

LCT1 Heathland

General Description

The Heathland landscape character type is a mosaic of wet mires, bracken, gorse and tracts of heather. The occasional group of firs, encroaching scrub and large tracts of woodland break up long views across this predominantly open landscape. The type is also found extensively within the remainder of the New Forest.

Location

The character type is located in a small area of the New Forest Heritage Area on the southern tip of the Test Valley Borough, to the south of West Wellow and west of Canada, forming part of the more extensive Heath Associated Smallholdings and Dwellings landscape character type within New Forest District. Only one character area is to be found:

- LCA1A West Wellow Heaths

Physical Influences

Geology and Soils: The Heathland character type overlays a mixture of solid geology which makes up the Branksome Sand group (formerly the Bracklesham Group). However past human activity (which led to the clearing of the 'Wildwood' in prehistoric times for grazing and cultivation), assisted by the slight natural acidity and permeability of the underlying sands and gravels, has led to leaching of nutrients, resulting in the poor acid soils.

Landform: Domed hill top commons and gentle valleys.

Drainage: Heathland lies within the River Blackwater catchment area. Soils are free draining with localized mires (wet boggy areas) and streams.

Biodiversity and Vegetation Pattern

This is a landscape of typical lowland heath, dominated by ericaceous shrubs. Heath occurs in mosaics with acid grassland, patchy woodland and scrub. In general the valleys have developed wetter areas due to soil erosion and deposition over time, and a few valley mires remain.

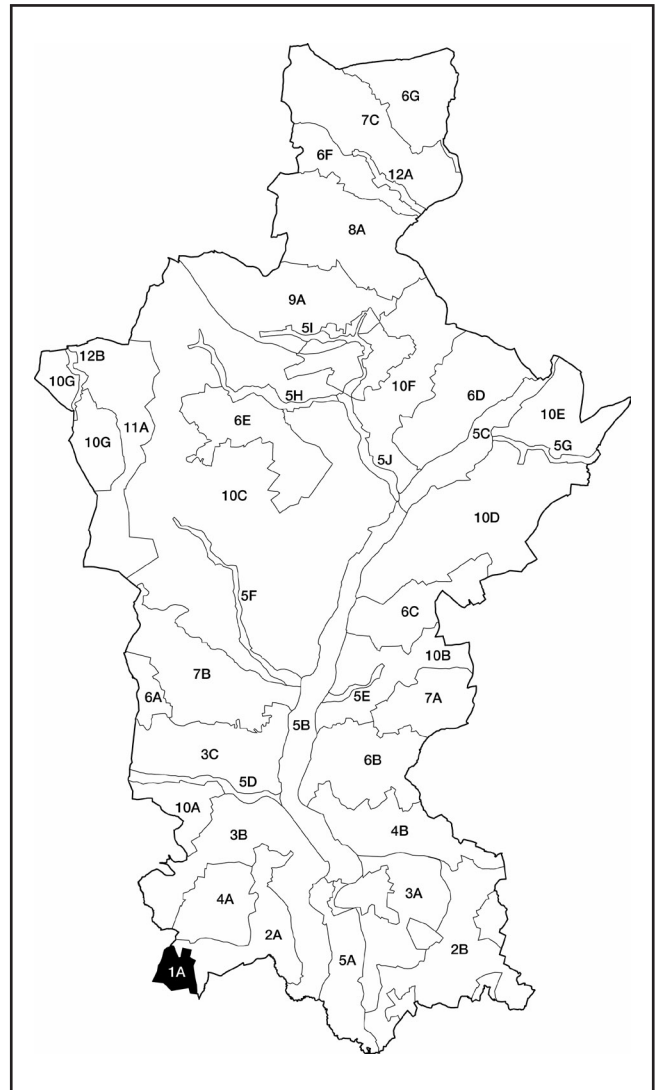
Notable habitats:

- Lowland heathland.

Historical Influences

The Heathland character type is characterised by large areas of unenclosed common heathland, subject to commoners' rights. The open heathland landscape may well be a product of forest clearance as early as the Bronze Age and two extant burial mounds (*tumuli*) are visible within this area of heathland.

Historically this character type was closely associated with the New Forest 'ancient forest farmlands' to the south and west and was, between AD 1227-1280, considered part of the New Forest. During this



time the northern boundary of the 'Large Bounds Perambulatory' was identified by Royal Charter as the River Blackwater.

Settlement Pattern

This landscape character type has no associated settlement. Settlements are generally found on the common edge where they tend to be linear late post-medieval developments. Where these have a historic core, it is usually as one or more farmsteads with the more modern settlements developing up around these farms in one or more direction. The roads are the principal driving factor behind the development of this more modern settlement.

The majority of heathland settlement within the district largely dates to later post-medieval and modern settlement expansion. The pattern of development suggests a more wholesale design and construction of housing rather than the more organic development of earlier periods which focused upon one or more arterial routes, but extending away from these to develop

relatively complex, rectilinear street patterns.

Communication Network

A number of formal and informal paths and public rights of way criss-cross this character type.

Key Natural and Cultural Landscape Issues:

- Invasion of scrub and pine due to low grazing pressure
 - Inappropriate coniferous plantations on heathland
 - Drainage of mires and conservation of mire woodlands
 - Erosion arising from recreation
 - Climatic change leading to increased risk of fire and loss of heathland
 - Impact of noise from adjacent roads and loss of tranquillity
 - Engineering improvements to roads creating a more urban character
 - Poorly maintained car parks leading to fly tipping
 - Reduction and isolation of heathland and mire habitats due to scrub encroachment.
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