association with the Eastleigh woodland based character areas and the extent of the County Lowland Mosaic Medium Scale.

I.4 Associations with JCAs and Natural Areas:

NCA 128: South Hampshire Lowlands

NA 75: South Coast Plain and Hampshire Lowlands

2.0 Key Characteristics

- A low lying landscape with shallow undulations, predominantly south sloping.
- Varied geology with permanently saturated heavy clays in the central and southern parts and locally higher sandy outcrops which are more undulating

resulting in agriculturally poor soils – conversely rich alluvial especially around tributaries of the Hamble are very high grade..

- Locally popular accessible woodland areas.
- Permanent pasture, plantations woodland and small holdings with secluded, heavily wooded, often ancient origin but replanted, away from the major towns.
- This area is strongly associated with the Royal Forest of Bere, a hunting reserve that retains wooded and to a lesser extent, open commons, assart field and woodland patterns.
- Hedgerows often low but with individual spreading mature oaks, sometimes of ancient origin or lines of oak with no ‘understory’ hedge and occasionally isolated field specimens.
- Extensive C.20th development, including urban expansion and infilling of common-edge settlements.
- Historically, mixed settlement pattern of very low density, tending towards nucleation along streams and around heath scattered throughout the area.
- Rich biodiversity, including woodland, heathland, grassland and wetland sites.

3.0 Physical Characteristics and Land use

3.1 The topography is predominantly gently undulating, but is more steep and varied around the fringes where sand and gravel outcrops. The land gradually rises from the centre of the character area to the east, west and north, and falls away to the south. Soils are seasonally to permanently waterlogged and predominantly heavy clays. However the mixed geology and topography creates some lighter silty soils with better drainage of high to very high agricultural quality particularly around the tributaries of the upper reaches of the Hamble.

3.2 There are three dominant bedrock geology formations which run in east- west bands. From north to south they are Lambeth Group (sandy clay which runs along the boundary with the chalk). London clay and Wittering formation (sand). There are a few areas of head and river terrace deposits. Where the Lowland Mosaic Heath Associated occurs this coincides with locally elevated sand and gravel outcrops, such as Shedfield, Shirrell heath and adjacent to West End. There are numerous localised ridges and hills shown in local place names (e.g. Ridge Copse and Thistle Ridge Farm).

3.3 Land use is very mixed, with a relatively high proportion of pasture and rough grassland. Farm holdings are predominantly small in size¹⁴. The area is rich in semi natural ancient woodland, and irregular edge, blocky shaped woodland is a particularly defining characteristic – especially in the core Forest area – defined by the Lowland Mosaic Medium Scale Wooded landscape. Field edges (especially on opposite sides from tracks and lanes) are frequently formed from these woodland blocks. Magnificent spreading and sometimes ancient oak trees are a feature of hedgerows, which often have low clipped interconnecting hedges. These hedgerows are most typical in the Lowland Mosaic Small Scale Wooded landscape which contains relatively small fields. There are occasional market gardening and nurseries. Urban fringe uses are more pervasive than in the Forest of Bere East, and typically include golf courses, small retail and commercial areas, horse paddocks, high voltage power lines and scattered housing in medium sized plots.

- 3.4 The great majority of the character area falls within the upper and mid parts of the Hamble catchment. Land in the far east drains to the Meon and west of Horton Heath and Fair oak is part of the Itchen catchment. There is a dense network of chalk springs and small streams which flow south into the Hamble. Field boundary ditches are frequent features. The main tributary flows from Bishops Waltham to Botley. The landscape is less low lying and generally better drained than the Forest of Bere East. There are a few areas of standing water and ponds, especially along the spring line where land falls away from the chalk to the north and meets the lower lying clayey soils of this landscape.

4.0 Experiential/Perceptual Characteristics

- 4.1 Views are predominantly short and often with a wooded backdrop. Outside the Lowland Mosaic Medium Scale landscape housing and development is frequently in the field of view. Within the character area locally elevated land such as Curdridge, Shirrell Heath, Winterhill and Swanmore have occasional long views to the coastal plain in the south. From a distance these areas appear wooded.

- 4.2 Lanes and roads are either very straight (where they are or were associated with commons such as new Road between Swanmore and Waltham Chase), or winding and twisting. The Lowland Mosaic Medium Scale landscape has an extremely low density road network and remains relatively remote. The centre of this area is traversed by the south coast railway line. The M27 on the southern side broadly separates this character area from the development along the south coast. Junctions off the motorway which lead into the character area are often heavily trafficked.

- 4.3 There is a dense rights of way network (particularly outside the Lowland Mosaic Medium Scale Wooded landscape) supplemented by commons and countryside service sites, particularly in the Lowland Mosaic Heath Associated landscape. This brings accessible land close to settlements. Despite this the Countryside Access plan highlights that town-countryside links are poor²⁷. There are few multi user routes and they are in poor condition in relation to other landscapes in Hampshire²⁷. The Pilgrim's Trail is the only long distance trail in the character area. The landscape is a popular local destination but does not have a particular draw to those from further afield.

- 4.4 This landscape is full of contrasts. The well wooded core Forest of Bere area is intimate, remote and secluded, but its peripheral landscapes have more development and urbanising influences. These are greatest in the western and southern parts of the character area, e.g the M27 and feeder road network, edge of town development, high voltage power lines and horse paddocks.

5.0 Biodiversity Character

- 5.1 Improved grassland comprises a considerable part of this landscape character area, with neutral/ undefined semi-improved and unimproved grasslands occurring throughout the area in small to medium sized patches alongside the productive agricultural land and woodland. Woodland varies; there are small patches throughout the area, with some larger woodland mosaics comprising different types of woodland. Smaller patches are often broadleaved and there is also forestry scrub associated with some woodlands.

- 5.2 This landscape contains four SSSIs which vary in composition. Botley Wood and Everetts and Mushes Copse SSSI comprises predominantly conifer plantations established in the 1960s or before. Despite coniferisation it is of exceptional importance for its rich insect populations, dependent upon the woodland clearings, broad herb-rich rides with abundant nectar sources and relict stands of semi-natural deciduous woodland. Much of the coniferous forest was planted into former coppice-with-standards woodland, though the western section was mainly planted into wet species-rich pastureland, remnants of which are still visible along the wider rides. Moorgreen Meadows SSSI is a neutral meadows and alder wood flanking a small tributary of the River Hamble. The meadows lie on alluvium and clay with thin deposits of peat. The sward comprises at least 17 co-dominant herbs and grasses and is of exceptional scientific importance for its populations of marsh orchids. The Moors, Bishop's Waltham SSSI supports a species-rich and ecologically diverse flora including many local or rare plants confined to unimproved, damp meadows. It is probably the richest site of its kind in the Hampshire Basin and is also a LNR. It lies near the junction of the Chalk and Reading Beds and is fed by a series of springs which may yield water of differing base status since the vegetation of the meadows exhibits an interesting juxtaposition of acid and basic elements. Waltham Chase Meadow SSSI comprises a group of unimproved neutral hay meadows. Collectively they represent one of the best examples in the county of dry neutral unimproved pasture. The flora is rich and includes a number of species now scarce such as green-winged orchid, adder's-tongue, callous fruited, water-dropwort, pepper-saxifrage, southern marsh orchid and cowslip. The rich and varied flora supports a rich invertebrate fauna, including, for example, 20 species of butterfly.
- 5.3 The Forest of Bere BOA and Hamble Catchment BOA both exist in this landscape character area. The Forest of Bere BOA contains a high concentration of ancient woodlands, wooded common, wood pasture and unimproved grassland and is of particular importance for small-leaved lime woods. The Hamble Catchment BOA covers habitats associated with the River Hamble including a variety of woodland and grassland types.
- 5.4 There are nearly 200 SINCs within this landscape character area. The majority are designated for their ancient and semi-natural woodland resource, although a significant number are designated for their unimproved grassland resource.
- 6.0 Historic Character**
- 6.1 Archaeology**
- 6.1.1 In common with the wider lowland and coastal belt along the south of Hampshire, there is a distribution of Mesolithic material through this area. Although mostly artefacts, there are also sites, particularly associated with river valleys, including the Hamble.
- 6.1.2 There is no evidence of Neolithic burials or settlements in this area. However Neolithic artefacts found across the area suggest the area was exploited, possibly by the communities on the chalk to the north. This pattern appears to have continued into the Bronze Age, although there are Bronze Age burial mounds in this area.
- 6.1.3 There is an Iron Age hillfort on the high ground to the southern edge, one of three along this high ground. An Iron Age settlement has recently been discovered close

by, but settlement generally tends to be associated with the valleys. The presence of the hillfort suggests that landscape was utilised and controlled, but the absence of settlement, enclosures and field systems suggests this was not intensive exploitation.

- 6.1.4 Roman evidence is limited, despite the presence of two Roman roads. There is a significant association between the deep clays and Roman kilns in the area, which may suggest managed woodland. The distribution of Roman villas tends to be in the valleys and the chalk, but there is one villa site in the lowland mosaic. One interpretation is a Roman hunting estate with industrial activity, utilising the different aspects of extensive woodland. The woodland character is reflected in the forest status of the area subsequently and within the historic landscape character of the present landscape.

6.2 **Historic Landscape**

- 6.2.1 The character area represents the approximate extent of the Forest of Bere – Portchester, West of the Meon which was given Royal Hunting status following the Norman invasion at the end of the 11th century. Waltham Chase came under the ownership of the Bishopric of Winchester.

- 6.2.2 The core Forest of Bere landscape was heavily wooded with rough grassland, marshy areas and heath. The land was managed by verderers who enforced forest law, primarily for deer hunting, timber and coppice. Woodland was assarted to leave numerous blocky irregular shaped copses with fields in between. Piecemeal enclosure of fields and woodland occurred to create a predominantly irregular pattern and size of fields with ditches and banks. Copses, shaws and remnant oaks (which were less suitable for timber) formed the field boundaries. The area has escaped large scale woodland loss, instead undergoing further piecemeal assarting and creation of more a more regular field pattern. Some of the woodland areas have been subject to replanting with conifer plantation in the late C. 19th. Modern development has been sparse apart from the development of Whiteley village in the mid 1990s.

- 6.2.3 The Lowland Mosaic Heath Associated landscapes are associated with open and wooded commons. The two largest open commons were Netley and Waltham Chase. Following disafforestation the character of these areas changed dramatically, with parliamentary enclosure in the mid 18th century producing a regular pattern of small fields with straight boundaries. Field sizes increased with distance from settlement. These areas have been the most intensively developed, due to the local brick industry and horticultural economy. Development on Netley Common and at Hedge End has resulted in a small gap between settlements. Waltham Chase, and commons at Shedfield and Shirrell Heath have gradually been infilled by development and fields subdivided for building plots, pony paddocks and nurseries.

- 6.2.4 Lowland mosaic landscapes to the north and west represent where the landscape was more extensively cleared and informally enclosed for pasture. Typically, pre-parliamentary enclosure of this landscape created a pattern of irregular shaped small fields, with a mix of open land and assart woodland in between. By the time the Forest of Bere was disbanded in 1810 much of the Lowland Mosaic Small Scale landscape had already been the subject of informal enclosure. Areas of Lowland Mosaic Open landscape usually have regular, straight boundary fields, typical of

formal and parliamentary enclosure, as Fair Oak and Hedge End enclosure maps show²⁶. This area has become increasingly developed and expansion of settlements within such as Bishops Waltham, Hedge End and Bishopstoke and the spread of Southampton have lead to field boundary alterations and loss.

- 6.2.5 Deer parks existed at Marwell, and Bishops Waltham. Other historic parks include Stoke Park, Bishops Waltham Palace and House and Botley Grange. There are also a number of mid nineteenth century parks.

6.3 **Built Environment**

- 6.3.1 Up until the mid C. 19th the settlement pattern of the character area was low density dispersed. There are frequent place name reminders of the hunting history associated with the landscape Durley – deer wood or deer clearing Waltham Chase – Chase hunting ground outside the Royal Forest. The town of Bishops Waltham originated as a springline settlement. It was an early local market centre and retains its strong medieval grid plan of streets. Botley, at the head of the tidal section of the Hamble obtained market charter in 1267. It has grander buildings and townscape than Bishops Waltham. Both towns have concentrations of timber framed buildings.
- 6.3.2 There is a significant if low density distribution of farmsteads of medieval and 17th century origin associated with the Lowland Mosaic Small Scale landscape types. The western and northern parts of the character area experienced a substantial growth in farmsteads in the 19th century associated with market gardening. Further farmsteads were established as a result of the mid 19th century enclosure of the rest of the core Forest of Bere landscape. Small holding size and varying agricultural soil quality created an uneven and often closely spaced pattern of farms, which continued well into the 20th century. Today the core Forest of Bere remains a low density, sparsely populated area.
- 6.3.3 The establishment of the railway connections to the south coast and London fuelled the development of the local brick industry in the north and southwest of the character area while market gardening and horticulture on the better soils served the London market. Development expanded rapidly from Southampton and around the commons. Common edge settlements are a particular feature. Detached often double fronted, Victorian and Edwardian cottages and villas strung out along the main road network from settlements are particularly characteristic. They are often of red brick with blue/grey headers and clay tiled roofs, set back from the road in medium to large plots. Later infill development was piecemeal and of very varied architecture styles, often larger size than their older neighbours.
- 6.3.4 Much of the character area has seen huge increases in development in the mid-late C.20th. In addition to the infilling of common edge settlement, the settlements closest to Southampton had extensive housing estate extensions such as Bishopstoke, Fair Oak and Hedge End. The late C.20th saw incursion immediately north of the M27 and east of the Hamble into the sparsely populated core Forest of Bere area in the form of Solent Business Park and Whitely village.

EVALUATION

7.0 Forces for Change

1. New large scale urban extensions.
2. Farm conversion to residential and loss of traditional land management practices.
3. Pressure for urban fringe use related activities.
4. Enabling greater access opportunities for local people.
5. Climate change impacts on semi natural habitats.
6. Forestry and woodland management change.

KEY QUALITIES AND EFFECTS OF FORCES

7.1 <i>Remnant islands of Forest landscapes, former large commons such as Netley and Waltham Chase and assarts fringed with 19th century enclosures resulting in a well wooded landscape with thick hedges and mature oaks, particularly in the north.</i>	
FORCES FOR CHANGE:	CONSEQUENCES
1.3.4.6	Threats: Further loss of farmland and in particular hedge and hedgerow oaks. Development within or adjoining former remaining open forest landscapes.
	Opportunities: Support and influence objectives in existing and new Forest Design plans such as Whiteley pastures which look to recreate, conserve and enhance mosaic of Forest landscapes. Influence agri-environment schemes in relation to characteristic hedges and impacts e.g. run off onto adjoining woodland sites.
7.2 <i>Mixed traditional settlement pattern of nucleated spring line settlements, common heath edge and dispersed 19th century farmsteads.</i>	
FORCES FOR CHANGE:	CONSEQUENCES
1.2 .3	Threats: Change from rural to suburban character extending further into the character area and in particular adjoining ancient woodland and heathy sites. Incremental small scale development of common edge settlement, particularly along main routes increasing the overall sense of unbroken development.
	Opportunities: Influence LDF policy related to this quality (Winchester, Eastleigh, Fareham councils) – in particular MDAs/SDAs (Hedge End and Whiteley) and SHLAA sites that are considered for housing allocation /reserve sites.

7.3

History of low intensity farming and exploitation, and consequently a high proportion of semi natural habitats, including ancient woodland, wet woodland, wooded common, damp unimproved grassland, heath, acid soil habitats and hedges.

FORCES FOR CHANGE:**CONSEQUENCES**

All

Threats:

Further loss of unimproved grassland to agricultural improvement.
Increasing abstraction from Hamble and Meon tributaries which have an effect on the surface and ground water levels in damp/wet habitats.
Changes in salinity to upper reaches of the Hamble, due to unrestricted change from saline to freshwater.

Opportunities:

Target agri-environment schemes and other grant funding sources towards conservation and enhancement of this key quality.
Influence River Catchment Flood plans of the Hamble, Meon and Itchen.
Support BOA target habitats for conservation, habitat linking, creation, reversion opportunities for lowland woodland, unimproved grassland, heath and damp habitats.

7.4

Very local countryside to large centres of population, including commons and Forestry Commission managed sites.

FORCES FOR CHANGE:**CONSEQUENCES**

2.3.4.6

Threats:

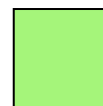
Over formalisation of semi-natural areas to provide recreation facilities.
Increasing access opportunities can introduce greater likelihood of conflict through misuse (e.g. fly tipping trespassing) on local farmland.

Opportunities:

Support CAP objectives; including off road links between countryside sites and improve connections north/south in relation to severance by M27.
Influence green infrastructure policy for this part of the PUSH area.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE:

Lowland Mosaic Open



SIMILAR AND ASSOCIATED TYPES HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT AND BOROUGH LEVEL ASSESSMENTS

Basingstoke:	Primary association: Open Arable on Clay, Open Farmland and Woodland Secondary association Mixed Farmland and Woodland
East Hampshire	n/a
Eastleigh	Primary association: Open Valley Farmland, Undulating Farmland Secondary association: Woodland Farmland and Parkland
Fareham	n/a
Gosport	n/a
Hart	n/a
Havant	n/a
New Forest	n/a:
Rushmoor	n/a
Test Valley	Mixed Farmland and Woodland Medium Scale
Winchester	n/a

SIMILAR AND ASSOCIATED TYPES IN NEIGHBOURING AUTHORITY ASSESSMENTS

Dorset	
West Berkshire	Open Clay Lowlands
West Sussex	
Wiltshire	Open Clay Vale

KEY IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS AND BOUNDARY DEFINITIONS

- Low lying, relatively flat on clay and alluvial soils and perhaps lighter and richer soils than medium scale and heath associated lowland mosaic landscapes.
- Close proximity to streams.
- Nearly all farmed land - no remnant open land / common.
- Little intensive exploitation pre Saxon period.
- Intensively farmed landscapes post disafforestation resulting in high density dispersed settlement of hamlets and farmsteads particularly in the Loddon valley and lower part of the Test.
- Often found close to settlement – particularly market towns like Romsey and Petersfield.
- Their open nature is attributable to relatively large fields and boundary loss and very low woodland cover and few undulations.
- Relatively little biodiversity interest apart from neutral grassland, remaining woodland and hedges.
- Mid 19th century - medium density dispersed settlement pattern

PHYSICAL

GEOLOGY, LANDFORM, ELEVATION:

Bedrock and Superficial Geology: The dominant formation is London Clay but where the LCT occurs in south Hampshire it has significant associations with the Wittering formation. Here, there is varied coverage of superficial and alluvium deposits.

Landform and Elevation: Predominantly flat to gently undulating and low lying. This is a fundamental factor in giving the feeling of openness. The flatness sets it apart from the other lowland mosaic types.

SOILS TYPES:

Typical soil type pattern: Consistently one type of soil; slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged fine loam over clay. Gley soil profiles. Predominantly 711h in north Hampshire and 711g in south Hampshire

FUNCTIONS:

Hydrological function: Not related to high hydrological function indicators, but varied where this type occurs. Generally minor or no groundwater vulnerability zones. Occasionally grade 3 or 4 source protection zones.

Food and Biomass: Very varied agricultural land grade from 2 to 4. The higher grade land is much less extensive and occurs in pockets associated with lighter alluvial soils close to watercourses. Biomass potential is very varied.

Biodiversity potential: Very low for the habitats where opportunity mapping has been carried out.

LANDCOVER AND LAND USE PATTERN: Markedly higher proportion of arable land (frequent/abundant) in comparison with other lowland mosaic landscape types. Low trimmed hedges containing isolated hedgerow trees. Very low woodland cover. Hedge bounded fields are relatively large compared and varied in size with other lowland mosaic landscapes. They average about 7ha but are frequently above 20ha.

HYDROLOGY: Associated with watercourses. Drainage ditches along field boundaries are a frequent feature.

EXPERIENTIAL

ACCESS AND TRANSPORT ROUTES:

Generally well developed road and lane network, perhaps because of often close proximity to settlement and or transport corridor. Not particularly dense footpath and bridleway network.

TRANQUILLITY:

Not identified as being particularly tranquil in the 2006 CPRE study. Due to the lack of woodland and substantial hedgerows and proximity to development, in south Hampshire there is little sense of tranquillity and seclusion. In north Hampshire where this type occurs there is less development to influence tranquillity.

BIODIVERSITY

The Lowland Mosaic Open landscape character type is an agricultural landscape comprising improved grassland and arable land, unimproved grassland and limited woodland.

Unimproved grasslands exist within this landscape; these are mainly neutral, although there are some acid grasslands. Unimproved grassland provides an important habitat resource, particularly when most of the surrounding grassland resource has been improved for agriculture, reducing its habitat potential.

Woodland is limited in the Lowland Mosaic Open landscape character type: it is less wooded than other Lowland Mosaic landscape character types. There is some broadleaved woodland and some parkland which may represent old pasture landscapes and are often species rich. There is also some active coppicing without standards. Hazel coppice woodlands can support rich flora and butterfly populations but this potential is reduced when there are no standards and if coppicing is no longer carried out.

The Loddon Catchment BOA exists within this landscape character type and identifies opportunities for lowland heath, lowland mixed deciduous woodland, lowland dry acid grassland, wet woodland and lowland meadow habitat creation and enhancement.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

ARCHAEOLOGY

There is light evidence of exploitation during the Mesolithic and Neolithic. In the Bronze Age there is little evidence and no suggestion that this is a farmed or settled landscape, and there are few Bronze Age burial mounds except along the fringes of the Avon valley (and a noticeable concentration on Petersfield Heath). Likewise in Iron Age there is little evidence of settlement, although there is some on the fringes of the Avon valley. However, where the river valleys cut through the bands of lowland mosaic there are several examples where the valley is marked by an Iron Age hill fort, such as Bulls Down Copse (Loddon). In the Roman period there are some Villa sites on the margins of these areas suggesting that exploitation, such as for woodland, hunting and quasi industrial activity such as pottery or tile production is making them slightly less marginal. There is a close correlation between lowland mosaic landscapes and pottery/tile production which may well reflect the availability of clay and fuel. In the medieval period assart landscapes, moats and deer parks, speak eloquently of the release of forest land to farming at this late stage in the evolution of the landscape.

HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Parts of the Loddon and Whitewater valleys are associated with large wavy fields which suggest areas that the land was enclosed by informal agreement and areas have seen significant boundary/woodland loss. In the south Hampshire lowlands the previous historic field pattern appears to have been predominantly more regular enclosures and these have suffered significant boundary loss to produce an open feeling to the landscape.

HISTORIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Settlement types by form: typically, historically medium density dispersed small settlement and farmsteads and areas surrounding modern expanded settlements in south Hampshire.

Building materials and type;

Typically associated with older material distributions of clay brick and tiles and timber framed buildings especially in the north Hampshire lowlands of the Loddon valley.

VISIBILITY

Prominency: Locally low lying above the lower reaches of river valley floor.

Enclosure: Distant views to wooded horizons and development. Low woodland cover, low hedges, and very gently undulating landform makes this landscape makes this the most intervisible lowland mosaic landscapes.

Public perceptions: This LCT is not associated with popular visitor areas. However it is close and visible to urban populations in south Hampshire.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE:

Lowland Mosaic Small Scale

Confined to central southern Hampshire, subtle differences to other lowland mosaic types.



SIMILAR AND ASSOCIATED TYPES HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT AND BOROUGH LEVEL ASSESSMENTS

Basingstoke:	Primary Associations: Mixed Farmland and Woodland, Mixed farmland and Woodland Small Scale. Secondary Associations: Enclosed Valley Sides, Enclosed Valley Floor Farmland, Small Scale Minor Valleys.
East Hampshire	Mixed Farmland and Woodland
Eastleigh	Farmsteads and Small Fields, Undulating Farmland, Golf Course.
Fareham	n/a
Gosport	n/a
Hart	Mixed Farmland and Woodland Large Scale (unsure why the difference in perception of scale).
Havant	n/a
New Forest	Ancient Forest Farmlands, Enclosed Farmland and Woodland.
Rushmoor	n/a
Test Valley	Mixed Farmland and Woodland Small Scale (some Mixed Farmland and Woodland Small Scale)
Winchester	Mixed Farmland and Woodland, Pasture on Clay, Mixed Farmland and Woodland Enclosed.

SIMILAR AND ASSOCIATED TYPES IN NEIGHBOURING AUTHORITY ASSESSMENTS

Dorset	
West Berkshire	
West Sussex	
Wiltshire	

KEY IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS AND BOUNDARY DEFINITIONS

- Low lying silty clay, but not sandy soils, that are seasonally wet and waterlogged in parts but also with better drained areas.
- The soils support predominantly permanent pasture land use.
- Less marginal farmed areas than the lowland mosaic medium scale and lowland mosaic heath associated types.
- Often small enclosures, small areas of woodland and undulating topography which produces the sense of a small scale landscape.
- Associated mostly with small chalk fed streams apart from where they border the New Forest perambulation where they are more acidic.
- Generally, high to very high density of dispersed small farmsteads and hamlets and associated with nucleated spring line settlements in the south and north Hampshire lowlands.
- Small semi natural and ancient woodland copses and hedges of varying character.
- Frequently a high density of public rights of way and winding lanes.
- Varying periods and types of enclosure but generally small scale but has some of the earliest enclosures out of all the lowland mosaic types – perhaps indicating less marginal and richer soils.
- Particular association with hamlets and villages of medieval and Saxon origin often associated with wood and wood clearance.

PHYSICAL

GEOLOGY, LANDFORM, ELEVATION:

Bedrock and Superficial Geology: London clay and Wittering formations typically close to the surface with little alluvial and superficial deposits.

Landform and Elevation: Shallow and relatively flat, low lying stream valley bottom landscapes.

SOILS TYPES:

Typical soil type pattern: Clay soils, types 711g and better drained only slight seasonal waterlogging 712c.

FUNCTIONS:

Hydrological function: Minor groundwater vulnerability zones, no source protection zones.

Food and Biomass: Very mixed grade soils, from grade I to unclassified. The best soils tend to be associated with the narrow stream floodplains. Variable biomass potential due to the variability in soils.

Biodiversity potential: Very little habitat creation potential for chalk grassland, heath and ancient woodland reversion.

LANDCOVER AND LAND USE PATTERN:

Similar size of fields to Lowland Mosaic Small Scale Wooded, but with hardly any woodland cover. Hedged small field size (below 3 to 4 ha), generally well connected. Belts of mature trees are typical. Boundaries tend to be thickly wooded and treed. Dominated by improved grassland and pasture land use. Not associated with sand and gravel mineral extraction.

HYDROLOGY:

These landscapes are located close to the bottom of local hydrological basins where there is good access to streams. The presence of small streams is a fundamental part of their character.

EXPERIENTIAL

ACCESS AND TRANSPORT ROUTES:

Moderate PRow network density (rural lanes, bridleways and footpaths.) emanating from settlements – typically less dense on the more waterlogged clay soils.

Generally minor road network which tends to be quite dense and comparable with the Lowland Mosaic Heath Associated LCTs. 'Doorstep' countryside for many local people – little or no open access land and commons.

TRANQUILLITY:

Not identified as being tranquil, but mapped as transitional areas between low and moderate tranquillity levels in the CPRE 2006 work.

CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS:

BIODIVERSITY

The Lowland Mosaic Small Scale landscape character type is a wooded agricultural landscape comprising improved grassland and arable land with woodland, unimproved grassland and occasional heath associated habitats.

Hedgerows are of various form and typically have mature trees. Some may be of ancient origin and associated with woodland pre disafforestation. In places the network is relatively dense, however, this density is inconsistent within the type and some locations are relatively open and unenclosed. Arable land and grassland improved for agriculture can support bird species include curlew, corn bunting and grey partridge.

There is a substantial resource of unimproved or semi-improved grassland within the Lowland Mosaic Small Scale landscape character type. Such grasslands are most likely associated with grazing or hay meadows and provide an important resource of more biodiverse grasslands within this arable landscape: unimproved grasslands play a vital role in supporting farmland associated species and biodiversity. Most grassland is neutral; however, there is some acid grassland and occasional patches of base rich fen within this landscape.

Patches of heathland habitats exist within the Lowland Mosaic Small Scale landscape character type, including both wet and dry heaths – but to a much lesser extent than the heath associated lowland mosaic. Where this type fringes the new Forest and Wealden area, heathland habitats exist when tree growth has been suppressed, often historically, through grazing and clearance. Dry heath supports heather and bristle bent grass and usually exist on higher, better drained ground. Lower down, as drainage becomes impeded, the species mix alters and indicates a wet heath habitat. Species including purple moor grass and cross leaved heath indicate acid fen. Acid fens have a similar character to wet heath, although there tends to be less heather associated with fens.

Woodland varies, there is a significant amount of ancient and semi-natural woodland, along with mixed and coniferous plantations, new tree growth and some parkland/ trees scattered over grassland (wood pasture). Wood pasture can represent areas where timber cropping and livestock grazing have historically undertaken concurrently and are often species rich. There is active coppice with standards and active coppice without standards in this landscape. Hazel coppice with oak and ash standards is a widespread habitat in Hampshire relating from the

historical production of wattle sheep hurdling. Hazel coppice woodlands can support rich flora and butterfly populations if the coppice is active and regularly cut.

Two BOAs exist within this landscape character type:

- Rother Valley BOA identifies opportunities for lowland meadow, wet woodland, reedbed and lowland fen habitat creation and enhancement.
- Ampfield – Baddesley – Chilworth – Lordworth BOA identifies opportunities for lowland heath, lowland mixed deciduous woodland, lowland dry acid grassland, wet woodland and lowland meadow habitat creation and enhancement.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

ARCHAEOLOGY

There is light evidence of exploitation during the Mesolithic and Neolithic. In the Bronze Age there is little evidence and no suggestion that this is a farmed or settled landscape, and there are few Bronze Age burial mounds except along the fringes of the Avon valley. Likewise in Iron Age there is little evidence of settlement, although there is some on the fringes of the Avon valley. However, where the river valleys cut through the bands of lowland mosaic there are several examples where the valley is marked by an Iron Age hill fort, such as at Buckland (Lymington), or Bulls Down Copse (Loddon). In the Roman period there are some Villa sites on the margins of these areas suggesting that exploitation, such as for woodland, hunting and quasi industrial activity such as pottery or tile production is making them slightly less marginal. There is a close correlation between lowland mosaic landscapes and pottery/tile production which may well reflect the availability of clay and fuel. In the medieval period assart landscapes, moats and deer parks, speak eloquently of the release of forest land to farming at this late stage in the evolution of the landscape.

HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Landscapes which have a high proportion small scale field enclosures. They can be recent formal enclosures, with a previous use as common land or small scale informal enclosures or small field assarts with little remaining woodland. There are few copses and woodland although hedges may be well treed – compared with the Lowland Mosaic Small Scale Wooded. May include late enclosure of parts of commons which were heathy and open rather than wooded.

HISTORIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Settlement types by form:

There is frequently a high density of small dispersed hamlets and farmsteads associated with this type where it occurs in north and south Hampshire lowlands. The land has been typically more intensively farmed and managed than the medium scale and heath associated lowland mosaic types.

Building materials and type:

Traditionally local clay tile and brick were used. There also tends to be a higher proportion of pre 1750 and timber framed buildings than other lowland types.

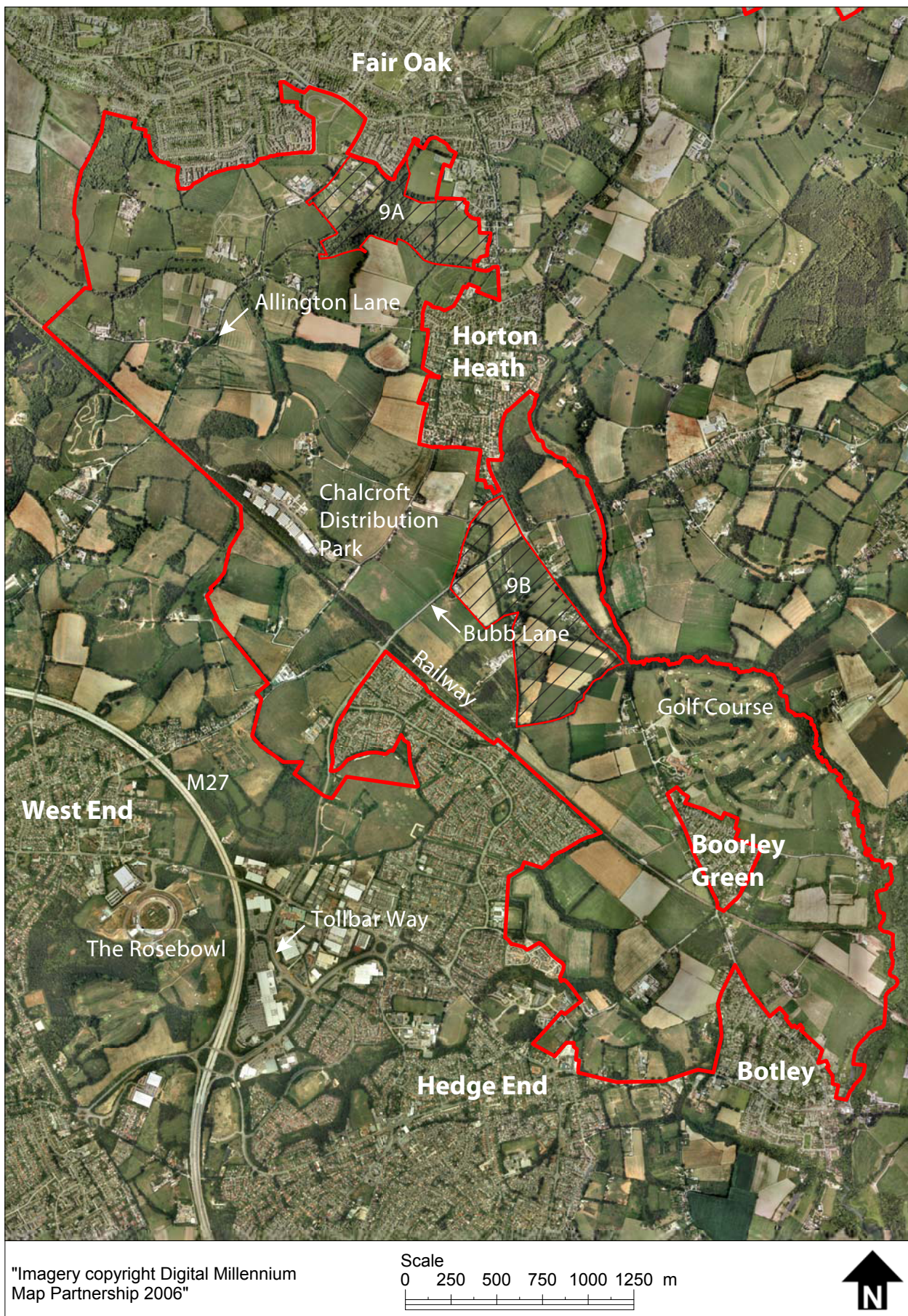
VISIBILITY

Prominency: Locally low lying, intervisibility with other landscape types reduced because of the latter's relatively high presence of woodland.

Enclosure: Very enclosed intimate landscape, due to the small fields with high hedges and the higher surrounding land.

Public perceptions: Although close to large centres of population of central southern Hampshire, the landscape is still very rural and valued as local countryside, visible from often heavily trafficked rural roads.

Area 9: Horton Heath Undulating Farmland



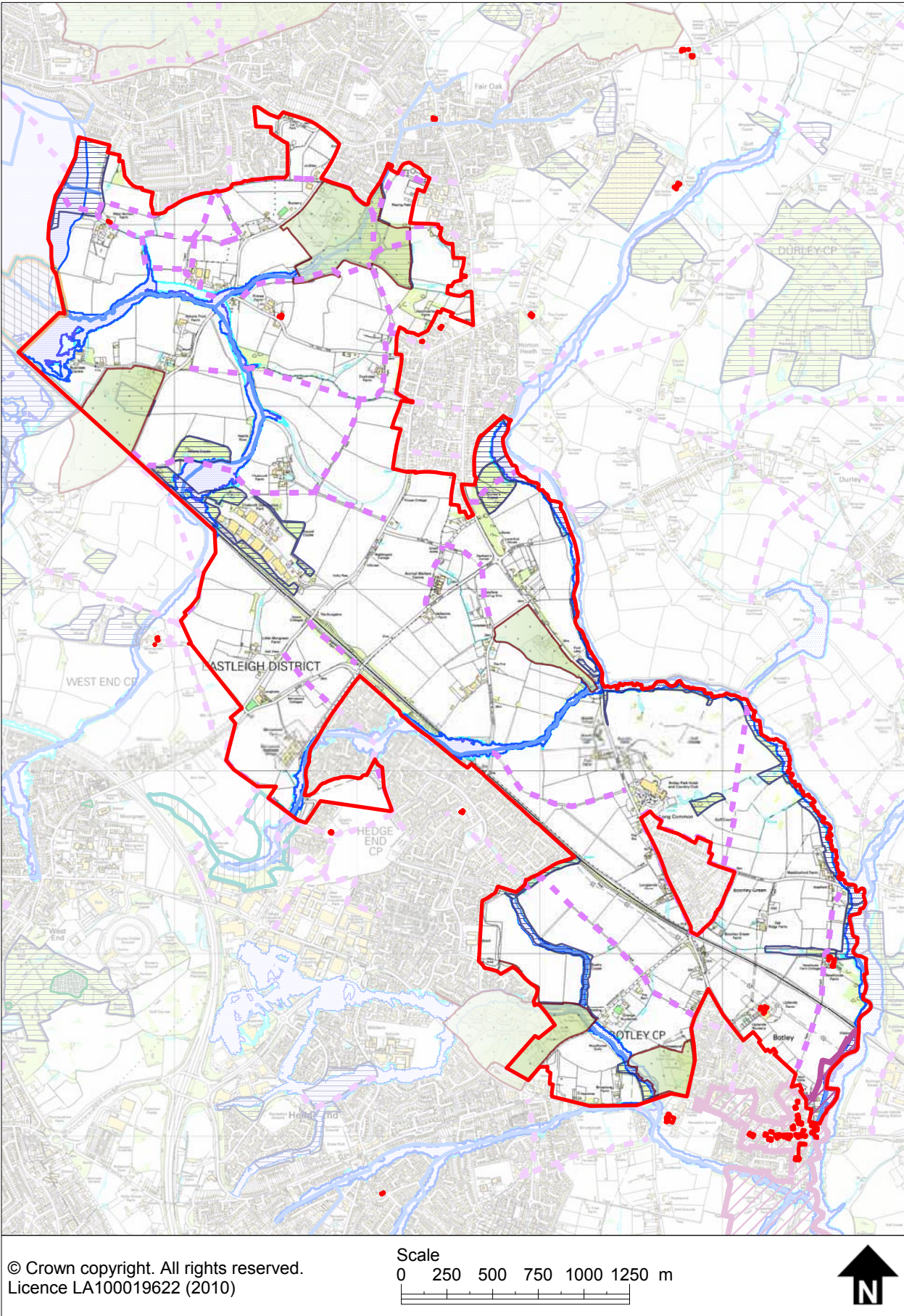
Description

- 4.129 The unifying characteristics of this predominantly agricultural landscape are the gentle undulation of the landform and the pattern of medium-size fields, generally bounded by good hedges with mature hedgerow trees. Small blocks of woodland and copses are dispersed throughout the area. Water courses are scattered through the character area. The northeast boundary of the character area is delineated by the River Hamble and associated Alder Carr woodland.
- 4.130 There is a network of narrow lanes and small farms which appear to date from the enclosure of land in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Views from within the area are generally to low wooded horizons.
- 4.131 There are a number of quite intrusive elements, notably the often prominent built edges of Bishopstoke, Fair Oak and Horton Heath that form the northern boundary and ribbon development along Allington Lane in the north, including a variety of poorly screened industrial sites. Chalcroft Distribution Park is an industrial site established sometime in the first half of the 20th century as a rail distribution park. It now serves as a road haulage distribution centre. Aside from its access onto Burnetts Lane in the southeast, it is surrounded on all sides by SINCs. The railway is a prominent feature at points, but the area extends beyond it to the southwest



Figure 24. Quobleigh Pond within sub-area 9A

Designations and Constraints



Key for Designation & Constraints:

	Character Area Boundary		Main River
	Area designated Ramsar, SPA* & SSSI Area		Floodzone 2
	SAC - Special Area of Conservation		Floodzone 3
	SSSI - Site of Special Scientific Interest		Right of Way
	SINC - Site of Important Nature Conservation		
	LNR - Local Nature Reserve		
	Historic Parks and Gardens		
	Conservation Area		
	Scheduled Ancient Monument		
	Listed Building		

*SPA - Special Protection Area

to merge with the Oaklands Woodland and Parkland (Area 10) and meet a low, but visually significant ridge which divides it from the M27 Corridor (Area 11).

- 4.132 In the south, the influence of the built-up areas of Hedge End, Botley and Boorley Green is less strong than those to the north, by virtue of a denser tree cover and more accommodating landform. The settlements do however form parts of the boundary to the character area.
- 4.133 Within the area there are two sub-areas which have their own distinctive appearance. In the north-east, area 9a is well-wooded with the woodland around Quobleigh pond and the parkland trees of the former Saviour Convent particularly conspicuous. In the south-east, area 9b has a partly-wooded parkland character with some dense tree belts.

Historic Features

- 4.134 There are several areas of land in the character area that are found on the Hampshire Historic Parks and Gardens register, that influence the character of the area:
- 4.135 Allington Manor (part) – “1870s Allington Farm, parkland with 2 fishponds; ponds remain although smaller; now a school.”



Figure 25. Panorama view west from Allington Lane

4.136 Holmesland – “1870s; c14ha small parkland with clumps; walled garden; now divided into 2 properties, part of walled garden remains.”

4.137 Lakesmere House School – “Previously Fair Oak Lodge/Old Saviours Convent and Kings School. Dates from C16 additions 1842; reputed to have been a stop for Tudor monks travelling between Netley Abbey & Winchester; had avenue of trees along approach drive, parkland, ponds”.

4.138 ‘The Croft, Winchester Road 1.6ha, detailed history not currently available’.

4.139 In addition, there are a small number of listed buildings, a mixture of farm houses and farm buildings, which form an integral part of the landscape and are indicative of the historic use of the land. They do not however, significantly influence landscape character.

HCC Historic Landscape Types:

4.140 Historic landscapes types in this area are:

1.2 Medium irregular assarts and copses



Figure 26. Panorama view towards the former St Saviour Convent in sub-area 9A



Figure 25. Panorama view west from Allington Lane

- 1.6 Medium to large regular fields, wavy boundaries
- 1.9 Small regular fields with straight boundaries
- 1.10 Medium regular fields with straight boundaries
- 1.16 Small rectilinear fields with wavy boundaries
- 4.5 19th century plantations (general)
- 7.2 Valley floor woodlands
- 9.6 Post 1810 settlement (general)
- 11.2 Golf Courses

Ecological Features

- 4.141 This character area has a wide number of SINC's with diverse habitats, such as wet woods associated with the River Hamble and its tributaries on the eastern edge of the character area and ancient semi-natural woodland in the south. The Wyvern Priority Area in the BAP includes subarea 9a in the north of the area (south of Fair Oak). It is made up of ancient boggy woodland, unimproved meadows with orchards, ponds and streams.



Figure 26. Panorama view towards the former St Saviour Convent in sub-area 9A

Key Characteristics

4.142 The key characteristics for this area are:

- Undulating landform with frequent low ridges
- Medium size fields usually with good hedges and hedgerow trees rather than woodlands
- Intrusive urban edges in some areas
- Unmanaged or inappropriately managed agricultural land

Landscape Types

4.143 Landscape types as set out in the Hampshire County Council Integrated Character Assessment 2011 for this area are:

- Lowland Mosaic, Medium Scale
- Lowland Mosaic, Small Scale
- Lowland Mosaic, Open

Landscape Character Sensitivity

4.144 The area is predominantly undulating farmland with strong hedgerows and small blocks of scattered woodland. It is relatively large, complex and rural in character.

Visual Sensitivity

4.145 Trees belts and hedgerow trees are notable features; however the area is largely open, with rural views normally ending at wooded horizons.

Key Issues

4.146 The key issues for this area are:

- The visual intrusion of existing settlement edges at Bishopstoke, Fair Oak and Horton Heath and Hedge End.
- The erosion of the rural character of Allington Lane through poor quality land management and poor screening of development.
- Future development and land management changes within the area increasing intervisibility between settlements.
- Significant pressure for development north of Boorley Green, off Woodhouse Lane, Hedge End and north of Botley as identified in the draft Local Plan.

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