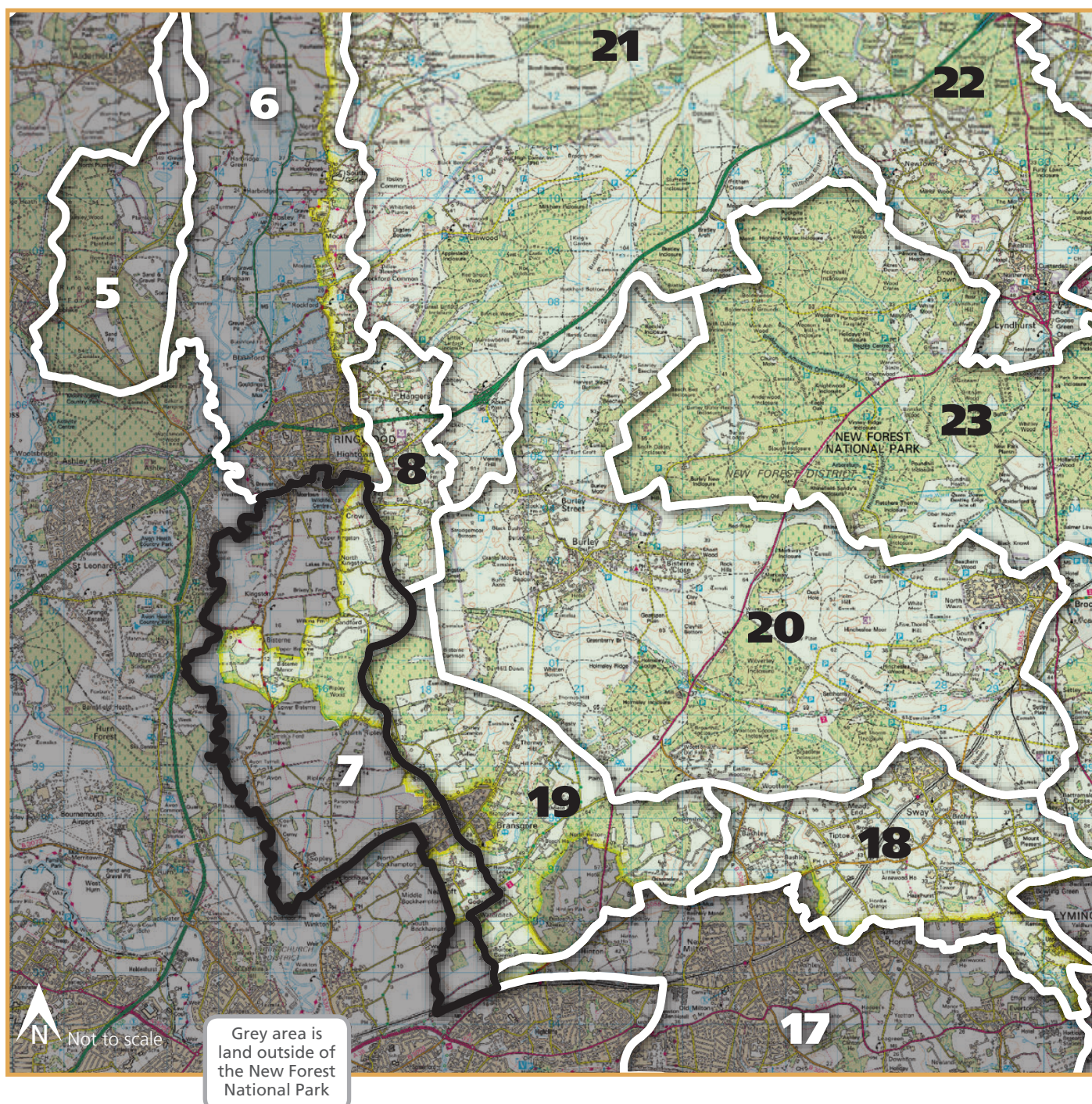




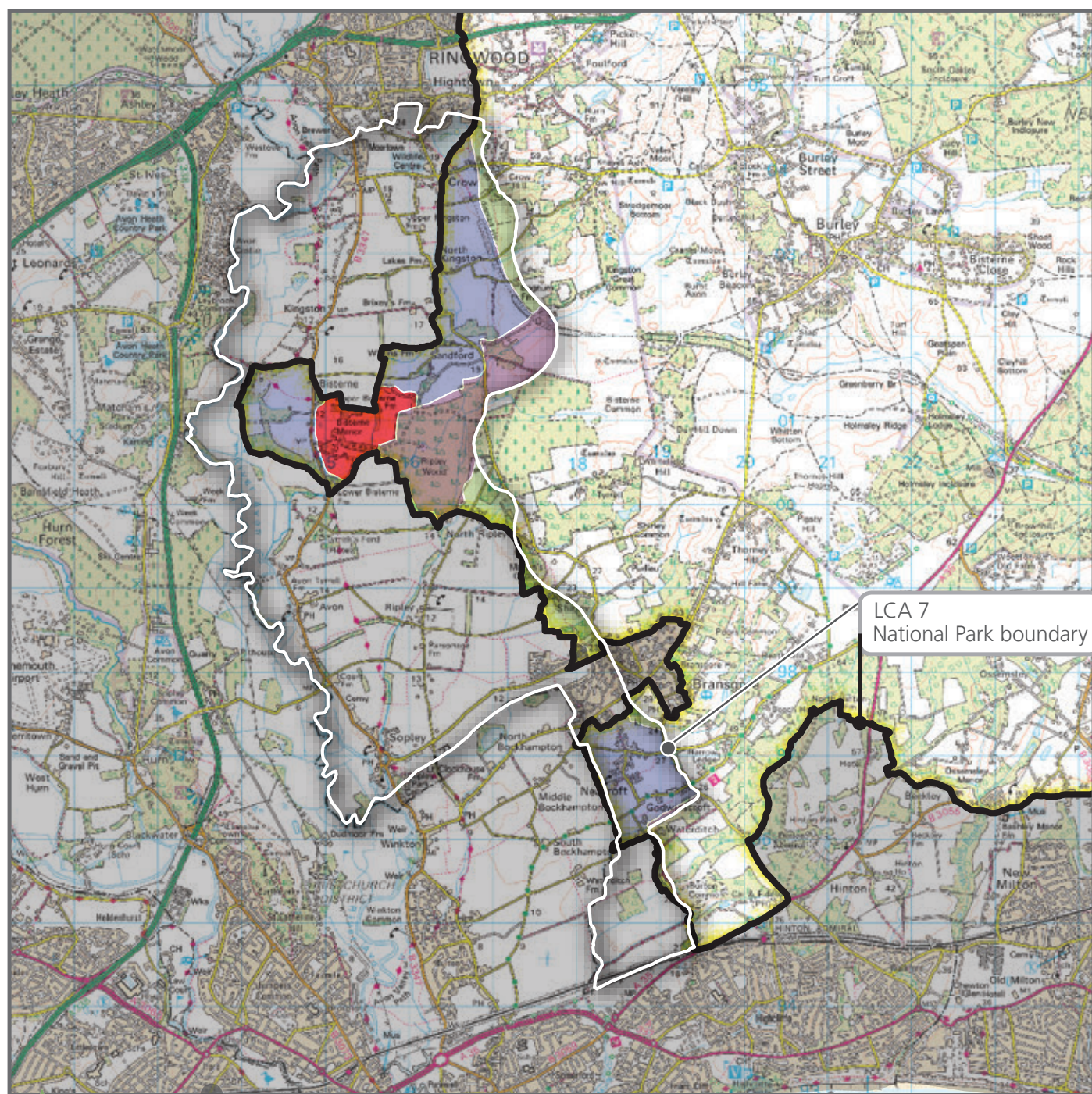
Arable fields near Sandford

LCA 7: LOWER AVON VALLEY

Location of LCA in the National Park



Component landscape types within LCA 7



Not to scale

Area in shadow- outside National Park

- 5. Heath Associated Estates
- 7. Ancient Forest Farmlands
- 11. River Terrace Farmlands
- 21. Historic Parkland

Only the central, north eastern and southern part of the Lower Avon Valley fall within the New Forest National Park.

A. LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

Key landscape characteristics¹

- Broad flat plain at approximately 14m above Ordnance Datum containing the meandering course of the River Avon.
- Tranquil pastoral scene on the floodplain, with open watermeadows and cattle grazing in the shade of mature trees (willows, poplars and oaks).
- Regular patchwork of mixed farmland divided by hedgerows with hedgerow trees or thick mature tree belts.
- Straight lanes follow field boundaries, creating a regular grid pattern.
- The river creates a barrier to movement west; the Avon Causeway provides the only crossing point.
- A major communication route, the B3347, runs north-south along the length of the valley with the small hamlets of Avon, Bisterne and Kingston situated along the road.
- Built development characterised by red brick thatched cottages and weather boarding on agricultural buildings.
- Long views and big skies.

Component landscape types

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

- 5. Heath Associated Estates
- 7. Ancient Forest Farmlands
- 11. River Terrace Farmlands
- 21. Historic Parkland

Key positive landscape attributes

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Flat open landscape characterised by mixed farming with floodplain meadows in the west. ■ Regular fields of late Medieval and Parliamentary enclosure, divided by hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees. ■ Small woodland copses sitting within the farmland mosaic. ■ Large block of wooded heath at Ripley Wood. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Historic parkland and veteran trees surrounding Bisterne Manor. ■ Area crossed by quiet rural lanes lined by hedgerows and woodland. ■ Sparse settlement with red brick farmsteads and cottages within quiet hamlets. ■ Long views often framed by trees and woodland. ■ Landscape derived from topography of inland windblown sand. |
|--|--|

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

Positive landscape features	Relevant designations
Flat open landscape characterised by mixed farming with floodplain meadows in the west.	■ A small area of meadow falls within the Avon Valley SSSI.
Regular fields of Parliamentary enclosure, divided by hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees.	■ N/A
Small woodland copses sitting within the farmland mosaic.	■ Four areas of woodland in the LCA are designated as SINC.
Large block of wooded heath at Ripley Wood.	■ Parts of Ripley Wood are designated as SINC.
Historic parkland and veteran trees surrounding Bisterne Manor.	■ Bisterne Manor is a Grade II Listed Building.
Area crossed by quiet rural lanes lined by hedgerows and woodland.	■ N/A
Sparse settlement with red brick farmsteads and cottages within quiet hamlets.	■ A number of farmsteads are Listed Buildings.
Long views often framed by trees and woodland.	■ N/A

B. LANDSCAPE EVALUATION

Current condition

Landscape structure: This is a landscape that was formalised in the 18th and 19th centuries, reflected in the continued presence of parliamentary fields across much of the landscape. Today, the structure of the landscape continues to be affected primarily by agricultural intensification - with a further loss of valued hedgerow networks linking to woodland weakening its historic character (particularly in the River Flood Plain landscape type). Valued semi-natural woodlands and copses have been transformed in places through the planting of coniferous species, affecting their form and setting within the landscape. A loss of hedgerow trees has impacted on the visual links between these woodlands and the wider agricultural landscape within the river flood plain. The setting of Bisterne Manor, a listed building within the Historic Parkland landscape type, has been eroded too by agricultural intensification – with veteran trees now standing out in arable fields rather than traditional grazed pasture. Links to the New Forest core are weakened due to the conversion of areas of open heath to forestry plantation in the 19th century (as at Ripley Wood). This forest-edge landscape remains a tranquil backwater maintaining its integrity and separation from nearby urban development, with small hamlets linked by quiet rural lanes framed by a backdrop of long woodland views.

Landscape elements: Although the matrix pattern of regular Parliamentary fields remains strong within this landscape (particularly the River Floodplain landscape type), the elements that make up this character have suffered a decline in condition. Hedgerows are often closely flailed, with an absence of hedgerow trees in places, and gapped up or replaced by fencing. Woodland copses that make up the mosaic of land uses have been replanted with conifers in some locations and a lack of active management such as coppicing, and consequential spread of exotics such as rhododendron, has influenced a decline in their biodiversity value. Heathland, which would once have covered a significant part of the middle section of this LCA (within the National Park) has been lost to forestry plantations in the last century. Another historic land use – ancient wood pasture associated with historic parkland – has been lost to agricultural intensification, although veteran trees remain as a reminder of this past character. The condition of built development remains strong in this landscape, with red brick buildings being particularly distinctive. Long views across the landscape remain a feature, often framed by trees and woodland as a reminder of its location within the New Forest National Park.

Landscape change

Key issues and trends

- Hedgerow loss and fragmentation, with gaps closed by post-and-wire fencing. Loss of hedgerow trees in places. Both of these issues have weakened the area's field pattern and disrupted important wildlife networks. Evidence of hedgerow re-laying is positively reversing this trend in places (in the River Terrace Farmlands landscape type).
- 19th and 20th century replacement of ancient woodlands with conifer plantations. Some of the area's semi-natural woodlands are also suffering from a spread of rhododendron and pine through a lack of management thereby decreasing their biodiversity value (in the River Terrace Farmlands landscape type).
- Past coniferisation of heathland – including at Ripley Wood. This has weakened habitat links to the nearby Open Forest (in the Heath Associated Estates landscape type).
- Changing pests and diseases leading to decline or death of certain tree species.
- Loss of wood pasture within historic parkland surrounding Bisterne Manor. Veteran trees remain but are now located in arable fields. New woodland planting is seeking to restore semi-natural woodlands surrounding the estate, positively contributing to landscape character (in the Historic Parkland landscape type).

C. LANDSCAPE QUALITY OBJECTIVES (LQOS) / STRATEGY

Vision

A mixed agricultural landscape set within a strong matrix of fields bounded by thick, well managed hedgerows with a healthy stock of hedgerow trees. Fields sit within a mosaic of managed semi-natural woodlands and copses dominated by broadleaves, including oaks. Historic parkland at Bisterne Manor is distinct from its intensive agricultural setting, with veteran trees standing in fields of grazed pasture. Visual and physical links to the New Forest core are strengthened, with historic locations of heathland restored to their former glory. The setting of the Avon Valley is characterised by grazed meadows and woodlands. Rural lanes wind through the landscape linking small red brick hamlets set against a tranquil backdrop of long views and wooded horizons.

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 7)

Future landscape management guidelines

Field patterns and boundary features

1. Protect the matrix of traditional field patterns as a strong feature of this landscape. Maintain fields bounded by well managed hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees on the valley sides to strengthen historic field patterns.

Agricultural land use

2. Manage and enhance the historic wood pasture land use around Bisterne Manor.

Biodiversity

3. Protect grassland meadows on the edge of the Avon Valley, including through continued livestock grazing in line with relevant Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements.
4. Restore and manage areas of former heathland (particularly at Ripley Wood), in line with the New Forest SAC plan, including the gradual removal of conifers and the reinstatement of livestock grazing. This will restore habitat and visual links with the nearby Open Forest.

Forestry and woodlands

5. Manage and restructure semi-natural woodlands, aiming to increase the proportion of broadleaves including through native tree planting with species including oak.
6. Protect the semi-natural broadleaved woodlands, including the removal of exotics such as rhododendron, managing (including coppicing) to maintain a diverse age structure.

Development and settlement edge

7. Protect the landscape setting of Bisterne Manor.
8. Protect the landscape's sparse settlement pattern of small traditional hamlets, retaining the clear separation from the urban area of Ringwood.

Summary table LCA 7 showing landscape issues and guidelines by Landscape Type

Landscape type	Summary of issue	Management guidelines (number)
River Terrace Farmlands	Hedgerow loss and fragmentation, gaps filled with post-and wire fencing. Loss of hedgerow trees.	1
	Past conifer planting within semi-natural woodlands.	5
	Spread of rhododendron in woodlands and lack of woodland management.	6
Historic Parkland	Road surfacing and creation of car parks affecting historic setting of Bisterne Manor.	7
	Loss of historic wood pasture.	2
Heath Associated Estates	Conifer planting on former areas of open heath.	4
ALL – LANDSCAPE-WIDE ISSUES	Development pressure (National Park-wide issue)	8

PHOTOGRAPHS OF LCA 7: LOWER AVON VALLEY

Arable fields near Sandford



Agricultural land and woodlands south of Bisterne

