

LCT10 Open Chalklands

General Description

The Open Chalklands landscape character type is a large scale arable landscape, characteristic of the most extensively farmed chalkland areas, where the chalk geology is generally not masked by the deposit of Clay with Flints. The hedgerow structure is fragmented and commonly replaced by fences, adding to the open landscape character. A limited number of small hedged pasture fields are found adjacent settlements and farmsteads. Blocks or belts of trees occasionally break up this open landscape, but are infrequent and isolated woodland blocks can be found adjacent to farmsteads. Small streams or winter bournes divide the type but generally it is noted for its dry valleys.

The settlement pattern is scattered and dominated by large farms. There is an occasional large house with parkland found sited within a dry valley. A pattern of right angled roads, often running straight for considerable distances and with wide verges, is typical of the Open Chalklands landscape type.

Location

Open Chalklands are located within the central area of the Test Valley, north of Broughton Down and around the southern edge of Andover. These are divided by the River Test and its tributaries and the winterbourne valleys.

Within the Test Valley Borough there are 7 Landscape Character Areas as follows:

- LCA10A East Dean Chalk Downland
- LCA 10B King's Somborne Chalk Downland
- LCA 10C Thruxton and Danebury Chalk Downland
- LCA 10D Leckford and Chilbolton Chalk Downs
- LCA 10E Drayton Chalk Downland
- LCA 10F Andover Chalk Downland
- LCA 10G Cholderton Downs

Physical Influences

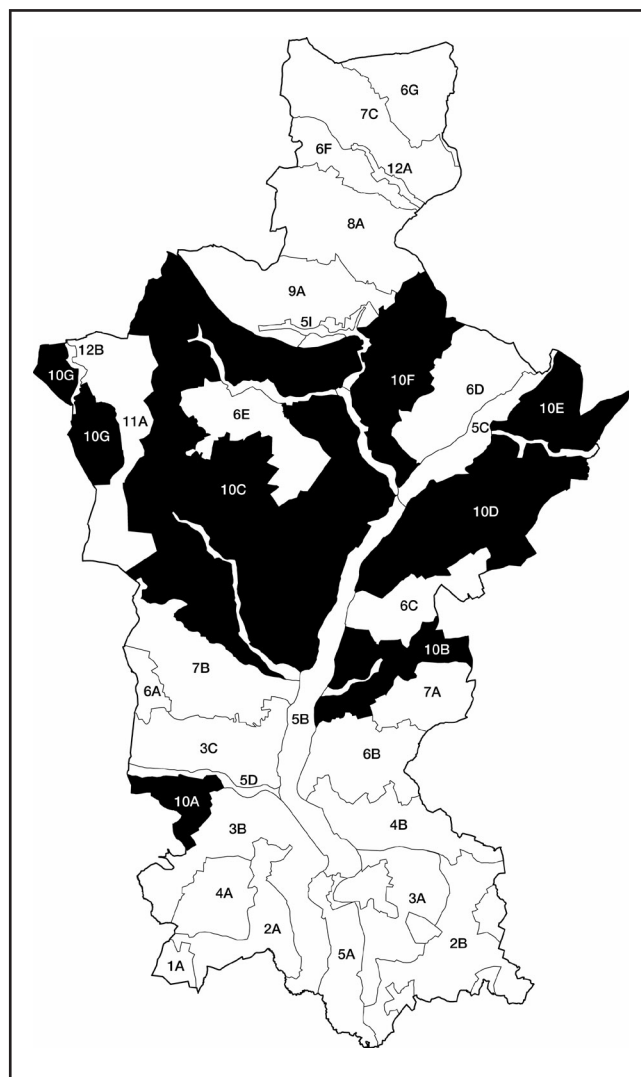
Geology and soils: Chalk with loamy and clayey soils.

Landform: Gently undulating to flat topography, occasionally broken by chalk river valleys of Landscape Character Type 5. A feature of this landscape is the dramatic sculptural scarps but they are less frequent than found within the Chalk and Clay landscape Types LT6 and LT7. These scarps are generally very steep and encircle valleys or overlook more extensive vales. The tops and toes of the slopes are abrupt, with a marked change in gradient.

Drainage: Due to the pervious nature of the chalk there is no evidence of surface drainage.

Biodiversity and Vegetation Pattern

This type is characterised by extensive open large scale arable farming. The hedge structure is limited, often low



and fragmented with few standard trees. They consist mainly of Hawthorn and Blackthorn although there are some older hedgerows that do have greater species diversity.

These areas have had extensive woodland clearance leaving sparse clusters of deciduous semi-natural woodland. There is a distinct lack of Oak due to the thin calcareous soils and dominant species are Ash, Beech, Holly and Yew.

The biodiversity is relatively low due to the extensive farming practice, although there are a few areas that support small populations of nationally declining arable weeds as well as birds such as corn bunting.

There is a strong commonality between the character areas within Open Chalklands and therefore some of the detail, usually included under the character area, is covered here.

There are important patches of unimproved calcareous grassland, associated with scarps and steeper slopes.

These grasslands are typically a rich mixture of grasses and herbs and are characteristic of a vegetation with a long history of grazing. The grasslands are dominated by fine-leaved grasses such as Sheep's Fescue and Red Fescue with Velvet Bent, and there is a variety of flowering plants that comprise a substantial proportion of the herbage, these include Salad Burnett, Selfheal, Birds-Foot Trefoil, Harebells, Lady's Bedstraw, Devils-Bit Scabious. Less frequent plants include Fairy Flax, Gentian, Eyebright, Kidney Vetch and Stemless Thistle. Typical orchids include Bee Orchid, Common Spotted Orchid, Pyramidal Orchid, Early Purple Orchid, Fragrant Orchid, Green-Winged Orchid, Burnt Orchid, Frog Orchid. Chalk grasslands are noted for their rich floristic diversity and also for their invertebrate populations.

There are occasional remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland, mostly small copses and shelter belts. Most of the ancient semi-natural woodland is dominated by Ash with some Oak where the presence of Oak indicates more acidic pockets of soil. Ash is the most common tree species with Field Maple and Yew. Other trees found in low frequencies include Lime, Hornbeam and Elm. The shrub layers are generally composed of Hazel, Elder, Blackthorn, Dogwood, Spindle and Privet. Typically Hazel was planted as a coppice crop. Ground flora includes Dogs Mercury, with Bluebells, Enchanters Nightshade, Arum Lily, Early Dog Violet, Yellow Archangel, Sanicle, Moschatel, and Pignut. Wetter areas often have dense covers of Ransoms/Wild Garlic. Typical orchids include Early Purple Orchid, Twayblade Birds-Nest Orchid.

Notable Habitats

Unimproved and semi-improved calcareous grassland.

Historical Influences

The Open Chalklands type is dominated by extensive stretches of parliamentary fields systems dating to the 19th century which have largely replaced earlier agricultural field systems. This Landscape type is characterized by well surveyed and open field systems and isolated stands of woodland, parkland and ancient monuments.

Settlement Pattern

Due to the extensive coverage of Open Chalklands, numerous settlement types fall within its boundaries although they do tend to be of a type related to the underlying chalk geology and the influence that this has upon topography and settlement development. These settlements are located in a fertile agricultural landscape and those upon the higher ground display a nucleated pattern of development while those on lower ground and in the valleys retain linear street patterns. Settlement types within this Landscape Character Type often retain readily visible historic cores including a manorial

complex, medieval church and medieval/early post-medieval housing. Farmsteads within the surrounding agricultural landscape are often very dispersed and sit within well developed farming 'territories'.

Communication Network

The major and minor road networks throughout this Landscape Character Type generally display straight, surveyed characteristics when extending through areas of parliamentary field enclosure. These surveyed roads appear to extend around the boundaries of the numerous formal parks which can be found in this landscape type. Within the wider valleys the road network tends to follow the natural contours of the valley floor landscape.

Key Natural and Cultural Landscape Issues

- Potential continued intensification of farming resulting in large fields, the loss of biodiversity and historic landscape features and the erection of large farm buildings
- Loss of chalk downland to arable or scrub encroachment
- Isolation of small patches of habitat
- Hedgerow fragmentation and loss
- Declining farmland bird populations
- Loss of unimproved mesotrophic grassland to arable or through application of fertilisers
- High risk of spray drift having an effect on hedges and hedge bottoms and arable weeds
- Changes to historic farm buildings and their historic landscape setting
- Potential impact of 'energy' crops on the strong downland character
- Possible future demands for irrigation of arable land, resulting in the need for reservoirs and associated infrastructure
- Inappropriate locations of woodlands, which sometimes impact on the open expansive remote character and series of views
- Inappropriate management of the characteristic Chalk Hanger woodlands and areas of grassland
- Sub-urbanizing influence of built development and roads, including the introduction of inappropriate styles of fencing, signage, lighting and planting
- Decommissioning of military bases and changes to use of MOD land (for example as a result of the Strategic Defence Review), resulting in changes in land use and associated developments
- Visually intrusive development in open areas of downland. Tall or large structures such as communication masts and transmitters, and wind turbines will, if not carefully sited, be particularly visually intrusive on the predominantly open skyline
- Impact of exposed development on the sense of remoteness.