

9F: GOSPORT AND FAREHAM COASTAL PLAIN



Lee on Solent promenade with a wide variety of architectural styles with Victorian origins. Shelving shingle beach – on the more exposed south western shore..



Bedenham and Frater MoD land – a mix of defence related uses/landforms and semi natural vegetation



Flat fertile fields of market gardening, glass houses, tree windbreaks, north of Stubbington.



Alver valley has a semi natural and more managed feel.



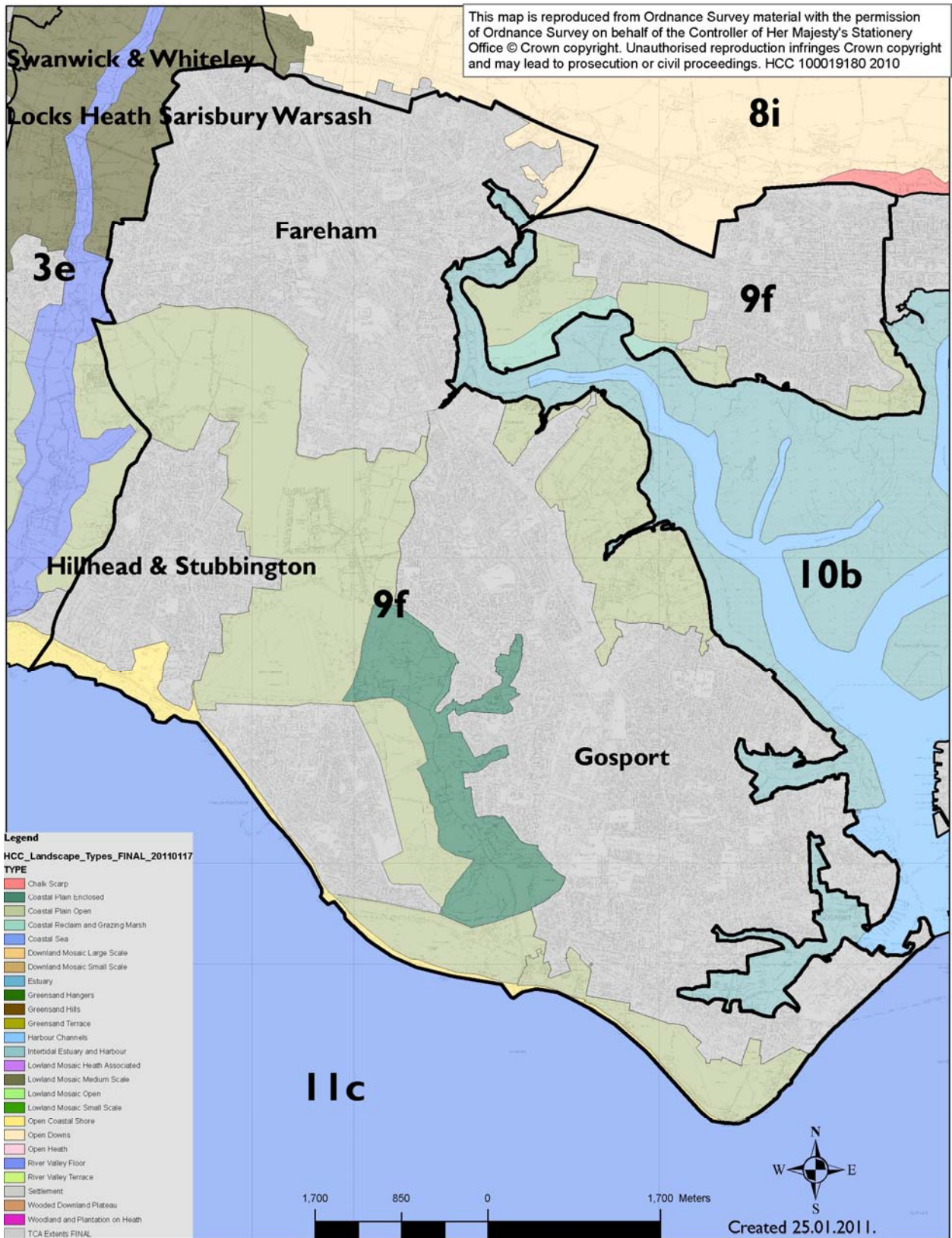
Browndown military site and SSSI - heathier soils in the extreme south and shingle on the foreshore.



Fort Brockhurst (background) in a modern industrial estate setting.



Fort Gillkicker –© James Pierce still retains its dominance in the landscape and from the sea.



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1.0 Location and Boundaries

1.1 This character area is located north of the Solent and west of Portsmouth Harbour. Its boundaries to the south and east are defined by the coastal landscape and its northern and western boundaries by Portsdown chalk escarpment and the Meon river valley respectively.



1.2 Component County Landscape Types

Coastal Plain Enclosed, Coastal Plain Open, Open Coastal Shore, Settlement.

1.3 Composition of Borough/District LCAs:

Fareham

Woodcot/Alver Valley
Fareham / Stubbington Gap

Gosport

All the Borough character areas
fall within this character area

The Gosport and Fareham character areas are at a much smaller scale. The Fareham assessment extends to mean high water whereas the Gosport assessment includes down to mean low water and in the east to the Portsmouth unitary boundary which extends into the intertidal zone.

1.4 Associations with NCAs and Natural Areas:

NCA 126: South Coast Plain
NA 75: Southcoast Plain and Hampshire Lowlands

1.5 Townscape assessment areas:

Gosport, Fareham, Stubbington, Hill Head and Lee on Solent

2.0 Key Characteristics

- A low lying landscape which physically forms part of the coastal plain but is isolated from the coastline by the development.
- Drained by shallow valleys of the River Alver and Wallington in the east and by small streams running into the Meon to the west.
- Predominantly light soils which are of high agricultural quality with heathier soils in the extreme south and shingle on the foreshore.
- In the south, grassland pasture dominates while to the north there are large arable fields with no significant boundary vegetation.
- The area is strongly influenced by the adjoining urban areas of Gosport, Stubbington and Fareham, and by defence infrastructure.
- The Solent coast draws visitors, particularly local residents for various leisure activities including angling, sailing and walking.
- Numerous small parks and allotments.
- Varied coastal views including across Portsmouth harbour and the city skyline which contrast with views across busy stretch of the Solent.

- A landscape rich in historic naval defences particularly forts which ring Portsmouth harbour and protect her entrance.

3.0 Physical Characteristics and Land Use

3.1 A low lying landscape gently sloping north to south with northeast to southwest geology banding. In the south the geology becomes increasingly sandy and silty and includes the Selsey and Earnley formations. There has been a history of mineral extraction particularly south of HMS Daedalus and there are mineral safeguarding areas in the Alver valley. The majority of the character area is below 15m but rises to 45m AOD at Porchester. Development is generally above 5m, leaving much of the non built landscape in the lowest lying areas. The shoreline west of Gilkicker becomes increasingly shelving and shingley, whilst the natural shore to the east is characterised by a more gradual profile leading to mudflats.

3.2 There are several tidal creeks on the east coast, including Frater, Haslar and Forton lakes which puncture the urban fabric and MoD related development. They are important natural habitats where the intertidal areas have been particularly squeezed by 20th century built environment. The Alver and Wallington rivers are set predominantly in urban settings. There are still some sections of the floodplain which retain a semi natural character such as the southern section of the Alver. However the water quality is particularly low chemically and biologically. Some fields and lower lying areas have drainage ditches particularly at Bedenham and around Woodcot

3.3 Land use is very mixed in the non built up areas and there are few rural characteristics. The field patterns are broken and a large proportion of the remaining boundaries have no hedges or hedges which are gappy and non woody, while many of the fields have been amalgamated and enlarged. The non-built coastal plain landscape has suburban and military related uses such as amenity grasslands, playing fields, airfield, golf courses and horse grazing. There is also occasional horticulture and crops under glass.

3.4 Along the coast the net littoral drift direction is from east to west and parallel to the shore which prevents any significant onshore deposition of beach material and hence the beaches are not particularly wide. At Lee on Solent and Hill Head sections have timber groynes which protect against erosion and help to retain areas of shingle beach. There is a beach replenishment site on the northern part of Lee on Solent shore while Southern Lee on Solent, Browndown and Stokes bay are depositional areas creating wider beaches. The 'headland' at Gilkicker point is an example of a cusped foreland, a feature caused by the effect of opposing directions of sediment transfer (long shore drift easterly direction meeting back eddy of Portsmouth harbour westerly direction).

4.0 Experiential/Perceptual Characteristics

4.1 Views out from the character area across Portsmouth Harbour and across the Solent are frequently restricted by MoD land. Northwards views often have developed skylines e.g. of Fareham and Porchester which adds to the impression of a suburban/developed landscape. This is alleviated by views beyond to Portsdown hill which provide a sense of a semi- rural hinterland. The most impressive views are of the Portsmouth skyline and naval dockyards, from places along the southern half of

the eastern shore, as well as views across the busy and narrow stretch of the Solent to the hilly backdrop of the Isle of Wight.

- 4.2 There is limited access to the Portsmouth harbour edge and the MoD firing range at Browndown. Nevertheless, the Solent Way provides a linear route along the coastline of Stokes Bay and there are strips of coastal common at Gilkicker and Lee on Solent, which are popular for recreation. There are five sailing clubs along this stretch of coast although continually shifting shingle constantly changes the beach profile and sometimes makes launching difficult. The south coast shore scene can be a blaze with colourful windsurfing and kitesurfing sails. Away from the coast there are numerous formal recreation sites, but the Alver Valley provides the only significant semi-natural experience. There are numerous sports pitches and allotments widely distributed across the area many under 5 hectares.
- 4.3 The area is strongly influenced by the large scale development and defence related uses. In places the segregation of MoD land created by long lengths of security fencing imparts a strong sense of separation and restriction of movement, and a sense of claustrophobia in the more developed areas. This contrasts with the openness of the coastline along Stokes Bay.

5.0 Biodiversity Character

- 5.1 Small and discreet areas of this landscape character area comprise part of the Solent and Southampton Water RAMSAR and SPA, and the Portsmouth Harbour RAMSAR site and SSSI site. These sites are designated for the marine habitats which they support, including tidal creeks, marshes and mudflats which can support large beds of narrow leaved and dwarf eelgrass, extensive green alga and sea lettuce. The sites also support internationally important numbers of wintering dark-bellied brent geese and nationally important numbers of grey plover, dunlin and black-tailed godwit.
- 5.2 Gilkicker Lagoon is designated as part of the Solent and Isle of White Lagoons SAC and is a sluiced lagoon with marked seasonal salinity fluctuation and supports high species diversity. Gilkicker Lagoon is also designated as a SSSI. It is a relict of a former defensive moat which in turn is thought to have been partially derived from an ancient fleet extending parallel and to the rear of the apposition beach of Gilkicker Point. The flora of Gilkicker lagoon comprises three species of charophytes, green alga species, and tassel pondweed. The invertebrate fauna includes at least 10 species of molluscs and 3 species of Coelenterata (anemones and allied groups). This assemblage is relatively rich and includes 5 national rarities.
- 5.3 In addition to the above designations there are two further SSSIs. Firstly Browndown SSSI which lies on the coast and is an extensive shingle beach comprising a disturbed sequence of apposition ridges supporting three main plant communities. Secondly The Wild Grounds SSSI which comprises an acid oakwood dominated by uneven-aged pedunculate oak with scattered yew, field maple and ash. Its natural origins and age structure, dominated by old trees are of great ecological and historical interest.
- 5.4 Beyond the designated sites this landscape character area is mainly urban in character with a large patch of arable land and associated habitats. The urban area

provides habitat variation through gardens, street trees and amenity planting, cemeteries, sports pitches and amenity grassland.

- 5.5 Running from the northwest to the south of the area there is a large matrix of habitats. Arable land dominates, with a small amount of improved grassland to the west. Unimproved and semi-improved neutral grasslands exist within the centre while further south there are active and restored quarries. To the southwest are areas of broadleaved woodland, swamp vegetation and dense scrub associated within the River Alver corridor and in the far south a small area of dry heath and acid grassland mosaic.
- 5.6 Coastal habitats also exist in this landscape character area, with marshy grassland, scattered scrub, ponds, shingle above high water and intertidal shingle.
- 5.7 The Portsmouth Harbour BOA fringes the east of this landscape character area. The biological richness and productivity of Portsmouth Harbour is reflected in the nationally important numbers of several wetland birds which overwinter there. There are over 40 SINC's in this landscape character area, with unimproved grasslands, coastal habitats and some ancient woodland designations. Local nature reserves include the West of the River Alver LNR and The Wild Grounds LNR.

6.0 Historic Character

6.1 Archaeology

- 6.1.1 Mesolithic artefacts (including a cluster of finds and a site on the plain below Portsdown Hill) found in the area, and taken with wider distributions, indicate that the coastal plain was utilised. In the early part of this period it would have been an inland rather than a coastal zone (due to lower sea levels).
- 6.1.2 Although there is no immediate evidence of Neolithic settlement, the long barrows on Portsdown Hill suggest that the plain was in some way settled or farmed. There is evidence of Neolithic pottery on the plain below Portsdown hill, which whilst not definitely settlement, implies settled existence. There are also some Neolithic artefacts found on the peninsula.
- 6.1.3 Similarly the peninsular also has evidence of some Bronze Age settlement, but it is limited and there is no evidence of field systems and burial mounds tend to be located on the higher ground behind the coastal plain. The number of Bronze Age hoards in this landscape may indicate a less intensively settled area and reflect evidence of cross channel trade.
- 6.1.4 There is limited evidence of Iron Age settlement on the coastal plain and sites below Portsdown Hill, but not along the peninsula. It seems up to this point that the coastal plain below Portsdown Hill is settled and farmed, but that it has not greatly extended down the Gosport Peninsula.
- 6.1.5 The Portchester Roman fort and the Roman road to it is a particular feature of the coast and the area's importance for defence and as a port, but the evidence does not suggest that the peninsula in general was intensively settled and farmed, although there is Roman evidence along the coastal plain under Portsdown Hill, presumably reflecting the important transport corridor along the coast.

6.1.6 In the medieval period the presence of Grange Farm Abbey suggests that this area was still underused and suitable as a gift of land for the establishment of a religious order. However there are clear areas, such as around Gosport and Stubbington, where the landscape was farmed by open field systems of some size in the medieval period. It is likely that in the medieval and late medieval period the coastal activity of ports and military activity gave an impetus to more intensive farming in this area.

6.2 **Historic Landscape**

6.2.1 Much of the historic landscape has been periodically altered and built over. This makes it difficult to see the different periods of exploitation and enclosure in the landscape today.

6.2.2 The Ordnance Surveyors Drawings of the area of 1803 mapping shows an intensively farmed landscape of small enclosures and common fields where it is possible to discern, around Stubbington and Alverstoke, small scale open field and common field system with origins from the late to post medieval period which had been subject to informal enclosure. Further to the north the field systems are slightly larger scale and the pattern is of the open field systems with late medieval origins. Virtually none of these field systems can be discerned in the modern farmed landscape. The winding nature of some of the rights of way and tracks are probably the only indications of where these boundaries might have lain. The 1800 landscape around Gosport and Rowner was of very small scale open and common fields, intensively farmed, serving the developing settlement of Gosport. Rowner became a completely open landscape by 1850 while to the south the landscape had been subject to formal enclosure by 1800, now completely lost to development of the MoD airfield and Lee on Solent. There were very few areas of common by 1800 Browndown remains as a MoD training area and Chark common is part of the Alver valley nature reserve and golf course.

6.2.5 This area does not appear to have been favoured for salt production. By 1800 the only major salt producing area was at the entrance to Fareham creek and records also show a small area by current day Hill Head.

6.2.6 In terms of parkland landscapes the spacious designed grounds of Haslar Hospital (EH Grade II), with its strong axial design including enclosed airing court gardens overlooks the Solent. Another significant park is Cams Hall where, although some of the park is now a golf course, other features have survived and an avenue of trees has been replanted lining the approach drive. There is another avenue at Blackbrook House, a fine example of a cottage orne with a Picturesque garden. There are a number of public parks and cemeteries in this area, some with their origins from the nineteenth century such as Anns Hill Cemetery in Gosport, Crescent gardens in Alverstoke, Walpole Park and part of the grounds to Bay House now form Stanley Park. Others such as Foster gardens and Falkland gardens were created in the first half twentieth century. Cams Hall/Home Farm at Fareham Creek now a office/golf course but quite an important former country house/estate farm/parkland setting.

6.3 **Built Environment**

6.3.1 Many of the roads and lanes have their origins in the tracks associated with accessing numerous small enclosure field systems and would have been winding in character.

Their alignments in the modern highway network are still discernible but often widened and straightened. Along the minor road network the alignments are better retained. The M27 and associated land run across part of the northern boundary of the character area and although there are bridges and underpasses, the landscape to the north is severed, with the busy parallel A27 reinforcing this separation. The north south roads such as the A32 and B3334 have a constant flow of slow moving traffic.

- 6.3.2 The settlement pattern by the mid 19th century contrasts east and west in the character area. To the west it is dispersed around what is now Stubbington. To the east it is nucleated with Fareham and Gosport as important market and defence-related towns. Alverstoke and Brockhurst are examples of much smaller nucleated settlements at this time. These have all been subsumed into Gosport and Fareham. Most development was post 1945.
- 6.3.3 There was a moderate density of 19th century farmsteads particularly either side of the Alver. Older steadings were located to the west and of 17th and 18th origin while in the far south on the sandier gravelly soils there were few. Now nearly all have been lost to development and MoD land take and those that remain are hemmed in on all sides by development including glass houses and market garden crops.
- 6.3.4 The defence of Portsmouth harbour and the British navy has been of key influence on this character area. Porchester castle is a fine example of a Saxon castle with Roman origins at the head of the harbour. From the time Henry VIII declared Portsmouth harbour as the home of the British navy defence of the harbour entrance and its approaches were the focus for development, including castles at Hasilworth known as the Gill-Kicker and at Alverstoke. Over the centuries since there has been rebuilding at these sites such as the north to south, Gomer to Elson line of forts and Stokes Bay moat and batteries connecting the line of forts to the west with Fort Monckton and Gillkicker. Unfortunately modern development has often paid little respect to the setting and location of these defences and their presence over the wider landscape and townscape is much diminished. The defences which are close to the coast such as Porchester castle, Gillkicker, Monckton and the batteries on the Stokes bay moat retain a dramatic presence from the water. There are a number of other military establishments that have interesting gardens and grounds and in some cases the trees and shrubs may have been brought back by ships from overseas.
- 6.3.5 HMS Daedalus is quite a prominent feature of this area, not just the airfield which forms a visual gap between areas of development, but also the group of buildings at the heart of the Daedalus Conservation Area, former flying boat sheds and aviation associated buildings which are fundamental to its listing on the EH register.

EVALUATION

7.0

Forces for Change

1. New development.
2. MOD Land Release.
3. Pressure from urban fringe use related activities.
4. Recreation pressures.
5. Climate change and coastal processes in particular sea level rise and increase in frequency of storms.

KEY QUALITIES AND EFFECTS OF FORCES

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| 7.1 <i>Rich naval history with forts and associated buildings often in particularly prominent locations.</i> | |
| FORCES FOR CHANGE: | CONSEQUENCES |
| 1.2.5 | Threats: Unsympathetic conversions and treatment of the setting to forts and building released from MoD ownership. Predicted sea level rise affecting under and above ground construction particularly those close to the coast. |
| | Opportunities: Balancing tourism needs and conversion for development demands whilst retaining and improving the setting to these historic features could be addressed by sympathetic design briefs. Including space for the setting to these forts could be included in coastline defence strategies. |
| 7.2 <i>Particular biodiversity interest tends to be on the peripheries and small scale - including shingle habitat, remnant acid oak woodland and a saline lagoon. The area adjoins internationally designated marine sites.</i> | |
| FORCES FOR CHANGE: | CONSEQUENCES |
| 1.2.3.4 | Threats: Interruptions to natural and man managed shingle beech replenishment and sources of shingle which affect the amount of material for key areas of this habitat, such as erosion at north west end of Browndown ranges. Breaching of sea defences and flood storm damage over sea wall and embankment at the Gillickicker would result in loss of habitat including saline lagoon behind. Some areas on the hill head section have no protection. Beach tourism and recreation pressure on shingle and dune communities. Coastal squeeze along Portsmouth harbour side. |
| | Opportunities: The planning of the balance between recreational pressures and wildlife objectives Fort Gillickicker to Browndown management unit in the face of sea level rise and increase storm frequency Design and materials could be influenced if opportunity arises on the Portsmouth harbour side of the character area for compensatory habitat creation through coastal realignment. |

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| <p>7.3 <i>A suburban influenced landscape with predominantly amenity recreation public open space within settlements and arable fields separating Stubbington and Hill Head from Gosport and Fareham.</i></p> | |
| FORCES FOR CHANGE: | CONSEQUENCES |
| 1.2.3.4 | <p>Threats: Loss of remaining urban and fringe open space to development and perception of quantity and quality of green space is not sufficient in Hill Head and South West Fareham. Most housing development is likely to be of a small scale nature but the Southern part of the gap between Stubbington Gosport and possible redevelopment of HMS Daedulus could result in perception that these settlements have merged.</p> <p>Opportunities: A more co-ordinated approach to stewardship within the Strategic Gap and exploring opportunities for accessible green space provision could be promoted as part of improving the variety and quantity of accessible green space and green infrastructure. The design and character for MoD land release for development could be influenced by the townscape assessment for Gosport, Fareham and Stubbington and Hill Head to ensure good integration with these settlements.</p> |
| <p>7.4 <i>Contrasting and varied coastal and harbour views over a busy stretch of the Solent and over Portsmouth Harbour to the city skyline and an inward-looking landscape within the character area due to flat topography and its built up nature.</i></p> | |
| FORCES FOR CHANGE: | CONSEQUENCES |
| 1.5 | <p>Threats: Sea defence work / adaptation and increasing height of structures where there is public access or from landward public open space which may limit or restrict views. Harbour side redevelopment schemes which restrict access / insensitive to the views over the harbour.</p> <p>Opportunities: Modifications to design of sea defences could ensure views from the landward side are retained over the coastline. Retaining and improving harbour and coastal views could be emphasised as a key factor in design briefs for development, public realm s and open space strategies.</p> |