



East Hampshire Landscape

Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 3: Chalk Valley
Systems

East Hampshire District Council

Draft report

Prepared by LUC

June 2024

Version	Status	Prepared	Checked	Approved	Date
1	Draft	L Bushby	K Milner	M Grant	22.02.2024
2	Final	L Bushby	M Grant	K Davies	17.06.2024



Land Use Consultants Limited

Registered in England. Registered number 2549296. Registered office: 250 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8RD. Printed on 100% recycled paper

East Hampshire Landscape Character Assessment

Contents

Chapter 1	4
Introduction	

Landscape Character Type 3: Chalk Valley Systems	5
--	---

Table of Tables

No table of figures entries found.

Table of Figures

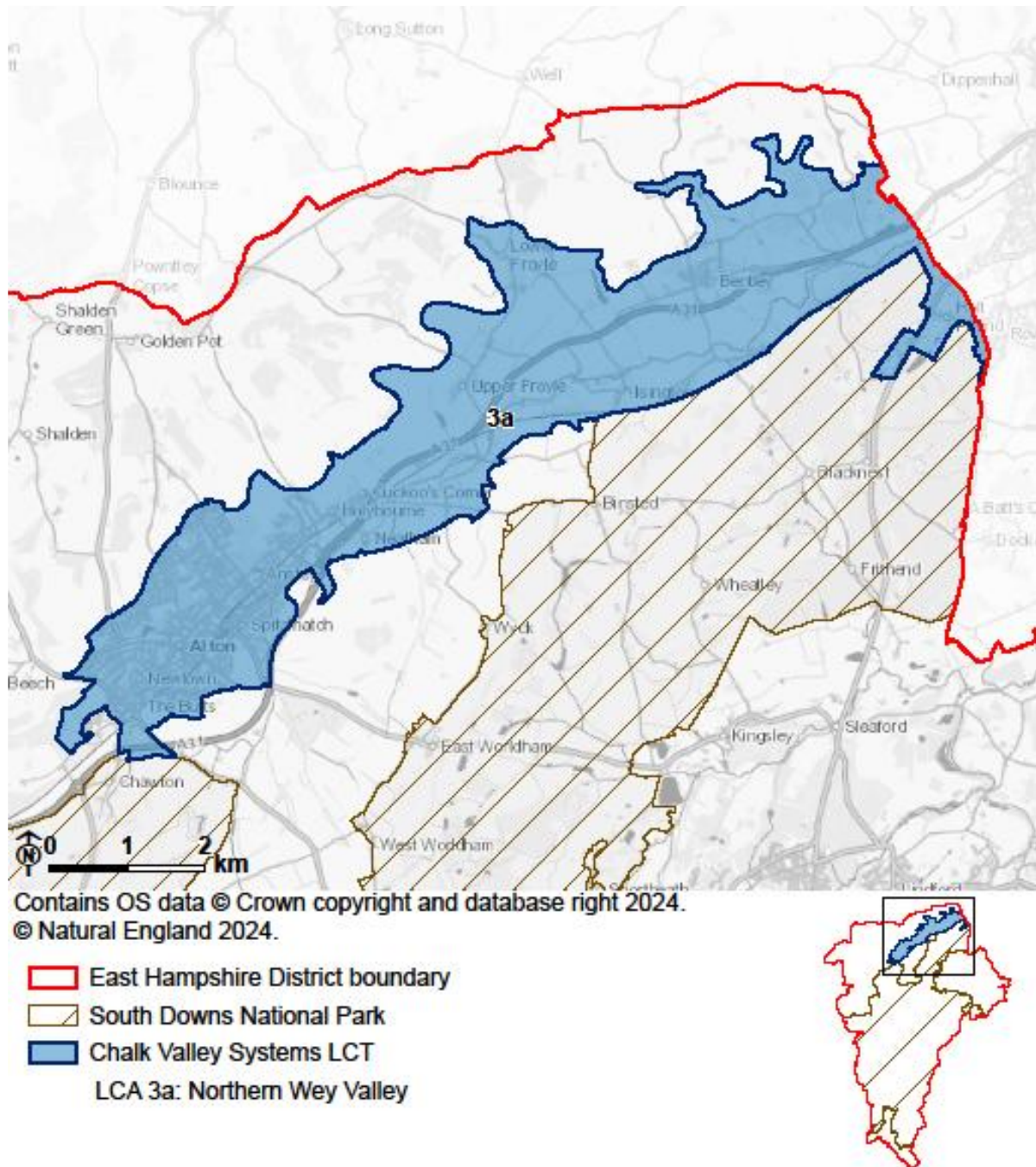
Figure 1.1: Location of the Chalk Valley Systems LCT	5
Figure 1.2: Grazing on the edge of Lower Froyle with woodland on the distant valley slopes	10
Figure 1.3: Open, pastoral character of the wider floodplain	11

Chapter 1

Introduction

Landscape Character Type 3: Chalk Valley Systems

Figure 1.1: Location of the Chalk Valley Systems LCT



Description

1.1 The Chalk Valley Systems are the branching valley systems of East Hampshire that drain the dip slope of the chalk downs and contain a river along at least part of their length. They often follow the lines of faults in the chalk and are winterbournes in their upper reaches. 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

- Broad, branching valley of the River Wey carved from the chalk downs and indented by dry valleys and coombes to produce smoothly rounded valley sides.
- On the valley sides the chalk soils support intensive arable cultivation on shallower slopes, with pasture and woodland on steeper slopes.
- Upper reaches of the valley is a winterbourne – wells and springs are features.
- Lower Valley floor contains clear, chalk river that flows within a flat, narrow floodplain dominated by improved and semi-improved grassland, divided by occasional hedgerows and frequent trees including lines of willow.
- The valleys have provided important routeways from prehistory – today, containing roads or winding lanes connecting a string of regularly spaced nucleated flint villages. Other notable routes include the Pilgrim's Way walking route, linking Winchester to the North Downs.
- Predominantly a landscape of planned 18th-19th century enclosure.
- Rivers were used to power watermills in the past – weirs, mill ponds and mills, as well as watercress beds are distinctive features of the landscape.

- Away from the A31 transport corridor and the development surrounding Birdworld, the valley retains an unspoilt and tranquil pastoral character.

Landscape Character Areas

1.2 The Chalk Valley Systems LCT contains one LCA:

- LCA 3a: Northern Wey Valley

Landscape Character Area 3a: Northern Wey Valley

Description

Location and Boundaries

1.3 The broad Northern Wey Valley LCA (landscape character area) is located to the north-east of East Hampshire District, extending from the River Wey's source to the south-west of Alton. From this point the river flows in a north-easterly direction towards Farnham in the adjacent district of Waverley. The northern and southern boundaries are defined roughly along the 110m contour line, following the apparent skyline of the valley as seen from the valley floor. The valley forms a main linear communication corridor linking Hampshire and Surrey containing the route of the A31 and the main rail line.

Key Characteristics

- A broad, shallow valley, cutting through and enclosed by the Chalk, Upper Greensand and Gault Mudstone geology.
- The River Wey, a 'chalk stream', arises as springs around which the market town of Alton has grown. The upper part of the river is a winterbourne, flowing seasonally.
- The northern chalk valley sides are indented by short coombe valleys and form bold bluffs overlooking the valley. To the south the valley sides are more varied and include the wooded backdrop of Alice Holt, as well as the lower land of the Greensand Terrace.
- The valley floodplain is predominantly pastoral with arable cultivation on the valley sides.

- Willows are features of the valley floor forming a distinct pattern alongside channels and ditches. Hanging woodland is occasionally present on the steeper slopes of the valley sides.
- Flood meadows with wet grasslands (e.g. around Froyle Mill) are of particular ecological interest for the range of wetland plant species they support, and their associated wildlife interest.
- Historic features associated with the river are apparent today. Remnant features relating to water management and agricultural/industrial use of the river, include weirs, mills, millponds and watercress beds.
- A string of nucleated settlements of medieval origin exist on the gravel terrace forming the lower valley slopes (e.g. Bentley and Upper Froyle).
- Villages are surrounded by a mix of early and recent field enclosures. The upper part of the valley is centred around the market town of Alton.
- St Swithun's Way represents an important route way since prehistory, formerly part of the Pilgrim's Way linking Winchester to the North Downs.
- Main transport routes (A31 and railway) form a contrast with the narrow lanes as they cut across the flat open valley floor, interrupting the otherwise tranquil character.

Figure 1.2: Grazing on the edge of Lower Froyle with woodland on the distant valley slopes



Figure 1.3: Open, pastoral character of the wider floodplain



Natural Influences

Physical Landscape

1.4 The River Wey flows within a narrow river channel and is visually quite insignificant in contrast to the other linear features (road and rail line) which cut along the valley bottom. The river has, however created a distinctive valley form carved through the varied geology of Chalk (to the north) and Upper Greensand and Gault (to the south) and has a wide flat floodplain. The differing geological conditions result in a valley with a distinct profile with strong chalk bluffs to the north and a more varied profile to the south. The northern valley side is also incised by coombes created by the erosional force of water flow over the chalk. On the flatter valley floor, the overlying fertile alluvial drift material gives rise to predominantly loamy soils. The immediate floodplain is dominated by pasture, including some paddocks. Arable farming is the dominant land use on the

gravel terraces; land between Alton and Bentley has an Agricultural Land Classification of Grade 2 (very good quality).

1.5 Although not extensively wooded, with the exception of the small area around Holt Pound which is set within Alice Holt Forest, there are significant areas of hanging woodland and copses on the valley sides, for example at Mill Court south of Upper Froyle and Wallfield Copse north-east of Bentley. Willow trees are characteristic of the valley floor. To the south-east the dark rising slopes of conifer woodland at Alice Holt form a dominant backdrop.

Biodiversity

1.6 The immediate floodplain of the River Wey, an internationally rare chalk stream habitat, is dominated by improved and semi-improved grassland, divided by occasional hedgerows and frequent trees including lines of willow. Pockets of marshy grassland also occur, for example around Froyle Mill, which includes an area SINC status. These wet grasslands are of particular ecological interest for their range of wetland plant species, and their associated wildlife interest. Occasional former watercress beds are also of note supporting aquatic plants. Ponds such as Kings Ponds east of the railway in Alton are further examples of valuable local habitats.

1.7 Away from the immediate river floodplain, rising ground is typically dominated by arable agriculture, together with occasional woodland blocks, particularly to the east of Bentley, and fragments of orchard. The majority of this woodland is of ancient origin, although much has been replanted. Many woodlands have SINC status.

Cultural Influences

Historic Landscape Character

1.8 This character area was a significant transit corridor during prehistoric and later periods, allowing access between the south coast, via the Solent River systems (Meon and Itchen) and the Thames valley.

1.9 Today, it is predominantly a landscape of planned 18th-19th century enclosure, particularly on the northern and higher slopes of the valley. These enclosures probably represent modifications of earlier enclosed landscape of later medieval date on the lower fertile slopes to take advantage of improved farming techniques. Southern slopes rise onto the Greensand Terrace, forming early enclosures of late medieval/post-medieval date.

1.10 Historic features associated with the river are apparent. Remnant features relating to water management and agricultural/industrial use of the river, include weirs, mills, and millponds.

1.11 Key historic characteristics include:

- Limited woodland apart from localised blocks of pre-1800 woodland east of Bentley.
- Occasional archaeological monuments, notably the Roman settlement site at Cuckoo's Corner east of Alton at point where Chichester-Silchester Roman road crosses the valley (Scheduled Monument).
- Absence of major historic parkland reflecting the agricultural emphasis of the landscape, however the avenue between Bentley Church and Bury Court is a distinctive feature.

Settlement Form and Built Character

1.12 A series of nucleated settlements of medieval origin along the lower valley slopes (e.g. Bentley and Upper Froyle) are located on the slightly raised gravel terrace above the flood level. There are also a number of villages with a more dispersed, linear pattern (e.g. Lower Froyle and Isington), and the market town of Alton which has become contiguous with the once linear village of Holybourne. Eight Conservation Areas, including at Alton, Holybourne, Isington, Froyle (Upper) and Foyle (Lower) are indicative of historic value. The settlements are surrounded by a mix of early and 18th-19th century enclosure and are generally well integrated into the surrounding landscape. Bentley was well integrated into the landscape and Alton is fairly hidden on the approach from the north. Further upslope to the north lies a scatter of 18th-19th century farmsteads of largely set within regular enclosures.

1.13 Large, agriculturally related buildings/sheds are a prominent feature in the west of this landscape area, and there are large scale edge of town style developments including Birdworld and a garden centre south-west of Holt Pound

1.14 The valley has a strong linear communication pattern, now dominated by the A31 and A325, with a parallel earlier trackway traversing the length of the valley upslope linking the medieval settlements (fossilised as the St. Swithun's Way footpath). Away from the A31 and A325 roads are generally narrow and enclosed by dense hedgerows and hedgerow trees, creating a strong rural character. The main London-Winchester railway line (1852) is a further influence within the valley. The railway west of Alton is part of the Watercress Line heritage steam railway with the name reflecting the historic use of the railway in transporting locally grown watercress.

1.15 Traditional building materials include flint, red brick and clay tiles. The villages of Bentley and Upper Froyle have churches that provide a focus and are key features in views up from the valley floor.

1.16 New developments, such as those to the north of Alton, are not as well integrated into the landscape. These new builds can be seen rising up the valley side without appropriate integration or screening.

Perceptual Influences

1.17 The scale of the landscape is varied along the course of the valley as a result of the variety of land uses. On the valley bottom the flat landform and hedged fields create a medium scale landscape. The well-maintained hedgerows, which mark the field boundaries and lines of willows along ditches, combine to provide some enclosure. Open views are afforded from the valley bottom up the valley sides and from one side of the valley to the other, for example when approaching Bentley from the south. On the higher valley the arable land use creates a more open landscape with some long views across the valley.

1.18 The A31 dual carriageway and A325 impact greatly on the tranquillity of this landscape. In the valley bottom, the hedgerows and trees reduce the visible and audible impact of A31 and railway. The strong sense of enclosure associated with Alice Holt Forest around the A325 mean that development such as Birdworld and the garden centre is prominent in the foreground of local views. The watercourses and associated vegetation result in a high level of perceived naturalness and tranquillity. However, when viewed from the higher elevations of the valley sides the busy A31 and the railway, including the Watercress Line, are dominant features.

1.19 The Northern Wey Valley forms a major transport corridor linking Alton and Guildford. This has resulted in a degree of fragmentation and detracts from the visual unity of the landscape. There are a number of public rights of way (PRoW) linking the nucleated settlements of the valley sides, notably St. Swithun's Way long distance footpath along the line of the former Pilgrim's Lane. The Hangers Way long distance footpath begins at Alton railway station and the Writers Way long distance footpath passes through the town. Route 224 of the National Cycle Network starts in the centre of Alton. There is a sense

that whilst accessible, the landscape is used for passing through, rather than for recreational purposes.

1.20 Lord Baden Powell lived in the village of Bentley, which also featured in the 90s/early 00s radio and TV programme 'The Village' which looked at the rural village and profiled its inhabitants. The 'Bentley Book' on the Alton Road, was designed by Lord Baden Powell for the Daily Mail competition for village signs 1923. A further distinctive local feature is Upper Froyle village with its 19 Italian 'saints' adorning houses and cottages belonging to the estate.

Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The course of the internationally rare chalk river system including springs, ponds and streams are especially sensitive to change from climate change, rural diffuse pollution, urban runoff and habitat degradation, with the water quality and water flow within the river and ponds in particular vulnerable to degradation.
- Wetland habitats, ponds, flowing open water and wet grassland, particularly around the River Wey, are sensitive to change from climate change leading to increased seasonal flooding, increased temperatures and periods of drought.
- Areas of pasture and unimproved grassland of the valley floor are of considerable biodiversity interest.
- The network of hedges and waterside willows which create enclosure and visual unity across the valley floor are vulnerable to loss/lack of management. Creation of hard, abrupt and unintegrated boundaries such as paddock fencing has caused further fragmentation of the landscape.

- The individual identity of the settlements located on the gravel terrace away from the floodplain could be vulnerable to incremental change and loss of strong nucleated/linear character.
- The mills, weirs, mill ponds and watercress beds which provide evidence for past use of the river are important features worthy of conservation.
- The archaeological monuments – Roman settlement site at Cuckoo’s Corner east of Alton at point where Chichester-Silchester Roman road crosses the valley (Scheduled Monument).
- The skyline and slopes of the adjacent downland (LCA 2a), where changes through development and loss of tree cover are very visible from the valley floor.
- The presence of the larger settlements of Alton and Farnham at either end of the valley create strong pressure for further change along the main transport corridors.
- The open character of this landscape with limited woodland cover amplifies its visual sensitivity with views afforded from one side of the valley to the other. Any new development or large-scale change, including solar energy development, would therefore be highly visible, however its impacts could be mitigated through appropriate planting. Establishment of additional woodland as part of Hampshire’s Nature Recovery Strategy – to achieve their commitment to plant 1 million trees by 2050 – may change the character of views within the valley.
- The undeveloped rural roads linking the settlements are especially important and are under pressure from increasing traffic that can erode verges. In addition, safety improvements can result in the loss of characteristic landscape features.

Guidance

Landscape Strategy

1.21 The overall management objective should be to conserve the tranquil, natural character of the Northern Wey Valley, and the individual identity of the small villages set on the gravel terrace above the floodplain. The valley should provide an open rural landscape between the towns of Alton and Farnham. The character of the enclosing valley sides, particularly the downland to the north of the Wey, which form the backdrop to the valley, should also be conserved.

Landscape Management

- Conserve, enhance and reconnect areas of notable wetland habitats relating to the River Wey in line with Site Specific Project 1 in the East Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy 2019. Consider opportunities for extending these habitats.
- Address potential for flooding issues with the implementation of natural flood management schemes, including enhancement of floodplain grazing marsh priority habitats and creation and enhancement of riparian woodland along the River Wey corridor. Safeguard water flows to maintain the pastoral quality of the valley floor and floodplain habitats.
- Monitor water quality in the rivers and seek to ensure high water quality and minimise water pollution.
- 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 to create a wildlife-rich habitat supporting farmland birds.

- Manage small valley side and valley bottom woodlands 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.
- Restore and create broadleaved woodlands surrounding the A31 and Alton/Holybourne to help reduce noise, light and air pollution, and to maintain and enhance the pockets of tranquillity.
- Support local initiatives for the restoration of traditional orchards and hop gardens, using and promoting local fruit varieties where viable.
- Ensure proposals for new trees and woodland creation are carefully considered in relation to the open landscape character and visual context and are in line with relevant guidance, including District Wide Project 6: Increase woodland cover in the East Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy 2019. Ensure newly planted trees and woodland 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 manage areas of pasture and unimproved grassland on the valley floor to improve biodiversity value.
- Conserve and manage the network of hedgerows and waterside trees along the valley floor promoting connectivity.
- Conserve historic elements such as mills, weirs and mill ponds and watercress beds which provide evidence for past use of the river.
- 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.

- Encourage sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, hardstanding, jumps and other paraphernalia that are associated with horse keeping.

Development Management

- Promote a landscape-led approach to integrating any new development in the valley, particularly around Alton and Holybourne, including through the use native hedgerows and trees, and to minimise impacts on views from higher land to the north and south. This should include considerate incorporation of green infrastructure into the site in line with District Wide Project 9 from East Hampshire's GI Strategy 2019.
- Development should be carefully planned, and biodiversity considered from the outset in line with East Hampshire District Council's Biodiversity and Planning Guidance [\[See reference 2\]](#).
- Conserve the small-scale nucleated/linear character of the gravel terrace settlements and conserve the rural character of the roads linking settlements.
- Conserve the setting of villages and key views towards and from them, including landmark features such as church towers/spires.
- Monitor further incremental linear development from Alton along the A31 and seek to conserve a rural landscape along the valley between Alton and Farnham.
- Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their rural setting whilst promoting opportunities for access, education and sensitive interpretation at historic sites.
- 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.

- Develop a network of integrated, well managed green spaces in Alton, reinforcing landscape character and local distinctiveness. This should build on Site Specific Project 3: Provide a new strategic semi-natural greenspace in the north-west of the District and District Wide Project 9: Incorporate Green Infrastructure into development sites within the East Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy 2019 [\[See reference 3\]](#)..
- 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 [\[See reference 4\]](#).

Report produced by LUC

Report produced by LUC

Bristol

12th Floor, Colston Tower, Colston Street, Bristol BS1 4XE
0117 929 1997
bristol@landuse.co.uk

Cardiff

16A, 15th Floor, Brunel House, 2 Fitzalan Rd, Cardiff CF24 0EB
0292 032 9006
cardiff@landuse.co.uk

Edinburgh

Atholl Exchange, 6 Canning Street, Edinburgh EH3 8EG
0131 202 1616
edinburgh@landuse.co.uk

Glasgow

37 Otago Street, Glasgow G12 8JJ
0141 334 9595
glasgow@landuse.co.uk

London

250 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8RD
020 7383 5784
london@landuse.co.uk

Manchester

6th Floor, 55 King Street, Manchester M2 4LQ
0161 537 5960
manchester@landuse.co.uk

landuse.co.uk

Landscape Design / Strategic Planning & Assessment
Development Planning / Urban Design & Masterplanning
Environmental Impact Assessment / Landscape Planning & Assessment
Landscape Management / Ecology / Historic Environment / GIS & Visualisation

Report produced by LUC

- 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 East Hampshire District Council (2021) Biodiversity and Planning Guidance. Available online: <https://www.easthants.gov.uk/media/6296/download?inline> (Accessed 22.03.2024)
- 3 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>
- 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)