



# East Hampshire Landscape

## Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 8: Wooded  
Claylands

## East Hampshire District Council

**Draft report**

Prepared by LUC

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# Contents

<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>4</b>
Introduction	

Landscape Character Type 8: Wooded Claylands	5
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## Table of Tables

No table of figures entries found.

## Table of Figures

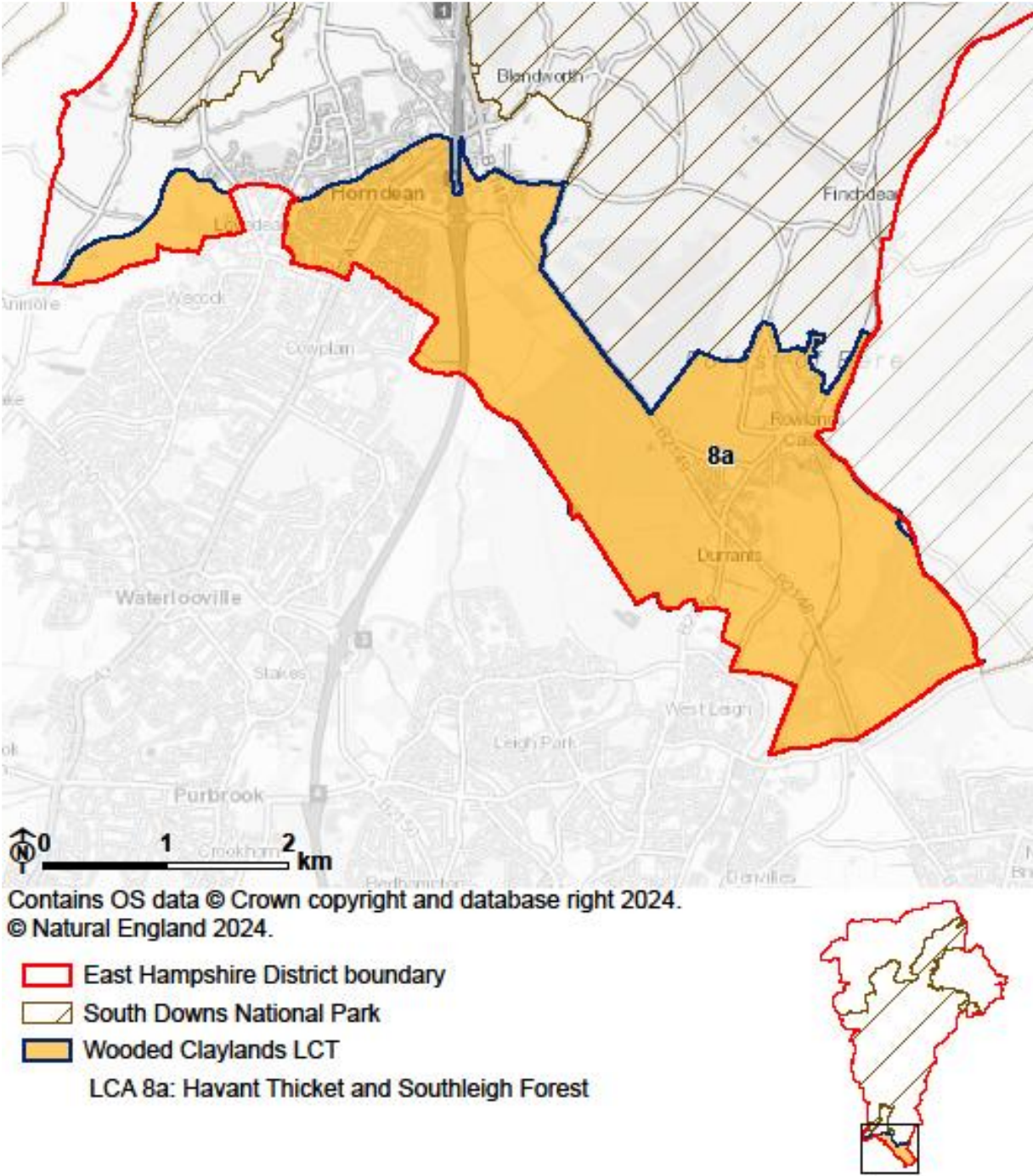
Figure 1.1: Location of the Wooded Claylands LCT	5
Figure 1.2: Public footpath through dense woodland within Havant Thicket	10
Figure 1.3: Pasture used for horse grazing with wooded backdrop including some settlement	11

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

# Landscape Character Type 8: Wooded Claylands

Figure 1.1: Location of the Wooded Claylands LCT



## Description

**1.1** The Wooded Claylands Landscape Character 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, a medieval royal hunting forest. Although part of a larger type (extending south into Havant District) the LCT key characteristics are specific to the study area.

## Key Characteristics

- Low lying, undulating, clay vale between the dipslope of the Chalk downland and the Portsdown chalk ridge.
- Underlying London Clay and Lambeth Group Formation produce a mixture of sandy and clayey soils which give rise to relatively unproductive agricultural land.
- Dominated by woodland, including Havant Thicket and Southleigh Forest, 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.
- Presence of lowland acid grassland (including at Blendworth Common and Hazleton Common Nature Reserve) and small remnants of lowland heath survives in woodland clearings.
- Woodland surrounded by regular 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century enclosures, many of which produce straight edges and sharp corners on the edges of the woodland.
- Encroachment onto the edge of common land is evident in common edge settlements, often with narrow parallel back garden plots e.g. at Rowland's Castle.

- Drained by a series of streams that flow south into the Langstone Channel.
- Extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation including common land, forest walks, cycling, golf and horse riding.

## Landscape Character Areas

**1.2** The Wooded Claylands LCT contains one LCA:

- LCA 8a: Havant Thicket and Southleigh Forest

# Landscape Character Area 8a: Havant Thicket and Southleigh Forest

## Description

## Location and Boundaries

**1.3** This Landscape Character Area (LCA) lies in the south of the district at the foot of the chalk downland dipslope. It incorporates part of the lower clay with flint covered chalk landscape around Horndean and Rowlands Castle and the clay vale to the south of this.

## 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 common land. Pockets of heathland within widespread lowland dry acid grassland are present (e.g. at Blendworth Common).
- Dominated by woodland, all of it pre-1800 but subsequently replanted (Havant Thicket and Southleigh Forest) and smaller copses which provide enclosure and a strong backdrop to views. Veteran trees are often found within hedgerows along field boundaries.
- The remnant woodland and common land represent fragments of the once extensive Forest of Bere – a medieval royal hunting preserve.
- Small geometric fields predominantly of recent enclosure with pasture, some managed as horse paddocks.



- Blendworth Common, Forestry Commission managed woodland at Havant Thicket and Staunton Country Park offer recreational opportunities and are grazed by livestock.
- Leigh Park (Grade II\* Registered Park and Garden) lies partly within this LCA within Staunton Country Park.
- Settlement comprises post-1800 expansion (Rowlands Castle and Horndean), possibly originating as common-edge settlements.
- Flint is a common and distinctive building material.
- Close proximity to Havant and Horndean allows good recreational access to this landscape and despite being adjacent to the urban edges there are opportunities to find places where there is a sense of relative tranquillity, for example, Havant Thicket near Staunton Country Park.
- The western part of the area (close to Horndean) is severed by the A3 motorway.
- Overall, this is a dynamic and visually busy landscape with pockets of relative tranquillity and strong rural character away from settlement.
- Currently, the first new UK reservoir in 30 years is being constructed in Staunton Country Park, with groundworks visible.

**Figure 1.2: Public footpath through dense woodland within Havant Thicket**



**Figure 1.3: Pasture used for horse grazing with wooded backdrop including some settlement**



## Natural Influences

### Physical Landscape

**1.4** This character area represents the transition from the chalk dipslope to the clay vale.

**1.5** 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 common land. 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



within the South Downs National Park to the north. Much of this LCA is covered by woodland bordered by geometric arable fields bounded by hedgerows with hedgerow trees.

**1.6** The LCA includes the source of a small number of streams, flowing south towards the Langstone Channel and there are occasional small ponds within woodland. 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 Portsmouth Water.

**1.7** Woodland, most of which is ancient, is significant in the landscape with larger blocks (e.g. Havant Thicket and Southleigh Forest) and smaller copses. Havant Thicket had examples of riparian woodland species in waterlogged ditches.

**1.8** Blendworth Common, also part of the historic Forest of Bere, includes areas managed by grazing where the former heathland cover is re-emerging. A restored landfill site lies in the south of the area enclosed by Southleigh Forest.

**1.9** Currently, the first new UK reservoir in 30 years is being constructed in Staunton Country Park, the groundworks of which are creating temporary visual obstruction.

## Biodiversity

**1.10** This character area is dominated by woodland, lowland dry acid grassland and floodplain grazing meadow. 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 characteristic of open semi-natural vegetation areas.

**1.11** Large blocks of woodland, such as Havant Thicket and Southleigh Forest, together with a number of smaller copses are of ancient origin and carry SINC designation. Hazleton Common Local Nature Reserve is another notable site within the LCA that comprises a mix of heathland, grassland, mixed gorse and woody scrub, ponds and wetland.

**1.12** Veteran trees found within hedgerows are ecologically important often supporting niche habitats.

## Cultural Influences

### Historic Landscape Character

**1.13** The intractable clay soils are likely to have limited early settlement and use of this area and the marginal character of the area is reflected in its historic 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.

**1.14** The area is dominated by woodland, all of it pre-1800 but much subsequently replanted. Woodland is surrounded by 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century enclosures of indicating enclosure of common land (such as at Blendworth Common). The presence of regular 19<sup>th</sup> century assarts to the south of Havant Thicket, soon to become Havant Thicket Reservoir, indicates that the woodland was previously more extensive. A small, isolated patch of early enclosure is located west of Lovedean.

**1.15** Key historic characteristics include:

- Settlement comprising post-1800 expansion (Rowlands Castle and Horndean), possibly originating as common-edge settlements.
- Historic parkland includes Leigh Park, a registered park and garden (RPG) at Staunton Country Park, and a small fragment of parkland at Rowlands Castle.

- 'The Castle' Scheduled Monument south of Rowlands Castle, which remains visible, albeit not accessible, as earthworks.
- Conservation areas at Rowlands Castle, including the large triangular village green and distinctive flint walls, and Sir George Staunton Park (overlapping with Leigh Park RPG), comprising parkland extending south into Havant, are indicative of historic landscape value in these areas.

## Settlement Form and Built Character

**1.16** The settlement pattern comprises nineteenth and later agglomerations originating as common edge settlement. There are few isolated farms.

**1.17** The LCA lies on the edge of Havant and incorporates part of Horndean. Settlements within the area include Rowlands Castle. The historic village of Rowland's Castle is based at the foot of the downs, around a triangular green, surrounded by more recent development extending southwards towards the edge of Havant. Locally important views across the village green towards Rowland's Castle URC Church also include railway arches and the flint wall surrounding Deerleap. Today, the area is characterised by modern suburban development. Typical building materials include flint, red brick and clay tiles.

## Perceptual Influences

**1.18** Woodland blocks provide a sense of enclosure contrasting with the more open areas of pasture, paddock, common land 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 LCA, although the repetition of woodland and pasture do provide some unity.

**1.19** Visual intrusion and noise disruption from roads, settlement edges, and pylon lines has eroded the rural character in places. However, the woodland provides a degree of containment and screening, often restricting views to pastoral fields and wooded skylines. Veteran trees in hedgerows along field

boundaries aid screening. There are opportunities to find areas where there is a sense of relative tranquillity.

**1.20** Whilst the PRoW network is relatively sparse, 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 cuts through this area, as do National Cycle Network Routes 22 and 222 (albeit both fragmented). The Forestry Commission manages Havant Thicket with numerous permissive tracks providing good access and recreational opportunities, and there is open access land at Hazleton Common. Staunton Way long distance footpath crosses the area. It 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 Shipwrights Way.

## Evaluation

### Key Sensitivities and Values

- Mosaic of woodland, heath and pasture, including 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.
- Veteran trees and their associated aesthetic, historic and ecological value.
- Lowland dry acid grassland and areas of heath and heathland regeneration including at Blendworth Common, which is a common land of the Forest of Bere
- Small watercourses, ponds and wetland habitats that are sensitive to change from climate change and habitat degradation, including from increased seasonal flooding, increased temperatures, and periods of drought.

- The pattern of early enclosures and assarts and pastoral fields which are vulnerable to loss/neglect of boundaries or changes to boundaries associated with use for horse grazing.
- The intact historic core of Rowlands Castle, including locally important views across the village green towards Rowland's Castle URC Church.
- The distinctive pattern and setting of common edge settlements including the open rural gap and sense of separation between Havant and Rowlands Castle.
- Strong sense of separation between Rowlands Castle and Havant, which could be eroded by future development in this area.
- The use of flint as a distinctive building material.
- Historic parkland at Staunton Park (which falls partly in this LCA), Leigh Park and its associated cultural and natural heritage value.
- High recreational value of Havant Thicket, Staunton Country Park, and the public rights of way (PRoW) network, including several long-distance footpaths.
- Pockets of relative tranquillity associated with woodland and areas with strong rural character in an otherwise busy landscape are threatened by traffic and future large-scale development.

## Guidance

### Landscape Strategy

**1.21** 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

- Conserve the mosaic of woodland, heath, dry acid grassland and pasture which forms the relic fragment of the former Royal Forest of Bere. Increase awareness of the Forest of Bere through provision of appropriate interpretation.
- Conserve and manage woodland and ancient woodland 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 [See reference 2].. This will contribute to landscape resilience and also minimise the risk of damage as a result of increased storms and high winds.
- 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 streams, ponds and areas of wetland habitat.
- Monitor water quality in streams and seek to ensure high water quality and minimise water pollution.
- Manage veteran trees appropriately to enhance longevity and maximise biodiversity value.
- Ensure appropriate management of Blendworth Common through grazing regimes to prevent scrub encroachment and promote heathland regeneration, and consider opportunities for further heathland creation on former commons within areas of plantation to create a suite of linked heathland sites. Seek to expand conservation grazing as a traditional form of land 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 to create a wildlife-rich habitat supporting farmland birds.
- Conserve fields of grazed pasture and resist change to paddock.
- Encourage sensitive integration of existing paddock fencing and encourage replanting of hedgerows to conserve and connect the field pattern.
- Conserve and enhance the historic parklands at Staunton Park through replacement tree planting and the restoration of parkland pasture.
- Consider management of the grass on the village green in Rowlands Castle to provide habitat for wildlife through relaxing mowing regimes and/ or meadow creation, including the verges.
- Maintain and enhance rights of way and improve links to the long-distance footpaths from settlements 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.
- In line with Site Specific Project 5 in the East Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy 2019, support the delivery of Havant Thicket Reservoir, enhancing accessibility to and from the site from surrounding open spaces and settlement.
- Encourage sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, hardstanding, jumps and other paraphernalia that are associated with horse keeping.

## Development Management

- Consider further opportunities for woodland planting within and around settlements and the urban edge to provide integration and screening.
- 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].
- Respect the distinctive pattern and setting of common edge settlements and conserve the intact historic core at Rowlands Castle.
- Maintain the open rural gap and sense of separation between Havant and Rowlands Castle. 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.
- 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.
- 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. Design should adhere to the guidance in Rowlands Castle Village Design Statement 2000 (1<sup>st</sup> Revision 2019).
- Consider potential to maximise opportunities for this area to provide a recreational gateway to the South Downs, and to Staunton Country Park.
- Ensure that new development is integrated into the existing network of PRoW.
- Ensure any future changes in association with the A3 motorway respects the character of the area and avoids use of excessive lighting, signage and 'suburban' features.

- 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

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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)