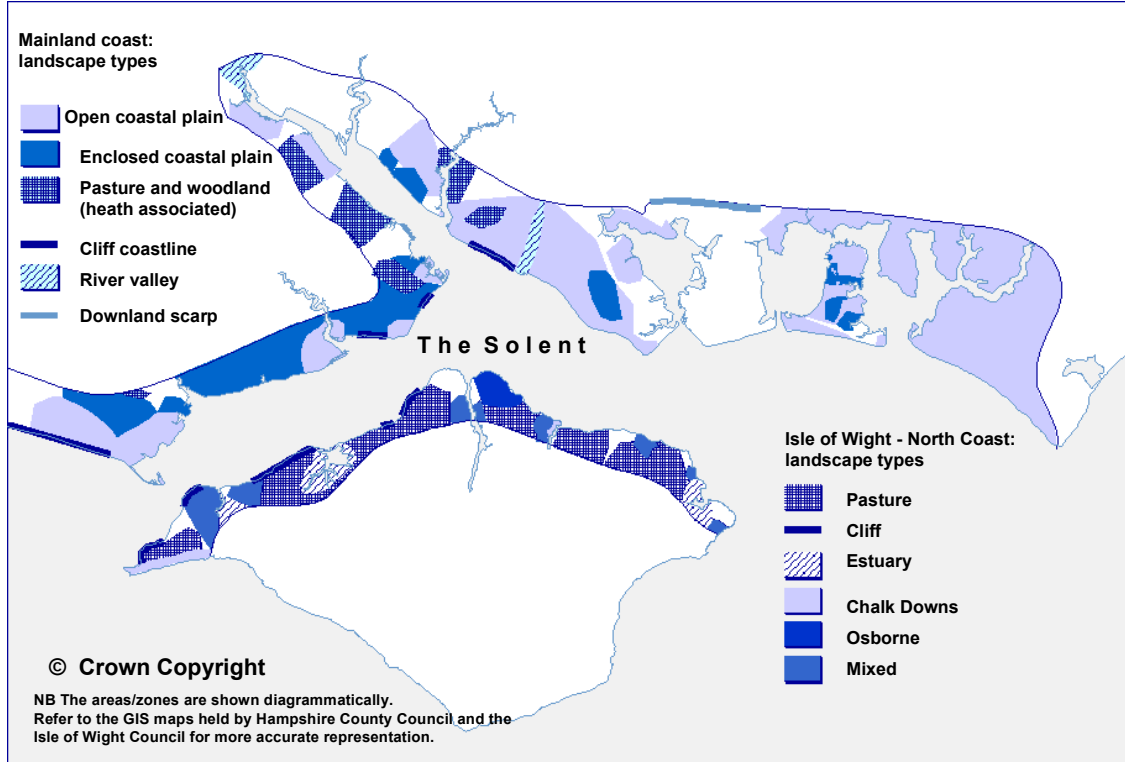


LANDSCAPE AND SEASCAPE

Long-term aim: 'to maintain the character and quality of the Solent's landscape and seascape, and enhance it where possible'.



The Position

The Solent provides a diverse and dramatic range of landscapes and seascapes. Its character is a product of the interplay between three elements, which can be described as follows:

a. The mainland coast of Hampshire and Chichester Harbour, including:

- the wooded coastline, estuaries, saltmarshes and spits of the New Forest;
- the urban, industrial and estuarine landscapes of Southampton Water, with prominent shipping activity associated with the commercial port;
- the River Hamble, with its busy recreational harbour in the lower reaches, and undisturbed wooded valley above Bursledon;
- the cliffs, shingle beaches and mudflats between Hook and Fort Gilkicker, and urban areas of Lee-on-the-Solent and Gosport (Stokes Bay);
- Portsmouth Harbour with a character defined by urban development, defence heritage and the activity of the Royal Navy and Commercial Port;
- the open and largely undeveloped shoreline, tidal waters and mudflats of Langstone Harbour;
- the varied inlets, shorelines and small settlements of Chichester Harbour.

b. The north coast of the Isle of Wight including:

- the dramatic cliffed coastline and beaches between the Needles and Yarmouth;
- the largely undeveloped low-lying and cliffed coastline between Yarmouth and Cowes, including the unspoilt expanse of Newtown Creek;
- the busy harbour of Cowes, with its focus for recreational and port activity, and the quieter reaches of the Medina River;
- the remote cliffed coastline of Osborne Bay, Kings Quay and the busier Wootton Creek;
- the mainly urban seaside coastline of Ryde, St Helens, and the quiet harbour of Bembridge.

c. The open Solent seascape, punctuated only by navigation buoys and marks, and the East Solent forts.

The constant but varied pattern of marine related activity is an intrinsic part of the character of the system, including major shipping movements (particularly in the East) and recreational craft cruising and racing in various numbers throughout the year.

The quality of landscape within the Solent is fundamentally determined by the type and quality of land-use and use of waterspace. The dominant forces which have influenced the character of the Solent in the 20th century are the growth of urban settlement on the coastal plain of Hampshire and development and reclamation associated with the growth of commerce, defence and recreational activities. The location of industries served by coastal traffic, principally the complex around Fawley, have also significantly affected the coastline's character. Change on the Isle of Wight has been much less dramatic, although similar trends can be identified. Whilst some changes to character are obvious, such as those resulting from major development, many result from a gradual process of smaller scale developments or land-use changes. Marina development has had a particularly noticeable effect on landscape in a number of places, particularly on the character of the Lyminster and Hamble Rivers.

The growth of large urban areas on the coast has brought with it an increasing requirement for local authorities to maintain and enhance the quality of the urban environment and townscapes. Urban areas of particular architectural or historic interest are recognised as Conservation Areas within which planning policies on development carry particular restrictions. Apart from their role in controlling and promoting development, local authorities also own significant areas of coastal land, and have responsibility for the maintenance of a range of amenities including open land, beaches, car parks, public launch points, country parks and nature reserves. The need for such work has increased over the decades, although there are now growing difficulties in securing adequate resources. Because the quality and character of the Solent's shorelines is critical to maintaining the character of the system as a whole, co-ordination of activity between local authorities is important, in order to make the best use of limited resources and to ensure consistency. Maximum, and co-ordinated use of the National Lottery and other funding sources needs to be made in order to secure adequate resources for future work.

There has been no definitive assessment of the quality of the Solent landscape and seascape, although assessments have been made for Chichester Harbour and the Isle of Wight Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), and by a number of the Hampshire District Councils. Similarly there is no objective information on the extent of ongoing landscape change on the undeveloped coast. Where the coast is farmed, landscape changes are likely to have followed the patterns of agricultural change, with a move towards more intensive methods of production, simplification of field systems and the provision of additional infrastructure to support equipment and storage of livestock and crops. Specifically coastal issues relate to the proximity of agricultural activity to the coastline and watercourses, and the interaction with recreational visitors. The Solent is recognised as a substantial element of the South Coast Plain landscape character area, within the Countryside Commission and English Nature's Countryside Character Programme.

What do we need to do?

1. Ensure that new land use and development maintains and enhances the character of the Solent

Land-use has a fundamental impact on the quality of landscape and seascape and the land-use planning system does, therefore, have a very important role to play in maintaining and enhancing landscape quality. Land-use plans should recognise and identify the importance of the coastal landscape and seascape and include appropriate policies to both protect important undeveloped areas and ensure, wherever possible, that development which does take place enhances landscape and townscape quality. There is a need for policies to recognise the importance of maintaining the remaining areas of undeveloped coast free from all but essential development, and to promote uses which support the long-term retention of these areas as open land. Specific policies are needed to protect Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Conservation Areas and other sites recognised because of their high landscape and townscape quality. Landscape policies for the coast also need to pay particular regard to how development is viewed from the sea and along the coastline.

LEAD ROLE: Local authorities.

Coastal landmarks are of particular practical and historic importance within the Solent, providing reference points for navigation, as well as being an important element of the character of the coastline. These sites need to be recognised and protected within the planning system.

LEAD ROLE: Local authorities.

2. Monitor landscape and seascape change

There is a need to understand and monitor the nature of gradual and piecemeal changes to the character of the Solent, and to ensure that long-term damage does not result through the cumulative effects of small-scale developments. This may be tracked through the land-use planning system, backed up by periodic revision of existing landscape assessments.

LEAD ROLE: Local authorities.

It would be desirable to draw together a single landscape and seascape assessment of the Solent based on existing recent work, and fill in any gaps.

LEAD ROLE: The lead authority and priority for this work needs to be determined. Hampshire County Council and the Isle of Wight Council probably have the best overview of the extent of current information.

3. Improve the quality of the landscape and seascape where possible

The landscape quality of the Solent is variable. There are a range of sites which have become degraded and unattractive as a result of poor quality development, neglect or lack of maintenance. The resources to improve such sites are finite, and there is an ever greater need for working in partnership on improvements, and to seek funding from external sources such as the National Lottery.



SOLENT FORUM ACTION: Flagship Project 2 of the Strategic Guidance is the Solent Environment and Access Initiative, which aims to develop a strategic approach to landscape and environmental improvements, in conjunction with the provision of improved visitor access and facilities. The initiative should take account of the need to:

- secure effective co-ordination of effort between the local authorities, and other bodies involved in landscape management and environmental improvements, in order to achieve a consistency of approach, prioritise work effectively and make best use of resources;
- seek to achieve landscape objectives in conjunction with objectives for nature conservation, protection of historic features and provision for public use and access;
- ensure that the undeveloped coast and important natural landscape features are managed to ensure their long term future, and for local authorities to work closely with the Ministry of Defence, private landowners and other land-holding bodies to achieve this;
- ensure that, where provided, amenities such as car parks, signage, litter bins and lighting are both necessary and appropriate to the landscape and maintained to a high standard;
- identify coastal eyesores and reduce their impact, or where possible remove them.

KEY ORGANISATIONS: LANDSCAPE & SEASCAPE

Lead organisations

Hampshire County Council
 Southampton City Council
 Portsmouth City Council
 Isle of Wight Council
 West Sussex County Council
 Chichester District Council
 New Forest District Council
 Eastleigh Borough Council
 Fareham Borough Council
 Gosport Borough Council
 Havant Borough Council

Other key organisations

Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions

Department of Culture, Media and Sport
 Ministry of Defence
 Countryside Commission
 English Heritage
 Environment Agency
 Lymington Harbour Commissioners
 Beaulieu River Management
 Associated British Ports
 Queen's Harbour Master
 Langstone Harbour Board
 Chichester Harbour Conservancy
 Yarmouth Harbour Commissioners
 Cowes Harbour Commissioners
 Bembridge Harbour Company
 Private Landowners
 Solent Protection Society
 Council for the Protection of Rural England
 Hampshire Gardens Trust