Saltmarsh at high tide - Pennington Marshes near Keyhaven, sea wall in the middle distance with the enduring profile of the Isle of Wight in the distance.

Mouth of the Lymington estuary.

Enclosed Coastal Plain farmland wavy edge thick hedge fields nr S Badgesley.

Wooded stream valleys incise the landscape-Danes Stream Ashley Bridge.

Cliff below golf course at Barton on sea – exposed fossil rich Barton Bunny Bed mid cliff – © Ian West

New Town Park Estate, nr Portmore typical of numerous estates in the area with views over the Solent.

Cliff top flats at Barton on Sea.
1.0 Location and Boundaries

1.1 This coastal plain landscape has strong visual links with Christchurch bay and the western Solent. Its western boundary follows the County boundary with Bournemouth and Christchurch Unitary authority. The eastern boundary roughly follows the Sowley stream and reflects the transition into decreasing densities of development, and change in HLC pattern from a landscape of predominantly parliamentary fields to one with more informal enclosures and assart woodland. The northern boundary marks a transition to landscape which looks more towards the heaths of the New Forest than the coast, and is smaller scale, more hedged and with extensive permanent pasture. The southern boundary is formed by the mean low water mark (at Spring tides).

1.2 Component County Landscape Types
Coastal Plain Enclosed, Coastal Plain Open, Open Coastal Shore, Coastal Reclaim and Grazing Marsh, Estuary, Settlement.

1.3 Composition of Borough/District LCAs:
New Forest DC
Lymington and Pennington Coastal Plain
Barton and Milford Coastal Plain

These two character areas are defined predominantly by the district landscape types; Coastal Plain Estates Small - Parliamentary Enclosures and Coastal Fringe together with several instances of Historic Parkland landscape type. The extent of the northern boundary of the County coastal plain landscape type follows very closely the line defined at the more local level assessment.

1.4 Associations with NCAs and Natural Areas:
NCA 131: New Forest
NA 77: New Forest

1.5 Townscape assessment areas:
New Milton, Barton on Sea, Lymington (south) and Pennington.

2.0 Key Characteristics

• A landscape of mixed topography which is generally flatter closer to the coast and more undulating inland, overlooking Christchurch Bay and the western Solent.
• Predominantly arable landscape of medium to large scale regular pattern agricultural fields with ditches and banks.
A coastline of contrasts, including exposed eroding cliffs in the west and mud flats and saltmarsh east of Hurst spit.

- Coastal grazing marshes, shingle spits and saline lagoons which are habitats of national and international importance.
- One of the best preserved areas along the south coast of the former salt making industry.
- Much of the area had been enclosed by 1790 with areas subject to later reorganisation in the 19th century.
- Small scattered 19th century plantations and linear deciduous woodlands along very small river valleys.
- Large estates with country houses, estate cottages and gate houses, several have now become schools or hotels.
- Lymington has had a central focus as a market town for the area and is a popular tourist destination with a strong marine leisure industry.

3.0 Physical Characteristics and Land Use

3.1 The Barton Clay formation emerges for a short stretch in the west on the coast. This formation is particularly rich in prehistoric marine fossils and is the main reason for the cliffs’ designation as a geological SSSI. Over 500 marine fossil species have been found in this formation, including bivalves, gastropods, other molluscs and sharks teeth. Coastal retreat of the Barton cliff can be up to 1m per annum. West of Hurst spit the beach is narrow and of shingle, below low cliffs about 20m high. Coastal groyne sea defence were installed in the 1960s which have helped protect against erosion from the easterly longshore drift. The spit shingle bank marks the transition between erosion and deposition coastline. East of Hurst spit the coast is characterised by mudflats and saltmarsh up to 1km wide at low water. Inland the relatively recent Tertiary geology is clay, with thin beds of sand and marl with extensive superficial sandy gravel deposits.

3.2 Soils are predominantly well drained and loamy, having developed over marine/river gravel terraces. This has given rise to large areas of high quality agricultural land particularly where soils are deepest (e.g. either side of the Lymington estuary). Farmland is intensively managed with large scale estates, with some large fields on flatter land north of New Milton and Barton on Sea. Agriculture is predominantly arable, but areas of improved pasture occur on the more undulating land associated with stream valleys. There is also a significant amount of horticulture and land under glass, particularly west of Lymington. Linear and small blocks of interconnected woodland and unimproved grassland follow the numerous stream valleys. The hedgerow network is noticeably less dense and more varied in height than in the Small Scale Lowland Mosaic landscape in the adjoining character area to the north.

3.3 Numerous small streams have incised this landscape, resulting in an increasingly undulating landscape towards the north. Small but steep valleys include the Danes Stream, Walkford Brook, and tributaries of the Avon, Plummers Water, Sowley Stream and the Lymington river. The mouths of most streams occur on the lower lying stretch of coastline east of Hurst Spit.

4.0 Experiential/Perceptual Characteristics

4.1 There are long views to the Isle of Wight, Christchurch Bay and the Purbecks from the cliff top path around New Milton and Barton on Sea. East of Hurst Spit, itself a
very visually dominant coastal features the views are closer to sea level and not so extensive. Inland, sea views are more limited especially in the Coastal Plain Enclosed but from the higher land and grounds of the historic houses and estate views of the Island are a designed feature.

4.2 Access along the coastal footpath is very popular with Hurst Spit being an obvious focus. Access to the beaches in the west is made difficult by the cliffs and erosion. Inland there is no common or open access land but the rights of way network is fairly dense but fragmented by roads, development and Country estates and is predominantly footpaths. Seasonal fluctuations in numbers of visitors and traffic, caravan parks and holiday villages are a feature of this landscape.

4.3 The eastern parts in land and eastern coastal areas – especially Hurst spit are identified as being the most tranquil parts which is probably attributable to less development and greater woodland coverage and away from the tourist beaches and more natural coastline.

5.0 Biodiversity Character

5.1 This is an internationally important landscape, covered by a number of nature conservation designations which reflect the outstanding ecology in the area.

5.2 The coastal parts of this landscape character area are part of the Solent and Southampton Waters RAMSAR site and SPA. These designations comprise estuaries and adjacent coastal habitats e.g. intertidal flats, saline lagoons, saltmarsh, reedbeds, damp woodland and grazing marsh. The combination of these habitats supports internationally important numbers of wintering waterfowl, breeding gull and tern populations and an important assemblage of rare invertebrates and plants. Parts of this landscape character area also form a proportion of the Solent Maritime SAC.

5.3 Beyond the designated sites, this landscape character area contains a range of habitats within residential development, agricultural land and coastal areas.

5.4 In the west of the area, the arable land includes patches of improved grassland and broadleaved woodland. Adjacent to this land is a significant area of residential land with small patches of woodland and amenity grassland/ sports fields, which (along with gardens) provide habitat variation. Further to the east the agricultural landscape continues, comprising arable land and improved grassland with some woodland patches. Woodland includes broadleaved woodland, parkland, coniferous plantations and mixed woods. The mix of arable and improved grasslands varies within this
There are patches of acidic and neutral unimproved grasslands, and sites associated with quarrying, including active quarries and restored sites. This pattern of urban land and agricultural land with habitat patches exists across the area except for the contrasting eastern edge which comprises coastal habitats, much of which is designated as part of the Hurst Castle and Lymington River Estuary SSSI. The coastal habitat mix is limited to the eastern part of the coast, where it is not affected by sea defences. In this area the coastal character is very strong and grades through different habitats: a large area of coastal grazing marsh extends into intertidal mud and sand with patches of continuous saltmarsh and permanent channels leading out to sea.

5.5 Very small parts of this character area are designated as part of the New Forest SSSI which embraces habitats including lowland heath, valley and seepage step mire, or fen, and ancient pasture woodland, including riparian and bog woodland.

5.6 Large parts of this landscape character area are also covered by the New Forest Coast BOA which possesses a remarkable diversity of habitat ranging from coastal mudflats and saltmarshes, shingle beaches and spits, soft rock cliffs, fresh and brackish marshland and pools, maritime grassland, species rich neutral and acidic grasslands, valley mire, heathland and a range of ancient semi-natural woodland.

5.7 There are over 70 SINCs in this character area. These are mainly designated for the ancient woodland resource which they support.

6.0 Historic Character

6.1 Archaeology

6.1.1 There are some Mesolithic artefacts in this zone, suggesting exploitation of the area. However, the shore itself was considerably further south than the present coastline. Evidence from around the coast indicates that the resources here were considerably exploited during the Mesolithic, but the archaeological evidence local to this area will now be offshore.

6.1.2 There is evidence of Neolithic artefacts, indicating that the coastal zone was exploited. Amongst the artefacts is Neolithic pottery, which is suggestive of settled activity, and one Neolithic site has been found. A Neolithic long barrow has recently been identified from aerial photographs, suggesting that the coastal zone was settled at least to some extent in the Neolithic.

6.1.3 The amount and range of Bronze Age archaeological evidence is again limited and the patterns are not clear cut. Some settlement has been encountered, but there are only a few burial mounds. Inland, on the southern flank of the New Forest overlooking the coastal plain, there are a considerable number of Bronze Age barrows. These are perhaps indicative of proximity to a settled coastal plain, and utilisation of the extensive grazing of the New Forest heath.

6.1.4 There is also limited evidence of Iron Age settlement, but there are two substantial Iron Age sites at Lymington (Buckland Rings and Ampress Works). Their position on the river may indicate some form of entrepot. There is also evidence of salt working on the coast, as well as evidence of workings from the coast appearing on inland
sites. However, the absence of a range of sites, and of field systems, suggests that the area was not densely settled.

6.1.5 Evidence from the Roman period is still limited, although there is evidence that salt production continued (indeed salt production is likely to have been a continuous and characteristic activity on this coast until post-medieval times). It also seems likely that there is a Roman site of some note awaiting discovery on the river in the Lymington vicinity. But generally this does not seem to have been a richly settled area.

6.1.6 Domesday book evidence indicates settlement was quite well distributed along this section of New Forest coastal plain.

6.2 Historic Landscape

6.2.1 Much of this landscape is imprinted with the effects of a medieval farmed landscape. On first edition mapping there is strong evidence to suggest medieval strips and furlongs around settlements of Milton, Milford, Downton, around Lymington and East End. Between settlements are semi-regular grids of medieval field systems of varying size and uneven field boundaries. North of Milford, to the west of the Lymington river and in the far northeast assarting is more prevalent, with incised woods creating irregular shaped fields often with wooded boundaries. This suggests that most of the fieldscape is of at least medieval origin. The coastal fringe was an area of corn production and cattle rearing, and the heath locally available to the north would have been used to turn out pigs in the autumn, giving a truly mixed farming pattern\textsuperscript{37}.

6.2.2 By 1790 most of the character area had been enclosed. The establishment of small estates on the coastal plain during the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century was associated with field amalgamation, reorganisation and a more regular character, such as at Walhampton. There were few areas of common, with those persisting until 1800 located in the northwest. 19\textsuperscript{th} century regular enclosures around Hordle and Upper Ashley common replaced the heathy common. Downton Common was one of the large commons to remain unenclosed until the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

6.2.3 The coastal landscape east of Hurst spit is one of the best preserved areas of landscape associated with salt making on the south coast. The industry started in medieval times and was recorded in 1086. It was the mainstay of the local economy well into the 18\textsuperscript{th} century – when it succumbed to cheaper supplies from Cheshire. Salterns occurred at Oxy, Pennington and Keyhaven. Salt was obtained by impounding sea water in shallow lagoons and allowing the water to evaporate. There was an associated network of landscape features: short canals, wind pumps and salt barns. Over 170 salt pans have been recorded.

6.2.4 Post-1810 small plantations associated with coastal estates and designed landscapes break up the landscape. They tend to be well set back from the coastline and along stream tributaries. The most significant park in the area is Pylewell Park which is on the English Heritage Register (Grade II\textsuperscript{*}) and had an avenue leading to the Solent with views of the Isle of Wright. There are two other parks close by that also have their origins in the eighteenth century; Newtown Park and Walhampton House. There appears to be quite a high density of parks and gardens in this area.
6.2.5 The expansion of Milford, Barton and Milton has erased much of the open field and medieval enclosures which surrounded these settlements. To the south of Lymington and in the east of the character area remains of these systems are more discernible in the modern landscape. The assart woods survive relatively well but the internal field boundaries are much altered such as around Everton. The small areas of late regular enclosure adjacent to the heath have been largely built over.

6.3 Built Environment

There is a fairly dense lane and minor road network which is winding and twisting – reflecting the pattern of field boundaries. They are often flanked by banks ditches which are best preserved in the Coastal Plain Enclosed. The alignment of the A337 between Lymington and New Milton has been widened and straightened from rural lanes.

6.3.1 The settlement pattern in this coastal plain landscape was more nucleated than dispersed in the mid 19th century, with settlements often associated with river valleys and estuaries such as Lymington and Keyhaven. This contrasts with the more dispersed pattern in the adjoining character area to the north. Settlement was concentrated in small hamlets and around farmsteads. Isolated rural dwellings are rare unless they are estate cottages, gate houses, country mansions or agricultural buildings. Lymington was the only market town and the economic hub of the area. Milford was also fairly prominent by the 19th C. Both relied on the salt making industry. Milton and Barton on Sea benefited from the coming of the railways and all have seen huge 20th century expansion (mostly post WW2) to the extent that Barton and Milton have coalesced.

6.3.2 Most farmsteads are set in isolation along tracks and lane junctions. Occasionally there may be two or three together forming small hamlets. Although the density of the dispersed settlement is lower than the adjoining Lowland Mosaic Heath associated landscape types in the character area to the north, the farmsteads of this area tend to be larger and more prominent in the landscape, although the 19th century planned farmsteads have a relatively low profile. There is a greater proportion of early farmsteads here than in the more heathy areas to the north. This part of the coast seems to have been more intensively farmed in the 18th and 19th centuries compared to the area further east. Most of the larger farms developed around loose courtyards, with some larger 19th century examples containing planned groups of buildings.

6.3.3 There are five conservation areas, including part of the predominantly rural one of Forest South East (east of Lymington, where settlement is more directly associated with commoning of the heath to the north). Of particular note is the occurrence of local, yellow brick to the east in and around Lymington and the presence of cob with thatch along the north west fringes of the character area, perhaps because of closer proximity to the Avon.
### EVALUATION

#### 7.0 Forces for Change
1. New development spreading from the east.
2. New mineral extraction.
3. Pressure from urban fringe use related activities.
4. Recreation and tourism related development and pressures.
5. Climate change and coastal processes in particular sea level rise and increase in frequency of storms.

### KEY QUALITIES AND EFFECTS OF FORCES

#### 7.1 A coastal landscape of high scenic value, with exposed cliffs in the west contrasting with sheltered marshes in the east. Lymington is popular for recreational boating.

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<td>1.3.4.5.</td>
<td>Threats: Coastal erosion along Barton cliffs and susceptibility of Hurst spit to storm damage has widespread implications for the rest of the Solent coastline. The cliff at Barton will continue to erode despite rock armour at its toe until natural angle of repose is reached. New housing development pressures likely to be only very small scale and likelihood of mineral extraction very unlikely. Erosion of saltmarshes fronting the Keyhaven – Lymington sea wall – exposing it to wave action from the sea. Pressure for farm building conversion to residential use. Pressure for horse grazing land and land for caravan parks, particularly around Lymington, Milford and Barton on sea.</td>
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<td>Opportunities: When coastal access opportunities are reviewed as part of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill 2008, support permissive access opportunities on the eastern coastal section. The rural quality and traditional built form could be emphasised in local level character assessments and village design statements. Sensitive approach to coast realignment around traditional built forms potentially could use and restore former saltern embankment features through influencing Shoreline Management Plan sections in this character area. If intertidal realignment on the eastern side of the Lymington is undertaken there will be opportunities to design these areas around the marinas and economic waterside uses. The cliff line between Barton golf club and Hordle cliff will probably be allowed to retreat, and cliff top uses such as the golf course will have to be accommodated inland. Opportunities to influence cliff top uses to enhance wildness/remote ness.</td>
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#### 7.2 Internationally important extensive mosaic of coastal and estuarine habitats of outstanding ecological importance.

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<td>5.</td>
<td>Threats: Coastal squeeze – the section the coastline between the Lymington river and Hurst spit is subject to coastal squeeze from sea defences much of which will come to the end of their residual life by 2030. Large areas of intertidal habitat and coastal grazing marsh are susceptible if Hurst spit is breached and would result in loss of internationally important coastal habitat. Interruptions or changes to sediment/shingle beach replenishment, particularly changes to coastline to the west (in the direction of longshore drift) will affect erosion of the western side of Hurst spit and cliffs at Barton/Milford on sea.</td>
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Opportunities:
Locating potential coastal retreat areas in relation to coastal squeeze in this stretch of coastline will affect a mix of public and private owned land. A co-ordinated, strategic approach could be sought to their design and location with support through agri-environment schemes. Realignment will affect rights of way and public access land between Keyhaven and Lymington.
Positive land management for potential intertidal habitat potential could be supported by agri-environment schemes.
Balancing the management of recreational activities to ensure they do not compete with nature conservation or other landscape objectives.
Water Level Management Plans for Pennington, Keyhaven marshes and Lymington have been produced and balance agricultural needs, flood management and wildlife benefit (such as reedbed conservation). They will have a significant positive impact their appearance—3D visualisation of the predicted effects of the WLMP could be useful in raising awareness and public expectation.

### 7.3
**Tangible evidence of time depth of settlement in the landscape, including varying degrees of intensive exploitation from Neolithic onwards, a well established pattern of settlement by Saxon times and the importance of Lymington as a trading port.**

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| **1.3.5** Threats: | Sea level rise and increase in saturated soils and soil salinity could have a detrimental effect on the woodland and treed hedgerows which link ancient woodland—particularly associated with stream valley sides and managed coastline retreat areas.
Greater storm frequency and intensity could damage woodland and trees.
Potential loss of archaeological and historic settlement sites as a result of erosion or development. |
| Opportunities: | Targeting agri-environment schemes to manage archaeological sites and historic features associated with settlement such as field boundaries and ancient woodland. |

### 7.4
**A historic coastal landscape which has relic features associated with one of the most extensive areas for salt making on the south coast. A strong surviving influence from 18th -19th century estate management occurs in the east, which exploited views of the Isle of Wight, and replanted semi-natural ancient woodland in stream valleys to include exotics and conifers. A few surviving medieval field boundaries also remain.**

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| **3.5** Threats: | Some of the medieval and 17th century origin farmsteads and relic features associated with salt making are in areas affected by potential sea level rise and farmland in areas of intertidal habitat creation to compensate coastal squeeze.
Loss of mature hedgerow oaks from storm damage / saturated soils / old age because of their coastal location.
Continued mineral extraction in the west of the character area would risk further loss of the historic field pattern.
Further loss of remaining grazing and pasture fields and field enlargement to accommodate arable in remaining areas along stream valley sides and coastal fringe. |
| Opportunities: | Agri-environment and woodland grant schemes could be used to target the conservation and enhancement of this key quality, in particular more precise identification of surviving estate enclosures and remaining medieval origin field boundaries. The historic strategic importance and surviving features of this area for salt production could be promoted as an important value in local assessment. |