

## Landscape Character Areas

### 3.4 RL Area 1 : Avon River Terrace – East of Burton (Including Salisbury Road Burton and Winkton)

#### General Description

**3.4.1** This flat tract of land sits between Burton and the eastern boundary of the district. As an alluvial terrace the area within the Borough boundary ranges between 7 and 15m AOD, over distances of 2km this change in level is almost imperceptible. Beyond the boundary the landform becomes distinctly steeper as the landscape rises into the edge of the New Forest.

**3.4.2** The area is visually enclosed by the dominant railway embankment to the south and the rising ground and woodland to the east. To the west St Catherine's Hill provides a low horizon above the village of Burton. To the north the landscape character continues up the Avon Valley beyond the Borough boundary.

**3.4.3** The landscape consists of medium scale regular fields typical of 19<sup>th</sup> century Parliamentary enclosures. Field boundaries being generally low flail cut native hedges with occasional hedgerow trees. A pattern of narrow pine shelterbelts run north south through the landscape, a characteristic noted in other sections of the Avon Valley. A network of minor lanes link a number of individual farmsteads to the settlements of Burton and Winkton within Christchurch and Bransgore outside the Borough to the northeast. This is complemented by a number of footpaths and bridleway links giving a good degree of recreational access to the area.

**3.4.4** The open and linear 'street' pattern of cottages and farm buildings along the Salisbury Road in both Burton and Winkton are interrelated with the rural landscape. Both areas have developed as historical 'ribbon' development alongside one of the few main routes through the valley. Both have side street links out to the adjacent farmland, and both contain a mix of small cottages and larger farm units set within fields, paddocks, and cottage gardens. Winkton is by far the smaller settlement. A cluster of cottages around a postage stamp green define the centre. A hotel and private school stand out as much larger buildings. The main road (B3347) dominates the setting. Despite the River Avon being within 100m of the village green there is no obvious physical connection between the two.

**3.4.5** On its eastern side, Winkton is enclosed by a small area of parkland landscape on the terrace side of the village. This area of large parkland trees set in an open pasture provides a contrast to some of the more intensive farmland of the general terrace area.

**3.4.6** As a 'modern' landscape the terrace farmland provides few cultural heritage connections. One 20th century aspect of heritage straddles the Borough boundary to the north east of Winkton where the Winkton advanced landing ground provided a base for WWII 404th Fighter Group. Little trace of the airfield remains visible on current aerial photographs.

**3.4.7** Development within the open countryside of the terrace has been restricted by planning control. Large scale modern farm buildings exist in a number of locations. These have been set within the open landscape with no significant landscape treatment and reflective roofing materials. From nearby lanes and footpaths such buildings are intrusive. Although in the wider landscape the flat landscape provides few elevated view points to give long distance views of the buildings.

**3.4.8** The early editions of the Ordnance Survey illustrate the location of the former Winkton House. This building has gone but its extensive garden wall remains as a significant feature alongside the main roadway. The map also illustrates the location of Winkton Common as a separate cluster now absorbed within the outer fringe of Burton.

#### Main Characteristics

- Wide expanse of flat landscape across deep alluvial soils.
- Mixed agricultural production of arable and livestock.
- Medium scale enclosure landscape of low hedged/fenced fields and occasional shelter belt plantations.
- Overall area enclosed by rising ground to the east and rail embankment to the south. Low horizon and limited views across and out of the landscape.
- Principal trees are oak and field maple, within hedge lines. Scotts pine within shelterbelts.
- Farmsteads and settlements sit low, often tightly grouped, in the landscape with few visually dominant buildings.





Occasional large modern barn constructions are also contained within landscape.

- The landscape is not heavily populated or developed. With quiet minor roads and footpaths, it is possible to feel some isolation (relative to the other parts of the Borough) within parts of the area.
- Glimpsed views of urban development, general noise intrusion, and intrusion of the railway result in a degree of connection to the modern townscape. This is not a totally unspoilt landscape. It is however accessible and reasonably well connected as a recreational resource.
- Historic development pattern remains evident as the boundary to Burton and the footprint of Winkton. Informal linear patterns of agricultural cottages and farm buildings reflect rural setting. Expanded area of Burton has compromised the isolated entirely rural character of the village. The older area provides a valuable contrast to more recent expansion.
- Character of original village strongly related to general density of buildings and spaces around and between plots.

**Sensitivity to Change**

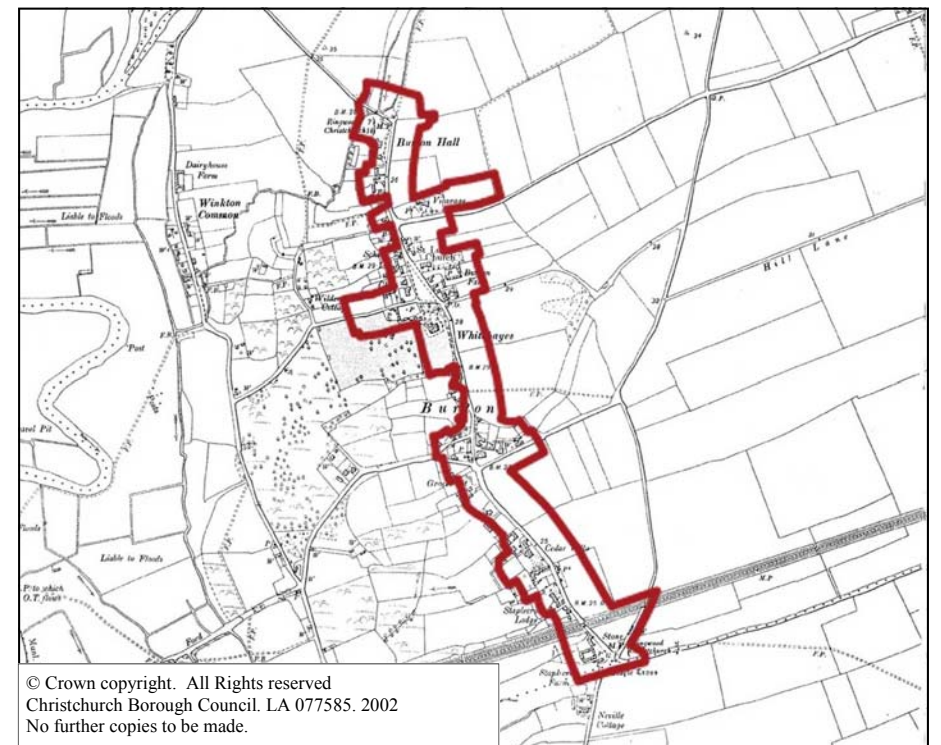
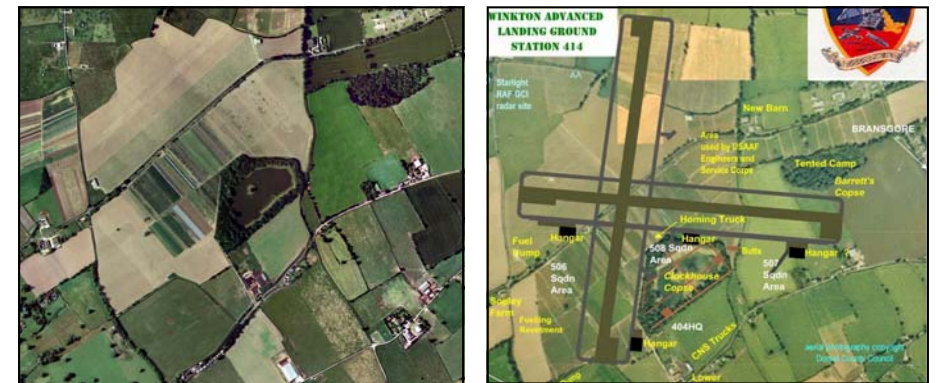
**3.4.9** This area represents one of the more extensive areas of agricultural landscape within the Borough. The basic perception of this area depends on the predominance of agricultural land use being maintained. It is also one of the more open and accessible areas and thus sensitive in terms of visual intrusion. As one of the more tranquil areas in terms of separation from the built up areas, it should be seen as highly sensitive to increased noise. The area is not heavily populated outside of the existing village envelopes.

**3.4.10** As an essentially empty landscape the area is sensitive to even individual developments as these would reduce the spatial separation of existing villages and farmsteads. The sense of space between the built up areas of the town and the contrasting enclosed landscapes of the forest make this area a buffer zone between the populated town areas and heavily used recreational landscapes of the Forest.

**3.4.11** The landscape of the terrace is not one with a strong sense of place or positive identity. However, within the context of Christchurch Borough, the open and essentially ‘empty’ space is an asset as this provides an area of agricultural countryside as a contrast

to the suburban townscapes and enclosed coniferous forests elsewhere in the Borough. There is also a value in the spatial separation the terrace provides between Christchurch and the New Forest.

**3.4.12** The continued protection of this area by Green Belt designation is relevant. Future development essential to the agricultural management of the land ought to be directed to the least visible locations and new buildings only allowed with appropriate landscape mitigation. Urban infrastructure, telecommunication masts, and intensive recreational developments could cause significant harm within the landscape and should therefore be resisted.



**Figure 3.12 - Burton Conservation Area**

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### 3.5 RL Area 2 : River Avon Flood Plain

#### General Description

**3.5.1** The River Avon flood plain generally sits at below 5m AOD. In some locations this is as much as 5m below the level of adjacent roadways or the wider landscape of the river terraces. On the eastern side the area is physically and visually contained by the B3347 and the village of Burton. To the west the area merges with the low-lying area of Cowards Marsh before the steeply rising ground of the St. Catherine's Hill ridge.

**3.5.2** This is a pastoral landscape of water meadows and occasional carr woodland. The river, where visible, can be seen as a meandering channel with small side channels and inter-connecting ditches. However, for much of its length the river cannot be easily viewed. The channel is set low in the landscape and this is a secluded inaccessible area with minimal public access. Hidden detail within the river corridor includes some interesting stone weirs and two thatched 'eel houses' on the River Avon close to Burton and Winkton.

**3.5.3** Views across the landscape are broken by clusters of mature willow. The pastures are divided by post and wire fences and ditches. The landscape is not heavily or intensely managed and with the irregular course of the river and ditches has an informal agricultural character.

**3.5.4** The isolation of the river away from the built up area ensures this is a tranquil landscape. However, the most tranquil areas are also the most inaccessible. The lack of access while disappointing from a public perspective may help protect the area's acknowledged importance for nature conservation.

**3.5.5** The traditional management of water meadows allows for diverse and important ground flora and bird life. The Avon Valley ESA scheme aims to support the continuation of this traditional agricultural management.

**3.5.6** The river area and large parts of the flood plain are designated as an SSSI, Special Protection Area and Ramsar site. These designations reflect the special diversity of the River Avon as one of the best examples of a chalk river system in Britain; and the importance of the flood plain areas as wetlands and wildfowl habitat.

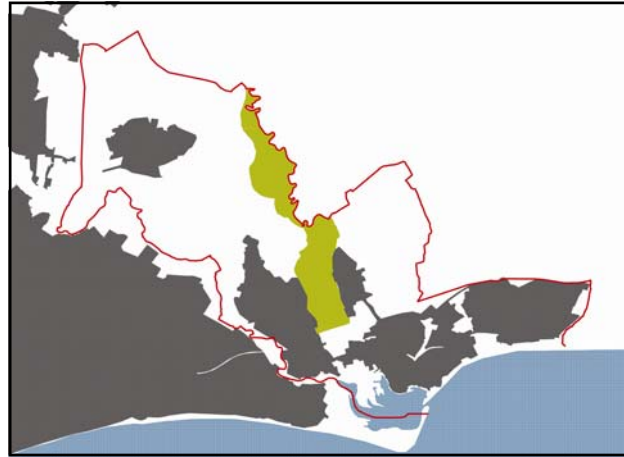
**3.5.7** In areas closer to the built up area the long distance path, The

Avon Valley Way, crosses the river and makes a brief connection with the riverbank. The route continues away from the river into the settlement areas beyond the flood plain. Other connections with the built up area include the power transmission line, water works, rail embankment and views to residential development. While still inherently attractive, the flood plain landscape is heavily influenced by these surrounding urbanising elements.

**3.5.9** The River Flood Plain is a landscape with a distinct underlying character. As a result of urban pressures and intrusions at the southern end of the valley, the quality of the landscape has been severely compromised. The quality (and tranquillity) of the landscape progressively improves up-stream of the built-up areas. Ironically the accessibility of the landscape is also progressively reduced up the valley. The Avon Causeway is one location where the landscape is at least visually 'accessible'. In this area the river valley presents a strong sense of place. For a river that has dictated so much of the surrounding landscape development, this is one character area that makes only a modest contribution to the general perception of the Borough as a whole.

#### 3.5.10 Main characteristics

- Low lying flood plain landscape with meandering natural river course.
- Tree cover of riverside willow trees and occasional blocks of willow carr woodland.
- Pastures formed with fencing and small-scale ditches. These include permanent grasslands and water meadows management areas supported by the ESA project).
- Low key agricultural management and irregular field patterns give the landscape an informal character
- Absence of buildings, roadways and other structures help reinforce this as a semi natural landscape.
- The northern part of the flood plain is inaccessible and remote from a range of urban influences.
- The southern area is slightly more accessible but at the same time more influenced by the urban area.





- The high water quality and natural chemistry of the river supports equally important nature conservation interests.

#### Sensitivity to Change

**3.5.11** As an area with no significant built development, minimal road access and few elements of urban infrastructure, this area would be sensitive to the introduction of such elements. The modest recreational access available in the southern end of the area is sensitive in terms of accessibility and amenity value of the routes. The value or function of such routes is often dependent on the condition or continuity of the wider rights of way network. It is noted that the main path route through to the flood plain links into urban/suburban areas of development on either side of the valley.

**3.5.12** As the area includes habitats of international importance the area provides a setting to significant wildlife interests. These are sensitive as protected environments and in terms of sensitivity of the protected species to increased disturbance or habitat loss.



**3.5.13** The area is relatively tranquil and remote, characteristics that are in themselves highly sensitive, but in this instance they are also critical to the habitat value of the river corridor. The landscape character and habitat status are also dependent on specific management regimes. The appropriate agricultural management is supported (on a grant aided voluntary basis) through the ESA designation. The characteristic landscape management of controlled summer grazing, informal landscape pattern of meandering river, fenced field areas and the sporadic tree cover are all part of the distinctive landscape, and all contribute to the stronger identity of this landscape. The continuity of the Avon Valley landscape extends well beyond the Borough Boundary (as indicated by the ESA area).



**3.5.14** On the basis of other sections of the river outside of the Borough, the potential threat of mineral extraction is an issue for the lower Avon Valley. In this location the strategic function of the protected and albeit inaccessible landscape is in the protection of a rural character landscape on the outer fringe of the built-up areas of Christchurch and Bournemouth. Mineral extraction in this area would have a substantial landscape impact and visual impact on the low lying landscape of the valley.

**3.5.15** Overall the landscape should be seen as highly sensitive to change and highly dependent on continual carefully controlled management, aimed at maintaining the status quo.



### 3.6 RL Area 3 : Cowards Marsh – Dudmoor

**3.6.1** This is an isolated area of wet heathland, rough pasture and scrub woodland located on the eastern edge of the Avon flood plain. The area sits at the base of St. Catherine’s Hill. Although very low lying, the area is enclosed from the general flood plain by a subtle ridge in the valley floor and a fringe of birch scrub woodland. The area was severed from the higher ground by the now disused railway line between Christchurch and Ringwood. On the early edition Ordnance Surveys (1870 – 1931) the area is indicated as marsh and scrub. Since the 1930’s the inner core of this area has been subdivided with individual plots. Some are managed as grass keep. Others have become established as residential plots with a mix of mobile homes and permanent buildings. The area is served by a winding single track private road, the only access being from the main residential area of Jumpers Common to the west. There are no public rights of way through the area, but the access track serves a riding school and Golf Centre located at Dudmoor Farm at the very end of the route.

**3.6.2** Despite the presence of private dwelling and other land, the area is designated within the Local Plan as a ‘modestly sized’ country park (Policy L21).

**3.6.3** The disused railway line is being promoted as a potential cycle route in the Local Plan and currently provides some level of informal access to the heath and forest areas to the north.

**3.6.4** The area is well treed and enclosed by the fringe of woodland around Cowards Marsh. The management of individual plots varies between areas of managed grazing and apparently abandoned scrub land. Two areas within Dudmoor are designated as sites of nature conversation interest. In addition the area is set between the important designated areas of St Catherine’s Hill and the Avon Valley.

**3.6.5** The area is essentially a private enclave with a distinctly remote ‘backland’ character. The development of individual isolated dwellings has brought a degree of domestication to what would have been a semi natural landscape. Some elements of this development have resulted in the sub-urbanisation of individual plots which in turn, are starting to change the character of the area to a more residential setting. It is understood some of this development is unauthorised and that the Local Authority is actively pursuing enforcement action to reverse these changes.

### 3.6.6 Main characteristics

- Low lying wet heathland landscape with a mixed degree of management.
- Enclosed area with fringe of birch scrub woodland.
- Informal land division, with wire fences and few hedgerows.
- Areas of rough pasture managed for equestrian grazing. Dominance of other equestrian facilities over other activity.
- Residential plots generally low key, non sub-urban dwellings with modest enclosure and informal settings.
- Access limited to small scale private roadway and no public rights of way.
- Isolated and remote semi rural/natural character.

### Sensitivity to Change

**3.6.7** Areas of ‘remote’ semi-natural landscape are valuable and inherently sensitive to change. Changes that lead to more intensive management or additional development (both buildings or other works) could quickly erode the particular character of this area.

**3.6.8** This area is also set between the highly sensitive landscapes of the Avon Flood Plain and St. Catherine’s Hill/Town Common Heath. Changes that increase the visibility of development or bring additional background noise disturbance to these areas would be significant advance impacts.

**3.6.9** The area has absorbed some residential development. Further development or expansion of individual properties will lead to continued sub-urbanisation of the environment. Even subtle changes to plot boundaries, entrance gateways, roads and drives, and non-native hedge planting all have the potential to alter the general character.

**3.6.10** There is therefore a need to control the development of further plot and landscape changes if the area is to be retained as countryside. The scope for restrictions on permitted development rights could be considered as a means to achieving this. In the longer term the conversion of the area to a country park will allow the reversal of the existing adverse changes.

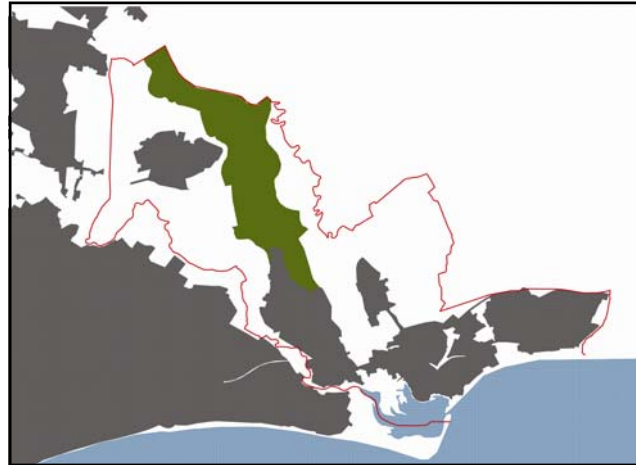
### 3.6 RL Area 3 : Cowards Marsh – Dudmoor cont ..



**3.6.11** The Country Park proposal offers the potential for a valuable focus for recreational access. This location could provide access to both heathland and river flood plain areas and the existing informal recreational facilities of the area. The sensitivity of the landscape character in this area and the adjoining habitats suggests that only a modest and carefully integrated facility could be accommodated.

**3.6.12** As a modest scale proposal, there is the scope for public access to be controlled and carefully directed. There is also potential for educational interpretative facilities/information to also be focused to good effect. In view of the status of the adjoining nature conservation interest, more detailed objectives or a masterplan ought to be developed and the potential effects on the environment assessed to ensure the policy can be developed without harm to the protected interests.





### 3.7 RL Area 4 : St. Catherine's Hill – Hurn Forest

**3.7.1** This area encompasses the spine of coniferous forest and open heathland that divide the Borough in two. At the southern end St. Catherine's Hill forms a dominant landmark in the centre of the Borough. A series of commons and plantations follow the higher ground between the Avon Valley and the Moors River to the Borough Boundary and beyond. Town Common, Sopley Common, Avon Common and Barnsfield Heath represent the main areas of heathland within this area and within Christchurch as a whole. These are fragmented by the extensive coniferous plantations that link between St. Catherine's and Hurn Forest.

**3.7.2** The pronounced landform of the ridge at its southern end softens to a more gently rolling landscape within the forest area to the north. The areas of higher ground are free draining with few natural watercourses. The more low-lying areas include numerous ponds and areas of wet heath.

**3.7.3** The areas were planted with predominantly Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) in the 1950's. The plantations have been thinned and continue to be managed on a commercial basis. In many areas the trees have self-seeded and young trees are spreading into unplanted heathland. Pockets of birch and oak woodland also exist, some planted as part of forest diversification, others as self seeded or as semi-natural unmanaged tree cover.

**3.7.4** Extensive areas of the heath and forested areas are designated as SSSI, Special Protection Area, Ramsar and SAC. These designations aim to protect the mosaic of habitats as a whole and reflect international level significance. In addition to the inherent value of these sites in isolation, it is noted the designated heathland areas also adjoin the designated areas alongside the River Avon (SSSI and Ramsar) and the Moors River (SSSI).

**3.7.5** The conservation interest also includes aspects of cultural heritage – fourteen scheduled ancient monuments lie within the area. St Catherine's Hill, being one of the earliest known areas of settlement within the Borough, is therefore of significant archaeological interest.

**3.7.6** The area is also open to extensive public access. Forestry Commission car parks, open forest rides, and a number of bridleways and footpaths provide a comprehensive public access. The proximity of the A338 and Bournemouth International Airport introduce significant background noise sources. In addition, power

transmission lines cross the parts of the open heathlands, and telecommunication masts form prominent negative landmarks on the top of St. Catherine's Hill. As a result the landscape is not as tranquil as other parts of the Borough. However, the enclosed woodland landscapes are protected from the visual influences of the urban area.

**3.7.7** The presence of St. Catherine's Hill as a landmark to many local views ensures this area is a key part of Christchurch Borough's identity. The rolling landform, distinct landscape of the heathland and dominance of the pine forests gives this area a strong sense of place. While the A338 is an intrusion into the landscape, the landscape provides a very strong and distinctive setting to the road as an approach to Bournemouth and Christchurch. This area plays a significant part in the perceived character and quality of the Borough as a whole.

#### 3.7.8 Main characteristics

- Localised ridge of high ground in the south fading out into the more gently rolling landform to the north.
- Thin poor soils over sandstone resulting in free drainage on the high ground. Areas of ponds and wet heath on lower slopes.
- Land cover of heathland and pine forest with occasional semi natural pockets of birch and oak woodland.
- Recognised nature conservation and cultural heritage interests and assets.
- Accessible and well used recreational landscape.
- Background influences of the urban area with trunk road traffic and aircraft noise.
- Prominent ridgeline and evergreen tree cover provide key landmark in local views and vantage point for views back across the Borough and over Bournemouth.

#### Sensitivity to Change

**3.7.9** These areas have already absorbed significant elements of infrastructure with the route of the A338, power lines and phone





#### RL Area 4 : St. Catherine's Hill – Hurn Forest—cont ...

masts. As areas that provide open public access, the forest and heathlands should be seen as highly sensitive to changes that further urbanise or 'develop' these landscapes, or restrict the recreational potential of the landscape. Any further infrastructure development should be assessed in terms of the cumulative impact of the existing and proposed intrusions.

**3.7.10** Future development pressures anticipated within the Hurn Forest Area include mineral extraction from the area to the east of the A338 and north of the Avon Causeway (see **Figure 3.13**) and the possible link road from the A338 and Bournemouth International Airport. The mineral extraction would be subject to environmental assessment as part of the Dorset Minerals and Waste Local Plan prescriptions. This should include detailed consideration of the ecological, landscape and cultural heritage impacts. Such assessment should also seek to identify the full range of potential long term beneficial effects of a positive after use and the mitigation and monitoring necessary to achieve this.

**3.7.11** The possible airport link road would affect the Moors River, St. Leonards and St. Ives Heath SSSI, SNCI's and the recreational use of the forest. Environmental assessment and a high standard of environmental design could help ensure the adverse environmental effects are fully addressed and proper mitigation measures are built into the detail scheme design.

**3.7.12** There are also potential conflicts between recreational pressures and nature conservation interests. Some of these are illustrated by soil erosion across the heathlands. Other less tangible human pressures, such as noise and disturbance could directly affect the nature conservation interests on the sites. With designations of international status for nature conservation, these potential affects could be highly significant.

**3.7.13** Other issues are related to recreational activities such as mountain biking and metal detecting, which can lead to damage of both ecological and archaeological sites. While this area is a valuable recreational resource, the area is very sensitive to such pressures and requires careful balanced management.

**3.7.14** To maintain both the landscape and ecological interest, these areas will also require continued management. The encroachment of the open heathlands with self-seeded tree cover and alien species, is a further example of the importance of such management. The

presence of the existing afforestation has impacted on the heathland cover. The management or removal of the tree cover is necessary from the heathland perspective, but at the same time will open up the landscape with potential implications for its recreation value and perception as a landmark. There are also potential conflicts between trees and archaeological remains as tree roots are known to damage sites or artefacts.



**Aerial photograph of Town Common** - illustrates the effect of recreational pressures on the sensitive heathland landscape.