2G: WOODED SANDLEHEATH FARMLAND

Court Hill area, close to the junction with the more elevated chalk landscape to the north.

South of Outwick – small field pattern often with copse edges along one or more boundarie

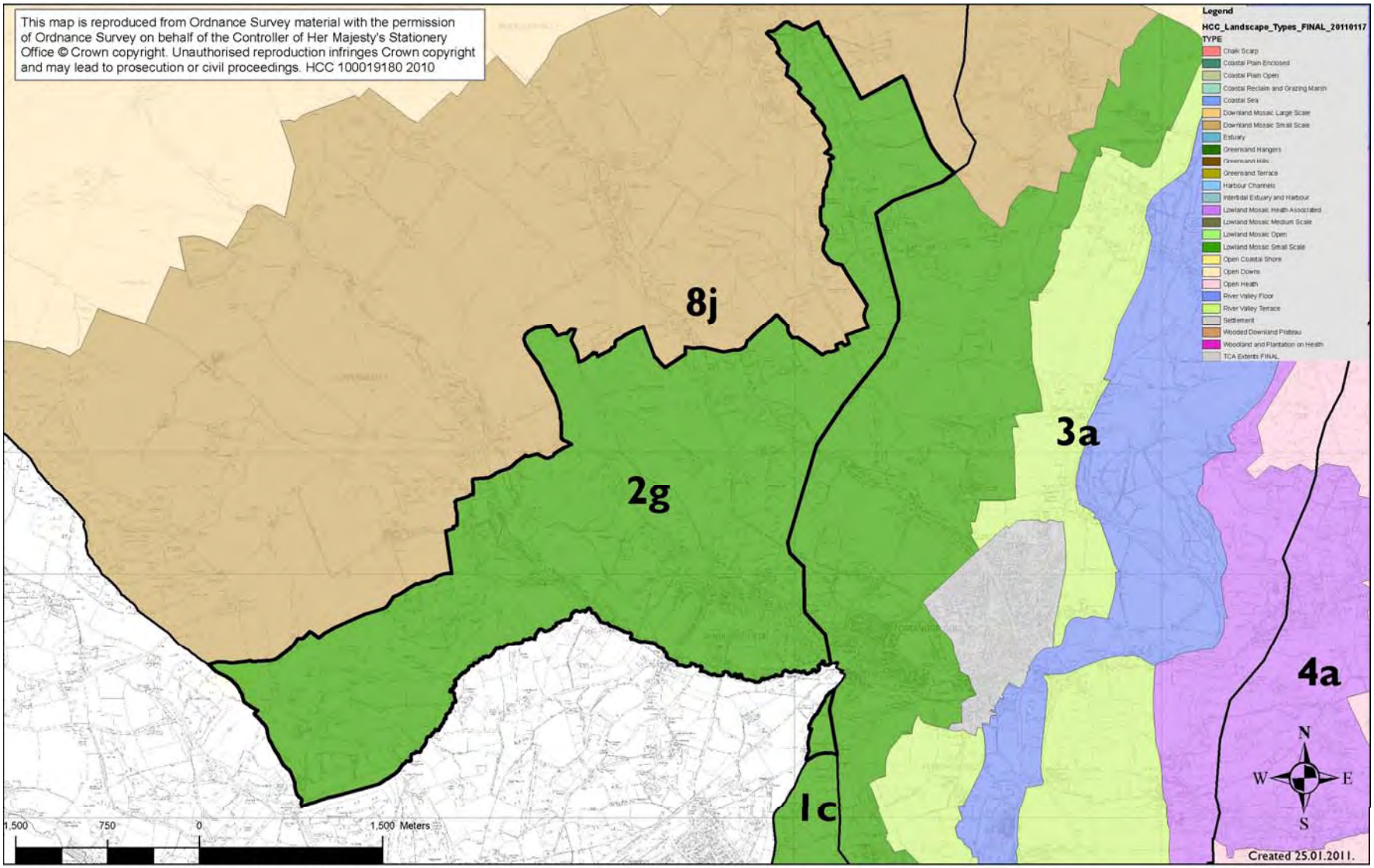
Several small stream valley dissect this landscape in north west to south east direction – Sweatford.

Rights of Way lead up on to the chalk as at Round Hill, Whitsbury Wood.

Sandleheath with common edge character and expansion from the late 19th century.

Fryern Court Wood – the pattern of farmstead distribution is typically dispersed and of moderate density.

Wide road verges around Sandleheath.



SANDLEHEATH WOODED FARMLAND

Hampshire County Council

1.0 Location and Boundaries

1.1 This landscape is located in the southwest of the County and to the west of the River Avon. It forms a transitional landscape on the eroded edge of the chalk dip slope extending into the lowland heath landscapes to the south. This landscape continues across the county boundary into East Dorset.

1.2 ***Component County Landscape Types***
Lowland Mosaic Small Scale

1.3 ***Composition of Borough/District LCAs:***

New Forest	**East Dorset**
Wooded Sandleheath Farmland	Woodlands Colehill and Hillbutts

The boundaries of this character area are broadly the same as the New Forest Landscape Character Assessment. Any variations are a reflection of the transitional nature of the landscape from chalk to lowland heath.

1.4 ***Associations with NCAs and Natural Areas:***
NCA 135: Dorset Heaths and NCA 134: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase
NA 81: Dorset Heaths and NA 80: South Wessex Downs

2.0 Key Characteristics

- Transitional landscape between the edge of the chalk dip slope and lowland heaths.
- Undulating landscape topography with a geology of Reading beds and London Clay.
- Extensive ancient woodlands locally designated for their biodiversity value, interspersed with other habitats such as wetlands and meadows.
- Mosaic of land uses including woodland, pasture, arable and water meadows.
- Well wooded landscape of ancient copses and thick hawthorn hedgerows with oak hedgerow trees which gives this landscape structure.
- Wooded landscape influence by former extent of deer parks which probably covered a large part of this character area.
- Ashford and Sweatford Waters dissect this landscape forming shallow valleys with grazed water meadows and stone bridges.
- Leafy winding lanes connect dispersed settlement and larger built up area of Sandleheath.
- Pines, gorse and rhododendron indicates isolated pockets of former heath at Sandleheath.
- Traditional building materials are red brick, with clay or slate and thatch.
- Quiet, peaceful, rural landscape with few landmarks – difficult to orientate.

3.0 Physical Characteristics and Land Use

3.1 Topographically this landscape is gently undulating as a result of its location on the edge of the chalk dip slopes and due to geological deposits of Reading Beds which form small hills. The highest land at 105m AOD can be found at Whitsbury Wood in the north. Generally, the land slopes southeast towards to the River Avon and is dissected by tributary streams. Around Sandleheath there are also deposits of London Clay and this, in combination with the Reading Beds, gives rise to brown forest soils which support a rich woodland flora. Agricultural land quality is predominantly of medium quality, with Grade poorer quality soils occurring within the river valleys.

3.2 There is a patchwork of different land uses. Woodland is a dominant element and much of it predates 1810. These ancient deciduous woodlands have a high nature conservation value as well a giving this landscape a robust structure and strong sense of enclosure. In the north of this character area there are areas of more recent plantation woodland, e.g. Radnall Wood and west of Whitsbury Common, while active coppicing can be seen at Ashridge Copse adding to the diversity of woodland character and type found in this landscape. The woodland copses are linked by hedgerows which enclose regular, medium sized fields within which there is a mixture of both arable and pastural land use. The presence of gorse, pines and rhododendrons at Sandleheath reflect an area of remnant heath, while areas of acid grassland can be found on remnant commons in the south of the area e.g. Lopshill Common. The marshy and verdant grasslands within the river valleys add to the diversity and colour found in this landscape.

3.3 The area falls within the Environment Agency Ashford Allen catchment area. The two watercourses which dissect this landscape are the Sweatford and Ashford Waters which flow in a northwest to southeast direction rising as springs at the edge of the chalk dip slope and forming tributaries to the River Avon. At intervals along the course of these rivers are distinctive stone bridges which form historic crossing points and within the flood meadows there are numerous ponds including fishponds. Within the designed landscape of West Park there are ornamental ponds while to the north of Sandleheath there are small waterbodies created following clay extraction for use in brick making – an activity this area was historically noted for.

4.0 Experiential/Perceptual Characteristics

4.1 The undulating topography coupled with repetitive pattern of woodland copses gives this landscape a strong structure and enclosed character. There are occasional views from more elevated open locations but these are not commonplace, and with few landmark features, this landscape is sometimes disorientating.

4.2 There are no long distance footpaths within this landscape. However there are numerous public rights of ways and footpaths which often traverse the higher land as well as three areas of open access land in the south of the area which were historically all part of Lopshill Common. There are no public rights of way across West Park designed landscape.

4.3 The wooded and rural character of this landscape and the sparse and dispersed pattern of settlement give rise to a peaceful and secluded character where tranquillity is relatively high particularly in the south, declining marginally around the linear settlement of Sandleheath.

5.0 Biodiversity Character

5.1 This is a well wooded agricultural landscape where improved grassland is the dominant habitat, with significant portions of associated arable land. In the north, the arable land does dominate over the improved grassland but elsewhere, improved grassland is more significant.

5.2 Woodland is varied, existing throughout the area as patches, both large and small, strips and forming an interlinked matrix. Broadleaved woodland is most dominant and this includes some patches of ancient and semi-natural woodland. Other woodland types exist throughout, with coniferous plantations, remnant patches of parkland and active coppice with standards, and some mixed woodlands and mixed plantations. Patches of unimproved grassland is sometimes associated with woodland, this varies and includes neutral, acidic and calcareous grasslands, with calcareous grass concentrated at West Park Wood in the centre of the area. The Allen River crosses the area north to south, near the centre, and this exerts an influence on habitat, with ponds, freshwater marshy grassland, swamp vegetation and tall marginal plants. Most of these habitats are absent elsewhere in the area, although there is some freshwater marshy grassland in the north.

5.3 There are occasional patches of bracken and dry heath habitats but these tend to be small scale and very infrequent.

5.4 There are over 30 SINCs in this landscape character area, most are designated for the ancient and semi-natural woodland resource which they represent.

6.0 Historic Character

6.1 *Archaeology*

6.1.1 There is very little evidence of Mesolithic date in this area, although looking more widely it would appear that there is evidence of Mesolithic activity on the flanks of the Avon Valley. On that basis it would seem likely that there was Mesolithic exploitation of this area. In the Neolithic there is very strong archaeological evidence for settlement in the downland that is to the north in Cranbourne Chase, but this evidence of settlement does not extend south into this area. There is evidence of Neolithic finds from this area and so it seems possible that this area was exploited by Neolithic populations who were settled in adjacent chalkland areas.

6.1.2 Archaeological excavation during extraction in the Avon valley has identified Bronze Age settlement. Indeed it seems likely that some of the undated enclosures of the Avon valley will prove to be of this date. There are Bronze Age burial mounds on the margins of 2G and of the river valley. It is likely that the populations in the valley were utilising but not settling the flanks of the valley. This is reflected in the presence of burial mounds but the absence of settlement. Likewise there is evidence of Iron Age settlement flanking either side of the upper Avon valley.

6.1.3 In the Roman period the Avon valley was a focus of activity, and settlement associated with that does appear in 2G. The presence of a villa between the woodland landscape and the chalk may suggest that the Roman estate was exploiting both environments.

6.2 *Historic Landscape*

6.2.1 The whole of this landscape comprises the landscape type Lowland Mosaic Small Scale. There are two distinctive historical patterns. Firstly on the south and south east fringes of the area, where there are assarted landscapes comprising a mixture of irregular field boundaries and associated copses/pre 1810 woodland. Secondly along the northwestern fringes, where the enclosure pattern becomes more regular, although still small scale, and where parkland landscapes have developed e.g. West Park Registered Park and Garden in the Hampshire register.

6.2.2 Assarting occurred when woodland was cleared to create open field systems. It is reflected in an irregular pattern of fields with wavy boundaries, ditch and bank field boundaries and thick hedgerows often with mature hedgerow trees. These early enclosures were centred around small hamlets or farmsteads. Woodland was cleared in the subsequent years creating smaller copses and fields. In places there were also areas of common which have subsequently become reduced in size and fragmented e.g. Lopshill Common, which previously linked together the three relatively small areas of common land seen today in the Lopshill area. There are numerous copses in this character area which show little change in extent and shape from 1st edition mapping. However the extent of the tract of wood at West Park Wood has been substantially reduced since the 19th century.

6.2.3 Around Sandleheath there has been a long history of brick making and clay working as a result of a seam of blue clay topped by fine brick earth and sand which runs across this area. Evidence of this activity can be found in placenames, disused pits and brickyards and the proliferation of ponds (former extraction areas) north of Sandleheath.

6.2.4 Prior to the establishment of West Park two earlier deer parks existed - Damerham and Rockbourne Parks.

6.3 *Built Environment*

6.3.1 The road network in this landscape comprises small leafy rural lanes which generally run in a north-south direction connecting the chalk landscapes with the low lying landscapes to the south. Along these lanes there is a dispersed pattern of farmsteads.

6.3.2 The largest settlement in this landscape is that of Sandleheath or Sandhill Heath as it used to be called. Historically this settlement originated as a small manor and associated farm dwellings on the edge of an area of heath/common. It remained a relatively small settlement until the construction of the railway in 1870 which stimulated growth and development such that the village now comprises a loose linear form along the main road which passes through its centre. Other settlement in this landscape comprises a dispersed pattern of occasional isolated farmsteads, the lack of settlement reflecting the general poor quality of the land and also association with clay extraction and brickmaking in the 16th to 19th centuries. In recent times linear development between farmsteads has created a more settled character e.g. around South End and The Marsh which are extensions to the settlement of Damerham.

6.3.3 Traditional building construction is timber framed with brick infill. More recent brick built buildings are also commonplace reflecting the local brick manufacturing activity in this area. Roofing materials include clay tile or slate and some thatch. Farms generally comprise a loose courtyard plan and the low level of arable production means that there are only a few small barns. Few traditional timber framed and weatherboarded farm buildings exist and often farm buildings have corrugated iron/steel roofs.

6.3.4 Sir Eyre Coote's Monument located within West Park is a notable landmark feature and adds to the area's local sense of place.

EVALUATION

7.0 Forces for Change

1. Development pressure for small scale affordable housing schemes.
2. Incremental suburbanisation and loss of traditional built character.
3. Changes in woodland and land management practices.
4. Climate change, particularly increased storms, droughts and disease, resulting in tree loss.
5. Potential mineral workings (Safeguarded area for clay extraction).

KEY QUALITIES AND EFFECTS OF FORCES

7.1 ***A mosaic of habitats, including ancient woodland, deciduous copses, pasture, water meadows, ponds, former heath, scrub, and semi-improved grassland, creating a rich biological diversity.***	
FORCES FOR CHANGE:	**CONSEQUENCES**
3.4.5	Threats: Potential loss of biological diversity due to changing land management practices and water abstraction. Continued loss and fragmentation of common land, reducing biodiversity. Potential loss of biodiversity due to future mineral extraction in safeguarded areas.
	Opportunities: Maintain and improve levels of biodiversity through Cranborne Chase and West Wilshire Downs AONB management plan biodiversity policies. Target agri-environment schemes to manage agricultural land to maximise its biological diversity and value. For example, restoration and conservation of remnant heathland at Sandleheath, and protection of marshy grasslands within river valleys. Management of watercourses and control of water abstraction are an important part of this process, in accordance with BOA targets. Ponds and areas of open water (within watermeadows, and former clay pits) should be retained. Use minerals planning policies and conditions to ensure that any future working of safeguarded minerals sites does not damage the biodiversity or scenic quality of the area.
7.2 ***Stone bridges across the Sweatsford and Ashford rivers are a distinctive feature of the windy leafy lanes which traverse this somewhat disorientating landscape.***	
FORCES FOR CHANGE:	**CONSEQUENCES**
2	Threats: Potential loss of character of rural lanes.
	Opportunities: Potential use of the Rural Roads Initiative to retain the character of the winding leafy lanes whilst meeting Highways standards. Retain traditional stone bridges and their settings.

7.2 ***A strongly wooded landscape, with parkland and medieval assarted woodland dominant historic features, providing a high nature conservation value, and a robust landscape structure with a strong sense of enclosure.***	
FORCES FOR CHANGE:	**CONSEQUENCES**
3.4	Threats: Potential loss of traditional woodland management practices affecting the robustness and ecological variety of the habitat. Potential tree loss from increased levels of drought, storms and disease resulting from climate change.
	Opportunities: Target agri-environment schemes to support traditional woodland management techniques such as coppicing, to ensure that woodlands are conserved and retain their robustness and ecological diversity. Also manage and replant hedgerows to conserve the hedgerow network, the linkages they form between woodlands, the historic field systems they delineate and the area's sense of enclosure. Retain wooded and historic landscape character through landscape policies in the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB management plan. Potentially use forestry management policies to replace coniferous plantations with native deciduous species, to conserve the characteristic interplay between broadleaf woodland and farmland. Replacement of parkland trees as necessary in order to ensure their continued presence within the landscape. Retention (and restoration if necessary) of parkland features such as lakes and monuments, and of key designed views.
7.4 ***Settlement consists of dispersed farmsteads, and the larger linear settlement of Sandleheath. Landscape evidence of the former brickmaking industry here exists in the form of placenames and ponds.***	
FORCES FOR CHANGE:	**CONSEQUENCES**
1.2	Threats: Difficulty in distinguishing the traditional built character of the area, due to recent development in a variety of materials and styles. Coalescence of settlements as a result of linear expansion along roads.
	Opportunities: Conservation of traditional buildings, and promotion of historic building guidance documents (EH, HCC and local) with respect to the use of local traditional building materials. Village Design Statements could give the opportunity to emphasise locally distinctive features in order to re-assert local character and built form. Distinctive 'gateways' could be created at the entrance to Sandleheath, to mark the limit of settlement, and avoid extensive urban fringe character along rural lanes. Use planning policies and conditions to integrate any new development into the surrounding landscape pattern through the use of tree and hedgerow planting, and to retain the strategic gap between Sandleheath and Ashurst.