

LCA4B Michelmersh to Ampfield Wooded Farmland

General Description

The Michelmersh to Ampfield Wooded Farmland character area is dominated by an intimate pattern of small fields (a mix of arable and pasture) surrounding the settlements of Michelmersh, Ampfield and Braishfield. In between these settlements the field sizes are larger, hedge-less and predominantly arable. A spring line crosses this area as the underlying geology changes to the porous underlying chalk, with a spring as seen at Braishfield. Casbrook Common forms a large area of open grassland.

A number of small disused pits, have regenerated as small woodlands which, create local focal points. The newer larger pits as seen east of Casbrook Common are yet to be restored.

Location

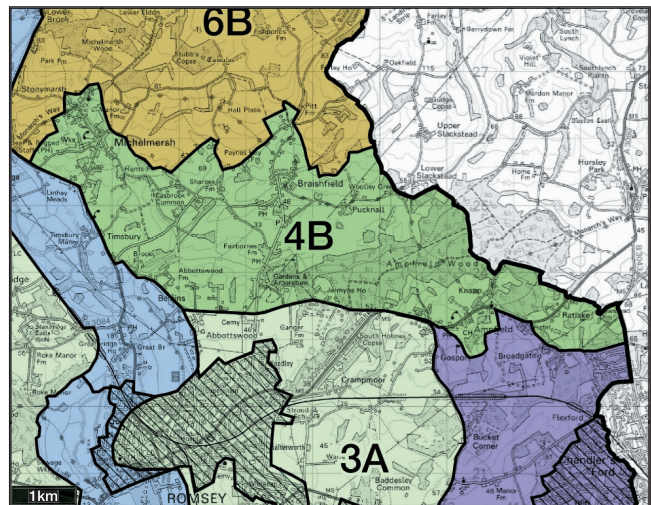
The northern boundary of Michelmersh to Ampfield Wooded Farmland follows the north side of Michelmersh and Braishfield. The eastern boundary is bounded by the Borough boundary. The southern boundary includes Sit Harold Hilliers Garden, Ampfield Wood, Ampfield and Ratlake with the western boundary following the A3057.

Local Physical Influences

Landform: An undulating landform with slopes descending westwards to the Test valley.

Geology and Soils: A mix of London Clay, Reading Beds and Bagshot Sands with a fringe of the Bracklesham Beds which extend southwards into LCA 3A.

Drainage: The area drains centrally into a tributary of the River Test which flows into Timsbury Lake. The area is better drained than LCA3A but has a number of lakes including Timsbury Lake and Fairbourne Lake and open areas of water in former mineral workings.



Local Biodiversity and Vegetation Pattern

This area is predominantly improved pasture and arable farmland, divided by hedgerows. Several areas of broadleaved woodland are found in this area, including Oxlease Copse and Berryhill Copse. Oak is the most common tree species, with abundant Birch. Ash is uncommon and Field Maple is rare. Sweet chestnut is also locally abundant and has often been planted as coppice. Other trees found in low frequencies include Holly, Whitebeam, Beech, Geum, and Rowan. Damper soils have Alder and Poplar. The shrub layers usually have abundant Hazel and Hawthorn. Ground flora includes Bluebell, Wood Anemone, Red Campion, Honeysuckle, Bramble, Woodruff, Wood Sorrel, Dog Violet, Wood Spurge, Twayblade and Greater Stitchwort. Typical orchids include Lesser Butterfly Orchid, Early Purple Orchid, Narrow-leaved Helleborine.

Occasional areas of important mesotrophic grasslands are found in this area, together with areas of damp



pasture. They are dominated by fine-leaved grasses such as Red Fescue, Crested Dogs-tail and Velvet Bent. Coarser grasses such as Cocksfoot and Yorkshire Fog are not so frequent. There is a variety of flowering plants that in some cases can comprise a substantial proportion of the herbage. This include White Clover, Red Clover, Birds-foot Trefoil, Knapweed, Bulbous Buttercup, Yarrow, Yellow Rattle, Selfheal and Oxeye Daisy. Typical orchids include Bee Orchid, Common Spotted Orchid, Pyramidal Orchid, Early Purple Orchid. This area also has small areas of lowland heath dominated by heather.

Local Historical Influences

Assarted fields occupy all of the upland located in the north east of the area along a line which follows the valley of the River Test to the west and which swings around to the east south of Fairburn's Farm. Up until the early 19th century this area was relatively forested and the surviving landscape of large irregular assarts probably represents a considerable clearance episode during this time. The presence of pre-1810 woodland on the south facing slopes suggests a possible medieval wooded environment in this area and as such, the large irregular assarts may represent the final stages in the forest clearance process with smaller assarts being expanded to create larger though still informal field systems during the 19th century.

The gently sloping valley sides of the River Test and the south facing slope below Fairburn's Farm offered excellent opportunities for formal enclosure and this was carried out by Act of Parliament during the 19th century. At the southern end of the area lie the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens and Arboretum.

Settlement Pattern

Braishfield is the principal settlement within this character area and sits within a largely assarted landscape. The historic core is largely linear and has subsequently developed extensions along other roads during the 19th century. This settlement has no direct road linking it with Michelmersh to the north west. Instead the main settlement to be linked with Braishfield is Romsey to the south. Surrounding Braishfield but within the assarted landscape are a cluster of farmsteads which are generally grouped quite closely together. On the down slopes within this area the farms are fewer (numbering only two) but are located on opposite sides of the Romsey to Braishfield Road.

Michelmersh retains several historic cores which tend to sit either upon the scarp ridge or to the east upon the higher land. This places the settlement some distance away from the ready water supply of the River Test but Michelmersh is supplied by numerous small springs. Later development has connected the historic

cores and extended downslope towards the valley floor. Located on the Romsey to Winchester road (A3090), Ampfield is a heath associated settlement type which is actually focused upon a minor road which heads north from the A3090. This settlement is linear in form extending largely along the length of the minor road although its church (which appears to be wholly a nineteenth century construction) is located away from the main settlement center and on the main A3090.

The road network tends to lead down from the upland assarted field systems down slope towards the parliamentary enclosures and the valley floor of the river Test. Where these roads meet with the areas of parliamentary enclosure they tend to become straightened while within the upland the road networks is much more governed by the surrounding contours indicating an earlier and probably medieval date.

The group of farmsteads associated with the large irregular assarted fields appear to be generally located around the village of Braishfield but appear to sit within extensive agricultural landholdings extending away from the village. The farmsteads which lie within the parliamentary field systems occupying the slopes are more spaced apart.

The three settlements of Michelmersh, Ampfield and Braishfield dominate this landscape. These settlements both have evolved around converging roads giving them a star like form, with development scattered along the roads in a linear fashion. Due to the linear development of these settlements open fields still exist near the centres providing the settlements with a rural quality. Farmsteads can also be found on the edge of these settlements.

A small number of Public Rights of Way with Monarchs Way exist within this LCA.

Local Settlements and Features of Built Form

- Ampfield: Heath Associated Settlement Type
- Braishfield: Chalk-Clay Spring Line Settlement Type
- Michelmersh: Chalk-Clay Spring Line Settlement Type
- Timsbury (North eastern portion): Chalk River Valley Settlement Type

Traditional buildings are often timber framed and thatched, with brick and flint a common feature in many other buildings. Clay roof tiles are common from the local clay pits but are being replaced from non local sources. Slates tiles are also found.

Community Perceptions

A good response and level of knowledge came from the local community in this area, with a keen interest in continuing to contribute to the landscape character

assessment process. For example, studies undertaken by the Ampfield Countryside Heritage Area Steering Group refer to 'A pattern of small fields and copses has evolved between the settlements of Hursley (Winchester District) and Ampfield. A 1588 map shows a field pattern that is still identifiable. The farmland around Ratlake is a good example of this historic landscape.' A local resident refers to the same area as 'uncannily reminiscent of some the oil paintings of Robert Bevan', dated around 1916.

There is considerable concern about the impact of development pressure on the landscape and visual amenity and that new landscaping in the area does not respect the existing local character and consequently is significantly eroding local distinction. There is also concern that local views and skylines are being adversely affected by new development.

Although parts of the character area were accepted as being in a poor condition, there is still considerable benefit to the landscape from the remnant hedgerow pattern and new habitats that have established on former mineral workings. Mineral workings are also generally well screened as the landscape fringes regenerate.

Remoteness and Tranquillity

Due to the high density of roads throughout this area there are few areas of quiet seclusion. The linear development of the settlements also gives a misleading impression that the area is highly populated. However, away from these converging developed roads, there are areas of open land, which offer better levels of tranquillity.

Key Characteristics

- Small fields located close to the village centre providing a rural quality
- Hedgerows surrounding the settlements providing screening and integration of the settlement into the landscape

- Poor quality but locally important hedgerows away from the settlements providing a weak sense of enclosure to large open areas
- Poorly restored areas of mineral extraction, enclosed by regenerating hedgerow and woodland belts
- Distinctive settlement pattern dominated by Michelmersh to Michelmersh
- Sir Harold Hilliers Gardens and arboretum at Ampfield
- Pockets of remnant heathland and ancient meadows
- Upland environment is heavily assarted and may represent only the latest phase of assarting
- The down slopes are predominantly covered by parliament enclosure
- The east section of Area 4B is largely replanted assarted pre-1810 woodland (4.2) which is recent in date.

Local Natural and Cultural Landscape Issues

- Impact of further development and agricultural change impacting upon the surrounding assarted environment
- Further erosion of locally distinctive landscape character through inappropriate landscaping and visually intrusive development.

Designations

Historic

- Ampfield House: Grade II* Listed Building in Conservation Area
- Sir Harold Hillier Gardens and Arboretum Mid 20th century garden. Grade II* Listed on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

Nature Conservation

SSSI

- Ratlake Meadows - Unimproved grassland, surrounded by mixed plantation woodland and broadleaved semi-natural woodland

SINC

- 34 SINCs, mainly ancient semi-natural woodlands, other woodland and agriculturally unimproved grassland; also mires and sites which support notable species