

WINCHESTER DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN PART 2
LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY APPRAISAL

NEW ALRESFORD

This appraisal has been prepared with reference to Hampshire County Council's guidance document '*Assessing Landscape Sensitivity at a Strategic Level*' (2006) which recognises the use of Landscape Character Assessments to inform land use and land management policy and, in addition, the need to assess the main attributes of landscape as a basis for gauging sensitivity. The approach in this guidance document does not try to place a value on different landscapes, nor does it seek to establish the capacity of landscape to accommodate development.

In addition, this appraisal is based on published Winchester City and Hampshire County Council documents on landscape character and type; physical constraints identified through a desk top exercise; and professional judgement from site visits. A more detailed landscape assessment may be required prior to the final identification and allocation of sites for development.

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1.0 LANDSCAPE AND TOWNSCAPE CHARACTER AND TYPES

Reference:

County level¹

Landscape and Townscape Character Areas which identify key characteristics, qualities and forces for change:

- New Alresford and areas to north and west: **Itchen Valley 3c**.
- East and south of Sun Lane: **Bighton & Bramdean Downs 7d**.

District level²

Two character areas create a diverse landscape setting for the settlement of New Alresford. They identify key characteristics, issues and designations with landscape and built form strategies specific to each area.

- Main character area (New Alresford and areas to north and west): **Upper Itchen Valley**.
- Other character area (East and South of Sun Lane): **Bramdean Woodlands**.

1.1 Landscape Character

1.1.1 Upper Itchen Valley Character Area

- Distinctive valley topography and vegetation along Rivers Arle and Itchen
- Highly valued and protected landscape setting for the town to the north, west and south-west that includes the water courses of the Arle and Itchen and the South Downs National Park (SDNP)
- Part of the countryside setting for New Alresford west of main Alresford Road and south of disused railway line lies within the SDNP
- Valley floor typically small pasture fields; historic water meadows
- Valley sides typically medium arable fields with hedges as enclosure
- Designated historic parkland of heritage/amenity/biodiversity value
- Long views across Arle river valley to countryside beyond
- Narrow leafy rural lanes mainly tranquil with occasional light traffic
- Network of public rights of way (PRoWs), national trails, drove roads and lanes connect local settlements with New Alresford; sparse network to the west of the town.

1.1.2 Bramdean Woodlands Character Area

- Undulating chalk/clay landform closely linked to the Itchen valley
- Part of the countryside setting for the town; area west of Tichborne Down golf course and south of A31 lies within the SDNP
- Distinctive east-west ridgeline defines New Alresford's topography
- Few natural water features other than occasional dew ponds
- Long views from higher ground across river valley and countryside beyond.
- Mainly large arable fields on sloping ground east of Sun Lane

¹ [Hampshire County Council Integrated Character Assessment 2010](#) (HICA)

² [Winchester District Landscape Character Assessment 2004](#) (WLCA)

- Undesignated landscape outside the SDNP with high amenity value east and south of the town
- Woodland copses and ancient woodland south of A31
- Local lanes used by commercial traffic, e.g. Tichborne Down, Whitehill Lane
- A31 is physical and visual barrier between town and country
- Sparse footpath network east of Sun Lane.

1.2 Townscape

1.2.1 New Alresford

- Main settlement in the character area
- Distinct edge of settlement between town and country
- Distinctive compact character with historic vibrant centre and influence of water-related activities
- Traditional building materials and methods of construction
- Distinctive features include: Mid Hants Railway Watercress Line; River Arle; lime avenues; diverse street scene character with wide main street; good pedestrian connectivity within the centre.

1.2.2 East and South of Sun Lane

- Sun Lane and Whitehill Lane/A31 form a clear distinction between town and country
- Predominantly modern residential development on sloping ground west of Sun Lane of similar age, appearance and layout; mainly cul-de-sacs with poor pedestrian connectivity and irregular distribution of amenity spaces
- Strategically prominent location of primary school on ridgeline in Sun Lane
- Mature forest trees in private and public realm have high amenity value
- Narrow, rural character of Sun Lane north of railway line with restricted vehicular access.

1.3 Landscape Types for New Alresford and surrounding area

1.3.1 As well as identifying landscape character areas, the HICA and WLCA detail the characteristics of each landscape type. This includes the distribution of areas, typical soils and geology, topography, archaeological and historic features and field patterns, vegetation, land use, settlement pattern, building materials, routes and degree of tranquillity. The WLCA also outlines key issues affecting landscape features typical of the area. The five landscape types (WLCA classification) here are -

- a. Historic Parkland: Arlebury Park; Old Alresford House; Ovington; Tichborne.
- b. River Valleys: Arle and Itchen with associated water features north, north-east, west and south-west of the town.
- c. Open Arable: east and south of settlement; north of river valley.
- d. Chalk and Clay: south of the town.
- e. Golf course at Tichborne Down, south of A31.

1.3.2 The descriptions of landscape character areas and landscape types outlined above have been used to inform the degree of landscape sensitivity for areas around New Alresford as set out in the following sections.

2.0 LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

Hampshire County Council's 'Assessing Landscape Sensitivity at a Strategic Level' (p6) states, "*Landscape sensitivity relates to the stability of character, the degree to which that character is robust enough to continue and to be able to recuperate from loss or damage. A landscape with a character of high sensitivity is one that once lost would be difficult to restore and must be afforded particular care and consideration in order for it to survive*". Five main attributes which contributed to this assessment have been used in this appraisal: physical landscape; experiential/perceptual; historic environment; biodiversity and visibility.

2.1 Physical Landscape

2.1.1 Landform

- *Water course and associated features of value:* New Alresford and its setting form part of the catchment area for the headwaters of the River Itchen. A main tributary, the River Arle, flows between New Alresford to the south and Old Alresford to the north with its source further east near Bishop's Sutton. The Arle is recognised at European level as a highly valued chalk stream in terms of amenity and biodiversity (designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC)). Associated features contributing to local distinctiveness include spring lines; watercress beds, man-made channels and weirs; historic water meadows; fish farms; Old Alresford Ponds; Fulling and Arle Mills; brick bridges.
- *River valley and sides:* The main area of development lies south of the east-west road connections following the river valley, namely The Avenue, Pound Hill, West Street and East Street. Historic Arlebury Park and the recreation ground provide a green buffer on the valley slopes between the river and housing to the south. The only significant area of development on the valley slopes centres around historic Broad Street which provides road links to Old Alresford on the other side of the river, and more recent housing and industrial development in the Dean, the latter detracting from the distinctive local character of the river valley slopes.
- *Topography:* The existing built settlement lies on sloping ground north, west and south of a main east-west ridgeline either side of Sun Lane with the primary school and grounds at the highest point (c. 100m AOD). The land continues to rise further east and south east towards Bramdean Common (140 m) and West Tisted (190 m) and north of the river to Bighton (130 m). Dry valleys tend to run north-south towards the Arle.

2.1.2 Land cover

- The two landscape character areas (1.1 above) result in quite different landscapes: the intimate, small scale nature of the river valley contrasting with the large arable fields and woodland areas on the higher ground.
- Woodland copses and ancient woodland, mainly to the south of the town and A31, often on hilltops where there are clay deposits. Most common species are beech, oak and hazel. Hazel coppice very characteristic of the area, e.g. Hassocks Copse, Heart Copse (ancient woodland) and Hookham Copse.
- Narrow rural lanes, often well contained by hedgerows and field boundary trees, e.g. Drove Lane, Appledown Lane.

- Trees make a significant contribution within main settlement in terms of their amenity value as shown by numerous Tree Preservation Orders in and around New Alresford.
- Valley floor of rivers Arle and Itchen: dominated by permanent pasture; species associated with wetland areas; semi or unimproved grassland often with historic water meadow features, e.g. carriers.
- Field boundaries: mature mixed indigenous hedgerows and trees.
- Mature feature avenue and roadside trees: species include lime, beech, sycamore.
- Historic parkland at Arlebury Park includes veteran parkland trees of high amenity and heritage value, such as Cedar of Lebanon.

2.2 Experiential / Perceptual

Ref: GIS constraints map and site assessment; CPRE Tranquillity Map³; Dark skies (CPRE / SDNP)⁴

- Contrasting landscape character between containment of twisting river valleys around New Alresford set within a well treed landscape and the open, expansive arable fields on higher ground (e.g. east of Sun Lane) with long views of countryside and treed skylines beyond.
- Pedestrian connectivity in countryside: very good network of long distance paths and national trails linking New Alresford with nearby settlements (St Swithun's Way; Itchen Way; King's Way, Wayfarer's Walk, Oxdrove Way). Connectivity further strengthened with national trails linking with other PRowS and rural lanes around New Alresford providing good pedestrian access between town and country.
- Pedestrian connectivity in town: good links between river and valley slopes to the south, mainly around historic town centre. Poor footpath links and permeability within modern residential development in the southern half of the town, especially south-east corner off Sun Lane. Road layouts comprising mainly cul-de-sacs and no footpath links combined with lack of clear direction/ sense of place have resulted in alternative informal pedestrian routes being created through built up areas. Evidence of many desire lines across amenity spaces, grassed verges and steep slopes.
- Opportunities for improving cycle routes in the area.
- Tranquillity: many of the footpaths that pass through areas of countryside are very tranquil; birdsong predominates except for the area to the south along A31 corridor.
- The South Downs National Park Authority is seeking dark sky status to protect quality of countryside where dark skies are most significant and to promote improvement of remaining areas. This may provide opportunities to increase enjoyment of landscape and night skies within the national park.

³ www.cpre.org.uk/resources/countryside/tranquil-places/item/1839

⁴ www.cpre.org.uk/resources/countryside/dark-skies
www.southdowns.gov.uk/looking-after/dark-skies

2.3 Historic Environment

Ref: GIS constraints map; HICA; WCLA; WCC Historic Environment record

- Historic centre is a Conservation Area.
- Water meadows are a significant feature of the historic landscape along the length of River Itchen, including around New Alresford, and are frequently found around the headwaters below natural springs. Watercress beds are also characteristic of the area. Early formal field enclosure on valley floor east of New Alresford in the 17th century favoured cultivation, but with the decline of water meadows in the 19th century these areas have become more wooded.
- Historic avenues, mainly lime trees, are a locally distinctive feature.
- Numerous pre-1810 historic parklands in the area, e.g. Old Alresford House, Avington, Arlebury Park, Tichborne Park and Ovington are all highly valued landscapes that contribute to local distinctiveness.

2.4 Biodiversity

Ref: GIS constraints map; HICA; WCLA

- Much of River Itchen is a classic example of a chalk river with associated habitats including fen meadow and flood pasture supporting a wide diversity of plant and wildlife species. As such, it is internationally designated as a SAC and nationally as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The river valley landscape is also covered by the Itchen Valley Biodiversity Opportunity Area, described as being botanically very important with extensive areas of unimproved vegetation along its length.
- Alresford Pond SSSI is a significant feature in the north-east corner of town. Formed in the headwaters of the River Arle, and created in the 12th century as a balancing lake for the Itchen Navigation, it is also recognised for its heritage and amenity value.
- Other features include Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) located sporadically along the River Arle adjacent the Soke and by Fulling Mill; Alresford golf course on Tichborne Down south of the town; and ancient woodlands, also south of the town.

2.5 Visibility

A visibility constraints map for the New Alresford area is included at Appendix 1.

3.0 SENSITIVITY APPRAISALS

A number of individual sites and areas of land in and around New Alresford have been promoted for development through the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)⁵. Those of similar landscape character have been grouped together for the purposes of assessing their sensitivity in the local landscape (Appendix 2). Four categories of sensitivity are used –

- Most sensitive***
- Highly sensitive***
- Moderately sensitive***
- Least sensitive***

3.1 Area east of Sun Lane and small area south of A31 (SHLAA site 277)

- Context: Sun Lane forms the western boundary of the site and a strong linear edge to existing residential development
- Route of Wayfarer's Walk along Sun Lane
- Character of main site: large arable fields on north and south facing slopes of ridgeline; contained by field hedgerows along the eastern and western boundaries; railway line to north and Whitehill Lane/A31 to south; open rural aspect with long views on higher ground; more sheltered and contained on lower ground in north-west corner around Langton farmhouse with vegetation restricting views of site from PRow along northern boundary
- Character of Sun Lane south of Watercress railway line: local road link well contained by tall field hedgerow, indigenous species mix includes guelder rose, blackthorn, field maple, sycamore; mature feature trees of lime, sycamore and beech in grassed roadside verges by school
- Character of Sun Lane north of Watercress railway line: narrow; no footpaths; rural feel; on-street parking reduces visibility; unsafe for pedestrians; road layout at either end of Sun Lane restricted in terms of traffic use; Whitehill Lane used by commercial traffic as short cut between settlements
- Character of small area to south of A31: very rural, enclosed area of pasture well contained by vegetation; no buildings visible in the vicinity other than glimpses of housing through hedgerow; isolated from the town by A31; network of rural lanes, some in poor condition
- Agricultural land quality east of Sun Lane: mainly grade 3a
- Important long views to countryside across river valley to north from the school on ridgeline; filtered views of the site through vegetation from PRow at White Hill to the east
- Panoramic views across the site from higher ground in Sun Lane across fields to the east; views of site on south-facing slope from A31, Whitehill Lane and PRow along Appledown Lane
- Landmarks to connect with place: primary school on high ground off Sun Lane; church tower visible from higher ground in existing housing area; may also be visible from within site..

⁵ www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-base/housing/strategic-housing-land-availability-assessment/

- Skyline features: east-west ridgeline through site; any development here would be visually prominent and unsympathetic with rural landscape character; telecom mast on eastern site boundary; far-reaching views of treed skylines and rural landscape character to north, east and south from ridgeline.

Summary of Landscape Sensitivity

A substantial area in agricultural use forming part of New Alresford's distinctive landscape setting with the well-defined settlement boundary along Sun Lane. Any development on higher ground along the main east-west ridgeline and the secondary north-south ridgeline along the eastern site boundary will have significant visual and landscape impacts on the site and surrounds, and is therefore considered **most sensitive**.

The north-west corner of the site by Langton farmhouse is **least sensitive** in terms of landscape and visual impacts as it is well contained on western and northern boundaries and on lower lying ground with restricted views to and from site. The lowest slopes south of the site adjacent Whitehill Lane are also **least sensitive** for similar reasons.

The remainder of the area, which includes the small triangular area south of A31, is considered **moderately sensitive**.

3.2 Area within Arlebury Park (SHLAA site 2532)

- Context: part of a substantial area of green space on sloping ground along southern side of the (north facing) Arle valley between historic Arlebury Park and recreation ground
- Character: maintained pasture well contained on boundaries by established hedgerows to the west and east adjoining a PRow; brick and flint estate wall along southern boundary adjoining The Avenue; open aspect across river valley to the north; southern half of the site and the north-western section adjacent the river lie within locally designated historic Arlebury Park
- Agricultural land quality: mainly poor (grade 4) through valley; 3b alongside The Avenue
- Important views: long views across river valley
- Panoramic views: from within lower half of the site and adjoining a PRow looking north and west across river valley to countryside beyond; views to and from site restricted by boundary vegetation on higher ground in southern half of the site
- Landmarks to connect with place: Arlebury Park House west of site; River Arle along southern boundary; distinctive lime avenue on southern boundary
- Skyline features: treed skylines across countryside.

Summary of Landscape Sensitivity

A **highly sensitive** site in terms of its location adjoining the River Arle and for potential impacts on biodiversity value, landscape and heritage character. The areas in the southern half of the site on higher ground, adjoining the main approach road into Alresford, are **moderately sensitive** as they are well contained, have restricted views and are furthest from the watercourse, although there are impacts on Arlebury Park as a registered historic park.

3.3 Area west of Drove Lane (SHLAA site 2408)

- Context: part of the Arle valley floor; distinctive character associated with watercourse; edge of settlement within countryside setting; SDNP is close to the site south of the railway line
- Character: low-lying area of wetland meadow with regenerative birch scrub; watercourse along northern boundary; well contained to the west and south by vegetation along Watercress railway line; adjacent to a small cluster of houses at the junction of Winchester Road and Drove Lane; access from Drove Lane, a well-treed, enclosed, narrow, tranquil rural lane
- Agricultural land quality: part of river valley - grade 4 (poor)
- Important views from site: overlooks Arlebury Park to the east; views across river valley; views of site from the Wayfarer's Walk
- Panoramic views: medium distance views north across river valley
- Skyline features: none
- Landmarks to connect with place: Arlebury Park House / grounds; River Arle.

Summary of Landscape Sensitivity

A **most sensitive** location in terms of landscape character and biodiversity with potential impacts on the local character of narrow rural lanes in the vicinity, including Drove Lane as the only vehicular access.

3.4 Area adjacent Spring Gardens (SHLAA sites 1927, 2553)

- Context: slopes of the Upper Itchen valley; distinctive character associated with Arle / Itchen river valley setting with its historic watercourse features such as watercress beds and carriers; close to springs; edge of settlement within countryside setting; SDNP close to site south of A31
- Character: small fields on sloping ground used mainly as horse paddocks; borders back gardens along New Farm Road; contained by the railway line to the north; restricted access along Spring Gardens, a narrow lane bordered by man-made water channels and low-lying watercress beds (part SSSI)
- Agricultural land quality: poorer quality 3b
- Vehicular access via rural lane (also St Swithun's Way) much used by joggers, walkers and cyclists; very little traffic; tranquil, semi-rural setting
- Important views from St Swithun's Way
- Panoramic views from higher ground within site looking south across A31 to countryside beyond
- Landmarks to connect with place: River Itchen and historic water-related features; Watercress Railway line
- Skyline features: treed skyline to south; houses along ridgeline on eastern boundary.

Summary of Landscape Sensitivity

Development would have potential significant impacts on local character, including water course, heritage assets and a national trail, with very restricted vehicular access along a narrow lane. The western and southern boundaries are a **most sensitive** location in terms of landscape character, biodiversity, features associated with the river valleys and water quality. The remainder of the site is **highly sensitive**.

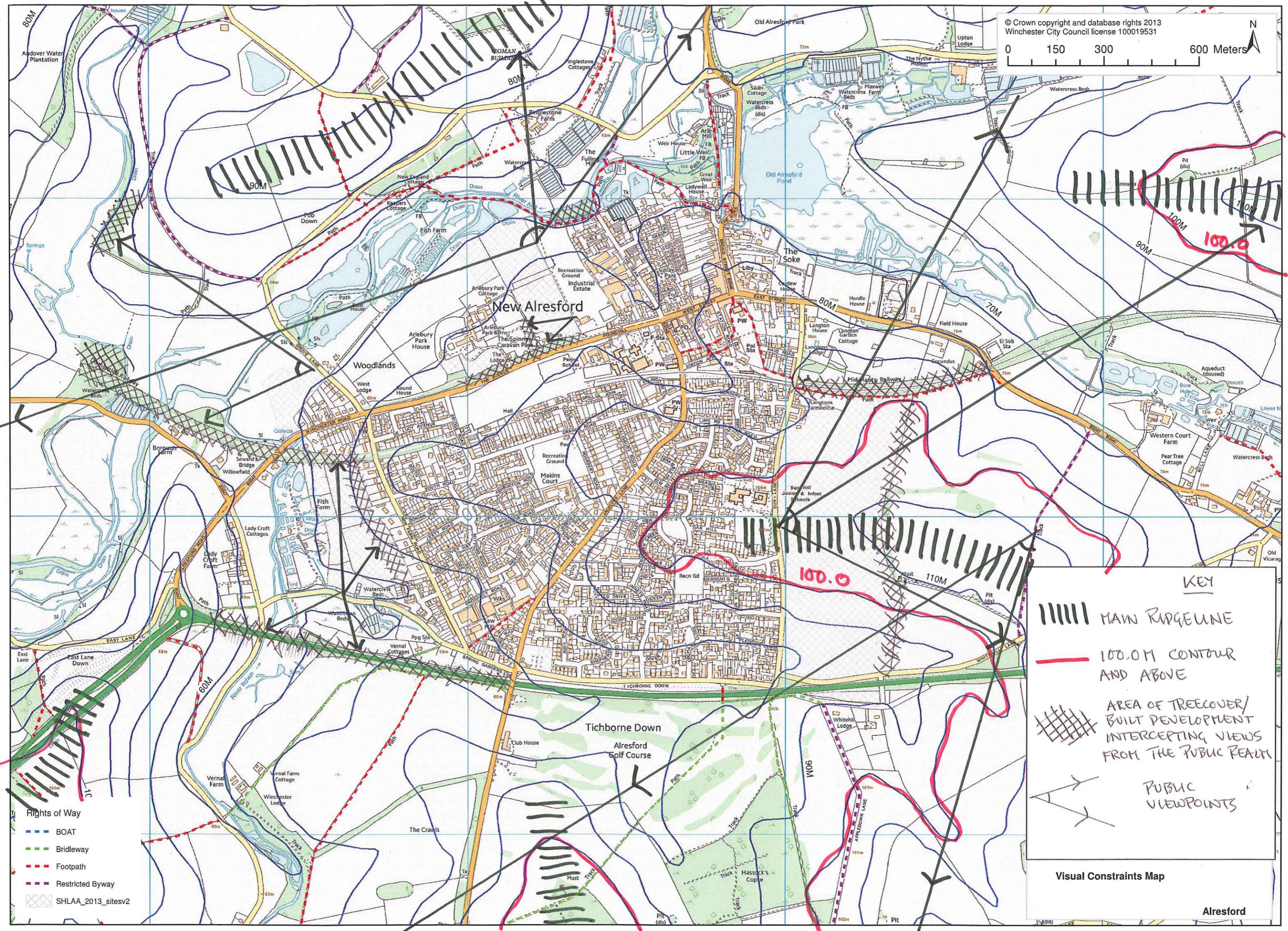
4.0 SUMMARY OF KEY LANDSCAPE AND TOWNSCAPE ISSUES FOR NEW ALRESFORD

Upper Itchen Valley Character Area

- Potential for contamination of water course from agriculture and development
- Fragmentation and neglect of hedgerows and woodlands
- Loss of views that identify place and local distinctiveness
- Loss of valued green space
- Motor vehicles predominate throughout the public realm
- Undesignated areas with special qualities that contribute significantly to setting of New Alresford are vulnerable to change, e.g. outside the South Downs National Park (SDNP) and its setting.

Bramdean Woodlands Character Area

- Potential for contamination of water course from agriculture and development
- Fragmentation and neglect of hedgerows and woodlands
- Potential loss of mature feature trees and local landscape character
- Loss of views that identify place and local distinctiveness
- Motor vehicles predominate throughout the public realm
- Physical and visual impact of A31 and traffic noise to the south
- Undesignated areas with special qualities that contribute significantly to setting of New Alresford are vulnerable to change, e.g. outside the SDNP
- Limited parking throughout Sun Lane exacerbated by primary school.
- Potential conflicts between heritage assets and increased traffic, e.g. historic railway arch in Jacklyn's Lane; brick wall boundary to Langton House.



- Rights of Way
- BOAT
 - Bridleway
 - - - Footpath
 - - - Restricted Byway
 - SHLAA_2013_sitesv2

KEY

- MAIN RIDGE LINE
- 100.0M CONTOUR AND ABOVE
- AREA OF TREECOVER/ BUILT DEVELOPMENT INTERCEPTING VIEWS FROM THE PUBLIC REALM
- PUBLIC VIEWPOINTS

Visual Constraints Map

Alresford

