NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK (DESIGNATION)
ORDER 2002

INQUIRY REPORT

PROVIDED TO

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD
AND RURAL AFFAIRS

LANDSCAPE ASSESSOR’S RECOMMENDATIONS

& REPORT
BOUNDARY SECTIONS 1 & 2

Land north of Totton, east of the A326/A36

2.99 Even before construction of the A326 Totton Bypass the 1st Local Plan Inspector concluded that the area of contention did not display Forest-like characteristics in sufficient strength or depth to justify inclusion in the NFHA, either as part of the wider Forest landscape or on the basis of outstanding natural beauty in its own right. This approach has endured through subsequent decisions about the NFHA made by the 2nd Local Plan Inspector and the High Court.

2.100 Since the first Local Plan Inquiry in 1992 the bypass has been built and the Testwood Lakes area has been developed on the Test/Blackwater floodplain and the lower Hillstreet slopes. Another new consideration in the intervening period has been the publication of the Countryside Character Area maps (CD209) which draw an indicative boundary between the New Forest and the South Hampshire Lowlands following the line of the A326/A36 via Ower.

2.101 New Forest landscape character is moving into a zone of transition in this area. In defining the edge of the New Forest National Park it is important to establish an unequivocal and robust boundary that answers without question the natural beauty test, all the more so in an area with a highly visible and heavily used road network. Even allowing for the indicative nature of the Character Area maps and the inevitable difficulty of considering transition zones, the claims of the area of contention for inclusion in the NFNP against the natural beauty test have not increased. The severance effect is now strongly experienced, especially north of Salisbury Road. For instance, views northwards from the A326/A36 junction near Loperwood Lane; eastwards from the A36 between Loperwood and Ower Roundabout; and westwards from the A36(T) between the same two points are of a generally flat pastoral landscape criss-crossed by major roads bearing heavy traffic. In addition the Enclosed Valley Sides landscape character type does not display adequate connectivity to the landscapes of the New Forest.

2.102 In considering the ‘gateway’ issue, I am not convinced by the Agency’s claim that the area around J2 of the M27 presents a strong sense of arrival at the commencement of the New Forest. A westbound traveller along the elevated section of the motorway across the Test Valley would notice the upcoming slopes, especially to the south, but before entering the cutting after Ower there are few real clues of arrival at the New Forest, except to the professional eye. I contend that for the majority there would be little to uplift the spirit and the landscape would appear little different from the small fields and woods on the other side of the Test near Rownhams.

2.103 The unifying factor of topography in this area is not reason enough to include all areas of that landform which is anyway very much on the edge of the topographic unit and where other detracting factors are strongly affecting landscape quality.
2.104 Consideration of the existing powerful landscape detractors in this area and their impact on landscape quality and hence the effect on the area generally meeting the natural beauty criterion, has not I believe been given due weight by the Agency.

2.105 Referring briefly to the area’s contribution to the historic dispersed pastoral system, the area as a whole clearly contributes to the commoning economy in that there is land with common rights and land used by commoners for back-up grazing. However, these factors cannot elevate the quality of the landscape in natural beauty terms or overcome the pervading influence of the powerful landscape detractors present here.

2.106 Consequently I conclude that although parts of this area do display New Forest characteristics they are not present consistently enough. Where they are present, they are often not of sufficient standard to warrant National Park status. The impact of detractors in this area is considerable to the extent that even in places where New Forest characteristics do exist they are often compromised by incongruous elements, thereby affecting landscape intactness, resulting in the reduction of landscape quality to a level below that necessary for designation.

2.107 For the purpose of description of boundary sections 1 and 2, the area is divided into 5 smaller parcels of land radiating out of Junction 2 of the M27 which are considered individually and then looked at together to arrive at a conclusion on the recommended revised boundary line.

2.108 I start with area 1 around Wade Hill Farm, north east of J2 M27 as far as the River Blackwater. Throughout this area I find that New Forest characteristics, such as mature hedgerow oaks and small scale fields are present to a certain extent, but nonetheless the area is heavily affected by the motorway corridor and pylon routes both visually and audibly. Even though there are some views possible towards the higher ground and wooded skyline to the west the overall orientation of this area is to the north and east, ie towards the Test Valley and river complex. On the ground I find that the River Blackwater does not constitute an easily recognised and robust boundary for the NFNP being a relatively minor watercourse which is low lying, and hidden by riparian vegetation in an area which contains several strong artificial features in the landscape.

2.109 Area 2 is the land south east of J2 M27 including Brooke’s Hill, Hill Street and Testwood Lakes up to Salisbury Road. The Hillstreet ridge forms an extremity of the New Forest plateau and has some features associated with ancient forest farmland such as small pastoral fields and the linear settlement of Hillstreet. This area displays little overall connectivity to the New Forest either physically or perceptually, except in the settlement form of Hill Street itself, the landform west of Hill Street and the field pattern on the east facing slopes between Testwood Lakes and Hill Street. The landcover and field pattern is generally fragmented and therefore the landscape is not intact, especially around Brooke’s Hill. Testwood Lakes is an artificial, albeit well designed landscape which has replaced the original pastoral format and now has little to really relate it to the landscapes of the New Forest. Functionally the Testwood Lakes area is primarily a partially complete water supply and storage utility site, admittedly with considerable recreation potential, but in an urban fringe landscape context. Due to the higher ground and road cutting in the west of this area the
motorway impact is reduced visually to a certain extent, but still very evident audibly particularly at Brooke’s Hill, as is the visual impact of the pylon network. However there are some good quality views north and west into the New Forest.

2.110 Area 3 is south of Salisbury Road to the edge of Totton, east of A326. The area from Crofts Farm to Sharves Hill, but not including the industrial area at Calmore Croft Farm, displays more adequately than any other in this boundary section, both clear landscape character connectivity to the New Forest and reasonable landscape quality which moves towards satisfying the natural beauty criterion. However this area is physically severed from the proposed NFNP by the busy dualled A326 and there are urban edge characteristics and influences evident on the southern edge towards Totton.

2.111 Areas 4 and 5 lie north west and south west of J2 M27 and extend across to the A36 containing Golden Gutter and Wade Park Farm. These are similar in that they are both poorly differentiated in landscape character terms and completely encircled by the motorway, trunk and A road network, experiencing the attendant intrusion that this brings. Even though there is factual landuse evidence of their connection to the New Forest through commoning use, visually the landscape quality here is poor with little possibility of meeting the natural beauty criterion.

2.112 Areas 1-5 as described above all fail to meet the natural beauty criterion. I therefore recommend that the boundary should follow the A36 from the Ower roundabout, across the M27 meeting the A326 at the Salisbury Road junction, continuing down the A326 to Loperwood Road to join up with the NFNP boundary section 2, following that without any amendment.

Land west of the A326/A36(T)

2.113 With regard to the objection concerning Paultons Park site and the M27 corridor I consider that this area is well within the high quality New Forest landscapes west of the A326. The theme park itself is well screened by boundary vegetation and internal plantings typically found within the New Forest. Also, I find that the majority of the motorway corridor west of Junction 2 is in cutting, which reduces the visual and audible impact and where it is not, interesting glimpses of the New Forest are available. I therefore consider that the area of concern is well contained and within an extensive tract of countryside that meets the natural beauty criterion and see no reason for it to be excluded.

Totton Urban Area

2.114 While appreciating the considerable historic legacy of the urban core of Totton and its relationship with several areas of interest close-by, I do not find that the town has anything to do with the natural beauty of the NFNP. Totton has expanded massively since the middle of the last century with extensive suburban areas of post war and more recent housing together with industrial sites at the waterside and Calmore. The urban area of Totton does not meet the natural beauty criterion and is not part of an extensive tract of countryside that does meet the criterion. I therefore conclude that Totton does not qualify to be included in the NFNP on natural beauty grounds.
 Manor Lands of Minstead

2.115 The Manor Lands enjoy a unique legal status in relation to other land within the perambulation. I find that the typical landscape types as assessed by the Agency are formed by local farmlands, woodlands and parklands which are similar to those found throughout the New Forest and integral to the landscape mosaic. The area contains many characteristic features such as small woods and fields contrasted by larger landscape features such as Manor Park and Manor Wood with some tranquil and hidden small valleys with a typical dispersed settlement pattern of Minstead village which contain many vernacular and often historic buildings. I conclude that the Manor Lands of Minstead are situated within the heartland of the characteristic landscapes of the New Forest which are intact and in good condition displaying high landscape quality. I have no hesitation in endorsing the inclusion of this area within the NFNP.

BOUNDARY SECTIONS 3 to 10

Eling to Marchwood

3.242 The area lying between the towns of Totton and Marchwood extending to MLW and Eling Channel is contained within the boundary of the NFHA while the area to the north of Eling Channel which covers the full extent of the Eling and Bury saltmarsh SSSI is also within the Designation Order.

3.243 I agree that the majority of the terrestrial land is fairly typical of the New Forest landscape character type, Ancient Forest Farmlands, as did LUC for the NFHA previously which gave recognition to the area’s natural beauty at that time. The area covered by this landscape type extends across the railway and A326 to the west, almost as far as the Perambulation beyond Langley Wood and adjacent copses where it increasingly becomes more typical of the type as one moves west.

3.244 The inter-tidal area and waterside edge is classified as a narrow section of the Coastal Fringe landscape type while the north and south boundaries are formed by the edges of the urban areas. An area of the Heavy Industry landscape type which includes the sewage works and incinerator site is found at the waterside near to Marchwood. However at the waterside of the Totton urban area I find another sizeable additional area of the Heavy Industry landscape type at Eling Wharf backed by the urban edge (on land associated with objections from Great Marsh Ltd/Burt Boulton Holdings/Koppers UK Ltd) which continues up to the A35 road bridge crossing the Test, resulting in this waterside section of the proposed NFNP being effectively sandwiched between two areas of the Heavy Industry type looking directly on to a major container port on the opposite bank of Southampton Water.

3.245 I agree partly that today this area contains elements and landscape character typical of the New Forest showing in places a landscape pattern of small irregular fields, hedgerows and hedgerow trees and some small woodlands. The multiple national and international nature conservation designations in the intertidal zone and historical linkages especially in the vicinity of Eling village and Eling Tide Mill, each with vernacular architectural style, are also recognised for the qualities that they impart to the area. However as one moves away from the village to the south and
south east the landscape grades into the ordinary until it meets the road and rail corridor which physically separates it from the proposed NFNP area west of the A326. The sizeable mineral extraction site north of Marchwood currently offers no New Forest landscape quality and the approved restoration plan indicates that the landscape conditions will eventually be no more than ordinary, nor give any greater connectivity to the New Forest, and there is no certainty of an improved restoration scheme.

3.246 Views into the area from Southampton show that the area has some relationship with the New Forest through the partly wooded waters edge and the skyline at Trotts Farm but the remaining skyline is further inland across the A326 at Golt’s Copse.

3.247 When looking out of the area, particularly at the waterside, there is no impression that this is an area of outstanding natural beauty, especially as major industrial detractors are seen at close range so visual impact is intensified. For instance looking across Southampton Water from Eling waterside, which is as little as 500m wide at this point, the eye meets the stacked wall of containers at the container port and other dockside facilities and the urban development of the city on rising ground behind, all with their associated noise profiles.

3.248 Looking north the view is directed by a double set of pylons which cross the shoreline footpath and saltmarsh, forming a ‘wirescape’ which draws the eye towards the raised and dualled flyover, road bridge and railway crossing the Test about a kilometre away, together with the much nearer view of the drums and containers of the storage facility at Eling Wharf immediately across Eling Channel, which is less than 50 metres across at the closest point. None of this equates with the outstanding natural beauty and landscape experience normally associated with being in a National Park.

3.249 In terms of overall connectivity the area appears to be generally isolated from the rest of the New Forest, due to its position at the head of the navigable waterside and especially by the A326, rail and pylon corridor between Jacob’s Gutter and Trotts Farm.

3.250 While I accept the strategic importance of this limited area of open countryside, currently this landscape is subject to strong urban and industrial components which impose a negative influence on landscape quality, resulting in a very uneven landscape condition, so that overall the natural beauty criterion is not adequately satisfied in order to recommend the area for National Park designation.

Marchwood to Hythe

3.251 While accepting that the reclaimed land at Dibden is now singularly the largest area of semi-natural grassland on the waterside, there is no question that this is an artificial landscape consisting of made-up ground from marine dredged material progressively placed on top of a once extensive saltmarsh environment. This now terrestrial area of around 200 hectares does possess unique physical qualities and conditions due to the nature of the introduced substrate and the dynamism of ecological evolution, which is recognised through the high grade nature conservation
designation status awarded, which also includes the remaining foreshore, but nevertheless today shows little of the character of New Forest landscapes.

3.252 Accepting that reclamation has occurred here since the 18th century and more intensively in the last 50 years, the landscape transformation has been intermittent and progressive, but not historically characteristic of the New Forest, nor is the land any more likely to satisfy the natural beauty criterion than any other brown field site occurring on the edge of the proposed NFNP.

3.253 The area does have a sense of isolation and a certain type of wildness due mainly to the extent of flat ground and its open nature, although the landscape cannot be directly experienced as there is no public access onto the reclaim itself and views of it are limited, mainly available from the water itself or from Southampton city. The sense of wildness and tranquility is also challenged by the setting between the busy military and commercial port activities of Marchwood and Southampton and the urban residential environment of Hythe where the recent marina housing development provides one of the rare but key view points over the whole area.

3.254 Due to these unique conditions but as part of the Coastal Fringe landscape type, the reclaim possesses limited commonality with other areas of the type within the NFHA and perambulation, and I consider that the reclaim itself falls at the lower end of a spectrum covering all grades of this type.

3.255 Turning to the land objected to by the Defence Estates close to Pumpfield Farm which is part of the Ancient Forest Farmlands type, I find that the landscape of this hidden area is in a poor condition, with one field having a large earth mound of introduced material. The area is visually affected by the nature of the multiple rail corridor, security monitoring and fencing of the Military port with glimpses of urban fringe characteristics beyond. The area does not offer a meaningful edge to the NFNP and does not possess outstanding natural beauty in any way.

3.256 Behind the landward bund and drainage channel skirting the reclaim’s western edge, I find a very different landscape situation evident in the presence of the Ancient Forest Farmlands landscape type. An older historic shoreline and many New Forest landscape and land use characteristics occur throughout, especially at Veal’s Farm and below West Cliff Hall, rising up to the low ridge that runs parallel but inland of Southampton Water. This elevated land with frequent fine distant views across to the waterside to the east and occasionally west into the heart of the New Forest, is most prominent from Marchwood Priory to Applemore Hill, but with associated higher ground at Dibden church and golf course fading through to the lower rise at West Cliff Hall.

3.257 This western area was defined within the NFHA (except the fields around West Cliff Hall) and therefore accepted to possess qualifying natural beauty. It still possesses many of the same characteristics today, albeit in a somewhat neglected condition in places, especially those areas near to the railway such as at Veal’s and Pumpfield Farms. This farmland, the small scattered village settlement at Dibden and the fine vernacular feature of Dibden church, and the manicured but well treed fairways of the golf course, are all set in a relatively tranquil landscape with little
3.258 I conclude that the area covered by the former NFHA boundary west of the reclaim still satisfies the natural beauty criterion today and also find no reason to exclude the area around West Cliff Hall on the edge of Hythe on natural beauty grounds. I recommend that both should be included in the NFN. In contrast I find that there is no landscape justification whatsoever for including in the NFN the fields north of Pumpfield Farm near to Marchwood, nor the reclaimed land at Dibden between the NFHA boundary and the foreshore.

**The Frost Lane area**

3.259 The Frost Lane valley forms a tenuous protrusion of the NFN boundary between the New Forest core and the waterside which was not included in the NFHA but later recognised as within the broad New Forest Countryside Character Area. According to the Agency the area is part of the Ancient Forest Farmlands landscape type which also extends further south to include Holbury Mire SSSI. Beyond the boundary in the Designation Order this landscape type includes a disused pit and skirts around the edges of the two Refinery sites. The same area was previously assessed and classified for the NFHA as degraded urban fringe coastlands not worthy of designation. This section of the NFN boundary also includes a large area of the foreshore covering the full extent of Hythe to Cadland saltmarsh SSSI which terminates in front of the main refinery complex.

3.260 In considering this area I find that there are some links with the New Forest but mainly in the central part of the valley which has a contained valley topography with some typical landscape characteristics, such as mature hedgerow oaks and parcels of semi-natural deciduous woodland and other habitats of interest, such as wet meadow. There is also a recognised historic parkland landscape at Forest Lodge, which eventually leads down to the open waterside aspect of the Hythe and Cadland Marshes SSSI of the coastal fringe type.

3.261 However the valley is close to the built-up areas of Hythe and Buttsash and the marshes close to several refinery complexes, so consequently as well as possessing the above characteristics the area also displays strong industrial and urban fringe elements. Refinery works are close at several points but especially evident from the waterside areas, with associated background noise and occasional glimpses of depots and a notable chimney stack in the central valley section. At the southern end close to the roundabout on the A326 the landscape quality is poor being affected by various components such as the poorly maintained sports ground, car park and associated rundown buildings, fly-tipping here and on the Solent Way, and the sightline areas of the roundabout feeder roads. The low grade landscape quality of this area effectively completely truncates the medium grade landscape quality of the central area of the Frost Lane valley from the high quality of landscape within the perambulation and NFHA on the west side of the A326. The landscape condition of the narrow neck of land which at two points is less than 250 metres wide, causes the valley landscape to the coast and the saltmarshes to be completely isolated from the rest of the NFN.

3.262 In conclusion I did not find any new information on landscape matters brought forward by the Agency that would justify the area’s reconsideration for inclusion after
public consultation, but found there was more re-examination of existing information. Overall I do not find the landscape of this extremely constrained area between the A326 and the saltmarshes of the SSSI to be at all outstanding and any quality that is present is heavily compromised by incongruous features and adjacent land uses and so fails to meet the natural beauty criterion required for National Park status.

3.263 The small triangle of land at Denny Lodge has some New Forest characteristics present mainly in the western half, but also experiences the urban fringe influences of Buttsash which are accentuated by the presence of the A326 and has more of the feel of a public open space serving the local housing neighbourhood. While I accept that earlier designations of the NFHA and New Forest SSSI cover this area it does not register as a robust and meaningful edge to the National Park and I cannot find any real justification for inclusion in the NFNP on grounds of natural beauty.

3.264 I therefore recommend that the NFNP boundary should follow the A326 along the edge of Fawley Inclosure and rejoin the Designation Order boundary south of the Buttsash sports ground around the western edge of the industrial estate before the Hardley roundabout.

Sites At Holbury

3.265 In the vicinity of Holbury Manor the NFNP boundary on the west side of Holbury tightly follows the built edge of the settlement, as did the NFHA. This area is part of Holbury Purlieu and appropriately classified by the Agency as an area of Heath Associated Small Holdings and Dwellings landscape type, which is a type found scattered around the edges of the core heathlands of the New Forest. The area of objection at Holbury is also contained within the Eastern Forest Heaths landscape character area which stretches from Lyndhurst to Blackfield.

3.266 As such I find the area contains much New Forest landscape character and is of a high landscape quality, typical of its type and not adversely affected by the presence of the limited area of the SMS Skips site which is well screened and contained by boundary vegetation, except at its entrance. The site is also closely associated on the west side with the wooded upper reaches of the Dark Water and on the east with the grounds of Holbury Manor, each with strong New Forest characteristics and associations, recognised by appropriate planning designations. Therefore I conclude that the area of objection is contained within a landscape of outstanding quality, meeting the natural beauty criterion and so I recommend that the NFNP boundary here should not be revised.

3.267 Turning to the east side of Holbury Manor grounds, I find no reason to include the recent housing development of Shapton Close even though it was built on land of historic interest within the curtilage of Holbury Manor. Architecturally the houses show some reference to pastiche vernacular design, but the development is very much part of the settlement of Holbury and does not meet the natural beauty criterion required for inclusion within the NFNP. I therefore recommend that the NFNP excludes Shapton Close.
Site at Kings Copse Road/Roman Road, Blackfield

3.268 The land covered by the objection has a chequered history with regard to the recognition of the presence of natural beauty (as detailed above in the summary of cases) with the land to the east of Roman Road repeatedly being reconsidered for inclusion, or not, in the NFHA. I conclude therefore, that this landscape has previously been found to be marginal in terms of landscape integrity and quality.

3.269 Looking at this area afresh from the vicinity of Roughdown Farm I do find there is considerable contrast in the character and condition of the landscapes east and west of the Roman Road track. That to the west shows a marked cohesiveness with New Forest landscapes, with a strong sense of enclosure with small fields, mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees, small copses and heaths looking towards the wooded skyline of King’s Copse Inclosure. To the east one sees a very open and large scale landscape which, while being typical of its landscape type, has nevertheless a quite fragmented field pattern with field amalgamations and hedgerow loss, an urban settlement backdrop and oil refinery skyline.

3.270 Accepting that the contrast between these landscapes gives diversity to the landscape setting of the historic Roman Road, I cannot accept the land to the east necessarily qualifies as part of the “extensive tract” or that because it is considered to be a “last remnant example” of the forest edge between urban areas and the perambulation, that it passes the natural beauty test any more readily than any other area of quite ordinary countryside.

3.271 Consequently I conclude that the area to the east of Roman Road does not satisfy the natural beauty criterion and is not up to the standard required to be included in the NFNP. I recommend that the NFNP boundary is revised from Lynwood Farm to follow the footpath south to the Roman Road as far as King’s Copse Road where it rejoins the boundary as proposed.

The Ruffs, Blackfield

3.272 This contained and limited visibility site lies between the edge of Blackwell Common and Blackfield village and is part of the Heath Associated Estates landscape type, containing a small area of ancient woodland and the remnants of a once operating forest smallholding considered by the agency to be part of an extensive tract of high quality landscape. The area was recognised as having natural beauty and was included in the NFHA.

3.273 Whilst recognising that the area still contains the necessary landscape elements to qualify for inclusion in the NFNP on natural beauty grounds, it is apparent that the situation of the land associated with housing on the site has changed. This has resulted in a reduced New Forest landscape quality with introduction of some non native exotic trees in the woodland, a suburban style east boundary fence with beech hedging and the main paddock crossed by a foul sewer, with neglected farm buildings and paddock.

3.274 While I consider that all of the relatively recent changes are potentially reversible, the over-riding characteristic of this area is one of suburbia which does not consistently meet the natural beauty criterion and does not offer a readily
understandable boundary to the NFNP today. While the woodland itself does possess natural beauty it is difficult to find a clearly identifiable eastern boundary on the ground for designation purposes. Instead I recommend that it would be more meaningful to use the western boundary fenceline of the ancient woodland as the edge of the NFNP. This would form a more robust edge of continuously high quality landscape which is evident at the boundary north and south of here.

3.275 I recommend that the revised boundary follows the western woodland edge from the ford on Chapel Lane in the north to the southern edge of the public open space south of the Ruffs where it would return to the boundary defined in the Designation Order.

3.276 An additional comment refers to the need to clarify a small boundary anomaly of the NFNP on the eastern side of Blackfield in the vicinity of Dark Lane north of Fawley Pit. This anomaly was not discussed during the Inquiry. At the point identified there is a small triangle of land which was excluded from the NFHA but included within the NFNP which appears to cross the corner of a public open space now occupied partly by a water body. It may be that this water was not present at the time of the NFHA and the re-alignment for the NFNP is to include the entire water body as it is now but which nevertheless divides the open space defined on the edge of Blackfield.

The Fawley to Calshot area

3.277 In examining the landscape between Fawley and Calshot one is unavoidably aware of the unique situation that is created in a New Forest context, by the extreme contrast of the massive structure of a major power station with its 200 metre high chimney and several 50 metre high block turbine halls within an otherwise extensive open coastal environment with many outstanding views to the Solent and the Isle of Wight.

3.278 The area is perceived by the Agency to provide a strategic role for the NFNP and forms the eastern section of the North West Solent Estates landscape character area and containing the main landscape types of Coastal Plain Estates and Coastal Fringe with a small area of Historic Parkland at Calshot and the Heavy Industry type at Fawley power station. I agree with this assessment apart from the northern extent of the Heavy Industry type at the power station site which should be more constrained as the area between that and Ashlett Creek is rapidly colonizing into a post-industrial deciduous woodland environment and a useful landscape resource.

3.279 At Ashlett I consider the active refinery works to the north to be more distant and less visible, (apart from a major pipe on the edge of the Mill car park) and to have little audible presence assisted by undulating and rising land with small woodland belts and Fawley village. I do not agree however that all of the marshes SSSI should necessarily be included in the NFNP if they do not meet the natural beauty criterion, which those north of Ashlett Creek do not, due to the visual intrusions of refinery operations on land and at sea.

3.280 Regardless of the powerful visual presence of the power station chimney nearby to the south, there is considerable evidence of the close connections that exist between the New Forest and the foreshore, both visually and in land use terms with
grazing forest ponies, small scale field and vegetation patterns in the undulating topography and in the building styles and materials along the lane leading down to Ashlett Mill.

3.281 As for the inter-tidal landscapes I find that the saltmarshes here are one of the most extensive areas of this habitat in Southampton Water stretching from the refinery pier to Calshot Spit. The marshes contrast with the extensive shingle beach and foreshore between Hillhead and Calshot Castle in the open maritime environment of the Solent and are separated from them only by the classic geomorphological feature of the shingle spit. The latter forms an important focus and ‘hinge’ in the land and seascape from which the other components radiate.

3.282 In looking to the land on the west of the power station I am of the opinion that overall this part of the extensive tract is also qualifiable on natural beauty grounds, even though part is currently an active but time limited mineral extraction site near to Badminton Farm, which is anyway being progressively restored to type. Otherwise this area is an unadulterated extensive tract of countryside that is typical of the Coastal Plain Estates, much of which has previously recognised natural beauty as part of the NFHA and/or the South Hampshire Coastal AONB and which is still very evident today.

3.283 Despite the presence of the power station I find that a true sense of wildness and tranquillity is present throughout this area due to the open nature of the landscape and maritime edge, the many long distant views across Southampton Water and the Solent and inland to the heaths and woods of the New Forest core area which impart a sense of remoteness. In this area there is also uniqueness in the intensity of landscape experience available, which is especially apparent at the coastal edge but also in places inland. This is due to a combination of exposure to the elements, the interest provided by witnessing the activity on a busy seaway together with the potent presence of the operationally quiet, but dramatically awesome scale of the power station’s built form.

3.284 With regard to the NFHA boundary I see no reason for excluding Calshot village, the Local Nature Reserve, Calshot Castle and Spit from the NFNP on natural beauty grounds, as this area is critical in appreciating the wider context of the outstanding landscapes of this coastal environment with numerous and strong links to the landscapes of the New Forest.

In conclusion I find that all of this area apart from that which is operational power station land satisfies the natural beauty criterion and recommend that it be included, with some revisions north and south of Ashlett, within the NFNP.

3.285 I therefore recommend that the boundary for the NFNP follows the Designation Order boundary south of Fawley village to the car park at Ashlett Mill, returning to the NFHA to exclude the pipeline, then omitting the recently constructed water body with islands to Ashlett Creek, taking a line out to MLW along the creek to rejoin the Order boundary around the coast from Calshot to Beaulieu River (and ultimately to Lymington River and Hurst Point). In the exclusion zone around the power station I recommend that the recolonising wooded area north of the power station and restored workings to the west are included within the NFNP boundary.
**Calshot to Lymington River**

3.286 Between Calshot Spit and Lymington River the NFNP Designation Order boundary consistently follows Mean Low Water, as elsewhere in the NFNP where it meets the coast. When the NFNP boundary crosses the inter-tidal estuarine zones of rivers such as the Beaulieu and the Lymington, it then follows the District Council’s administrative boundaries which cut across the main channels at the seaward end. This has also been the approach taken for the maritime boundary line of both the coastal AONB and NFHA (and the perambulation before it, to the west of Beaulieu River). So it is apparent that the area down to MLW has long been recognised as possessing natural beauty.

3.287 While I appreciate the anxieties of various operational concerns of commercial shipping and fishing interests and the likely impact of climate change on the saltmarsh environment, I find no reason to exclude the area between MHW and MLW from the NFNP on natural beauty grounds. This intertidal area contributes much to the landscape quality of the fully terrestrial land behind and the combination of the two is quite outstanding and forms part of an extensive tract of countryside between Calshot and Hurst Spits where key New Forest landscape types and characteristics flow unimpeded to the coast to meet the water’s edge.

3.288 I find that the landscape condition and degree of intactness of the various landscape types, with no incongruous elements and features present, together with numerous and extensive high quality nature conservation sites with good connectivity to the New Forest both physically and culturally and extending down to MLW, render this land and seascape to be of the highest order fully meeting the natural beauty criterion.

3.289 In conclusion I am aware of no reasons whatsoever for excluding any part of this extremely high quality, diverse and tranquil coastal landscape from the NFNP on natural beauty grounds.

**BOUNDARY SECTIONS 11 & 12**

**The town of Lymington and surrounding areas**

4.127 In considering the diverse landscapes of the town and surrounding countryside it is apparent there are major variations in landscape quality. The boundary of the NFHA excludes Lymington and land to the south while to the north the NFHA boundary has had a chequered history. The AONB covers the coastal area to MLW from Lymington River to Keyhaven but does not include a band of land from Lower Pennington and north of Normandy Lane to the town’s southern periphery. The NFNP boundary in the Designation Order covers the whole of this area including the town and land extending from the river as far west as Milford-on-Sea and north to Lymore and Efford, thereby including land not previously recognised as possessing natural beauty.
Lymington

4.128 Looking first to the built-up area of Lymington I find that the town centre has a fine, historic core centred on the High Street which rises from the river valley, providing a view east towards the New Forest and with other outlying architecturally attractive residential areas such as that south of Buckland and alongside Pennington Common.

4.129 Lymington also has some nineteenth century housing, but otherwise the majority of the urban area is composed of 20th century development, most recently on the west side of town, where there are extensive areas of modern housing of a type and form which is mainly suburban in character and has no particular relationship with town’s landscape context. In addition on the eastern periphery of Lymington, a string of light industrial and utility sites are found along the riverside mainly north of the road bridge, such as that associated with Lymington Precision Engineers (190). The townscape quality generally decreases from the central Conservation Area outwards and the relationship between urban and rural is not always one of harmony.

4.130 According to the Agency’s landscape assessment the town is located within character area 16 (CD 127) which is made up of 4 landscape types: the Urban type of Lymington itself, Coastal Plain Estates, Coastal Fringe and Historic Parkland, the latter being found only on the east side of the river. Even though the townscape possesses a high quality urban environment with plenty of mature gardens and open spaces with mature trees, these are not key characteristics of any other New Forest landscape. In addition I find only one strong visual link with the New Forest, as mentioned above, and the town’s main focus is inward or towards the river and not to the Forest.

4.131 Despite its size, it is extremely difficult to get an overall visual impression of the town from the outside, except from the coast due to the local topography and screening by vegetation within and throughout the urban area preventing inter-visibility. This is least evident at Pennington Common where heathland blends into the urban layout.

4.132 In conclusion I find that the town is contained within its own urban character area of Lymington townscape, and the physical relationship with the surrounding countryside is predominantly exclusive of the New Forest.

4.133 While I accept that the central area of Lymington is a high quality urban setting and historically there were strong links with the New Forest through past associated activities, such as the export of Forest products, I do not find that the wider urban area relates to the rural hinterland today, but is more oriented to the coast as a ferry port and centre for sailing.

4.134 In conclusion I find that the quality of the townscape of Lymington is variable, is not part of the typical landscape character of the New Forest, does not form part of the extensive tract of country and does not meet the natural beauty criterion that is necessary for consideration as part of the NFNP. In conclusion I recommend that the town is excluded from the NFNP on natural beauty grounds.
Land south of Lymington

4.135 The land between the urban edge and the coast to the south of Lymington to Milford-on-Sea contains considerable diversity both in landscape character and landscape quality. This area was not included in the NFHA mainly because the relationship between the New Forest and the coastal landscape was not as strong as that east of Lymington River. However the previous AONB designation had recognised the intrinsic natural beauty of this part of the coast and its hinterland north of Keyhaven Marshes.

4.136 The NFNP boundary in the Designation Order includes land right up to Milford-on-Sea, including Keyhaven village and land on the west side of the Avon Water beyond the AONB. In looking to this area I find there is an extensive area of land west of Lower Pennington which is adversely affected by incongruous land uses and devoted to mineral extraction, landfill and refuse recycling, which impose a highly negative impact on the landscape quality of this area which is not in keeping with that expected of AONB or NFNP designations.

4.137 Even with the relatively short time horizon of 2007 for initial land restoration I am of the opinion that this area will not for many years, if ever, meet the standard required to satisfy the natural beauty criterion for NFNP designation purposes.

4.138 The landscape structure has been essentially broken between Keyhaven and Efford to such an extent that even with a careful and well designed restoration scheme, the landscape will appear artificial and over time is likely to achieve no more than an ordinary status of landscape quality. Between the Avon Water and Lymore Lane the landscape is an agriculturally intensive one of cereals and maize, interspersed with occasional remnant Forest features such as in the vicinity of Agarton Lane but much more evident around Keyhaven village. At Efford, apart from Great Newbridge Copse, the land around the Horticultural Research Station contributes little to New Forest landscape character offering only a tall exotic conifer linear boundary, and associated strictly regimented plots which tend to over power the semi-abandoned narrow valley between that and the refuse site.

4.139 In contrast, to the south of this disturbed and ravaged landscape I find that the Coastal Fringe landscape type is one of high quality with outstanding views east and south across the marshes and the Solent to the Isle of Wight. A strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity prevails regardless of the industrial activity to the north, in an open coastal marsh environment appropriately recognised for its natural beauty by the AONB designation and containing important nature conservation designations, all of which extend to Hurst Spit. In addition, immediately south of the built-edge of the town, between Lower Pennington and Waterford and inland of the Coastal Fringe, I find the Coastal Plain Estates landscape type is still very evident and intact, containing a typical pattern of small irregular fields with hedgerow trees and small areas of woodland connecting with the coastal landscape pattern of marshes and woods further east across the river. This area has a close intimacy with and forms part of the assemblage of coastal landscapes of the New Forest running along this part of the Solent between Keyhaven and Calshot. As a result I find that this area demonstrates a typical New Forest landscape assemblage, is of high quality and fully meets the requirements of the natural beauty criterion.
4.140 In my overall conclusions on the assessment of land which qualifies as part of the extensive tract and meets the natural beauty criterion, I recognise that the situation south of Lymington is complex, that the landscape conditions and character have and continue to change and therefore require particularly careful consideration in order to arrive at a robust and legible boundary for the NFNP that will stand the tests of time.

4.141 I therefore recommend that to include all the land south of Lymington which does meet the natural beauty criterion and is therefore suitable for NFNP designation the boundary should be as follows:-

On the east side of the river estuary below Lisle Court Farm, where MLW meets the perambulation, the NFNP boundary would cross the river directly south west to meet the west bank close to the southern edge of the outer marina at Waterford. It would then follow the footpath and Solent Way which follow a bund beyond the western edge of the marina, reaching the built edge of the town at the end of Westfield Road. It would then follow the boundary of the built up area (as shown in the Local Plan) along All Saints Road to Delaware House, then turning south to Normandy Mead via Viney Road. It would then leave the defined built-up edge of the town just before Normandy Mead, and continue south to the junction with Normandy Lane where it would then follow Poles Lane west to Ridgeway Farm (omitting areas of formal public open space on the edge of the town which do not meet the natural beauty criterion) where it then picks up a footpath north of the farm going west to Lower Pennington Lane and crosses it, via a track to meet the AONB boundary and cycleway north of Sadlers Farm.

From here I recommend that the boundary turns south to join and then follow Lower Pennington Lane to the road end on Pennington Marshes and then follow the byway west to Keyhaven Marshes as far as Illey Lane including the triangle of recently restored land. The boundary would then follow the eastern ditch running north and parallel with the Avon Water as far as the ditch and dyke crossing the watercourse and then return south towards Vidle Van Farm track.

From this point my recommendation is that the NFNP boundary should skirt the built-up area of Keyhaven as closely as possible to join MHW south of Salt Grass Cottages and then include Hurst Castle Spit before returning east along MLW. In my view it is important to include the whole of the small coastal village of Keyhaven, centred on its harbour and historic core, but the area of qualifying natural beauty does not extend into the large-scale open arable fields to the north and west of the village. The boundary shown on the map attached to Appendix 1 attempts to indicate this but it is difficult to do so entirely clearly at the scale of the Designation Order, especially as Keyhaven is not a village with a built-up area defined on a Local Plan Inset Map. It may be that this area should be covered by a specially prepared Inset Map attached to the Designation Order so that the boundary can be clearly indicated at a more appropriate scale.

Land north and west of Lymington

4.142 In the area west of Lymington and north of Efford Bridge around to Buckland and Bowling Green to the edge of the town I do not find the landscape character and quality of the Ancient Forest Farmlands type consistently intact and the resultant landscape quality is limited. This is due partly to the loss of hedgerows and field
rationalisation especially west of Buckland Manor Farm, but also to the mixed standard of ribbon development along Ramley Road where several glasshouse complexes, some of which are disused, and the medium scale and occasionally visible Gوردleton Industrial Park together impart an urban fringe feel to this landscape which is not outstanding in natural beauty terms. The land between Yaldhurst Copse and Cowley Farm is of marginally better landscape quality, having retained a typical irregular field pattern with a more wooded character than that to the east, but still has an urban fringe quality and is otherwise isolated.

4.143 In my opinion this is contrasted by the landscape quality and condition of the mainly wooded valley of the Avon Water south of Batchley Copse and Wainsford Bridge which, together with the heathy character of Upper and Lower Pennington Common, I find contains a good blend of New Forest landscape character and a true sense of being on the edge of the Forest. This is despite the encroachment of recent housing development on the western outskirts of Lymington, which is fortunately well screened from view.

4.144 In conclusion I recommend that the boundary for the NFNP in this area should be retained as for the NFHA in the Local Plan from Walhampton on the east bank of the Lymington River, crossing west at the road bridge and continuing around the north side of the town, including Buckland Rings, then west along Sway Road, excluding Gordleton Industrial Park turning south to Upper Pennington to meet the edge of the built up area before swinging away again to reach the A337 at Efford Bridge.

Land at the Barton – Milford Gap

4.145 In considering the whole area of contention between Milford-on-Sea and Barton I recognise that from the coast northwards the area does have landscape associations with the New Forest. The NFNP boundary follows the NFHA continuously between Efford Bridge and Hinton House thereby recognising that the area to the north of the boundary line met the natural beauty criterion for the NFHA designation.

4.146 I agree that the landscape character of the open countryside is one of the Coastal Landscape Estates landscape type with small parliamentary enclosures, with the Historic Parkland type present at Newlands Manor and Ashley Clinton House, but also at Arnewood House and Efford House, interspersed with the larger urban areas of Milford-on-Sea, Barton, Ashley and New Milton together with the sizeable villages of Everton and Hordle.

4.147 I also recognise the various typical New Forest landscape type features of small fields, woods and streams that are present in certain areas such as around Lymore, the often wooded corridor of Danes Stream and its tributaries, from Noah’s Ark Farm in the north through Taddiford Gap to the edge of Milford-on-Sea, and in the vicinity of Leagreen and Newlands Manor, which together with the other historic landscapes in this section, all display a degree of natural beauty giving pockets of high landscape quality. There is also visual access to a coastal landscape with fine views across the Solent from Hordle and Barton cliffs with the associated geological interest at the latter.
4.148 Notwithstanding the past literary and land management links with the New Forest, I also find that this landscape has changed considerably in recent times due to the dynamic pace of suburban expansion of the late 20th century evident in all the settlements across the this swathe of countryside, especially visible at Barton and Ashley. In looking to Milford-on-Sea I find a pleasant seaside village focused around the village green and historic buildings of the Conservation Area, but with considerable newer development on all sides. This effectively divorces the historic village from its original combined country and seaside setting. The village has retained a not surprising orientation to the coast being a popular haunt with locals and visitors alike, but has not retained the small scale charm of Keyhaven which is well integrated into its waterside and coastal marshland landscape setting.

4.149 Even though the landscape types present are found elsewhere in the NFNP it is evident that here landscape intactness has in places been markedly infringed, mainly by the raw edges of suburban residential development and changes in agricultural practices, but also by incongruous features such as Efford Horticultural Research Station and the large holiday park south of Downton.

4.150 In assessing this area I find that, even with the higher quality areas as mentioned above, the strength of landscape character and the overall landscape quality diminishes as one moves south from the NFNP boundary in the Designation Order to a level not worthy of National Park status between the main settlements and south of Everton and Hordle. This landscape is not, in my opinion, outstanding in a New Forest sense and the natural beauty criterion is not met in the majority of the countryside of this area.

4.151 North of Everton and Hordle up to the NFNP boundary I find the situation slightly different in that the landscape here is at the upper end of the transition spectrum of land that would qualify under the natural beauty criterion. There are few detractors but the landscape character is compromised by extensive arable fields where field boundaries have been comprehensively rationalised so my conclusions would still apply.

4.152 However I do find there are two exceptions to this conclusion which lie close to the NFNP boundary. The first is at Arne Wood/Anewood House which I find has physical affinity (and may yet have proven literary connection) with the landscape to the north and would make a more robust boundary in this area. The second is at Cottager’s Lane north of Hordle where the field pattern, boundary vegetation and vernacular buildings have an obvious connectivity with the Ancient Forest Farmlands landscape to the north to such an extent that I believe this area would be more appropriately classified as of that landscape type.

4.153 In drawing conclusions for this section I find that the boundary does define the land which meets the natural beauty test for NFNP designation and provides a legible boundary for the National Park. I also conclude that the wider contention area is isolated from the New Forest by the surrounding settlements, though shows some affinity with the Forest, but that affinity is patchy and shows unevenness in landscape quality. The combination of isolation, and inconsistent character and quality is such that the area does not form part of the extensive tract of countryside that does meet the criterion of natural beauty.
4.154 The boundary of the Designation Order is robust and meaningful along this
section except at the two locations described above, namely Arne Wood and north of
Hordle where NFNP boundary revisions are recommended. Both of these areas
satisfy the natural beauty criterion and form part of the extensive tract of country
which qualifies for National park status.

4.155 The boundary recommended is therefore as the Designation Order from Efford
Bridge to the wood north of Batchley Farm where it would depart from the NFNP
boundary turning west around the wood and include the two small enclosures between
it and Arnewood itself. The boundary would then continue along the southern
boundary of Arnewood including Arnewood House and the small paddocks and
grounds around the house returning to meet the NFNP boundary at the footpath
coming from the west side of Arnewood.

4.156 At Hordle I recommend that the boundary should include the Cottager’s Lane
area, departing from the NFNP boundary from Hollybush Farm and continue south
along the lane to follow the built edge of Hordle towards the crossroads on the north
side of the village where it would rejoin the NFNP boundary just east of the road
junction.

**Land between Barton and Mudeford**

4.157 While accepting that the coastal area between Barton and Mudeford is
attractive and forms a valuable landscape resource in the otherwise heavily developed
area east of Christchurch, I find that the area has little connection, either actual or
perceived, to the landscapes of the New Forest.

4.158 Apart from the shore between MHW and MLW and occasionally the narrow
strip behind, I find the area is thoroughly urbanised and has no New Forest landscape
character. The narrow open area at Chewton Bunny is encroached upon by holiday
chalet development and the urban development of Highcliffe, while north of the A337
are the rather manicured grounds of Chewton Glen Hotel and a heavily modified
series of fields and a large nursery complex closer to the railway. As a result I find
this essentially urban fringe area has a very tenuous connection to the landscape north
of the railway, which anyway is not within the NFNP boundary in the Designation
Order.

4.159 In conclusion I find that the area of contention is isolated, has little connection
with the landscapes of the New Forest, does not meet the natural beauty criterion and
therefore cannot qualify for inclusion in the NFNP. I therefore recommend that the
boundary here is retained as in the NFNP Designation Order.

**Land west and north of New Milton**

4.160 In looking to the land in question west and north of New Milton I agree that
the landscape character is of the Coastal Plain Estates type as defined by the Agency
but contains a simple composition of two main elements. The first is the wooded
valley of Walkford Brook running north to south and the other the large arable fields
either side of the valley which lack field boundary definition but are crossed by
pylons and overhead lines.
4.161 Consequently I find the landscape here is simple and ordinary, and without the landscape pattern framework typical of this type resulting in poor landscape quality. By its very nature Walkford Brook has connectivity to the New Forest landscapes further north but only as a limited corridor and not forming part of the extensive tract of countryside north of the B3055. Considered as a whole this area does not have outstanding landscape quality, and does not satisfy the natural beauty criterion and is therefore not of National park status.

4.162 In the vicinity of Dark Lane and Hinton House I find the NFNP boundary alignment is correct in that it excludes the large arable fields associated with the area west of New Milton considered in the last section, but includes land more typical of the Heath Associated Small Holdings and Dwellings landscape type which is evident around Hinton House and Hinton Park. Here the larger scale field system is also well wooded with mature hedgerow trees throughout the farmland with former heathland evident in places.

4.163 I find that all the land associated with the Dark Lane objection area has the character of this typical New Forest landscape type, is intact and of good quality satisfying the natural beauty criterion and so should be included in the NFNP.

4.164 I therefore conclude that I do not find it necessary to recommend a revision to the boundary in this area.

**Land at Hinton Park**

4.165 I find that the contended land at Hinton Park and the surrounding associated countryside has long been recognised for its natural beauty, having been part of the NFHA.

4.166 While accepting that the landscape of Hinton Park is not often visible from surrounding countryside due to the extensive layout of woods beyond the central parkland area and the mosaic of smaller woodland within, I do find that the wider landscape setting is appreciable at various locations in the surrounding countryside and from longer distance viewpoints. The landscape character is one that is redolent of the New Forest, markedly intact and of a very high quality, which typifies a well-managed estate that is intrinsically part of the wider New Forest landscape and amply meets the natural beauty criterion.

4.167 Beyond the highly regarded designed landscape of the parkland, which is recorded and detailed on the Hampshire County Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, with English Heritage Grade 1 listing for the buildings it contains, I find the wider landscape within which it sits consistently includes all the characteristics of its Heath Associated landscape type which is a classic New Forest type found elsewhere within the NFNP.

4.168 I therefore have no hesitation in recommending that this area should be included in its entirety within the NFNP as it more than adequately satisfies the natural beauty criterion and I see no reason on these grounds for a boundary revision in this area.
Cranemoor Common

4.169 I find Cranemoor Common is an attractive, well used and locally valued landscape resource for the nearby residential neighbourhood. However it is now dislocated from the NFNP quite emphatically by the railway and its embankment, both visually and physically. While I accept that it must have once been part of the New Forest commons it no longer forms part of that system and does not logically form part of the extensive tract of countryside to the north.

4.170 I conclude that it would be inappropriate for the NFNP boundary to divert from the robust boundary that the railway provides in order to include this small parcel of land which is now a local open space. Therefore I do not recommend that the NFNP boundary be revised to include Cranemoor Common.

BOUNDARY SECTIONS 13 - 15

5.266 The Avon Valley presents a major challenge for defining a meaningful western boundary for the NFNP due to the variety of

- landscape character and landscape quality
- land use
- connectivity to the New Forest core area

5.267 In assessing all the perspectives put before the Inquiry it is evident that a wide range of options exists, all with reasoned arguments for both exclusions and inclusions of land varying from the NFNP boundary as defined in the Designation Order. In assessing all these perspectives, it is satisfying the Natural Beauty criterion that is critical to the process of defining a justifiable and meaningful boundary worthy of NFNP designation status.

5.268 Various conceptual matters related to the landscape of the Avon valley area and the natural beauty criterion are considered more comprehensively in my general report to the Inspector (Appendix 1). These matters include concepts such as defining the “extensive tract”, what is “New Forest” landscape character, the role of the cultural dimension in “linkages to the New Forest” and the consistency of landscape quality, to name some which are most pertinent to the consideration of these particular boundary sections.

5.269 When recognising land that satisfies the criterion it is critical to ascertain the degree to which landscape quality is present in order to define the area of nationally outstanding countryside for NFNP designation purposes. Also, it is important that convincing arguments are employed for what constitutes the landscapes of the New Forest and how the various types of landscape relate and connect to each other in order to understand the validity of this western boundary to the NFNP.

5.270 Diversity of landscape character is considerable in the Avon corridor arguably more than any other part of the NFNP boundary areas by virtue of the:-

- range of agricultural landscapes
- presence of the water-meadow and river system
- historical patterns of land use
• variety of habitat and biodiversity interests
• presence of sizeable areas of urban development close to and within the NFNP Order

5.271 In looking first to the overall landscape analysis of the Avon by LUC for the NFHA (CD206), landscape type 9 (Farmed Terrace) was totally excluded between Christchurch and Fordingbridge. Type 10 (River Meadowlands) was included only north of Fordingbridge on the eastern side of the river where it was identified as important for backup grazing with a close relationship to the Forest core area. On the other hand the Agency, in CD126, found that a much wider area of the valley satisfied the natural beauty criterion and included areas of River Terrace Farmlands and the Avon Floodplain types within the NFNP boundary of the Designation Order, so that the western edge of the floodplain often provides the western boundary of the NFNP, except in the Lower Avon where higher heathy ground west of the floodplain, such as Town and Leybrook Commons, is also included. The justification for this considerable extension is based primarily on a wider definition of New Forest related landscapes, the ecological quality of the river system, and historical connections to the Forest.

5.272 Looking to the urbanised areas of the valley, the NFHA has consistently excluded the urban areas of Christchurch, Burton, Ringwood and Fordingbridge. Although LUC also recommended the exclusion of Bransgore, the village was eventually included in the NFHA as adopted. The NFNP boundary originally excluded all these urban areas except Bransgore, but after the public consultation stage the Agency also included Ringwood within the Designation Order boundary.

5.273 In setting out my conclusions for this extensive and complex part of the boundary of the NFNP it is more manageable to divide boundary sections 13-15 covering the Avon valley from Christchurch to Downton into several subsections (following the pattern in the case reporting), dealing first with proposed boundary retractions and then with proposed extensions. Finally, I conclude with my overall recommended boundary revisions.

PROPOSALS FOR A REDUCED BOUNDARY

1. Retraction to the Heritage Area western boundary

5.274 After the first local plan inquiry the western boundary of the NFHA, as defined according to the criteria used for that purpose, was broadly along the bottom of the New Forest slope opposite Fordingbridge. The second local plan inquiry scrutinised and revised the boundary north of Ringwood and Blashford Lakes. However in considering the boundary of the NFNP as in the Designation Order there is a need to examine a wide range of additional areas that are included by the Agency and other parties to see whether they offer a more rigorous boundary alignment or interpretation of the natural beauty criterion as now understood.

1a. The Lower Avon Valley

5.275 The Dorset Authorities’ case argues (a) that the landscapes of the Lower Avon valley are not adequately related to those of the New Forest and therefore not valid for
consideration as part of the NFNP, and (b) even if they were related, they do not possess the necessary landscape quality to satisfy the natural beauty criterion. I consider that this view is too critical as there are areas within the Lower Avon that do demonstrate New Forest related landscape character, are distinctive and intact, and do therefore satisfy the criterion in terms of landscape quality. In my opinion these areas are Hengitsbury Head, Stanpit Marsh, St Catherine’s Hill, Town Common, Ramsdown Plantation, Sopley village, Leybrook Common, Kingston village and North Kingston Common.

5.276 The main question for these areas is related to the extent of their isolation and lack of physical connectivity to the core Forest area. Even though some areas offer outstanding mid and distant views to the New Forest from the elevated sites mentioned above, they all are nevertheless collectively separated from it by either unacceptably large areas of low landscape quality with unrelated character such as encroaching urban areas or land that has experienced agricultural intensification.

5.277 I find that there are extensive areas of mediocre to poor quality landscape often occurring within the River Terrace Farmlands landscape type. Frequently this is the critical factor separating land which otherwise could form part of the extensive tract of countryside that would satisfy the criterion. For instance at Kingston North Common across to Leybrook Common and Matcham’s View, I find physical isolation from the Forest brought about by the presence of ordinary countryside with extensive arable intensification, together with other negative landscape elements such as hedgerow loss and incongruous buildings. The same situation occurs eastwards of Town Common and Sopley village where degraded landscape quality due to the extent of agricultural intensification and the presence of uncharacteristic features is even more severe across to Bockhampton and Bransgore.

5.278 In the Lower Avon I find it difficult to reconcile the inclusion of the high quality landscape of the River Avon and floodplain as land sufficiently physically connected to the New Forest and included within the NFNP. So often it is resolutely separated from the core landscapes by the same wide swathe of low to mediocre farmland with little landscape quality or strong relationship to the landscape mosaic of the New Forest and therefore not worthy of National Park status. These river landscapes cannot be considered part of the extensive tract of countryside meeting the natural beauty criterion, when the dominant intervening component is a landscape type that in the majority so obviously falls well short of the landscape quality required to satisfy the criterion.

5.279 In assessing Bransgore, I find a markedly expanded New Forest edge village with substantial areas of modern housing which overwhelm the old village centre. This is distinctly different in character to the Thorney Hill settlement which is well integrated within the Heathland Small holdings and Dwellings landscape type of the surrounding countryside. I find that I agree with LUC’s analysis in CD 207 para 38 that due to the extent of recent development Bransgore fails to satisfy the natural beauty criterion even though it is located hard up against the landscape of the core forest area on its eastern side. However, to south of Bransgore and west of Neacroft and Waterditch, there is a small strip of farmland beyond the NFHA boundary that continues to display a relationship to the Forest with landscape quality that meets the criterion.
5.280 The exception to this situation is found in the land from Ripley Wood to the edge of the watermeadows below Bisterne, where I find there is a continuous and substantial degree of connectedness to the Forest from Bisterne Common westwards, in terms of landscape character and landscape quality satisfying the natural beauty criterion to a degree that qualifies this area for inclusion within the NFNP. There is a network of small copses and woods in this area, some with a heathy character, as well as a lesser degree of arable intensification throughout and a persistence of the original enclosure pattern with frequent hedgerow trees and historic landscape parkland trees around Bisterne Manor itself.

5.281 Apart from this, it is not possible to justify inclusion of any further land west of the A338 below Ringwood on natural beauty grounds because of the factors discussed above - isolation, urbanisation, unrelated character and insufficient landscape quality.

1b. The Upper Avon Valley

Blashford Lakes

5.282 Looking to the Blashford Lakes area north of Ringwood as far as Ibsley village, I find the landscape decisively affected by past mineral extraction and current workings east and west of the A338. Previous extraction areas have been reclaimed as a series of water bodies which form a waterscape of recreational and ecological value and interest. I therefore agree with the Agency’s classification of the Blashford Lakes complex as predominantly an area of the Gravel Extraction landscape type with a limited area of the Heath Associated Small Holdings and Dwellings type. As such the area has little or no landscape character in common with the New Forest, even though the Lakes often provide the context and foreground to views of the steep and wooded forest edge which lies in close proximity to the east.

5.283 The landscape of the surrounding area consists of the urban area of Ringwood to the south, the Avon Floodplain to the west and the River Terrace Farmlands to the north. I find each of these is either insufficiently connected to the Forest or lacking in adequate landscape quality, or both, so that collectively they and the Lakes themselves do not form an extensive tract of countryside that qualifies to be considered for inclusion in the NFNP. Overall, with the history of past extraction and the scale of current activity towards and beyond the A338, I find this area (except for the Avon floodplain from Ringwood to Ibsley Bridge which is an outstanding landscape in its own right) to be essentially an engineered landscape with little New Forest character or landscape quality except at Ellingham. It thus fails to meet the natural beauty criterion and is not worthy of National Park status.

Ibsley to Fordingbridge

5.284 This section contains certain areas within the Floodplain and Enclosed Farmland and Woodland types which have considerable natural beauty and tranquillity, some with evidence of New Forest landscape characteristics and high landscape quality. These are all found west of the River Avon at Turmer and Turmer Hill, Kent Hill, Bleak Hill, Harbridge village and the floodplain and woods south of Fordingbridge to Bickton. In these areas I find a variety of distinct landscape
character types, although not all are New Forest landscape types, such as those on the
floodplain, but all demonstrate good to outstanding landscape quality. In particular, if
it were not for its detached location the block of land covering Turmer and Kent Hills
to Harbridge and Harbridge Farm would satisfy the natural beauty criterion for NFNP
status.

5.285 However I find all the aforementioned areas are isolated from the Forest by
the mediocre landscape quality of the intervening River Terrace Farmlands, as in the
Lower Avon valley. With regard to the part played by various physical and cultural
linkages identified by the Agency in CD237, I do not find that these are sufficiently
significant to further justify the inclusion of areas of land not otherwise qualifying for
inclusion on natural beauty grounds. The various linking elements identified in
CD237 are covered in more detail in my general report in Appendix 1.

5.286 As in the Lower Avon Valley, the result is that with the degree of unevenness
in landscape quality it is difficult to connect the high quality patches to the Forest
core, due to the extent of the poorer landscape quality of the farmed landscape of the
river terraces between the A338 and Gorley Lane. This land poses a consistent barrier
to the flow of landscape quality found east and west of the river and in itself shows
limited connections to the Forest either in landscape character or in current land uses.
It is with reluctance that I conclude that the areas of high quality landscape on the
west side of the Avon do not form part of the extensive tract of countryside that can
be considered for inclusion within the NFNP.

5.287 I also conclude that it is difficult to see how the land west of the NFHA
boundary across to the Designation Order can be justified for inclusion considering
the inconsistency of landscape character and landscape quality present, to the extent
that overall the land concerned is not outstanding and does not fulfil the criterion for
inclusion within the NFNP on natural beauty grounds.

5.288 In my view the inclusion of land within the Designation Order beyond that
verified for the NFHA is not possible for the reasons stated above. However, it has to
be clearly recognised that defining a firm and robust boundary on the ground in this
particular area poses some of the most difficult practical problems found at any point
around the perimeter of the NFNP.

5.289 The present NFHA boundary takes a snaking line west of Gorley Road,
including small areas of land just beyond the edge of the perambulation, because the
2nd Local Plan Inspector considered it appropriate to include a “tract of small fields
with hedgerows and trees....generally consistent in character with adjacent areas east
of Gorley Road” (CD 236 para 5.1.55). I support this general approach because
although Gorley Road would be a firm boundary it would exclude small areas of
traditional common grazing within the perambulation as well as some other New
Forest features such as traditional buildings, farmsteads and smallholdings fronting
Gorley Road and forming part of the communities of North and South Gorley.

5.290 However, the current boundary of the NFHA is not entirely appropriate for the
NFNP because it follows a series of features such as ditches, fences, hedges, some of
which may no longer exist, within an area west of the road where the landscape
character is quickly changing to one not typical of the New Forest (River Terrace Farmlands) and deteriorating in quality.

5.291 This problem is least acute north of the Hungerford T-junction and in this area I recommend that the NFHA boundary should be adopted northwards to Criddlestyle since it forms a pragmatic line more or less following the foot of the New Forest slope and marked reasonably clearly by field boundaries, footpaths and Stuckton Road.

5.292 The greater difficulties occur in the area south to Cross Lanes at Mockbeggar. My recommended boundary here is drawn with the intention of including only that land west of Gorley Road which (a) is within the perambulation, (b) is immediately associated with frontage properties and features or (c) forms the immediate visual setting of the linear settlements along the road. However, I have had difficulty in achieving these objectives clearly, given the scale and age of the Designation Order map. This is another situation where an Inset Map at a more appropriate scale would make the limits of the designated area clearer for those who have to use the Order and it may be that some minor departures from the line I have indicated would be justified in order to achieve the objectives I have set.

Fordingbridge to Searchfield Farm

5.293 North of the B3078 I find that the landscape of the river corridor and floodplain has a direct relationship with the adjacent steeply wooded slopes of the New Forest which consist of the Ancient Forest Farmland and Heathland landscape types. Here the wide meanders of the river flow close to the base of the slopes on three occasions at Sandy Balls, Godshill and Hale. In between these meanders the water meadow pastures and old floodplain water management systems persist, the degree of intactness increasing northwards, except in fields closer to the A338. I also find that the Heath Associated Smallholdings and Dwellings landscape type found around Woodgreen penetrates well into the New Forest heathland plateau at Millersford and Cunninger Bottom also has a particularly integrated landscape relationship with the floodplain below the village.

5.294 In contrast I find the land within the meander to the east of Fordingbridge is the exception, as here the intensity of agricultural change from meadowland to arable agriculture is most evident. Around South and North Charford Farms north of Breamore, which run dairy herds that graze the watermeadows, the landscape again becomes transitional towards downland character which begins to filter in from the north and west together with an increasing element of arable cropping closer to the road.

5.295 In assessing this area I conclude that this part of the River Avon and floodplain, except for the aforementioned area, has a distinct landscape character which is of outstanding landscape quality. The area also demonstrates a strong landscape relationship with the New Forest core area, the diverse landscapes of the river corridor and wooded slopes collectively forming an outstanding landscape suite. This can be considered part of the extensive tract of countryside that fully meets the natural beauty criterion necessary for National Park status.
2. **Exclusion of Ringwood**

5.296 In terms of landscape character I find that the sizeable urban area of Ringwood lies between the Gravel Extraction landscape type of Blashford Lakes and the Agency’s River Terrace Farmlands type to the south of the town. The town abuts the Ancient Forest Farmlands type to the east and the Floodplain type to the west, but is separated from the latter by the A31 road corridor. The older part of the town lies mainly to the western side of the urban area and close to the A31 where there are many fine vernacular buildings of interest together with the strong focal point of the church, all delimited in their extent by the town’s Conservation Area. Beyond this there are extensive areas of more modern housing development, particularly to the north and east of the town centre, and a limited distribution of mixed development to the south of the town centre, terminating at the sewage works.

5.297 In considering whether the town and its setting possess landscape quality of merit sufficiently intrinsic to the New Forest landscape to meet the statutory criterion of natural beauty, I find that the town centre does have elements that link it visually and historically to the New Forest. This is achieved through the architectural styles and building materials of the Conservation Area and features such as the church spire landmark, seen while travelling from the Forest, and through evidence of the past Forest-related functions within the Conservation Area. However in my view these links are spatially and functionally limited and the points from the public consultation exercise (as relied upon by the Agency), do not provide convincing reasons for including Ringwood on natural beauty grounds.

5.298 I also find that the sheer scale of the town contributes markedly to its separation from the surrounding landscape. This is assisted by the physical and audible presence of the A31 on the west side, albeit in cutting, plus the predominance of extensive areas of quite ordinary late 20th century housing development to the east and the restored but artificial post mineral extraction landscapes of the Blashford Lakes to the north. To the south the town has a more direct relationship with the rural landscape with less imposition on the surrounding countryside. However, there is some development of light industrial character with little to commend it for inclusion within a nationally recognised landscape designation.

5.299 Even though the town is situated close to the high quality landscapes of the Avon valley and the backdrop of the Ancient Forest Farmlands landscape type found on the slopes above Poulner, overall I consider that the town is insufficiently integrated with the surrounding rural landscape to form part of a broad sweep of countryside that can be considered for inclusion. It therefore does not meet the natural beauty criterion necessary to qualify for National Park status. In the previous section I have already indicated while I recognise the high quality landscape of parts of the River Avon corridor and floodplain, they are not always part of the mosaic of landscapes that qualify for NFNP status, so that the town’s physically close relationship with the Avon River does not necessarily lend any greater weight for its inclusion in the NFNP.
5.300 I consider that overall the urban area of Ringwood does not satisfy the criterion of natural beauty or form part of an extensive tract of countryside that does so. I therefore recommend that Ringwood should not be included in the NFNP.

3. Exclusion of land at Breamore

5.301 I find that the land included within the Designation order west of the A338 at Breamore is of undoubted high landscape quality. It also has a distinct character containing an outstanding collection of vernacular buildings throughout the main village and North and Upper Street, including the main estate buildings of Breamore Park. However I am not convinced that this landscape is of typical New Forest character. Even though the countryside is classified as being partly within a typical agricultural landscape of the Forest edge, namely the Agency’s River Terrace Farmlands type, and partly within the Enclosed Farmlands and Woodlands type of the Sandleheath area, I find that both these categories cover a broad and varied spectrum of landscape character. In my assessment the landscape character at Breamore in this northerly part of the Avon Valley is beginning to show signs of the downland character of the West Wiltshire Downs AONB, from the village architecture to the field pattern and emerging soil types in fields west of the village, increasing westwards. I find that this differentiation from the New Forest is also substantiated by the lack of any accepted historical relationship for at least the past 720 years.

5.302 In considering these factors I find that the boundary chosen by the Agency divides what is a distinct landscape character unit that includes all of Upper Street and Breamore Park. Although the Agency’s approach is to make landscape quality the key consideration in boundary determination rather than landscape character, I find it difficult to understand why some land on the west side of Upper Street and part of the historic landscape of Breamore Park has been excluded. The result is that the boundary in the Designation Order follows an indistinct route without clear physical features around the main village but divides both Upper Street and North Street.

5.303 My own view of this boundary anomaly is that it is clear that the NFNP was taken right up to the AONB to avoid a situation where a narrow band of high quality landscape was excluded from both designations. However given Breamore’s uncertain connections to the New Forest physically and historically and the desirability of avoiding splitting any part of the settlement, I conclude that the boundary should be drawn back to the raised dismantled railway embankment to the east of the A338, excluding Breamore in its entirety together with the nondescript fields between the embankment and the A338.

4. Exclusion of land at St Catherine’s Hill/Town Common/Blackwater Hill

5.304 These heathy areas on the west side of the Avon including Town Common, St Catherines and Blackwater Hill are in my opinion isolated, even though they afford some superb distant views into the Forest from their elevated positions and possess many characteristics similar to more extensive areas within the New Forest. However, in detail these areas are more ecologically akin to the suite of Dorset lowland heaths, have a different land management history, and are distanced by the width of both the Avon floodplain and the River Terrace Farmlands from Burton to Bransgore. In addition I find that the Town Common area, despite its ecological and archaeological importance, is a heavily used local resource with a certain urban fringe
atmosphere. I therefore find these areas too disconnected from the Forest to be considered as part of the extensive tract of countryside that can qualify for inclusion as part of the NFNP.

PROPOSALS FOR EXTENDED BOUNDARIES

1. **Land west to the Moors River**

5.305 While I accept that in some ways this area contains characteristics and qualities similar to the timber inclosures within the NFNP, I do not find that the landscape quality is outstanding or worthy of national recognition. While I recognise the wealth of available recreational experiences within this landscape, I do not consider that this area forms part of the extensive tract of country that defines the NFNP, nor does it offer any visual access into the Forest. The area is much more closely related to other afforested areas of lowland heath in Dorset rather than to the New Forest which is a considerable distance to the east and beyond Ringwood, which in itself does meet the natural beauty criterion. I therefore find no reason on natural beauty grounds to extend the boundary of the NFNP across Ashley Heath to the Moors River and cannot recommend inclusion of this area.

2. **Land to the west of the Avon between Town Common and Fordingbridge**

   **2a Sub-area between Town Common and Leybrook Common**

5.306 Located on the higher ground on the west side of the Avon Valley, overall I find this area somewhat isolated from the Forest although it shares some common landscape characteristics. I can see the merits of including parts of this area within the NFNP, such as Ramsdown Plantation which has a distinct wooded and heathy character with good landscape quality and some impressive views towards the New Forest across the Avon floodplain, but it is nevertheless limited in area and dislocated from the valley by the impact of the busy A338. I find that this area, together with Week and Avon Commons which have poorer landscape quality, has stronger biological and physical commonality with the system of Dorset lowland heaths and therefore does not form part of the qualifying extensive tract of countryside.

5.307 The scattering of built development throughout the area, albeit predominantly recreational, in places further reduces landscape quality, mainly through site selection, materials and in places design standards. In addition the area also contains an identified preferred site for mineral extraction identified south of Week Common and experiences the growing nearby impact of an expanding regional airport with increasing traffic levels.

5.308 I agree that the western edge of the floodplain presents an unsatisfactory and possibly fluctuating boundary here and the A338 might offer a more easily recognised physical boundary for the NFNP, but I do not find that the proposed additional land demonstrates adequate New Forest landscape character or quality to meet the natural beauty criterion to qualify for NFNP status. Also as stated for the Lower Avon in the previous section, due to the degree of isolation of this area, I consider that the land between Town and Leybrook Commons (and hence any land west of here) does not form part of the extensive tract of country meeting the criterion. It therefore cannot be considered for inclusion in the NFNP.
2b Sub-area at Ashley, east of the A338

5.309 The low density suburban housing south of the A31 at Ashley as far as Leybrook Common, is a high quality, well treed residential environment. While it is located on the higher ground that is often present north and south along the western side of the Avon above the floodplain and is within the visual envelope of the valley, it bears little relation to the landscapes of the valley or the core Forest area further east, other than a topographic commonality. I therefore find that the area does not possess the landscape character and natural beauty that is necessary for inclusion within a National Park and does not share the characteristics of other New Forest settlements. It is therefore not recommended for inclusion within the NFNP.

2c Sub-area between Ringwood and Fordingbridge

5.310 I find the area north of Ringwood between the Designation Order boundary and The Belt up to Turmer Brook, containing Somerley Park and the adjacent woods and plantations of Baker’s Hanging, to be of mixed landscape character and quality. The area is composed of the River Terrace Farmland landscape type which contains few Forest related landscape elements and on closer examination I find the woodland component has stronger connections to land further west at Ashley Heath.

5.311 This land forms part of the chain of elevated bluffs with evidence of former lowland heath ecology which was once part of the network of Dorset Heaths. These sites are found intermittently along the west side of the Avon valley but here have undergone a marked change in land management resulting, over time, in a change in landscape character with the introduction of plantation forestry, a practice commonly found west and north of here on similar soils.

5.312 I appreciate that the Baker’s Hanging woods are an attractive vegetation mix, with some deciduous woodland rather than exclusively coniferous plantation blocks, and with a mixed age structure allowing the limited persistence of some former ground cover of the lowland heath habitat. Nevertheless the landscape character is more related to areas further west and the landscape quality is poor to medium with limited connection to the New Forest. The intervening floodplain and Blashford Lakes complex adds to the physical separation of this area from the core NFNP area.

5.313 Turning north to Somerley Park itself I find a distinct but not outstanding, historic designed landscape in a prime location on the edge of the floodplain but little New Forest landscape character evident and mainly screened by woodland from the valley. Again, the grounds are within the River Terrace Farmlands type, but very different in character to the area described above, indicating the wide spectrum of landscape that this type covers. As far as one can tell, with the limited visual and physical access, the only views available are a relatively distant one from within the New Forest at Mockbeggar Hill, which is across the lakes and gravel workings south of Ibsley, and only a partial glimpsed view from Ellingham churchyard. The parkland is also limited in its physical connectivity to the Forest for the same reasons as before, that is by the interception of the floodplain and the post mineral extraction landscape at Blashford.

5.314 With the inconsistent and intermittent landscape quality and the overall lack of physical and ecological connectivity, I find this area does not possess sufficient
natural beauty to satisfy the criterion and does not form part of the extensive tract of countryside that can be considered for inclusion within the NFNP boundary.

5.315 Looking north to the area between Lower Turmer and north to the edge of Fordingbridge, initially I find a much more intact landscape both in character and quality as far as Kent Lane and Harbridge village. Here a sense of tranquillity is evident with landscape characteristics such as heathy deciduous woods with open areas and individual veteran trees, together with a scattering of thatched cottages and other vernacular village and farm architecture, all of which is connected visually and physically across the river through Harbridge village and Ibsley Bridge to the New Forest at South Gorley and Mockbeggar. Going north again, beyond Kent Lane the landscape grades into ordinary arable farmland with copses leading to Midgeham Farm and beyond to Fordingbridge Lane.

5.316 Looking west from Harbridge Drove, I find that the essentially afforested landscape west of Ringwood Forest across to Verwood is increasingly separated from the New Forest by actual distance, topography and land use, with little or no relationship with land across the Avon corridor. There are some areas of lowland heaths such as at Cranborne and Alderholt Commons but again, as in the Lower Avon, these are more closely connected with the network of lowland heath sites across Dorset and not with those of the New Forest.

5.317 In conclusion, although there are limited areas of high landscape quality west of the Avon, some with a New Forest related character, most particularly as described between Turmer and Kent Hills across to Harbridge, overall it is not possible to recommend their inclusion. This is due to isolation from the core Forest area by the extent of the river floodplain, albeit a high quality landscape in its own right, and the questionable landscape quality of the river terrace farmlands beyond.

5.318 Therefore I conclude that areas west of the Avon in this section do not form part of the extensive tract of countryside meeting the natural beauty criterion and cannot be included within the NFNP.

3. Land in and around Fordingbridge Town

5.319 Looking at the character of Fordingbridge and its countryside setting, this urban area lies within the Agency’s River Terrace Farmlands landscape type lying close to and west of the River Avon, but also meets the edge of the Enclosed Farmland and Woodland type of the Sandleheath area which extends further west into true downland landscape. I recognise the high quality of the town’s historic core which extends across to the east side of the Avon at Horseport, all of which is befittingly covered by its Conservation Area status, but away from this core considerable modern housing development has occurred, especially to the north. While I accept that there are undoubted historical connections to the countryside both east and west of the town the influences are unavoidably multifarious, which adds diversity in built character and orientation but results in a less specific connection to the New Forest today.
4. Land between Fordingbridge and Downton

5.320 On the west side of the Avon Valley between Fordingbridge and Breamore the River Terraces landscape type is prevalent but I find the landscape quality is unremarkable rather than outstanding and anyway fades as one moves west. In addition the area is physically and culturally distanced from the New Forest, a fact which is exacerbated by the A338 which offers a robust boundary here. Even though the area possesses characteristics common to the landscape type it fails to meet the natural beauty criterion, so does not qualify for inclusion in the NFNP.

5.321 North of Breamore the landscape character commences a major transition towards downland from South Charford Farm northwards and is not distinctly of New Forest character. While I appreciate that the landscape quality here is high, it is not of the appropriate type for inclusion without weakening the rigour with which the boundary is selected for what is recognised as the New Forest, rather than any other nationally recognised landscape fulfilling the natural beauty criterion.

5. Land east of Burton

5.322 The land east of Burton outside the area covered by the Designation order falls within the River Terrace Farmlands landscape type which suffers from the impact of agricultural practices and incongruous development previously covered in the section above on the Lower Avon Valley. I therefore find that this area does not demonstrate sufficient landscape quality to meet the natural beauty criterion and cannot be included within the NFNP.

6. Christchurch Harbour to Hengistbury Head

5.323 While the land from Hengitsbury Head to the A35 does possess some areas of high landscape quality, overall it is insufficiently connected to the landscapes of the New Forest and in addition is compromised by influences of the surrounding urban areas. It therefore fails to meet the natural beauty criterion that is necessary to qualify for inclusion within the NFNP.

Landscape Assessor’s recommended boundary for sections 13-15

5.324 In section 13 the recommended boundary follows the NFHA from the railway at section 12 northwards along the base of the slope below Burton Common as far as Waterditch. It then turns west along the minor road as far as the small watercourse that is also the administrative boundary between Hampshire and Dorset and follows this line up to Waterhouse Farm. From here it follows the minor road west then northeast to Bockhampton Corner. It then circumnavigates the whole of Bransgore as defined in the local plan, also excluding existing and proposed public open spaces on the north and south edges of the village. The NFNP boundary then picks up the existing NFHA boundary again on the north side of the village on Derritt Lane at New Merryfield Farm and follows the NFHA northwards as far as Ripley Wood.

5.325 At the far western edge of Ripley Wood, which is nearest to the parkland at Bisterne Manor, the NFNP boundary departs from the NFHA line to follow the line of woods leading to Lower Bisterne Farm, joining the B3347 south of the farm following the small watercourse running from the woods towards the Avon. The boundary then
follows the southern edge of the woods lying west of the B3347 leading to Lower Side Copse and then turns north along the west side of the wood before picking up the field boundary and drainage channel at the northwest corner of the wood which leads to Alder Bed Copse. From here the boundary meets an east-west channel and footbridge on the edge of the wood and then follows the west side of wood to Wattons Ford track and bridleway. Then the boundary turns east following the bridleway and Avon Valley Path to Dean’s Farm and back to the B3347 via a minor road. On meeting the B3347, the NFNP boundary follows it for a short distance to the Dragon Lane turn-off from where it follows the eastern edge of the wood north of Bisterne Church. Half way along the wood edge the boundary then follows field boundaries that enclose the main parkland of Bisterne Manor across to the edge of Three Corner Copse to rejoin the existing NFHA boundary. The NFNP then follows the same line as the NFHA to Ringwood.

5.326 In section 14, in the vicinity of Ringwood, I recommend that the boundary for the NFNP should be the same as for the existing NFHA boundary, excluding and following the built edge of the town as shown in the local plan. From North Poulner onwards the recommended boundary for the NFNP continues to follow the NFHA to Cross Lanes.

5.327 From Cross Lanes to the Hungerford T-junction the NFNP boundary requires a detailed line to be carefully defined around the linear settlements at a larger scale than the Designation Order maps, following the principles set out under 1b Upper Avon Valley subsection Ibsley to Fordingbridge. North of the Hungerford T-junction the recommended boundary again follows the NFHA boundary as far as Criddlestyle on the B3078.

5.328 In section 15, the recommended boundary again follows the NFHA from Criddlestyle long the east bank of the River Avon to Lower Burgate on the A338 where it joins the Designation Order boundary for a short distance to Burgate Cross. The recommended NFNP boundary then departs from the Designation Order to follow the line of the raised embankment of the disused railway line, rejoining the Order boundary to the south of South Charford Farm. From here to Searchfield Farm no revisions to the Designation Order are recommended.

**BOUNDARY SECTIONS 16 - 17**

**Land north of Hale**

6.83 The River Avon at this point flows close to the main break of slope that runs north-south on the east side of the valley and here lies west of the designed landscape of Hale House which includes substantial areas of woodland on the steeper ground. I find the landscape character in this north west part of the NFNP as defined in the Designation Order quite diverse with River Floodplain, Ancient Forest Farmlands, Historic Parkland and Heath Associated Smallholdings and Dwellings landscape types all present in a relatively small area and closely associated with the Heathland type to the east which also comes right down to meet the river floodplain at Godshill Inclosure. At the same time the landscape rapidly moves towards true downland landscape character as one travels north and west. This is evident by observing the
While recognising the landscape character transition from the New Forest landscape mosaic to that of chalk downland, I find that the whole of this area is of high landscape quality with no incongruous features and amply meets the natural beauty criterion for National Park status. In deciphering a suitable boundary for the NFNP I appreciate that there may be several possibilities, but I find that the boundary as defined in the Designation Order is robust and legible by following the edge of woodland, footpaths or farm tracks from Searchfield Farm to North Charford.

However I would recommend one minor revision. This is the small area of woodland south of Searchfield Farm that is excluded from the boundary and which I recommend is included as it forms the northern extremity of the woodland associated with Hale House and is more decipherable on the ground than the small stream that runs through the wood at this point.

Redlynch, Bohemia and Lover

I find that the area north of the minor road between North Charford to Timbury Lane Farm contains villages with a typical New Forest settlement layout, set within a landscape that is intrinsically part of the wider tract of country that exemplifies the Ancient Forest Farmland landscape type. This is in good condition with high landscape quality and therefore qualifies for NFNP status under the natural beauty criterion. I therefore find no reason on natural beauty grounds to recommend any boundary revision in this area.

Land at the Earldoms

This area lies well within the New Forest Countryside Character Area and is composed of Ancient Forest Farmlands which are very typical of this landscape type and found elsewhere in the NFNP. I am also of the view that the area of contention is in good condition with high landscape quality and forms part of an extensive sequence of New Forest habitats dominated by ancient semi-natural woodland from Loosehangar to Whiteparish Common. A considerable part is also recognised for its nature conservation value with SSSI and cSAC status. Consequently I have no hesitation in concluding that this area fully meets the natural beauty criterion and should be included within the NFNP.

Redlynch to Newton Crossroads

From Redlynch the NFNP boundary follows Grove Lane and Moors Lane via Titchborne Farm which I find is a robust line which divides landscapes which have distinctly different character and orientation with downland to the north and New Forest character to the south. Due to the increasing downland character to the north of Grove and Moor Lanes I do not find it appropriate to recommend any extension to the Designation Order boundary in a northerly direction here. Even though there are two large scale nondescript arable fields south of Moor Lane to the south east of Moor Farm, overall they are dominated by the surrounding landscape New Forest quality and form part of the extensive tract of countryside that satisfies the natural beauty criterion.
6.89 The NFNP boundary departs from Moors Lane at Lowdens Copse to follow a line with which I concur as the land south of Newton Farm crossroads on the A36 displays less decisiveness in landscape character and the landscape quality is fairly poor. However, for completeness, I would recommend that the boundary should include the whole of the mire and woodland SSSI south of Newton Farm and follow the footpath south of the smallholding adjacent to the SSSI leading directly to the A36.

**Land near Whiteparish Village**

6.90 Looking to the area between Newton crossroads and the western edge of Whiteparish I find that the landscape character and quality changes from larger poorly defined fields nearer to Newton Lane, to an intricate field and hedgerow pattern which runs to the southern outskirts of Whiteparish village. This change is reflected in the NFNP boundary in the Designation Order which here follows a minor stream through a sequence of the smaller enclosures in undulating terrain. I also find that the countryside to the north of both Moors Lane and Newton Lane has a definite downland quality seeping in from the north. Even though this area is classified by the Agency as of the Ancient Forest Farmland landscape type, I am not convinced that the landscape character is particularly distinct or that landscape quality is consistently sufficient to meet the natural beauty criterion.

6.91 The meandering boundary leaving the A36 north eastwards to Whiteparish is not well defined on the ground, following little more than a ditch in places and, especially in the drier months, is not particularly easy to follow. While I accept that the natural beauty criterion is met to the south, I would still recommend that this boundary be re-aligned for legibility, to follow the footpath leaving the A36 in a northwest direction from the camping ground across to the southern tip of Whiteparish village where it rejoins the Designation Order around the south western built edge of the village.

**Whiteparish Village to Cowesfield Green**

6.92 I find that the village of Whiteparish demonstrates more affinity with downland villages than those within the New Forest to the south, especially in terms of settlement pattern and, in the older village core, the use of local vernacular architectural styles and building materials, so that I consider it wholly appropriate that the village is excluded from the NFNP.

6.93 The countryside immediately to the south of Whiteparish across to Whiteparish Common shows some elements of New Forest landscape character through features such as small woods with smaller scale pasture fields and hedgerows. However, predominantly it is farmland with larger scale arable fields without substantial boundary definition with an element of chalkiness beginning to appear in the soils of some fields closer to the village. In contrast the character and quality of Whiteparish Common woods is totally in keeping with those of the New Forest landscape of the core area, with a physical and historical connection to the Langley Woods complex and offers an easily recognised and meaningful NFNP boundary in this area.
6.94 Overall I find that between the southern edge of the village and the NFNP boundary the landscape varies in character, degree of intactness and consistency of landscape quality. Nevertheless all of these qualities do tend to strengthen from north west to south east across the area, so that at Whiteparish Common and Cowesfield Green the landscape is most affiliated to the NFNP landscape characteristics with good landscape quality. However Cowesfield Manor shows a marked orientation to farmland north of the A27, in a way similar to the older buildings in Whiteparish village which greatly reduces any viability for inclusion of the Manor and grounds in the NFNP.

6.95 With regard to the parish as a whole, while I agree that Whiteparish is a downland village, I find no reason to exclude the whole of the parish area as I find that New Forest landscape character and quality is present within its boundary, and is especially evident at Whiteparish Common which satisfies the natural beauty criterion for NFNP status.

6.96 I therefore recommend no major boundary revision in the area south of Whiteparish, except for the small deviation (agreed by the Agency) to exclude the Herrington House property which, although adjacent to Whiteparish Common, is essentially part of the farmland landscape surrounding the village.

Land between A36 and A27

6.97 Looking at the area as a whole it is evident that the landscape from the A36 northwards changes gradually from typical New Forest character towards chalk downland countryside, until north of the A27 where it becomes wholly downland in character. At times the band of transition is wide and occasionally contains incongruous areas and features which deplete the otherwise good landscape quality of this area.

6.98 As this is an extensive and intricate area of landscape it is more readily comprehensible to deal initially with the assessment of the landscape and its adherence to the natural beauty criterion in three blocks from east to west between the north and south confines of the A36 and A27 and then to return to look at the area as a whole for boundary recommendation purposes.

Between Whiteparish Common and Plaitford Green

6.99 I find Whiteparish Common to be the most northerly extension of the New Forest ancient woodland SSSI which has typical New Forest pastoral wood character with a sense of remoteness and considerable landscape quality, forming part of a complex of woods stretching south west into the Perambulation including Langley Wood and Loosehangar Copse. This area has consistently formed part of the NFHA with recognised natural beauty fulfilling the criterion.

6.100 This is contrasted with the adjacent Melchet Park which was not included in the NFHA or the pre-consultation draft boundary for the NFNP. This area was brought in after the NFNP consultation exercise mainly on the premise of further evidence on links with the New Forest through past use as a deer park and the presence of the historic parkland.
6.101 I appreciate that the A27 forms a well defined boundary in this area and that this land falls within the Ancient Forest Farmland landscape type identified by both LUC and the Agency, stretching from Redlynch to Wellow, and that the historic parkland landscape at Melchet Park is found on the Hampshire Register, with Melchet Court listed as a Grade II* building.

6.102 Whilst recognising that the previously extensive Forest of Melchet once had a close connection with the New Forest in both being Royal Forests used for hunting, which possibly merged in this area between the A36 and A27, today the situation is very different. I find that the limited extent of the parkland together with the surrounding agricultural land makes this area far from typical of the Ancient Forest Farmlands landscape type. I saw that the designed parkland landscape possesses a network of woodland and specimen trees nearer to the house, but individual fields within the parkland are more often than not under arable production and completely contained within a swathe of larger arable fields which isolate the parkland from the more wooded land to south, east and west. The argument of strong historical connections to the New Forest as a former deer park does not in my opinion alter the fact that this fairly extensive area is in itself not a good example of the landscape type and has a distinctly different landscape pattern which is not well integrated with the landscape further south at Landford. The landscape character is compromised by the intensity and scale of agriculture and, apart from the historic parkland core, appears to be similar to other areas outside the NFNP boundary which have been excluded by reason of the dominating presence of arable agriculture.

6.103 Moving south of Melchet the NFHA boundary followed Park Water as far as Gunnsfield Piggeries and then found its way by various features such as a footpath, field boundaries, the western edge of Boulder Wood and a small stream to meet with the NFNP boundary, where this minor tributary of the Blackwater crosses the road north of Plaitford Green. My reason for describing this line is to demonstrate that I appreciate that the A27 north of Melchet Park offers, according to the Agency, “a more robust alternative boundary” for this northern area of the NFNP. I agree that there is no doubt that it is otherwise difficult to delineate a clear and tangible alternative in this complex and transitional area between the A36 and A27. However, it has to be queried how far land not meeting the natural beauty criterion can be included in the NFNP in order to establish a strong boundary.

6.104 In the southern section of this westerly block, from Barnsell Copse across to Bowles Farm on the minor road between Plaitford Green and Plaitford to the A36 I find an area of mixed landscape character with a variable degree of field amalgamation and non-agricultural enterprises and a consequent loss of “Forestness”, which is more frequent as one travels towards the A36. While the area closest to Whiteparish Common has the most intact landscape character and quality, this too fades as one moves south and east towards Plaitford.

6.105 In conclusion, although I can see that overall this area is part of the Ancient Forest Farmland landscape type, I find that apart from the section from Whiteparish Common to Landford Wood Farm, there is uneven intactness and distinctiveness of character, which affects the overall landscape quality of this tract. As a result I am not convinced that all the land in this subsection meets the natural beauty criterion consistently enough to merit NFNP status.
**Plaitford Green to Woodington**

6.106 Between Plaitford Green and Wellow Mill the NFNP boundary follows a series of small lanes, as did the NFHA. I find that the Heath Associated Small Holdings and Dwellings landscape close to the A36 changes abruptly into Ancient Forest Farmland just north of Wellow.

6.107 It is evident that across this area there is a variation in landscape quality resulting from such factors as the semi-suburban housing in parts of Wellow, intensive market gardening polytunnels, and subsidiary buildings associated with various farming practices such as poultry production units and vegetable cropping arrangements, as at Gardiners, Pinns and Gauntletts Farms. All of this contrasts with the deeply rural landscape from Cross Oaks Farm to Sherfield English and at The Frenchies.

6.108 While I recognise the original core of West Wellow as a traditional Forest settlement with a linear arrangement of long narrow plots, I find that today the extended village has more of the feel of a commuter settlement spreading along the A36 with many larger scale individual dwellings with large gardens, demonstrating an altogether more low-density suburban housing pattern than a traditional Forest village. The same is true of Ham Down but to a lesser extent as here the original layout is more intact.

6.109 On the north side of West Wellow I find that a substantial amount of field improvement and amalgamation has taken place through to the River Blackwater, with less New Forest landscape character than other areas further north, beyond the Designation Order boundary, such as that south of Sherfield English. This contrasts with the south facing slopes north of the Blackwater, which here forms the boundary in the Order, where the pattern of field enclosure is predominantly small scale around Bower’s Farm, with rationalisation occurring as one moves eastwards. However, even where the old field pattern has been retained this is adversely affected by large areas of polytunnels and plastic sheeting on higher ground which appears to be increasing in area. Here local topography also imparts greater visibility of this incongruous feature over wide areas, thereby reducing the landscape quality of the surrounding countryside.

6.110 A substantial area of large arable fields also occurs around Woodington, covering an area from the fishery on the river Blackwater in the south to The Frenchies in the north. This shows little connectivity to New Forest landscapes and presents fairly ordinary countryside that can be found in many parts of southern England.

6.111 I conclude that overall this subsection has a loose affiliation with the landscape character types that they form part of, often lacking a sense of being in the New Forest. In addition several areas offer very inconsistent landscape quality with some of the best qualifying areas found beyond the NFNP boundary, such as south of Sherfield English. Consequently I find considerable parts of this subsection to be unexceptional and unable to satisfy the natural beauty criterion that is required to warrant National Park status.
Woodington to the A3090

6.112 The Designation Order boundary, and the NFHA before it, follows the course of the River Blackwater through the middle of this subsection suggesting that the area to the north does not satisfy the natural beauty criterion. I do find that the topographic orientation of the whole of this northern area is mainly to the east except for the Embley Wood section which is orientated southwest, and also the historical and cultural focus tends towards Romsey and the Test Valley.

6.113 However looking at the area beyond the NFNP boundary to the A27 and east to Gardeners Lane I find that, in terms of landscape character and quality, the southern part is a strong contender for inclusion as it shares many common characteristics with other Forest landscapes and is in good condition with few incongruous features. In contrast the land east of Gardeners Lane shares none of these qualities. Even though there is a sizeable area of woodland at Burnt Grove, it has no particular affiliation with the New Forest.

6.114 I saw that the attractive historic landscape of Embley Park provides a long distance panoramic view into the New Forest core area from the terraces at Embley House, the Park having a Grade II listing on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. However I do not find the parkland landscape sufficiently intact to be outstanding in natural beauty terms or warrant NFNP status. Parts of this historic parkland design have been altered to cater for the needs of the school, while a larger part of the grounds to the south of the main house have been redesigned as a golf course, which is very different from the original intended parkland landscape concept. Even though there are several sizeable woods and copses surrounding the parkland the aforementioned changes have affected the quality of the landscape which collectively means that the natural beauty criterion is not met as required for NFNP status.

6.115 Contrasted to this I find that Embley Wood and land associated with Kentford House, both once part of the wider Embley Estate, have stronger New Forest landscape character and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity. The unique assemblage of species and habitats in Embley Wood itself is closely related to the biodiversity of the New Forest and is now recognised as of national ecological importance with possible SSSI designation in preparation. The resulting high landscape quality does satisfy the natural beauty criterion albeit rather isolated from other areas of the New Forest. Despite this, the ecological connectivity of Embley Wood to other areas within the NFNP is inarguable and on grounds of natural beauty this area north to Ryedown Lane does warrant being given NFNP status.

6.116 Turning to the area south of the River Blackwater which is within the Designation Order boundary, I find the countryside from Ham Down to the roundabout at Ower to be of the Heath Associated Estates landscape type with a common geological base to areas further south. This area is in reasonable condition, but I find that there is a decline in quality towards Ower with detracting features such as pylons, a works yard, roadside service area, nursery and workshops. However, apart from the pylons, these are mostly well screened and do not unduly affect the attractiveness of the countryside.
I find the landscape here displays the expected features of small scale irregular field pattern, well structured by hedgerows and small woods and ponds, with remnant features of heaths and previous commons. It is also similar to areas of the same type south of the A36. This landscape is marginal in terms of meeting the natural beauty criterion but qualifies on the basis of being part of the extensive tract to the east and south which does meet the criterion very ably.

**Overall conclusion on the area between the A36 and the A27**

Having initially declared that this northern area of the NFNP forms a transition zone between New Forest and downland landscape character, it is also transitional in terms of landscape quality with pockets of high quality isolated from the extensive tracts of country that do meet the natural beauty criterion. In conclusion I find that the landscape situation is extremely complex and diverse, with a mixed standard of landscape quality throughout and markedly varying degrees of intactness of New Forest character. Within the Designation Order boundary I find there are sizeable areas of farmland which do not meet the natural beauty criterion, posing the question of how an “extensive tract of countryside” is defined.

The challenge is to define a meaningful boundary that includes all the land meeting the natural beauty criterion well, with a robust, legible and coherent boundary without compromising National Park standards. The question that has to be answered is to what extent can areas that do not meet the criterion be absorbed into the areas that do, without reducing the overall landscape quality and still legitimately forming part of an outstanding landscape of national importance qualifying for NFNP status by reason of its overall natural beauty.

In the northern boundary zone, certain areas do qualify on natural beauty grounds but are not necessarily of sufficient New Forest landscape character, while other areas have strong Forest characteristics but lack the standard of landscape quality needed to satisfy the natural beauty criterion. After examining this area at length I conclude that between A36 and A27 there is an intricate patchwork of areas that do and do not qualify for NFNP status on natural beauty grounds. Due to this variability it is unavoidable that areas which would otherwise qualify will be excluded by reason of isolation or lack of physical connectivity to the New Forest in order to arrive at a legible and meaningful boundary for the NFNP.

**Landscape Assessor’s recommended boundary for Sections 16 and 17**

In order to achieve the above I recommend that the NFNP boundary should be as set out beneath.

**Section 16** From Searchfield Farm the boundary should follow the northern edge of the woodland including the currently excluded small area of woodland just to the south of the farm. It would then follow the Designation Order boundary to Moor Lane. Where it leaves Moor Lane the boundary should follow the whole of the northern edge of the woodland mire SSSI, meeting the A36 via the footpath that follows the southern edge of the smallholding.

After crossing the A36 the boundary then picks up the footpath from the camping ground that leads northeast towards Whiteparish village, rejoining the
Designation Order boundary at the built edge of the southern end of the settlement and continuing as far as Park Water Cottage, except for a minor deviation to exclude the grounds of Herrington House as agreed by the Agency. I then recommend that the boundary should turn south following Park Water stream as far as the track that crosses it coming from Landfordwood village, thereby excluding Melchet Park and Landford Manor farmland, but including the whole of Whiteparish Common and Landfordwood village. From here I recommend that the boundary follows the track to the village, circumnavigating it by the southern built edge and then following Stock Lane to the A36 at The Beeches.

6.124 Section 17 I recommend that the boundary then follows the A36 to Plaitford and West Wellow, turning north at Palmer’s Bridge between West Wellow and Ham Down along the stream that separates the two as far as Romsey Road, then west to Wellow Mill to rejoin the Designation Order boundary at the River Blackwater. From here I recommend that the boundary continues southeast along the river until it meets a small tributary on the southeast side of Bellconey Copse, then turns north along this to meet, after a short distance, the footpath that leads to Ryedown Farm on Ryedown Lane. It should then turn east along Ryedown Lane to Gardeners Lane, turning south along this lane to meet the A3090, where the boundary turns south towards the Ower roundabout to meet the boundary recommended for section 1.