



Landscape Character Areas

PI West Walk - Rookesbury Park

P: Wooded Claylands

LANDSCAPE TYPE P: WOODED CLAYLANDS

P.1 The *Wooded Claylands* landscape type comprises densely wooded landscapes that occupy the clay vale between the dipslope of the South Downs and the Portsdown chalk ridge. The *Wooded Claylands* identified in this study area form part of a wider clay lowland landscape containing the Forest of Bere, most of which lies outside the AONB and designated National Park boundaries.

DESCRIPTION

Integrated Key Characteristics:

- Low lying, undulating, clay vale between the dipslope of the South Downs and the Portsdown chalk ridge.
- Underlying London Clay and Wittering Formation produce a mixture of sandy and clayey soils which give rise to relatively unproductive agricultural land.
- Dominated by woodland, including semi-natural copses and mixed plantations, which creates a strong sense of enclosure.
- Woodland forms part of a relic fragment of the Forest of Bere, a royal hunting preserve, during the Medieval period.
- Small remnants of lowland heath survive within woodland clearings.
- Woodland surrounded by regular recent (18th-19th century) enclosures, many of which produce straight edges and sharp corners on the edges of the woodland.
- Post-medieval encroachment on the edge of the common waste is evident as common edge settlements, often with narrow parallel back garden plots (lying just outside the designated National Park boundary).
- Drained by a series of streams that flow into the Meon Valley.
- Presence of designed landscapes – from medieval deerparks to post-medieval landscape parks containing woodland incorporating a network of paths and rides.
- Extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation including forest walks, cycling, and horse riding.

Physical Landscape

P.2 The *Wooded Claylands* lie on Tertiary rocks, the most recent bedrock found in the South Downs. These comprise the brightly mottled clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Lambeth Group, the bluish grey clays of the London Clay Formation, and the sands and gravels of the Wittering Formation.

P.3 The clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Lambeth Group and the bluish grey clays of the London Clay Formation give rise to slowly permeable soils which support dense mixed woodland and pasture. The sands and gravels of the Wittering Formation give rise to well drained sandy soils which support coniferous woodland and heath.

P.4 The landscape is drained by numerous streams which flow into the River Meon.

Perceptual/Experiential Landscape

P.5 The high density of woodland provides a strong sense of enclosure – many of the plantations are coniferous and these create dark and mysterious pockets which have a deeply remote character. The landscape is essentially still as a result of the low population density and lack of movement and this contrasts with the area outside the boundary where there is a very high population density.

P.6 The landscape has a high level of perceived naturalness (due to the presence of mixed woodland, heathland and wetland habitats), lack of visible overt human impact, a low density of settlement, and associated dark skies and low noise levels. These factors all contribute to the sense of tranquillity.

P.7 Although the landscape has a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity, large areas of woodland are managed by the Forestry Commission and this provides good opportunities for access and recreation.

Biodiversity

P.8 This landscape is dominated by extensive areas of woodland of ancient origin. Typically these ecologically important areas of ancient woodland have been designated at the county level as SNCI. Although the woodlands have been widely replanted in the past, mostly with coniferous species such as Scot's pine, they have retained significant ecological value, with habitats such as occasional mature oaks, woody scrub, streams and ponds providing added interest. The extensive network of rides and paths, are also key features.

P.9 The large woodland areas provide important habitat for a range of breeding birds and invertebrates, as well as for lichens and fungi which are found in association with old broadleaved trees.

Key Biodiversity Features	Importance
Extensive tracts of ancient woodland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide important habitat for a range of breeding birds, woodland plant species and lichens

Historic Character

P.10 Prehistoric and Romano-British occupation of this landscape is likely to have been limited, due to the intractable soils. However, some exploitation of the landscape will have taken place involving some level of woodland clearance. The area is likely to have retained a far more wooded appearance than neighbouring districts, with much exploitation of the local resources taking place from settlements on the downland and coastal plain.

P.11 The marginal nature of the character area is reflected in its use as a royal hunting park by the Saxon kings. During the medieval period, this wooded landscape lay within the Forest of Bere, a royal hunting preserve. Royal forests contained a variety of land cover elements (the term forest meaning land outside the Common Law) including farmland, but it is known that Bere did have extensive areas of woodland

that supplied timber for shipbuilding from at least the 13th century. It is likely that the woodland is a relic fragment of this ancient woodland.

- P.12 The wooded heart lay within a larger area of common waste utilised by people living in nearby settlements such as Wickham. This was enclosed during the 18th-19th centuries, and the woodland is now surrounded by regular recent enclosures, many of which tidied up the woodland edge to produce the straight edges and sharp corners which are visible today. Post-medieval encroachment on the edge of the common waste, from the 17th century onwards, is reflected by a number of small scattered settlements just beyond the designated National Park boundary, often with narrow parallel back garden plots, characteristic of common-edge settlements.
- P.13 The landscape is now largely of 18th-19th century creation with enclosures and designed landscapes dating to this period. The original pre-1800 woodland survives, albeit with subsequent modification by the Forestry Commission to provide facilities for visitors, and is surrounded by the recent enclosures associated with the enclosing of the former common waste.

Key Features of the Historic Environment	Importance
Recent enclosures	Evidence that landuse history remained one of common grazing until relatively late in the post-medieval period
Extensive pre-1800 woodland	Landscape largely unchanged since the medieval period providing a strong sense of historical continuity
Designed landscapes - medieval deerparks and post-medieval landscape parks	Provide evidence of the use of agriculturally marginal land by the wealthy strata of society for recreational use
Dispersed farmsteads	Associated with recent enclosure of common waste
Common-edge settlements	Evidence for unregulated encroachment onto common waste

Settlement Form and Built Character

- P.14 The settlement pattern in this landscape is characterised by a very low density of dispersed settlement, with nucleated settlements situated beyond the designated National Park boundary in more favoured areas. This conforms to English Heritage's rural settlement designation of East Wessex Sub-Province within the South-eastern Province.
- P.15 The typical settlement form is of scattered isolated farmsteads, deriving from more recent enclosures during the 18th-19th centuries, set within regular field systems that have replaced earlier patterns. Smaller nucleations of probable 19th century and later date are located around the edge of the common wastes, representing unofficial encroachment of the common-edge zone.
- P.16 Building materials are typically flint, red brick and clay tiles.

EVALUATION

Sensitivity

- P.17 This landscape has many sensitive natural, cultural and aesthetic/perceptual features that are vulnerable to change. Key landscape sensitivities include:

- Areas of remnant ancient woodland that form part of a relic fragment of the Forest of Bere, and provides a sense of enclosure, a high perceived naturalness, and rich biodiversity.
- The sense of remoteness and tranquillity arising from the low density of settlement with associated low noise levels.
- Remnants of lowland heath which are important in providing a sense of time depth, a high perceived naturalness, and a rich biodiversity.
- The medieval deerparks and post-medieval landscape parks that provide evidence of the use of agriculturally marginal land by the wealthy strata of society for recreational use.

P.18 The high proportion of woodland cover limits visual sensitivity of the landscape.

Change – Key Issues and Trends

Past Change

P.19 Observable changes in the past include:

- Woodland passed from the Crown Office of Woods to the Forestry Commission in 1919 followed by planting of conifers on heathland (this has now ceased).
- Conversion of pasture associated with designed parkland landscapes to arable land use and loss of parkland trees.
- Encroachment of scrub onto remaining areas of heathland in areas of low grazing pressure.
- Decline in traditional woodland management techniques (coppicing) as forestry has concentrated on coniferous rotations.
- Increasing recreational use of the area and provision of recreational facilities, for example car parks, toilets and caravan sites.
- Hedgerow loss around field enclosures and replacement with fencing.

Future Landscape Change

P.20 In the short term (5 years) change is likely to be on a small-scale basis. Individual changes may not be immediately apparent or have a clear (visible) landscape impact. It is likely that tree cover will continue to change, particularly in relation to commercial forestry plantations with sensitive management required to minimise the impact of felling regimes and replanting particularly where this occurs on prominent skylines. The area may experience increased traffic pressures on rural lanes, plus increased demand for leisure land uses which may cumulatively start to erode the remote and tranquil character of the area.

P.21 It is difficult to be prescriptive about long term change (20 years) as this will be dependent on prevailing policies and incentives. The South Downs Management Plan

will be a key tool in managing change and ensuring a positive future for the area. Some potential changes and key vulnerabilities within the *Wooded Claylands* are outlined below.

Climate Change: Potential adverse change could include changes in the streams, which are characteristic of the area with high water flows and increased erosion contrasting with periods of drought and low flows. There may also be a change in the species composition of habitats particularly affecting the heathlands and ancient woodlands. Wind damage, due to increases in severe gales is another concern in this wooded area - the predominance of the older age classes may increase the susceptibility of woodland to damage from droughts and storms. Future improved management of woodlands for fuel may also be a positive benefit.

Agricultural Change and Land Management: Agricultural management will be driven by the changes in the world market and the CAP. In this area of low fertility clayey and sandy soils, it is possible that marginal farms may cease active agricultural production. The land may be vulnerable to purchase as hobby farms or for horse grazing and these uses will require active management to ensure the distinctive rural, remote character of the area is retained. Positive landscape change could result from regimes to promote enhanced environmental management of woodland and heathland sites.

Development: In this area the characteristic most vulnerable to adverse change is the remote, rural character. Although extensive development is not envisaged, this characteristic could be eroded by increased traffic from development outside the AONB/ designated National Park boundaries as well as potential impact of development itself in terms of lighting and recreational pressures.

Broad Management Objective and Landscape Guidelines

- P.22 **The overall management objective should be to protect and enhance the mosaic of lowland heath, grassland and woodland, and enhance the sense of history and connections with the Forest of Bere.**

Landscape Management Considerations

- Conserve pre-1800 woodland and monitor/ check the spread of introduced invasive species in ancient deciduous woodland.
- Reduce the impact of forestry by encouraging sensitive forestry practice, for example mixing different species and felling small coupes.
- Plan for climate change, researching appropriate species mixes and designing woodlands to minimise damage as a result of increased storms.
- Encourage re-introduction of traditional woodland management techniques, such as coppicing, and promote interest in, and marketing of, local wood products, including wood for fuel.
- Assess potential for creating new, interconnected heaths within the woodland mosaic.

- Maintain and re-plant hedgerows and ancient hedgerow oaks in pastoral clearings.
- Conserve and restore the landscape and built features of the historic parks, in particular through continued replacement tree planting and the restoration of parkland pasture.
- Encourage sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, hardstanding, jumps and other paraphernalia that are associated with hobby farms or private stables and that fall outside planning control.

Development Considerations

- Conserve the low density of dispersed settlement which contributes to the tranquil rural character.
- Ensure that any built development reflects the local vernacular –resist suburban style garden boundaries, kerbs, and lighting. Conserve the remote rural character of the landscape.
- Ensure recreational facilities, such as toilet blocks, car parks and caravan/camping sites, do not erode sense of tranquillity and integrate them into their wooded setting. Avoid use of excessive lighting, signage, ‘suburban’ style boundaries and hedges.

Character Areas

The *Wooded Claylands* landscape is represented by one small character area in the South Downs – this area occupies the lowlands bordering the Meon Valley above Wickham.

PI:	West Walk – Rookesbury Park
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PI: WEST WALK-ROOKESBURY PARK

Location and Boundaries

PI.1 The *West Walk-Rookesbury Park* character area occupies the lowlands bordering the Meon Valley above Wickham. It forms part of a wider clay lowland landscape containing the Forest of Bere, most of which lies outside the designated National Park boundary. The southern, western and eastern boundaries of the character area are formed by the designated National Park boundary – this boundary marks a change to a more settled lowland clay landscape. The northern boundary is defined by a change in geology to the chalk dip slope of the *Downland Mosaic*.

Integrated Key Characteristics:

- An area forming part of a low lying, undulating, clay vale between the dip slope of the South Downs and the Portsdown chalk ridge.
- Underlying clays, sands and gravels produce a mixture of sandy and clayey soils which support a mosaic of woodland, heath and pasture forming the largest relic fragment of the former Royal Forest of Bere.
- Dominated by woodland, including semi-natural copses, mixed plantations, and coniferous plantations on former heath. Small remnants of lowland heath within woodland clearings.
- Woodland surrounded by regular recent (18th 19th century) enclosures, many of which produce straight edges and sharp corners on the edges of the woodland, for example along Hollywell Road.
- Common edge settlements, such as Hundred Acres and Soberton Heath, lie just outside the character area (and designated National Park) boundary.
- Drained by a series of streams that flow into the Meon Valley.
- Presence of medieval deerparks and post-medieval landscape parks e.g. Rookesbury Park (listed on English Heritage's register) and Holywell House, West Lodge, and Meon Deer Park (on Hampshire County Council's local register).
- An extensive network of rides and paths and recreational facilities provided by the Forestry Commission, and a caravan site at Rookesbury Park.

Specific Characteristics Unique to West Walk-Rookesbury Park

PI.2 The *West Walk-Rookesbury Park* character area is an area of woodland, heath and pasture forming the largest relic fragment of the former Royal Forest of Bere. Many of the woodland areas carry non-statutory designation, with the largest known as West Walk SINC, comprising a reserve of around 360ha. Much of the original ancient woodland cover has been replanted with coniferous plantations, although areas of mature oak, together with woody scrub, streams, ponds and an extensive network of rides and paths occur, and provide important ecological features.

- PI.3 Other notable woodland reserves within the character area include, Dirty Copse SINC, Rookesbury Park Plantation SINC, and Great Holywell Copse SINC. As a whole these woodlands are particularly important for their breeding birds, woodland ground flora and lichens.
- PI.4 The woodland is managed by the Forestry Commission and provides extensive recreational opportunities. There are three car parks at West Walk, Woodend and Upperford Copse. These provide access to many miles of forest paths and tracks, including gravelled forest roads for cyclists and a specialised cycle route for the mountain biker. There is also an extensive network of waymarked routes for horse riders. The area also includes a caravan site at Rookesbury Park.
- PI.5 The woodland is surrounded by regular recent (18th-19th century) enclosures which extend beyond the boundaries of the character area. This represents land that was reclaimed from former 'waste' - some of the place-names still reflect this history (e.g. Frith Farm in the Meon valley, just outside the character area, meaning scrubland at the edge of a forest). Common edge settlements, such as Hundred Acres and Soberton Heath, lie just outside the character area (and designated National Park) boundary.
- PI.6 The southern part of the character area is occupied by Rookesbury Park, established in the 18th century. The woodland area known as West Walk appears to have been incorporated within this aesthetic landscape. There are a number of other historic parks and gardens, including the remnants of Meon Deer Park, and the grounds of Holywell House and West Lodge.

Sensitivities Specific to West Walk-Rookesbury Park

- PI.7 All of the landscape and visual sensitivities listed in the landscape type evaluation apply to this character area. Specific to this character area are:
- The mosaic of woodland, heath and pasture which forms the largest relic fragment of the former Royal Forest of Bere.
 - The distinctive common edge settlements, such as Hundred Acres and Soberton Heath, which lie just outside the character area.
 - 18th century Parkland at Rookesbury Park.
 - Historic parks and gardens at Holywell House, West Lodge, and Meon Deer Park (on Hampshire County Council's local register).

Change Specific to West Walk-Rookesbury Park

- PI.8 Past change specific to this area includes:
- Planting of conifers.
 - Conversion of pasture to arable land use and loss of parkland trees at Rookesbury Park in the 20th century.
 - More recent development of a caravan site at Rookesbury Park.

- PI.9 There may be pressures for recreational facilities and buildings associated with the school at Rookesbury Park. In addition there is likely to be pressure for increased recreational use of the landscape, and demand for recreational facilities, over the next 20 years.

Landscape Management/Development Considerations Specific to West Walk-Rookesbury Park

- PI.10 In addition to the generic landscape management and development considerations for this landscape type, the following landscape management considerations are specific to this character area:

- Conserve the mosaic of woodland, heath and pasture which forms the largest relic fragment of the former Royal Forest of Bere. Increase awareness of the Forest of Bere.
- Conserve and enhance the historic parklands at Rookesbury Park through replacement tree planting and the restoration of parkland pasture.
- Recognise and protect locally important parks and gardens, such as Holywell House, West Lodge, and Meon Deer Park, as well as those listed on English Heritage's Register.

- PI.11 The following development considerations are specific to this character area:

- Respect the distinctive pattern, and settings, of common edge settlements, such as Hundred Acres and Soberton Heath, which lie just outside the character area.
- Ensure recreational facilities and infrastructure is sensitively integrated within the woodland setting.
- Maximise opportunities presented by this areas as a 'recreational gateway' to the South Downs.



Large woodland blocks, provide important ecological habitats.



Well drained sandy soils, support coniferous woodland and heath.



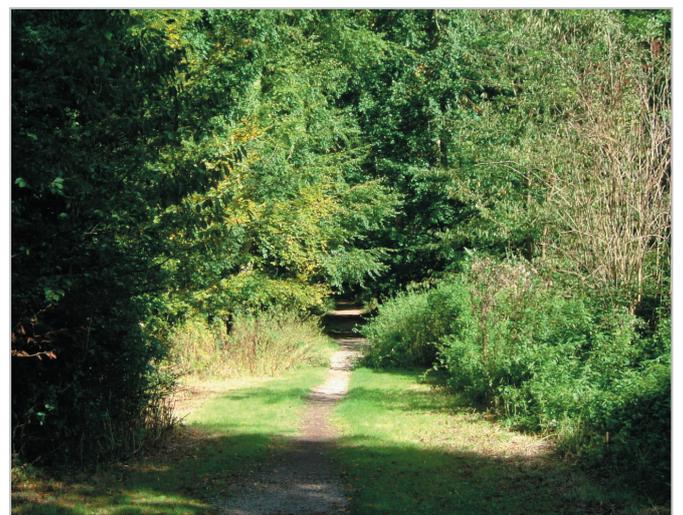
Large areas of woodland are owned by the Forestry Commission and provides good opportunities for recreation.



Woodland surrounded by recent (18th and 19th century) enclosure which often forms straight edges and sharp corners.



Heathland landscape on sandy soil.



Woodland footpaths.