Appendix Q
Landscape Character Type Q: Wooded Claylands

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* in the National Park form part of a wider clay lowland landscape containing the Forest of Bere, most of which lies outside the National Park boundary.

Description

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.
- Drained by a series of streams that flow into the Meon Valley.
- 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 National Park boundary).
- 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

Q.1 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.

Q.2 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.

Q.3 The landscape is drained by numerous streams which flow into the River Meon.

Perceptual/Experiential Landscape

Q.4 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 contrasting with the area outside the National Park boundary where there is a very high population density.

Q.5 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, associated dark skies and low noise levels. These factors all contribute to the sense of tranquillity.

Q.6 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

Q.7 This landscape is dominated by extensive areas of woodland of ancient origin, with a large proportion identified as a BAP Priority Habitat (deciduous woodland). Typically, these ecological important areas of ancient woodland have been designated as LWS. Although the woodlands have been widely replanted in the past, mostly with coniferous species such as 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.

Q.8 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
Deciduous woodland (a BAP Priority Habitat), including extensive tracts of ancient woodland.	Deciduous woodland provides important habitat for a range of breeding birds, woodland plant species and lichens

Q.9 Habitats across the *Wooded Claylands* haven't been considered as part of Natural England's National Habitat Mapping Project. However, Network Enhancement Zones associated with the habitats found within the Meon Valley (which crosses through the centre of the *Wooded Claylands*) include land within this landscape. These areas of land are considered suitable in connecting existing patches of habitats through the creation of new habitats.

Historic Character

Q.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.

Q.11 The marginal nature of the character type 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.

Q.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 National Park boundary, often with narrow parallel back garden plots, characteristic of common-edge settlements.

Q.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.

Key Features of the Historic Environment	Importance
Dispersed farmsteads	Associated with recent enclosure of common waste.

Settlement Form and Built Character

Q.14 The settlement pattern in this landscape is characterised by a very low density of dispersed settlement, with nucleated settlements situated beyond the National Park boundary in more favoured areas. This conforms to Historic England's rural settlement designation of East Wessex Sub-Province within the South-eastern Province.

Q.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.

Q.16 Building materials are typically flint, red brick and clay tiles.

Evaluation

Ecosystem Services in the Wooded Claylands

Q.17 Ecosystem services are the benefits people and society get from the natural environment. The *Wooded Claylands* provide:

Provisioning	■ Timber provision – coniferous and mixed plantations. ■ Water availability – sandstone aquifer maintains springs and base flows into rivers and streams.
Regulating	■ Regulating water flows – soils and underlying geology are permeable and able to absorb and store winter rainfall, helping to avoid accelerated water run-off and flooding. The area is drained by numerous streams which flow into the River Meon, providing flood protection and flood storage capacity. ■ Regulating soil erosion – areas not cultivated are protected from erosion. ■ Climate regulations - carbon sequestration and storage benefits in soils, woodland and heathland. Free draining soils are of particular importance to carbon storage. ■ Air quality regulation – woodlands play an important role in regulating local air quality. ■ Pollination – heathland and the back gardens associated with the common-edge settlements are important nectar sources for pollinating insects.
Cultural	■ Sense of place – a wooded areas that forms part of a relic fragment of the Forest of Bere. ■ Tranquillity – presence of mixed woodland, heathland and wetland habitats, lack of visible overt human impact, a low density of settlement, associated dark skies and low noise levels. ■ Recreation – large areas of woodland managed by the Forestry Commission.
Supporting	■ Biodiversity – significant woodland cover providing important habitats for woodland plant species, lichens, fungi, breeding birds and invertebrates.

Sensitivities

Q.18 This landscape has many sensitive physical and aesthetic/perceptual features that are vulnerable to change. Key landscape sensitivities are included in the table below:

Key Landscape Sensitivities
1. Areas of remnant ancient woodland that form part of a relic fragment of the Forest of Bere and provide a sense of enclosure, a high perceived naturalness, and rich biodiversity.
2. The sense of remoteness and tranquillity arising from the low density of settlement with associated low noise levels.
3. Remnants of lowland heath which are important in providing a sense of time depth, a high perceived naturalness, and a rich biodiversity.
4. 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.

Change – Key Issues and Trends

Past Change

Q.19 Past change includes:

Past Change
1. 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), resulting in a change to the historic landscape pattern and increasing the sense of enclosure, while providing recreational opportunities.

Past Change	
2.	Decline in traditional woodland management techniques (coppicing) as forestry has concentrated on coniferous rotations.
3.	Conversion of pasture associated with designed parkland landscapes to arable land use and loss of parkland trees, changing historic landscape pattern.
4.	Encroachment of scrub onto remaining areas of heathland in areas of low grazing pressure, resulting in loss of habitat
5.	Hedgerow loss around field enclosures and replacement with fencing, resulting in a loss of historic field patterns.
6.	Increasing recreational use of the area and provision of recreational facilities, for example car parks, toilets and caravan sites.

Future Landscape Change

Q.20 The likely future changes are set out in the table below:

	Future Change
1.	An increase in the coverage of commercial forestry plantations with impacts from felling regimes and replanting.
2.	Increased rainfall could lead to high water flows of streams, and increased rates of soil erosion for the freely draining sands and gravels of the Wittering Formation, contrasting with periods of drought and low flows.
3.	Increased temperatures may result in changes to the species composition of habitats particularly affecting the remnant areas of heath and ancient woodlands. This could also lead to the formation of pathogens which in time could result in the decline in ability of woodland to regenerate and the loss of mature/significant landscape trees.
4.	Wind damage, due to increases in severe gales, is another possible issue 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 be a positive benefit.
5.	Agricultural management will be driven by the changes in the world market and the agricultural policy. 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.
6.	Positive landscape change could result from regimes to promote enhanced environmental management of woodland and heathland sites.
7.	If Net Zero commitments are implemented, it is likely that there will key changes to land use, including an increase in woodland related to afforestation initiatives.
8.	Open access heathland is sensitive to trampling caused by increased visitor numbers resulting in increased erosion and flooding. Drier summers will also increase the risk of fires.
9.	Pressure for development outside the National Park (and the associated increase in traffic from new developments) may result in visual impacts from the boundary edge and affect general perceptual qualities including tranquillity / dark skies and the overall remote, rural character. There may also be increased recreational pressures as a result.

Broad Management Objective and Landscape Guidelines

Q.21 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.

Guidance for Landscape Management

A. Conserve pre-1800 woodland and monitor/ check the spread of introduced invasive species in ancient deciduous woodland, and plan for long term woodland regeneration. As conditions change, plant suitable species and manage woodlands to improve structure, health and diversity of habitat, improving the connectivity of woodland across the Greensand Hills.

B. Reduce the impact of forestry by encouraging sensitive forestry practice, for example mixing different species and felling small coupes.

C. Plan for climate change, researching appropriate species mixes and designing woodlands to minimise damage as a result of increased storms.

D. 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.

E. Manage existing heathland to prevent encroachment of scrub and assess potential for creating new, interconnected heaths within the woodland mosaic.

F. Maintain and re-plant hedgerows and ancient hedgerow oaks in pastoral clearings.

G. Be alert to potential new pests and diseases and plan for their management. Continue to monitor native species to assess changes in numbers and distribution. Monitor and control the spread of invasive species which are a cause of decline in native habitats, such as Rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum* in woodlands. Refer to the SDNP INNS Strategy.

H. 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.

I. 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.

J. Develop large scale habitat re-creation as part of enhancing the green infrastructure within the National Park, to provide greater recreation resource and allow the spread of potentially increased visitors across numerous sites. Manage visitor pressure by, where necessary, directing people away from the most vulnerable areas at sensitive times. Where appropriate, develop new recreational routes to take pressure of those routes at risk from erosion.

K. Promote responsible recreation behaviour. This is particularly important during periods of heat wave, where there is increased risk to health as well as risks of fire in areas of open grassland / heathland and woodland.

L. Seek to minimise water pollution from agriculture through sensitive land management practices, including restoration of buffer strips along watercourses to minimise run-off.

Guidance for Integrating Development into the Landscape

A. Conserve the low density of dispersed settlement which contributes to the tranquil rural character.

B. 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.

C. 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.

D. Conserve the tranquil, wooded and undeveloped character of the landscape and associated dark skies, taking account of the technical guidance note dark skies technical 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

Q.22 The LCT is dominated by woodland with a mix of broadleaved woodlands and conifer plantations, covering approximately 75% of the area or 5.01km^2 of woodland, making it the most wooded part of the National Park. The woodland strategy is to preserve the pre-1800 woodland, encouraging the replacement of coniferous plantations with new indigenous species. Woodland planting would be appropriate where these do not conflict with lowland heathland conservation and enhancement.

Q.23 Avoid the introduction of non-native plant and animal species and monitor occurrence and abundance of new pests and diseases. Appropriate plant species may be informed by the National Biodiversity Network Gateway, relevant Biodiversity Action Plans and biological records from the relevant Biological Records Centre.

Q.24 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 *Wooded Claylands* landscape is represented by one small character area on the southern boundary of the South Downs National Park, south of Soberton Heath.	
Q1:	West Walk – Rookesbury Park Wooded Claylands

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Location and Boundaries

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 National Park boundary. The southern, western and eastern boundaries of the character area are formed by the 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 dipslope of the *Downland Mosaic*.

Key Characteristics

- An area forming part of a low lying, undulating, clay vale between the dipslope 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 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 Historic England'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

Q.25 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 LWS, 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 provide important ecological features.

Q.26 Other notable woodland reserves within the character area include, Dirty Copse LWS, Rookesbury Park Plantation LWS, Great Holywell Copse LWS, Ragnals Copse LWS, Great Lion Copse LWS and Little Lion Copse LWS. As a whole these woodlands are particularly important for their breeding birds, woodland ground flora and lichens.

Q.27 The woodland is managed by the Forestry Commission and provides extensive recreational opportunities, including car parks that 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.

Q.28 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 National Park) boundary.

Q.29 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 designed 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

Q.30 All of the landscape and visual sensitivities listed in the landscape type evaluation apply to this character area. In addition, specific to this character area are:

Key Landscape Sensitivities	
1.	The mosaic of woodland, heath and pasture which forms the largest relic fragment of the former Royal Forest of Bere.
2.	The distinctive common edge settlements, such as Hundred Acres and Soberton Heath, which lie just outside the character area.
3.	18th century parkland at Rookesbury Park.
4.	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

Q.31 In addition to the generic changes listed in the landscape type evaluation, specific changes to this area include:

Forces for Change	
1.	Pressures for recreational facilities and buildings associated with the school at Rookesbury Park.

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

Q.32 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.** Conserve the mosaic of woodland, heath and pasture which forms the largest relic fragment of the former Royal Forest of Bere.
- **b.** Conserve and enhance the historic parklands at Rookesbury Park through replacement tree planting and the restoration of parkland pasture.
- **c.** Recognise and protect locally important parks and gardens, such as Holywell House, West Lodge, and Meon Deer Park, as well as those listed on Historic England's Register.

Q.33 The following development considerations are specific to this character area:

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