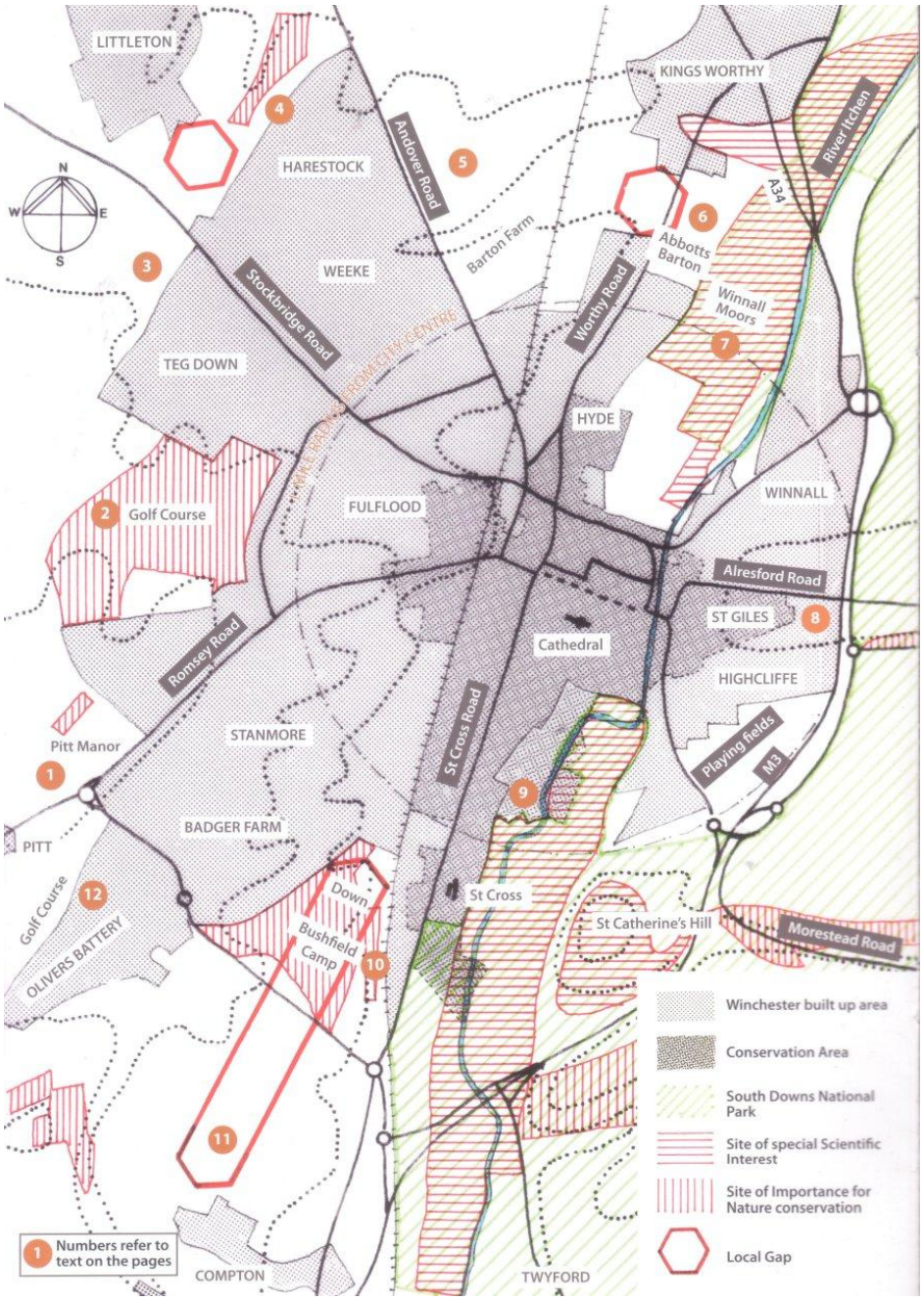
Winchester and its setting



Map of Winchester showing its Setting

Acknowledgements

Published by the City of Winchester Trust and Hampshire Gardens Trust in 2011, with acknowledgements to the *Winchester City and its setting Report (1988)* and *Winchester Heart of a City (2009)*.

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Layout and design by Judith Blake. Printed by Sarsen Press, 22 Hyde Street Winchester SO23 7DR.

Winchester and its Setting - Introduction



View of Winchester looking west by G.F.Robson, 1827

A very important component of the character of the City is its landscape setting. In this booklet the two Trusts explain why this is so. The City of Winchester Trust was set up in 1957. The aim of the Trust is to preserve the distinctive and evolving character of the City, by seeking to influence the decisions of the City and County Councils, the South Downs National Park Authority and the proposals of developers.

The Hampshire Gardens Trust was founded in 1985 and its aim is to conserve, protect and enhance the rich heritage of historic parks, gardens and green spaces in the county, the unique setting of the city of Winchester is therefore of importance to the Trust.

'We removed to Winchester for the convenience of a Library, and find it an exceeding pleasant Town, enriched with a beautiful Cathedral and surrounded by a fresh looking country….The whole Town is beautifully wooded – From the Hill at the eastern extremity you see a prospect of Streets, and the Buildings mixed up with Trees – Then there are the most beautiful streams about I ever saw – full of Trout.' So wrote John Keats in 1819 when the population of Winchester was about 17,000.

Nearly 200 years later, this description of the City is still very recognisable, even when it has developed suburbs and has a population of 42,000. The valued historic, architectural and landscape character of Winchester has been recognised in planning terms by a number of designations, whose purpose is to conserve and enhance. These designations are shown on the map on the previous page.

This booklet highlights the importance of these protected areas in maintaining the valued setting of the City when viewed both from within and without. It also highlights

where the character of the City is vulnerable to possible development, where no protection exists at present.

Whether protected or not, the two Trusts, believe that continual vigilance needs to be exercised by all involved in the future development of Winchester, be they planning applicants, planning officers or members of planning committees charged with decisions, to ensure that Winchester continues to be 'an exceedingly pleasant Town'. To that end this booklet offers awareness and guidance, on the importance of conserving and maintaining the valued landscape setting of the City.

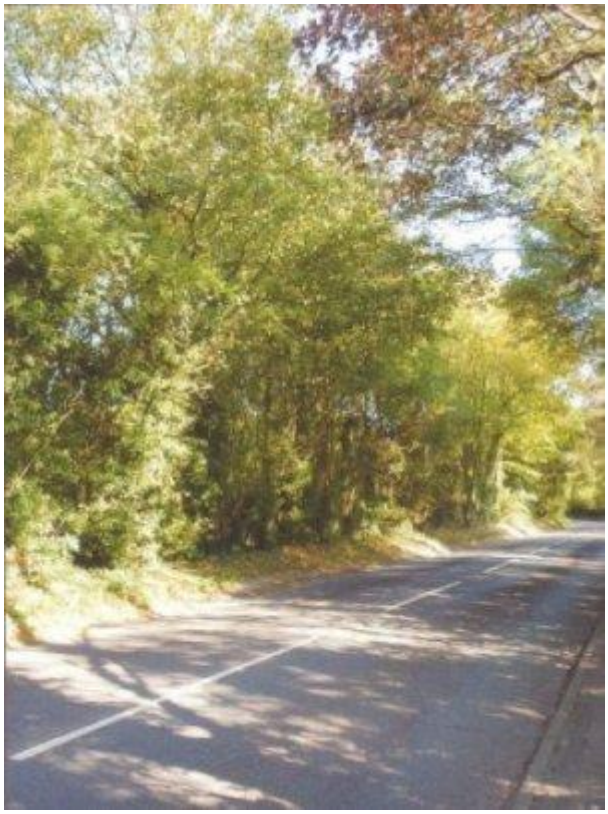
Winchester and its Setting - Winchester viewed from the outside

The city is sited in the valley of the River Itchen. From the valley the chalk downland rises gently to the west and more dramatically to the east. The City is surrounded on all sides by countryside, and the interaction of town and country is evident in all directions. Starting from the south and moving clockwise around the outside of the City, the setting is divided into twelve sections, and is described in terms of significance, existing protection and vulnerability.

Winchester and its Setting - Western Setting

Kilham Lane/ Pitt Manor

The defined built-up area of the City finishes on the north east side of Kilham Lane. On the other side the only buildings are Pitt Manor (a Registered Historic Park and Garden) and Pitt Manor Cottage, where the mixed parkland and farmland has been designated as a Local Reserve Site for housing. This has been the subject of an outline planning application for 200 dwellings and a park and ride car park, which is currently going through the appeal process. This development would maintain the green edge of Kilham Lane and abutting Pitt Manor Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), but, on a gentle south-westward slope, it would be visible from the bridleway which skirts the boundary, and from distant viewpoints such as the village of Pitt and the South Winchester Golf Course, particularly when the perimeter tree belts are not in leaf. It would also have a detrimental effect on the green corridor approach to Winchester along the Romsey Road, from where glimpses of the field can be seen through the narrow belt of trees. The proposed vehicular access to the housing and the car park, a bus lay-by and intrusive public car park lighting would effectively destroy this part of the distinctive approach to Winchester that Romsey Road provides.



Pitt Manor Site, Romsey Road boundary



View of Pitt Manor site from Pitt

Teg Down

This is a large area of undulating calcareous grassland that falls away from the ridge of trees along Chilbolton Avenue that forms part of the tree lined horizon around the centre of the City. The area is a SINC and is used by the Royal Winchester Golf Course.



Royal Winchester Golf Course

Salters Lane/Lanham Lane

These two lanes have a totally rural edge with views of the countryside extending towards Sparsholt and beyond. The Sparsholt Woodlands Landscape is one of undulating well drained chalkland that provides the north west setting for Winchester. Recent development, some of quite high density for an edge of City location, has taken place in both lanes.



Farmland from Salters Lane


Kennel Lane looking towards Littleton

Harestock/Littleton

Pre 1945 development took place on the south east side of Harestock Road. Post 1945 development in Harestock has now extended the built up area of Winchester up to the east side of Harestock Road. On the north west side on Crown Land is the Sir John Moore Barracks, surrounded by woodland so that this recent development is barely visible. Between Kennel Lane and Stockbridge Road is the Local Gap between Winchester and Littleton.

Winchester and its Setting - Northern Setting

Three Maids Hill/Andover Road

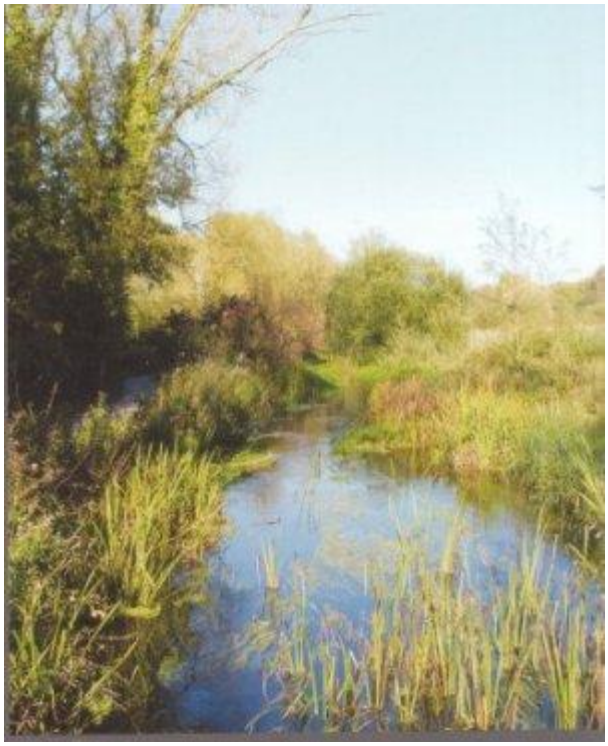
This area to the north of the City includes the 93 hectares of Barton Farm, which brings a ‘green wedge’ of good quality farmland close to the city centre. As well as allowing a rural approach to Winchester along the Andover Road and the railway, this area of gently undulating arable land provides a visual link across the Itchen Valley to the South Downs National Park and gives panoramic views northwards to open countryside.


Use of trees on 65m ridge line, Barton Farm

A line of tall trees cuts across the site on the 65 metre ridge line north of which the land slopes gently to Well House Lane, with a steeper embankment at the NE corner. Along the southern edge a dense belt of tree cover softens the built-up residential area of Park Road and Old Gardens. These trees also contribute to the tree-lined horizon around the city. Barton Farm is designated as a “reserve” site for 2000 houses and supporting infrastructure, and has been the subject of successive planning applications and appeals. The latest was dismissed by the Secretary of State, partly on the grounds that “the proposals did not meet planning policies seeking to protect and enhance the special and historic character of Winchester and its landscape setting”. If development of this greenfield site eventually goes ahead, it would destroy the ‘green wedge’, and extend the urban edge of Winchester much further into the countryside and risk destroying one of the ‘green wedges’, which are such an important characteristic of the City, unless very carefully designed to perpetuate the green corridor.



View towards A34 from King's Way footpath at Abbotts Barton


Winnall Moors

Abbotts Barton/River valley north

The dense housing of Hyde gives way northwards to sports fields in the river flood-plain and to the lower density housing of Abbotts Barton. North of this the proposed development of 90 houses in a field off Francis Gardens will reduce the rural gap, of less than a kilometer, between the built up area of Winchester and Headbourne Worthy/Kings Worthy.

Winnall

Winnall Moors is an area of floated water-meadows, now protected as a Nature Reserve, and provides an area of natural wetland close to the centre of the City. The eastern part is within the South Downs National Park. The northern extremity of the site extends as far as the A34 at Headbourne Worthy. At the southern end adjoining the built up area of the City are allotments, playing fields and the River Park Recreation Centre. To the east the Winnall Estate exists as a triangle of housing, superstores and industry, extending the built up area of the City northwards to the edge of Easton Down. The eastern boundary of the Winnall housing area is defined by the M3.

Winchester and its Setting - Eastern Setting

St Giles Hill/Highcliffe/Bar End



View of Highcliffe vand M3 from Morestead Road

The eastern boundary is again defined by the M3, with the National Park beyond. St Giles Hill with its tree-cover provides an important landscape feature in views within the City, particularly as an eastern backdrop to views from the southern river valley. The setting to Highcliffe and Bar End is a mixed use land pattern. To the south of the Highcliffe housing area, exposed on a flat plain, are valued playing fields and the athletics stadium, together with allotments and some grazing land. To the west are industrial premises and the park and ride site which are less visible in the setting being screened by the landform and trees.



Skate park and Highcliffe



View of Meads across to Winchester College
Click to enlarge

College/St Cross/River valley south


View of Meads across to Winchester College


St Catherine's Hill


St Cross Church and Hospital


River Itchen looking north, Five Bridges Road

The southern water meadows between the city centre and St Cross are bounded by Winchester College and the Conservation Area to the west and St Catherine's Hill and the National Park to the east. The river valley is an SSSI. These designations, reflect the high quality and value of this landscape which provides an outstanding setting for the City.

Whiteshute Ridge, Bushfield Down and Camp

This ridge, most of which is designated as a SINC, provides an important backdrop on three sides and has a sensitive relationship with the City, the river valley and the National Park. To the west, the high open land of Whiteshute Ridge provides an attractive and valued backdrop to Badger Farm and offers long views of the city and the countryside to the north.

The north facing slope of Bushfield Down has an extensive panoramic view of the City (marred only by overhead powerlines) encompassing the Cathedral, the College Chapel, St Cross and St Catherine's Hill. In turn the Down, including the site of the long abandoned army camp, provides a centuries old view over St Cross Hospital from the National Park. Kim Wilkie has referred to this downland as 'the key to the setting of Winchester'.



Panorama View from Bushfield Camp on the left to the City on right

Winchester and its Setting - Southern Setting

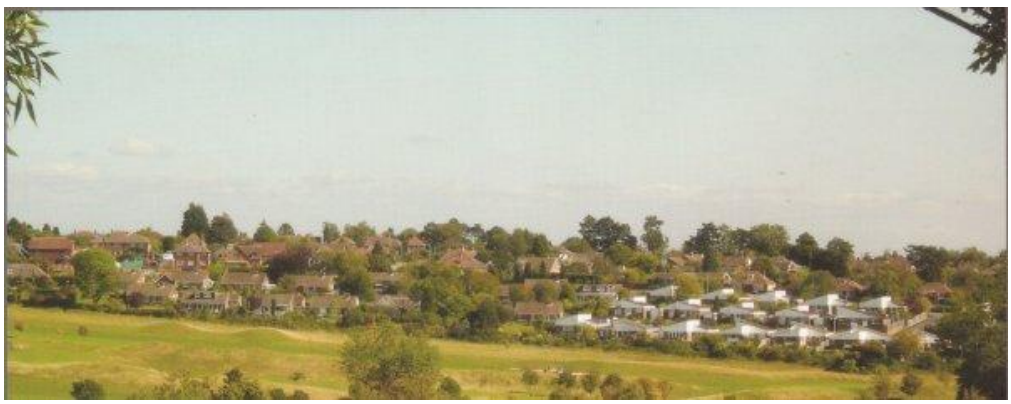
Compton



Cathedral from Compton Down

Northward from the Compton Ridge, there is a stunning view of the Cathedral, which appears to be the sole occupant of the chalk downland setting, with St Catherine's Hill to the east. Towards the foreground the tree lined Roman Road offers a dramatic landscape feature. In the middle ground there is a large area of undulating farmland, which forms part of the Local Gap between Winchester and Compton.

Oliver's Battery



Olivers Battery

This residential suburb is sited on a flat topped chalk ridge, with steep slopes falling away to the east and surrounded by countryside on its western and south eastern side, which contains the Yew Hill Butterfly Reserve (SINC). The housing presents a hard edge when viewed from Romsey Road, in between which is a dry valley that is the site of the South Winchester Golf Course with its string of lakes. From the top of the ridge there are views of the countryside to the west, south and east, which are part of the Hursley Scarplands Landscape, a topographically complex Upper Chalk landscape of ridges, scarps and valleys with numerous areas of small woodland. The character of this area should be maintained (Oliver's Battery Village Design Statement adopted 2008).

Winchester and its Setting - The Setting inside the City

The value of the landscape setting is not just confined to the outside view of Winchester. It also has a value when moving through the City and from many vantage points, emphasizing the close link between town and country and also the compact urban area, which at its centre from east to west is only two miles wide. Approaching the city centre on the radial roads from the west, the countryside to the east can be viewed from the Stockbridge and Romsey Roads, which gives emphasis to the compactness of the City. Unlike many comparable towns, the approaches to Winchester are not spoiled by unsightly sprawling development.



Stockbridge Road


Romsey Road

The approaches from the west, and to a slightly lesser extent the north and south, cross a clearly defined division between town and country while those in the east along Easton Lane and Bar End exhibit the first stages of sprawl.



Easton Lane



Bar End

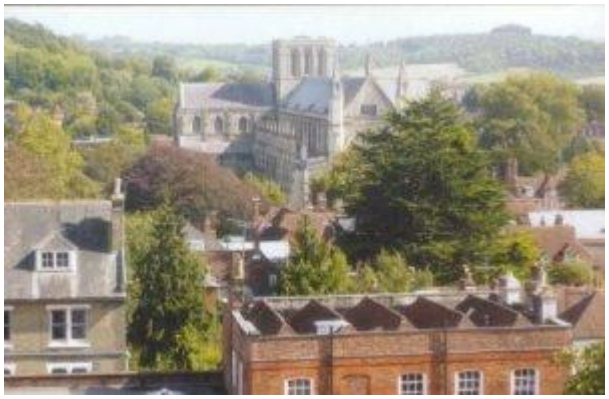
Within the City there are many fine views that reinforce the close links between town and country. From Stanmore and St James's Lane in particular, there are extensive views to the east of the National Park and St Catherine's Hill.


Stanmore


Oram's Arbour

In addition to the view of St Giles Hill from the High Street, there are views of the wider countryside to the east from the area around the Castle and the Law Courts and from Oram’s Arbour.

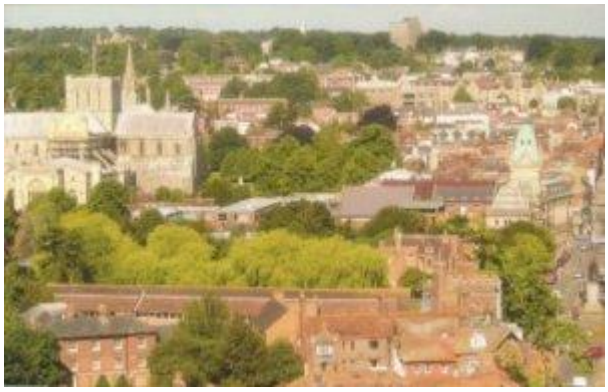

High Street and St Giles Hill


View from the Law Court

Winchester and its Setting - Trees and the landscape

A vital component of the landscape setting, in addition to the topography of chalk downland and the River Itchen, are the trees in the surrounding countryside and those within the City. A ridge running around the west of the city centre provides a

continuous belt of tree cover that is only broken by the slab block of the Police HQ and the tower of the Prison. Within the city centre and the residential suburbs there is extensive tree cover that creates a tree dominant landscape. This is dependent on space in car parks, public parks, gardens and highways that allow trees to flourish. It is of great importance that as generations of trees grow part maturity, they are replaced by new planting of similar species.



Ridge of trees around City Centre

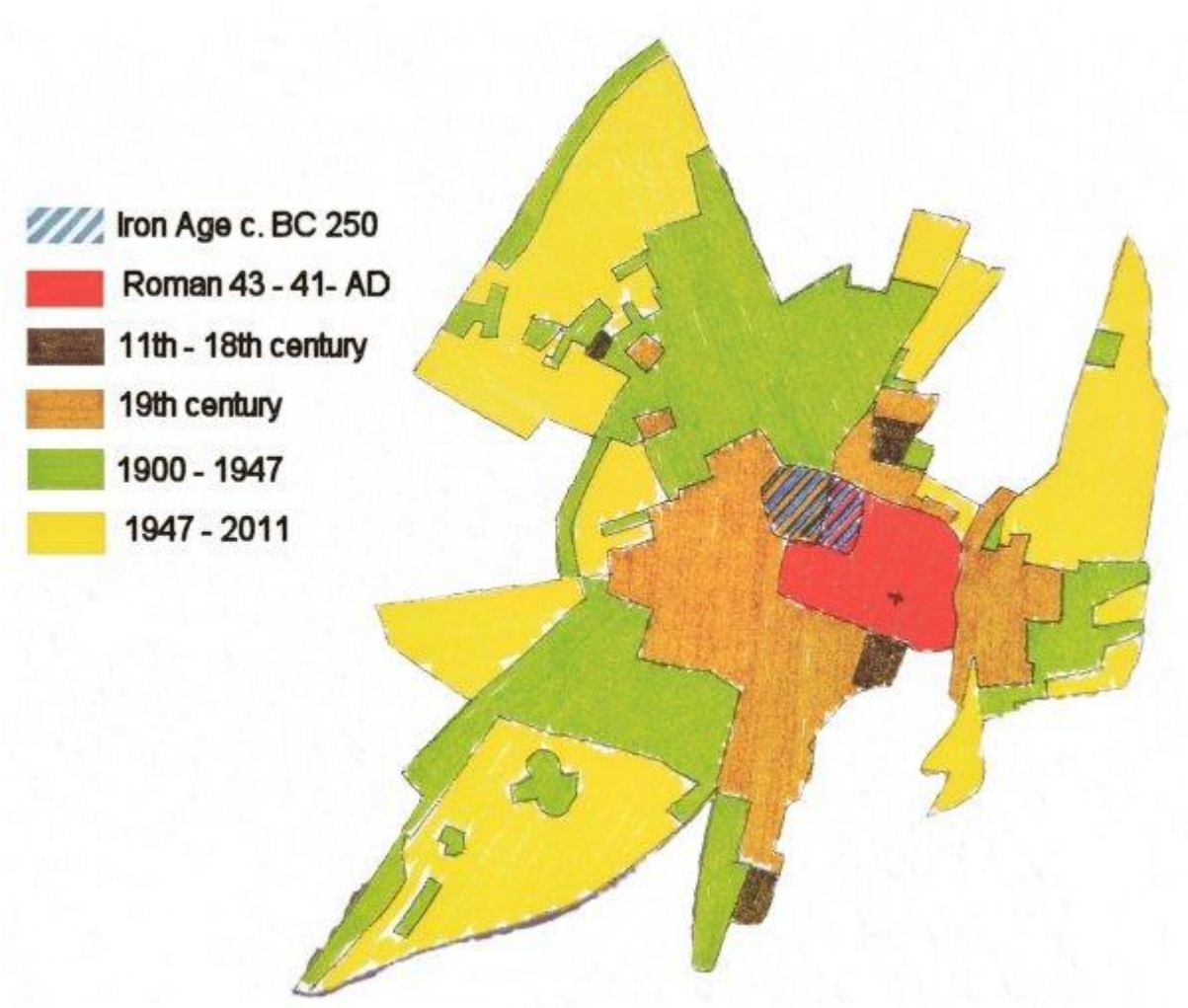


Fulflood - valley of trees, gardens and houses

Winchester and its Setting - Winchester and growth

Winchester has evolved and grown over a period of 2,260 years. Beginning with the Iron Age settlements on St Catherine's Hill and Oram's Arbour (c. 250BC), followed by the Roman city from 43 to 410AD, Winchester grew slowly until the 19th century, when the City expanded in all four directions from the city walls. The 20th century saw major expansion to the west and to a lesser extent to the east, which more than doubled the urban area. So far this expansion to the west and to a lesser extent to the east, which more than doubled the urban area. So far this expansion has caused less harm than might be expected, due to the landform, the great preponderance of trees and the 'green wedge' that characterize the principal apoproach roads.

To maintain the valued setting of Winchester, planning policies responding to the need for growth will have to steer a sensitive course that avoids both unsightly peripheral spread and damage to the assets of the City. Policies will have to very carefully manage 'the China Cabinet problem'.



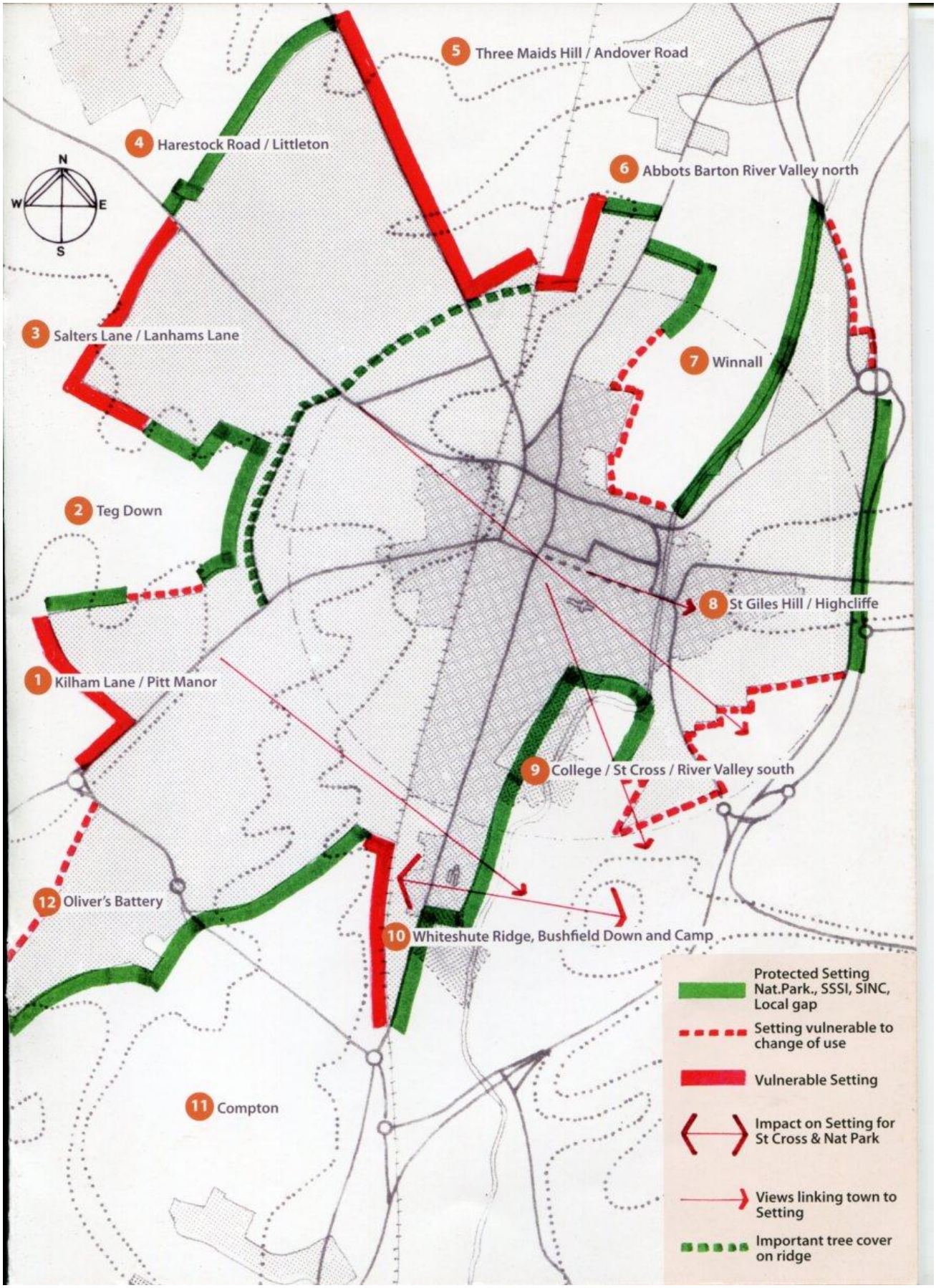
Growth of Winchester



The China Cabinet problem

The cabinet has the capacity to store and display precious china securely and safely. If china continues to be acquired, the capacity of the cabinet will be exceeded. China within the cabinet may then become damaged from overloading, and the elegance of the cabinet suffer from external storage.

Winchester and its Setting - Conclusion



Map of Winchester showing its Setting vulnerability

The value and significance of the River Itchen, chalk downland and tree cover that combine to create the landscape setting for Winchester is subject to varying levels of protection and vulnerability. Numbers refer to the areas of the setting, shown on the map on this page.

Protected areas

On the assumption that national planning policies for the National Park, SSIs, and local planning policies for SINCs and Local Gaps remain robust, the areas of the setting that are provided with protection are:-
2. Teg Down, 4. Harestock, 6. Abbotts Barton, 7. Winnall (part), 8. Winnall/Highcliffe(east side), 9. River Itchen south, 11. Compton

Vulnerable areas

These areas, mainly used for recreation, could, if changes of use were permitted, accommodate limited and contained levels of development. If sensitively designed they could enhance the landscape setting.
2. Teg Down (south), 7. Winnall (south), 8. Highcliffe/Bar End, 12. Olivers Battery (NW)

Unprotected areas

These are areas that have no protection from proposals that would expand the city boundaries, which would have a serious impact on the setting and compromise the compactness of the City. They are:-
1. Kilham Lane/Pitt, 3.Salters Lane, 5. Barton Farm, 10. Bushfield

The Trusts conclude from this assessment of Winchester and its setting, that the landscape surrounding the whole of the City has an importance that planning authorities should recognize by designating it as a heritage asset in Development Plans.

Winchester and its Setting - Glossary

National Park – Under the Environmental Act 1995, a Park Authority has a statutory purpose to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the Park.

SSSI – Sites of Special Scientific Interest – these are designated by English Nature under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, for their special ecological or geological interest.

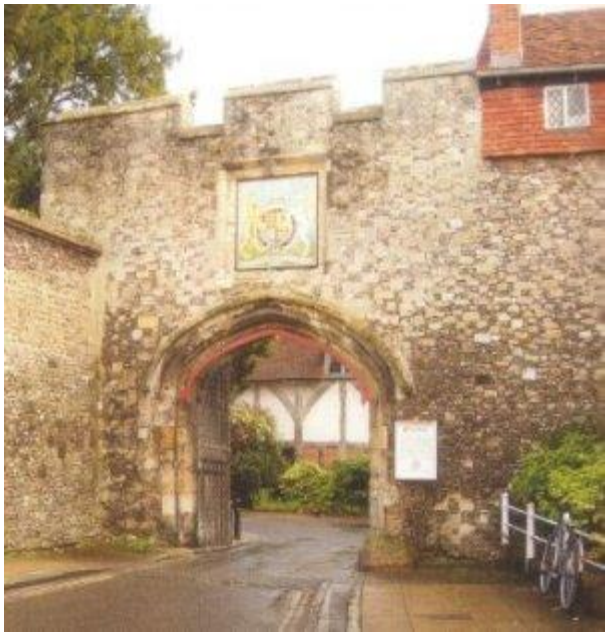
SINC – Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation – sites within Hampshire that are of particular importance for nature conservation, containing habitats or features which are effectively irreplaceable.

Local Gap – area of countryside designated by the Local Planning Authority as a means of conserving the separate identity of settlements. Local gaps are defined to preserve the separate identities of smaller settlements at risk of coalescence and cover locally important areas of open and undeveloped land.

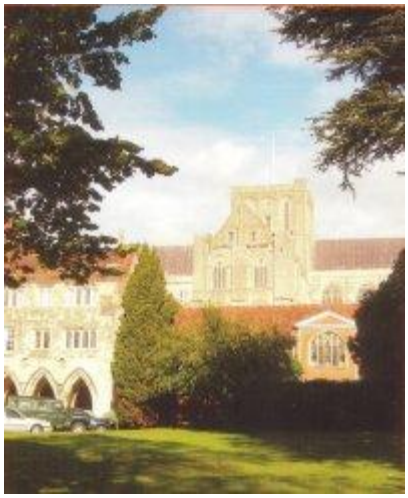
Winchester and its Setting - An impression



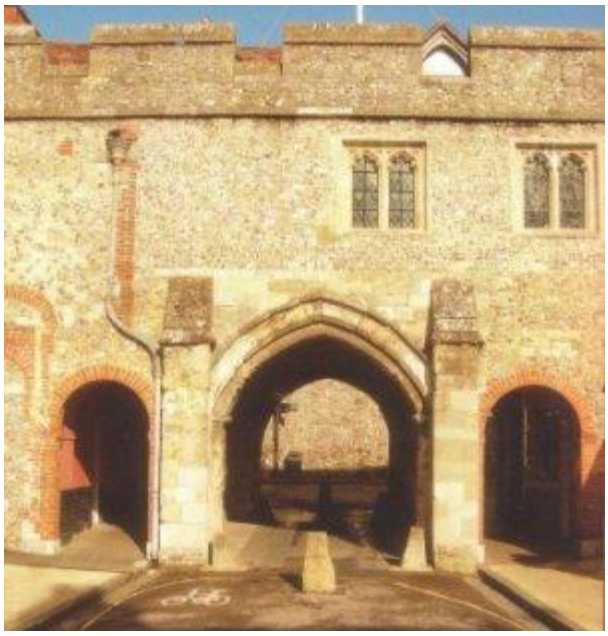
High Street/Butter Cross



Priory Gate



Cathedral Close



Kings Gate

“Of all the cities in England, Winchester has managed to sit particularly comfortably in its landscape. The settlement shelters in a valley bowl where the waters of the River Itchen collect. The web of streams and channels and their inherent defences helped Alfred the Great to choose the town as his capital, but the Norman shift to London allowed Winchester to sleep on as a provincial city.

Today you can still walk from the Iron Age fort in the open downland across the medieval water meadows, through the King’s Gate in the city walls and the Priory Gate to the Cathedral Close and reach the Buttercross in the centre of the city without passing a petrol station, a Tesco or a B&Q. What is more, when you look back from the Buttercross, you can still see the open hillsides that surround the city and when you approach from a distance the towers of the Cathedral, the Guildhall, the Prison and the College chapel stand out as the principal buildings. Tess of the

d’Urberville’s hanging tower is the first glimpse of the city from miles away. Town and countryside remain united.”

Kim Wilkie, Landscape Architect



Water meadows



St Catherine's Hill