

Area 3: Lower Itchen Valley Floodplain



Description

- 4.38 This is a landscape of flat grassland in former flood meadows that is now used predominantly to graze cattle. The open views are punctuated by tree belts and occasional small copses found alongside the ditches and streams.
- 4.39 At the southern end of the character area, the elevated M27 cuts through at the edge. To the west lies Southampton Airport. The sight and sound of the motorway traffic and airport aircraft dominate the character. The elevated railway cuts through the northern edge. The southern edge of the boundary roughly conforms to the boundary of the special area of conservation.
- 4.40 A large section of this area is occupied by the Itchen Valley Country Park which runs up to the railway embankment in north. The park is made up of water meadows associated with the River Itchen, woodland and meadows. The river meanders through the centre of the park with a network of small streams diffusing out. The Itchen Navigation runs through the area to the west of the river. The floodplain is so wide that there is virtually no sense of being in a valley, except at the area's eastern edge. A more dominant characteristic is the great visual interest provided in foreground views by wetland vegetation, the river itself and the earthworks of the former flood meadows.
- 4.41 In the central part of the character area, the openness and contrasting enclosure of the tree belts give a sense of isolation. This is complemented by the wooded horizons formed by the western edge, the tree belts along the Itchen and the complex of high woods at High Wood in the east.

Historic Features

- 4.42 A distinctive valley, much of the area would have been flood meadows that flooded naturally, and water meadows containing 'drains and drowners' that allowed water to flow over fields depositing silt and minerals to fertilise the soil. Established between 17-19th century, they fell into disuse due to the high labour costs and the introduction of artificial fertilisers and herbicides.

HCC Historic Landscape Types:

- 4.43 Historic landscapes types in this area are:
- 1.10 Medium regular fields with straight boundaries (parliamentary type enclosure)
 - 7.1 Miscellaneous valley floor fields and pasture
 - 7.2 Valley floor woodland
 - 7.5 Unimproved hay meadows or pasture
 - 13.3 Airfield

Ecological Features

- 4.44 The Eastleigh biodiversity action plan identified this area within the Itchen Valley Priority Area. Much of this character area lies within the Itchen Valley Country Park. The ecology of the area is dependent on the River Itchen and management of the water levels. This is reflected in the River Basin Management Plan produced by the Environment Agency (2009).
- 4.45 The river has a chalk bed with populations of protected species of southern damselfly, fine-lined pea mussel, white clawed crayfish and other important species. The River Itchen and the Itchen Navigation both have local, regional, national and European levels of biodiversity protection. The structure of the disused water meadows, mentioned above, serves an important ecological function by providing habitats for a diverse range of flora and fauna.
- 4.46 The character area contains ancient semi-natural woodlands and semi-improved grasslands which have significance for nature conservation and designated as SINCs. Much of the area also has national designation as a site of nature conservation (SAC).

Key Characteristics

- 4.47 The key characteristics for this area are:
- Pasture and meadow of flood meadows
 - Tree cover from ditch sides, tree-belts and small copses
 - Physical and auditory presence of M27, railway and airport
 - Limited access to the centre of the area
 - Distant wooded horizons
 - Sense of isolation
 - High nature conservation interest



Figure 6. View at the southern end of the Itchen Valley Country Park across the former watermeadows



Figure 7. The Itchen Navigational Trail

Landscape Types

4.48 Landscape types as set out in the Hampshire County Council Integrated Character Assessment 2011 for this area are:

- River Valley Floor

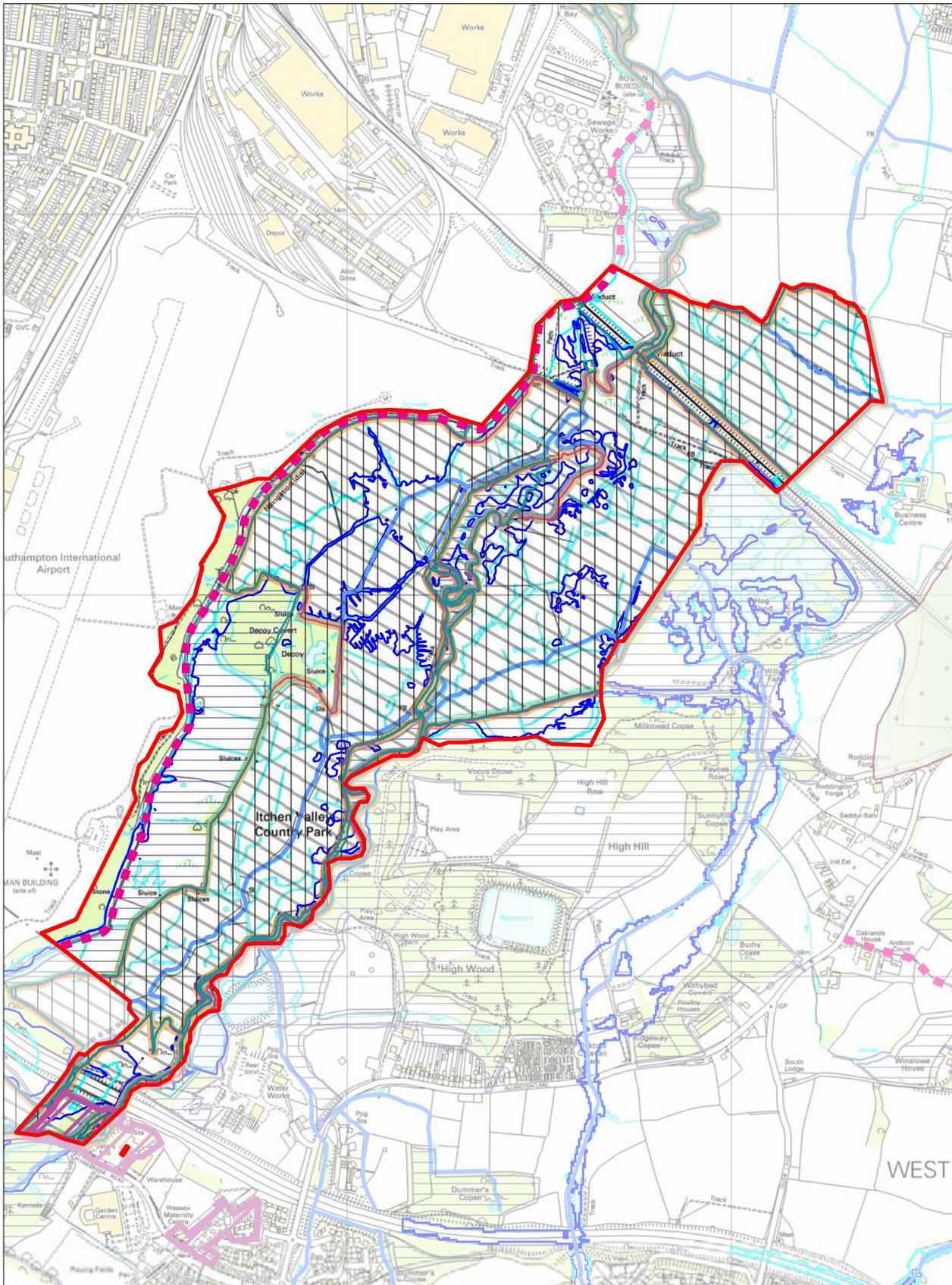
Landscape Character Sensitivity

4.49 This area has distinctive rural qualities despite the peripheral detractors of Southampton Airport, the railway and the M27 motorway.

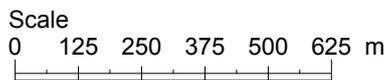


Figure 6. View at the southern end of the Itchen Valley Country Park across the former watermeadows

Designations and Constraints



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Key for Designation & Constraints:			
	Character Area Boundary		Main River
	Area designated Ramsar, SPA* & SSSI Area		Floodzone 2
	SAC - Special Area of Conservation		Floodzone 3
	SSSI - Site of Special Scientific Interest		Right of Way
	SINC - Site of Important Nature Conservation		
	LNR - Local Nature Reserve		
	Historic Parks and Gardens		
	Conservation Area		
	Scheduled Ancient Monument		
	Listed Building		

*SPA - Special Protection Area

4.50 The high level of sensitivity of the area is partially due to its accessibility/popularity with people on the Itchen Way and in the Itchen Valley Country Park, ie. there are a large number of 'receptors', people who would see and experience changes in the character of the area. The mosaic of field boundaries, woodland edges, tree lined ditches and the meandering River Itchen give an interesting complexity to the landscape. The majority of the character area is of high biodiversity value..

Visual Sensitivity

4.51 The character area is formed by the valley floor. It is open with very little woodland in the area itself, although lined with trees along the edges. As a result, longer views are found primarily up and down the valley.

Key Issues

4.52 The key issues for this area are:

- The conflict between priorities of facilitating public access and nature conservation
- Sensitivity of the ecology of the watercourses and undeveloped floodplain to change