



East Hampshire Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 1: Clay Plateau

East Hampshire District Council

Draft report

Prepared by LUC

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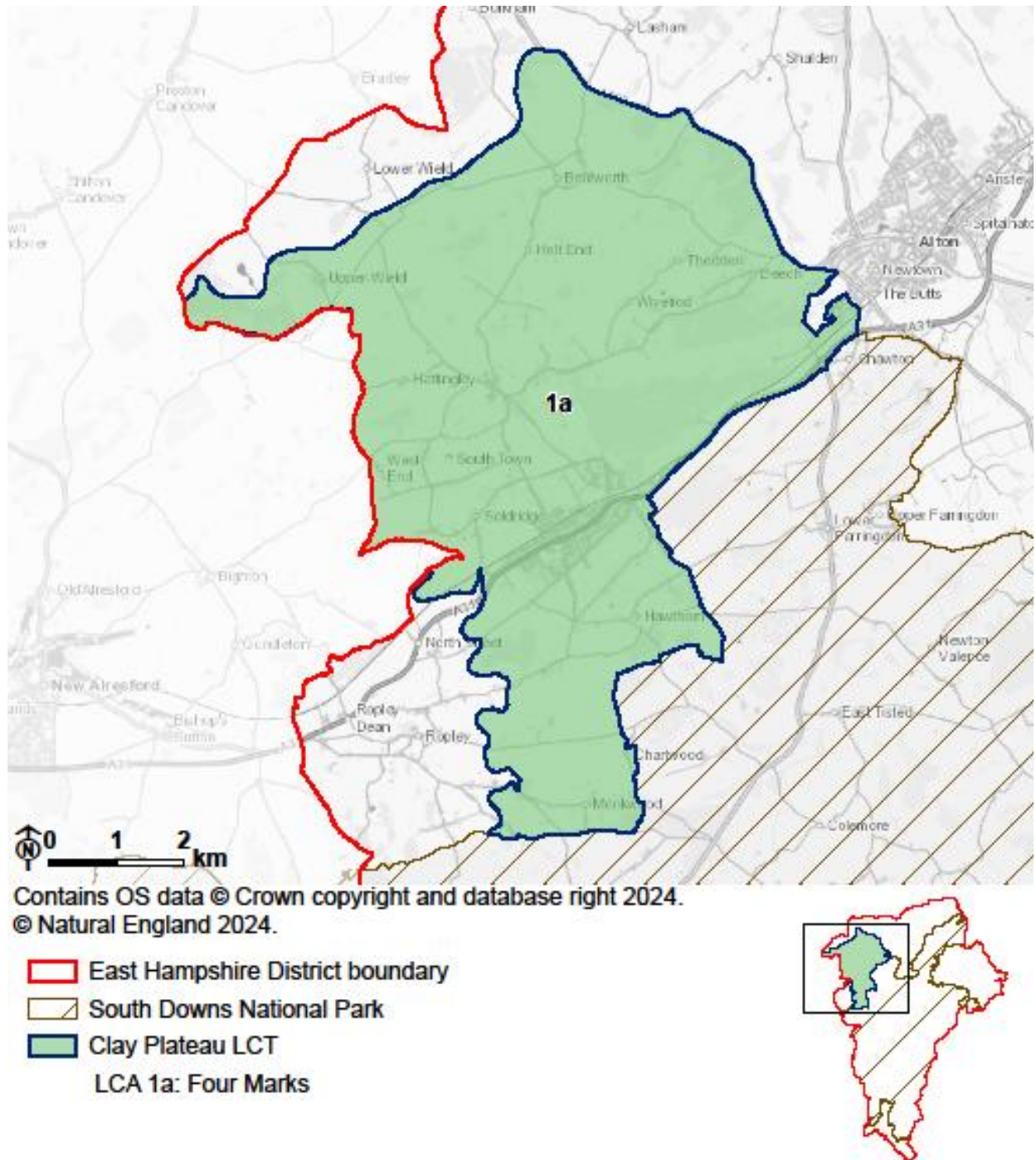
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Landscape Character Type 1: Clay Plateau

Figure 1.1: Location of the Clay Plateau LCT



Description

1.1 The Clay Plateau comprises an elevated block of clay-capped chalk in the western part of East Hampshire, continuing to the south into the SDNP. The boundaries of this LCT are defined by the extent of the virtually continuous drift deposit of clay with flints that cap the chalk. Although part of a larger type (which occurs across East Hampshire) the LCT key characteristics are specific to the study area (i.e. the area of East Hampshire outside the South Downs National Park).

Key Characteristics

- Chalk overlain by shallow continuous clay capping resulting in heavier and poorer quality soils.
- Elevated and gently undulating landform.
- A mixed farmland landscape.
- Varying enclosure – open and exposed in higher plateau areas with occasional long views, with a more enclosed character in relation to woodland cover.
- Survival of original pre 1800 woodland including at Chawton Park Wood and Bushy Leaze Wood, and presence of Oak as a key species in hedgerows and woodland.
- Varied field pattern including irregular blocks of fields are evidence of 15th –17th century enclosure and a more regular field system represents 18th and 19th century enclosure.
- A settled rural landscape comprising dispersed farmsteads and occasional linear villages/hamlets, such as Beech and Dry Hill, with church spires forming distinctive features in the landscape.
- Presence of round barrows, notably around Medstead, indicative of a Bronze Age ritual landscape.

- Narrow, rural lanes bordered by wide verges and ditches are little used.
- A public rights of way (PRoW) network around villages which includes long distance routes such as the Pilgrim's Way, becoming sparser in the wider countryside.
- Small scale historic parkland landscapes such as at Bentworth, some relating to a history of hunting.
- A generally peaceful and tranquil landscape away from the A31.

Landscape Character Areas

1.2 The Clay Plateau LCT contains one LCA:

- LCA 1a: Four Marks

Landscape Character Area 1a: Four Marks

Description

Location and Boundaries

1.3 The Four Marks LCA is defined by the extent of a shallow but virtually continuous deposit of clay with flint which caps the chalk bedrock geology west of Alton. This geology extends to the south-east and continues into the South Downs National Park.

Key Characteristics

- Elevated undulating plateau with an almost continuous clay cap overlying the chalk bedrock. A more rolling landform with occasional winterbourne valleys is evident to the north around Bentworth indicating the transition to the chalk downland.
- A mixed farmed landscape, reflecting variations in soil type and including considerable areas of pasture managed by horse grazing.
- Fields of late medieval origin in the north and south of the area with the central part of the character area comprising distinctive planned enclosure of the late 19th century (at Four Marks, Dry Hill and Medstead).
- 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 Chawton Park Wood and Bushy Leaze Wood occur.
- Occasional areas of neutral grassland, orchard, 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 mixed farmland.
- Small parklands at Bentworth, Medstead and Thedden are of local importance.
- Settlement includes isolated farmsteads of 18-19th century and of medieval origin and villages of varying size which are generally linear, following the road pattern. Four Marks is notable as a large village with a distinctive pattern of former small-holder plots to the north-west.
- Cut by the A31 and a railway but otherwise a network of rural roads cross the area.
- A good PRow network, including parts of the historic route of the Pilgrim's Way (linking Winchester and Canterbury – much of it now formed by the A31), the Writers' Way and St. Swithun's Way.
- Away from the density of settlement around the A31 at Four Marks and noise and movement associated with the transport corridors, this is a peaceful and in places a tranquil and rural landscape.

Figure 1.2: Open views across undulating arable fields with intact hedgerows and distant wooded horizons



Figure 1.3: Tree cover creates a sense of enclosure surrounding pasture managed by horse grazing



Natural Influences

Physical Landscape

1.4 An elevated undulating plateau landscape formed by extensive superficial deposits of clay with flint overlying the chalk bedrock geology. Clayey and fine silty soils that are often very flinty support a mix of arable farmland and pasture as well as retaining significant areas of woodland. In some areas the landform, for example to the north around Bentworth has a rolling 'downland' character with occasional winterbourne valleys. Occasionally, the edge of the clay at its junction with the underlying chalk forms a minor but steep scarp, as at seen around Ropley.

1.5 The most elevated land lies in the centre and to the north-east of the character area, around the settlement at Four Marks. Four Marks village is the third highest point in the county. From here there are extensive views to the south/south-east as far as Butser Hill and the South Downs scarp. The higher land also corresponds with the occurrence of significant areas of ancient woodland, e.g. at Old Down Wood, Chawton Park Wood, Bushy Leaze Wood. Field boundaries are varied with some tall hedges, post and wire fence, well-trimmed and unmaintained, fragmented hedgerows. Water is not a particular feature of the landscape however a number of ponds occur throughout the area. A recently established vineyard west of Medstead is an example of changing land use in the area.

Biodiversity

1.6 As well as mixed agriculture, this LCA supports numerous woodland blocks, many of which are of ancient origin, particularly on higher and sloping ground. Many of the ancient woodlands have been replanted, and often comprise a mix of broadleaved and coniferous tree species. The majority are relatively small, although large blocks such as Chawton Park Woods and Bushy Leaze Wood also occur. A number of woodland sites are identified as SINC.

1.7 Other features of ecological note include occasional areas of orchard, road verges of ecological importance - which support fragments of the type of flower-rich grassland once widespread in lowland Britain - neutral grassland and ponds. A relatively intact hedgerow network provides additional wildlife habitat and enhances habitat connectivity within the agricultural landscape.

Cultural Influences

Historic Landscape Character

1.8 Archaeological monuments (Scheduled Monuments consisting of several barrows, Medstead Camp and an unclassified earthwork occur close to

Medstead. The presence of these monuments suggests that that the area was valued, at least for ritual purposes, during the Bronze Age.

1.9 Blocks of fields of late medieval origin generally occur in the north of the LCA, these represent enclosure of the open fields around medieval settlements during late medieval and post-medieval periods. The central and southern part of the LCA comprises distinctive late 19th century planned enclosure, mostly smallholdings associated with post-medieval settlements at Four Marks, Dry Hill and Medstead. These comprise small rectilinear plots associated with linear roadside settlement and reflect the influx of smallholders in the years before and after the First World War, attracted by the railway. Areas of 18th-19th century enclosure also occur around Bentworth. A distinctive block of smallholdings around Dry Hill dates to the late 19th-early 20th centuries.

1.10 The pre-existing landscape was of early enclosure around 16th-17th century farmsteads, with scattered blocks of 18th-19th century enclosure on areas of former common land. The skeleton of this distinctive landscape survives in the winding network of lanes and tracks, into which the later rectangular field patterns have been fitted.

1.11 The survival of ancient woodland in the north-eastern part of the character area may be associated with the presence of several parks in the vicinity. Chawton Park still exists as parkland within the South Downs National Park, east of this LCA, and is likely to have extended further west (into this LCA) in the past. There is an absence of historic parkland in the rest of the character area reflecting the agricultural emphasis of the landscape.

1.12 Key historic characteristics include:

- Survival of Bronze Age Barrows, including to the north of Medstead, indicative of a prehistoric ritual landscape.
- Historic parkland landscapes in the north-east part of the character area.
- Survival of significant blocks of ancient woodland provides evidence of medieval and early post-medieval woodland exploitation, e.g. coppicing and charcoal burning.

- Distinctive planned late 19th century enclosure and small holdings associated with post-medieval settlements at Four Marks, Dry Hill and Medstead.
- Alton Abbey (a Benedictine Monastery in the Church of England) and Bentworth Hall, associated with Bentworth Park are further features.

Settlement Form and Built Character

1.13 This is a settled rural landscape, with varying size and age of settlements, however a large proportion is 20th and 21st century development. Four Marks is the largest settlement, located alongside the A32 and railway. Veterans of the Crimean War, who were allocated plots for their smallholdings, originally settled the village of Four Marks. Low density small holdings located along roadsides at Dry Hill and Soldridge have distinctive long, narrow gardens to the north-west of Four Marks. Beech comprises a wide variety of detached dwellings of varying form with generally large, linear plots set within a wooded valley.

1.14 Elsewhere, the area is characterised by a low settlement density with isolated 18th-19th century farmsteads set within areas of 18th-19th century enclosure, and isolated farmsteads of late medieval origin set within areas of mainly early enclosure. Some of the isolated farmsteads may represent shrunken medieval hamlets.

1.15 Occasional small, nucleated villages of medieval origin are surrounded by earlier enclosures e.g. Medstead, which has a wider distinctive 'stellate' pattern extending from the village with bungalows with large gardens. Most villages are linear, of varying size, and surrounded by 18th-19th century enclosures e.g. Bentworth.

1.16 Although much of the central part of the character area is settled, the density appears low due to large gardens and tree cover. The scattered nature of development and presence of trees and boundary vegetation softens and integrates development into the landscape. More recently, many of these smallholder plots have been redeveloped with houses of greater size and

massing and in some cases loss of screening vegetation and construction of hard boundaries along the frontages of properties. Cumulatively, these small-scale changes have altered the local landscape character, creating the impression of a more 'built-up' landscape in parts.

1.17 Characteristic building materials include flint, red brick and clay tiles.

Perceptual Influences

1.18 This is largely a landscape open farmland scattered with woodland which provides a localised sense of enclosure and seclusion. The northern parts of the character area are more open, providing a contrasting perceptual experience. Tree cover often restricts views, however on higher land there are long views across the character area and beyond (including towards Alton, Basingstoke and the South Downs National Park from Medstead and Four Marks), as well as some local views. Views to the south of Medstead now incorporate new development in Four Marks.

1.19 There is no open access land although a generally good PRow network links the settlements. The route of the Pilgrim's Way linking Winchester and Canterbury passed through this area (much of the historic route now represented by the A31). Long distance footpaths include the St. Swithun's Way and the Writers' Way. National Cycle Network Routes 23 and 224 pass through this landscape area, converging together in Medstead.

1.20 The Watercress Line railway also runs through this area in a corridor parallel to the A31. The heritage steam railway's name reflects the historic use of the railway in transporting locally grown watercress. Whilst parts of this LCA are characterised with a sense of tranquillity and strong rural character, this is eroded in proximity to the transport corridors.

1.21 East End Farm (near Bentworth) was leased by George Wither Senior, in 1580 and as such is the likely birthplace of the poet George Wither, in 1588.

Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The agricultural mosaic, especially areas of grazed pasture, neutral grassland, ponds and orchards, and need to ensure good management of areas used for horse grazing.
- Fields of both late medieval origin and distinctive 18th-19th century enclosure.
- Areas of ancient woodland which provide enclosure, time-depth, biodiversity interest and textural contrast.
- Woodland and hedgerow tree cover, including fragments of orchard, which creates seclusion and enclosure and helps integrate built development.
- Occasional winterbourne river valleys, which are vulnerable to the increasing number of extreme rainfall events.
- Small-scale piecemeal character of settlement around Four Marks, Dry Hill, Beech and Medstead and the need to avoid over-development of plots and retain enclosing vegetation and boundaries.
- The generally low-density character of settlements with strong linear patterns and a sense of separation between villages which is under pressure for development and vulnerable to coalescence, particularly between Alton and Four Marks.
- Historic landscape features including small historic parklands which have cultural and natural heritage value, and occasional archaeological monuments including round barrows.
- Long, occasionally long-distance views across the undulating landform from high ground, including towards the South Downs National Park.
- The character of the quiet rural lanes linking settlements particularly the hedgerows and grass verges are especially sensitive to loss as a result

of redevelopment of former small-holder plots and to traffic eroding verges.

- Overall strong rural character of the landscape which is under pressure for development.

Guidance

Landscape Strategy

1.22 The overall management objective should be to conserve the rural character of the Four Marks Clay Plateau, maintaining the strong sense of enclosure and perception of low-density settlement created by the unifying woodland/tree cover and farmland mosaic.

Landscape Management

- Ensure a joined-up, landscape scale approach towards changes to agricultural practice through ELMS and local initiatives at a landscape scale such as Landscape Partnerships.
- Promote appropriate management of farmland, including restoring buffer strips along field margins to minimise run off, maintain the biodiversity of wetland features including ponds and wetlands and to create a wildlife-rich habitat supporting farmland birds.
- Conserve and manage woodland, including ancient woodland and orchards in line with Guidance on Managing ancient and native woodland in England [See reference 1]. Ensure a diverse species and age structure by thinning, coppicing, promoting natural regeneration and replanting as necessary, in line with District Wide Project 7: Enhance access and increase active management of existing woodland in the East Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy 2019. This will contribute

to landscape resilience and also minimise the risk of damage as a result of increased storms and high winds.

- Conserve and enhance hedgerows and hedgerow trees and consider opportunities for re-planting, gapping up and connecting.
- Conserve and enhance historic parkland, including estate railing boundaries, and support local initiatives for the restoration of traditional orchards, using and promoting local fruit varieties where viable.
- Ensure new trees and woodlands are planted in line with relevant guidance, including District Wide Project 6: Increase woodland cover in the East Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy 2019, and have suitable management and maintenance plans to ensure their successful establishment. Manage and monitor the threats posed by tree diseases and pests, and plan for climate change by researching appropriate species mixes to create robust and resilient woodlands.
- Conserve and enhance 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.
- Encourage sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, hardstanding, jumps and other paraphernalia that are associated with horse keeping.
- Maintain and enhance rights of way and improve links to the long distance footpaths within the LCA, as well as improving links with the South Downs National Park, in line with District Wide Projects 3: Connect with the South Downs and 4: Identify and enhance strategically important rights of way in the East Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy 2019.

Development Management

- Conserve the current density of settlement, quiet roads, sense of relative tranquillity and strong rural character of the landscape.

- Where development does occur, there should be landscape led and considerate incorporation of green infrastructure into the site in line with District Wide Project 9 from East Hampshire's GI Strategy 2019 [See reference 2]. Development should be carefully planned, and biodiversity considered from the outset in line with East Hampshire District Council's Biodiversity and Planning Guidance [See reference 3].
- Integrate any new development sensitively with including through the use of native hedgerows and trees.
- The form of settlements should be perpetuated by limiting backland development, emphasising the existing linear street pattern and retaining the loose dispersed pattern. Seek to avoid redevelopment of smallholder plots with buildings of greater size/massing and incongruous (sub)urban style.
- Where development does occur, there should be tactical and considerate incorporation of green infrastructure into the site in line with the District Wide Project 9: Incorporate Green Infrastructure into development sites from East Hampshire's Green Infrastructure Strategy 2019.
- Conserve and enhance the soft boundaries and verges of the small plots (Four Marks, Dry Hill and Medstead) particularly frontages along rural lanes. Ensure retention of existing native hedges as well as beech/laurel hedges and associated grass verges. Seek to limit construction of hard or ornamental boundaries fencing which create a more urban character.
- Maintain individual settlement identity and limit linear expansion and infilling between existing settlements e.g. Beech and Medstead, and Medstead to Four Marks. Retain an undeveloped rural road corridor along the A31 and important open gaps, for example between Alton and Four Marks.
- Ensure that new farm buildings and associated storage structures and working areas are sensitively sited and screened to reduce their impact in the landscape.

- Conserve the character of sunken lanes and verges – seek to reduce traffic pressures and road improvements which would alter the character of these sunken lanes.
- Use sustainable and locally sourced materials, vernacular building techniques and styles, responding to the existing landscape character, to inform design and ensure integration with the surrounding landscape.
- Ensure that new development is integrated into the existing network of PRoW.
- Avoid a negative impact on the South Downs National Park’s Dark Skies Policy by preventing and positively reducing artificial light pollution in line with the South Downs National Park Technical Advice Note Version 2 **[See reference 4].**

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- 1 Forestry Commission (2010) Guidance: Managing ancient and native woodland in England. Available online: [Managing ancient and native woodland in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/managing-ancient-and-native-woodland-in-england) (Accessed 05.06.2024)
- 2 LUC (2019) East Hampshire Green Infrastructure Study. Available online: <https://www.easthants.gov.uk/planning-services/planning-policy/local-plan/emerging-local-plan/evidence-base/environment>
- 3 East Hampshire District Council (2021) Biodiversity and Planning Guidance. Available online: <https://www.easthants.gov.uk/media/6296/download?inline> (Accessed 22.03.2024)
- 4 South Downs National Park Authority (2021) Dark Skies Technical Advice Note (TAN) Version 2. Available online: [DNS-TAN-2021-Main-Document-External-Lighting.pdf \(southdowns.gov.uk\)](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/media/6296/download?inline) (Accessed 22.03.2024)