East Hampshire District

Landscape Character Assessment

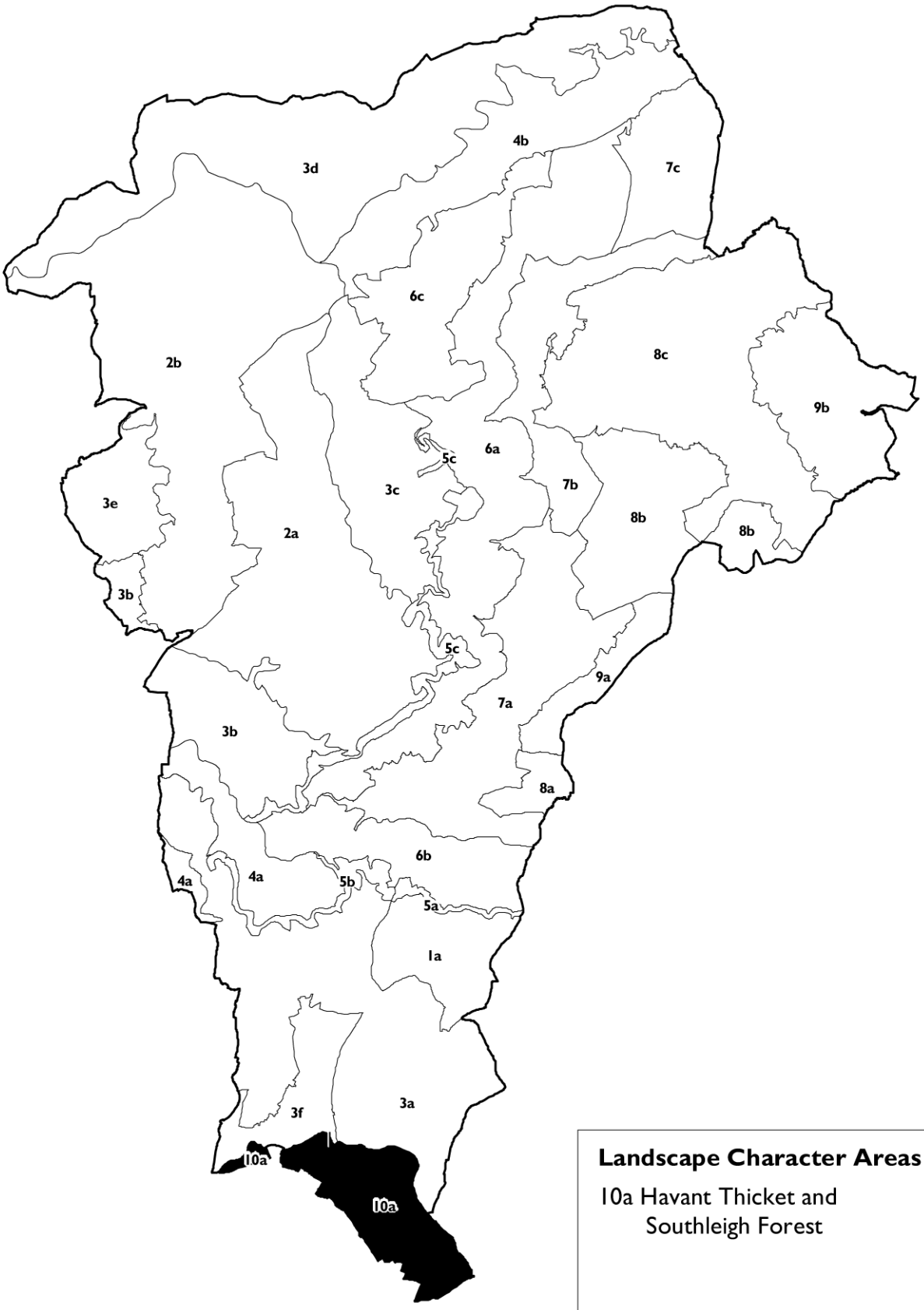
Final Report

by Land Use Consultants

on behalf of East Hampshire District Council

July 2006

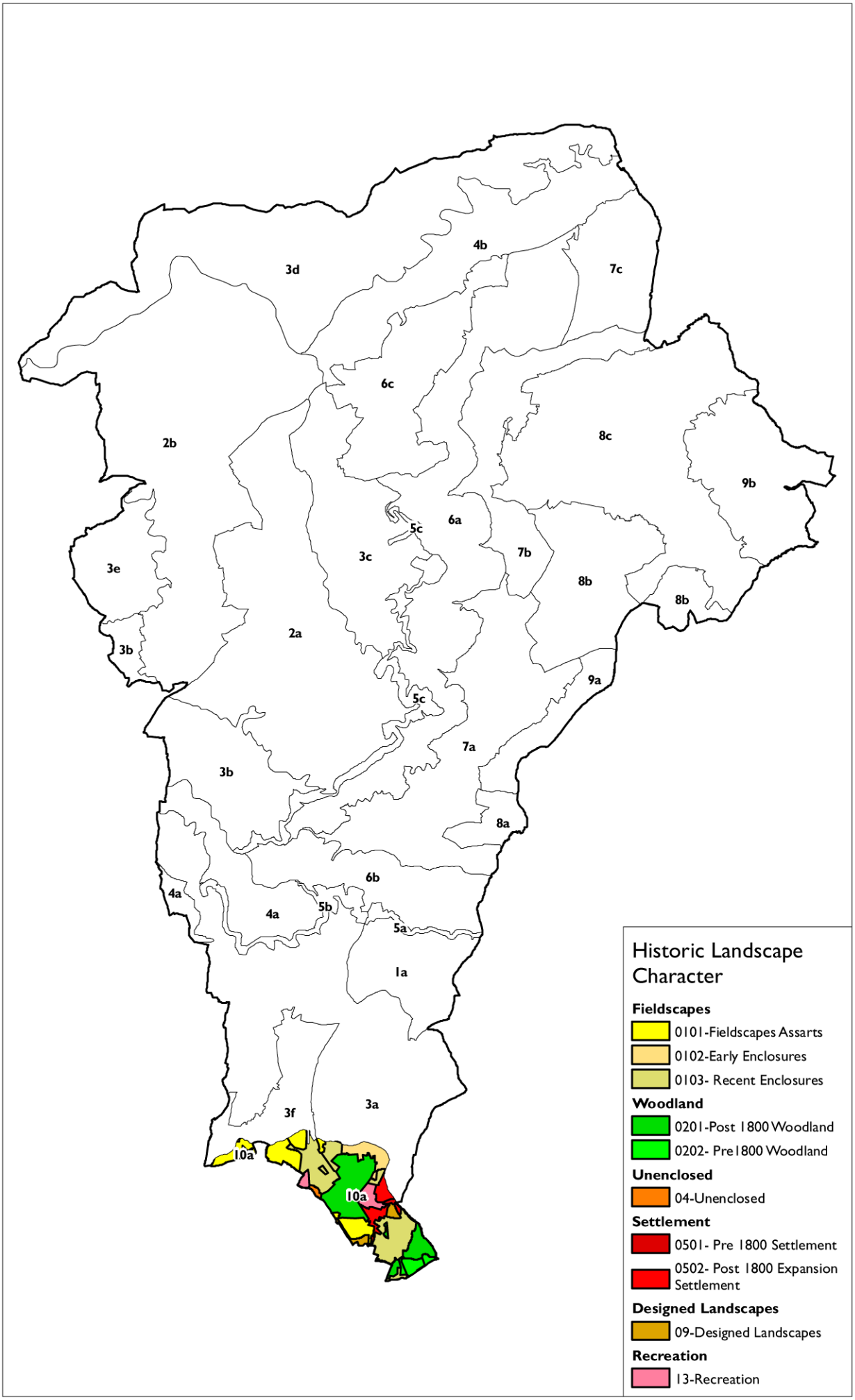
Landscape Type 10 : Wooded Claylands



Landscape Character Areas

10a Havant Thicket and Southleigh Forest

Landscape Type 10 : Wooded Claylands



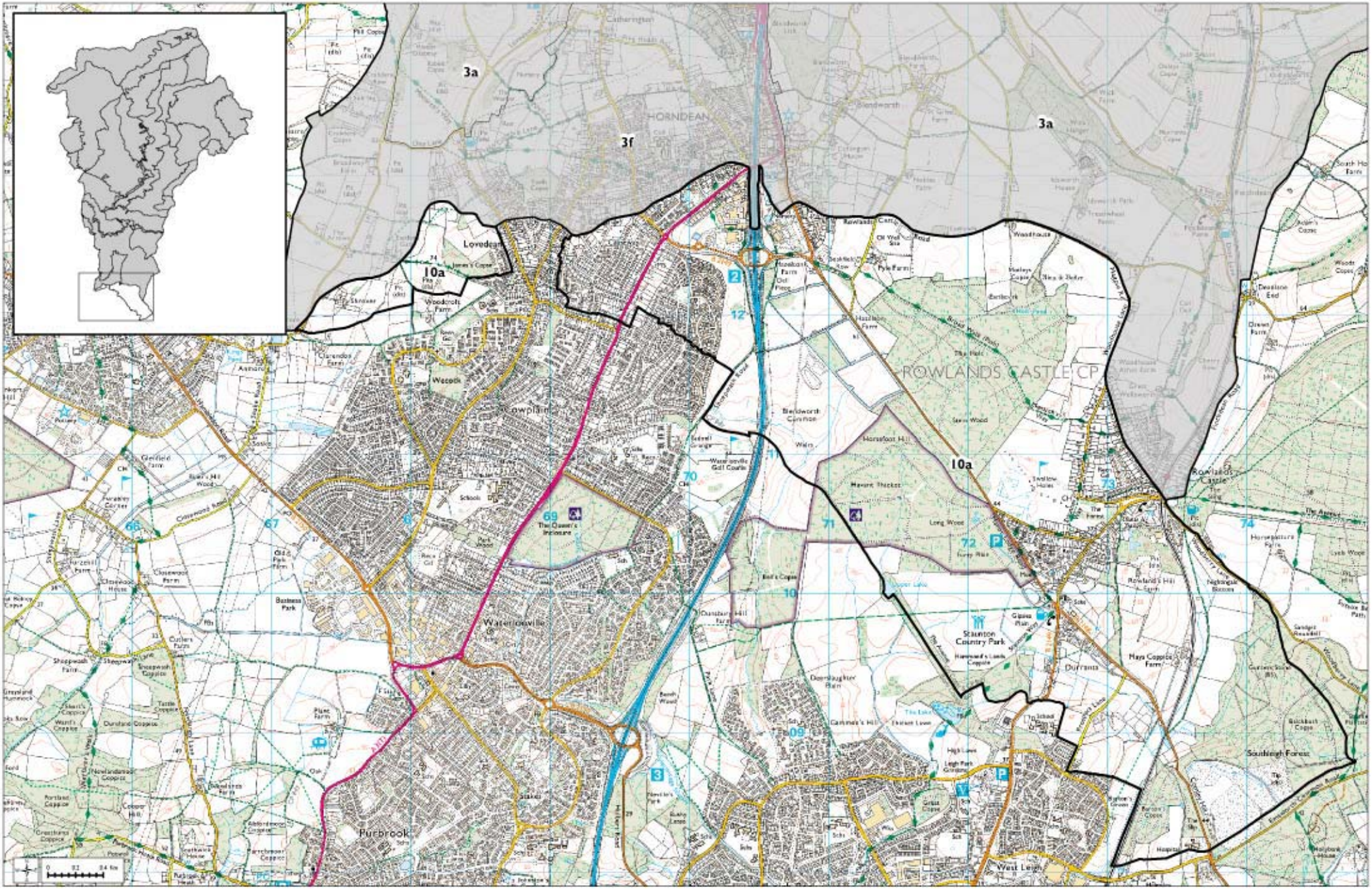
LANDSCAPE TYPE 10: WOODED CLAYLANDS

10.1 The *Wooded Claylands* landscape type comprises densely wooded landscapes that occupy the clay vale between the dipslope of the chalk downland and the Portsdown chalk ridge. The *Wooded Claylands* identified in this study area form part of a wider clay lowland landscape containing the Forest of Bere.

Key Characteristics:

- Low lying, undulating, clay vale between the dipslope of the Chalk downland and the Portsdown chalk ridge.
- Underlying London Clay and Wittering Formation produce a mixture of sandy and clayey soils which give rise to relatively unproductive agricultural land.
- Dominated by woodland, including semi-natural copses and mixed plantations, which creates a strong sense of enclosure.
- Woodland forms part of a relic fragment of the Forest of Bere, a royal hunting preserve, during the Medieval period.
- Small remnants of lowland heath survive within woodland clearings.
- Woodland surrounded by regular recent (18th-19th century) enclosures, many of which produce straight edges and sharp corners on the edges of the woodland.
- Post-medieval encroachment on the edge of the common waste is evident as common edge settlements, often with narrow parallel back garden plots (lying just outside the designated National Park boundary).
- Drained by a series of streams that flow into the Meon Valley.
- Presence of designed landscapes - from medieval deerparks to post-medieval landscape parks containing woodland incorporating a network of paths and rides.
- Extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation including forest walks, cycling, and horse riding.

Character Area 10a: Havant Thicket and Southleigh Forest



10A: Havant Thicket and Southleigh Forest

Location and Boundaries

10A.1 The character area lies at the foot of the chalk downland dipslope incorporating part of the lower clay with flint covered chalk landscape around Rowlands Castle (which lies outside of the South Downs National Park) and the clay vale to the south of this. Character areas extend to the district boundary in the south.

The character area is not in the South Downs National Park.

Key Characteristics

- Transitional area incorporating the low lying, clay vale and the edge of the chalk downland dipslope.
- A varied landcover dominated by woodland and including pasture, paddocks and commonland. Pocket of heathland are present at Blendworth Common.
- Dominated by woodland, all of it pre-1800 but subsequently replanted (Havant Thicket, The Holt and Southleigh Forest) and smaller copses which provide enclosure and a strong backdrop to views.
- The remnant woodland and common land represent fragments of the once extensive Forest of Bere - a medieval royal hunting preserve.
- Sheepwash Road is an ancient route through the area providing access form the lowlands up onto the downs.
- Small geometric fields predominantly of recent enclosure with pasture, some managed as horse paddocks.
- Blendworth Common, Forestry Commission managed woodland, Staunton Country Park offer recreational opportunities.
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments include Ring work and Bailey at Motley's Copse. Remains of a Roman villa are present at Causeway Farm.
- Settlement comprises post-1800 expansion (Rowlands Castle and Horndean), possibly originating as common-edge settlements.
- Several small oil well sites in the southern part of the area are an unusual feature. The Southleigh landfill site is prominent on the southern edge of the area.
- Close proximity to Havant and Horndean allows good access to this landscape and despite being adjacent to the urban edges there are opportunities to find places of tranquillity.
- The western part of the area (close to Horndean) is severed by the motorway.

Physical Landscape

10A.2 This character area represents the transition from the chalk dipslope to the clay vale.

10A.3 Clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Lambeth Group and clays of the London Clay Formation underlie the character area. This bedrock geology creates a flat to gently sloping landform and gives rise to slowly permeable, seasonally wet soils which support a varied landcover of woodland, pasture, paddock, settlement and commonland. The heavy, difficult to work clay soils mean the area has retained extensive woodland cover. To the north of the clay, around Rowlands Castle, the bedrock geology is chalk, comprising the edge of the dipslope with a flatter topography not typical of the adjacent chalk downland character area. Much of this area is covered by woodland (The Holt and Stein Wood) bordered by geometric arable fields bounded by hedgerows with hedgerow trees.

10A.4 A swallow hole occurs at Rowlands Castle, this is a natural geological feature in direct contact with the chalk aquifer/underground streams. At times of heavy rainfall water entering the swallow hole is heavily polluted with clay particles which eventually reaches Bedhampton Springs, a major water supply source for the Portsmouth Water Company.

10A.5 Woodland, most of which is ancient, is significant in the landscape with larger blocks (e.g. Havant Thicket, The Holt and Southleigh Forest) and smaller copses (Barton's Copse and James's Copse). Much of the woodland represents remnants of the Forest of Bere and many are designated as SINCs.

10A.6 Blendworth Common also part of the Forest of Bere, includes areas managed by grazing where the former heathland cover is re emerging. A landfill tip lies in the south of the area enclosed by Southleigh Forest and a number of small oil well sites lies to the south of Rowland's Castle Road.

Perceptual/Experiential Landscape

10A.7 The woodland blocks provide a sense of enclosure contrasting with the more open area of pasture, paddock, common and parkland. This variety in landcover creates a visually 'busy' landscape which is intensified by the M3 and built up edge of Horndean which divide the area. The landscape forms the transition from the chalk dipslope to the coastal plain; the flat low-lying landform, repetition of woodland and pasture help integrate disparate elements. Views are often restricted by woodland or are across pasture fields to a wooded skyline.

10A.8 Visual intrusion and noise disruption from roads, settlement edge, the oil well sites and pylon lines has eroded the rural character in places. However, the woodland provides a degree of containment and screening and there are opportunities to find areas of tranquillity within this character area.

10A.9 This is an accessible and permeable landscape due to its proximity to Havant and Horndean and its comprehensive road network. The Havant to London railway line also cuts through this area. The Forestry Commission manages Holt/Stein Wood and Havant Thicket with numerous tracks providing good access and recreational opportunities. Staunton's Way path crosses the area, the Way is named after Sir George Staunton, an MP for Portsmouth in the early 19th century who created the

country estate, which now forms the country park that bears his name. The area is also served by the Monarchs's Way and there is open access land at Blendworth Common.

Biodiversity

10A.10 This character area is dominated by woodland and permanent semi-improved and improved pasture grassland, and includes a number of ecologically notable sites. Many of the remnant woodland and common grassland areas represent fragments of the once extensive Forest of Bere. In general, the vegetation ranges from neutral to acid in character with areas of damp acid grassland, bracken and gorse, together with occasional patches of heather being characteristic of open semi-natural vegetation areas.

10A.11 Occasional large blocks of woodland occur, such as Havant Thicket and Southleigh Forest, together with a number of smaller copses, that include Barton's Copse and James's Copse. Many are of ancient origin and carry SINC designation. Other notable sites within the character area include Hazleton Common, a Local Nature Reserve, that comprises a mix of heathland, grassland, mixed gorse and woody scrub, ponds and wetland.

Historic Character

10A.12 The intractable clay soils is likely to have limited early settlement and use of this area and the marginal character of the area is reflected in its use as a hunting park. The landscape today reflects its history as part of the more extensive medieval Forest of Bere, a royal hunting preserve. The area is dominated by woodland, all of it pre-1800 but much subsequently replanted. Woodland is surrounded by recent enclosures of 18th-19th century date indicating enclosure of common waste (such as at Blendworth Common). The presence of regular assarts of 19th century date to the south of Havant Thicket indicates that the woodland was previously more extensive. A small isolated patch of early enclosures is located west of Lovedean, with early post medieval enclosures defined by trackways north of Havant Thicket.

Key Historic Characteristics

- Settlement comprises post-1800 expansion (Rowlands Castle and Horndean), possibly originating as common-edge settlements.
- Historic parkland - EH Registered parkland at Staunton Park, with one small unregistered parkland at Rowlands Castle, with early post-medieval enclosures defined by trackways north of Havant Thicket.
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments occur as Ring work and Bailey at Motley's Copse.

Settlement Form and Built Character

10A.13 The typical settlement pattern comprises nineteenth and later agglomerations originating as common edge settlement. There are few isolated farms.

10A.14 The character area lies on the edge of Havant and incorporates part of Horndean. Settlements within the area include Durrants joining Rowlands Castle to the north

and stretching southwards to the edge of Havant. The intact village of Rowland's Castle is based at the foot of the downs, around a linear green, and has expanded with more recent edge development. Today, the area is characterised by modern suburban development. Typical building materials include flint, red brick and clay tiles.

EVALUATION

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

10A.15 Key sensitivities include:

- Areas of remnant ancient woodland (e.g. Havant Thicket) that form part of the Forest of Bere, provide a sense of enclosure, time depth and rich biodiversity.
- Blendworth Common, which is a common land of the Forest of Bere with areas of heathland regeneration.
- The pattern of early enclosures and assarts which are vulnerable to loss/neglect of boundaries or changes to boundaries associated with use for horse grazing.
- The intact historic core of villages such as at Rowlands Castle.
- Ancient routes such as Sheepwash Lane which are vulnerable to heavy traffic pressures and erosion of rural character.
- Pockets of tranquillity which are threatened by large scale development and traffic.

10A.16 Woodland cover limits visual sensitivity of the landscape and provides opportunities for planting mitigation associated with development

Landscape Strategy and Guidelines

10A.17 **The overall management objective should be to conserve the landscape mosaic of woodland, common land/heath and pasture, and enhance the sense of history and connections with the Forest of Bere.**

Landscape Management Considerations

- Conserve the mosaic of woodland, heath and pasture which forms the relic fragment of the former Royal Forest of Bere. Increase awareness of the Forest of Bere.
- Conserve and enhance the historic parklands at Staunton Park through replacement tree planting and the restoration of parkland pasture.
- Conserve and manage ancient woodland and monitor/check the spread of introduced invasive species.
- Encourage re-introduction of traditional woodland management techniques, such as coppicing.

- Ensure appropriate management of Blendworth Common through grazing regimes to prevent scrub encroachment and promote heathland regeneration. Consider opportunities to create an extended area of heathland.
- Encourage sensitive integration of paddock fencing and encourage replanting of hedgerows to conserve the field pattern.
- Protect the Scheduled Ancient Monuments at Motley's Copse and their setting.

Development Considerations

- Consider further opportunities for woodland planting within and around settlements and the urban edge to create screening.
- Respect the distinctive pattern and setting of common edge settlements and conserve the intact historic core at Rowlands Castle.
- Maintain the open rural gap between settlements and limit linear expansion and incremental development along roads.
- Conserve the character of the rural lanes that cross through the area. Monitor traffic pressures and avoid upgrading and creation of a more urban character.
- Consider potential to maximise opportunities for this area to provide a recreational gateway to the South Downs.