

## Landscape Character Areas

## C: Clay Plateau



## LANDSCAPE TYPE C: CLAY PLATEAU

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- C.1 The *Clay Plateau* comprises an elevated block of clay-capped chalk in the western part of the South Downs between Chawton in the north and Froxfield in the south. The boundaries of this landscape type are defined by the extent of the virtually continuous drift deposit of clay with flints that caps the chalk.

### **Integrated Key Characteristics:**

- Chalk overlain by shallow continuous clay capping resulting in poorer heavier soils.
- Large tracts of elevated gently undulating countryside.
- A predominantly pastoral farmland landscape with significant blocks of woodland.
- Varying enclosure - open and exposed in higher plateau areas with occasional long views, with a more enclosed landscape in relation to woodland cover.
- Survival of original pre 1800 woodland and presence of oak as a key species in hedgerows and woodland.
- Varied field pattern including irregular blocks of fields are evidence of 15<sup>th</sup> –17<sup>th</sup> century enclosure and a more regular field system represents 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosure.
- Limited settlement comprising dispersed farmsteads and occasional small nucleated villages/hamlets with church spires forming distinctive landscape features.
- Presence of round barrows indicative of a Bronze Age ritual landscape.
- Narrow, little used lanes bordered by wide verges and ditches and limited rights of way network.
- Small scale historic parkland landscapes, some relating to a history of hunting.
- A strong sense of remoteness, stillness and emptiness.

### **Physical Landscape**

- C.2 This landscape type is found on the elevated chalk upland of the Hampshire Downs. The extensive deposits of clay-with-flints that overlies the chalk differentiates it from other areas of downland within the South Downs.
- C.3 The acidic clay capping gives rise to poorer heavy soils resulting in a landscape dominated by pasture, and blocks of woodland with limited arable cropping. Fields are defined by woodland edges and hedgerows. Oak is dominant in woodland, hedgerows and as a hedgerow tree species. There is evidence of more heathy vegetation occurring in relation to acidic soils with bracken frequently in hedgerows.

## Perceptual/Experiential Landscape

- C.4 The *Clay Plateau* is a landscape of both openness and enclosure due to the variation in landform, field size and extent of hedgerow and woodland cover. Occasionally very long views in open, higher areas amplify the sense of remoteness. Elsewhere, tall hedgerows along roads and woodland blocks provide containment and enclosure.
- C.5 This is a simple landscape composed of few elements, farming is not intensive, there are few settlements and little traffic on the rural lanes. Overall this landscape has a strong sense of remoteness, stillness and emptiness.
- C.6 Recreational use of the area is limited with relatively few rights of way. Although there is no registered common land there are occasional areas of relic common, now wooded. Historic Parkland, some of which relates to the history of hunting in the western downs is characteristic.
- C.7 The First World War poet Edward Thomas lived in the parish of Froxfield and drew inspiration from this and adjacent landscapes.

## Biodiversity

- C.8 The character area contains significant woodland cover, and includes a large number of ancient woodlands. The ancient woodlands have been traditionally managed under a coppice with standards regime, although many have been neglected over recent decades. Other important ecological features include plantation woodland, field ponds and a relatively intact hedgerow network, which provides important wildlife habitat and enhances habitat connectivity within the agricultural landscape.

Key Biodiversity Features	Importance
Significant woodland cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The area supports a number of non-statutory woodland sites, including several of ancient origin. Blocks of plantation woodland also provide important habitat in the local context.</li></ul>
Mosaic of permanent pasture with some arable and well developed hedgerows and field ponds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Provides habitat diversity at a landscape scale.</li></ul>

## Historic Character

- C.9 Finds of flint hand axes within the remnant clay-with-flint deposits indicates possible presence of Palaeolithic hunters. The downland soils capped by clay-with-flint tended to be avoided by prehistoric farmers as the soil was too intractable and acidic, although the evidence of flint scatters suggests some utilisation of patches of better soil is likely, particularly in the valleys and in areas covered by now vanished wind-blown (loessic) soils. The presence of round barrows indicates that the area was valued at least for ritual purposes during the Bronze Age. There is some evidence to suggest that further tree clearance of the clay areas was undertaken by Romano-British farmers who had the benefit of improved ploughing technology to tackle the heavy soils.
- C.10 The earliest Anglo-Saxon settlers are thought to have avoided the areas of clay-with-flint. Later communities settled along the river valleys, with Alton becoming a

market centre, but also expanded onto the downland, with some of the original settlements surviving into later centuries as isolated farms. It is likely that woodland regenerated on much of the clay.

- C.11 A sheep-corn husbandry system developed throughout the medieval period, with huge communal sheep flocks pastured on the downland during the day, and brought down onto the arable lands at night to provide valuable manure. This system was far less efficient than that practised on the eastern downs. The pasture was less extensive due to the increased woodland cover, and sheep were often required to graze common wood pastures, together with cattle and pigs, producing a pastoral system reminiscent of the Weald. The woodland was exploited for a wide range of craft industries.
- C.12 The western downs were also used to a great extent for hunting with deer parks recorded in several locations. Much of this land was not available for agriculture, although areas of commonland were accessible.
- C.13 During the later medieval and early post-medieval periods (15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries), the open fields around many of the medieval settlements were enclosed, producing irregular blocks of fields and these are still evident. The downland between probably remained unenclosed, although some of it may have been cultivated during the high point of medieval settlement during the 13<sup>th</sup> century and subsequently abandoned.
- C.14 The bulk of the landscape type was enclosed during the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, creating more regular field systems. Blocks of medieval woodland survive throughout the landscape, indicating that the medieval clearance was less thorough than in eastern Sussex (reflecting poorer soils), together with smaller clumps of post-1800 plantation, many of which originated as game coverts.

<b>Key Features of the Historic Environment</b>	<b>Importance (including reference to designated areas)</b>
Small settlements	Indicative of medieval manorial system based around open fields.
Recent enclosure	Forms part of post-1800 gentrification of the landscape
Low-level of surviving settlement – earlier occupation existing as earthworks/archaeological sites	Reflects fluctuating settlement patterns through time due to changing environmental/cultural conditions
Scattered post-medieval farmsteads	Indicates the changing nature of farming practice following decline of traditional manorial system
Survival of blocks of pre-1800 woodland	Provides evidence of medieval and early post-medieval woodland exploitation, e.g. coppicing and charcoal burning
Areas of post-1800 woodland plantations	Forms part of post-1800 gentrification of the landscape

### **Settlement Form and Built Character**

- C.15 The settlement pattern in this area is characterised by a low density of dispersed settlement, with a scatter of nucleated settlement in preferred areas. This conforms to English Heritage's rural settlement designation of East Wessex Sub-Province within the South-eastern Province, where the dominant settlement form comprises nucleated villages situated beyond the landscape type. The typical settlement form is relatively late in origin, and comprises isolated farmsteads of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century origin

set within areas of recent enclosure derived from former sheepwalk. However, some of the farmsteads are of medieval origin and represent former dependent hamlets which have subsequently shrunk.

- C.16 The exceptions to this pattern comprise several small nucleated settlements of medieval origin lying within sheltered low-lying areas. The Victorian church at Privett has been described as a 'town church in the country' – its tall spire provides a landmark on the plateau.
- C.17 Building materials are typically flint, red brick and clay tiles.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Sensitivity**

- C.18 This landscape type has a number of sensitive natural, cultural and aesthetic/perceptual features that are vulnerable to change. Key landscape sensitivities include:
- The pockets of original pre-1800 (probably medieval) woodland which provide enclosure and textural contrast.
  - Long open views in higher areas which amplify the sense of remoteness
  - The strong sense of remoteness arising from the simple landscape pattern, quiet roads and very low density of settlement.
  - Intact hedgerow network with hedgerow trees which are of biodiversity interest and create a strong landscape pattern as well as seclusion and enclosure.
  - Presence of historic parkland and common land.
- C.19 Where there is woodland cover in this landscape type the visual sensitivity of the landscape is reduced. The more open elevated areas that afford long views across the plateau are the most visually sensitive part of this landscape.

### **Change – Key Issues and Trends**

#### **Past Change**

- C.20 Some of the most fundamental changes to this landscape occurred in the 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> field enclosures. However, more recent changes include:
- Decline in traditional woodland management techniques (such as coppicing) as forestry has concentrated on coniferous rotations.
  - Woodland regeneration and creation of plantations on former common land.
  - Introduction of modern influences such as pylons which are highly visible within the open plateau landscape.
  - Land being sold separately from buildings resulting in pressure for new development.

### ***Future Landscape Change***

- C.21 In the short term (5 years) there is likely to be little change in this landscape.
- C.22 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 landscape. Some potential changes and key vulnerabilities within the *Clay Plateau* are outlined below.

**Climate Change:** Potential adverse change could include changes in the species composition of habitats affecting the ancient woodlands. Wind damage, due to increases in severe gales is also a concern. Higher temperatures could also lead to incidence of different livestock pests and possible increased use of pesticides if pests and pathogens increase.

In response to climate change, the pursuit of renewable energy may result in demand for wind energy development in the elevated open plateau areas which could alter the sense of tranquillity and remoteness associated with this landscape. There may also be demand for growth of biomass crops. 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. On these poorer soils over clay, it is possible that some farms may cease active agricultural production with a consequent change in the grazed, pastoral character. Land is likely to continue to be sold separately from buildings creating pressure for new development. Positive landscape change could result from regimes to promote enhanced environmental management of woodland, for example, the South Downs Forest Design Plan proposes to restore a large proportion of plantations on ancient woodlands to native species.

**Development:** However the landscape may be affected by development in adjacent areas beyond the Natural Park boundary.

### **Broad Management Objective and Landscape Guidelines**

- C.23 **The overall management objective should be to conserve the remote, quiet character of the landscape, formed by the pasture and woodland mosaic, quiet lanes and sparse settlement.**

### ***Landscape Management Considerations***

- Conserve the original pre-1800 woodland, woodland, hedgerows and hedgerow trees which provide enclosure in this landscape and form a strong landscape pattern and important wildlife network.
- Seek to reinstate active management of ancient woodlands traditionally managed under a coppice with standards regime.
- Manage woodland to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure to minimise risk of damage as a result of increased storms and high winds. Promote interest in, and marketing of, local wood products, including wood for fuel.

- Increase the biodiversity of arable land and intensive grassland. Promote appropriate management of arable farmland to create a wildlife-rich habitat supporting farmland birds, including retaining areas of fallow land, maintaining over winter stubbles, maintaining an unploughed margin around arable land, and managing existing hedgerows.
- Consider creation of different strips and blocks of habitat and encourage unusual arable weeds to enhance value for wildlife.
- Monitor regeneration of hedgerow trees and consider opportunities for re-planting. Create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
- Address the landscape and nature-conservation interest of ancient woodlands, ponds, parklands and relic commons through appropriate management.
- Seek to conserve and restore historic designed landscapes, and their settings. Encourage reversion of arable to pasture in these landscapes.

### **Development Considerations**

- Conserve the very low density of settlement, quiet roads and consequent deeply rural character and strong sense of remoteness and stillness associated with the *Clay Plateau*.
- Ensure that new farm buildings and associated storage structures and working areas are sensitively sited and screened to reduce their impact in the landscape.
- Maintain open views and across the higher plateau areas which contrast with the more enclosed areas contained by woodland.
- Avoid road 'improvements' and addition of signage that would alter the rural character of the quiet lanes. Control erosion of verges.
- Conserve historic landscapes and their settings, encouraging the management/ restoration of permanent pasture, parkland trees, avenues and clumps of trees.

### **Character Areas**

The *Clay Plateau* landscape type has only one character area.

CI:	Froxfield Clay Plateau
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## CI: FROXFIELD CLAY PLATEAU

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### Location and Boundaries

- CI.1 The character area comprises the broad plateau of continuous clay capped chalk and it is the extent of this geology that defines its boundaries. To the north and north-west the edge of the character area is delineated by the designated National Park boundary. There are views from the edges of this plateau over surrounding landscapes, particularly from the eastern edge of the plateau over the landscapes of the Greensand and Weald.

### Integrated Key Characteristics:

- An elevated gently undulating domed plateau defined by the shallow continuous clay capping which overlies the chalk bedrock.
- A landscape of mixed arable and pasture fields, some of late medieval origin (representing enclosure of the open fields around medieval settlements during the late medieval and post medieval periods) and some relating to planned enclosure during the 18th-19th centuries.
- A significant area of medieval assarts around Froxfield Green/High Cross which are visible as small, irregular fields set within woodland.
- Varying enclosure - open and exposed in higher plateau areas (e.g. centrally around Colemore) with a more enclosed landscape in relation to woodland cover (e.g. in the north and south of the area).
- Woodland occurs throughout the plateau – significant areas of ancient woodland occur in the northern part of the character area (e.g. Dogford Wood, Plash Wood and Lord's Wood) with small copses, sweet chestnut coppice and game coverts elsewhere. Presence of oak as a key species in hedgerows and woodland.
- Coppiced hedgerows are characteristic with a high proportion of holly.
- Low settlement density with isolated farmsteads of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century origin set within areas of recent enclosure, and small nucleated villages of medieval origin (e.g. High Cross) lying within sheltered low-lying areas and surrounded by earlier enclosures. Some of the isolated farmsteads represent shrunken medieval hamlets.
- Occasional areas of former commons, e.g. Colemore Common, support wood pasture which has a high biodiversity value.
- Field ponds provide locally important habitats.
- Narrow, little used rural lanes cross the area, bordered by wide verges and ditches. A marginal landscape with a strong sense of remoteness, stillness and emptiness.

- Historic parkland landscapes at Rotherfield Park and Basing Park provide evidence of the history of hunting in this area.

### **Specific Characteristics Unique to Froxfield Clay Plateau**

- C1.2 The Froxfield Clay Plateau is a still, quiet, seemingly remote landscape with sparse settlement, quiet rural lanes, and general absence of movement and activity. Farmland is predominantly pasture with a variety of field sizes relating to different periods of enclosure. The smaller irregular blocks of fields, produced by the enclosure of open fields during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, are still evident across most of the area. However, other parts of the plateau are dominated by regular field systems which represent planned enclosure during the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, reflecting the booming golden years of arable farming during the Napoleonic wars and the era of High Farming from the 1840s.
- C1.3 Patches of woodland occur throughout, and include a number of ancient woodland sites. The largest ancient woodlands, are found in the north of the character area, for example Plash wood, Maryland copse and Winchester wood. A large number of these woodland blocks are designated as SINCs, and are notable for supporting a range of plant species indicative of ancient woodland cover, and provide important habitat for a range of faunal species, including breeding birds.
- C1.4 Occasional areas of former common occur as at Colemore Common and Newton Common, although these are mostly under secondary woodland/plantation. Views vary according to the extent of woodland cover with more open flat plateau areas providing long views, contrasting with areas of greater enclosure.
- C1.5 This area is characterised by the absence of open access land with a limited rights of way network linking farms and villages. There are a number of historic parkland landscapes with a deer park recorded at Rotherfield (listed grade II\* on the English Heritage register) and another at Basing Park. A number of local parks and gardens occur including a late 18<sup>th</sup> century park at Pelham Place and a later park at Broadhangers. Some public access to these historic landscapes is possible. Coles is a locally important garden at Privett which is open to the public at various times of the year. Otherwise this area is not obviously used for recreational purposes, with no specific attractions or recreation facilities.
- C1.6 The deserted medieval village at Colemore is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Present settlement is sparse with dispersed farmsteads and very small villages at Privett, Froxfield Green, High Cross and East Tisted. The settlement edge of Four Marks, located on the designated National Park boundary, has an influence on the north western edge of the *Clay Plateau*. Privett has an impressive and imposing church in relation to the size of the village, with the spire forming the key feature in open view across the landscape.

### **Sensitivities Specific to the Froxfield Clay Plateau**

- C1.7 All of the landscape and visual sensitivities listed in the landscape type evaluation apply to this character area. Specific features sensitive to change in this area are:
- The historic landscapes including the former deer parks at Rotherfield and Basing and the 18<sup>th</sup> century parklands at Pelham Place and Broadhangers.

- The remnant former commons of the Froxfield Clay Plateau, Colemore Common and Newton Common.
- The ancient woodland (e.g. Dogford Wood, Plash Wood and Lord's Wood).
- Views to church spires, as at Privett, and their open setting which provide a point of reference in the landscape.

### **Change Specific to the Froxfield Clay Plateau**

C1.8 In addition to the generic changes listed in the landscape type evaluation, specific changes to this area include:

- The introduction of pylons resulting in visual intrusion.
- Decline in traditional woodland management practices (coppicing), field expansion, and regeneration of woodland on former commons.
- Replacement of semi-natural woodland with plantation woodland.
- Scrub encroachment and decline in grazing on former commons and areas of wood pasture.

### **Landscape Management/Development Considerations Specific to the Froxfield Clay Plateau**

C1.9 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:

- Identify important landscape features such as ancient tracks, hedgerows, old drove roads associated with commons and ensure their conservation.
- Conserve the remnant features of the former medieval deer parks at Rotherfield and Basing.
- Conserve historic 18th century designed landscapes at Pelham Place and Broadhangers and their settings, encouraging the management/ restoration of permanent pasture, parkland trees, avenues and clumps of trees.
- Encourage biodiversity enhancement within parkland areas to include low intensity management of grassland areas, conservation of veteran trees and retention of deadwood habitats.
- Encourage the reinstatement of woodland management by coppicing to reinstate the neglected stands of old coppice woods. Enhance the diversity of woodland edges.
- Consider reinstating grazing and restoring wood pasture management to commons.
- Consider further opportunities for recreation and access to this less well visited part of the South Downs.

CI.10 The following development considerations are specific to this character area:

- Conserve the sparsely settled, undeveloped character and special quality of 'remoteness', arising from the absence of development and activity.
- Ensure the settlement edge of Four Marks does not encroach into the area.
- Conserve views to church spires and their open setting which provide a point of reference in the landscape – of particular importance is the prominent and distinctive church spire at Privett.



A still, quiet, seemingly remote landscape at Froxfield.



Pylons create a linear feature within the open landscape.



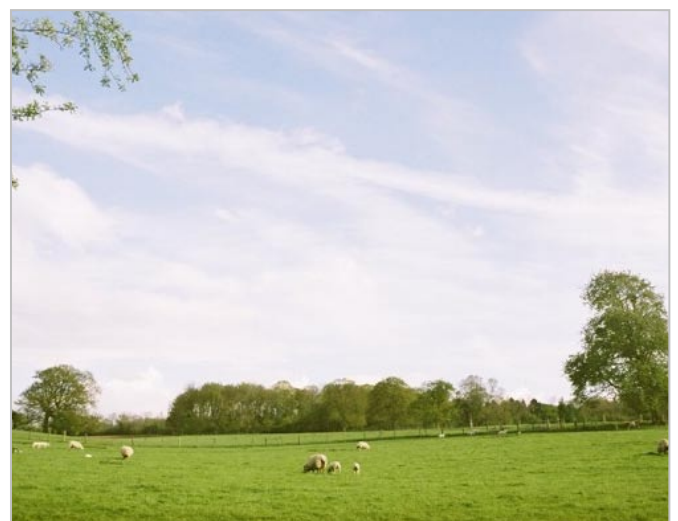
Varying levels of enclosure with areas of open, exposed arable land contrasting with woodland edge/parkland.



Views to church spires provide a point of reference in the landscape.



Bracken in the hedgerow is indicative of the acidic soils.



Sheep grazing opposite the Slade, Froxfield.