Appendix C
Landscape Character Type C: Clay Plateau

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 Green 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. This type contains some of the highest and most remote parts of the National Park.

Description

Key Characteristics

- Chalk overlain by shallow continuous clay capping resulting in lower fertility slightly acidic loamy soils.
- Elevated gently undulating countryside of mixed pastoral and arable farmland with significant blocks of woodland.
- Varying enclosure - open and exposed in higher plateau areas with long views, with a more enclosed landscape in relation to woodland cover.
- Notable woodland cover including surviving ancient woodland together with smaller clumps of post-1800 plantation, many of which originated as game coverts. Oak is a key species in hedgerows and woodland.
- Varied field pattern which consists of modern field amalgamation of earlier irregular enclosure during the 17th and 18th century, with occasional blocks of earlier assarts and later regular field patterns from 19th 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.
- Roads are typically narrow, little used lanes bordered by wide verges and ditches (although the A32 crosses the area).
- Footpaths and bridleways provide further links and access.
- Small scale historic parkland landscapes, some relating to a history of hunting.
- An elevated landscape with a strong sense of remoteness, stillness and dark skies. The type, alongside parts of LCT A, B and D contains some of the highest and most remote parts of the National Park.

Physical Landscape

C.1 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 National Park.

C.2 The acidic clay capping gives rise to lower fertility slightly acidic loamy soils resulting in a landscape of mixed arable and pastoral farmland, and blocks of woodland. 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 in hedgerows.

Perceptual/Experiential Landscape

C.3 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.4 This is a simple landscape composed of relatively 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 dark skies.

C.5 Recreational use of the area is confined to public rights of way (footpaths and bridleways) across the farmed landscape. 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 and much of the area is still managed by private estates.

C.6 The First World War poet Edward Thomas lived at Steep in the parish of Froxfield and drew inspiration from this and adjacent landscapes.

Biodiversity

C.7 The character area contains a significant amount of woodland, much of which is deciduous woodland (a BAP Priority Habitat) and ancient woodland. The ancient woodlands have been traditionally managed under a coppice with standards regime, although many have been neglected over recent decades. Ancient semi-natural woodlands carry non-statutory wildlife designations as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).

C.8 Other important ecological features include remnant areas of good quality semi-improved grassland and pockets of lowland calcareous grassland (also BAP Priority Habitats) adjoining the neighbouring *Downland Mosaic* character type, plantation woodland, field ponds and a relatively intact hedgerow network, which provides important wildlife habitat and enhances habitat connectivity within the agricultural landscape.

C.9 An area of BAP Priority Habitat lowland calcareous grassland on the edge of the *Clay Plateau* at Colemore and Priors Dean is identified as providing an effective habitat network in Natural England's National Habitat Networks Mapping Project. Adjacent to this habitat is a small area of semi-improved grassland identified as being suitable for restoration and extending west from this area, land is considered suitable for the creation of new habitats in order to connect existing grassland habitats as part of a Network Enhancement Zone.

Key Biodiversity Features	Importance
Significant cover of deciduous woodland (a BAP Priority Habitat), much of which is of ancient origin.	Deciduous woodland contains important canopy and ground flora. Blocks of plantation woodland also provide important habitat in the local context.
Mosaic of permanent pasture with some arable and well developed hedgerows and field ponds.	Provides habitat diversity at a landscape scale as well as facilitating species movement through undisturbed habitats.
Pockets of good quality semi-improved grassland and lowland calcareous grassland (both BAP Priority Habitats).	Chalk grassland is a nationally scarce resource highly valued for its very rich flora and rare butterflies. Semi-improved grassland is moderately species-rich but valued for its potential for habitat enhancement.

Historic Character

C.10 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 was likely, particularly in the valleys and areas covered by now vanished wind-blown (loessic) soils. The presence of round barrows indicates that the area was valued 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.11 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.12 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.13 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.14 During the post-medieval period the open fields around many of the medieval settlements were enclosed, producing irregular blocks of fields. These piecemeal enclosures are still evident, identified by regular or irregular shaped fields with wavy or straight boundaries, creating an informal field pattern. Assarts, formed from the clearance of woodland, are also scattered throughout the type. The downland probably remained unenclosed, although some of it may have been cultivated during the high point of medieval settlement during the 13th century and subsequently abandoned.

C.15 Regular field patterns resulting from planned enclosure in the 18th and 19th century remain evident across significant areas in the centre of the type, such as at Barnet Side or from the late enclosure of common land at West Tisted Common.

C.16 Most fields were later amalgamated, reflecting changes in agricultural practice and the intensification of farming in the 20th century, creating the larger regular or semi-regular fields with a mix of boundary form that now characterise the type.

C.17 Blocks of medieval woodland survive throughout the landscape, indicating that the medieval clearance was less thorough than in eastern Sussex (reflecting less fertile soils), together with smaller clumps of post-1800 plantation, many of which originated as game coverts.

C.18 Historic parkland, including areas of woodland plantation, is associated with country houses at Basing Park and Rotherfield Park, although much of the parkland features at Basing Park have been lost to farmland.

Key Features of the Historic Environment	Importance
Small settlements	Indicative of medieval manorial system based around open fields.
Recent enclosure	Forms part of post-1800 reorganisation 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.19 The settlement pattern of the *Clay Plateau* is characterised by a low density of dispersed settlement, with a scattering 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 18th-19th 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.20 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.21 Building materials are typically flint, red brick and clay tiles.

Evaluation

Ecosystem services in the Clay Plateau

C.22 Ecosystem services are the benefits people and society get from the natural environment. The *Clay Plateau* provides:

Provisioning	■ Food provision – livestock grazing and arable production. ■ Timber provision – broadleaved and conifer supply, however many woods are under-utilised.
Regulating	■ Regulating water flow – woodland helps regulate flow of water into adjacent valleys. ■ Regulating water quality – water filters through the soils and bedrock to recharge the chalk aquifer over which this landscape type lies. ■ Regulating soil erosion – permanent vegetation and woodland cover helps to prevent soil erosion from wind and water, particularly on sloping ground. ■ Climate regulation – woodland cover delivers carbon sequestration. ■ Air quality regulation – woodland cover is important in regulating local air quality.
Cultural	■ Sense of place – the patchwork of farmland and woodland, country houses and historic parkland create a landscape with a sense of place. ■ Tranquillity – a strong sense of remoteness, stillness and dark skies with little traffic and few settlements. ■ Recreation – the rural lanes and network of footpaths and bridleways provide a recreation resource.
Supporting	■ Biodiversity – significant areas of deciduous woodland (including ancient woodland) and pockets of semi-improved and lowland calcareous grasslands, that support a range of species

Sensitivities

C.23 This landscape type has many sensitive physical and aesthetic/perceptual features that are vulnerable to change, as set out in the table below.

Key Landscape Sensitivities
1. The deciduous woodlands which provide enclosure, sense of place, time depth (particularly the ancient woodlands) - and support a range of flora and fauna.
2. The strong sense of remoteness arising from the quiet roads, very low density of settlement and elevated plateau location.
3. The dark skies associated with the South Downs International Dark Skies Reserve, which are vulnerable to light sources, particularly in the 'Dark Sky Core' in the south of the type.
4. Intact hedgerow network with hedgerow trees (many of which are oak) which are of biodiversity interest and create a strong landscape pattern as well as seclusion and enclosure.
5. Presence of historic parkland and common land which provide time depth and a sense of history.
6. Pockets of semi-improved and lowland calcareous grasslands that support a range of flora and fauna.
7. The open elevated areas that form undeveloped skylines.
8. The long rural views across the plateau and from its eastern edge across lower land.

Change – Key Issues and Trends

Past Change

C.24 Some of the most fundamental changes to this landscape occurred due to modern amalgamation of earlier field enclosures. However, more recent changes include:

Past Change
1. Decline in traditional woodland management techniques (such as coppicing) and increase in forestry concentrating on coniferous rotations.
2. Woodland regeneration and creation of plantations on former common land.
3. Introduction of modern built structures such as pylons which are highly visible within the open plateau landscape.
4. Fragmentation of land holdings.

Future Landscape Change

C.25 The likely future changes are set out in the table below:

Future Change
1. Increased temperatures may result in changes in woodland and hedgerow habitat extent and species composition which could adversely alter overall wooded landscape character, particularly affecting ancient woodlands.
2. Increased temperatures could also lead to an increase in pathogens which could result in the decline in ability of woodland to regenerate and the loss of mature/significant trees. Future management of woodlands for fuel may be a positive benefit.
3. Veteran parkland trees and historic-lined avenues in designed landscapes may be particularly vulnerable to pest and diseases, storms and drought associated with climate change.
4. Wind damage, due to increases in severe gales is also a concern in this elevated landscape. The predominance of older age classes may increase the susceptibility of woodland to damage from storms.
5. In response to climate change, renewable energy may result in demand for wind energy development in elevated open plateau areas which could alter the sense of tranquillity and remoteness associated with this landscape.
6. If Net Zero commitments are implemented, it is likely that there will be key changes to land use, including a reduction in grazing land (linked to plant-based diets) to free up land for other uses such as bioenergy crop planting (and low-grade biomass production) and a major programme of afforestation including woodlands, on-farm woods and shelterbelts.
7. Agricultural management will be driven by changes in the world market and agricultural policy. On these less fertile soils over clay, it is possible that some farms may cease active agricultural production with potential for diversification into other land uses. Land is likely to continue to be sold separately from buildings creating pressure for new development.
8. It is possible that this area, which is dominated by areas of land managed as large estates, may be less vulnerable to market forces and trends towards amalgamation or conversely subdivision of farmland.
9. Positive landscape change could result from regimes to promote enhanced environmental management of woodland and grassland habitats. For example, the South Downs Forest Design Plan proposes to restore a large proportion of plantations on ancient woodlands to native species as well as the restoration of chalk grassland habitat in specific areas which will have the benefit of revealing the hidden historic landscape that currently lies beneath the woodland.
10. Pressure for development outside the National Park, including housing and infrastructure, may result in visual impacts from the boundary edge and affect general perceptual qualities including tranquillity and dark skies. For example, widening or development pressure along the A31, which runs along the border of the type to the north west.
11. Extensions and alterations to individual properties (such as lighting or introduction of suburban style fencing and boundaries), plus increased demand for recreational land uses such as horse riding may cumulatively start to erode the perceived rural, remote character of the area.
12. Increasing traffic pressures may have impacts on the narrow rural roads and lanes with wide verges and roadside trees that characterise the area.

Broad Management Objective and Landscape Guidelines

C.26 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.

Guidance for Landscape Management

A. Conserve the organic landscape pattern with its diverse field pattern marked by a network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Restore and manage hedgerows and plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees. Create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.

B. Conserve pre-1800 woodland and reinstate active woodland management by coppicing to reinstate the neglected stands of old coppice woods. Enhance the diversity of woodland edges.

C. 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 and construction.

D. Manage wood pasture and parkland habitats by the conservation of veteran and mature trees and planning for their succession, these play an essential part in maintaining the historic landscape character of the area.

E. Increase the biodiversity of arable land and intensive grassland 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, creating different strips and blocks of habitat including unusual arable weeds and managing existing hedgerows.

F. Promote enhanced environmental management of species-rich chalk grasslands, extending and linking areas of habitat.

G. Be alert to potential new pests and diseases and plan for their management (particularly in ancient woodland).

H. Continue to monitor native species to assess changes in numbers and distribution. Monitor and control the spread of invasive species which a cause of decline in native habitats, such as Contonesters on the chalk grassland or Rhododendrons in the hanger woodlands. Refer to the SNDP INNS Strategy.

I. Maintain and develop the rights of way network and creation of green infrastructure within the national park, providing further opportunities for responsible recreation and access to this less visited part of the South Downs.

Guidance for Integrating Development into the Landscape

A. Conserve the very low density of settlement, quiet roads and consequent deeply rural character and strong sense of remoteness associated with the *Clay Plateau*.

B. Ensure that new farm buildings and associated storage structures and working areas are sensitively sited and screened using native species to reduce their impact in the landscape.

C. Maintain open views across the higher plateau areas and from the eastern edge across lower land and consider the impact of any development on these and views to local landmarks.

D. Conserve the undeveloped skylines of open plateau areas.

E. Avoid road ‘improvements’ and addition of signage that would alter the rural character of the quiet lanes. Control erosion of verges.

F. Conserve historic landscapes and their settings. Encourage biodiversity enhancement within historic parkland, including the management/ restoration of permanent pasture, parkland trees, avenues and clumps of trees and retention of deadwood habitats.

G. Conserve the tranquil, wooded and remote character of the landscape and associated dark skies, which extend across the elevated plateau landscape. Pay particular attention to the introduction of any new lighting into the landscape, particularly in the 'Dark Sky Core' of the International Dark Sky Reserve, taking account of the technical

guidance advice note: https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/TLL-10-SDNPA-Dark-Skies-Technical-Advice-Note-2018.pdf.

Woodland strategy and suitable species

C.27 The LCT contains 7.24km^2 of woodland, mostly broadleaved including surviving ancient woodland, along with mixed woodland plantation associated with country houses. Oak is a key species in hedgerows and woodland. This represents approximately 14% woodland cover. The less fertile soils of this landscape type provide opportunities to increase native woodland cover by extending and connecting existing woodland, particularly existing ancient woodlands. This will also support climate change mitigation as part of afforestation programmes and reduce soil erosion, particularly when planted on slopes.

C.28 Avoid the introduction of non-native species. Appropriate plant species may be informed by the National Biodiversity Network Gateway, relevant Biodiversity Actions Plans and the relevant Biological Records Centre.

C.29 Ensure any purchased plant stock is through reputable nurseries, operating the Plant Health Assurance Scheme (once it has been trialled) to protect against the risk of *Xylella fastidiosa* and other plant health risks.

Character Areas The *Clay Plateau* landscape type has only one character area.	
C1:	Froxfield Clay Plateau

C1: Froxfield Clay Plateau

Location and Boundaries

This character area comprises the broad elevated plateau of continuous clay capped chalk located to the west of the Selborne Hangers. To the north and north-west the character area extends beyond the 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.

Key Characteristics

- An elevated gently undulating domed plateau defined by the shallow continuous clay capping which overlies the chalk bedrock.
- A farmland landscape of mixed arable and pasture fields, some of post medieval origin (representing enclosure of the open fields around medieval settlements) and some relating to planned enclosure during the 18th-19th centuries.
- Occasional assarts 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 18th-19th 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 strong sense of remoteness, stillness and dark skies.
- Historic parkland landscapes at Rotherfield Park and Basing Park provide evidence of the history of hunting in this area.

Specific Characteristics Unique to the Froxfield Clay Plateau

C.30 The *Froxfield Clay Plateau* is a still, quiet, seemingly remote landscape with sparse settlement, quiet rural lanes, and general absence of movement and activity (except for agricultural activities). Farmland is a mixture of arable and pasture with a variety of field sizes relating to different periods of enclosure. The smaller blocks of fields, produced by the piecemeal enclosure of open fields during the 17th and 18th centuries, are still evident across much of the area. There are also occasional assarts, formed by woodland clearance, dating from the 16th century. Fields of early post-medieval origin occur in the west of the character area (south of Monkwood), these represent enclosure of the open fields around medieval settlements. Other parts of the plateau are dominated by regular field systems which represent planned private enclosure during the 18th-19th centuries, reflecting the booming golden years of arable farming during the Napoleonic wars and the era of High Farming from the 1840s. Fewer of these recent enclosures are present in the western part of the character area, although smaller areas of recent enclosure in this part of the character area reflect enclosure of common land (e.g. West Tisted Common) from the 18th century onwards.

C.31 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 LWS and are notable for supporting a range of plant species indicative of ancient woodland cover, providing important habitats for a range of faunal species, including breeding birds.

C.32 Occasional areas of former common occur at Colemore Common and Newton Common (also a LWS), 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.

C.33 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 Historic England register) and another at Basing Park. A number of local parks and gardens occur including a late 18th 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 except for public footpaths and bridleways.

C.34 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 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 views across the landscape. The deserted medieval village at Colemore is a Scheduled Monument.

Sensitivities Specific to the Froxfield Clay Plateau

C.35 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:

Key Landscape Sensitivities
1. The former deer parks at Rotherfield and Basing and the 18th century parklands at Pelham Place and Broadhangers.
2. The remnant former commons of Colemore Common and Newton Common.
3. The ancient woodlands (e.g. Dogford Wood, Plash Wood and Lord's Wood).
4. Views to church spires, as at Privett, which provides a point of reference in the landscape and is noted as a key landmark in the View Characterisation and Analysis[1] report.
5. Small irregular fields of post-medieval origin and occasional assarts, particularly in the west of the character area and around Froxfield Green/High Cross.

Change Specific to the Froxfield Clay Plateau

C.36 All of the changes listed in the landscape type evaluation apply to this character area.

Landscape Management/Development Considerations Specific to the Froxfield Clay Plateau

C.37 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:

a. Identify important landscape features associated with commons, post-medieval and assart field enclosures and ensure their conservation.

b. Conserve the remnant features of the former medieval deer parks at Rotherfield and Basing.

c. 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.

d. Consider reinstating grazing and restoring wood pasture management to Colemore Common and Newton Common.

C.38 The following development considerations are specific to this character area:

a. Ensure the settlement edge of Four Marks does not encroach into the area.

b. Conserve views to the distinctive church spire at Privett.

[1] LUC. 2015 South Downs National Park: View Characterisation and Analysis