



New Forest National Park Landscape Character Assessment



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Bluebells in ancient woodland, Brockenhurst

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Preparation of the Landscape Character Assessment

This plan has been prepared by the New Forest National Park Authority with the help and assistance of the Landscape Strategy Steering Group which comprises representatives from Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, Forestry Commission, Natural England, Wiltshire Council, Test Valley Borough Council and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. Several meetings of the Steering Group were held in 2008/2009 to develop the Landscape Character Assessment.

A joint Landscape and Wildlife Roadshow public consultation was held in June and July 2010 which included five events in and around the National Park, an open consultation with questionnaire, website information and advertisements in the local press. The events were well attended by members of the public and many useful contributions and opinions were received. Presentations were made to the New Forest Consultative Panel in January 2011 and May 2013. A 17 week public consultation was held between April and July 2013 on the draft Landscape Character Assessment. In addition, meetings were held with Parish Councils and local interest groups during the same period.

The Landscape Character Assessment was approved at the New Forest National Park Authority meeting in September 2013.

April 2015



Autumn leaves, near Brockenhurst

Introduction

- 1.1 From the wooded slopes of Wiltshire in the north and across the central plateau to the open coastline of the Solent in the south, the New Forest National Park has a rich variety of landscapes. Whilst they all have a distinctive character they are also all recognisably part of the New Forest.
- 1.2 Landscape character assessments are a tool for setting out what makes one place different from another. They identify those features, such as variations in the natural environment, settlement pattern and land uses, that give a locality its 'sense of place' and pinpoint what makes it different from neighbouring areas. It also provides a framework to help measure how the landscape changes over time.
- 1.3 In 2000, New Forest District Council took the broad National Character Areas produced in the 1990s by the Countryside Agency and developed a more detailed Landscape Character Assessment. This subdivided the New Forest into areas of similar character and type, describing key features and management guidelines.
- 1.4 The adopted New Forest National Park Management Plan includes a commitment to undertake more work on ways to conserve and enhance the local landscapes. As a result this document builds on the New Forest District Landscape Character Assessment and takes each of the landscape character areas that fall or part fall within the National Park boundary. It also:
 - identifies the landscape features/attributes within that area that are most important in defining its character and sense of place
 - identifies the condition of the landscape and the most important features within it
 - considers the forces for change acting on the landscape and
 - on the basis of the above, identifies the future draft vision for that landscape character area and supporting management guidelines.
- 1.5 The Landscape Character Assessment is a technical document which can be used in many situations such as devising indicators to gauge landscape change, and informing future planning policies and proposals.
- 1.6 A public consultation was held in 2010 with five road shows and an open consultation comprising a questionnaire, website information and advertisements in the local press, seeking the views of residents. Presentations were made to the New Forest Consultative Panel in January 2011 and May 2013. A 17 week public consultation on the draft Landscape Character Assessment was held between April and July 2013. In addition, meetings were held with Parish Councils and local interest groups.

Related documents

- 1.7 The Landscape Character Assessment develops the broad aims and strategies of the adopted New Forest National Park Management Plan and Core Strategy. It also sits alongside, and complements, other National Park documents such as the Conservation Areas Character Appraisals, Design Guide, Recreation Management Strategy and numerous Village Design Statements.



Pony, early morning

The landscape of the New Forest

- 2.1 The New Forest National Park covers 56,658 hectares (220 square miles) and, with the exception of the Broads, is the smallest National Park in the UK. The New Forest is one of the UK's last extensive areas of semi-natural habitat and pastoral farming that owes its origins to management as a medieval royal hunting forest and the survival of a strong commoning system. Commoning in the New Forest became formalised in the late medieval period. This is one of the few remaining extensive systems of common rights operating in lowland Europe.
- 2.2 Lying within the Hampshire Basin, the New Forest forms an elevated plateau of sands, gravels and clays that slopes gently to the coast of the Solent, bounded by the River Valleys of the Avon to the west (partially lying within the National Park) and the Test to the east. A steeply wooded ridge marks the western edge of the plateau and the start of the distinctive Forest core – a mosaic of woodland, ancient wood pasture, stream valleys, heathland, mire and forest farmlands. The northern part of the plateau contains dramatic landforms with extensive elevated open heathland plains cut by steeply eroded U-shaped valleys. The A31 divides the plateau along a natural watershed. To the south of this the landscape is more verdant with open lawns and larger areas of semi-natural woodland and wood pasture, as well as extensive open heathland. This whole area reveals an incredible time depth, preserved through the system of commoning, including 340 Bronze Age barrows and fine Iron Age hillforts. In all the National Park has 214 Scheduled Monuments, some 10% of all Scheduled Monuments in South East England.
- 2.3 The unenclosed semi-natural woodlands, heathlands, mires and grass lawns together form the area known as the 'Open Forest', interspersed with large wooded Inclosures. Combined, these cover some 50% of the National Park area and are managed largely by public and voluntary bodies – the Forestry Commission (responsible for managing the Crown Lands of the National Park, which covers some 26,756 hectares or 47% of the National Park), the National Trust, Hampshire County Council and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. Much of the Open Forest is of national or international importance for nature conservation.
- 2.4 The Forest Inclosures were created at various times since the 17th century and are fenced to protect them from grazing stock. Many of the older broad-leaved woodlands, older conifer plantations and specimen conifers are important landscape features and wildlife habitats.
- 2.5 Pockets of ancient forest farmlands and small-holdings with strong commoning traditions border the Open Forest. Heathland commons run along the western and northern edges of the Open Forest while assarted fields (medieval fields cut out from the original woodland cover) and woodlands are particularly characteristic of the eastern and southern boundaries. In contrast the large-scale coastal estates along the Solent fringes are dominated by parliamentary enclosures evident in large rectangular fields bounded by predominantly hawthorn hedgerows.
- 2.6 In total some 23% of the National Park (13,000 hectares) is privately managed farmland. These

enclosed lands of small-holdings and large estates create a rural landscape characterised by scattered farmsteads and hamlets, narrow winding lanes and small fields divided by thick hedgerows. About 62% of the enclosed farmland is under pasture although there are areas of arable cultivation especially in the north and south east.

- 2.7 The wild and flat Solent shoreline extends over 42 kilometres (26 miles) with extensive areas of mudflats, shingle and salt marsh, backed in places by low cliffs. Unusual habitats include oak woodland coming down to the water's edge along the Beaulieu Estuary and a series of saline lagoons (Salterns) at Keyhaven.
- 2.8 Settlements are part of the distinct landscape of the New Forest and have their own distinct sense of place. Historically the towns and villages of the New Forest developed on the more productive land of the river valleys and coastal plain fringing the Forest core. The older market towns of Lymington, Ringwood and Fordingbridge now lie outside the National Park boundary. The four main villages of the National Park are Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst, Sway and Ashurst.
- 2.9 Rural settlement is either nucleated as in Beaulieu or Woodgreen, or dispersed with scattered hamlets such as Frogham. Linear villages, such as East Boldre, developed later as land was enclosed piecemeal from the Open Forest. The main villages expanded from the 19th century onwards and have a denser settlement pattern. Some of the larger estates have buildings set within landscaped grounds and parkland.
- 2.10 The relationship between the Forest and neighbouring sea and land is close, with strong historic links to a far wider area of common land and a rich history of salt production and ship building on the coast. In modern times the constant evolution of urban expansion and industrial development from outside the Forest impacts within. Decisions made beyond the Forest's boundaries can affect the special qualities of the National Park.
- 2.11 The New Forest District Landscape Character Assessment (2000) divides this landscape into a number of character areas which help to identify the differing pressures, trends and opportunities.

- 2.12 For each landscape character area lying wholly or in part within the National Park the character assessments divide into three parts:
- Description¹ - key characteristics, attributes and designations
 - Evaluation¹ - condition, issues and trends
 - Landscape Quality Objectives² - a vision and a plan looking at the landscapes today.
- 2.12 The individual landscape character assessments are set out as follows (the character areas marked # are wholly within the National Park):
- Upper Avon Valley
 - Lower Avon Valley
 - Poulner Woods and Pastures #
 - Landford Forest Farmlands
 - West Wellow Heaths and Commons
 - Copythorne Forest Farmlands
 - Hythe and Ashurst Forest Farmlands
 - North West Solent Estates
 - Lymington and Pennington Coastal Plain
 - Sway Pasture and Residential Settlements
 - Bransgore Woods and Pastures
 - Southern Heathland and Forest #
 - Northern Heathland and Forest #
 - Furzey Woodland and Villages #
 - New Forest Central Woodlands #
 - Lymington River #
 - Beaulieu Heath #
 - Eastern Forest Heaths

1 From New Forest District Landscape Character Assessment (2000)

2 The term Landscape Quality Objectives (LQOs) comes from the European Landscape Convention (ELC). According to the ELC, Landscape Quality Objectives should:

- *Identify the characteristics that local people want recognised in their surroundings (i.e. what aspects of the landscape they value most).*
- *Set out the objectives that are being pursued for that landscape.*



Pasture fields
around Fritham



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