

Overton Parish

Biodiversity Action Plan

2015 to 2019



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Foreword

Welcome to Overton Biodiversity Society's Parish Biodiversity Action Plan for 2015 to 2020.

This builds upon the first Overton Biodiversity Action Plan (2009 – 2014) which was produced by Overton Biodiversity Society with assistance from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Overton Parish Council and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.

I hope you enjoy reading it and that the actions and targets set out in it will help the local community to protect and enhance the wildlife heritage of the parish of Overton.



Alison Cross

Area Head of Conservation (North & East Hampshire)

Introduction

Overton Parish comprises a wide range of wildlife habitats and species which contribute to its biological, economic and social well-being. The village's wildlife areas are coming under increasing pressures from climate change, development and water abstraction. This Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is produced to help monitor species, habitats and wildlife in Overton so that we are aware of changes and may initiate action to mitigate adverse effects.

The identification of key habitats and species within the parish and the production of habitat and species action plans form a framework for the conservation of local wildlife. As part of the 2009 – 2014 BAP²¹, the Biodiversity Society surveyed a variety of 'at risk' species and habitats; these surveys laid out their findings and provided suggestions for conserving and enhancing habitats. This updated BAP sets out timescales for the areas of interest for the period 2015- 2019; it includes ongoing surveys and work parties as well as proposals for carrying out larger surveys on rare/endangered species. During the surveys we will be continually alert for alien species which may be threatening to take over a habitat.

This plan aims to engage community-based action to protect and enhance Overton's natural heritage.

Acknowledgements

Overton Biodiversity Society would like to thank everyone involved in updating this Biodiversity Action Plan. All photographs are courtesy of Overton Biodiversity Society unless otherwise stated.

We acknowledge data supplied by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre.

A Parish Plan for Biodiversity

What is Biodiversity?

'Biodiversity' comes from the words **biological diversity** and simply refers to the variety of living things found within an area. Overton's biodiversity ranges from single celled micro-organisms to mammals, birds and trees. The biodiversity of an area also refers to the range of **habitats** such as woodlands or rivers where these species are found.



River Test

Why is Overton's Biodiversity Important?

All human life depends on healthy ecosystems and the living things they contain.

Globally, biodiversity provides us with many of the things we need to survive – water, oxygen, food, clothing and medicines.

Locally, Overton's biodiversity contributes to making the village a pleasant place to live. It enriches our lives and helps to keep us healthy – mentally as well as physically. One of the factors which attracts people to live and work in north Hampshire is its natural environment and wildlife.

Overton's Biodiversity Plan and the Bigger Picture

In June 1992 the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro led to over 150 countries signing the Convention on Biological Diversity. The main aim of the Convention is to encourage widespread commitment to sustaining and enhancing global biodiversity. It calls for the creation and enforcement of national strategies and action plans to conserve, protect and enhance biological diversity.

As part of its response to the Rio Summit the UK Government published the UK Biodiversity Action Plan in 1995 setting out our national objectives.

In 1998 the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership set out strategic action plans for biodiversity within the county¹ followed in 2000 by specific species and habitat action plans².

In 2003 Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council produced "Living Landscapes – a Landscape and Biodiversity Strategy for the Borough of Basingstoke and Deane". The strategy, updated in 2014, provides a framework for the work of the council in relation to the conservation and enhancement of landscape and biodiversity³. One of the tasks identified in the strategy was to

explore the development and role of parish-based conservation action plans in helping to achieve landscape and biodiversity objectives. This key action supports one of the guiding aims of the strategy - to encourage the participation of local groups and people in decisions affecting the future of the borough's biodiversity.

A Biodiversity Action Plan for Overton was prepared for 2009-2014 to help our community to identify the principles set out at international, national and regional level and to put them into practice at a local level within Overton Parish. It helped us to identify our local wildlife resources and to make suggestions on how they might be maintained or improved. This plan for 2015-2019 builds on what we learned from the original plan and sets out our key actions for the next 5 years.



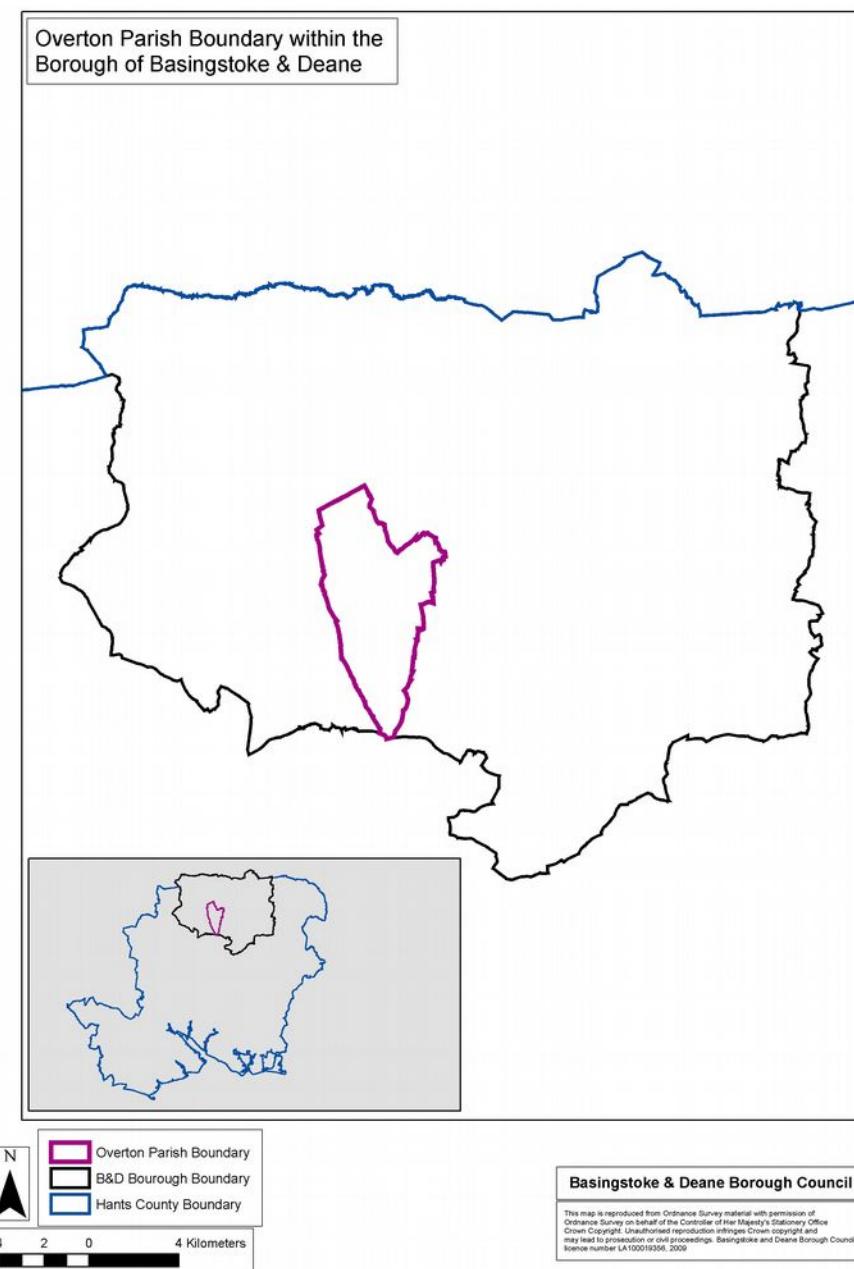
Overton's largest oak tree at Ashe, January 2015

The Parish of Overton

Location

The Parish of Overton is situated in north-west Hampshire and covers an area of approximately 35 km² (13 square miles) on the western side of the Hampshire Downs. It includes the upper Test valley and the source of the River Test which rises at Ashe Manor Farm.

Overton village has approximately 4300 inhabitants and lies at the centre of the parish in the valley of the River Test, 13 km west of Basingstoke on the B3400.



Overton Parish within north Hampshire and the Borough of Basingstoke and Deane

Overton Parish Rights of Way and Transport Routes

OVERTON CIVIL PARISH



Geology and Soil

The underlying rocks of the parish form part of the Hampshire Basin, a geological feature in which the rocks slope gently from the north to the south. The oldest rock is Cretaceous chalk which was formed over 65 million years

ago. This chalk is a porous, fine grained limestone which is generally highly permeable and alkaline.

The soil types in the parish are mainly calcareous with areas of overlying plateau drift and clay with flints. In the Test valley there are river and valley silt and gravel deposits.

The Soil Survey of England and Wales has identified four main groups of soils (Soil Associations) in the parish⁴:

Soil Association	Characteristics
Charity 2 Association	Well drained flinty fine silty soils in valley bottoms. Calcareous fine silty soils over chalk or chalk rubble on valley sides, sometimes shallow. Parent materials: flinty and chalky drift over chalk.
Frome Association	Shallow calcareous and non-calcareous loamy soils over flint gravel affected by groundwater. Small areas of peat. Risk of flooding. Parent materials: chalky and gravelly river alluvium.
Andover 1 Association	Shallow well drained calcareous silty soils over chalk on slopes and crests. Deep calcareous and non-calcareous fine silty soils in valley bottoms. Striped soil patterns locally. Parent material: Chalk.
Carstens Soil Association	Well drained fine silty over clayey and fine silty soil, often very flinty. Parent materials: Plateau drift and clay-with-flints.

A map showing the soil types present in the parish is given in Appendix 1.

Climate and Hydrology

Overton has a temperate climate with an average annual temperature of about 10°C and about 750 mm annual rainfall⁵. Just under 50% of the rainfall is lost to evaporation and transpiration. The rest soaks into the deeper layers of the underlying chalk which are saturated with water. This water moves through the chalk under the influence of gravity until it emerges as springs in the river valley.

Generally, rain takes several months to filter through the underlying chalk to the springs, so the winter rainfall swells the underground reserves and gives peak river flows in late spring. The temperature of the water is fairly constant entering the River Test at about 11°C regardless of the season⁶.

With climate change, snowfall is becoming rare and frost less common than in the past. Predictions for the future suggest increasingly hot, dry summers with milder, wetter winters. Extreme weather events such as storms and heavy rain may become more common⁷.

Topography

The landscape of the parish owes much to the influence of the last ice age which ended some 10,000 years ago.



Overton village looking north over the valley of the River Test © Sue Teagle.

Although not actually covered by ice during this period (the glaciers ended further to the north), the dry valleys in the Chalk Downs were probably formed by stream erosion when the ground was frozen causing rainfall to run over them rather than soaking in as it does today⁴.

One of the main landscape features of the parish is the valley of the River Test which runs from east to west across the central portion of the area.

Altitudes within the parish range from 75 metres at its lowest point (where the River Test flows out of the parish at Laverstoke) to 185 metres at Robley Belt on the northern boundary of the parish.

Landscape History and Archaeology

Man has influenced the landscape of the parish for thousands of years. Evidence of human activity can be seen in the presence of:

Popham Beacons – prehistoric barrows dating to the bronze age (2,400 – 700 BC)

Harrow Way – an ancient trackway thought to date to the iron age (700 BC – 43 AD) or earlier

Portway - the Roman road from Silchester to Sarum which forms part of the northern boundary of the parish

Victorian railway line - the tree-lined railway line with its impressive embankments bisecting the northern part of the parish.

Historic landscape types identified in the parish⁸ include:

Assarted Woodland – early medieval to early post-medieval enclosures, formed by the clearance of woodland and scrub to form farmland

Wavy-edged fields – fields with wavy boundaries, resulting from 17th and 18th century informal enclosure

Ladder fields – fields with long wavy-edged parallel boundaries, often running for several kilometres over chalk uplands, resulting from 16th and 17th century informal enclosure

Parliamentary fields – regularly shaped fields typically formed by Parliamentary Enclosure Acts of the late 18th – 19th century.



Ladder fields looking south over Robley Belt © Sue Teagle

Studying field patterns and their boundaries can indicate where the oldest and most species-rich hedges are likely to be found, and gives an indication of when and how the modern landscape has been formed.

A map showing the historic landscape types present in the parish is given in Appendix 2.

Landscape Character Areas

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council has identified four main “**Landscape Character Areas**” within the parish, based on a study of habitats, land use and landscape history. Each Landscape Character Area represents a tract of land with a recognisable local identity and wildlife interest⁸.

A map showing the landscape character areas present in the parish is given in Appendix 3. The landscape character areas are described in more detail below.

Great Litchfield Down and Willesley Warren

This open, rolling area forms a distinct character area in the northern part of the parish with its southern boundary marked by the River Test. The area is underlain predominantly with chalk, which has been covered in places with clay with flint deposits. Erosion of this underlying geology has led to the formation of a rolling, strongly undulating landform, with numerous dry valleys. Elevated relief and lack of vegetation cover contribute to an exposed and remote character.

Landscape character within this area is comparatively uniform with coherence and unity provided by the area's scale and openness. Large, open arable fields, with a weak hedgerow and woodland structure separate it from the surrounding, more enclosed, chalkland landscapes. Occasional small areas of pasture are distributed within the area. The area is bounded to the north by Robley Belt - a linear plantation marking the route of the Roman road which forms the northerly boundary of the Parish. The area north of the Salisbury to London railway line lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).



Great Litchfield Down and Willesley Warren landscape character area © Sue Teagle

Test and Bourne Valley

The River Test has cut through the underlying geology of predominantly chalk beds giving rise to the distinct flat valley floor. The alluvial loam and valley gravels deposited by the river results in a change in vegetation characteristics from the surrounding chalkland.

The area consists of valley floor, slopes and built areas. The land adjacent to the river forms a mixture of wet woodland, disused watercress beds and grazing land, some of which is now unused and overgrown. The River Test and some adjacent areas are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The valley sides have a mosaic of pasture and arable farmland interspersed with small woodland blocks, the fields bounded by a strong hedgerow structure and hedgerow trees. Much of the settlement within the parish is situated in this area.



River Test at Southington © Jane MacKenzie

South Test Down

This area is underlain with chalk layers creating a gently undulating landform and is found to the south of the village.

Within the parish, the western part of this area is characterised by large arable fields with low hedgerows and limited woodland cover creating a fairly open landscape. To the east, the higher frequency of woodland and hedgerows leads to a more enclosed landscape.



Looking north over Test Valley Golf Course showing South Test Down
landscape character area © Sue Teagle

Oakley and Steventon Down

This area, also underlain by chalk beds, is covered by widespread deposits of clay with flints (particularly on higher ground) which creates the characteristic undulating landform.

The landscape comprises a patchwork of medium to large arable fields interspersed with frequent woodland blocks. The relatively enclosed nature created by the woodland distinguishes this area from the surrounding more open character areas.

The area includes a high proportion of ancient semi-natural woodland which has been designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs).

The second of Overton's two SSSIs – Micheldever Spoil Heaps - is found in the southern part of this area on the site of Victorian railway excavations now colonised with rare plant species such as cut-leaved germander (*Teucrium botrys*).



Micheldever Spoil Heaps looking north © Ken MacKenzie

Habitat Types

The Phase 1 (main) Habitat Types in the parish were mapped in 1996/97 by Hampshire County Council and in 2006 by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council⁹. The following ten main habitats were identified as occurring locally, the first eight of which are included in the Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plan². The 10 are:

1. Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland (areas of Wet Woodland have also been recorded within the parish)
2. Open Standing Water / Ponds
3. Lowland Wet Grassland (which can include Floodplain Grazing Marsh and Lowland Meadows). In addition, areas of Lowland Fen have also been recorded in the parish)
4. Chalk Rivers
5. Wood Pasture and Parkland
6. Arable Field Margins
7. Hedgerows
8. Lowland Calcareous Grassland
9. Spoil Heaps
10. Improved Grassland

A map showing the all the habitats types recorded within the parish is given in Appendix 5.

Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland



Lowland woodland forms a significant part of the parish landscape and is a major wildlife habitat. Although there is no single large area of woodland in the parish, there are many scattered stands of mixed woodland throughout, particularly in the south of the parish on areas of heavier soils. Many of these areas are classed as semi-natural ancient woodland and have SINC status. In addition, the parish is covered by an extensive network of hedgerows (around 150 km/100 miles)

providing both localised woodland habitats and a valuable green connection, i.e. wildlife corridors between habitats.

Open Standing Water / Ponds

Standing open water habitats are found in a few locations adjacent to the River Test such as settling beds associated with Overton's paper mill. In the past, the River Test was diverted in several places to create watercress beds. These are no longer used for growing watercress but remain as important areas of open water (at Polhampton, Flashetts and Southington) as do farm ponds and ornamental lakes.



Lowland Wet Grassland



The wildlife interest of the River Test is not restricted to the river itself but extends to the meadows adjacent to it. Some of these, especially higher up in the catchment, have been significantly improved for agriculture whereas some of the meadows closer to the western boundary retain more of their wildlife interest. These areas are now largely ungrazed

and are at risk of reverting to wet woodland or conversion to unsuitable land uses such as pony paddocks.

Several areas along the River Test are situated in low-lying areas with silty or gravelly soils, a high water table and, sometimes, seasonal flooding (Ashe, Polhampton, Quidhampton, Southington). These factors create a grassland habitat distinct from the classic chalk grassland habitat.

Chalk Rivers

The source of the River Test is at Ashe on the eastern edge of the parish. It runs westward for 4.1 km (2.5 miles) before crossing the parish boundary on the western side.

The River Test, its associated side streams and adjacent meadows and wet woodland, are classed as an SSSI and widely regarded as the Parish's prime wildlife site. It is home to many of the landmark species of the parish such as kingfishers (*Alcedo atthis*), water voles and



possibly otters (*Lutra lutra*).

However, the most recent assessments of the river within the parish by Natural England between April 2002 and March 2006 described conditions throughout as being “unfavourable” or “unfavourable and declining”¹¹.

This is due to a variety of factors including inappropriate water levels, siltation and water pollution within the river and lack of grazing and invasion of nettles and scrub in adjacent areas.

Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) has been noted in at least one location on the banks of the river. This non-native garden escape rapidly colonises riverbanks and damp ground. In the autumn the plants die back leaving the banks bare of vegetation and vulnerable to erosion.

Wood Pasture and Parkland



Areas of wood-pasture and parkland were identified by HBIC at Berrydown Court, Burley Wood and Southington. Areas of former wood-pasture also exist in the south of the Parish adjacent to the Micheldever Spoil Heaps SSSI.

Wood pasture and parkland are valued for their preservation of ancient trees, often pollarded, with their associated species, such as lichen and invertebrates. Small areas of wood pasture and parkland exist in the parish.

Arable Field Margins

Arable farming is the predominant form of land use in the parish. The predominant crops grown are wheat, barley and oilseed rape. Fields are large to accommodate modern farm machinery and many hedges have been removed over the last 50 years. A large part of the south of the parish is farmed organically by Laverstoke Estate.



Sympathetic management of the field margins and headlands may encourage farmland birds and rare arable plants such as chicory (*Cichorium intybus*) and

cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*).

Hedgerows



There is an extensive network of hedges within the parish. The total length of hedgerow has been estimated as approximately 150 km with a density of about 4 km of hedge per kilometre of ground area¹⁵.

Well-maintained hedges, especially when combined with sympathetic field margin

management, are an outstanding wildlife resource. They provide shelter for a wide range of species including many farmland birds and also make up wildlife corridors allowing species to move safely from one area to another. Without hedges, some species such as dormice would remain dangerously isolated in specific locations. In addition to their importance for wildlife, hedges are also of great landscape value and historic significance.

Overton Biodiversity Society carried out a survey of hedgerows in the parish during 2003-2006. In most respects our local hedgerows were found to be very representative of the chalky arable landscape of southern England although they also appear to be more species-rich than the national average¹⁵.

Resurveying a sample of biodiverse and ‘at risk’ hedges in the parish of Overton during 2014 revealed the physical condition to be similar to that in the original surveys conducted during 2004, 2005 and 2006. One ‘at risk’ hedge had been lost to housing development. There was a slight overall decrease in biodiversity of the hedgerow species, with the ground flora also showing lower diversity. However, no firm conclusions about decrease in biodiversity can be drawn from the sample size of 7 hedges which were not all re-surveyed in the same month as the original study.

Further ‘at risk’ hedges will continue to be identified by OBS. Where these relate to housing development, surveys will be conducted to establish condition and biodiversity to inform developers of the value of the hedgerow resource and potential for conservation, enhancement and new planting.

Lowland Calcareous Grassland

Only tiny areas of unimproved chalk grassland remain in the parish, along a few road verges (Kingsclere Road) and in Overton Church graveyard where there is a significant glow worm population (*Lampyris noctiluca*).



Spoil Heaps



These are localised areas of disturbed chalk derived from Victorian railway cuttings found in the southern end of the parish. The spoil heaps can provide a habitat for a range of unusual plant species, including the rare cut-leaved germander.

Improved Grassland

Areas of grassland used for grazing livestock are found throughout the parish. On conventional farms these are sown pastures containing ryegrass and are heavily fertilised for maximum production. On organically farmed land artificial fertilisers are not used and the sown seed mixtures include a wide range of herbs and grasses.



Other land use

Although not identified as priority habitats for Hampshire the following land use types are important locally.

Sports fields



Overton is fortunate in having available a wide range of recreational land. This includes land managed by Overton Recreation Centre, Overton Primary School playing fields, land managed by the Parish Council, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council and the privately-owned Test Valley Golf Course.

Some of this land already has considerable wildlife potential – Town Meadow contains sections of the River Test SSSI and has evidence of the presence of water voles while others could be improved for wildlife without interfering with their recreational potential.

Gardens

Gardens form a major wildlife resource within the village with some being managed exclusively as wildlife gardens.



Roadside Verges

There are approximately 50 km of road in the parish - short stretches of which have retained some of the original diversity of chalk grassland. One section on the B3051 Overton to Kingsclere road has been designated as a SINC on the basis of its floral diversity which includes orchids.

Road side verge Kingsclere Road © Ken MacKenzie



Little Meadow

Little Meadow is an area of about one acre adjacent to Kingsclere Road and the

parish cemetery. The land belongs to Overton Parish Council (OPC), and has been developed by Overton Biodiversity Society (OBS) to encourage a diversity of wildlife and to provide a pleasant area for the people of Overton and visitors to the parish to enjoy.

Work began on site in 2005, to introduce mainly native trees, shrubs and wildflowers. Three hedges (one subsequently laid in January 2012) and eight specimen trees were planted, as well as a dense area of native roses. Wild flower seed mixtures, plug plants and container plants have been added, with an emphasis on bee-friendly plants (not necessarily native) in the border next to the hard standing. Structural features included the hard standing area, with seating, human sundial and two interpretation boards, a beetle bank, stone pile and large logs (which had rotted by 2014).

The pH of the site was found to be around 7.9.

Management aims are to maintain or increase the biodiversity of Little Meadow, and to continue to provide an area to be enjoyed by human visitors. OBS achieves these aims by means of working days arranged at Little Meadow as and when required (usually about 4 days per annum).



Information boards at Little Meadow

Nature Conservation Sites in Overton

The habitats of 40 sites within the parish have been surveyed and the records of these surveys are kept by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC). Some of the sites surveyed are of particular wildlife significance and have been designated for their nature conservation importance. There are two **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** within the parish and 22 **Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs)**.

A map showing all the designated sites within the parish is given in Appendix 4.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

There are over 4,000 SSSIs in England, covering around 7% of the country's land area. The designation process is managed by Natural England¹⁰.

Notification of a site as a SSSI gives legal protection to the best sites for wildlife

and geology in England.

There are two SSSIs within the parish – the River Test SSSI, running from east to west through the middle of the parish and Micheldever Spoil Heaps SSSI (also known as “the Chalkies”) in the south of the parish.

The River Test SSSI

The River Test is a classic chalk stream and is one of the most species-rich lowland rivers in England. The water is naturally base-rich and of great clarity, but like many lowland rivers shows evidence of nutrient enrichment.



River Test between Kingsclere Road and Station Road © Jane MacKenzie

The River Test supports a high diversity of invertebrate species and is especially rich in aquatic molluscs.

The River Test SSSI includes areas of former water meadows, fen pasture and rush pasture communities of botanical interest. The River Test and its adjoining vegetation provide valuable habitats for wetland birds.

Almost the entire river is managed to maintain and facilitate fishing for trout (brown and rainbow)¹¹. Eels are also present in the Flashetts stretch.

Water voles (*Arvicola terrestris*) are common in places, but their numbers are thought to have declined as has been noted elsewhere in Britain¹².

Micheldever Spoil Heaps SSSI

This area, now partly managed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, is an area of nineteenth century chalk spoil heaps produced during the construction of the London to Southampton railway. The area is described as being of “quite exceptional botanical importance” for species such as cut-leaved germander, wall bedstraw (*Galium parisiense*), spring cinquefoil (*Potentilla neumanniana*) and fly orchid (*Ophrys insectifera*)¹³ which have colonised the site.



Micheldever Spoil Heaps © Ken MacKenzie

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)

SINCs are locally important wildlife sites. A SINC is a non-statutory designation generally administered by a local authority in partnership with conservation organisations. The designation recognises important habitats and species on sites that fall outside statutory site designations. Local government authorities have schedules of SINCs within their area and include policies in their Local Plans and Local Development Frameworks to safeguard these sites from inappropriate development¹⁴.

SINCs within the Parish of Overton

At the time of production of the 2009-2014 BAP the Harrow Way and Overton Churchyard were not recorded as surveyed by HBIC. The biodiversity value of these areas were drawn to their attention through BAP actions and both are now designated as SINCs.



A map showing the location of each SINC is given in **Appendix 4**. Comments about each SINC and some other sites of interest, taken from habitat survey reports held by HBIC, are presented in **Appendix 5**.

Species

Overton's habitats support a tremendous range of species, some of which are **UK & Hampshire BAP Priority Species²**.

It would not be possible to review all of the species in this document, but it is possible to select “**flagship species**” and to suggest ways in which they can be protected. Flagship species meet one or more of the following criteria:

- They are priority species in the Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plan
- They have statutory protection
- They are indicators of the health of the habitat in which they live
- They are widely valued by the local community as a species of local importance.

Water vole

(*Arvicola terrestris*)

The water vole is one of Britain’s fastest declining species with numbers having fallen by as much as 94% over the last 100 years¹². The species was once common within the parish but is now only rarely seen.

A water vole survey carried out by Overton Biodiversity Group in 2006¹⁶ identified two areas within the parish where populations have survived.

The survey also identified inappropriate river bank management and predation by mink (*Mustela vison*) as major causes of their decline.

The surveys were repeated in Autumn 2014 when the estimated number of water voles showed a sharp decline, particularly in stretches of the river where they were previously fairly abundant (e.g. Kingsclere Road to Station Road). This may be due to predation by mink or by inappropriate bank side management or may be due to the survey being carried out, (for most stretches), slightly later than in 2006, with dying back of bank side vegetation and dead leaves making it difficult to locate signs of water vole activity, e.g. their latrines.



Water Vole © Graham Roberts

Common Dormouse

(*Muscardinus avellanarius*)

The common or hazel dormouse is a small tree-living and largely nocturnal mammal.

Dormice prefer natural woodland and thick hedgerows so their presence is an indication of a healthy woodland habitat. OBS surveys conducted in 2009, 2010 and 2011 showed that dormice were found in significant numbers in the Overton Parish¹⁷. They were found predominantly on the Harrow Way but also in the hedgerows around the village.



Common Dormouse © Phil McLean

Kingfisher

(*Alcedo atthis*)

The kingfisher is a fairly rare, easily disturbed bird and is widely seen as a symbol of the River Test.

Kingfishers require slow moving, shallow stretches of rivers which are clean enough to support large amounts of small fish. Kingfishers require overhanging branches above shallow stretches of the river for their perches. Observations have established that there is a breeding population on the River Test.



Kingfisher © Phil McLean

Farmland Birds

Just as the kingfisher can be seen as an indicator of the health of aquatic environments, farmland birds are taken as an indicator of the environmental health of agricultural land.

Farmland bird species include corn bunting (*Miliaria calandra*), goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), grey partridge (*Perdix perdix*), linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*), skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), stock dove (*Columba oenas*), tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*), turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*), lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) and yellow hammer (*Emberiza citrinella*). Major reductions in their numbers have been recorded through surveys such as the BTO Common Bird Census and Breeding Bird Survey¹⁸ largely due to the intensification of agriculture which has taken place over the last 50 years.



Lapwing © Albert Roberts

Overton is fortunate that all the local farmers are sympathetic to wildlife and a significant part of the parish farmland is managed organically by the Laverstoke Estate with consequent benefits for wildlife, especially farm land birds.

Black Poplar

(*Populus nigra*)

The black poplar is one of Britain's rarest trees and is associated with the wet meadow conditions found along the valley of the River Test. Overton Biodiversity Society has carried out a survey of notable trees in the parish and was able to liaise with a local landowner and confirm that one of the trees on his land is a mature black poplar.



Black Poplar © Ken MacKenzie

Bluebell

(*Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*)

Southern England is one of the strongholds of the bluebell where it is one of the indicator plants for ancient semi-natural woodland. Although fairly common they can be threatened by illegal removal and by inappropriate woodland management.

Spectacular bluebell woods within the parish include Southley Copse and Burley Wood.



Bluebell © Alex Cruickshank

Glow worm

(*Lampyris noctiluca*)

The glow worm is a beetle about 25 mm in length. The wingless female glows in the dark to attract males. After mating she will lay her eggs and then die.

Glow worms require specific conditions to survive – snails (on which they feed) and sensitive management of the vegetation in which they live.

St Mary's churchyard has a long-established colony of glow worms. Surveys conducted by OBs in 2009, 2010 and 2011 confirmed that, although numbers are in decline nationally, the colony of glow worms found in Overton is stable¹⁹.



Glow worm © John Horne

Butterflies and Moths

Most UK butterfly and moth species are declining with 24 species of butterfly and 150 species of moth now listed as priority species on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan²⁰.

Butterflies and moths are very sensitive to changes in their environment and are excellent indicators of the health of their habitats. OBS has organised talks on butterflies and moths and has run numerous moth trapping sessions at a number of sites in the parish. A summary of sightings between 2009 and 2014 can be found on the OBS website.



Holly Blue butterfly

© Veronique Kerguelen

Overton Biodiversity Action Plan

Developing the new Action Plan

A summary of the outcomes of the 2009-14 BAP can be found in the Resources Section of the OBS website²².

Based on the experience of the first Overton Parish BAP²¹, the 2015-19 Action Plan has been designed to include the following:

- Identification of a realistic number of actions all of which are considered achievable
- Identification of who will be undertaking the action and where external expertise is required
- Identification of success criteria to judge how well the action has been achieved

The Plan below is presented in a slightly different format from the 2009-14 BAP and covers the period from the beginning of 2015 until the end of 2019. It outlines the broad aim, objective or continuous activities for a habitat or species, followed by specific actions. The specific actions have timings for completion allocated to a quarter of a particular year and with an indication of by whom the action should be undertaken. Suggested criteria for success are also given.

For some actions, sub-groups will be set up, led by an OBS Committee member, to plan, execute and report on the specific action.

The Action Plan 2015-2019

Habitat or species	Aim, Objective or Continuous Activities	Specific Actions	By When	By Whom	Success criteria / Comments
SINCs and SSSIs	Raise OBS awareness of sites	Review presence of SINCs	2015 Q1 2019 Q4	OBS Committee	Updated list of confirmed SINCs with date of most recent surveys
		Visit to restored part of River Test SSSI at Laverstoke Park	2015 Q3	OBS members	Visit completed
Chalk river	Promote the importance of the River Test and its associated habitats and species	Arrange Winter or Spring talk	2017 Q1	Invited speaker	Open meeting attended by OBS members and visitors
Hedgerows	Monitoring condition of hedgerows in the Parish	Repeat 2014 survey of at-risk and species-rich hedgerows	2019 Q3	Hedgerow sub-group	Report on website detailing species and condition of hedges and comparison with previous surveys
	Record condition and diversity of hedgerows potentially at risk from building work	Survey hedgerows on or adjacent to development sites in Overton Neighbourhood Plan	2016 Q3	Hedgerow sub-group	Report detailing species and condition of hedges for Parish Council
Little Meadow (LM)	Maintain and enhance biodiversity	Survey LM hedgerows	2016 Q3	Hedgerow sub-group	Report on website detailing species and condition of all LM hedges
		Re-survey meadow for species diversity	2016 Q2	Expert external surveyor	Report on website detailing species
		Undertake routine maintenance	Q1,Q2,Q3,Q4 annual	LM sub-group	Planting, pruning, weeding and grass clearing, as required
Micheldever Spoil heaps SSSI	Assist Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust with their management of this site	Ongoing practical scrub clearance and maintenance and assistance with Cut Leaf Germander surveys	Q1, Q3 annual	Chalkies volunteers	Annual participation by OBS members
Gardens	Raise awareness of importance of gardens for biodiversity	Organise Overton "Garden Safari" day	2016 Q3 2018 Q3	OBS members	Visit to at least two Overton gardens in each year

Habitat or species	Aim, Objective or Continuous Activities	Specific Actions	By When	By Whom	Success criteria / Comments
		Seed initiative	2017 Q1	OBS Committee	OBS members and wider village community engaged in 'growing for wildlife'
Water vole	Monitor presence of water voles	Repeat water vole survey	2019 Q4	Water vole sub-group	Report on website detailing survey and comparison with previous surveys
Common dormouse	Monitor presence of dormice	Repeat dormouse survey	2018 Q3	Dormouse sub-group	Report on website detailing survey and comparison with previous surveys
		Check dormouse boxes	2015 Q3	Dormouse sub-group	Confirmed number, location and condition of boxes and number occupied
Black poplar	Increase number of BP trees in the Parish	Propagate Black poplar	2015 Q4	Black poplar sub-group	Cuttings taken and established from tree at Polhampton
		Grow 'other sex' sapling for propagation	2016 Q1	Black poplar sub-group	New sapling purchased
Glow worm	Monitor presence of glow worms	Glow worm survey	2015 Q2 2017 Q2 2019 Q2	Glow worm sub-group	Website report detailing findings and comparison with previous surveys
General	Promote wider biodiversity knowledge and active community involvement; Liaise, encourage and support Tree Warden scheme	Annual winter / spring meetings / talks / activities Publicity of OBS activities in Parish News & Views	2015 Q1 2015 Q4 2016 Q1 2016 Q4 2017 Q1 2017 Q4 2018 Q1 2018 Q4 2019 Q1 2019 Q4	OBS Committee	Delivery of at least one event per annum to audience of OBS members and wider village community

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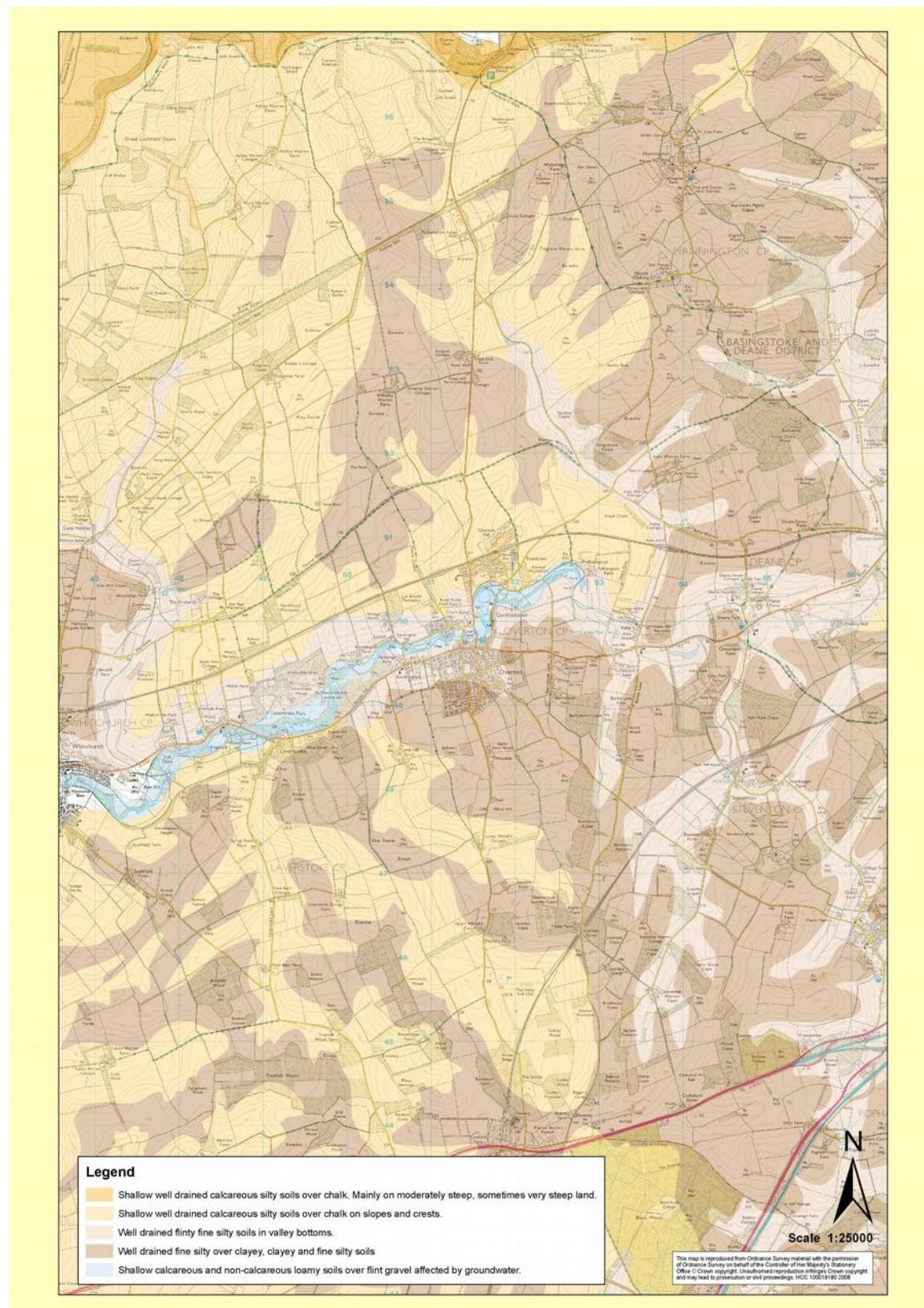
Abbreviations

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BDBC	Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
BTCV	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
BTO	British Trust for Ornithology
EA	Environment Agency
FC	Forestry Commission
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
HBIC	Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre
HIOWWT	Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
OBS	Overton Biodiversity Society
OPC	Overton Parish Council
ORC	Overton Recreation Centre
SINC	Site of Interest for Nature Conservation
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

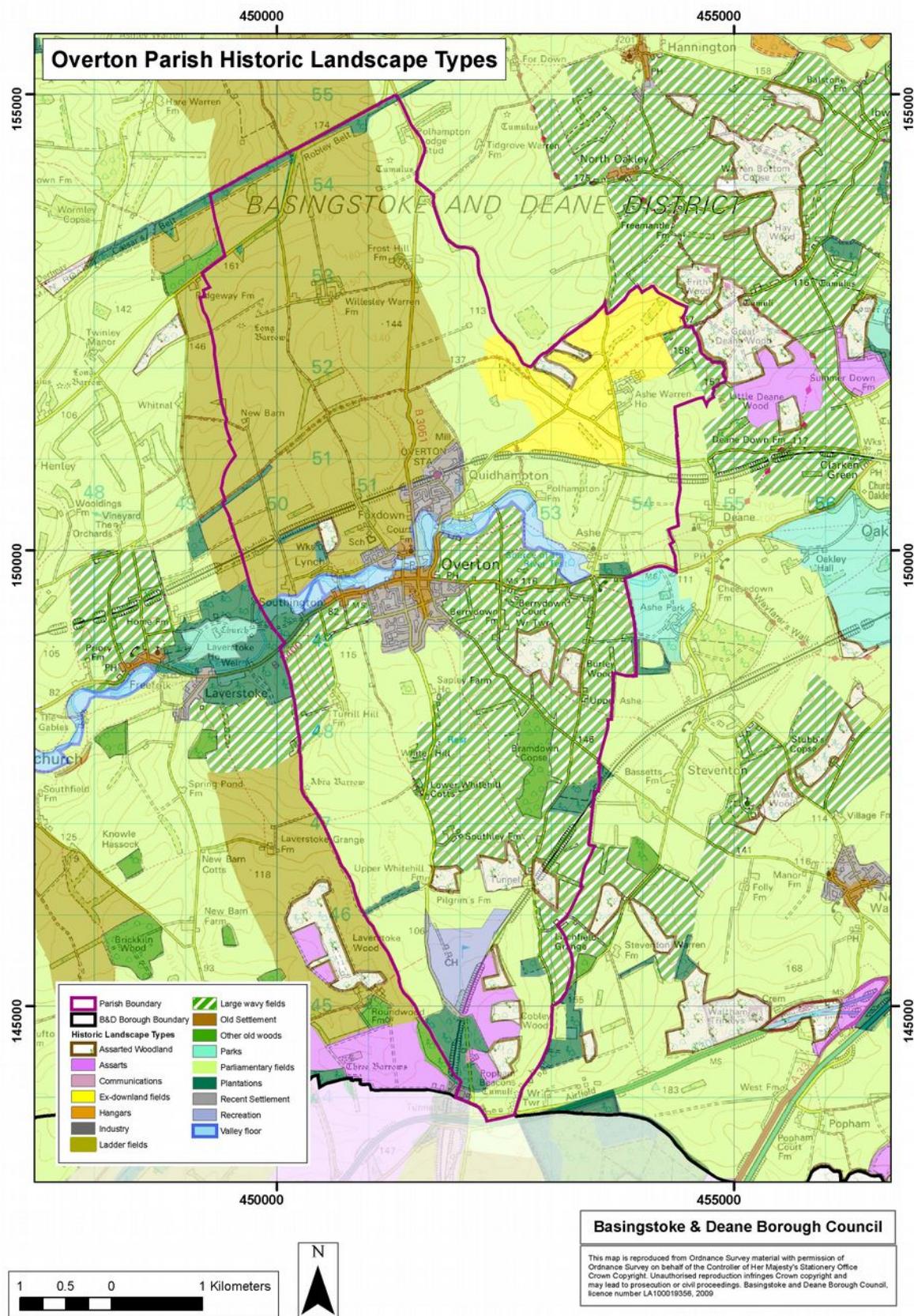
Appendices

1. Soils of Overton (map)
2. Historic Landscape Types (map)
3. Landscape Character Areas (map)
4. Designated Sites (map)
5. HBIC comments on SINCs and other sites of interest
6. Phase 1 Habitat Types (map)

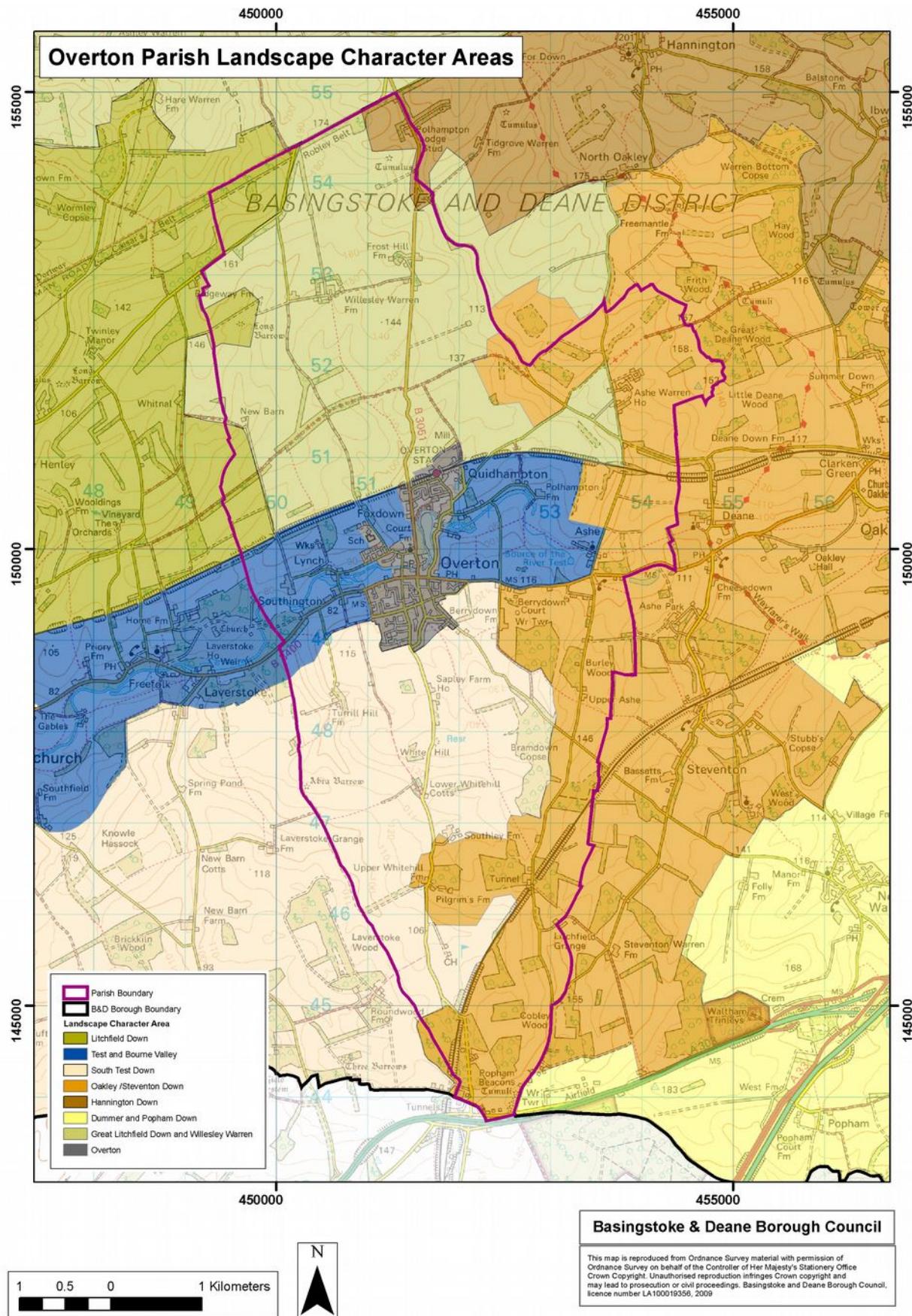
Appendix 1 – Soils of Overton



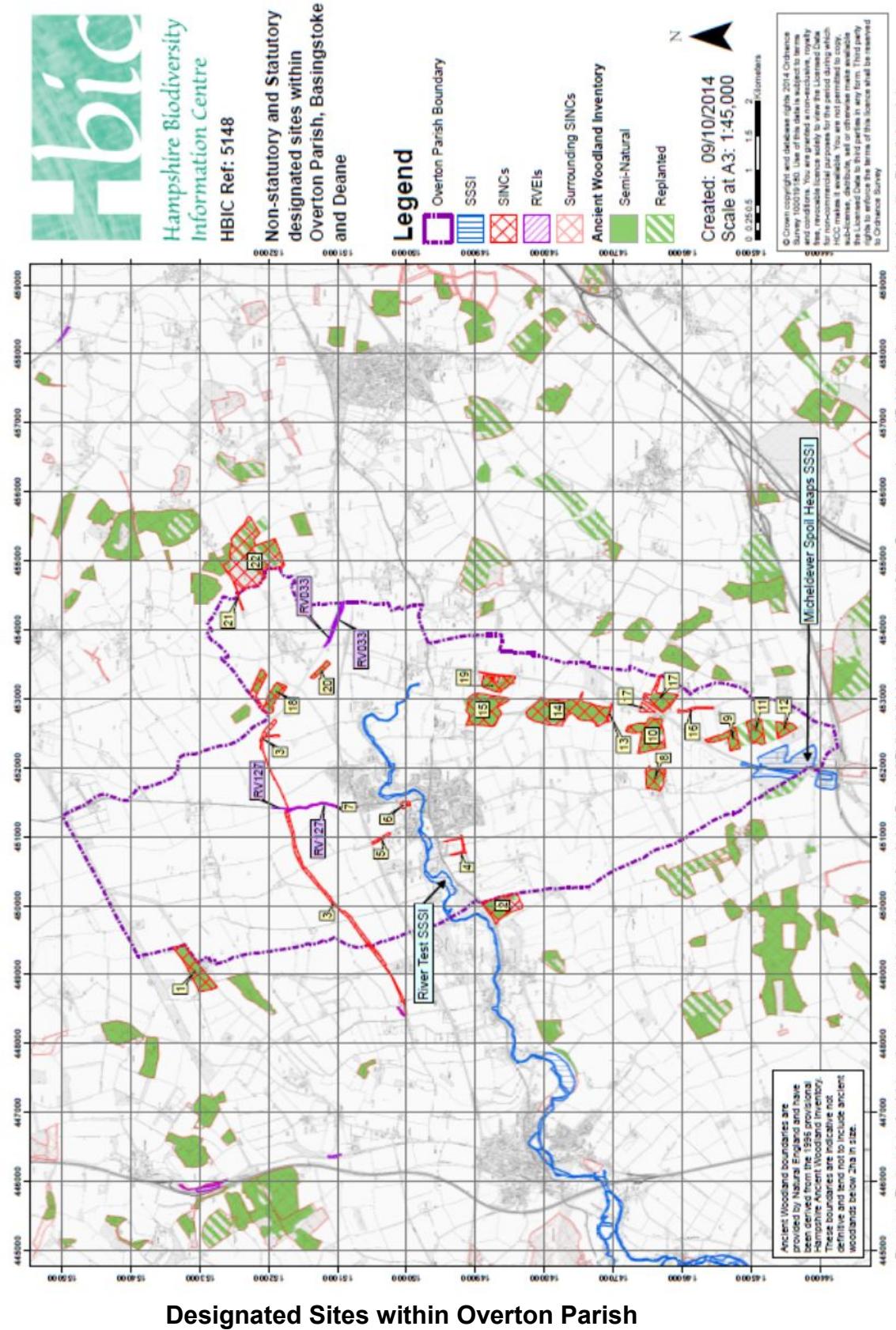
Appendix 2 – Overton Parish Historic Landscape Types



Appendix 3 – Overton Parish Landscape Character Areas



Appendix 4 – Statutory and Non- Statutory



Designated Sites within Overton Parish

Appendix 5 – HBIC comments on SINCs and other sites of interest

Map Ref:	1	SINC Name:	Ridgeway Copse
Survey Date:	Oct 1979	Area:	15.5 ha
Comments:			
SINC is on but outside the north-west parish boundary, central grid reference SU49005300.			
No survey comments available			

Map Ref:	2	SINC Name:	Rotten Hill Copse
Survey Date:	June 1991	Area:	13.4 ha
Comments:			
SINC is on but outside the west parish boundary, central grid reference SU49904870.			
No survey comments available			

Map ref:	3	SINC name:	The Harrow Way
Survey Date:	Apr 2010	Area:	14.6 ha
Comments:			
The Harrow Way is an old drove road crossing the mid Hampshire chalk lands, with this particular section of the Harrow Way located north of Overton, Hampshire.			
The habitats here include structurally diverse calcareous scrubs and ancient semi-natural Ash-Hazel woodlands, some of which have been replanted with non-native species. The site acts as a significant and important wildlife corridor in what is essentially a landscape dominated by arable farmland.			
An excellent variety of old woodland and wayside plants were recorded during the survey, including 29 species of old woodland indicator species. The County Notable species Birds-nest Orchid (<i>Neottia nidus-avis</i>) was also recorded on the extreme western edge of the site.			

Map Ref:	4	SINC Name:	Overton Green Lanes and Sunken Tracks
Survey Date:	May 1998	Area:	0.9 ha
Comments:			
A series of fine old sunken tracks and green lanes situated on a gently sloping and northerly facing valley side site, between the western edge of Overton and Southington. The site constitutes a series of important ecological corridors linking the Test Valley with the open country to the south and west of Overton.			

Map Ref:	5	SINC Name:	Court Drove Woodland Strip
Survey Dates:	May 1998 May 2011	Area:	0.9 ha
Comments:			
Court Drove is a small ancient semi-natural Oak-Ash-Hazel-Field Maple woodland, situated in a broad strip along the eastern side of Court Drove between the school and the railway line, Overton. Despite its small size the wood retains a notable number of ancient woodland vascular plants (or indicators) including goldilocks buttercup (<i>Ranunculus auricomus</i>) and Solomon's seal (<i>Polygonatum multiflorum</i>). Evidence would suggest that the site supports an active population of dormice (<i>Muscardinus avellanarius</i>).			

Map Ref:	6	SINC Name:	St Mary's Churchyard
Survey Date:	July 2010	Area:	0.9 ha
Comments:			
St. Marys Churchyard, Overton is a medium sized churchyard, dominated by semi-improved / improved chalk grassland, situated on the northern edges of the River Test valley, Overton, mid Hampshire. The site supports ten chalk grassland indicator species. Most of the churchyard is regularly mown.			

Map Ref:	7	SINC Name:	Road Verge, NS 30-B3051 Kingsclere Road, Frost Hill
Survey Date:	Aug 2003	Length:	~ 1 km
Comments:	<p>Grassland which has become impoverished through inappropriate management but which retain sufficient elements of relic unimproved grassland to enable recovery.</p> <p>13 species of vascular plants characteristic of unimproved chalk grassland.</p>		

Map Ref:	8	SINC Name:	Southley Copse
Survey Date:	Sept 1990	Area:	7.7 ha
Comments:	<p>Southley Copse lies on the rolling chalklands of North Hampshire where variable depths of drift material can give rise to unusual and surprising types of woodland. Within intact ancient semi-natural woodland soils are often acid and impoverished and may be seasonally wet. Centuries of extractive management have maintained these conditions, originally under pasture woodland, later under coppice management, and created curious monotonous stands in which ash is rare, beech, unless introduced, usually absent, and calcicole ("chalk-loving") shrubs are generally restricted to banks, pits or other disturbed areas.</p> <p>These woods are quite distinct from woods on thin, truly "chalky soils", and may be of great antiquity.</p> <p>Southley Copse is a good example, and appears to be a fragment of formerly extensive woodland.</p> <p>23 ancient woodland vascular plants recorded.</p>		

Map Ref:	9	SINC Name:	Cobley Wood North
Survey Date:	April 1992	Area:	6.4 ha

Comments:

Cobley Wood "North" is a moderately sized ancient semi-natural oak-ash wood on a relatively flat and gently sloping site.

The wood exhibits a notable semi-natural canopy including an unusual plateau alder stand. The wood also retains a diverse flora including some 21 ancient woodland vascular plants.

Map Ref:	10	SINC Name:	Quidhampton Southley Copse & Pilgrims Copse
Survey Date:	May 1997	Area:	7.7 ha & 8 ha

Comments:

Quidhampton Southley Copse is a medium sized ancient semi-natural woodland, situated on a gently sloping and flat site on the immediate side of Pilgrim's Copse.

The wood retains a notable variety of stand types and includes the unusual old woodland indicator plant water avens (*Geum rivale*).

32 ancient woodland vascular plants recorded.

Pilgrims Copse is a moderately sized, ancient semi-natural hazel and field maple wood situated on a gently sloping hillside on the mid Hampshire chalk.

The wood is adjacent and very similar to Quidhampton Southley Copse.

28 ancient woodland vascular plants recorded.

Map Ref:	11	SINC Name:	Cobley Wood – Middle
Survey Date:	Apr 1992	Area:	7.1 ha

Comments:

Cobley Wood 'Middle' is a medium sized ancient semi-natural oak-hazel wood on a relatively flat site.

The wood is of particular interest because of its varied semi-natural canopy and diverse ground flora.

20 ancient woodland vascular plants recorded.

Map Ref:	12	SINC Name:	Cobley Wood – South
Survey	Apr 1992	Area:	4.3 ha

Date:			
Comments:			
Cobley Wood 'South' is a small ancient semi-natural copse on a gently sloping and rather poorly drained site.			
The wood retains notable variation in the semi-natural canopy, as native 'stand-types' vary with the underlying soil and drainage characteristics of the site.			
15 ancient woodland vascular plants recorded.			

Map Ref:	13	SINC Name:	Field South of Bramdown Copse
Survey Date:	Aug 2000	Area:	0.2 ha
Comments:			
Arable field on south facing slope, sheltered by wood to north. Contains broad-fruited cornsalad (<i>Valerianella rimosa</i>), a UK BAP priority species.			

Map Ref:	14	SINC Name:	Bramdown Copse
Survey Date:	June 1985	Area:	33 ha
Comments:			
A dark neglected wood. 27 ancient woodland vascular plants.			

Map Ref:	15	SINC Name:	Berrydown Copse
Survey Date:	Nov 1990	Area:	20.9 ha
Comments:			
Bounded to the south by "excellent old green lanes and wood hedges. 23 ancient woodland vascular plants.			

Map Ref:	16	SINC Name:	Litchfield Grange Boundary Bank
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Survey Date:	Apr 1992	Area:	1.3 ha
Comments:			
A strip of ancient semi-natural woodland and old hedgerow on a particularly impressive old boundary bank...notable semi-natural canopy and retains diverse and species rich ground flora.			

Map Ref:	17	SINC Name:	Litchfield Copse
Survey Date:	Apr 1992	Area:	11.3 ha
Comments:			
<p>Litchfield Copse is a mainly ancient semi-natural copse with some notable associated recent semi-natural and ancient/recent semi-natural stands.</p> <p>The wood retains a diverse structure and a species rich flora, including some 27 species of ancient woodland indicator plants. The structure of the wood suggests that it may be derived from wood pasture.</p> <p>Evidence suggests that the copse retains a population of dormice.</p>			

Map Ref:	18	SINC Name:	Kingsdown Wood
Survey Date:		Area:	11.2 ha
Comments:			
Part ancient semi-natural woodland. No survey information available.			

Map Ref:	19	SINC Name:	Burley Wood & Lane
Survey Date:	Apr 2005	Area:	8 ha
Comments:			
<p>A good example of coppice-with-standards woodland and has varying ages of coppice present. The woodland is rich in species, especially ancient woodland indicators. In total 30 ancient woodland indicators were noted including a large population of the county scarce herb-paris (<i>Paris quadrifolia</i>).</p>			

Map Ref:	20	SINC Name:	Heath Copse
Survey Date:		Area:	1.8 ha
Comments:			Ancient semi-natural woodland. No survey report available.

Map Ref:	21	SINC Name:	White Lane
Survey Date:	June 1995	Area:	0.5 ha
Comments:			White Lane is a wooded green lane stretching from the northern edge of Great Deane Wood to the cross-roads north of Ashe Warren House. No management. 7 ancient woodland vascular plant species.

Map Ref:	22	SINC Name:	Great Deane Wood
Survey Date:	June 1995	Area:	52.4 ha
Comments:			SINC is on but outside the north-east parish boundary linking with White Lane, central grid reference SU55105230. No survey comments available.

Other Sites of Interest

HBIC holds survey records for the following non-designated sites within the parish:

Site Name	Grid ref	Area (ha)	Survey Date	Comments
Court Drove Arable Field	SU50805030	8.1	Apr 1999	Perimeter includes Ancient semi-natural woodland" and tall hedge, unclipped on fine old boundary bank. Hedge reaching 5 metres wide.
Small Meadow, Laverstoke	SU51585045	1	May 1994	A small rank fen meadow situated in the valley of the River Test to the immediate south of Northington fen. This is a possible former water meadow, isolated from management for some time. 1 species of vascular plant characteristic of unimproved neutral grassland.
Railway Line Copse	SU51205060	0.9	May 1998	A strip of recent woodland and scrub situated on the railway embankment on the southern edge of the railway line, between the B3051 and Court drove. Interesting as a wildlife corridor.
Flashetts	SU51605000	3.8	April 1997	The Flashetts comprise an area of valley bottom fen and swamp, willow dominated riverine woodland and old watercress beds. Scrub encroaching fen in places. Patches of common reed swamp in the south. Evidence of Dormice.
Foxdown Estate Copse	SU51805050	0.5	May 1993	A small roughly square copse situated on a gently and

Site Name	Grid ref	Area (ha)	Survey Date	Comments
				southerly facing hillside. Limited management and some evidence of urban fringe influence.
North of Micheldever Spoil Heaps	SU51924480	2	July 2000	Further bare chalk spoil heaps beyond the Micheldever Spoil Heaps HWT Reserve. Superb bare chalk flora including cut-leaved germander recorded in 2000.
Cobley Plantation	SU52504440	5.8	April 1992	Cobley wood 'south-west' is a largely recent sycamore-ash stand situated on a relatively flat site, to the immediate north of the Popham Beacons.
Warren Plantation	SU52804540	2.6	April 1992	Warren Plantation is a recent sycamore plantation on a gently sloping and westerly facing site.
Road Verge 114, C19 Deane	SU54105120	~ 700 metre s	June 2000	Broad ancient semi-natural woodland on each side of the road.
Parish Hedgerows	Overton	150 km / 100 miles	2003 - 2005	Surveyed by Overton Biodiversity Society
OVA Land North of OV007	SU51205030	17.1	May 2011	A large block of arable dominated farmland, with a strip of ancient semi-natural Ash-Hazel woodland (the SINC Court Drove Break, SU51205030) situated along the north-western edge of the site, on the northern edge of Overton. Largely arable farm land. The woodland is unmanaged.

Site Name	Grid ref	Area (ha)	Survey Date	Comments
OVB Two sites west of OV007	SU51105010	0.9	May 2011	A pair of small permanently horse grazed paddocks, with associated horse training areas.
OV002 Overton Hill, London Road	SU51905000	8.5	May 2011	Large block of arable and associated farmland, on the eastern side of Station Road.
OVC Land North-West of School near OV007	SU50805010	1.8	May 2011	<p>Old semi-improved and improved paddocks, west of Court Lane and north-west of Overton CE Primary School, with occasional structurally diverse scrub, garden management and old hard standings and disturbed ground.</p> <p>Although no evidence of reptiles and snakes was found during the survey, structurally diverse sites such as this often retain significant herpetological interest.</p> <p>Partly managed as a vegetable garden, the rest occasionally grazed by ponies.</p>
OV007 Land North of Court Farm	SU51305010	2.6	May 2011	<p>Land North of Court Farm comprises a series of improved grass paddocks and small recent plantations</p> <p>Regularly grazed by sheep, occasional hay crop.</p> <p>Pastures recently treated with herbicide.</p>
Town Meadow	SU51104970	5.4	July 2010	Town Meadow, Overton is a large block of improved valley bottom pasture, which is regularly mown and used as a small golf course.

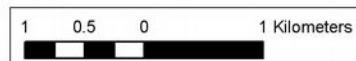
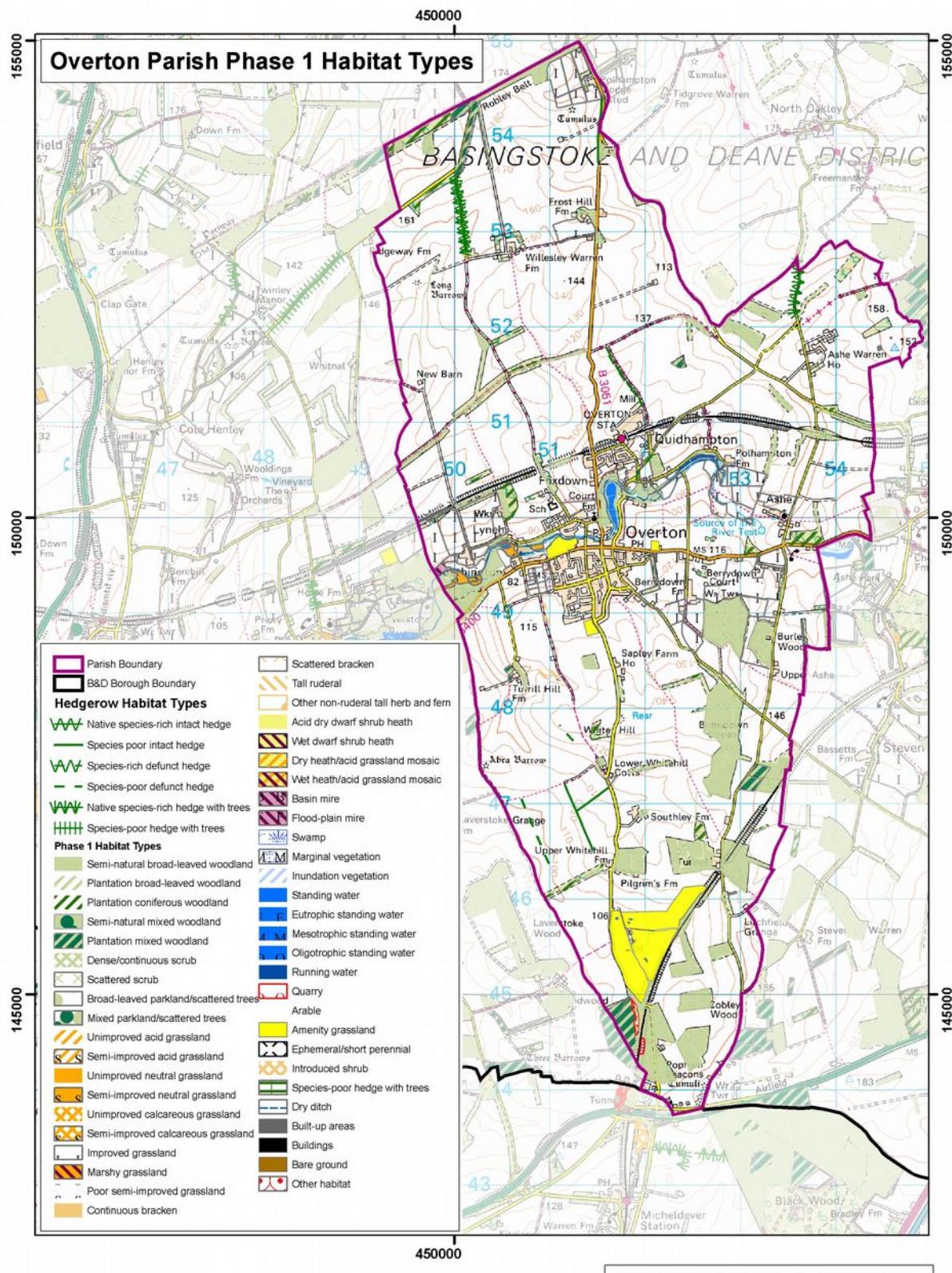
Site Name	Grid ref	Area (ha)	Survey Date	Comments
				The meadow has an open cover of amenity planted trees and has one small chalk stream feeder that drains into the River Test, which runs along the northern boundary of the site.
OV004 Two Gate Lane	SU51904930	9.1	May 2011	Grass ley and recent plantation.
OV006 Land off Pond Close	SU51004900	6.8	May 2011	Land off Pond Close is a large arable field, with associated ruderal herb dominated vegetation, situated on an old farm storage site.

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Appendix 6 – Overton Parish Phase 1 (main) Habitat types



Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council

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