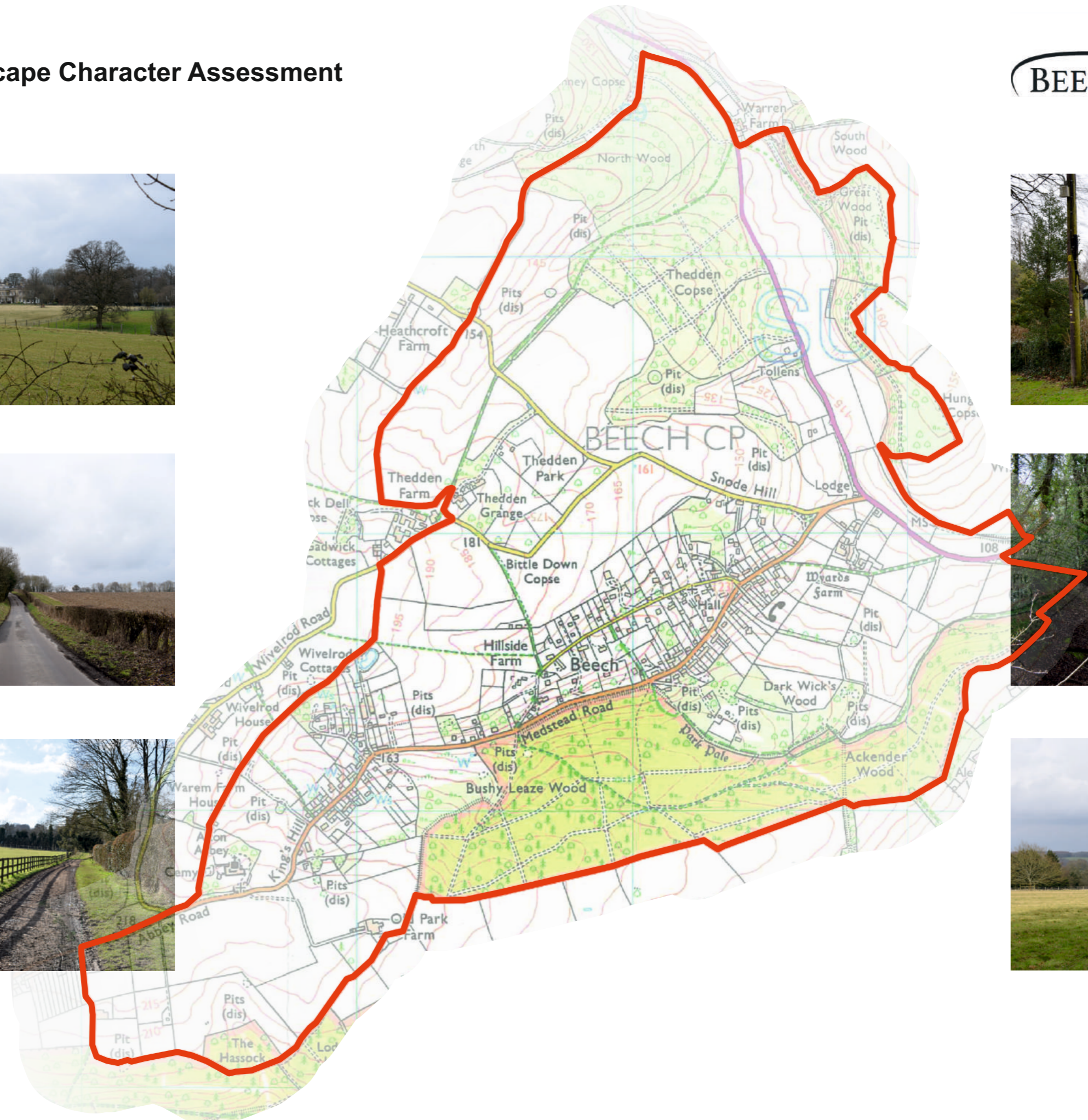


Beech Landscape Character Assessment



Beech Landscape Character Assessment

Introduction

Objectives

This Landscape Character Assessment sits within the framework of the national, county and district character assessments and will form part of the evidence base for the emerging Beech Neighbourhood Development Plan and provide robust evidence to help guide and assist in spatial planning and development management within the Parish. This is intended to aid in ensuring that the distinctive character of the Parish is retained and change is accommodated in a positive way.

Methodology

Landscape classification is central to landscape character assessment and is concerned with dividing the landscape into areas of distinct, recognisable and consistent common character, grouping areas of similar character together. For this assessment the Parish was divided into six Landscape Character Types (LCT) which share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land use and settlement pattern.

This study aims to guide users towards an understanding of the relative sensitivity of the individual LCT. This sensitivity is established by combining judgements on value with those on its ability to withstand change.

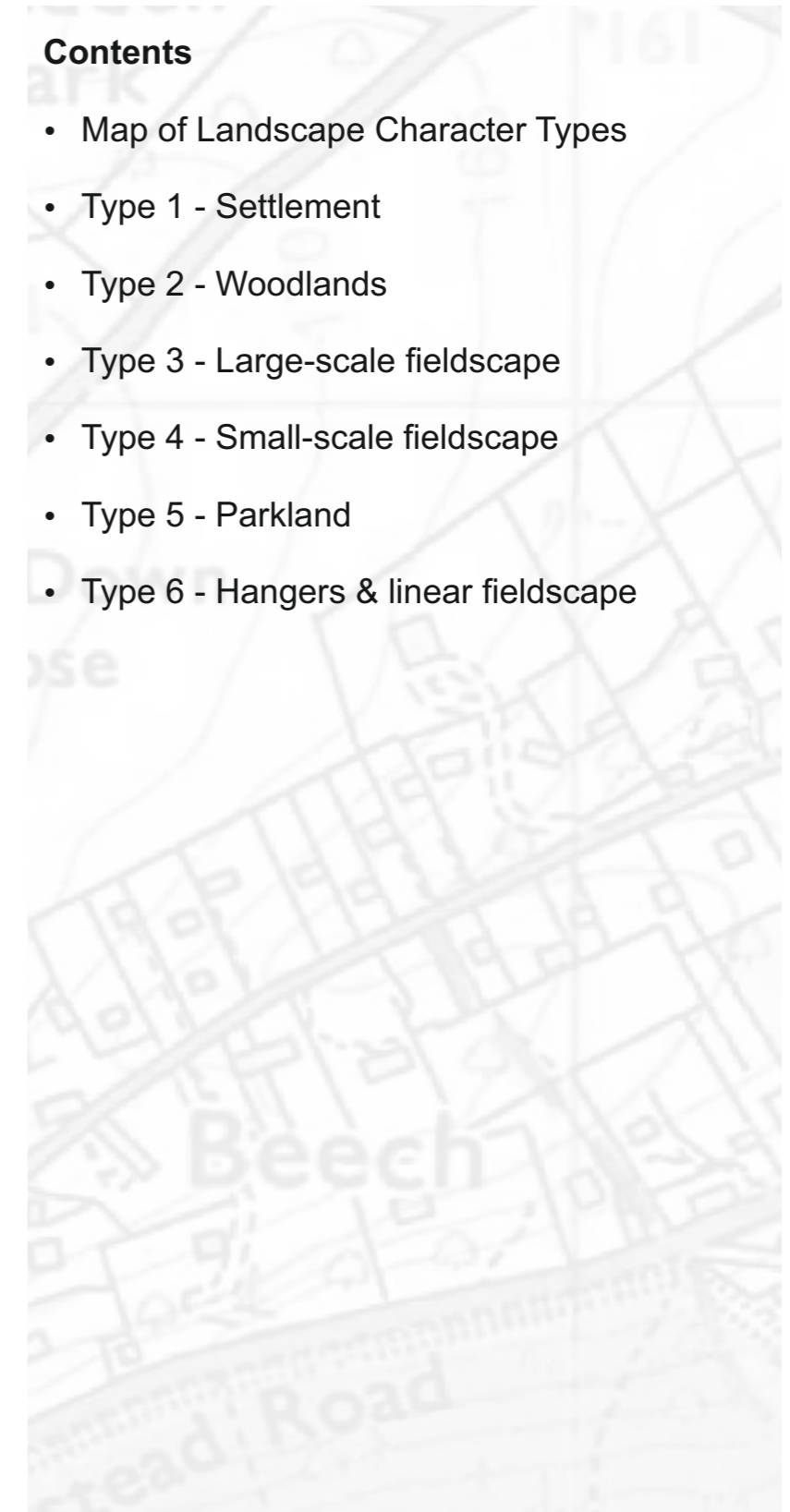
Landscape value can be understood through relevant landscape designations, the use of available landscape character assessments (as a starting point) and information on status of features (such as conservation areas and tree preservation orders). A range of other factors can also help in the identification of value:

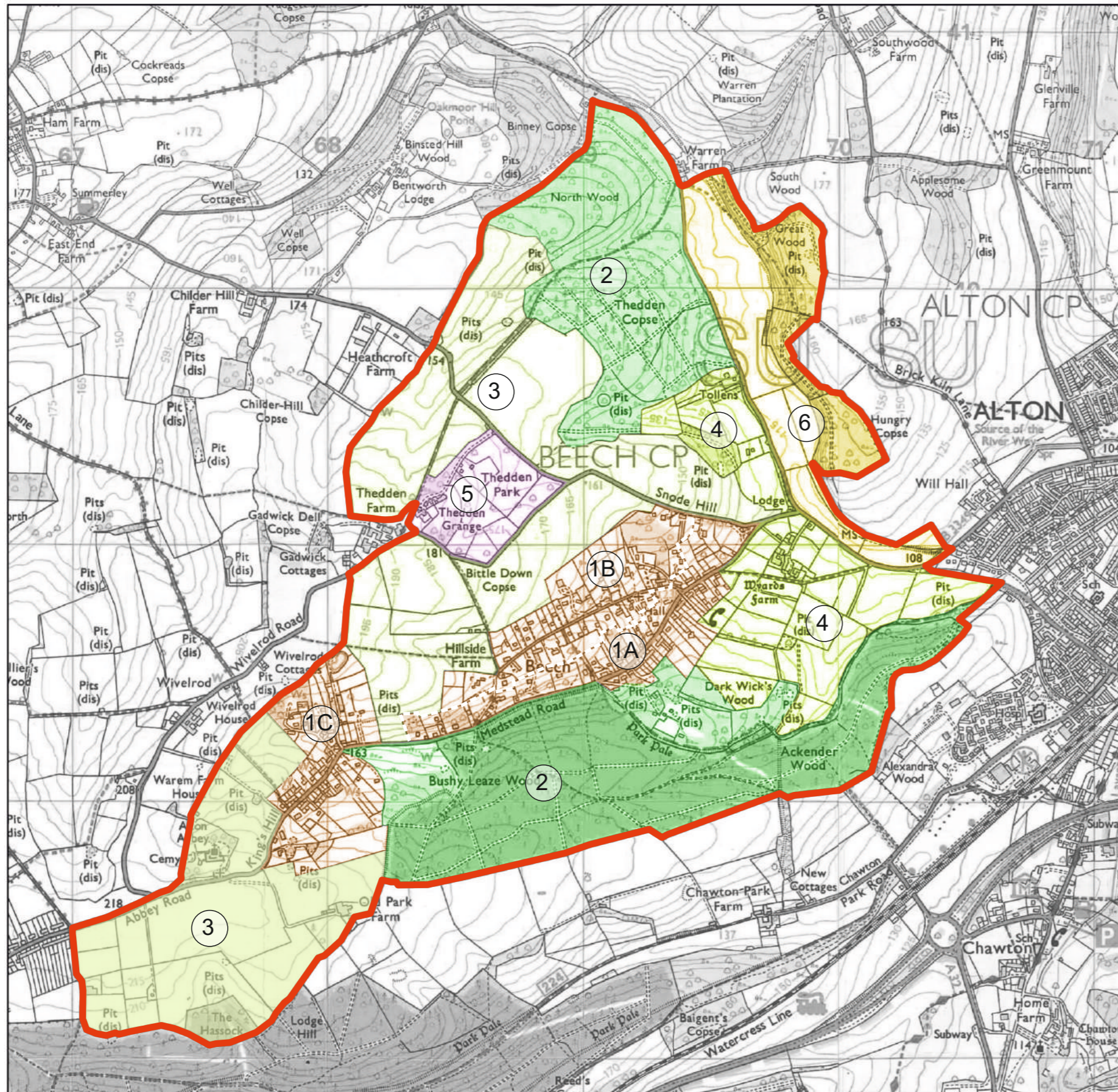
- Landscape quality (condition) of physical state: includes extent to which typical character is represented, intactness and condition of individual elements*
- Scenic quality: level of appeal primarily to the senses (not wholly visual)*
- Rarity: presence of individual elements or features, or rare Landscape Character Type*
- Representativeness: where a particular character, or element / feature is considered particularly important example*
- Conservation interests: where features of interest add value to landscapes such as wildlife, archaeological, or historical / cultural interest. These can have value in their own right*
- Society: the relative value attached to the landscape by society, either formally or informally. In the case of this study an understanding of the value attributed by the local community has been informed by the findings of the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire*
- Perception: recognition of perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty or tranquillity*
- Associations: connections to art, literature or events that contribute to perception of value and material available on local or community interests*

Forces for change have been broadly identified subjectively through anecdotal evidence and professional judgement.

Contents



- Map of Landscape Character Types
- Type 1 - Settlement
- Type 2 - Woodlands
- Type 3 - Large-scale fieldscape
- Type 4 - Small-scale fieldscape
- Type 5 - Parkland
- Type 6 - Hangers & linear fieldscape










Landscape Character Types

KEY

-  Parish boundary
-  LCT 1: Settlement
 - 1A: Medstead Road
 - 1B: Wellhouse Road
 - 1C: Kings Hill

Note: the use of the term 'settlement' does not imply a planning designation but reflects landscape character

-  LCT 2: Woodlands
-  LCT 3: Large-scale fieldscape
-  LCT 4: Small-scale fieldscape
-  LCT 5: Parkland
-  LCT 6: Downland hangers and linear fieldscape

Notes:

1. LCT 1-5 lie within EHDC Character Area 2b Four Marks Clay Plateau

LCT 6 lies within EHDC Character Area 3d Lasham Downland Mosaic

2. The graphic representation of mapped boundaries may infer that there is a sharp change from one landscape character type to another; however, on the ground these boundary lines represent a zone of transition from one landscape character type to another.



Landscape Character Type 1: Settlement

Overall Character

The settlement of Beech as it appears today dates mainly from the 1890's onwards and comprises a wide variety of individual detached dwellings set within a wooded valley. Medstead Road (LCT 1A) forms the main road through the village, Wellhouse Road (LCT 1B) includes the older buildings which pre-date the late-Victorian expansion and King's Hill (LCT 1C) located on higher ground somewhat apart from the rest of the village has a less valley-like character. NOTE: The use of the term 'settlement' does not imply a planning designation but reflects landscape character

Relevant key characteristics drawn from 'East Hampshire Landscape Character Assessment' 2006

- Varying enclosure - open and exposed in higher plateau areas with occasional long views, with a more enclosed landscape in relation to woodland cover
- Survival of original pre-1800 woodland and presence of oak as a key species in hedgerows and woodland
- Limited settlement comprising dispersed farmsteads and occasional small nucleated villages/hamlets
- Narrow, little used lanes bordered by wide verges and ditches and limited rights of way network
- Tree cover creates a secluded and enclosed landscape contrasting with the openness of the arable fields and hedgerows help integrate built development
- This is a peaceful and in places a tranquil and rural landscape

Local key characteristics supplementing those above

- Individual properties within generally large linear plots along Medstead and Wellhouse Roads (as shown on William Carter's 1893 Plan)
- Built form of very varied style, materials, scale, mass and alignment mostly dating from late 19th Century onwards
- No visible evidence of business uses
- Variety of boundary treatments including native deciduous and high proportion of evergreen laurel hedges
- Village core backed by woodlands with significant conifer content
- Medstead Road (1A) is aligned along a contained wooded valley. The wooded skyline increases the sense of enclosure.
- Wellhouse Road (1B) is within a woodland with an accompanying sense of enclosure.
- Kings Hill(1C) is a hilltop settlement on one of Hampshire's highest points forming a distinct satellite settlement with a perceived sense of elevation and relative openness.
- Cluster of historic listed buildings on Wellhouse Road including remaining prefabricated Norton Bavant and St Peter's Church (unlisted) and Donkey Wheel House.



Garden boundaries comprising hedges with grass verges reinforce the rural character of Medstead Road. Bushy Leaze Wood forms a dramatic backdrop.



Listed buildings on Wellhouse Road



Landform rises up to King's Hill which is separated from main village



Rural character of Wellhouse Road with less influence of traffic. Brick and flint walls and cleft post and rail fencing with hedges form appropriate rural boundaries.



St Peter's Church dating from 1902 one of few remaining pre-fabricated buildings within the village

Beech Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 1: Settlement

Valued characteristics

- Separation from urban expansion of Alton and Medstead
- Quality varied housing within a wooded valley creates visual interest
- Tranquility
- Village Hall and recreation ground
- Historic listed buildings including The Old Farmhouse, Donkey Wheel House, Norton Bavant, Wellhouse Cottages (all Grade II) and prefabricated buildings which formed part of original settlement including St Peter's Church
- Hedges, tree cover and well-vegetated front gardens which create seclusion and enclosure, helps integrate built form and creates habitat for wildlife
- Large number of trees subject to Tree Preservation Orders (TPO)
- Linear settlement

Detracting features

- Proliferation of mis-matched street furniture adjacent to village hall
- Evidence of 'rear garden' activities within front gardens including sheds and greenhouses which erodes the rural character
- Properties which do not reflect characteristic orientation of built form, with rear gardens facing onto highways
- Introduction of modern building materials of an uncharacteristic and unsympathetic colour-palette
- Kerb encroachment and damage to roadside verges.

Forces for change

- Threat of coalescence with neighbouring settlements of Alton and Medstead
- Pressure for infill development including building within front gardens of existing properties leading to increased housing density, loss of vegetation and loss of semi-rural streetscape
- Inappropriate and oversized suburbanising boundary treatments including close-board fencing and large gates leading to a loss of predominantly rural character
- Pressure to redevelop and extend existing properties creating small 'estates' of unified house styles or properties which are out of scale with their plot and dominate neighbouring properties
- Use of inappropriate and suburbanising building materials

Broad management objective

To retain and enhance the valued, wooded character of the village with its mix of individual properties whilst allowing for appropriate and sensitive development.

Landscape management and development considerations

Retain and enhance the valued characteristics listed above and:

- Seek opportunities to plant trees and hedgerows which reflect the local character
- Avoid road 'improvements' and addition of signage that would alter the rural character of the quiet lanes
- All new and replacement dwellings and extensions to be sensitively integrated within the existing settlement through the careful use of characteristic materials and boundary treatments
- Consider opportunities to introduce smaller-sized dwellings to provide opportunities to enable first-time buyers and down-sizers to remain within the village
- Conserve the current density of settlement (including a minimum plot size of 0.2 hectares in the EHDC designated 'Special Housing Area'), quiet roads and consequently peaceful and in places rural character of the landscape.
- Maintain individual settlement identity and limit linear expansion and infilling between neighbouring settlements
- The existing form of settlement should be perpetuated by limiting development within garden spaces and peripheral plots, by emphasising the existing rhythm of building frontages as a reflection of plot size and by maintaining the relationship this pattern has to the settlement as a whole
- Seek to avoid redevelopment of plots with buildings of greater size/massing and incongruous (sub)urban style



Kerb encroachment and damage to verge



Closeboard fencing and evidence of 'rear garden activities' influence the semi-rural character of Medstead Road



Mis-matched signage and street furniture erodes the rural character around the village hall

Landscape Character Type 2: Woodlands

Overall Character

Bushy Leaze Wood, Ackender Wood, Thedden Copse and North Wood comprise mostly areas of ancient replanted woodland some of which is managed for commercial forestry or country sports with a high percentage of non-native coniferous planting. Smaller areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland exist on the edges of these areas with a greater biodiversity. There is some evidence of former chalk pits. These areas are characterised by few formal public rights of way but are used informally for recreation.

Relevant key characteristics drawn from 'East Hampshire Landscape Character Assessment' 2006

- Chalk overlain by shallow continuous clay capping resulting in poorer heavier soils
- Large tracts of elevated gently undulating countryside
- Varying enclosure - open and exposed in higher plateau areas with occasional long views, with a more enclosed landscape in relation to woodland cover
- Survival of original pre-1800 woodland and presence of oak as a key species in hedgerows and woodland
- A peaceful and in places a still and empty landscape
- Ancient woodlands have been replanted, and often comprise a mix of broadleaved and coniferous tree species. The majority are relatively small, although occasional large blocks such as Bushy Leaze Wood occur
- Tree cover creates a secluded and enclosed landscape contrasting with the openness of the arable fields
- Survival of significant blocks of pre-1800 (ancient) woodland provides evidence of medieval and early post-medieval woodland exploitation, e.g. coppicing and charcoal burning
- Areas of original pre-1800 woodland (Bushy Leaze Wood) provide enclosure, biodiversity interest and textural contrast

Local key characteristics supplementing those above

- Historic Park Pale at Bushy Leaze Wood
- Network of formal and informal footpaths
- Areas of plantation woodland
- Absence of built form
- Bushy Leaze Wood, Ackender Wood, North Wood and Thedden Copse designated Sites of Important Nature Conservation (SINC)



Park Pale at Bushy Leaze Wood



Replanted woodland at Thedden Copse

Beech Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 2: Woodlands

Valued characteristics

- Absence of development
- Habitat value to local wildlife
- Tranquility
- Sense of enclosure
- Contains and forms distinctive backdrop to settlement, prevents coalescence and acts as buffer to transport infrastructure
- Valued for informal recreation

Detracting features

- Proliferation of non-native coniferous species
- Heavy machinery associated with commercial forestry
- Lack of more traditional, less intensive woodland management including coppicing

Forces for change

- Greater pressure for recreational use
- More intensive mechanised forestry operations
- Potential threat of new pests and diseases and of climate change

Broad management objective

Retain and enhance the existing woodland through appropriate traditional management techniques and encourage replanting of non-native coniferous species with native broadleaved species to increase biodiversity. Ensure woodlands remain connected to wider landscape and thus contribute to the wider green infrastructure network.

Landscape management and development considerations

Retain and enhance the valued characteristics listed above and:

- Encourage planting native broadleaved species to replace coniferous species
- Conserve the original pre-1800 woodland tree cover, hedgerows and hedgerow trees which provide enclosure in this landscape and form a strong landscape pattern and important wildlife network
- Seek to reinstate active management of ancient woodlands traditionally managed under a coppice with standards regime
- Manage woodland to ensure a diverse indigenous species and age structure to minimise risk of damage as a result of increased incidence of extreme weather. Promote interest in, and marketing of, local wood products, including wood for fuel



Bushy Leaze and Ackender Woods form backdrop to housing south of Medstead Road



Thedden Copse and North Wood help buffer the parish from busy A339

Beech Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 3: Large-scale fieldscape

Overall Character

Whilst this LCT is shown as two distinct areas within this study it represents one continuous fieldscape which is interrupted by the presence of the settlements at Thedden Park and King's Hill and bisected by the parish boundary. It is characterised by large arable fields to the north and west of the settlement and an elevated position which offers far-reaching views.

Relevant key characteristics drawn from 'East Hampshire Landscape Character Assessment' 2006

- Elevated undulating plateau with an almost continuous clay cap overlying the chalk bedrock
- A landscape dominated by pasture but also with some arable fields, reflecting variations in soil type
- Some fields of late medieval origin
- Occasional areas of neutral grassland and ponds and a relatively intact hedgerow network contribute to the ecological value of the landscape
- Tree cover creates a secluded and enclosed landscape contrasting with the openness of the arable fields
- Settlement includes isolated farmsteads of 18–19th century and of medieval origin

Local key characteristics supplementing those above

- Elevated position allows far-reaching views
- Alton Abbey forms a distinct cluster of buildings between the settlements of Beech and Medstead
- Wooded skyline
- Generally arable fieldscape



Far-reaching views across the fieldscape towards Alton



The gatehouse of Alton Abbey which falls between the settlement of King's Hill and Medstead



Large arable fields divided by tree belts and hedgerows



Gently undulating elevated landform



Far-reaching views across the fieldscape

Beech Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 3: Large-scale fieldscape

Valued characteristics

- Separation between Beech and Medstead / Thedden
- Historic Abbey
- Sense of remoteness
- Openness with opportunities for far-reaching views
- Views of skyline
- Is part of the historic views and setting of Thedden
- Generally quiet and tranquil

Detracting features

- Medstead Road can be busy and dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists
- Industrial buildings at Alton visible in some views

Forces for change

- Pressure to remove hedgerows and increase field sizes further

Broad management objective

Retain and enhance the agricultural landscape whilst resisting further field amalgamation and enhancing biodiversity.

Landscape management and development considerations

Retain and enhance the valued characteristics listed above and:

- Manage the agricultural landscapes for biodiversity such as incorporating hedgerows or grass field margins
- Monitor regeneration of hedgerow trees and consider opportunities for replanting
- Ensure oak standards grow up to form hedgerow trees
- Encourage replanting of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Conserve areas of pasture and seek to ensure good management of horse grazing, including retention of hedgerow boundaries, management of the sward and avoiding proliferation of buildings/sheds etc.
- Ensure that new farm buildings and associated storage structures and working areas are sensitively sited and screened to reduce their impact in the landscape
- Avoid road 'improvements' and addition of signage that would alter the rural character of the quiet lanes
- Encourage sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, hardstanding, jumps and other paraphernalia that are associated with hobby farms or private stables and that fall outside planning control



Rural lanes bounded by hedges and (to the left) the parkland railings of Thedden Park.



Far-reaching views across the fieldscape towards Alton

Landscape Character Type 4: Small-scale fieldscape

Overall Character

This LCT comprises an area of smaller, more intimate fields on relatively low-lying land to the south and east of the village core, primarily used as pasture and for horse grazing.

Relevant key characteristics drawn from 'East Hampshire Landscape Character Assessment' 2006

- Elevated undulating plateau with an almost continuous clay cap overlying the chalk bedrock. A more rolling landform is evident to the north around Bentworth indicating the transition to the chalk downland
- A landscape dominated by pasture but also with some arable fields, reflecting variations in soil type and including considerable areas of pasture managed by horse grazing
- Occasional areas of neutral grassland and ponds and a relatively intact hedgerow network contribute to the ecological value of the landscape
- Settlement includes isolated farmsteads of 18–19th century and of medieval origin

Local key characteristics supplementing those above

- Small-scale, intimate fieldscape used for pasture and horse grazing
- Wyards Farm Granary (Grade II listed), Wyards Farm House (Grade II*), Milestone (Grade II)
- Wyards Farm locally listed garden (Hampshire Gardens Trust). Association with Jane Austen
- Parliamentary fields



Paddocks enclosed by non-native conifers



Far-reaching views from higher ground through gaps in tree belts



Wyards Farm painted by Jane Austen's niece, Anna Lefroy (1815) (retrieved from. <http://wyardsfarm.co.uk>)



Equestrian fencing



Neglected fields with ruderal vegetation abutting Medstead Road

Beech Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 4: Small-scale fieldscape

Valued characteristics

- Forms key part of the gap between Alton and Beech
- Habitat for wildlife
- Views of skyline
- Intimate scale
- Associated with Jane Austen
- Opportunities for far-reaching views
- Some good hedgerows

Detracting features

- Medstead Road can be busy and dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists
- Negative influence of busy A339 which erodes tranquillity
- Use of non-native coniferous hedging and shelterbelts

Forces for change

- Threat of coalescence with neighbouring settlement of Alton
- Increased equestrian activity with associated fencing and paraphernalia
- Threat of development which would truncate visual relationship between existing settlement (LCT1A) and woodland (LCT3) of Bushy Leaze and Ackender Woods

Broad management objective

To retain and enhance the existing landscape of small-scale pasture fields which contribute to the setting of Beech

Landscape management and development considerations

Retain and enhance the valued characteristics listed above and:

- Maintain the individual settlement identity by limiting linear expansion and infilling between existing settlements i.e Beech and Alton. Retain an undeveloped rural road corridor along the A339 and important open gaps.
- Ensure that new farm buildings and associated storage structures and working areas are sensitively sited and screened to reduce their impact in the landscape
- Avoid road 'improvements' and addition of signage that would alter the rural character of the quiet lanes
- Encourage sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, hardstanding, jumps and other paraphernalia that are associated with hobby farms or private stables and that fall outside planning control
- Monitor regeneration of hedgerow trees and consider opportunities for replanting
- Conserve areas of pasture and seek to ensure good management of horse grazing, including retention of hedgerow boundaries, management of the sward and avoiding proliferation of buildings/sheds etc.
- Manage the agricultural landscapes for biodiversity such as incorporating hedgerows or grass field margins
- Ensure oak standards grow up to form hedgerow trees
- Encourage replanting of hedgerows and hedgerow trees with suitable, native species
- Preserve feeling of spaciousness and views to wooded skyline from properties on Medstead Road.



Additional images required



Additional images required



Well-maintained hedgerow with hedgerow trees and grass verge

Beech Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 5: Parkland

Overall Character

This LCT comprises the parkland setting of Thedden Grange which features individual trees set amongst areas of rough grassland. Nearer to the house the landscape is more managed and ornamental.

Relevant key characteristics drawn from 'East Hampshire Landscape Character Assessment' 2006

- Elevated undulating plateau with an almost continuous clay cap overlying the chalk bedrock
- A landscape dominated by pasture but also with some arable fields, reflecting variations in soil type and including considerable areas of pasture managed by horse grazing
- Occasional areas of neutral grassland and ponds and a relatively intact hedgerow network contribute to the ecological value of the landscape
- Tree cover creates a secluded and enclosed landscape contrasting with the openness of the arable fields
- Parkland as at Bentworth, Medstead and Thedden is of local importance (Hampshire Register)
- Settlement includes isolated farmsteads of 18–19th century and of medieval origin

Local key characteristics supplementing those above

- Elevated landscape with frequent far-reaching views
- Boundaries comprising parkland railings
- Semi-improved grassland used as grazing
- Individual mature parkland trees often with protective fencing to trunks
- Thedden Grange is a focal point for the landscape
- Imposing flint wall alongside Wivelrod Road



Thedden Grange is the focal point of the parkland landscape of mature trees set in semi-improved grassland.



Semi-improved grassland with estate railings form setting to Thedden Grange



Mature tree and parkland railings to LCA boundary



Flint wall on Wivelrod Road with conifers behind.



Thedden Parkland

Beech Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 5: Parkland

Valued characteristics

- Historic buildings and their setting
- Valued for wildlife
- Tranquility and remoteness
- Far-reaching views
- Mature trees and small copses
- Part of small hamlet (Thedden) with separation from settlement of Beech
- Traditional boundaries including estate railings and flint walls

Detracting features

- Encroachment of industrial buildings in Alton into long-distance views
- Some parkland trees are over-mature and in deteriorating condition (but are important for wildlife)
- Use of non-native conifers as hedging

Forces for change

- Pressure to remove veteran trees.
- Deterioration of boundaries

Broad management objective

To retain and protect the parkland landscape and its boundaries and ensure succession through planting appropriate trees

Landscape management and development considerations

Retain and enhance the valued characteristics listed above and:

- Manage the agricultural landscapes for biodiversity such as sowing wildflowers to the edges of open spaces and in smaller 'left-over' spaces
- Encourage replanting of coniferous hedge with native broad species
- Maintain the existing parkland character including estate railing boundaries and plant appropriate trees species to ensure succession
- Actively manage small woodlands and copses to ensure their long-term success



Trees of mixed ages and traditional parkland railings



Far-reaching views



Close-mown grass adjacent to the house with parkland beyond, separated by parkland railings

Landscape Character Type 6: Hangers and linear fieldscape

Overall Character

This LCT comprises the only part of the parish to lie east of the A339 and within EHDC LCA 3d: Lasham Downland Mosaic and consists of a series of linear arable fields backed by an area of steep woodland.

Relevant key characteristics drawn from 'East Hampshire Landscape Character Assessment' 2006

- Large-scale rolling landform characteristic of chalk, incised by linear dry valleys and forming strong bluffs above, and a dramatic contrast with, the Wey valley
- A mixture of 18th and 19th century arable fields and early post medieval pasture fields, with pockets of older medieval assarts surrounded by woodland. This mosaic of habitats supports arable weeds and farmland birds
- Varying extents of clay capping resulting in varying soils and land cover, including areas of open arable fields revealing the distinctive curves and undulations of the chalk landform, as well as more enclosed wooded areas on the clay capped summits
- A mosaic of arable fields interlocked with woodland to create a unified landscape of both openness and enclosure
- Long views are across open fields to a wooded or open skyline. In more enclosed areas views are short and contained by woodland
- Ancient woodland corresponds to areas of clay capping and steeper slopes
- Sparsely populated with a small number of villages nucleated around rural lane crossroads as at Shalden and Lasham. Some settlements have extended along roads and have a more linear form, notably extension of Alton along the lane towards Golden Pot. Dispersed farmsteads occur throughout the area.

Local key characteristics supplementing those above

- Evidence of remains of route of Basingstoke and Alton Light Railway on western edge of Great Wood
- Great Wood and Hungry Copse designated Site of Important Nature Conservation (SINC)
- Linear fieldscape bounded by A339 to the west and Great Wood/Hungry Copse to the east
- Lack of built form
- Warren Farm forms a distinct isolated cluster of buildings outside but adjacent to the LCT and parish boundaries



Warren Farm (which lies just outside parish boundary), backed by North Wood



Undulating linear fieldscape



Undulating linear fieldscape bounded by Hungry Copse



Approximate route of former Basingstoke and Alton Light Railway on western edge of Great Wood.



Linear fieldscape with landform emphasised by woodland

Beech Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 6: Hangers and linear fieldscape

Valued characteristics

- Forms part of the separation between Alton and Beech
- Ancient and semi-natural woodland at Hungry Copse
- Linear, undulating landform with long views to skyline

Detracting features

- Influence of busy A339 on tranquillity
- Apparent lack of woodland management

Forces for change

- Removal of hedgerows and fragmentation of green infrastructure
- Increased traffic on A339 leading to further loss of tranquillity

Broad management objective

To retain the sinuous, linear fieldscape bounded by well-managed native woodland

Landscape management and development considerations

Retain and enhance the valued characteristics listed above and:

- Manage the agricultural landscapes for biodiversity such as incorporating hedgerows or grass field margins
- Reintroduce appropriate woodland management with replanting, where required
- Encourage replanting of non-native coniferous woodland with native species
- Retain the undeveloped rural road corridor along the A339



Traffic and signage on A339