

Chapter 3

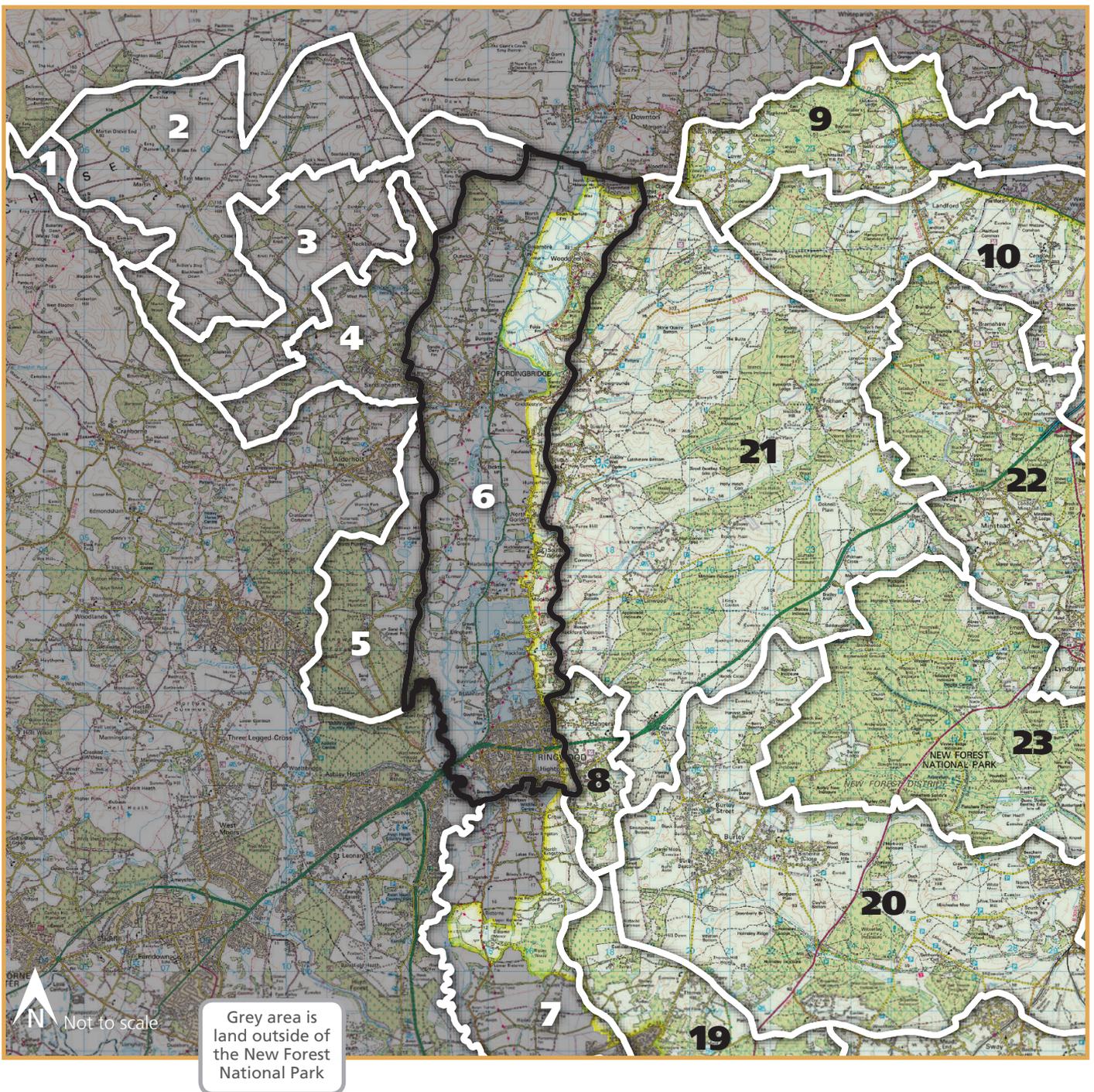
Landscape Character Assessments



View across the Avon Valley from Hale

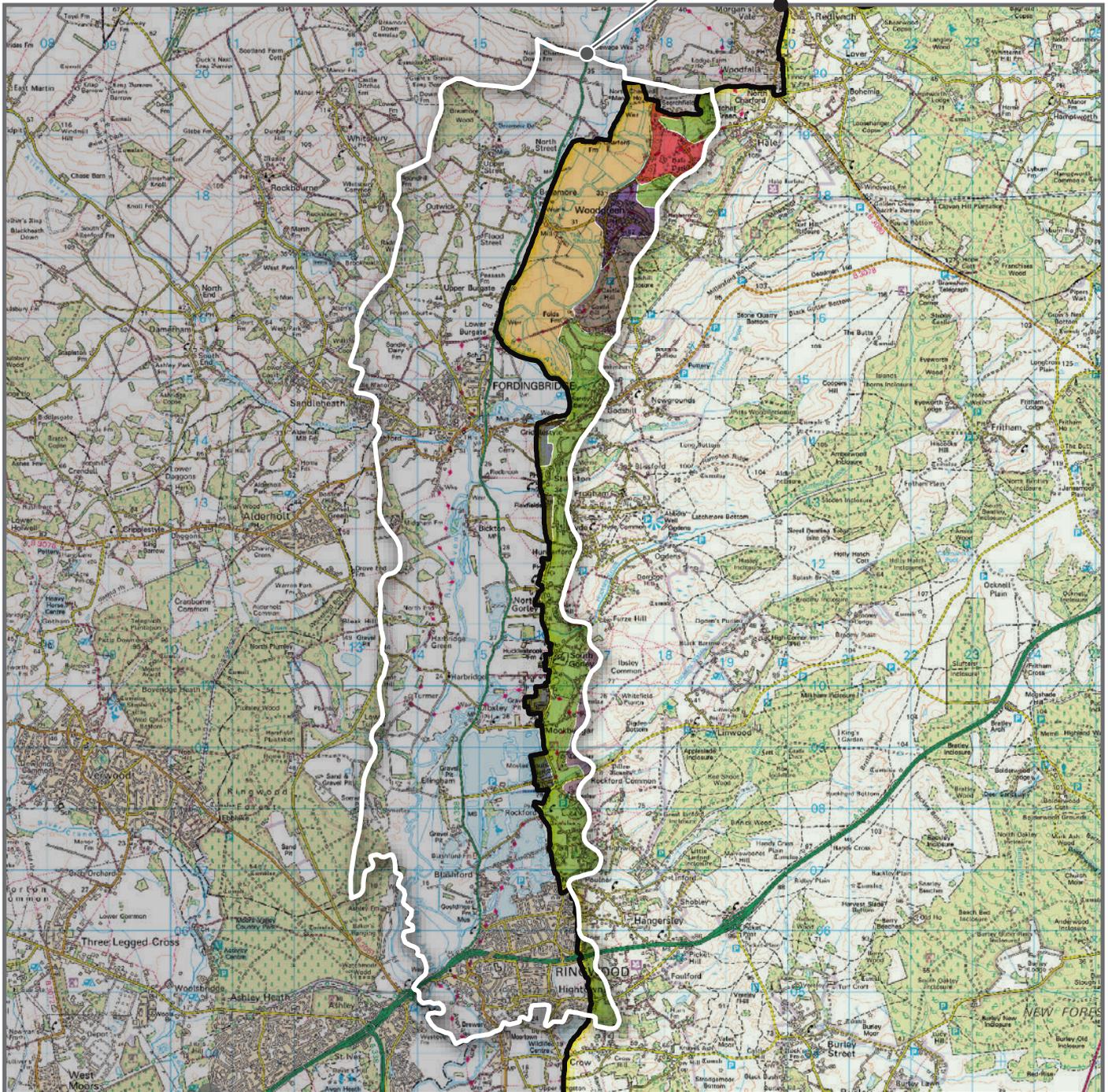
LCA 6: UPPER AVON VALLEY

Location of LCA in the National Park



Component landscape types within LCA 6

LCA 6
National Park boundary



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Not to scale

Area in shadow- outside National Park

- 6. Heath associated smallholdings and dwellings
- 7. Ancient Forest farmlands
- 11. River terrace farmlands
- 12. River floodplain
- 20. Heathland
- 21. Historic parkland

Only the eastern slopes and the northern most part of the floodplain of the Upper Avon Valley fall within the New Forest National Park.

A. LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

Key landscape characteristics¹

- Broad open valley containing the meandering River Avon and enclosed to the east by a steep wooded ridge;
- Gently meandering river with stone bridges at minor crossing points;
- Large areas of neutral unimproved grassland and open water meadows of high nature conservation importance;
- Large settlements of Fordingbridge and Ringwood in the floodplain are historic crossing points of the river;
- Main A338 runs the length of the valley with minor crossings in an East-West direction;
- Church towers are features, protruding from trees within the floodplain;
- Timber framed thatched cottages are a feature of the valley;
- Open bodies of water resulting from gravel extraction, function as important breeding grounds and habitats for wintering wildfowl as well as recreational lakes;
- Distant views to steep wooded slopes.

Component landscape types

The main landscape types found within this LCA, in the New Forest National Park, are:

6. Heath Associated Smallholdings and Dwellings
7. Ancient Forest Farmlands
11. River Terrace Farmlands
12. River Floodplain
20. Heathland
21. Historic Parkland

Key positive landscape attributes

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ River Avon and seasonally flooded historic water meadows, marsh and rough grazing on the valley floor. ■ Stone bridges, mills and historic built features on the valley floor. ■ Small, traditional fields of pasture (including assarted fields) bound by thick thorn hedgerows and hedgerow oaks. ■ Semi-natural broadleaved woodlands on the valley side comprising some ancient hanger woodland, areas of ancient wood pasture, and plantation woodlands. ■ Historic parkland, including historic landscape features such as avenues and copses at Hale Park. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Historic features including a hillfort on the valley side. ■ Open heathland on the top of the valley side at Mockbeggar. ■ Enclosed heaths. Villages/hamlets often with an historic core and village green or common on the valley side. ■ Scattered smallholdings and dwellings with common grazing interspersed with pastures and paddocks on the valley side. ■ A network of narrow lanes and residual commons, including drove roads running from the lower land up to the commons. ■ Panoramic views from Castle Hill towards Breamore. |
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¹ Note that because most of this LCA falls outside the National Park, some of these key characteristics, taken from the New Forest District Landscape Character Assessment, do not apply. See the table of positive landscape attributes for information on the landscape attributes within the National Park.

Relevant designations relating to positive landscape attributes

Key landscape features	Relevant designations
River Avon and seasonally flooded historic water meadows, marsh and rough grazing on the valley floor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Part of the Breamore Conservation Area. ■ River Avon is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). ■ The river forms part of the River Avon System Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Area (SPA) ■ Some meadows are designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) e.g. Breamore Meadow.
Stone bridges, mills and historic built features on the valley floor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Part of the Breamore Conservation Area. ■ St Michael's Priory is a Scheduled Monument (SM); ■ Includes listed buildings.
Small, traditional fields of pasture (including assarted fields) bound by thick thorn hedgerows and hedgerow oaks.	
Semi-natural broadleaved woodlands on the valley side comprising some ancient hanger woodland, areas of ancient wood pasture, and plantation woodlands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Some woodlands designated as SINCs e.g. Sandy Balls Wood.
Coniferous plantation woodland on heathland at Godshill Inclosure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Part of the New Forest SPA, SAC and SSSI.
Historic parkland, including historic landscape features such as avenues and copses at Hale Park.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Part of the Western Escarpment Conservation Area. ■ Grade II* listed park (on English Heritage's Register). ■ Includes listed buildings.
Historic features including a hillfort on the valley side.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Frankenbury Hillfort is a SM.
Open heathland on the top of the valley side at Mockbeggar.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Part of the New Forest SPA, SAC and SSSI.
Enclosed heaths.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ N/A
Villages/hamlets often with an historic core and village green or common on the valley side.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Part of the Western Escarpment Conservation Area; ■ Includes listed buildings.
Scattered smallholdings and dwellings with common grazing and interspersed with pastures and paddocks on the valley side.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Part of the Western Escarpment Conservation Area; ■ Includes listed buildings.
A network of narrow lanes and residual commons, including drove roads running from the lower land up to the commons.	
Panoramic views from Castle Hill towards Breamore.	

B. LANDSCAPE EVALUATION

Current condition

Landscape structure: This is a largely intact landscape with historic origins. The structure of the river flood plain, comprising water meadows, marsh and rough grazing on the valley floor is intact. The mosaic of woodlands, fields (including small assorted fields), commons and villages on the valley side is intact, although there is evidence of some field boundary loss which is beginning to erode landscape structure of the Ancient Forest Farmlands landscape type. The structure of Hale Park is readable in the landscape.

Landscape elements: The condition of individual elements in the floodplain landscape is good with bridges and mills in good repair, a varied age structure of trees and actively grazed fields. However, there is evidence of some paddocks on the floodplain. Large electricity pylons cross the floodplain, dominating views. On the valley side, in the Ancient Forest Farmlands landscape type, there is some evidence of under-grazed fields, gappy and grown-out hedgerows and hedgerow loss. The elements that comprise Hale Park are generally intact, but in variable condition. In the Heath Associated Smallholdings and Dwellings landscape type there is evidence of coniferous species associated with gardens, close board fencing and signage which is suburbanising the area.

Landscape change

Key issues and trends

- Further loss of, or fragmentation of, hedgerows – altering the structure the landscape by affecting the small scale field pattern sense of enclosure. Loss of hedgerow oaks, as key features associated with the Forest, is also an issue (in the Ancient Forest Farmlands type).
- Under-grazed fields - affecting the condition of the Ancient Forest Farmlands landscape type.
- Changes in land use resulting in potential loss of historic water meadows and characteristic floodplain habitat, reducing the sense of openness of the flood plain and changing the traditional land use of rough grazing (in the River Floodplain type).
- Restoration of past coniferisation of open heathland and 19th century beech and oak Inclosures through clearfell positively affecting parts of the Heathland landscape type.
- Decline in traditional woodland management and loss of wood pasture, decreasing the diversity of woodlands in both the Historic Parkland and Ancient Forest Farmlands types.
- Changing pests and diseases leading to decline or death of certain tree species.
- Expansion of coniferous and non-native species in private gardens – eroding the rural character of the area and spreading into semi-natural woodlands (in the Heath Associated Smallholdings and Dwellings landscape type).
- Replacement of native hedgerows or open roadside property curtilages with impermeable and suburban boundary treatments e.g. close board fencing and ornamental brick walls – eroding the rural character of the landscape (in the Heath Associated Smallholdings and Dwellings landscape type).
- Proliferation of signage - eroding the rural and open character of the landscape (in the Heath Associated Smallholdings and Dwellings landscape type).
- Encroachment of settlement onto commons – eroding the traditional character of the Ancient Forest Farmlands landscape type.

C. LANDSCAPE QUALITY OBJECTIVES (LQOS) / STRATEGY

Vision

An open floodplain landscape of historic water meadows and unimproved grazing marsh subdivided by occasional hedgerows with ancient oak and willows, enclosed by a contrasting valley side that supports a mosaic of small scale fields bound by well managed hedgerows with hedgerow oaks, managed semi-natural broadleaved woodlands (including assarted woodlands and ancient hanger woodlands), wood pasture, ancient commons supporting unimproved grazing, scattered smallholdings and dwellings, and historic parkland. A landscape in which rural villages and hamlets have strong functional and visual links with commoning communities, historic elements such as hillforts and historic parkland forming landmark features. A landscape that is clearly part of the New Forest, with good links to the river floodplain to the west and to the central forest landscapes to the east.

Overall Landscape Strategy

The priority in this landscape character area is to **protect** the positive landscape attributes valued within it. This will require active protection.

This should be accompanied by a strategy to **manage** the landscape to improve those attributes that are in poorer condition to improve overall quality.

Management guidelines number
(as per following table LCA 6)

Future landscape management guidelines

Field patterns and boundary features

1. Protect the mosaic of small scale fields bounded by well managed hedgerows with hedgerow oaks on the valley sides – manage to retain and enhance the strong hedgerow network that reflects the historic origins of the landscape (particularly in the Ancient Forest Farmlands landscape type).

Agricultural land use

2. Protect the open floodplain landscape of historic water meadows and unimproved grazing marsh.
3. Manage through grazing to maintain the continuity of a grazed landscape, able to provide grazing for commonable animals.
4. Manage the characteristic open floodplain habitats and traditional land use of rough grazing (in the River Floodplain landscape type) – maintaining traditional field patterns.

Forestry and woodlands

5. Protect the semi-natural broadleaved woodlands (including assarted woodlands and ancient hanger woodlands) through the removal of exotics and manage these to maintain a diverse age structure through coppicing and pollarding where appropriate – helping increase adaptation to climate change (in the Ancient Forest Farmlands, Heath Associated Smallholdings and Dwellings and Historic Parkland types).
6. Protect the remaining areas of wood pasture, heathland and ancient commons and manage these by maintaining common grazing.
7. Plan for the gradual restoration of the conifer plantation at Godshill Inclosure to predominantly mixed and broadleaved woodland, by allowing broadleaf regeneration (in the Heathland landscape type). Refer to the appropriate Forest Design Plan for more detailed information.

Historic landscapes and features

8. Protect the stone bridges and mills that are features of the valley floor (in the River Floodplain landscape type) – manage these to ensure their survival.
9. Protect historic elements such as hillforts and historic parkland features and manage these to ensure they form visible features in the landscape.

Development and settlement edge

10. Protect the distinctive historic pattern of settlement with distinctive rural villages, hamlets and scattered smallholdings and dwellings – maintaining the rural character of the landscape with, for example, property boundaries of native hedgerows or railings rather than suburban close-board fencing, external lighting kept to a minimum and selection of deciduous species rather than ornamental conifers on garden boundaries (particularly in the Heath Associated Smallholdings and Dwellings landscape type).
11. Protect the strong functional and visual links between the settlements and their landscape setting and manage common grazing to maintain the character of these settlements, ensuring settlement does not encroach onto commons.
12. Protect the network of narrow lanes and residual commons.
13. Protect and enhance the physical and visual links between the river floodplain to the west and the central forest landscapes to the east, including maintaining the drove roads running from the lower land up to the commons.
14. Refer to the Western Escarpment Conservation Areas Appraisal and the Breamore Conservation Area Appraisal for details on historic landscape setting, layout and plan form of the historic settlements, and architectural styles, materials and detailing of buildings within these settlements.

Summary table LCA 6 showing landscape issues and guidelines by Landscape Type

Landscape type	Summary of issue	Management guidelines (number)
River Floodplain	Increase in subdivision of land on the floodplain.	4
	Loss of historic water meadows and characteristic floodplain habitat, reducing the sense of openness.	2, 4
Heathland	Past coniferisation of open heathland and historic beech and oak Inclosures.	6, 7
Heath Associated Smallholdings and Dwellings	Spread of exotic species, including rhododendron, into semi-natural woodlands. Lack of woodland management.	5, 10
	Replacement of traditional hedgerow boundaries with suburban treatments such as close board fencing.	10
	Proliferation of signage	10
Ancient Forest Farmlands	Hedgerow and hedgerow tree loss, affecting ancient field patterns.	1
	Undergrazed fields.	2
	Spread of exotic species, including rhododendron, into semi-natural woodlands. Lack of woodland management.	5
	Spread of development onto common land.	10,11,14
Historic Parkland	Spread of exotic species, including rhododendron, into semi-natural woodlands. Lack of woodland management.	5
	Loss of wood pasture.	6
Heath Associated Estates	No issues identified	N/A
ALL – LANDSCAPE-WIDE ISSUES	Development pressure (National Park wide issue)	10,11,12,13, 14

PHOTOGRAPHS OF LCA 6: UPPER AVON VALLEY

Infill development, Woodgreen



View across the Avon Valley from Hale

