

North of Fareham Strategic Development Area

SUMMARY LANDSCAPE APPRAISAL

Introduction

The South East Plan (published July 2009) includes a policy (SH2) for the allocation of a Strategic Development Area (SDA) within Fareham Borough to the north of the M27 motorway comprising 10,000 new dwellings. The Coalition Government has announced its intention to abolish the South East Plan and other regional strategies and housing targets are being reassessed at local level. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to have regard to the Regional Strategy (at least for the time being) and the fact that Fareham Borough Council (within whose area the SDA lies) is continuing to plan for the SDA in preparing and adopting the Winchester LDF. As the landscape appraisal will form part of the LDF evidence base, it will respond to the underlying principles set out in policy SH2 regarding potential landscape impact of the SDA on the surrounding area and assessment of the open land needed to protect settlement identity. A main objective of the appraisal is to help inform any future decisions about land within the Winchester District part of the study area.

Policy SH2 states that:

‘the precise form and location of SDAs will be established in development plan documents (DPDs). Their impact will be assessed in relation to their effect on surrounding districts and their sustainability, including their landscape impact.

To prevent coalescence of the SDAs with neighbouring settlements and in order to protect the separate identities of individual settlements, areas of open land will be maintained between the Fareham SDA and Wickham/Funtley/Knowle.

The precise boundaries of these areas of land will be defined in DPDs (Development Plan Documents) to include land which has a predominantly open and/or rural appearance. The open land will be selected to respect the identity of the existing settlements while ensuring that opportunities for sustainable access to services and facilities in the SDA and adjacent urban areas are not prejudiced.

Within these areas, built development will not be allowed except for small scale buildings which cannot be located elsewhere and which are essential to maintain established uses within the areas of open land, or to enhance their recreational value.’

The main area of proposed new development lies within the Fareham Borough. The outer extents to the W and NW of the SDA which cross the boundary within Winchester District and adjoin the village of Knowle have been generally identified as ‘potential GI areas’ or ‘green buffers’.

The SDA study area within Winchester District is broadly defined as land between the village of Wickham to the north and the District boundary in the south; the N-S railway line close to Knowle to the west and Wickham Common to the east.

Methodology

The appraisal applies professional judgement based on a visual site assessment carried out in 2010 with a desk top study using GIS constraint maps and recognised documents, some with recommendations as listed below.

For clarification, the term 'landscape' is recognised as a collective term for all components that make up countryside and settlements, 'landscape' being interchangeable with the term 'environment' (ref document below Assessing Landscape Sensitivity at a Strategic Level (HCC 2006) p6). Components of landscape when considered in this way are the

physical landscape (soils, landform and land cover) including landscape character; experiential landscape (to include tranquillity and countryside access); biodiversity; historic environment and visibility. The term '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.'(Chris Bray, Worcestershire County Council, from Countryside Agency Topic Paper 6 'Techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity').

The appraisal refers to the following main documents and maps:

Fareham Borough Landscape Assessment (Scott Wilson Resource Consultants adopted as SPD May 1996)

Landscape Character Assessment for Winchester District (March 2004)

Assessing Landscape Sensitivity at a Strategic Level: a description of the methodology (Hampshire County Council 2006)

Landscape Sensitivity Analysis for the Fareham Strategic Development Area (Hampshire County Council October 2006): landscape character description, detailed analysis and summary report.

PUSH GI Strategy Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (UE Associates October 2009)

Winchester District Green Infrastructure Study (Enfusion May 2010)

Draft Integrated Landscape and Townscape Character Assessment (HCC April 2010)

Constraint maps:

1. WCC 2009 landscape sensitivity constraint maps covering physical landscape; experiential; biodiversity; historic environment; contamination; civil aviation restrictions.
2. Fareham SDA general constraints map of 'local landscape features and designations' (Tribal April 2009)
3. 'Refining Fareham SDA Capacity Analysis' constraints map and aerial photo of revised SDA area showing main strategic green infrastructure areas within Winchester District (David Locke Associates August 2009)

Landscape Character within the SDA

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) work identifying landscape character was initially carried out at county level by Hampshire County Council (2000). LCA is a tool for identifying the features that give a locality its 'sense of place.'

The main landscape character areas within the SDA study area identified at county level are:

- Meon River Valley to the west of Knowle
- Portsdown Hill Chalk Scarp which covers the main SDA area between Knowle and Wallington River to the east, the M27 to the south and as far north as the district boundary and Crockerhill

- Eastern Forest of Bere Wooded Lowland Mosaic which extends along the northern edge from the Meon valley.

A draft *Integrated Landscape and Townscape Character Assessment* (April 2010) is currently being finalised by Hampshire County Council which when completed will replace the existing County Landscape Character Assessment (2000). Responding to current issues, legislation and guidance, it covers both townscape and landscape bringing it in line with the European Landscape Convention, the latter making it clear that landscapes should not stop at urban boundaries. It also places greater emphasis on a spatial reporting framework for regional and sub-regional green infrastructure planning work, provides compatibility with the emerging LDF spatial planning approach and, with the addition of settlement characterisation, a spatial context for urban place shaping. This appraisal therefore includes data from the County's Integrated Assessment to supplement Winchester City Council's more detailed, but older, 2004 district assessment.

The new Integrated Assessment gives a contextual overview of the Hampshire landscape with cross boundary characterisation. It identifies three main character areas within the SDA study area:

- Meon Valley (area 3e) mostly outside the study area to the west; it excludes Knowle.
- Forest of Bere East (area2f) which runs along the District boundary through the northern part of the study area. It includes Knowle and surrounds to the east and north.
- Portsdown Hill Open Downs (area 8i), a wide E-W strip that includes most of the SDA and continues to Havant, all within Fareham Borough.

At the local level, LCA documents have been produced by Fareham Borough Council (1996) and Winchester City Council (2004). As both assessments are now dated, they need to be read alongside the County Integrated Assessment. The following landscape character areas are identified within the SDA study area:

Fareham Borough Landscape Assessment (May 1996):

- North Fareham Downs (LCA 09) which covers the main area east of Knowle
- Forest of Bere (LCA10) which mainly comprises the wooded ridgeline along the district boundary to the north of the SDA.

Landscape Character Assessment for Winchester District (March 2004)

- Lower Meon valley (map 20) which includes the village of Knowle situated on the slopes of the River Meon within the area referred to as a green buffer above.
- Forest of Bere Lowlands (map 18); wooded ridgeline along the district boundary to the north of the SDA, which adjoins Rookesbury Park, includes Wickham Common, extends as far east as Waterlooville and north to Soberton.

Landscape Character in Winchester District

Ref: *Landscape Character Assessment for Winchester District* (March 2004); *Draft Integrated Landscape and Townscape Character Assessment* (HCC April 2010); *Fareham Borough Landscape Assessment* (Scott Wilson Resource Consultants adopted as SPD May 1996); *Landscape Sensitivity Analysis for the Fareham Strategic Development Area* (Hampshire County Council October 2006): landscape character description, detailed analysis and summary report.

A summary of existing landscape character of the study area within Winchester District has been compiled using the above assessments and field work.

Physical Landscape:

Ref: GIS Constraint maps

- Topography

The Meon valley is a significant N-S landscape feature west of the SDA, which passes through Wickham further north and sub-divides the once extensive Forest of Bere. A key characteristic of the river Meon is the fairly narrow major river valley and floor with gently sloping sides situated within the clay lowlands of the Hampshire Basin. The slopes rise generally to 45.00m above sea level in the NW corner of the SDA around the settlement of Knowle with a high point of 50.00m in the centre of an area of woodland known as Fiddlers Green. This woodland forms part of a distinctive wooded ridgeline, evident as a skyline feature along the northern edge of the SDA within the Winchester District boundary.

Ridgelines are a significant landscape feature of the area immediately north of Knowle settlement continuing along the District boundary north of the SDA to Wickham Common. The ridgelines provide physical containment of the SDA from the north and a distinctive SW to NE elevated ground profile between the two main river valleys, River Meon in the west and River Wallington to the east. The wooded ridgeline is a skyline feature and a key characteristic when looking north from the SDA

The ridgelines provide far reaching and panoramic views south and south east across the SDA and beyond to the coast, which are most prominent at heights of 40.00m and above. The higher ground continues to the east of Wickham as a gently undulating landscape rising to heights of 64.00m above sea level by Crockerhill Farm, which is the highest point in the landscape between Wickham and the motorway and location of a water tower, a visually prominent feature on the skyline. The physical constraints of ridgelines and river valley provide effective natural containment for the SDA.

Another feature of the area is the significant influence of the topography, most notably ridgelines and river valley, on the local road network and railway line (part of which is now dismantled), which evolved historically in response to the E-W ridgelines north of the SDA and N-S route of the Meon river valley to the west.

In terms of accessibility, the valley has been a physical barrier for much of its length restricting E-W pedestrian and vehicular movement, as well as influencing direction of the railway lines, which when built created additional barriers for pedestrians and vehicles. This has since changed for the N-S railway line following the valley side to Wickham as it was closed in the 1950s and is now disused, providing a distinctive tree lined feature used in part as a footpath and bridleway and considerably improving access in the area.

The course of the old Roman road follows the E-W elevated ground from the village of Wickham heading east to Wickham Common and beyond. The area remains very rural in character with sparse settlement in the form of scattered farmsteads, small isolated hamlets e.g. by Wickham Common and houses as ribbon development alongside B2170 and A32.

On the Fareham Borough side of the boundary, a gently sloping dry valley runs in an E-W direction next to Heytesbury Farm and the hamlet of Crockerhill at the base of the main ridgeline. Currently farmed as arable, the lower levels and open aspect of the dry valley are in striking contrast to the adjoining wooded ridgeline character. Dry valleys are a key characteristic of the area linking up either with the Meon valley in the west or the Wallington river valley in the east. The topography within the main SDA site comprises a main south facing slope that falls away from this dry valley at the northern

end, average 40.00m above sea level, to the M27 in the south, average 15.00m above sea level.

- Landcover and Land use

The combination of landcover and land use has played a major part in establishing landscape character of this area. The Forest of Bere LCA, which includes the area immediately to the E and S of Wickham as far as the District boundary, has a varied geology which supports a very high diversity of semi-natural habitats making it one of the richest areas in the District in terms of biodiversity.

The area to the north and west of the SDA is very rural in character with a sparse settlement pattern, the historic village of Wickham being the main settlement about a mile to the north. Its original medieval layout is based around a central rectangle, known as the Square, surrounded by burgage plots resulting in a compact urban form, which has since expanded east and west of the river.

Knowle Village is a recent development based around the conversion of a large Victorian former hospital. Its wider contextual setting includes the two areas identified as 'green buffers' on the SDA draft masterplan options, located to the NE and SE of Knowle. Both areas are rural in character, the southern area mainly arable fields contained by boundary mature oak trees and hedgerows; the northern area a diverse mix of woodland and copses, including designated ancient woodland, arable fields and pasture. Both areas are accessible with public rights of way along boundaries and links through woodland to Mayles Lane.

Traditional building materials are influenced by the clay geology and include red and grey bricks and plain clay tiles, with slate used on later buildings such as the former Knowle Hospital. Thatch is not common and flint is rare.

The varied geology of the Meon valley provides 'an intimate and enclosed character' with pastures, marshy grassland, willow-lined watercourses and riverside woods, including ancient woodland with protected status. The valley floor and sides are typified by paddocks and pastures (enclosed meadows) with few long views.

In contrast, higher elevated ground between Knowle and the area immediately south and east of Wickham (including the Common), creates a distinctive skyline feature when viewed from the lower-lying SDA area to the south. Although open in places, much of the skyline appears well wooded, a key characteristic, as there are a number of copses scattered throughout the area, most notably along the District boundary as far east as Boarhunt.

Much of the well established woodland landscape in the study area is associated with the watercourses on lower lying land and on ridgelines and hills mainly to the north between the SDA and Wickham. A distinctive feature of the local landscape is the presence of magnificent spreading and sometimes ancient oaks within mature field boundary hedgerows, particularly evident alongside the many tracks and lanes so prevalent in the area.

Common land and Forestry Commission managed sites feature in this area (Forest of Bere east). Potential concerns identified within this character area include the 'over formalisation of semi-natural areas to provide recreational facilities' and problems associated with 'increasing access opportunities introducing a greater likelihood of conflict through misuse e.g. fly tipping or trespassing on local farmland'. It also recognises increased traffic from commuter 'rat runs' from expanding surrounding

populations; loss of farmland and in particular hedges and hedgerow oaks, a key characteristic of the area; the potential loss of habitat and increasing pressure for urban fringe related uses e.g. golf courses, horse paddocks and settlement edge recreation grounds particularly north and east of Fareham.

- Agricultural land classification:

The alluvial and gravel deposits of the Meon valley cross distinctive E-W bands which create a highly variable geology around Knowle and NW part of the SDA study area, influencing landscape character as outlined above and quality of the soil. The highest (Grade 1) agricultural land quality exists on the western valley slopes by The Lodge, NW of Knowle merging into Grade 2 around Tapnage with lower land quality (Grade 3) evident throughout much of the main area between the SDA and Wickham.

Planning Policy Statement 7 (*Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*) states that the presence of the 'best and most versatile' agricultural land, defined as Grades 1, 2 and 3a, should be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations, for example, biodiversity, quality and character of the landscape, amenity value or heritage interest when considering suitability of areas for development.

England		
Grade	Hectares	%
Grade 1	354,562	2.7
Grade 2	1,848,874	14.2
Grade 3	6,290,210	48.2
Grade 4	1,839,581	14.1
Grade 5	1,100,305	8.4
Non Agricultural	655,856	5.0
Urban	951,424	7.3
Hampshire County		
Grade	Hectares	%
Grade 1	1,548	0.4
Grade 2	17,854	4.9
Grade 3	209,336	56.9
Grade 4	55,772	15.2
Grade 5	19,476	5.3
Non Agricultural	41,282	11.2
Urban	22,449	6.1

Reference: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rds/lgmt/docs/ALC-Stats071105.pdf>

- Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

There are a number of TPOs within and around Knowle Village that protect existing mature tree cover including specimen feature oaks, a key local characteristic of the area. Trees providing significant landscape structure and containment are also protected, for example, an area Preservation Order on the north side of the Village alongside Mayles Lane. Small copses and trees within informal indigenous hedgerows define the District boundary and public right of way route, situated south and east of the existing triangular area immediately south of Knowle, part of 'the green buffer'; these too are protected as an area Order.

Elsewhere, there is relatively little tree protection within the study area. Much of the tree cover is locally characteristic and makes a positive contribution in terms of amenity value. The relatively low number of TPOs may therefore have less to do with condition and amenity and more to do with the absence to date of change which triggers the need for protection, particularly pressure of new development. If the proposed SDA goes ahead, additional protection may be required to safeguard significant trees in the long term thereby retaining a key characteristic of the existing landscape.

Experiential characteristics:

Ref: GIS constraint maps

The area to the north and west of the SDA is very rural in character with a sparse settlement pattern. Despite this, it does not have a strong Public Rights of Way (PROW) network throughout the study area, which restricts links between settlements and public access and enjoyment of the wider countryside. There are sparse links to the west and the highly accessible FC woodland in Whiteley due mainly to physical constraints such as the restrictive topography of the Meon valley and the railway lines. Rookesbury Park, a large private estate east of Wickham, has no public footpaths, further limiting access north of the study area.

There is one central public right of way which follows the district boundary at the northern end of the SDA; it crosses fields following the dry valley by Heytesbury Farm, continuing south of Knowle; the same footpath links with Crockerhill to the east and beyond the A32 to Wickham Common. A second footpath spur diverts through Fiddlers Green woodland, connecting Knowle and Wickham via Mayles Lane. As this is the only accessible route between the settlements, access is very limited and as Mayles Lane is frequently used locally as a short cut for vehicles it is not currently ideal for pedestrians.

The footpath continues to follow the District boundary westwards to the railway and the River Meon, both significant physical constraints severely limiting access beyond to the wider countryside and Forestry Commission owned land around Whiteley. Another footpath spur continues into the SDA area within Fareham Borough, leading to the settlement of Funtley next to the motorway in the south and eastwards across the SDA to the Wickham Road (A32).

The relatively sparse PROW network N and W of Knowle does not apply east of the A32 as the area around Wickham Common is very accessible. As a well used open space there are public footpaths and bridleways which radiate out in all directions, historically linking the Common with surrounding farmsteads, hamlets, woodland, the two main Meon and Wallington river valleys, and even further afield to the settlements of Knowle and Wickham, although the busy A32 dissects an otherwise uninterrupted E-W route through mainly tranquil, rural countryside.

Many of the footpaths at the northern end of the SDA tend to follow the existing E-W ground profile either along ridgelines or along the two main dry valleys, the first by Crockerhill and the second south of Birching Copse and Wickham Common. Part of the disused railway line now provides a valuable footpath and bridleway link between Knowle and Wickham, albeit with limited access from the SDA study area as it lies west of the river Meon.

Landscape strategies in the Winchester LCA identify a need to improve the footpath linkages to the disused railway line and the Forest of Bere; also to conserve and enhance the rural character of existing roads and lanes avoiding inappropriate road improvements. The Winchester GI Study provides further assessment and scope for GI improvements

such as improved footpath and cycle links between settlements and publicly accessible areas of green space.

Unlike the Itchen valley, there are no national trails within or close to the study area; Kings Way is the nearest approximately 1.5 miles to the east passing the village of Boarhunt en route to the south coast from Winchester.

In terms of tranquillity a sense of remoteness in an undisturbed and peaceful rural setting is evident among the lanes, tracks and footpaths within the area to the north of the SDA and Wickham. Dependent on weather and site conditions, background traffic noise from the M27 is sometimes heard from paths on higher ground following the District boundary. The only other main traffic route passing through this area is the A32 with its links to the south coast and motorway; even with this, traffic noise is perceived to be occasional rather than constant and therefore not considered an intrusion on the overall tranquillity of the area.

Another significant factor when assessing the level of tranquillity within the low density road network and its sense of remoteness is the absence of 'rat runs' to main roads outside the study area as experienced in other parts of the District; the one possible exception being Mayles Lane as a convenient road link between Knowle, Wickham and main routes beyond.

Increasing levels of commuter traffic and increased recreational pressure on the surrounding rural countryside are two main issues arising from major new development that need careful management if they are to avoid having an adverse impact on the special landscape qualities and sense of place. Key characteristics need to be protected and enhanced to retain local distinctiveness and character but there is also potential to improve the current situation by promoting Mayles Lane for pedestrian and cycle use and creating links to the west of Knowle.

Historic Environment:

Ref: GIS constraint maps

The area north of the SDA within Winchester District is part of an extensive landscape historically associated with the Forest of Bere as a royal hunting reserve, which originally extended east to Waterlooville and west to Eastleigh in the 11th century and was the last to be disbanded in 1810. The influence of land management practices of coppicing and timber extraction, wood and heath pasture and small scale agriculture consistent throughout this period remain a key landscape characteristic of this area today.

The area now known as the Forest of Bere is described by the Forestry Commission as 'the nearest and most accessible countryside for many of the residents of SE Hampshire' (Push GI Strategy Sept 2009). It is a mixture of woodland, open space, heathland, farmland and downland creating a wide variety of habitats and publicly accessible areas. A main PUSH GI Strategy initiative is to develop the wider Forest of Bere area as a regional park, which will have major benefits with the provision of green infrastructure at the sub-regional level. The level of accessibility does however vary throughout the Forest of Bere; the SDA study area for instance does not have a rich footpath network as outlined above and would benefit from improved accessibility to woodlands, parks and other open spaces in the vicinity.

Historic Parks are commonly found in river valley locations, the Meon valley is no exception. Rookesbury Park, an extensive post 1810 park east of Wickham, is the only

example in the SDA study area, situated to take advantage of views across the Meon river valley. There do not appear to be any Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the area.

The area to the north and west of the SDA is very rural in character with much of the treed skyline along the ridgelines comprising designated ancient woodland, a key characteristic of this area which extends as far west as Whiteley and to Boarhunt and beyond in the east. There are only two main settlements; the historic village of Wickham being the main settlement about a mile to the north. Its original medieval layout is based around its centre known as 'the Square' and surrounded by burgage plots within a compact urban form, which has more recently expanded east and west of the river; the older central area now protected as a Conservation Area.

Knowle Village, which adjoins the 'green buffer' shown on the SDA draft masterplan options, is a recent development based around the conversion of a large Victorian former hospital. There are a number of farmsteads which are listed buildings between the SDA and Wickham, such as Mayles Farm, Castle Farm, Webbs Land Farm; other listed buildings are in Knowle and Wickham with Rookesbury Park and Park Place Pastoral Centre closeby.

Landscape strategies in the Winchester LCA (Lower Meon Valley) identify a need to retain and enhance the 'rural and riparian character of the area' and for any future development to be sensitive to the historic character of settlements and respecting their compact nature.

Biodiversity

Ref: GIS constraint maps

The main landscape character area in Winchester District study area (Forest of Bere East: HCC Integrated Assessment) is generally of high biodiversity value deriving from the complex mosaic of habitats, with a very high proportion of SINC's covering copses and woodland, including ancient woodland, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats. Wickham Common is a designated SINC as is part of the Meon valley floor SW of Wickham.

A significant feature of the area between Knowle and Wickham is a large area of mixed woodland, which includes Fiddlers Green, consisting of broadleaved and coniferous plantations containing patches of wet heath, dry heath with acid grassland mosaic and some active coppicing with standards. This large area is a designated SINC extending to the District boundary and forms one of many large areas of woodland evident along the E-W ridgelines and steeper slopes. Other SINC's are: Blakes Copse; Carpenters Copse; Homerhill Copse; Pigeonhouse Coppice; Orchard Copse; Birching Copse. The extensive area of woodland further west towards Whiteley is a SSSI. The study area is also covered by the Forest of Bere BOA (Biodiversity Opportunity Area) which reinforces the importance of this landscape in terms of its high biodiversity value.

A detailed understanding of this valuable ecological resource will help to inform detailed masterplan development, as well as GI Strategies. Undertaking surveys and assessments would enable habitats and species of principal importance in the area to be identified at a more detailed and local level.

Landscape strategies in the Winchester LCA identify the need to conserve the rich biodiversity in the area particularly that associated with the clear spring water, a key characteristic of the lower Meon valley; to restore ancient species rich hedgerows and to

conserve and restore woodlands through appropriate management with creation of new woodlands as links providing green corridors across character areas.

Visibility

The E-W ridgelines between the SDA and Wickham provide far reaching and panoramic views, south and south east across the sloping ground within the SDA and beyond to the coast, most prominent at heights of 40.00m and above. Long uninterrupted views of Portsdown Hill on the skyline are seen from the public right of way which follows the District boundary in the NW corner of the SDA (immediately south of semi-natural ancient woodland).

Continuing southwards along the PRoW following the District boundary to the point where the footpath diverts into the village of Knowle, there is a significant visual corridor looking SE across and beyond the SDA, providing panoramic views of specific coastline features e.g. Spinnaker Tower and buildings in Portsmouth as a skyline feature. In the middle distance moving traffic on the M27 is visible at lower levels on the far side of the SDA at heights of approximately 15.00m above sea level.

When looking south across the SDA towards Funtley and east towards the Wickham Road, views from footpaths on the edge of built development at Knowle are filtered by mature trees and hedgerows along field boundaries that follow the District boundary, vegetation that is considered significant and protected by a TPO.

Long panoramic views are also evident from the ridgelines over the Forest of Bere to the north and north east with HMS Mercury a distinctive landmark on the skyline. Equally, there are views looking back to the ridgeline from Kings Way, the only national trail within the vicinity of the study area, as it passes along higher ground E of Wickham and Rookesbury Park, heights rising to over 90.00m above sea level.

The higher ground continues to the east of Wickham as a gently undulating landscape with heights up to 64.00m above sea level by Crockerhill Farm, the highest point in the local landscape between Wickham and the M27; a water tower is located on this high point, a visually prominent landmark on the skyline seen from all aspects.

From the south, there are uninterrupted views from the public realm and Fareham Common looking north across the busy M27 into the SDA, with existing sloping ground of the SDA rising from 15.00m to 50.0m, creating the perception of greater prominence when viewed from this point. The water tower at Crockerhill Farm and the Knowle roofscape are significant skyline features.

In contrast, much of the Meon river valley landscape to the west of Knowle is visually contained by wooded valley sides that frequently extend to the waters edge, creating a natural setting for the valley floor. Existing physical features of woodland, ridgelines and river valley provide shortened views from within the north and west of the study area, providing visual screening and containment of the SDA beyond.

A key characteristic of the overall area is the significant visual contrast between existing settlements and adjoining countryside, due in part to the mainly well defined edge of built development for the two main settlements of Knowle and Wickham but also the distinctive rural character of the surrounding landscape especially N and NW of the study area. This marked contrast heightens the perception of a tranquil rural landscape even with the main coastal built development to the south and main traffic routes of motorway and A32 south and east of the SDA.

The Winchester LCA (2004) recognises the prevalence of long views across the area and the need to minimise impact of intrusive structures such as telecommunication masts and electricity pylons through sensitive siting, screening and the use of underground cables (Forest of Bere LCA).

Landscape Sensitivity Summary within Winchester District part of the study area.

The SDA study area comprises both protected and non-protected landscape features. The aims of the European Landscape Convention and government's place-making agenda recognise the value of all places, not simply protected areas of 'highest' quality. The local characteristics/features of the existing landscape, including those valued by the local community, are a significant factor when considering the impact of future development on the landscape and its wider contextual setting.

The appraisal establishes that the existing countryside within the Winchester District part of the study area, which includes the two areas by Knowle described as 'green buffers', is a landscape that is highly valued in terms of its key characteristics and opportunities, and is very sensitive to the impact of any major new development.

A summary of the special landscape qualities of the area include:

- Existing open land with a rural, mainly tranquil landscape character that protects the separate identities of the two individual settlements of Knowle and Wickham, and prevents coalescence with the SDA.
- The countryside that lies between Wickham in the north, Wickham Common to the east, Knowle village and the Meon valley in the west is a high quality landscape with its varied topography; intimate valley landform and landscape structure; narrow country lanes with established boundary vegetation and numerous small farmsteads, many still in active use.
- The very diverse landscape has high biodiversity value with its wide range of semi-natural habitats and numerous designated SINCs, including ancient woodland.
- The unspoilt nature of the area, sparse settlement pattern and sense of tranquillity evident throughout much of the area is considered sensitive to any large scale development and its supporting road infrastructure.
- The northern ridgeline with its wooded skyline and absence of man made landmarks is a key landscape feature.
- The ridgeline provides significant physical separation between Wickham and the SDA restricting middle and long distance views of the SDA to and from the north.
- The numerous woodlands and copses along the ridgeline serve as a main green corridor, more so where they link with mature trees and hedgerows along field and lane boundaries.
- Existing landscape characteristics provide potential for increased public accessibility into the countryside and between settlements where green corridors follow existing public rights of way. This will need to be balanced against the need to protect and enhance biodiversity with any improved access proposals planned and managed carefully to protect sensitive areas from over-use.
- In terms of unacceptable visual impact, the areas most sensitive to change are the ridgelines and higher ground around Knowle village overlooking the main area of proposed new development, in particular, panoramic views S and SE across the SDA to the coast.
- There are prominent views to and from the SDA from public footpaths following the District boundary; to and from Knowle and longer distance views from footpaths both to the N and S on higher ground over 45.00m above sea level.

- Restricted short views creating a remote feel within parts of the Meon valley, due mainly to existing woodland cover and limited public access. Although the tranquil wooded river valley provides the least intrusive views it is sensitive to disturbance from increased public access and habitat fragmentation. This will need to be taken into consideration when assessing opportunities to improve the footpath network either side of the District boundary and across the river valley.
- Existing fields immediately SE and NE of Knowle, bounded by significant mature oak trees and hedgerows protected by TPOs, create the perception of a settlement within a natural, wooded parkland setting. Because of their proximity to residential development, these areas, described as 'green buffers', are especially vulnerable to increased recreational pressure from new development. This may have a detrimental impact on the special qualities of the area, such as loss of feature specimen oaks and hedgerows, key characteristics of the area; over-use leading to degradation of landscape and natural features; conflicts of interest e.g. dog walking and childrens play; over formalisation of semi-natural areas to provide golf courses or edge of settlement recreational grounds and sports pitches with their associated requirement for suitable vehicular access, parking and building facilities; increasing access opportunities which introduce a greater likelihood of conflict through misuse e.g. fly tipping or trespassing on local farmland.
Retaining and managing these green buffers as a semi-natural landscape will help to retain and enhance existing character and local distinctiveness. It will also provide an appropriate landscape setting for Knowle village; 'natural' buffers and strengthening of green corridors may also play a role in helping to protect and improve biodiversity value.
- Natural and cultural landscape features and landmarks are key characteristics within the existing landscape; their protection safeguards local distinctiveness.

In conclusion, the recognised sensitivity of this area, its vulnerability to major new development and the need to protect the separate identity of existing settlements, avoiding coalescence with the SDA, would justify all of the SDA study area land within Winchester District being retained as green space, which should be properly managed to ensure the long term retention and enhancement of its existing rural landscape character and special qualities as identified in this appraisal.

23.06.2011