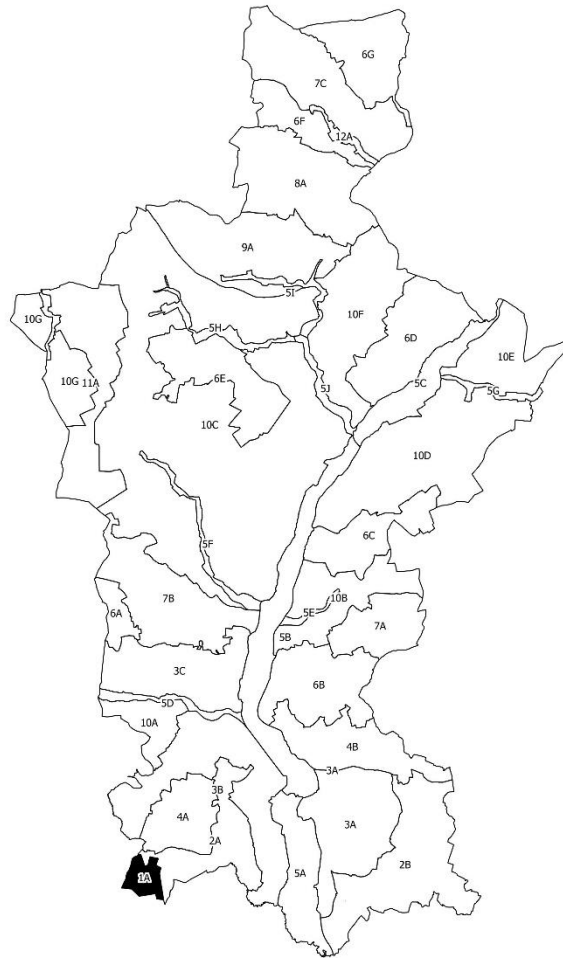


LCT1 Heathland

General Description

- 1.1 The Heathland landscape character type is a mosaic of wet mires, bracken, gorse and tracts of heather and acid grassland. 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

- 1.2 The character type is located in a small area of the New Forest National Park on the southern tip of the Test Valley Borough, to the south of West Wellow and west of Canada, forming part of the West Wellow Heaths and Commons character area within the New Forest National Park's Landscape Character Assessment. Only one character area is to be found:

- LCA1A West Wellow Heaths

Physical Influences

- 1.3 **Geology and Soils:** The Heathland character type overlays a mixture of solid geology which makes up the Wittering Formation and Earnley Sand Formation. 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 localised mires (wet boggy areas) and streams.

Biodiversity and Vegetation Pattern

- 1.4 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 with areas of purple moor grass and lowland fen habitats.

Notable habitats

- Lowland heathland

Historical Influences

- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 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

- 1.7 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.

- 1.8 The majority of heathland settlement within the Borough 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

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

Key Natural and Cultural Landscape Issues

- 1.10 Key natural and cultural landscape issues as follows:
- Locally non-native 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
 - Damage to archaeological features from recreation

Land Management Guidelines

- 1.11 All of the Borough wide land management guidelines in the introduction apply to this Landscape Character Type. Land management guidelines specific to this Landscape Character Type are:
- 1.12 **Heathland**
- Enhance the protection of heathland from fire damage

- Maintain the current extent of unenclosed heathland, and maintain heathland restoration to provide linkages between isolated patches
- Control the invasion of undesirable scrub and pine
- Encourage the continuity of commons grazing

1.13 **Woodland and Trees**

- Remove conifer plantations and restore heathland and / or broadleaf woodland where appropriate
- Encourage the planting of deciduous small woodlands and tree belts using locally-relevant species, provided that these do not result in the obstruction of important views, or change the overall character of the area.

1.14 **Biodiversity**

- Encourage the development of new habitat links between existing areas of biodiversity value
- Maintain variety of wetland habitats by limiting changes to drainage and creation of new wetland habitats

1.15 **Historic Landscapes**

- Encourage the implementation of appropriate protection measures to archaeological features and provide alternative pedestrian routes.

Land Use and Development Guidelines

1.16 All of the Borough wide land use and development guidelines in the introduction apply to this Landscape Character Type. Specific to this Landscape Character Type are:

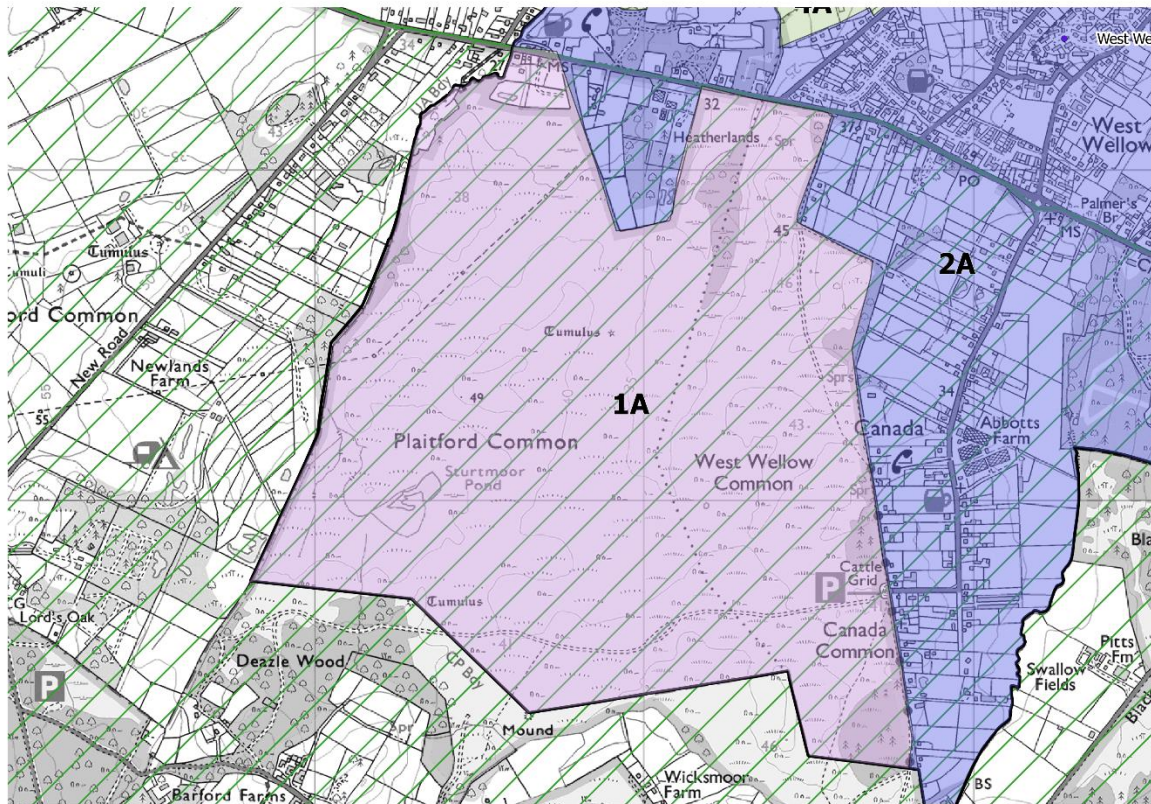
1.17 **Built Development**

- Protect the pattern of scattered smallholdings and dwellings – maintaining the rural character of the landscape with, for example, property boundaries of native hedgerows or railings rather than suburban close-board fencing, external lighting kept to a minimum and selection of deciduous species rather than ornamental conifers and evergreens on garden boundaries.
- Avoid encroachment into the open heathland
- Maintain the open character of the landscape and avoid visual intrusion into the existing sense of remoteness

1.18 **Infrastructure**

- Avoid suburbanisation arising from introduction of inappropriate highway measures

LCA1A West Wellow Heaths



New Forest National Park area indicated with green line hatch.

General Description

- 1.A.1. West Wellow Heaths is a gently undulating landscape with domed hill top commons (Canada Common) and shallow valleys, creating an open barren landscape with wide views from the few high points across to the south. Overhead transmission lines along with small groupings of trees and scrub provide vertical features within this landscape.

Location

- 1.A.2. This character area lies in the south western corner of the Borough and forms a unique landscape unit in the Borough, defined by the Borough boundary to the west and south and including Plaitford, West Wellow and Canada Commons. The characteristics of this area extend southwards. The entirety of this character area is within the New Forest National Park¹.

¹ Regard should also be had to the New Forest National Park's Landscape Character Assessment.

Local Physical Influences

- 1.A.3. **Geology and Soils:** The Heathland character type overlays a mixture of solid geology which makes up the Wittering Formation and Earnley Sand Formation. 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 localised mires (wet boggy areas) and streams

Local Biodiversity and Vegetation Pattern

- 1.A.4. The area has an important flora and fauna particularly in regard to its lowland heathland and associated habitats, particularly the wetter mire areas. This is an area of typical lowland heath, dominated by ericaceous shrubs. Heathland occurs in mosaics with acid grassland, patchy woodland, scrub, and a few valley mires.

- 1.A.5. There are three main types of heathland represented here - dry heath, dominated by ling (the common heather species); humid heath, dominated by bell heather; and wet heath, dominated by cross-leaved heath. The most diverse and species rich areas are the valley mires and the acid grasslands, which support a variety of flowering and lower plants, such as tormentil, heath bedstraw, birds-foot trefoil, harebell, milkwort and violets in the grasslands, and bog bean, least skullcap, bog pimpernel, lousewort, and a variety of *sphagnum* moss species in the mires. Orchids found include spotted heath, southern marsh orchid and early purple orchid. In some areas, these plants comprise a substantial proportion of the ground flora.

- 1.A.6. The table below identifies the broad habitat types for LCA1A.

Broad habitat type	Area of habitat (Hectares)	Percentage of the LCA (%)
Acid grassland	41.14	15.19
Boundary and linear features	0.36	0.13
Broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland	10.55	3.89

Built-up areas and gardens	0.78	0.29
Coniferous woodland	0.03	0.01
Dwarf shrub heath	187.18	69.10
Fen, marsh and swamp	27.66	10.21
Improved grassland	2.35	0.87
Unidentified habitat	0.07	0.03
Unidentified water	0.76	0.28
Total	270.88	

Local Historical Influences

- 1.A.7. This area of heathland may well have been cleared as early as the Bronze Age and retains two burial mounds dating from this period.
- 1.A.8. This area has and continues to be considerably influenced by its associations with the New Forest. Between AD 1227 and 1280 the 'Large Bounds Perambulatory' identified this landscape character area as falling within the New Forest and so King's Law which extended as far north as the River Blackwater.
- 1.A.9. Part of this character area includes premises which retain rights to forest grazing or to both forest and adjacent commons grazing.

Designations

- 1.A.10. Designations that lie wholly or in part within this Landscape Character Area comprise:
- 1.A.11. **Landscape**
- New Forest National Park
- 1.A.12. **Nature Conservation**
- SAC, SPA and Ramsar site
- New Forest SSSI
 - New Forest – includes a mix of habitats including heath, grassland, mire, open water, and woodland.

Settlement Pattern

- 1.A.13. Several 19th century 'heath associated' type settlements line the northern and eastern edges of this character area although no settlement can be found within its bounds. Similarly no farmsteads can be found upon the heathland of either Plaitford or Wellow Common probably, as their name suggests, because they represented land where common grazing rights still held sway.
- 1.A.14. No roads or tracks extend across the heathland although several informal paths and rights of way do exist. The informal paths and to a lesser extent the rights of way are fluid and are subject to change over time and consequently may not represent traditional routes across the commons.
- 1.A.15. Features of built form include mixed aged and style of development with infill.

Local Settlements

- 1.A.16. No settlements within this Landscape Character Area.

Remoteness and Tranquillity

- 1.A.17. Due to the limit of development in Plaitford, this landscape has a strong feeling of remoteness. However, the A36 is a busy road and, at peak times with the right weather conditions, will cause a high level of intrusion across to the commons.

Key Valued Characteristics

- 1.A.18. Key valued characteristics of LCA 1A are as follows:
- A strong heathy character resulting from the underlying older geological deposits and acid soils, reflected in the presence of gorse, birch and scots pine, maintained by grazing
 - Areas of unenclosed heathland common, including Canada, Plaitford and West Wellow Heaths, with shared landscape features to other areas of New Forest heathland
 - Occasional long views over Commons - generally limited by the domed topography of the low ridges and encroaching scrub

- Unenclosed common heathland, which is criss-crossed by many formal and informal paths and rights of way
- Premises in the surrounding area retain rights to graze cattle and ponies on the common
- Presence of New Forest ponies
- A strong sense of remoteness and solitude away from the A36.
- Of particular importance is the accessibility of the New Forest for passive recreational pursuits.
- Linear settlements adjacent to LCA within a pattern of ancient rectilinear paddocks, with a close relationship to the commons.

Key Detractors

1.A.19. Key detractors of LCA1A are as follows:

- Influence of A36
- Visual intrusion of pylons

Local Natural and Cultural Landscape Issues

1.A.20. Local natural and cultural landscape issues for LCA1A are as follows:

- Loss of fragile archaeological features such as Bronze Age burial mounds through pedestrian erosion of unstable heathland soils
- Loss of historic common land associated with the New Forest to increasing development pressures from existing linear settlements
- Loss of tranquillity arising from increase in traffic
- Increased need for water abstraction leading to mires and wet woodlands drying out causing a reduction in biodiversity
- Invasion of gorse, birch, bracken, scrub and pine due to low grazing
- Reduction of heathland and isolation of small patches due to scrub encroachment
- Loss of unimproved habitat through fertiliser leachate

Landscape Strategy and Guidelines

1.A.21. Landscape Strategy and Guidelines for LCA1A West Wellow Heaths are as follows:

- The West Wellow Heaths are highly valued as a natural and recreational resource, but their popularity and dependence on an active commoning system requires a positive effort to maintain the current assets. The overall strategy is to conserve and enhance the tranquillity and open grazed heathland character of West Wellow Heaths, as part of policy and strategy for the whole of the New Forest National Park and to protect and enhance the key valued characteristics.

Land Management

1.A.22. All of the Borough wide and Landscape Character Type land management guidelines apply to this Landscape Character Area. Specific to this Landscape Character Area are as follows:

1.A.23. Biodiversity

- Ensure the current extent of unenclosed heathland is as a minimum, maintained, while promoting heathland restoration to provide linkages between isolated patches
- Protect the mosaic of heathland habitats through grazing and restoration work, including controlling levels of bracken and other invasive species
- Protect the edge of commons from settlement encroachment in line with relevant Countryside Stewardship agreements

Land Use and Development

1.A.24. All of the Borough wide and Landscape Character Type land use and development guidelines apply to this Landscape Character Area. Specific to this Landscape Character Area are:

1.A.25. Built Development

- Any new development should not alter the distinctive linear pattern or result in the coalescence of Plaitford and West Wellow
- Avoid adversely impacting the tranquillity of the open heathland through inappropriate scale and style of development including extensive glazing, loss of vegetation and suburban boundary treatments

1.A.26. Infrastructure

- Protect the area from further noise intrusion from the A36
- Seek opportunities to screen the A36 through planting of native tree belts

- Maintain public recreational car parks in a good condition
- Seek opportunities to reduce the visual impact of overhead power lines

1.A.27. **Recreation, Tourism and Access**

- Encourage measures to limit erosion from vehicle parking



Long views across Commons with pylons interrupting skyline



Mires and tumulus



Ponies grazing on West Wellow Common



Birch and gorse establishing