

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
2013

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1 Introduction

National Character Areas were first introduced by the Countryside Agency in the 1990's with broad areas of the country mapped according to similar landscape types. The New Forest was shown as one large character area. In 2000, New Forest District Council produced a more detailed Landscape Character Assessment which subdivided the New Forest into areas of similar character and type, describing key features and management guidelines.

This document builds on the New Forest District Landscape Character Assessment (2000). It takes each of the landscape character areas that fall all or part within the National Park boundary and:

- 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 to assist in the achievement of the vision.

The Landscape Character Assessment has close ties to the Conservation Areas Character Appraisals, Design Guide and Village Design Statements. The aim of all the documents being to preserve the special qualities of the National Park.

2 The landscape of the New Forest

- 2.1 The New Forest National Park covers 56,658 hectares (220 square miles) and is the smallest National Park in the UK other than the Broads. The New Forest is one of the last extensive areas of semi-natural habitat and pastoral farming in the UK 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, intimate 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, covering 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 broadleaved woodlands 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 assorted 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 and meadowland, 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 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 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 that have some variation in each area.
- 2.11 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.

¹ From New Forest District Landscape Character Assessment (2000)

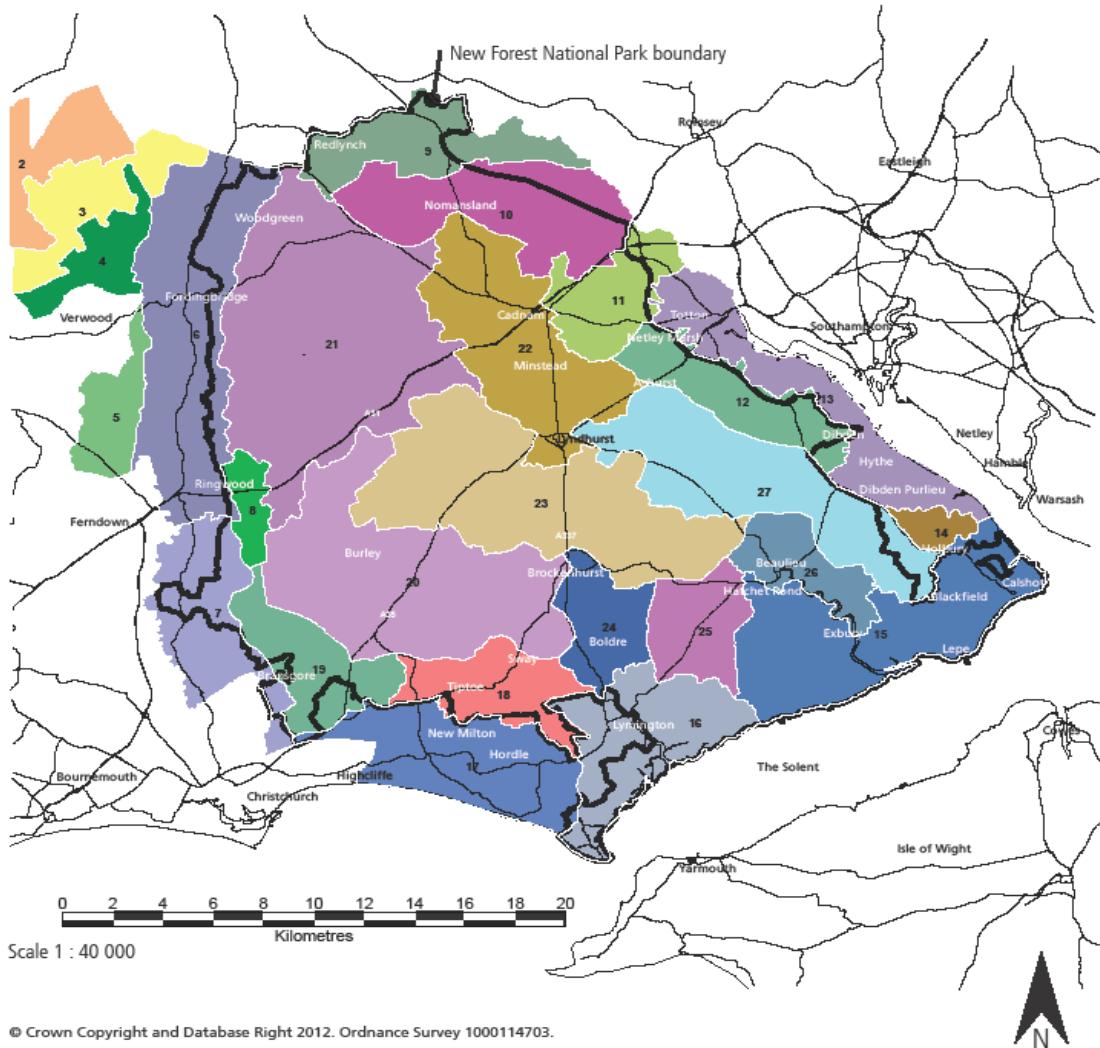
² The term Landscape Quality Objectives (LQOs) comes from the European Landscape Convention (ELC). According to the ELC, Landscape Quality Objectives should:

- 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.

2.12 The individual landscape character assessments are set out below (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 Smallholdings
- 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

Landscape Character Areas



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Key

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| 2. Martin and Whitsbury Open Farmland | 19. Bransgore Woods And Pastures |
| 3. Damerham and Rockbourne Valley | 20. Southern Heath and Forest |
| 4. Wooded Sandheath Farmland | 21. Northern Heath and Forest |
| 5. Ringwood Forest | 22. Furzey Woodland and Villages |
| 6. Upper Avon Valley | 23. New Forest Central Woodlands |
| 7. Lower Avon Valley | 24. Lymington River LCA |
| 8. Poulner Woods and Pastures | 25. Beaulieu Heath |
| 9. Landford Forest Farmlands | 26. Beaulieu River LCA |
| 10. West Wellow Heaths and Commons | 27. Eastern Forest Heaths |
| 11. Copythorne Forest Farmlands | |
| 12. Hythe and Ashurst Forest Farmlands | |
| 13. Waterside Parishes | |
| 14. Fawley Refinery Complex | |
| 15. North West Solent Estates | |
| 16. Lymington and Pennington Coastal Plain | |
| 17. Barton And Milford Coastal Plain | |
| 18. Sway Pasture and Smallholdings | |

