

Landscape Character Assessment for Eastleigh Borough

Background Paper



DECEMBER 2011

Preface

Title of Document

Landscape Character Assessment for Eastleigh Borough.

Purpose of Document

This report updates the previous borough-wide assessment of landscape character, the *Landscape Assessment of Eastleigh Borough* (Chris Blandford Associates, 1997). The document is intended to inform landscape policy as part of the emerging Local Plan and as such it will form part of the technical evidence base.

Objectives

- To update the 1997 landscape character assessment, reviewing and re-defining landscape character areas as necessary in accordance with updated methodology and new information
- To provide a basis for assessment of the potential landscape impact of development proposals in the Local Plan and of planning applications
- To enhance understanding of the landscape context for settlements and the role of the landscape in maintaining their separate identities.
- To provide a basis for landscape management and enhancement
- To support the preparation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy for the borough

Consultation

Whilst there is no statutory obligation to consult on Local Plan background papers, it is considered best practice for this process to be undertaken. As such, the document was made available on the Borough Council's website www.eastleigh.gov.uk and letters were sent to those parties who may have an interest in the assessment, inviting them to comment. Representations received helped to inform this document.

Statement of Publication

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Contents

1 - Background	
European Legislation	6
Guidance and Planning Policy Context	6
Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire	8
2 - Methodology	
3 - The Landscape of Eastleigh Borough	
Description	15
Topography	17
Geology and Soils	17
Ecological Character	18
Cultural Heritage	21
Landscape Character Areas	34
Landscape Character Types	36
Historic Landscape Types	36
4 - The Local Landscape Character Areas for Eastleigh Borough	
Landscape Character Areas	39
Area 1: Broom Hill Farmland and Woodland	42
Area 2: Upper Itchen Valley	48
Area 3: Lower Itchen Valley Floodplain	56
Area 4: Southampton Airport	62
Area 5: Itchen Valley Sports Pitches	68
Area 6: North Stoneham Park	76
Area 7: Bishopstoke- Fair Oak Woodland and Farmland	84
Area 8: Knowle Hill Farmland and Woodland	92
Area 9: Horton Heath Undulating Farmland	98
Area 10: Oaklands Woodland and Parkland	106
Area 11: M27 Corridor	112
Area 12: Farmland and Woodlands	120
Area 13: Hound Plain	126
Area 14: Old Bursledon	132
Area 15: Netley Abbey Coastland	138
Area 16: Victorian Parkland	146
Area 17: Westfield Common	154
Area 18: Hamble Common	160
Area 19: Hamble Valley	166
5 - References	
Publications	174
Websites	175
6 - Glossary	
Glossary of terms	176
Appendix A - Planning Policy - Under Review	
Proposed Planning Policies	178

Appendix B - Green Infrastructure	
The Green Infrastructure Framework.....	179
Appendix C - Forest of Bere	
The Vision for Countryside Access for the Forest of Bere.....	181
Appendix D - Key Characteristics	
Key Characteristics of the Character Areas in the Borough of Eastleigh.....	182
Appendix E - Selection Criteria	
Criteria for selecting Sites of importance for Nature Conservation in Hampshire....	193

1 - Background

European Legislation

- 1.1 The *European Landscape Convention (ELC)* (2000) was signed by the UK government in February 2006 and ratified by the Council of Europe in November the same year. Although the legislation is yet to be interpreted into national policy, the convention's wording reinforces the role of landscape character assessment and guides the process towards a greater emphasis on the relationship of people with the landscape. The rivers and coast of Southampton Water also come within the scope of the ELC.
- 1.2 The ELC defines landscape as "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors" and aims to "promote landscape protection, management and planning".

Guidance and Planning Policy Context

National

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (PPS1)

- 1.3 PPS1 sets out the Government's aims for sustainable development and guidance on how these aims should be achieved.
- 1.4 Particularly relevant to the purpose of this landscape character assessment is paragraph 5 which indicates the role planning should take in achieving "sustainable and inclusive patterns of urban and rural development", by:
 - Making suitable land available for development in line with economic, social and environmental objectives to improve people's quality of life;
 - Contributing to sustainable economic development;
 - Protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, the quality and character of the countryside, and existing communities;
 - Ensuring that development supports existing communities and contributes to the creation of safe, sustainable, liveable and mixed communities with good access to jobs and key services for all members of the community."
- 1.5 The PPS goes on to expand on these strategies, requiring for example in para.17 that "planning policies should seek to protect and enhance the quality, character and amenity value of the countryside and urban areas as a whole. A high level of protection should be given to most valued townscapes and landscapes, wildlife habitats and natural resources."
- 1.6 Para.18 indicates that "planning should seek to maintain and improve the local environment and help to mitigate the effects of declining environmental quality..."

- 1.7 This landscape character assessment provides the research and background information to identify the general character of areas within Eastleigh borough and recognise their value. This background evidence will be used, together with a range of other prepared documents, to formulate new policies as part of the local development framework.
- 1.8 PPS1 states that “plan policies and planning decisions should be based on:
- Up-to-date information on the environmental characteristics of the area;
 - The potential impacts, positive as well as negative, on the environment of development proposals (whether direct, indirect, cumulative, long-term or short-term); and,
 - Recognition of the limits of the environment to accept further development without irreversible damage.” (para.19)
- 1.9 It goes on, in para.20, to require development plan policies to take account of environmental issues such as, “the protection of the wider countryside and the impact of development on landscape quality; the conservation and enhancement of wildlife species and habitats and the promotion of biodiversity; the need to improve the built and natural environment in and around urban areas and rural settlements, including the provision of good quality open space; the conservation of soil quality; and the preservation and enhancement of built and archaeological heritage.”
- 1.10 In delivering sustainable development, para.27 emphasises that “in preparing development plans, planning authorities should seek to...(ix) Enhance as well as protect biodiversity, natural habitats, the historic environment and landscape and townscape character”.

Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7) Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

- 1.11 PPS7 outlines the importance of local character, diversity and the need for development to respect and enhance these aspects (para. 12). The guidance justifies the replacement of ‘Areas of Special Landscape Quality’ designations used in earlier character appraisal work in favour of landscape character assessments, (para. 24).

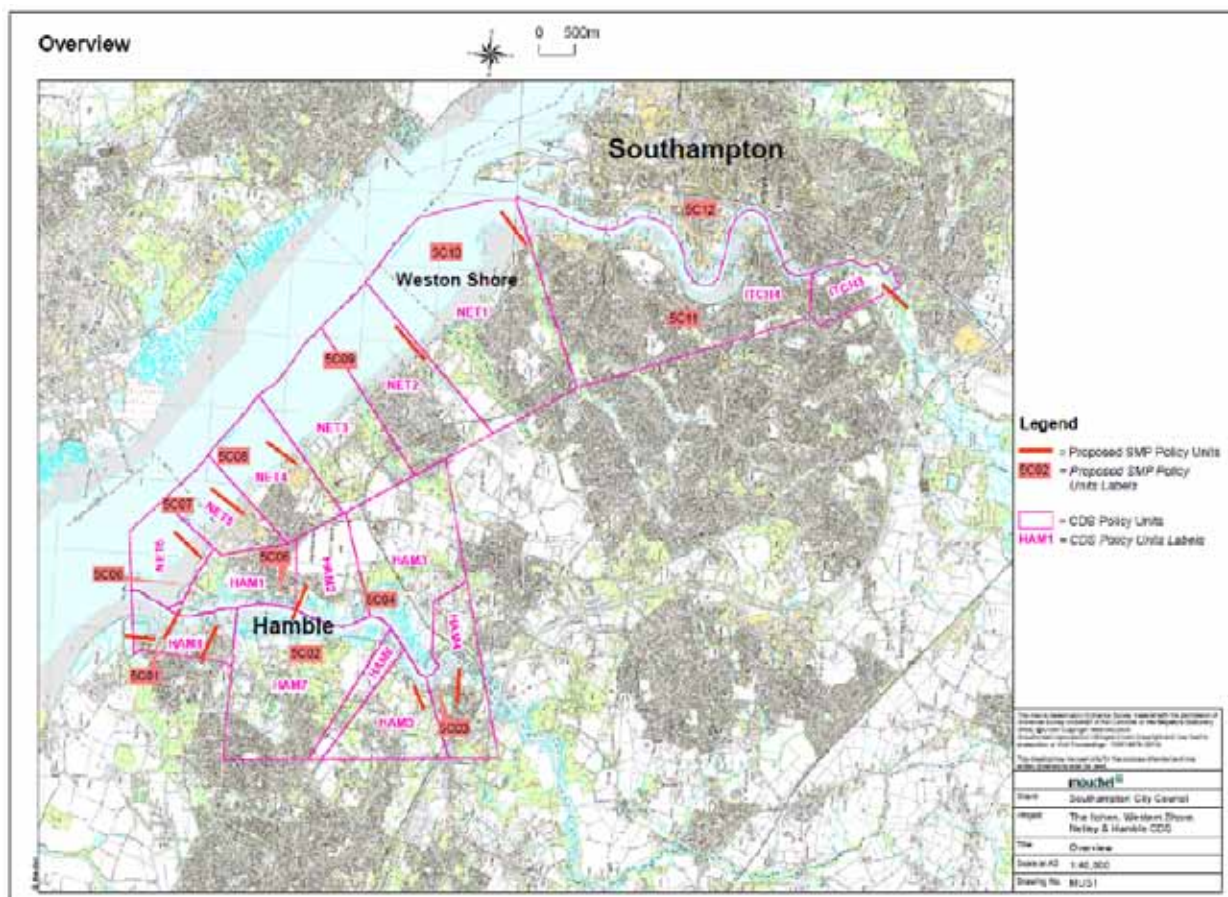
Local

Hampshire Intergrated Character Assessment 2011

- 1.12 The earlier *Hampshire Landscape Strategy Study: A Strategy for the Future (2000)* has now been replaced by the *Hampshire Intergrated Character Assessment 2011*. Details of the latest assessment can be found on the Hampshire County Council website at: <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/landscape-and-heritage/planning-the-landscape/landscape-character/hampshire-integrated-character-assessment.htm>..

Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire

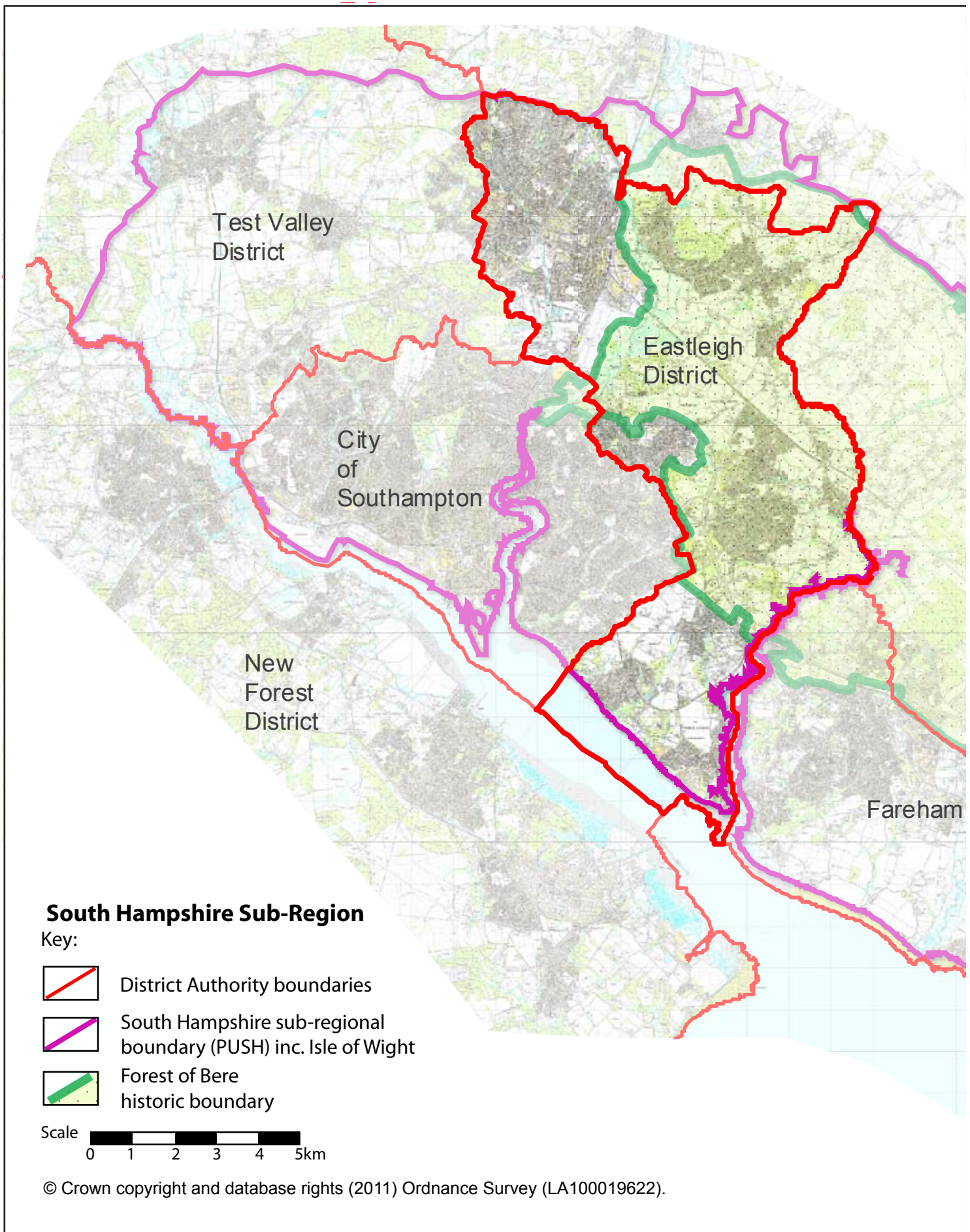
- 1.13 The Partnership for Urban South Hampshire, PUSH, is made up of eleven local authorities who are dedicated to sustainable, economic-led growth and improving prosperity and the quality of life for people who live, work and spend leisure time in South Hampshire. The authorities within PUSH have various responsibilities for managing the landscape and considering its character
- 1.14 The Green Infrastructure (GI) strategy produced by PUSH is intended to set out how the GI across the South Hampshire subregion “can be made to function as effectively as possible to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services in the form of a carefully structured robust network of interconnected and multifunctional green space”, (UE Associates Ltd, 2009).
- 1.15 Green Infrastructure is defined as, (reproduced from the *South East Green Infrastructure Framework*, 2009), “sub-regional networks of multifunctional open space.”
- 1.16 The strategy has drawn up a GI Framework that is made up of themes and objectives to guide GI development. These themes and objectives are summarised in appendix C. There are four areas which the strategy identifies as having common influences.
- 1.17 Area 1 is The Coastal Zone. This area runs along the length of the south Hampshire coast and includes internationally important sites for nature conservation. A small area in the south of Eastleigh borough, along the Netley and Hamble coastline, falls within this zone. A draft Coastal Defence Strategy (CDS) (http://www.southampton.gov.uk/Images/Non-Technical%20Summary_tcm46-267161.pdf) has been prepared on behalf of Eastleigh and Fareham Borough Councils and Southampton City Council. The primary objective of this strategy is to protect people, assets and property from coastal erosion and flooding, through the development and implementation of a sustainable strategy for coastal defence “which is compatible with natural processes, environmentally acceptable, economically and technically viable and which is compatible with preferred management strategies in neighbouring areas and with the Shoreline Management Plan Review (SMP2) covering the study area.” Public Consultation for both the CDS and the North Solent SMP2 was carried out in 2010. The North Solent SMP2 takes account of the findings in the CDS. (<http://www.northsolentsmp.co.uk/index.cfm?articleid=6633&articleaction=nthslnt&CFID=38159148&CFTOKEN=16310443>)
- 1.18 Area 2 is The Forest of Bere, an area of approximately 26,000 hectares of woodland, settlements and lowland farmland, falls within the PUSH sub-region, encompassing much of Eastleigh Borough.
- 1.19 Hampshire County Council, working through PUSH, have developed a *Countryside Access Plan for the Forest of Bere 2008-2013* which supports the objectives of the Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire.



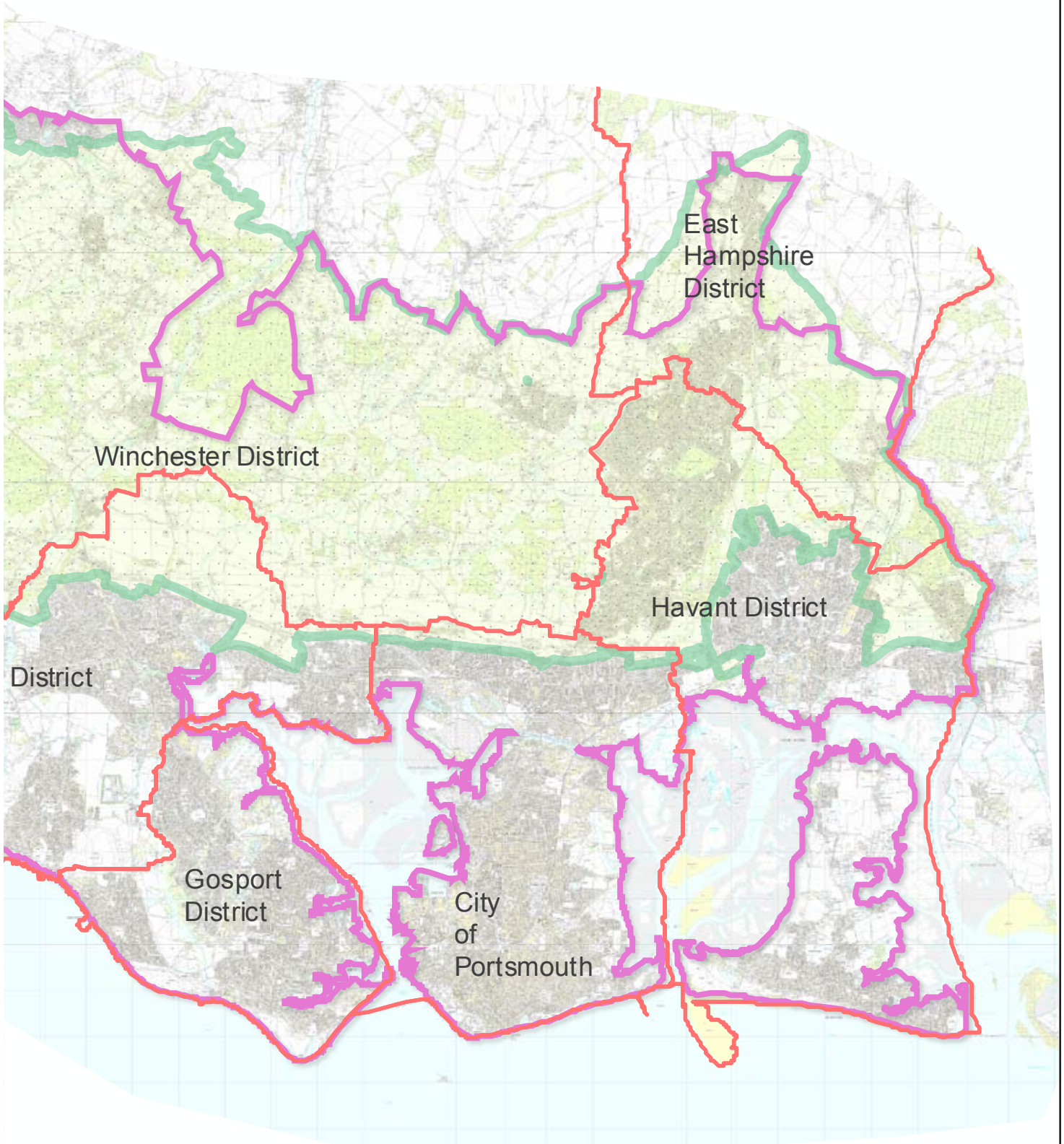
Map 1. Map from CDS/SMP2

(<http://www.hants.gov.uk/rh/countryside/access/forestofbere.pdf>)

- 1.20 Area 3 is The Western Arc, encompassing the urban realm from Fawley to Romsey and eastwards to the edge of Eastleigh borough. This area forms an important buffer between the New Forest National Park and planned urban growth.
- 1.21 The fourth area identified is The Urban Realm and its Setting. This area is formed of major settlements and their setting including the accessible countryside in the green gaps which separate the settlements. The majority of Eastleigh borough falls into this area. Strategies relating to this area will include individual authority's local development frameworks guided by a number of PUSH publications and Government policies.



Map 2. Subregional map showing Eastleigh Borough



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2 - Methodology

2.1 The methodology used for this study is based on the *Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland* (Countryside Agency (now Natural England) and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002) and its supplementary topic papers

2.2 The characterisation process consists of four steps, which are set out in the guidance mentioned above:

“Step 1: Defining the scope: All Landscape Character Assessments need a clearly defined purpose. This will critically influence the scale and level of detail of the assessment, the resources required, those who should be involved in its preparation, and the types of judgement that are needed to inform decisions. As part of defining the scope, it is normally essential that a familiarisation visit is undertaken to allow those involved in commissioning or carrying out the assessment to learn more about the character of the location’s landscape.

Step 2: Desk study: This involves review of relevant background reports, other data and mapped information, and use of this information to develop a series of map overlays to assist in the identification of areas of common character (usually draft landscape character types and/or areas).

Step 3: Field survey: Field data is collected in a rigorous way to test and refine the draft landscape character types/areas, to inform written descriptions of their character, to identify aesthetic and perceptual qualities which are unlikely to be evident from desk information, and to identify the current condition of landscape elements.

Step 4: Classification and description: This step then refines and finalises the output of the characterisation process by classifying the landscape into landscape character types and/or areas and mapping their extent, based on all the information collected, followed by preparation of clear description of their character. These descriptions will often recognise ‘forces for change’, such as key development pressures and trends in land management.”

2.3 It is important to recognise the distinction between character types and character areas. The guidance defines character types as:

“Distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogenous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical land use and settlement pattern. For example, chalk river valleys or rocky moorlands are recognisable and distinct landscape character types” (The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002).

2.4 It goes on to define character areas as
“single unique areas...discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape

type. So, taking the chalk river example, the Itchen Valley, the Test Valley and the River Avon (all chalk rivers) would be separate landscape character areas, of the chalk river valley landscape character type. Each has its own individual character and identity, even though it shares the same generic characteristics with other areas of the same chalk river valley type” (*The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002*).

- 2.5 This Eastleigh-specific landscape character assessment draws upon the regional character areas defined in *The Character of England Landscape, Wildlife and Cultural Features Map (Natural England, 2005)*.
- 2.6 This study did not require original research or fieldwork on historic landscapes or nature conservation. Information on the former has been obtained through Hampshire County Council, a brief review of secondary sources and an equally brief appraisal of eighteenth and nineteenth century maps. The principle source of information on nature conservation was the Eastleigh Biodiversity Partnership document *Wild About Eastleigh (2002)*.
- 2.7 The use of a Geographical Information System (GIS) enabled the overlaying of data layers from Hampshire County Council, Natural England and Eastleigh Borough’s local plan onto aerial photography and Ordnance Survey maps.
- 2.8 In order to establish how people perceive the landscape it was necessary to consult not just on the visual/spatial component identified in this document but also on the non-visible components. For example emotional response, sense of place, tranquillity and cultural value. Comments made by consultees have been taken into account in the final version of this document.