

Overall Character

This character area extends from Hampshire in the west to Chichester in the east and runs along the northern boundary of the Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Much of this area lies below the high spring tide level and has been reclaimed from the sea. The relatively open character allows long views to the Harbour area and occasional views of the spire of Chichester Cathedral. Sporadic settlements hug the tops of the inlets of Chichester Harbour and are mainly located along the coastal road, the A259, which crosses the area east-west. A landscape which, despite lacking strong distinctive character, has strategic value and has great potential to improve the setting of the surrounding urban areas. Intensive horticulture, glasshouses, horse paddocks, busy roads and bypasses are features of this landscape.

Key Characteristics

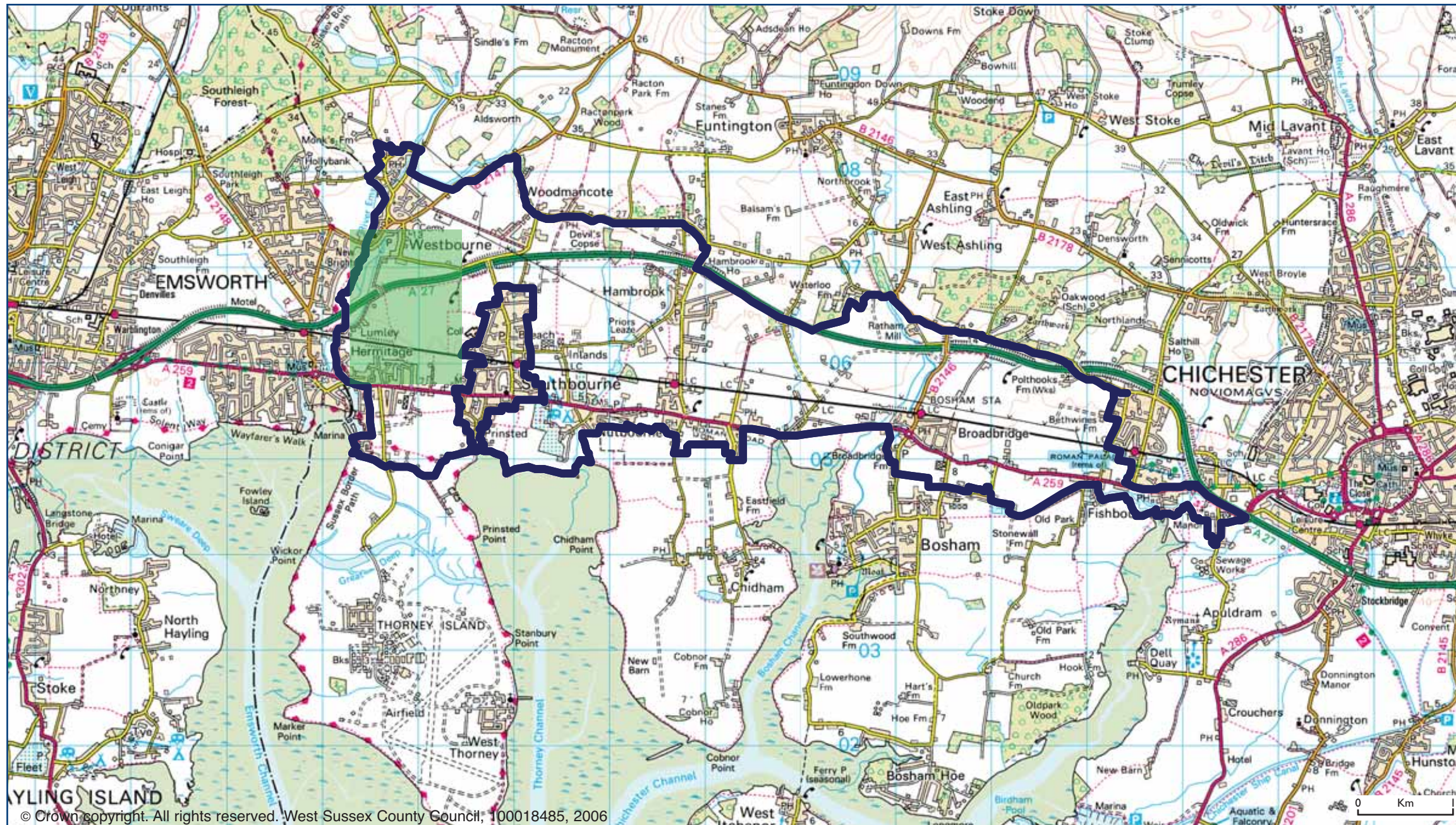
- Low lying flat open landscape.
- Long views to Chichester Harbour and to the distinctive spire of Chichester Cathedral.
- Suburban settlement dominates the area.
- Small towns, villages and road crossings hug the tops of inlets to Chichester Harbour.
- Degraded tree and hedgerow framework. A low density of hedgerows and hedgerow trees with occasional shelterbelts.
- Meandering rifes and drainage ditches.
- Large-scale arable farming and market gardening.
- Clusters of greenhouses.
- Winterbourne chalk streams flow through this area.
- Frequent urban fringe influences of horse paddocks, agricultural and light industry.
- Busy minor and major roads which also serve as bypasses. Minor roads run mainly north-south between the A259 and A27.
- Narrow gaps of open land between Hermitage, Southbourne, Nutbourne and Chidham. The gaps between settlements provide important visual relief to the built up areas, although their landscape character is often poorly defined, with a degraded hedgerow network.
- A few parts of this area retain elements of a smaller-scale, more varied landscape with quiet hamlets and traditional villages enclosed by small pastures.

Southbourne Coastal Plain

South Coast Plain

The area covered by the Sheet is derived from:

Chichester to Shoreham Coastal Plain (C1) Landscape Character Area as defined in the unpublished **West Sussex Landscape Character Assessment** (November 2003).



Historic Features

- Inlets, small waterways and ditches.
- Few visible prehistoric monuments, apart from crop marks.
- Large regular fields, mostly the product of Parliamentary enclosure.
- West of Chichester, Fishbourne Villa is unparalleled in Roman Britain for size and splendour. Roman building at Broadbridge.
- Medieval churches at Fishbourne and Westbourne.
- Watermills (post medieval - medieval) located around the small waterways and inlets feeding into Chichester Harbour, at Fishbourne, Nutbourne, Westbourne, Lumley and Ratham.
- Brickworks.

Biodiversity

- Semi-natural habitats are scarce due to intensive arable agriculture.
- The rife and ditch systems, together with occasional ponds, are of particular ecological value, supporting an important but fragile population of water voles.
- Fragments of woodland, some of which are ancient.
- Winterbourne chalk streams flow through this area and interact with saline estuaries causing unique conditions.
- Occasional species-rich meadows along rifes.
- Wetland reed bed and tall fen habitat associated with the tops of inlets flowing into Chichester Harbour.
- Occasional village ponds and greens provide local havens for wildlife.
- Hedgerow pattern is fragmented with occasional isolated woods. Linking features assume a greater significance in an otherwise cultivated landscape.

Change - Key Issues

- Urban development pressures, especially in the gaps between settlements and on the edge of Chichester.
- Major existing road improvements and the possibility of new ones.
- Conversion of agricultural buildings to light industrial uses.
- Introduction of large scale glasshouses with distribution sheds.
- Climate change may increase the risk of storm surges associated with flooding, with consequences for land currently adjacent to inter-tidal landscapes and habitats, increasing pressure for possibly insensitive coastal defences.
- Management and possible realignment of sea defences, due to predicted sea level rises, will have significant implications for landscape over the coming decades.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Key sensitivities are:

- Farm diversification and garden centres leading to introduction of signs and fencing.
- Derelict glasshouses and agricultural holdings.
- Changes in transport infrastructure.
- Proximity to Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Development at the top of waterways and inlets feeding in to Chichester Harbour.
- Key views to Cathedral and Chichester Harbour.
- Managed retreat of the coastline may be particularly influential in the future, providing opportunities for creation of new coastal and inter-tidal habitats and could result in a more naturally functioning landscape.



Major road - A27



Reedbed - Fishbourne

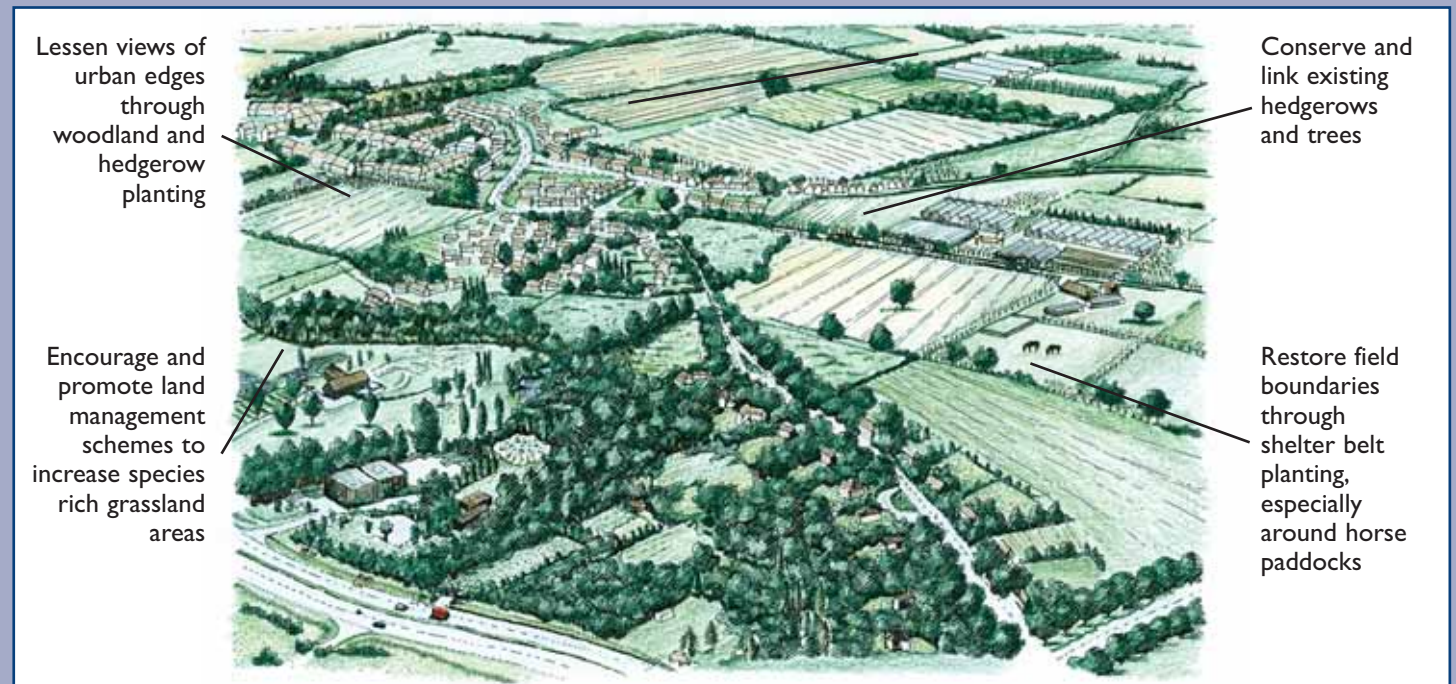


Horse paddocks - Westbourne



Flat landscape with arable farmland and degraded hedgerows - Fishbourne

Land Management Guidelines



Conserve the long views to Chichester Harbour and the spire of Chichester Cathedral.

- Create a new large scale tree and hedgerow framework to complement the open, intensively farmed landscape, whilst maintaining important views.
- Maintain and strengthen field boundaries such as hedgerows and shelterbelts.
- Conserve and link existing hedgerows and trees.
- Restore field boundaries through shelter belt planting, especially around horse paddocks.
- Establish landscape management plans for urban edges.
- Encourage conservation and community involvement in urban open spaces and village greens.
- Encourage the creation of new suburban woodlands, preferably with community involvement, for recreation and to link up with existing woodlands to the north.
- Encourage bold tree planting adjacent to roads to enhance both the visual and wildlife value of these areas.
- Restore and strengthen the landscape of the gaps between settlements.
- Encourage landscape enhancements around villages and on their approaches.
- Strengthen the landscape framework and filter the views of the urban edge through planting of woodland, tree and shrub belts and groups. Use these to screen and unify disparate suburban elements, especially along roadside verges, on village edges and around glasshouses.
- Conserve, manage and enhance existing village ponds.
- Maintain and enhance the landscape and biodiversity of rifes, waterways and inlets.
- Encourage and promote land management schemes to increase species-rich grassland areas.

The Guidelines should be read in conjunction with:

- County-wide Landscape Guidelines set out in *A Strategy for the West Sussex Landscape* (November 2005) published by West Sussex County Council.
- Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2004 - 2009.