

2C: LODDON VALLEY AND WESTERN FOREST OF EVERSLEY



Typical valley floor landscape in the character area– Small Scale Lowland mosaic with backdrop of the raised plateau gravel © Hampshire Wildlife Trust.



Basingstoke canal flash © HWT



River Loddon © HWT



Lowland Mosaic Open landscape near Stratfield Turgis © HWT



Historically, high density / frequency of small dispersed settlements – typically with buildings of 17th C or older origin -Mattingley

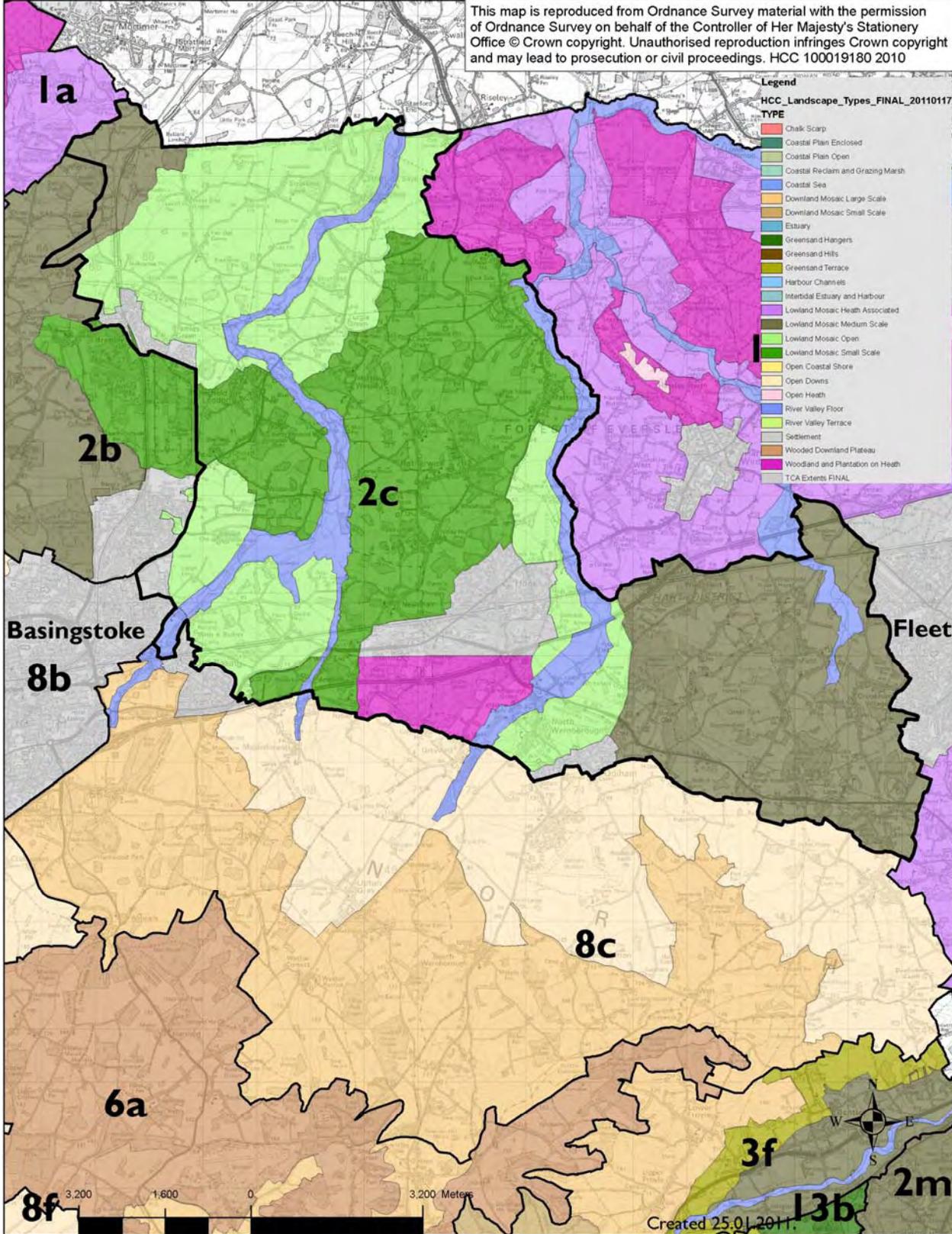


Remains of the wall around Roman settlement of Silchester – which overlooks the Loddon Valley..



The Vyne - there is a significant concentration of historic parks and gardens often incorporating water.

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LODDON VALLEY AND FOREST OF EVERSLEY WEST



1.0 Location and Boundaries

1.1 This character area is broadly defined by the valley and tributaries of the River Loddon. It lies to the north of the chalk downs and extends to the County boundary with West Berkshire. The southern boundary follows a marked geological and topographical boundary between the low-lying clay of the character area and the chalk



downland. The eastern boundary follows the River Whitewater – eastward from this point the landscape becomes more undulating and more heath like in character. To the west the boundary is broadly defined by the western extent of the catchment, but is related to the road from south of Ramsdell to Little Loddon.

1.2 Component County Landscape Types

Lowland Mosaic Large Scale, Lowland Mosaic Medium Scale, Lowland Mosaic Small Scale, Wooded Heath, River Valley Floor, Settlement

1.3 Composition of Borough/District LCAs:

Basingstoke and Deane BC

Loddon and Lyde Valley (predominantly)
North Sherborne

Hart DC

Wellington
Tylney
Bartley

1.4 Associations with NCAs Natural Areas:

NCA 129: Thames Basin Heaths

Natural Area: 66 London Basin

2.0 Key Characteristics

- Low lying gently undulating landscape divided on a north-south axis by the shallow, broad valley of the River Loddon.
- A poorly draining landscape, dissected by a network of often wooded streams and minor tributaries. It contains a mosaic of habitats supporting a rich and varied biodiversity.
- Distant views of continuous plantation woodland on elevated sand and gravel plateaux in adjoining character areas to the east and west.
- Thick hedges often with banks and ditches and many ancient trees.
- A high density of public rights of way and permissive access network.
- A secluded intimate feel, and a sense the landscape has had a long history of small settlement and farms by the presence of timber framed and old brick small farm buildings.
- Early disafforestation of medieval deer parks in the 14th century, resulting in an assarted landscape in which woodland has become increasingly fragmented. Fields have been reorganised but generally retain their irregular pattern

- A significant concentration of large historic parks and gardens, such as Stratfield Saye, Tylney Hall and The Vyne.
- A high density dispersed settlement pattern which has mid medieval origins and remains relatively little altered, including a concentration of medieval moated sites. Villages often have greens.
- GHQ defence line.
- High voltage power lines stride through the landscape.

3.0 Physical Characteristics and Land Use

3.1 This is a low lying, predominantly clay landscape with gentle undulations formed by the Loddon, Lyde and Whitewater rivers and their tributaries. These create broad, shallow valleys separated by low plateaux. The rivers rise in the chalk to the south and run northwards to meet the Blackwater, which in turn joins the Thames. The land rises gently by about 40-50m from north to south, reaching its maximum height of about 100metres AOD at the junction with the chalk downs. The topography in the southern half of the area is more complex, with small, locally steep hills rising about 20-30m above the surrounding landscape, generally associated with localised outcrops of Bagshot Sand, which is the predominant geology in the adjoining character area to the east. The most extensive of these outcrops is on the ridge between the Loddon and Whitewater valleys. Alluvial deposits close to the streams are of comparatively high agricultural grade compared with the heavier clay soils.

3.2 This character area has a relatively high proportion of arable land, especially in the open lowland mosaic landscape type. In the small and medium scale lowland mosaic there is a more equal balance between arable and permanent pasture. Woodland (often ancient) is a significant landscape component. Hedgerows with mature specimen trees on banks with ditches are common, comprising remnants of ancient woodland, historically cleared to create farmland and improve field drainage. 1810 mapping indicates that fen areas, now invaded by scrub and wet woodland, were once open and would have been grazed.

3.3 The chalk fed streams of the Loddon, Lyde and Whitewater and their tributaries flow northward to the Blackwater on the County boundary and into the Thames at Shiplake. The streams are braided and flow in small floodplains, and sections have been formed into ponds or canalised to form mill leats.

4.0 Experiential/Perceptual Characteristics

4.1 The high proportion of woodland within and adjoining this character area creates a strong sense of enclosure, with longer views only possible from areas of more open or higher ground.

4.2. There is generally a dense public rights of way network based on the historical links between the numerous farmsteads and small settlements across the character area. Many of the small woodlands and copses are connected to the network. The Three Castles path from Windsor to Winchester is the only long distance path in the character area. There are relatively few open access areas except for commons at Odiham, Hook, Bartley Heath and Hartley Wespall. Historic parks and gardens include Stratfield Saye and the Vyne. Dogmersfield Park and Tylney Park have been developed as hotels and golf courses but have rights of way crossing their land.

4.3 The well wooded landscape, often with ancient trees, numerous streams and a wealth of traditional buildings in quiet hamlets with limited modern development contribute to a sense of tranquillity. This contrasts strongly with the intrusion of major roads including the M3 and the A33, and significant extents of modern development around Hook, Chineham and North Basingstoke suburbs and Bramley. The frequent occurrence of high voltage power lines which tower above the

woodland and fields emphasise the proximity to large centres of population even in secluded locations.

5.0 Biodiversity Character

- 5.1 This is a lowland agricultural landscape comprising mainly agricultural grasslands and woodland. Within the arable areas there are patches of improved grassland which tend to be smaller and less frequent in the north and larger and occur in a mosaic with woodland in the south. There are also patches of unimproved and semi-improved neutral grasslands which are more frequent and larger in the south and amenity grassland and sports pitches throughout the area, often associated with urban areas.
- 5.2 Woodland varies in type, it is mainly broadleaved and ancient semi-natural which is distributed throughout in fairly small patches. There is a large patch of parkland in the northeast of the area, associated with Stratfield Staye Park which includes wetland habitats associated with the river Loddon including patches of marshy grassland. In the east, at Bramley, there is a large mosaic of broadleaved woodland, forestry scrub, coniferous and broadleaved plantation and grassland. In the south of the area, on Hook Common, there is an area of broadleaved woodland (Butter Wood south of the road is ancient and semi-natural woodland) with small patches of dry heath with dry heath/acid grassland mosaic and bracken stands. There are further, much smaller examples of dry heath habitats associated with Odiham Common in the east.
- 5.3 There are six varied and well-distributed SSSIs. Butter Wood SSSI is an outstanding example of ancient wood pasture comprising oak-hazel woodland in the south, grading to an oak-birch association with scattered holly on the more acidic soils in the north. Greywell Tunnel SSSI is on the Basingstoke Canal and gives shelter to the largest population of bats of any known site in Britain. Hook Common and Bartley Heath SSSI together with Butter Wood SSSI, are surviving fragments of an extensive series of common lands including extensive areas of open wet heath, of which few now survive in the Thames Basin. Odiham Common with Bagwell Green and Shaw SSSI comprises an extensive area of wood pasture, meadows and common land on the edge of the Thames Basin. Warnborough Green SSSI comprises two ancient marshy meadows either side of the River Whitewater, close to the Basingstoke Canal and has traditionally been grazed by the commoners' livestock. The meadows are an example of a rare and declining grassland habitat: being both species-rich with numerous plants characteristic of unimproved wet grassland and containing several species which are regionally uncommon.
- 5.4 The Loddon Catchment BOA extends into the west of this area. The headwaters of the Loddon contain a nationally restricted type of chalk peatland, presenting a good opportunity to restore a species rich fen meadow.
- 5.5 There are over 200 SINCs in this landscape character area. Coxmoor Wood covers 53 hectares and is designated for its ancient and semi-natural woodland and agriculturally unimproved grasslands. By contrast, Blackfields Farm Meadow Stream is much smaller, at 0.2 hectares, which supports outstanding assemblages of aquatic species. There is also Chineham Woods Local Nature Reserve which comprises

Great Sorrell's Copse, Toll House Copse, Long Copse and Guinea Copse. Great Sorrell's Copse and Long Copse are managed to restore the coppice cycle.

6.0 Historic Character

6.1 Archaeology

6.1.1 Much of the area contains limited archaeological evidence, except in the northern and southern extremities of the Loddon valley where there is a considerable range of prehistoric activity from the Mesolithic onwards, including evidence of Bronze Age settlement. However, despite archaeological survey, evidence for such activity is weak in the central section. It is noticeable that many of the types of archaeological site absent from this area are to be found clustered immediately to the south of the divide between the chalk and the clay in the Basingstoke area, which is archaeologically rich and varied.

6.1.2 There was a clear focus of Iron Age activity on the high ground to the west where the late Iron Age Oppidum of Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester) overlooks the valley. It is possible that the Iron Age camp at Bulls Down Copse represents some form of control of a north-south route in the valley rather than being the hub for a wider exploitation of the landscape. Likewise, in the Roman period it would appear that the principle focus of activity is associated with the town of Calleva Atrebatum rather than with the wider landscape.

6.2 Historic Landscape

6.2.1 The character area lies on the peripheries of the adjoining former Royal Hunting Forests of Eversley and Pamber. The Forest of Eversley was probably disafforrested in the late 13th century⁵¹. Extensive areas of woodland were subject to clearance or assarting by the 14th century. This suggests that the assarts are of mid medieval origin and later encroachment for agriculture has led to woodland being increasingly fragmented. The process of medieval forest clearance is likely to have resulted in greater freeholder occupation than in the chalk area to the south. Nonetheless there are still some large estates such as Stratfield Saye and Sherbourne St. John³⁷, which are located outside the lowland mosaic small scale landscape.

6.2.2 The areas of lowland mosaic medium scale landscape in the western parishes of Sherborne St John and Monk Sherborne are characterised by comparatively large blocks of woodland assarting and interconnecting shaws which were 'uncompartmentalised'. There are numerous lanes and tracks shown on the first edition mapping and some of the lanes are drawn with dashed line edge indicating they were unbound by hedges. The density of these lanes and tracks indicate that land was perhaps in multiple ownership with shared access to different fields. Small areas in the southeast of this landscape type have undergone significant late formal enclosure (1829) resulting in a regular field pattern.

6.2.3 The parishes of Hartley Wespall, Rotherwick and Newnham contain an assart landscape with small irregular blocks of woodland. The medieval field pattern is likely to have been the result of informal enclosure around the dispersed settlement pattern. The fieldscape retains much of its original irregular pattern associated with assarting. There are wide wooded lane verges in places (shaws) often leading to

commons or greens, which were presumably drove roads. There has been significant reorganisation of original assarts south of Bramley for the WW2 barracks. The lowland mosaic small scale wooded landscape in the southeast of the character area is related to the late survival of Odiham wood and Dogmersfield common.

- 6.2.4 The lowland mosaic open landscape has a strong coincidence with large wavy boundary fields with an irregular pattern, probably with assart origins. These areas have remained relatively unwooded for a considerable period of time. The field structure has medieval origins and can be seen to the west and south of Stratfield Saye. Field boundary hedges have mature trees but are generally not as thick and high as in the small scale landscape areas. There are two small areas of strip and furlongs, which are unusual in Hampshire. The large estates of Stratfield Saye, Highfield and Buckfield occur in this more open landscape.
- 6.2.5 The river valley floor landscapes appear as rough pasture hatch on the OSD mapping. Traditionally this fen landscape would have been worked for peat, constantly creating open habitats and a succession of carr scrub and wood. Much of the land was drained and water levels controlled – but in a less formal way than the watermeadows of the chalk streams of the Hampshire Downs in the south. An exception seems to be in the upper reaches of the Loddon near Newnham, where a system of straight channels sluices and leats created a typical watermeadow landscape. The decline in grazing throughout the C. 19th and 20th has led to scrub and carr habitat invading these once relatively open riparian landscapes⁴⁹.
- 6.2.6 The landscape around Hook has probably seen the greatest recent change, from an extensive area of wooded common and heath to rapid C. 20th settlement expansion, the M3, and establishment of conifer plantation.
- 6.2.7 There is a particularly high concentration of large historic parks in this area, four of which are Registered. Stratfield Saye, Dogmersfield and The Vyne all have their origins in deer parks and their distribution appears to be closely linked with the Loddon and Lyde streams. Tylney Hall had an extensive formal landscape with avenues laid out at the beginning of the C.18th. These are also features of Stratfield Saye, Highfield Park and Dogmersfield Park. Here the landscape was also ornamented with follies which were later demolished to create the more fashionable naturalistic landscapes of the late C18th and the formal canals were also removed and the lake extended. Water is a common feature of the parks and gardens in this area; e.g. Bearepair and Odiham Castle had moats which may have been partly ornamental while at Stratfield Saye and The Vyne the river was dammed and widened to give the appearance of a lake. During the C. 19th parks were modified and planted with newly introduced species. New parks were also created at Sherfield Manor and Sherfield Hall.

6.3 **Built Environment**

- 6.3.1 The minor road and lane network winds through the landscape and is comparatively dense. Routes (often with dog legs and corners) have origins in piecemeal establishment of the network to serve the high density farm and early settlement pattern. ‘A’ roads from Basingstoke include the A30, A33, and A287 and have probably developed from realigning and straightening the original lanes. The area

feels busy with fast moving traffic, which is cited as a deterrent to cycle users in the countryside access plan⁵⁸, but the lanes away from the major routes can be quiet.

- 6.3.2 The high density dispersed settlement pattern of the mid 19th century in this landscape contrasts strongly with the low density nucleated pattern characteristic of the downland landscape to the south. The area has a wealth of historic built form of medieval origin, including church and manor house, and manor farms¹⁰ e.g. North Warnborough, Mattingley and Heckfield. These are likely to have been of 'pre-forest' origin – representing the earliest extant medieval settlement. The poor soils of the area constrained settlement growth. However towards the south and the boundary with the chalk settlement size is greater- with the churches and manor retaining their focal position in the settlement – such as at Odiham. There is a high concentration of medieval moated sites, particularly in the west of the character area. Evidence suggests that these were constructed in areas of recent land clearance in the C.13th and 14th, coinciding with the period after the disafforestation of Eversley, possibly for protection and defence⁵². They are not particularly visible in today's wooded landscape. Medieval fish ponds are also associated with this landscape. Many villages and hamlets are associated with greens and small commons e.g. Bramley, Turgis Green and Sherfield on Loddon. New centres developed along the common pasture edges – in particular greens with funnelled trackways which led off commons and heaths e.g. Mattingley and Winchfield Hurst. The use of 'end' in place names is often associated with settlements that developed in the Middle Ages as secondary settlements or on or near marginal land e.g. West End Green and Stanford End. There is a strong association with the lowland mosaic small and medium scale wooded landscape types and medieval and C. 17th farmsteads
- 6.3.3 The Market town of Odiham has historically been the most significant settlement. Odiham castle was built in the early 13th century and was used by the Royal household which contributed significantly to the stature of the town⁹. The historic core, with its numerous timber framed buildings (many with later facades) and, its church of Anglo Saxon origins, has remained relatively free from modern development. Most modern housing is located on the eastern edge of the town. However, Hook with its strategic location on the rail and motorway network has seen the greatest expansion in the mid to late C. 20th of housing and high tech industry. Other modern development trends include large detached rural houses.
- 6.3.4 The quality of the historic built environment is reflected by numerous and extensive Conservation Areas e.g. Rotherwick, Newnham, Mattingley, Heckfield, North Warnborough and Odiham. This area has one of the highest concentration of surviving timber framed and pre 1700 buildings incorporating brick in Hampshire. Canal and rail links in the south led to the establishment of brickworks¹¹, which produced the characteristic red/orange local bricks. Flemish bond with blue / grey decorative headers are fairly typical of pre 1850 buildings. Black (coal tar coated) weatherboard timber barns with hipped roofs, low eaves and low brick walls are also distinctive. . The area also has a high concentration of thatched, clay tiled roof and tile hung buildings. The latter are particularly associated with timber frame buildings. There are a large number of watermills on the fast flowing chalk streams. Most are now converted to modern commercial and residential use.

6.3.5 The Basingstoke Canal was built between 1788 and 1794 and is 32 miles long with 29 locks⁵⁵. It runs in the south east of the character area from Greywell and was built to provide a transport link to the River Wey and the London market. During the C.19th it became increasingly less profitable due to competition from the railway. After many years of restoration the canal is now navigable to the River Wey. It is also designated as a Conservation Area.

6.3.6 An important recent archaeological aspect of this area is the GHQ line. This was an 'inland stop line' from 1940 in preparation for a German invasion. It consists of a pre prepared defensive lane, usually behind another obstacle, such as a railway or a canal or river, which was supplemented in places by the use of an anti tank ditch. The prepared positions consisted of pillboxes, and the line of these pillboxes can be picked out in the landscape.

EVALUATION

7.0 Forces for Change

1. New housing development and changes to existing stock.
2. Farm conversion to residential and land management changes.
3. Pressure from urban fringe use related activities.
4. Recreation pressures
5. Climate change

KEY QUALITIES AND EFFECTS OF FORCES

7.1 <i>Tangible medieval enclosure landscape with assarts, shaws, wavy boundary valley floor field systems, ditched boundaries, commons, greens, winding lanes, moated sites and an unusually high proportion of designed landscapes some with deer park origins.</i>	
FORCES FOR CHANGE:	CONSEQUENCES
All	<p>Threats: Alteration/ reorganisation of medieval origin field systems due to land management changes Road realignment and widening. Insensitive ditch management deepening/widening. Inappropriate development on green and on common fringes reducing common area. Alteration and change of use to designed landscapes to increase commercial viability may be in conflict with original design philosophy– and in particular change to water features and mature wooded avenues characteristic of many parks and gardens here.</p> <p>Opportunities: Influence (EA) river catchment flood plans and Loddon Catchment Biodiversity Strategy plan (HWT) to raise importance of these historic associations. Support the work of the Loddon and Eversley Heritage Area project and connections made with local communities in relation to the historic landscape. Influence agri-environment schemes in relation to field boundary ditches, conserving recognisable remnant ancient enclosures. Emphasise connections with medieval origin landscape features (e.g. greens and commons) in preparation of parish level character assessments and village design statements. Support initiatives which aim to restore wooded and heath common areas to more traditional forms of management e.g. coppicing and secondary woodland clearance/grazing.</p>
7.2 <i>High density dispersed pattern of small settlements centred on greens and farmsteads, with springline settlements on the southern boundary and a comparatively high concentration of timber framed and pre 1700 buildings.</i>	
FORCES FOR CHANGE:	CONSEQUENCES
1.2.3	<p>Threats: Change to settlement pattern distribution and size by enlargement of hamlets and farms. Loss of traditional farm related land and building uses to residential and perception of suburbanising influences / uses in the countryside.</p> <p>Opportunities: Influence LDF policy related to this quality (Basingstoke and Hart councils) – in particular MDA or SHLAA sites that are considered for housing allocation /reserve sites north of Basingstoke and Hook.</p>

	Raise local awareness of the historic settlement characteristics and importance to maintaining character in local level assessments and VDS'.
7.3 <i>A lowland agricultural landscape, much of which has been farmed continuously from mid medieval times, resulting in a mosaic of habitats including chalk streams, hedgerow, damp and wet meadow, fen, carr, wet and ancient woodlands and occasional heath.</i>	
FORCES FOR CHANGE:	CONSEQUENCES
All	<p>Threats: Further loss of unimproved grassland to agricultural improvement. Inappropriate management or lack of awareness to manage/ manipulate the stream water levels and therefore adversely affecting wetland habitats. New development not only results in direct loss of habitat but affects run off flood risk, increases the need for wastewater treatment, and subsequently water levels and quality which are integral to sustainability of wet habitats characteristic of this landscape. Economic viability of grazing regimes which are integral to successful management of wet lowland meadow and unimproved grassland management.</p> <p>Opportunities: Encourage initiatives which promote understanding and conservation of remaining common such as Warnborough Green, Hook Common and Bartley Heath. Support the Basingstoke Canal Authority aims and other biodiversity management plans and strategies such as the Loddon Catchment Biodiversity Strategy. Support the opportunities of conservation and enhancement in the Loddon, Lyde, Whitewater catchment and headwaters BOA which targets both the lowland wooded and heathy commons, hedgerows, chalk fed streams, fen, floodplain and meadow habitats.</p>
7.4 <i>Very local countryside to large centres of population to the east and south served by a dense footpath network on the stream valley floor – in a pastoral setting with views enclosed by woodland on surrounding higher ground.</i>	
FORCES FOR CHANGE:	CONSEQUENCES
1.3.4	<p>Threats: Over formalisation of semi-natural areas to provide recreation facilities. Increasing access opportunities can introduce greater likelihood of conflict through misuse (eg fly tipping and trespassing) on local farmland which affects landowner confidence in users of the RoW network across their land. Reducing tree cover on surrounding higher land (heathy commons) for biodiversity and historic landscape management could create greater intervisibility with surrounding development and reduce sense of ruralness.</p> <p>Opportunities: Support CAP objectives; including permissive network for broadening availability for other users. Work with key land managers and organisations to improve dialogue and understanding with local communities of more radical and visible land management practices/changes.</p>