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West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Prepared by LUC for West Berkshire Council
August 2019



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West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Final Report
Prepared by LUC for West Berkshire Council
August 2019

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Part 1: Overview



1 Introduction

The purpose of this Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

- 1.1 In March 2018 West Berkshire Council commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) to review and consolidate the Council's existing landscape evidence base contained within the:
 - Newbury District Council District-Wide Landscape Assessment (Landscape Design Associates, 1993).
 - North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (LUC, 2002).
 - Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (LUC, 2003).
- 1.2 The work carried out provides a comprehensive and up to date landscape character assessment for all land outside defined settlement boundaries in West Berkshire.
- 1.3 The updated Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) for West Berkshire:
 - Provides a comprehensive and up to date landscape character assessment for all land outside defined settlement boundaries in West Berkshire;
 - Ensures that an understanding of the character of the landscape can be used as a positive tool to manage change by providing a framework for informed decisions to be made;
 - Provides a robust evidence base for more detailed site specific landscape sensitivity and capacity studies;
 - Facilitates the protection and enhancement of valued landscapes in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework;
 - Forms a sound evidence base for the implementation of the West Berkshire Local Plan to 2026, and for the review of the West Berkshire Local Plan to 2036 and supporting the landscape character policies within it.
- 1.4 The LCA can be used to consider landscape character when planning any type of change. It is therefore designed to be used by all involved in decisions about proposals for change and development including:
 - Landscape architects;
 - Developers, members of professional development project teams and other organisations who own or manage land;
 - Other professionals involved in assessing the consequences of change on other aspects of the environment;
 - Planners and other officers in local government and government agencies who may be the recipients of reports on the consequences of change and development; and
 - Politicians, parish councils, local interest groups, amenity societies and the general public who may be involved in decisions about proposals for change and development.
- 1.5 A User Guide is set out in **Appendix 5**.

The role of Landscape Character Assessment

- 1.6 **Landscape character** is defined as “a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse”¹. **Landscape character assessment** is the process of identifying and describing such variations in character across a landscape – in this case West Berkshire District. It also seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of features and attributes (characteristics) that make different landscape distinctive. The landscape is the result of the interaction between people and the environment that gives an area a local identity. The ‘landscape wheel’ at **Figure 1.1** below illustrates how the different natural, cultural and perceptual attributes of a landscape combine to produce character.



Figure 1.1 The 'landscape wheel' (Natural England, 2014)

- 1.7 The process of Landscape Character Assessment is described in “*An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment*” (Natural England, October 2014).
- 1.8 Understanding the character of place and evaluating an area’s defining characteristics is a key component in managing growth sustainably and ensuring that the inherent qualities of West Berkshire’s landscape can continue to be appreciated. Understanding of character can be used to ensure that any change or development does not undermine whatever is valued or characteristic in a particular landscape.

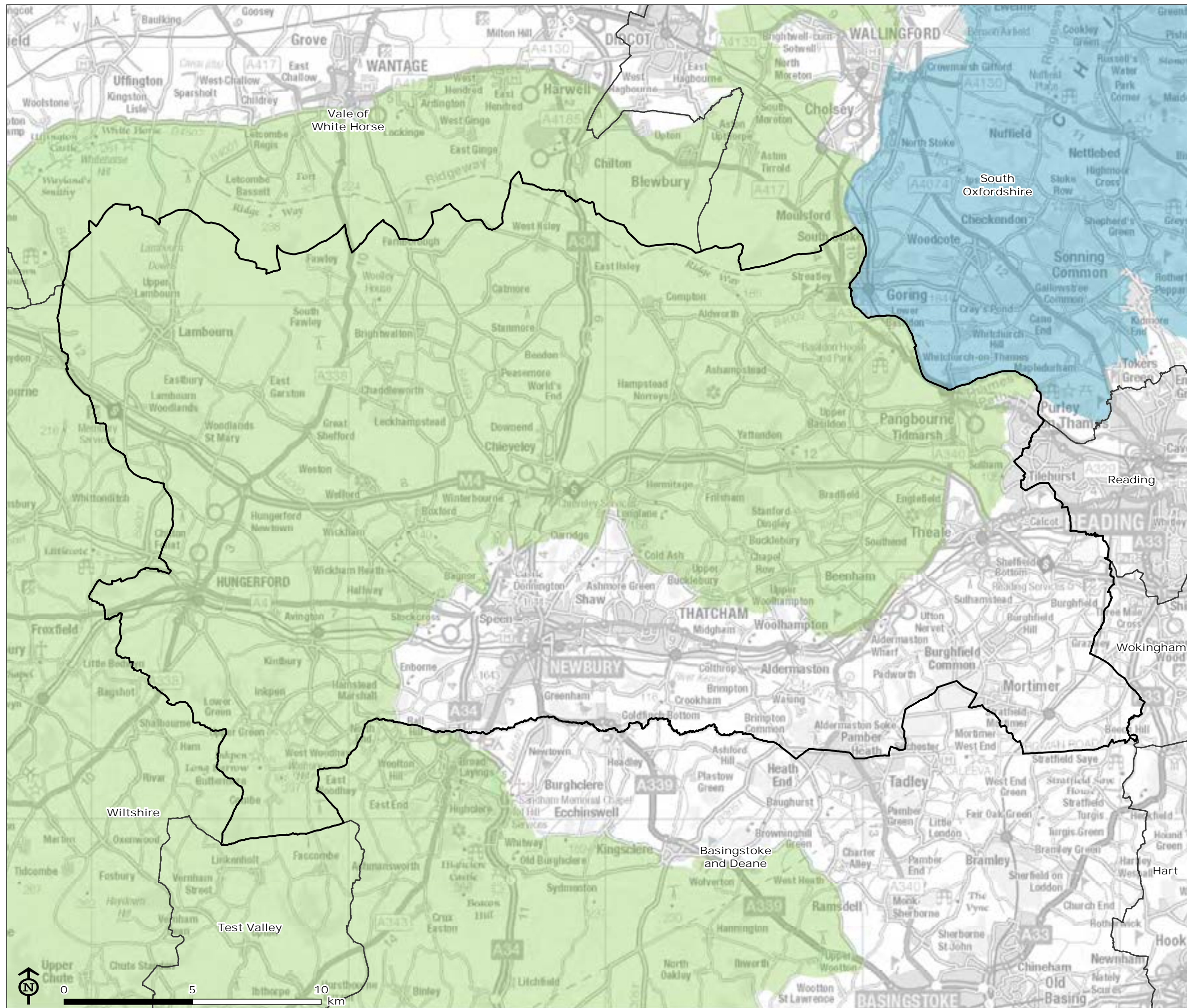
West Berkshire in context

- 1.9 West Berkshire is a unitary authority of 704 square kilometres (272 square miles), which is located in the south east of England. The location of the District is shown in **Figure 1.2**. It contains both towns and extensive rural areas, with about 90% of the District being rural in character. The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally

¹ Definitions taken from Natural England (2014) *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment*.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691184/landscape-character-assessment.pdf

important and legally protected landscape, designated for the quality of its scenic beauty and covers 74% of the District.

- 1.10 Approximately 44% of the total population live in the rural areas of the District. This rural population is dispersed across a large number of towns, villages and smaller settlements each of which has its own identity, as well as its own specific needs and concerns. This rural dimension is very important in shaping the character of West Berkshire, its communities, economy and environment. The importance of agriculture and rural businesses, the prominence of landscape and countryside along with the small scale and dispersed nature of rural communities, are all important issues and challenges. The rural environment of West Berkshire adds significantly to the quality of life enjoyed by urban residents of the District and is a considerable asset for the wider area.
- 1.11 West Berkshire is part of the Thames Valley which is recognised as the most dynamic and competitive sub-regional economy in the UK. Employment provision in West Berkshire is diverse, and rates of employment in the District remain high.
- 1.12 The largest settlements include Newbury and Thatcham and the urban areas of Tilehurst, Purley on Thames and Calcot in the east of the District, close to Reading. Newbury is the largest town in West Berkshire and serves as the District's administrative centre.
- 1.13 West Berkshire is well connected in transport terms. At the centre of the District is an important road interchange. This is where the east-west M4 motorway intersects with the north-south A34. There are road connections to larger centres such as Reading, Oxford, Swindon, Basingstoke and London. Mainline railway services to London and the south west of England run through the south of the District. These locational factors, combined with high quality urban and rural areas, contribute towards making the area a popular place to live and work.



West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 1.2: **West Berkshire in Context**

- West Berkshire District
- Neighbouring Local Authority boundary
- Chilterns AONB
- North Wessex Downs AONB

Map Scale @A3: 1:145,000



Policy Context

The European Landscape Convention

- 1.14 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into force in the UK in March 2007. It establishes the need to recognise landscape in law; to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and planning of landscapes; and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies.
- 1.15 The ELC definition of 'landscape' recognises that all landscapes matter, be they ordinary, degraded or outstanding:
- "Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors".***
- 1.16 The ELC puts emphasis on the whole landscape and all its values and is forward looking in its approach, recognising the dynamic and changing character of landscape. Specific measures promoted by the Convention, of direct relevance to this study include:
- the identification and assessment of landscape; and
 - improved consideration of landscape in existing and future sectoral and spatial policy and regulation.
- 1.17 This Landscape Character Assessment will continue to make a key contribution to the implementation of the ELC in West Berkshire. It helps to reaffirm the importance of landscape, co-ordinate existing work and guide future work to protect, manage and plan the landscapes of West Berkshire.

National Planning Policy

- 1.18 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in February 2019, states in paragraph 170² that:
- 'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
- ...protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality)' (para 170.a)
- ...recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland ...' (para 170.b).
- 1.19 It goes on to say in paragraph 72 that 'great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)... [and] the conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas'.
- 1.20 The NPPF is supported by Planning Practice Guidance³ which recognises the role that Landscape Character Assessment plays in helping to understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape.

Key Local Plan policies in relation to landscape character

- 1.21 The Local Plan for West Berkshire is part of the statutory planning framework for the District. It sets a vision and framework for the future development of West Berkshire, addressing needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure – as

² NPPF Chapter 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment Para 170
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779764/NPPF_Feb_2019_web.pdf

³ PPG Natural Environment Landscape Reference ID: 8-036-20190721 and 8-037-20190721
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment>

well as a basis for safeguarding the environment, adapting to climate change and securing good design. The Plan is also a critical tool in guiding decisions about individual development proposals.

- 1.22 The current Local Plan makes clear what is intended to happen in West Berkshire up to 2026, where and when this will occur and how it will be delivered. The key overarching Local Plan policy in relation to landscape character is Core Strategy policy CS19 which deals with Historic Environment and Landscape Character. It states:

‘In order to ensure that the diversity and local distinctiveness of the landscape character of the District is conserved and enhanced, the natural, cultural, and functional components of its character will be considered as a whole. In adopting this holistic approach, particular regard will be given to:

- a) The sensitivity of the area to change.
- b) Ensuring that new development is appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character.
- c) The conservation and, where appropriate, enhancement of heritage assets and their settings.
- d) Accessibility to and participation in the historic environment by the local community.

Proposals for development should be informed by and respond to:

- a) The distinctive character areas and key characteristics identified in relevant landscape character assessments including Historic Landscape Characterisation for West Berkshire and Historic Environment Character Zoning for West Berkshire.
 - b) Features identified in various settlement character studies including Quality Design - West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document, the Newbury Historic Character Study, Conservation Area Appraisals and community planning documents which have been adopted by the Council such as Parish Plans and Town and Village Design Statements.
 - c) The nature of and the potential for heritage assets identified through the Historic Environment Record for West Berkshire and the extent of their significance.’
- 1.23 The policy is based on the use of landscape character assessments as a basis for informing decisions. As the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment replaces the Newbury District Landscape Assessment (1993) and the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003) and forms an up to date assessment for all land outside defined settlement boundaries in West Berkshire it will be used to inform and support this policy.
- 1.24 The Council is now reviewing its Local Plan to cover the period up to 2036. The West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment also forms a sound evidence base for the review and will support the landscape character policies to be contained within it.

Relationship to Published Landscape Studies

Landscape Character Assessment hierarchy

- 1.25 Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at a variety of scales and levels of detail, with the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment included within a wider hierarchy of landscape character assessment information cascading down from the national to local (West Berkshire) level.
- 1.26 At the national level, England is divided into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs). Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape character, biodiversity and geodiversity. There are descriptive profiles available for each NCA (published in 2014 by Natural England⁴), setting out information on landscape character, changes in the landscape and an assessment of ecosystem services delivered. West Berkshire is largely covered by two NCAs: NCA 116, the Berkshire and

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>

Marlborough Downs, and NCA 129, Thames Basin Heaths. Smaller areas of the north east of the District are covered by NCA 110, the Chilterns, and NCA 115, the Thames Valley, with an area on the south west boundary of the District within NCA130, the Hampshire Downs. Existing national character areas within West Berkshire are shown on **Figure 1.3** National Landscape Character Context.

- 1.27 Landscape character does not stop at administrative boundaries but continues seamlessly into surrounding administrative areas. Therefore, an aim of this assessment is to sit alongside:
- Landscape Character Assessments of adjacent authorities, including Basingstoke and Deane, Test Valley, Wiltshire, Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire and Wokingham;
 - Landscape Character Assessments for the North Wessex Downs AONB and for the Chilterns AONB.

The landscape character types were assessed to ensure consistency across the different Landscape Character Assessments.

- 1.28 This assessment can also provide a framework for more detailed assessments, such as local landscape character assessments produced to inform Neighbourhood Development Plans and other community planning documents.

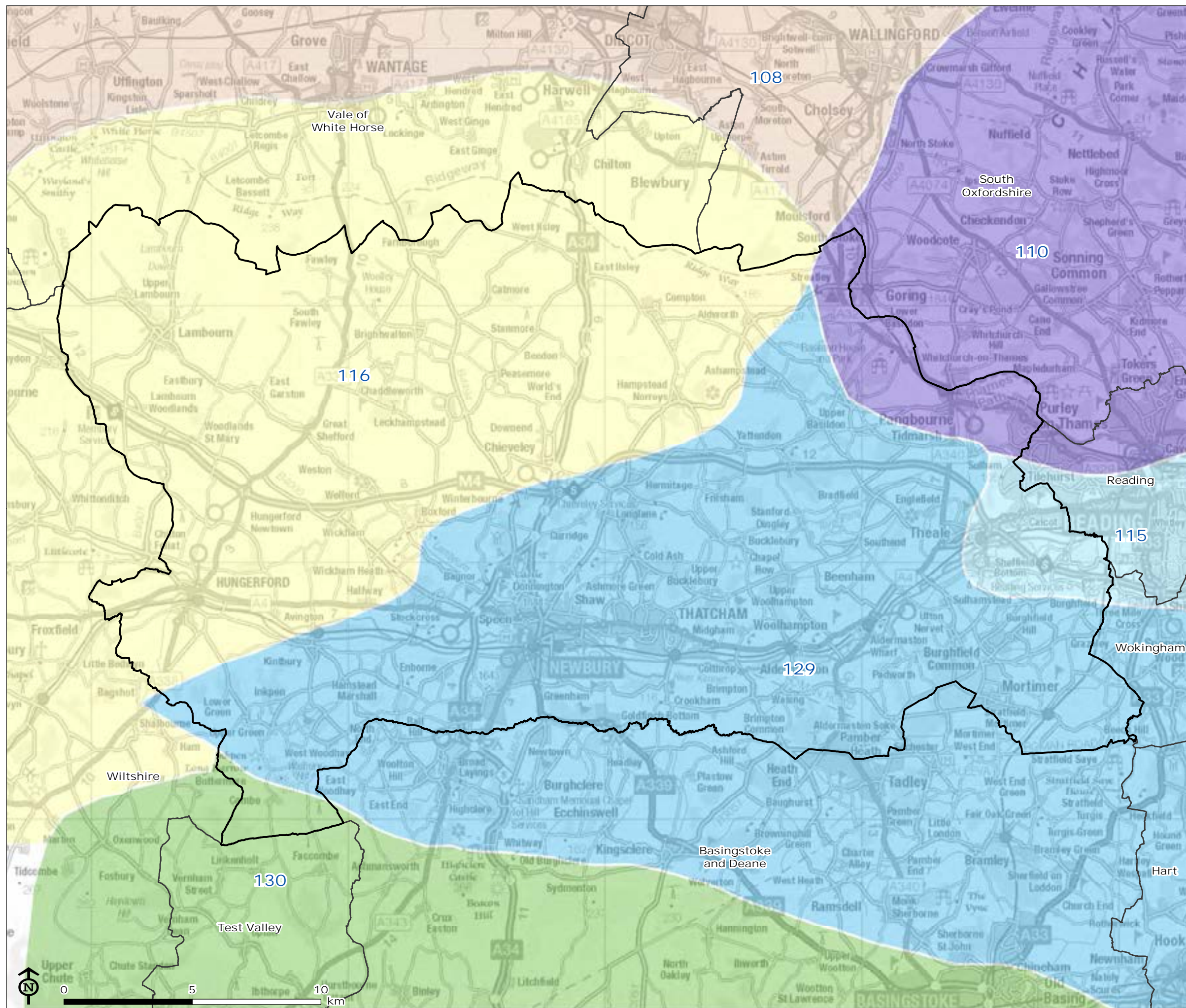
Relationship with existing Landscape Character Assessments

- 1.29 This assessment builds upon the existing local authority scale assessments from 1993 and 2003 as well as the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002) (which covers 74% of the District). This West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment supersedes both the Newbury District Landscape Assessment (1993) and Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003) and sits alongside the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002), which was produced in order to manage and guide change across a designated area extending beyond West Berkshire. The two studies should be considered complementary to each other.
- 1.30 This Landscape Character Assessment classifies the District into Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) as set out in **Figure 5.1**. The boundaries of the Types and Areas are based on a review and consolidation of the classifications used in the previous studies. The relationship between the classifications used in each assessment is set out in **Appendix 1** and further details of the approach set out in **Section 2** below.

Structure of this report

- 1.31 This report is structured as follows:
- **Part 1** provides an overview, comprising:
 - **Section 1: Introduction** presents the background and purpose of the Landscape Character Assessment, policy context and relationship to other landscape studies (this chapter).
 - **Section 2: Methodology for the Landscape Character Assessment** presents a summary of the method and approach to the landscape character assessment.
 - **Section 3: Formative Influences** looks at the physical and cultural influences that have shaped today's landscape.
 - **Section 4: Landscape Character Classification** presents the landscape classification.
 - **Part 2** presents the landscape character of the landscape character types and areas through a series of 'profiles'.
- 1.32 The report is supported by the following appendices:
- **Appendix 1** provides an analysis of the landscape classification of West Berkshire in earlier studies.
 - **Appendix 2** provides a glossary of terms used in the document.

- **Appendix 3** lists the attendees at the community consultation workshop held on 3 July 2018.
- **Appendix 4** provides details of the feedback given at the community consultation workshop.
- **Appendix 5** provides a 'user' guide for those considering the impact of landscape character as a result of any type of change.



West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 1.3: National Landscape Character Area Context

- West Berkshire District
- Neighbouring Local Authority boundary
- National Character Areas
 - 110: Chilterns
 - 115: Thames Valley
 - 116: Berkshire And Marlborough Downs
 - 129: Thames Basin Heaths
 - 130: Hampshire Downs

Map Scale @A3: 1:145,000





Methodology for the Landscape Character Assessment

2 Methodology for the Landscape Character Assessment

Approach

- 2.1 This Landscape Character Assessment follows the method promoted by Natural England through *'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment'* (2014)⁵, which embeds the principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) within it.
- 2.2 The assessment has been prepared within the framework set by Natural England's National Character Areas, and aims to join up with surrounding authorities' Landscape Character Assessments. It supersedes the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003) and the Newbury District Landscape Assessment (1993) but sits alongside the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2003) as set out above (Paragraph 1.29) and in **Appendix 1**.

Process of Assessment

- 2.3 The process for undertaking the study involved four main stages, described below, namely:
- Desk-based review and classification;
 - Field survey;
 - Stakeholder consultation;
 - Draft Report; and
 - Final Report.
- 2.4 GIS was used throughout the study as the tool for collating, manipulating and presenting data.

Desk study

- 2.5 The initial desk based stage involved the collation of a wide range of mapped information to 'sense-check' the existing landscape classifications and establish an up to date baseline. Data used within the report, including data collated in the GIS database, is shown in **Table 2.1** below:

Table 2.1 GIS Data

Name	Source
Base OS mapping at 1:50K and 1:25K	Ordnance Survey
Terrain 50 Contour data	Ordnance Survey
Linear features, mass movement, artificial ground, superficial deposits and bedrock geology 1:50K	British Geological Survey
Administrative boundaries	West Berkshire Council
National Character Areas	Natural England
Public Rights of Way	Natural England
River features & flood zones	Environment Agency

⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/396192/landscape-character-assessment.pdf
[accessed February 2015]

Agricultural Land Classification	Natural England
Nature conservation designations	Natural England (national datasets) and West Berkshire Council (local datasets)
Priority habitats	Natural England
Historic Landscape Character Areas Historic Landscape Characterisation dataset Historic Environment Character Zoning dataset & associated texts Historic Environment Character Areas dataset & associated texts	West Berkshire Council
Heritage designations	Historic England (national datasets) and West Berkshire Council (local datasets)
Dark skies	CPRE
Infrastructure	Ordnance Survey
Local Plan	West Berkshire Council

Classification

- 2.6 Classification is concerned with dividing the landscape into areas of distinct, recognisable and consistent common character and grouping areas of similar character together.
- **Landscape Character Types** share broadly similar patterns of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences in each area in which they occur. Although not identical they share a common pattern of elements e.g. Wooded Downland LCT.
 - **Landscape Character Areas** – Each landscape type is divided into a number of geographically specific character areas. These share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own particular identity or ‘sense of place’ e.g. Shefford Wooded Downland LCA.
- 2.7 The update of the landscape classification for West Berkshire is based on a review and consolidation of the three existing landscape studies covering West Berkshire: Newbury Landscape Assessment (1993), Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003) as well as the Landscape Character Assessment for the North Wessex Downs AONB (2002). It brings all three studies together at a single district level scale. The classification was undertaken at a scale of 1:25,000 and covers land outside of existing settlement boundaries only. The urban areas of Newbury and Thatcham and the main built up areas of other settlements across the District have therefore not been included⁶.
- 2.8 Although there was some consistency in the classification between the three studies, the boundaries of some of the character areas across these landscape studies did differ. The classification for this Landscape Character Assessment took the 2003 Berkshire LCT and LCA boundaries as a starting point but has been mindful of any variations in the 1993 Newbury study. Some landscape character areas were amalgamated where they are geographically adjacent to each other and where the written descriptions apply equally to both. Further detail is set out in **Appendix 1**.

Field survey

- 2.9 A field survey was undertaken in June and July 2018 to review and refine the draft classification, make notes on landscape character and take photographs to help with subsequent assessment. This specifically focussed on:

⁶ The built up areas of the District are covered by various other settlement character studies. In particular this Landscape Character Assessment will complement the guidance contained in the ‘Quality Design – West Berkshire’ Supplementary Planning Document (adopted June 2006) which applies to all developments across the District.

- verifying and fine-tuning the classification of the landscape types and areas identified;
- verifying and identifying key characteristics; and
- identifying valued features, qualities and detractors, and opportunities for future management.

Consultation

- 2.10 A focused stakeholder consultation event was held on 3 July 2018 to present the work being undertaken and invite comments back on the proposed classification, draft area names and boundaries, as well as gauging information on key characteristics, what is valued in the landscape, key changes since 2003 and current and future issues affecting the landscape. The workshop was well attended by a range of different stakeholders from across the District including representatives from parish councils, neighbourhood planning and parish plan groups, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, the North Wessex Downs AONB and West Berkshire Council.
- 2.11 Comments provided at the consultation event, and in subsequent responses, helped to inform the definition of assessment area boundaries, the descriptions of key characteristics, valued features and qualities, detractors and landscape strategy. A full list of workshop attendees is provided at **Appendix 3** and the record of comments made included in **Appendix 4**.
- 2.12 The desk based study, field work and consultation process resulted in the definition of 10 Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and 26 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) for West Berkshire. The classification is shown on a **1:250,000 scale** base map at **Figure 5.1**

Draft report

- 2.13 A draft Landscape Character Assessment report was submitted to the WBC Steering Group for comment in August 2018.

Final report

- 2.14 Following comments from WBC Steering Group, the Landscape Character Assessment report and updated LCA classification were finalised in May 2019.

Landscape Character Area Descriptions

- 2.15 The descriptive profiles for the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment are presented at Landscape Character Area level and arranged by their respective Landscape Character Type within the District. Each LCT section begins with an overview map showing the location of the LCT within West Berkshire and its relationship with other LCTs.
- 2.16 The descriptive profiles of the Landscape Character Areas within West Berkshire are structured as follows:

Map and summary of location and landscape character

- A location map (1:25,000 scale) which shows the extent of the LCA and its relationship with other LCAs, followed by a summary paragraph explaining its location and defining landscape character.

Representative photos

- These help the reader appreciate the visual character of the LCA.

Landscape character

- This section provides a description of the landscape character of the LCA:
 - **Key Characteristics:** In bullet point format, the key characteristics provide a detailed explanation of the character of the LCA.

- **Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution:** a description of significant cultural heritage features in the landscape;
- **Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats:** a description of significant natural features in the landscape including designated habitats.

Evaluation

- The evaluation provides an understanding of what is important in each LCA and why, with key sensitivities and qualities validated through stakeholder consultation:
 - **Valued Features and Qualities:** identifies the sensitivities and qualities that are particularly valued for their contribution to landscape character (i.e. if any one attribute ceased to exist, it would change the character to the detriment of the landscape);
 - **Detractors:** identifies key detractors and issues including past, current and likely future trends that bring about change in the landscape; and
 - **Landscape Strategy:** landscape guidance focused on development management considerations to enhance the landscape of the area.

Formative Influences



3 Formative Influences

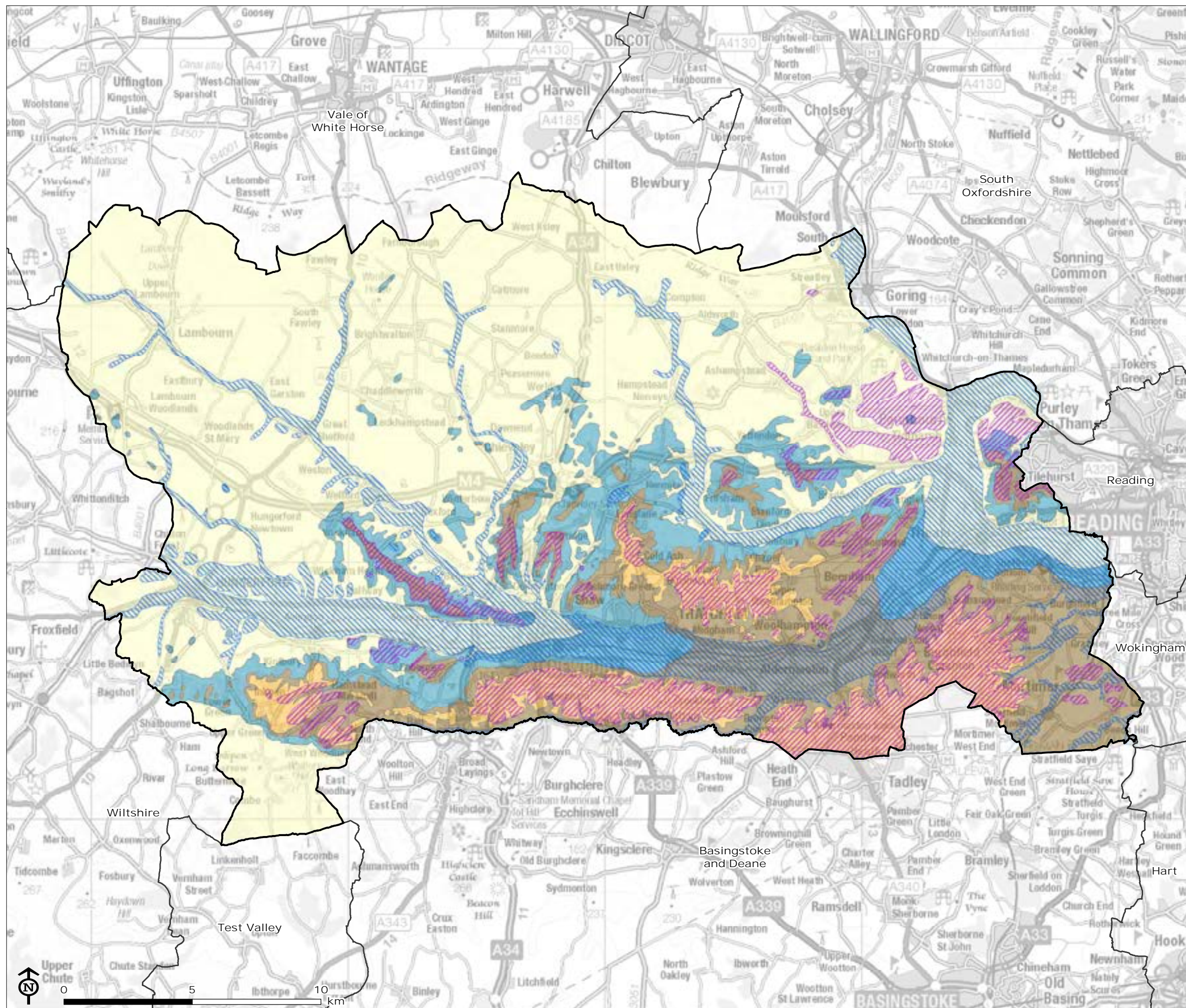
- 3.1 This chapter summarises the main physical and cultural evolution which has shaped the distinct landscape of West Berkshire. The later detailed descriptions of the different Landscape Character Areas highlight those key characteristics and valued attributes that are of significance to the particular landscape concerned.
- 3.2 The landscape of West Berkshire has evolved over millennia, through the interaction of the natural environment and human activities, in particular the combination of physical and cultural influences. Physical influences such as geology and landform, together with the overlying pattern of settlement and land use are key determinants of landscape character.

The Physical Dimension

- 3.3 The physical components of the landscape are the most tangible and fundamental influences upon its character, being the most permanent and least changeable aspect of its appearance. The underlying geology creates the 'backbone' of the landscape. The actions of weathering, erosion and deposition alter the landform, consequently influencing hydrological patterns and affecting the nature of soil conditions. This affects how humans have used and continue to exploit the landscape for agriculture, settlement and industry and, consequently, influences the nature of the vegetation and fauna that the landscape can support.

Geology

- 3.4 The basic structure of the landscape is fundamentally influenced by its underlying rocks and relief. Geology and the processes of weathering, erosion and deposition influence the shape and form of the landscape and its drainage and soils. In turn, these influence patterns of vegetation and land use.
- 3.5 **Figure 3.1** illustrates the solid (or bedrock) geology that underlies the District and the superficial (or drift) geology that overlies this.
- 3.6 The bedrock geology of West Berkshire is dominated by chalk strata laid down in the Cretaceous Period of the Mesozoic Era (between 145.5 and 65.5 million years ago). As a result of later tectonic activity these deposits were raised to form the chalk outcrop which includes the Berkshire Downs, occupying the northern and western parts of the District. Clays and sands of the Lambeth Group (Reading Formation) occupy lower ground in the south of the District (the source of clays for brick and tile making since pre-Roman times).
- 3.7 Towards the south and east of the District, the re-establishment of sea levels resulted in the formation of the Thames Group, the most significant member of which is the extensive band of London Clay, a dark blue to brownish-grey clay with variable silt and sand content. Much of the London Clay in West Berkshire is overlain by the Bagshot Formation (including the Bagshot Beds, Camberley and Windlesham Formations), which is dominated by a thin pale grey clay and fine grained sand that supports areas of heath.
- 3.8 Glacial and fluvial activity in the Quaternary Period (Pleistocene Epoch) of the Cenozoic Era resulted in the deposit of sands and gravels, most notably in the south and east of the District where floodplain levels have gradually dropped, resulting in today's Kennet Valley and tributaries. Alluvial deposits of the most recent geological epoch, the Holocene, form the highest layer in the river valleys. Some 'clay with flints' deposits, the weathered remains of chalk into which later deposits were mixed, were also formed in this period.



West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 3.1: Geology

- West Berkshire District
- Neighbouring Local Authority boundary
- Drift Geology
 - Plateau Gravel
 - Valley Gravel
- Solid Geology
 - Bagshot Beds
 - Chalk
 - London Clay
 - Reading Beds

Map Scale @A3: 1:145,000



Topography and Drainage

- 3.9 The underlying geology has been weathered to create the distinctive landforms seen across the District today. **Figure 3.2** shows the topography and drainage, showing the key river valleys and great variety of topography across the District from the elevated downlands in the north and chalk scarp in the south east.
- 3.10 The general drainage pattern is from west to east and the main river, marking the north-eastern edge of the District, is the Thames, defined to the north by the steep scarp of the Chilterns. The tributaries of the Thames are significant rivers in their own right. Of these the principal channels are the River Kennet (with its tributaries the Dun, Lambourn and Enborne), the River Pang and the River Loddon (with the adjoining Blackwater River), which marks the south-eastern corner of the District. The valleys of these rivers form distinctive landscapes threading through the District.
- 3.11 Topographically the chalk downlands form the highest parts of West Berkshire, forming a sweeping curve of uplands that extend westwards from the Thames Valley then curve south towards the Wiltshire border and down into Hampshire. Walbury Hill, in the south-western corner of the District, is at 297m above sea level also the highest point in the South East England region. The lowest areas are the larger river valleys and surrounding claylands at the eastern end of the District, with the plateau gravel drift deposits forming ridges of higher ground between the river valleys, often with relatively steep-sided escarpments.

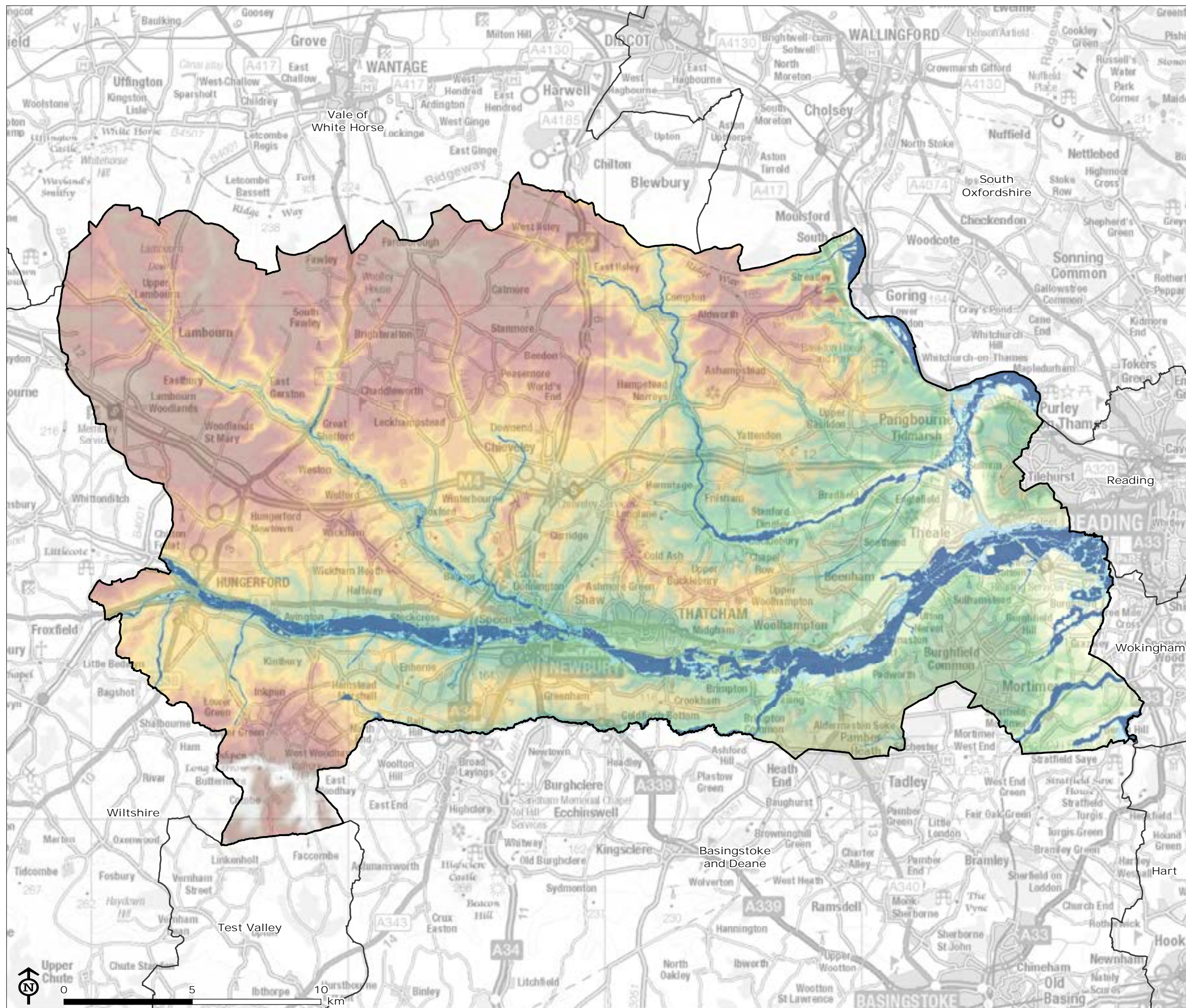
Soils

- 3.12 The soil types found across West Berkshire are influenced by a combination of underlying rock type, climate, slope, drainage and vegetation cover. Human activity over many centuries, particularly vegetation clearance and land management has also influenced soil development.
- 3.13 There are strong variations in the soils of West Berkshire. These can be divided between the chalk landscape of the downlands, the clay and alluvial deposits of the eastern parts of the District, the variable terrace and Lambeth Group deposits of the south and the sandy influences of the Bagshot Formation in the south-east.
- 3.14 An overview of the West Berkshire's Agricultural Land Classification is shown in **Figure 3.3**. The higher chalk downlands are characterised by thin calcareous and nutrient-locked soils that support pastoral grassland and extensive areas of arable landscape (particularly used for cereal growing). Where they have an overburden of deeper deposits of clay-with-flints the proportion of arable land increases and also creates conditions able to support significant woodlands which are less common on the thinner soil of the downs. These tend to have an agricultural grade of 3, although there are localised patches of grade 2 corresponding to the higher areas of downland and within the dry valleys. In contrast, the nutrient poor acidic soils of the Bagshot Formation support woodlands and heathlands and are, today, in extensive use for coniferous plantations being of grade 3 and 4. Where both these calcareous and acidic conditions are present, a diverse and rich mosaic of patches of woodland, arable land, pasture and heaths has arisen.
- 3.15 The alluvial soils and clay soils are, generally, more fertile, although they are difficult to work and suffer from waterlogging. The clays give rise to predominantly grade 3 soils, which, on account of their flatness, are used for arable farming and are sometimes drained by extensive networks of ditches. However, in the valleys there is a wide variety of agricultural land classifications ranging from grade 1 (in the lower Kennet) to grade 5 (in the Pang and other areas of the Kennet valley). Consequently these support a diverse patchwork of both arable and pastoral fields.

Land cover and habitats

- 3.16 Nature conservation designations are shown on **Figure 3.4**. In the northern and western parts of the District, the Berkshire Downs is an agricultural landscape centred on Lambourn and Hungerford. Remnant species-rich chalk grasslands on steeper slopes are the key habitat on the higher open downlands, with broadleaf woodlands, many of them Ancient Woodland, becoming significant on the lower chalk slopes. The Lambourn Valley floor is the most ecologically-rich element of this area, important for its river, wet woodland, reedbeds and wet grassland / grazing marsh. Several stretches of the river and floodplain are SAC-designated (the Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain SAC).

- 3.17 Steep chalk slopes at the south-western corner of the District, centred on Walbury Hill have Ancient Woodland and the largest traditionally managed single chalk grassland area in the county (Inkpen and Walbury Hills SSSI), covering almost 100ha.
- 3.18 The lower-lying land forming the southern and eastern parts of West Berkshire is a well-wooded landscape, mostly secondary woodland that has developed on former heaths rather than Ancient Woodland but nonetheless still significant for the latter, which occurs generally as small blocks but also in some larger concentrations – e.g. south of Hermitage and around Frilsham. Remaining heathland areas are important habitats - Greenham Common (SSSI) is the largest heathland in the county, covering 60ha and supporting a good variety of heathland species – and the Kennet Valley retains important meadows / grazing marsh and wet woodland, including an area designated as part of a SAC (the Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain).
- 3.19 In the north-east of the District, the undulating chalk slopes descend to the floodplain of the Thames between Streatley and Reading. Woodlands are the principal habitat on the steeper slopes, and there are grazing marshes along several stretches of the Thames.
- 3.20 On the fringes of Reading, the lower Kennet Valley includes several large former gravel pits that are now important open water habitats.



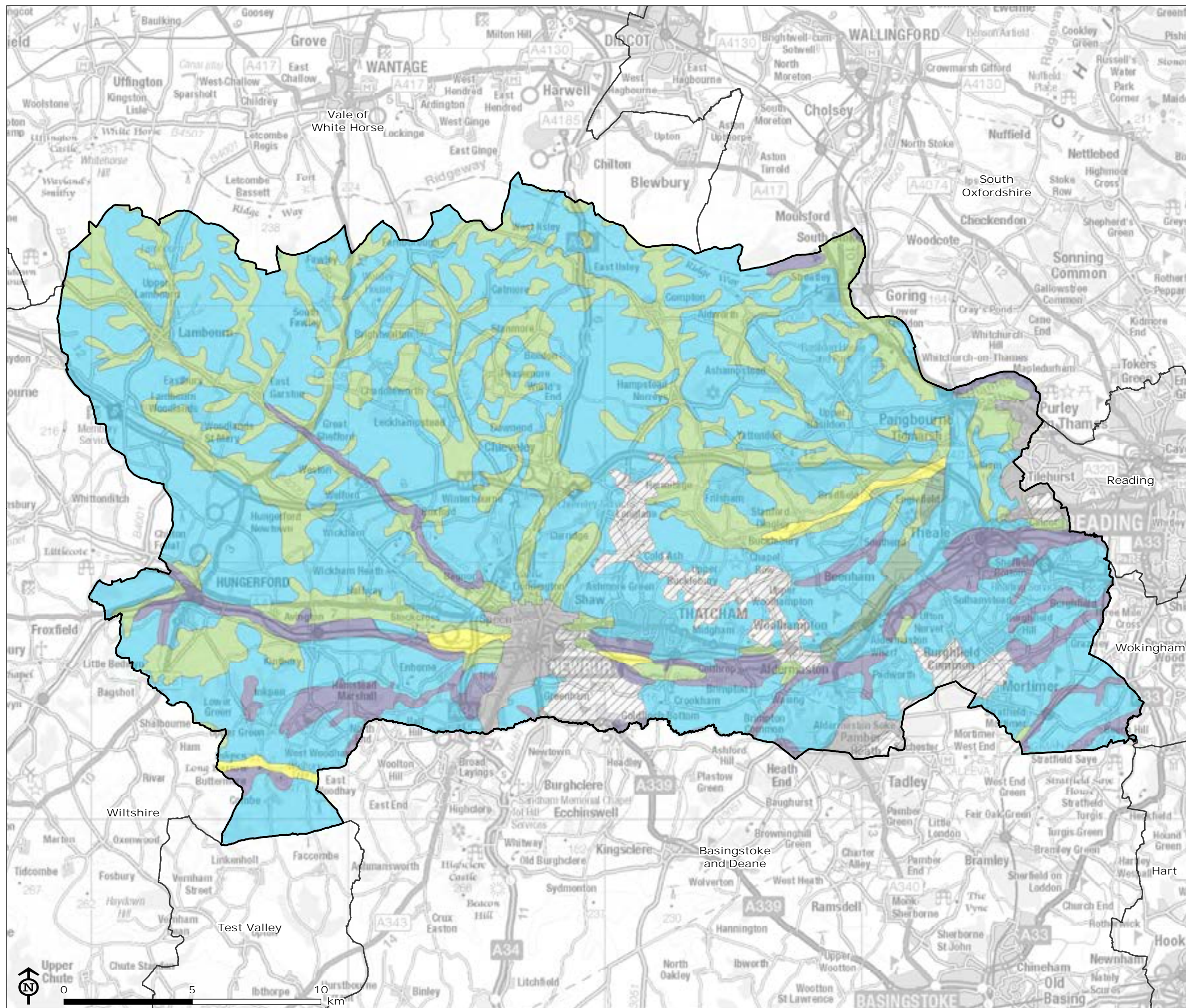
West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 3.2: Topography and Hydrology

- West Berkshire District
- Neighbouring Local Authority boundary
- Flood zone 3
- Flood zone 2

Map Scale @A3: 1:145,000





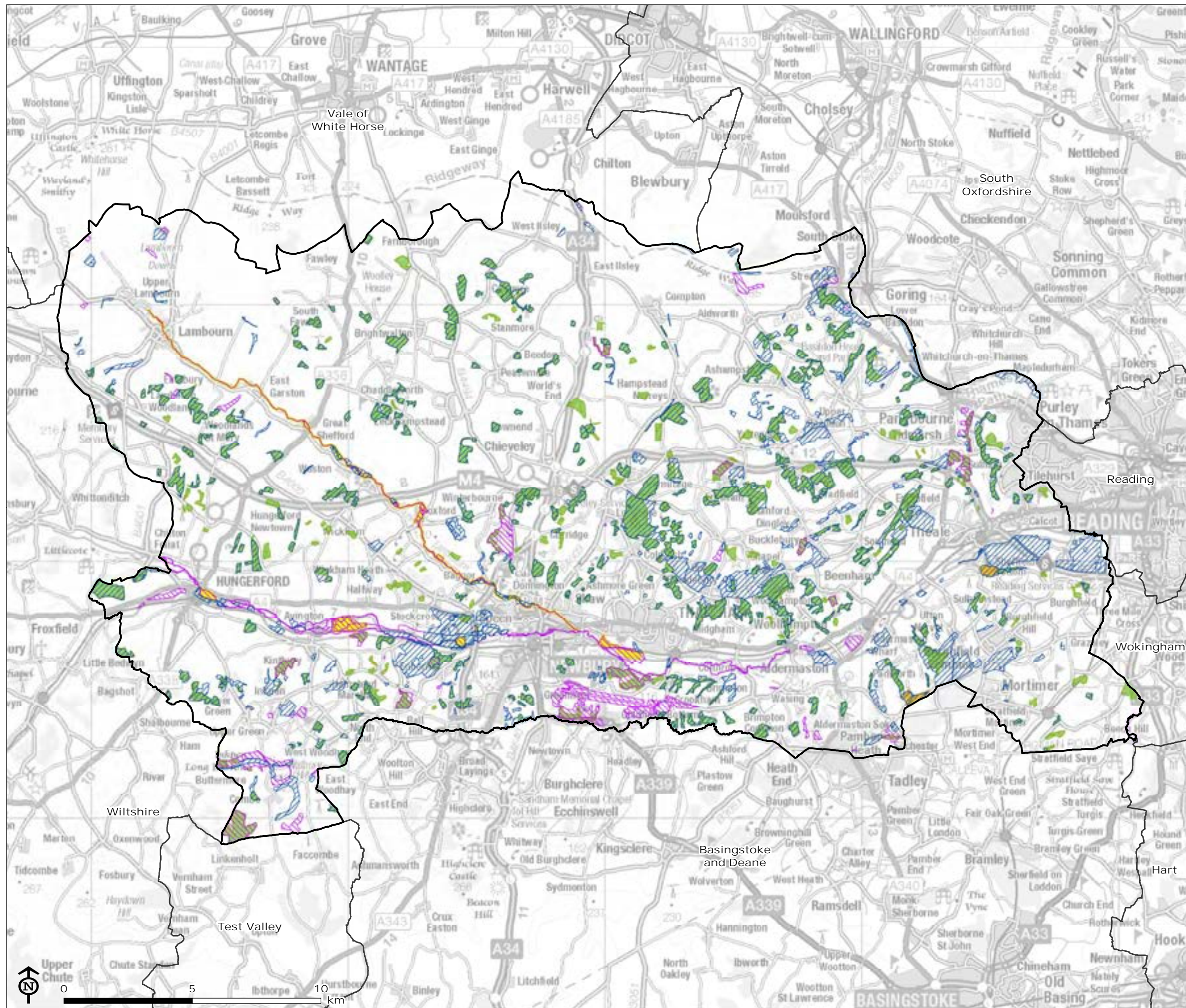
West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 3.3: Agricultural Land Classification

- West Berkshire District
- Neighbouring Local Authority boundary
- Agricultural Land Classification**
 - Grade 1 (excellent)
 - Grade 2 (very good)
 - Grade 3 (good-moderate)
 - Grade 4 (poor)
 - Grade 5 (very poor)
 - Non Agricultural
 - Urban

Map Scale @A3: 1:145,000





West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 3.4: Nature Conservation Designations

- West Berkshire District
- Neighbouring Local Authority boundary
- Local Wildlife Sites
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Special Area of Conservation
- Local Nature Reserve
- Ancient woodland

Map Scale @A3: 1:145,000



The Human Dimension

- 3.21 The following information is derived from West Berkshire Council's work on Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC), Historic Environment Character Areas (HECA) and Historic Environment Character Zoning (HECZ) as well as information on recorded heritage assets (designated assets). **Figure 3.5** Historic Landscape Character illustrates the historic landscape types within West Berkshire that were assigned a 'high' significance level in the West Berkshire Historic Landscape Character Sensitivity Assessment (2011)⁷.
- 3.22 The landscape of West Berkshire derives from the interplay of its physical attributes and its use through time. Human activity has been attested in the District back into the Palaeolithic period, through the finds of artefacts (flint tools), and activity from the Mesolithic⁸ onwards is well-attested, first through archaeological remains and later also through individual landscape features (such as lynchets and burial mounds) and structural remains (including buildings). The richness of the District's past is represented in the numerous, but diverse, heritage assets which survive within its historic landscape. Many of these are designated heritage assets and these span most of the influences which have shaped the District, from those derived from the rituals of the distant past (Combe Gibbet Long Barrow and Lambourn Sevenbarrows), through traces of medieval and post-medieval settlement (parish churches, deer parks) and industry (Newbury's Cloth Hall, the Kennet and Avon Canal locks) to post-medieval and modern warfare (Newbury I & II Civil War battlefields; Cold War Cruise missile shelter complex at the former Greenham Common Airbase).
- 3.23 Moving away from discrete heritage assets, the influence of the past in the District's current landscape starts to become apparent from the later prehistoric period onwards. This is in part through tangible remains, such as those parish and other boundaries in the north and west of the District which appear to be inherited from later-prehistoric field systems or land division (including Grim's Ditch), but also through the evidence of land cover itself. Examples of the latter include the heathlands in the south and south east of the District since, in the south of England, many such areas have their origins in overworking of poorer soils in the Bronze Age. Some of the District's routeway network also has roots in the deeper past and, through the way in which later landscapes and settlements are conditioned by them, have an influence on the present landscape. The north of the District contains a section of the Ridgeway which, whilst not closely dated, is reputed to be a routeway with prehistoric origins. The road from Speen to Lambourn Woodlands is part of a long-distance Roman road, Ermin Street, connecting the towns of *Calleva Atrebatum* (Silchester) and *Glevum* (Gloucester).
- 3.24 With the exception of Newbury and Hungerford, there were historically no sizeable urban centres in the District, although Aldermaston, Lambourn and Thatcham were significant settlements in the medieval period. The landscape was essentially rural until urban growth was spurred, first by improvements in transport infrastructure from the later 18th century⁹ and, more recently, by a general growth in urbanism and suburbanism associated with the modern economy. The majority of the District's landscape operates in a framework which was established in the medieval period and falls into two distinct types, downland and heathland, with the former lying to the north and west of the District and the latter to the south and east. The Kennet Valley west of Newbury forms a transitory area where aspects of both types of historic landscape occur. Since the latter part of the 20th century there has been significant residential and commercial growth around Newbury, Thatcham and to the west of Reading. The construction of the M4 motorway was a significant growth driver, and in recent decades the M4 corridor has evolved as a major hub for technology companies, e.g. Vodafone which has a major campus site on the edge of Newbury.
- 3.25 Outside of the urban areas much of West Berkshire's rural economy is managed within large agricultural estates, which generally conveys an impression of an orderly and well-managed landscape. A number of these estates, such as Englefield, Wasing and Chilton, include historic

⁷ This study took into account the contribution of the Type to the landscape, both modern and previous, and a professional judgement of the importance and interest of the HLC Type, e.g. ancient woodlands being seen as more significant for historic landscape character than land restored following gravel extraction. Further details can be found on the West Berkshire Council website at <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/historicenvironmentprojects>

⁸ The Kennet floodplain at Thatcham has some of the best-known Mesolithic sites in the UK.

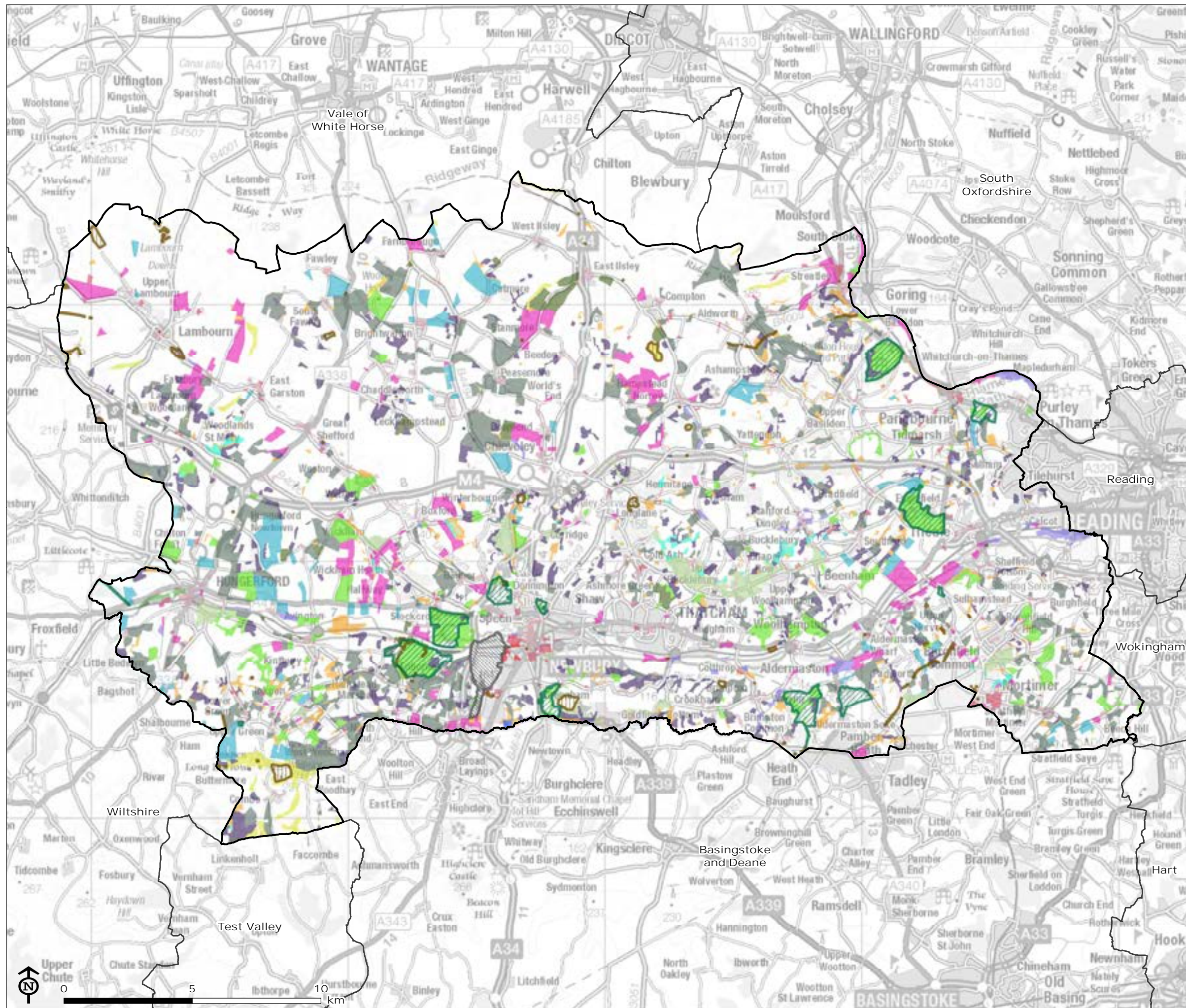
⁹ Growth around Hungerford and Theale was spurred by servicing rising coaching traffic between London and Bath along what is now the A4, historically known as the 'Bath Road'.

parkland cores, typically sited on the slopes above the District's principal river valleys. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) is also a significant landowner, with landholdings at AWE Aldermaston, AWE Burghfield and RAF Welford. The atomic weapons establishments at Aldermaston and Burghfield are significant local employers but have had an adverse impact on landscape character. Since its decommissioning, RAF Greenham Common has been designated public parkland, and retains large areas of SSSI-designated heathland.

- 3.26 In the downland areas, fieldscapes with only occasional woodland are the norm with settlement typified by nucleated settlements (villages and larger hamlets) and some isolated farmsteads. The balance of land uses in downland areas has its origins in the establishment of common farming systems toward the close of the late Anglo-Saxon period. These comprised open arable fields on the lower slopes of the valley sides, meadow on the valley floors and grazing land on the unenclosed grassland on the upper valley slopes and watersheds. In this system, settlements were typically sited just off the valley floor, often on spring lines, at the junction of the meadow land and open fields. This system was reflected in, or was responsible for, the layout of parishes in the downland areas with each settlement getting a section of meadow, arable and downland grazing and this resulting in elongated parishes stretching from the valley floor to the watershed. This is particularly evident in the Lambourn Valley and is an influence still visible in the layout of present land uses. The open fields and common grazing were gradually privatised and enclosed into individual fields and common meadows converted to water meadows. This process began in the post-medieval period and the conversion of grazing and open field accelerated with the onset of parliamentary enclosure in the late 18th century.
- 3.27 By the middle of the 19th century, the remaining common land in downland areas had been enclosed into fields. As with the majority of the English farming landscape, these areas have been heavily influenced by the adoption of mechanised farming since WWII with earlier fields reorganised or amalgamated to create holdings more suited to ever larger machinery. The removal of boundaries associated with this trend has accentuated the historically less-wooded nature of these areas meaning the landscape often has an open and expansive feeling. The combination of historic land-use and topography has also meant that these parts of the District were well-suited to racehorse rearing and training. This has led extensive areas of gallops, plus associated studs, stables and paddocks, developing in the high downs, particularly around Lambourn, and adding further distinctiveness to this part of the District.
- 3.28 In heathland areas the landscape is much more wooded with fields and heathland commons interspersed amongst woods and settlement mainly in small hamlets, common edge settlements or dispersed farms. Although the existence of heathland commons is likely to be traceable back to the Bronze Age, this overall pattern of landscape in this area too appears to have roots in the medieval period. As with the downland areas, parliamentary enclosure was also a significant influence on the landscape with many heathland commons privatised into fields between the late-18th century and mid-19th century. Many of the fields thus created proved unsuitable for arable cultivation, owing to the poorer quality of soils, and were soon turned over to woodland plantation, mainly conifers for commercial forestry. This reinforced the already wooded nature of this part of the District and remains a key influence on the present landscape. It is particularly notable between Aldermaston and Burghfield Common and between Hermitage and Chapel Row.
- 3.29 The presence of extensive deposits of sands and gravels in the heathland areas and on the floor of the Kennet Valley has resulted in significant change to these sections of the District due to the commercial value of these deposits in the construction industry since the 19th century. Although such deposits would have been worked on an ad hoc basis for centuries, industrial-scale exploitation of them has been a feature of the 20th century onwards. As well as operational quarries, there are also flooded former quarries on the valley floor, e.g. at Theale and Woolhampton, and also restored agricultural landscapes. Some of the restored landscapes, such as those near Sulhamstead, create distinctively different areas of landscape since they were restored using fields or a different shape or alignment than had existed pre-quarrying. Some of the flooded former quarries, particularly around Theale, have taken on new uses as leisure facilities for fishing and water sports.

Experiential and Perceptual Character

- 3.30 Away from the towns and main roads, the majority of the District enjoys relatively high levels of tranquillity, whether through elevation and distance from large settlements, as is the case in the high downland areas, or as a result of containment from urbanising influences by strong woodland cover. This is conveyed in **Figure 3.6** Tranquillity.
- 3.31 **Figure 3.7** Dark Skies shows levels of light pollution within West Berkshire, illustrating that outside the main settlements and away from the M4 corridor the majority of the District enjoys dark or very dark night skies, with little light pollution. Dark skies can make an important contribution to perceptions and enjoyment of the landscape.



West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 3.5: Historic Landscape Character Areas Rated 3 for Significance

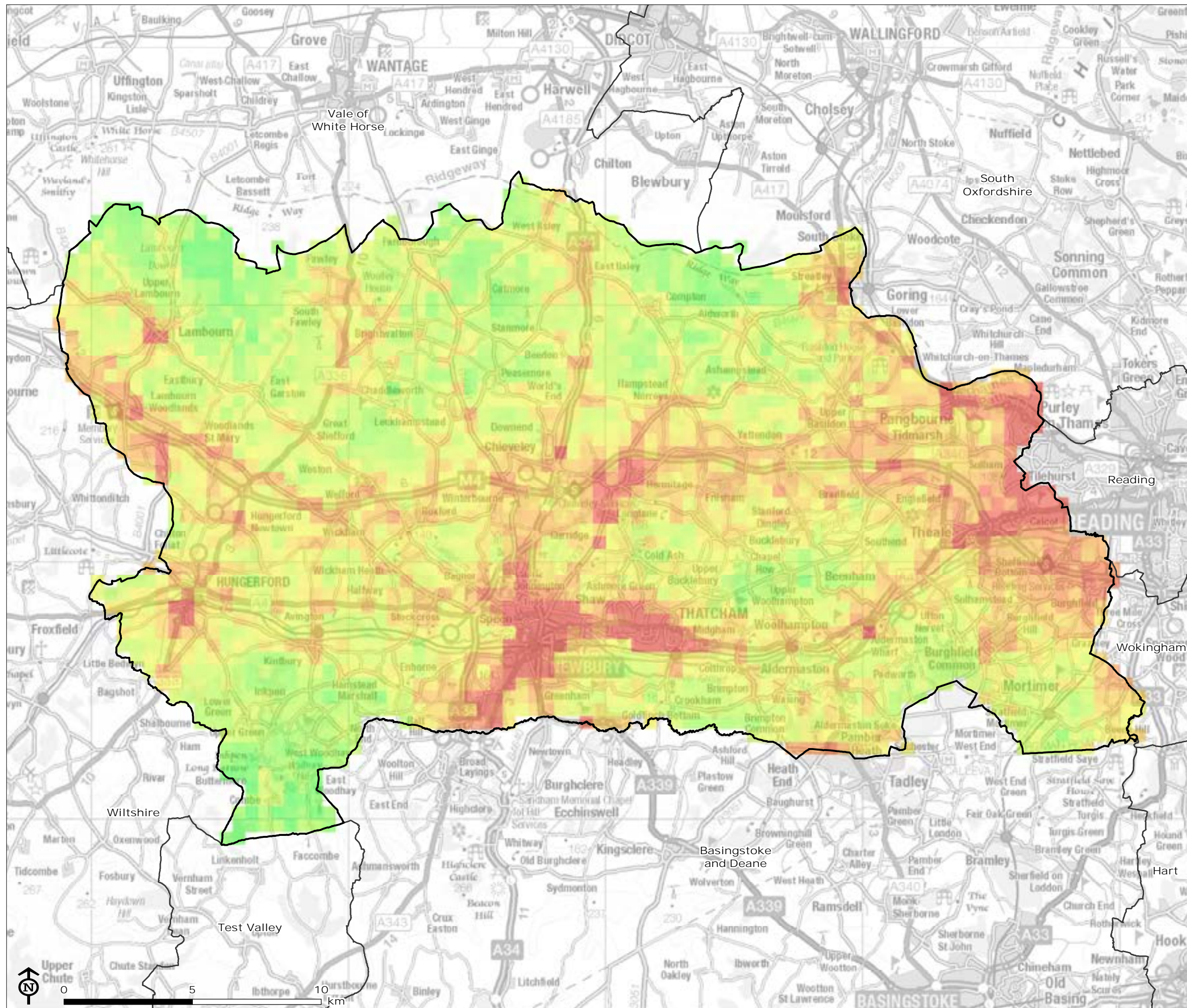
- West Berkshire District
- Neighbouring Local Authority boundary
- Registered Park & Garden
- Scheduled Monument
- Battlefield

Historic Landscape Type (with a significance value of 3 in the West Berkshire Landscape Character Sensitivity Assessment - 2011)

- 18 - 19thC settlement
- ancient woodland
- assarted enclosure
- commons & greens
- designed landscape
- downland
- enclosed meadows
- historic settlement
- interwar settlement
- managed cultural asset
- meadow
- old secondary woodland
- parliamentary enclosures
- post-parliamentary enclosures
- pre18thC irregular fields
- pre18thC regular fields
- pre18thC sinuous fields
- ridgeway

Map Scale @A3: 1:145,000





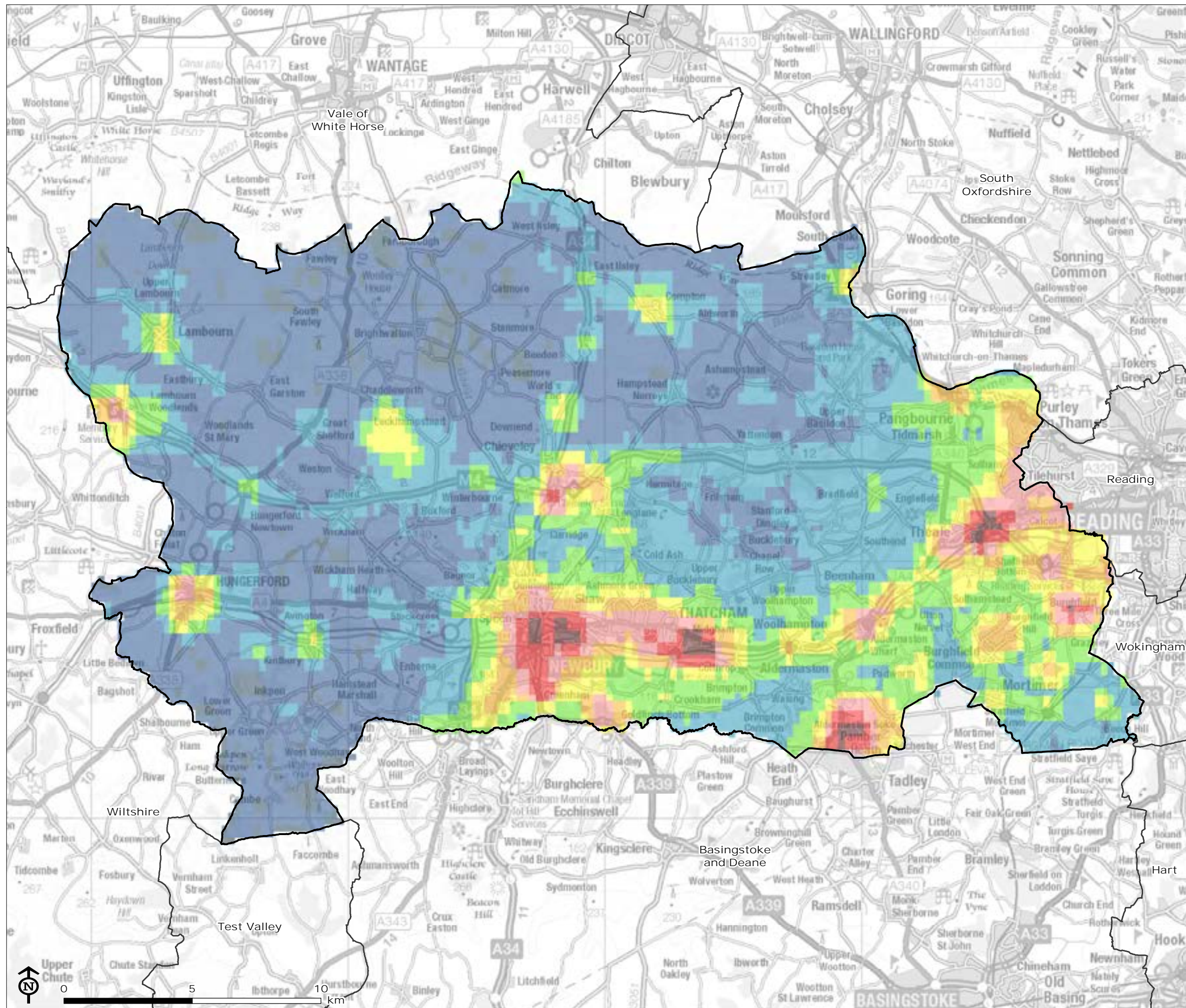
West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 3.6: Tranquility

- West Berkshire District
- Neighbouring Local Authority boundary
- Tranquility**
 - Most tranquil
 - Least tranquil

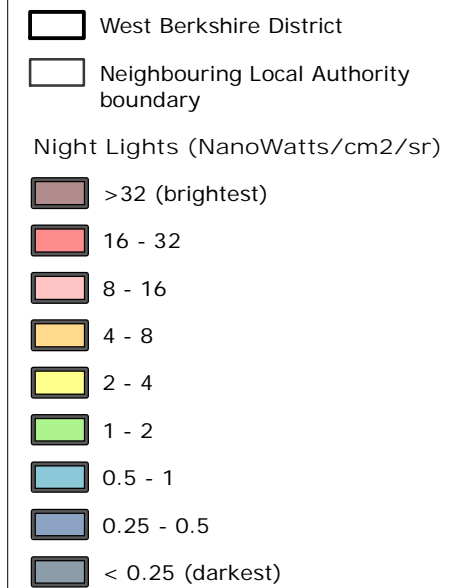
Map Scale @A3: 1:145,000





West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 3.7: Dark Skies



Map Scale @A3: 1:145,000



Landscape Issues



4 Landscape Issues

- 4.1 In some areas of the West Berkshire landscape, the condition of the landscape has deteriorated or is considered to be at risk due to the factors summarised below. It is recognised that some of the causes of poor landscape condition are outside the remit of planning, and some are outside the remit of West Berkshire Council itself. However, some may be addressed by policy and development management, and where this is the case suggestions are made within this document on how positive outcomes may be achieved.

Climate change

- 4.2 Climate change is expected to result in change to the landscape. It is a major pressure on agricultural landscapes and is likely to result in increasingly unpredictable weather patterns with hotter drier summers, more intense rainfall and longer dry periods resulting in the need for agriculture to adapt to grow different crops and develop more flexible and responsive land management practices. Hotter summers and increases in temperatures could result in increased demands for irrigation and domestic uses. Responses to climate change may also result in pressure for development of renewable energy such as solar farms.
- 4.3 Climate change resulting in more extreme weather patterns could alter the species composition of existing species-rich woodlands and hedgerows, favouring species with lower water demand. There are likely to be increasing incidences of pathogens which may change the species mix of woodlands. Higher temperatures and prolonged drought are likely to put woodlands under stress and increase the risk of wildfires.
- 4.4 Climate change is also likely to affect important semi-natural habitats, particularly river and wetland habitats throughout the District. This will include water shortages in summer and increased water flows and flooding in winter, causing potential damage to habitats and species.

Development Pressure

- 4.5 There is continued pressure for development across the District. The Council's spatial planning strategy builds on the existing settlement pattern and uses a hierarchy of settlements as the focus for development. Whilst reflecting the distinct characteristics of the different parts of West Berkshire it aims to both maintain a network of sustainable communities and protect and enhance the environmental assets of the District. Urban development is maximised together with a combination of strategic urban extensions and smaller sites for housing also identified. In rural areas housing is focused on rural service centres and service villages.
- 4.6 In rural areas the characteristic small villages and dispersed farmsteads are at risk from more piecemeal development. Cumulative impact is an important consideration in these areas, as incremental changes when viewed collectively can significantly change the character of a landscape. The conversion of rural buildings to residential and commercial use for instance can have a considerable impact on an area's character. Changes in agricultural practices can make older agricultural buildings redundant and encouraging their re-use may help to retain important elements of character as well as provide employment in rural areas. New larger agricultural buildings can be more obtrusive and so siting, design and landscape are all the more important.
- 4.7 Intensification of modest rural properties through extensions and the addition of large ancillary buildings and/or redevelopment can result in a disproportionate number of larger country houses, resulting in a loss of smaller and mid-sized properties and increased suburbanisation undermining a balance in the historic settlement pattern and rural character. Whilst there may be no increase

in the actual number of dwellings, a scene that was once comprised of isolated agricultural workers cottages and barns set within open fields is urbanised and the rural character altered.

- 4.8 Large scale renewable energy developments such as wind and solar farms, which can have a significant impact on the character of some landscapes, have had limited impact across most of West Berkshire. There are no large-scale wind turbines, and only a few smaller ones (e.g. the two at Sheepdrove Farm near Lambourn), with the AONB designation proving a significant constraint in the area that, in terms of lack of population, would otherwise be most suitable for such development. Field-scale solar farms are currently limited to the M4 corridor, with several to the south of the Kennet Valley between Newbury and Reading (e.g. at Pingewood near Burghfield and at Grazeley Green), and another at the western edge of the District alongside the M4 at Membury.

Increases in traffic and transport

- 4.9 An extensive transport network crosses the District, including the M4 motorway corridor, A34 and mainline railway. Large, visually intrusive gantries have been installed as part of the electrification of the Great Western mainline railway. More frequent trains also have a knock on effect on road traffic at level crossings. Narrow rural roads are vulnerable to widening, new access splays for new development, and are used by an increasing number and size of vehicles. These cause damage to the grass verges and hedgerows, degrading their rural character. Inappropriate management is leading to a decline in species-rich roadside grassland.

Agricultural changes

- 4.10 Agricultural changes, particularly related to the viability of traditional small-scale farming, are resulting in partial decline leading to suburbanisation in some areas and intensification of farming practices in others.
- 4.11 Intensification is associated with a loss of pasture for arable and fodder crops (maize) which is in turn resulting in field enlargement and subsequent loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Hedgerows lose their function in arable landscapes and are often replaced by post and wire fences.
- 4.12 Changes to agricultural management are leading to an incremental decline in the condition of chalk grassland across the District. This includes the declining viability of sheep grazing, leading to scrub encroachment and the conversion of land to alternative uses, including horse paddocks, which encroaches on the grassland.
- 4.13 More intensive farming practices are resulting in larger amalgamated farms with new agricultural buildings. These agricultural buildings tend to be large scale and have no local distinction, and therefore are detractors within the landscape. Farm diversification, for example into biofuels and biodigesters, requires large scale features including fuel storage and digesters as well as new access roads and entrances, which often have negative landscape impacts.
- 4.14 Farms are generally decreasing in number with many smaller farms diversifying or going out of business and their agricultural buildings steadily converted to residential, recreational or commercial use, with accompanying change in lighting requirements, noise and roadside signage, further eroding rural character.
- 4.15 Development pressure, particularly along the settlement edge, is leading to fragmentation of existing agricultural land, with land being kept in hope of rising land value. These landscapes suffer from a consequent lack of active management and scrub encroachment resulting in poor visual character.
- 4.16 There is an increase of non-traditional use of farmland such as horse-paddocks, particularly on the settlement edge. Increased equine activity is having an impact on the character of the countryside with an increasing use of horse tape, number of ménages, stabling and degradation of pasture due to changes in management (e.g. lack of active grassland management leading to either scrub invasion or over grazing).

- 4.17 The trend within the horse racing industry is to move yards away from traditional sites within settlements to new greenfield sites closer to the gallops. This coincides with the move towards all weather gallops, which threaten the survival of traditional grass gallops.
- 4.18 Until the early 1990s the extent of heathland vegetation declined throughout the District due to changing land use patterns, including conversion to forestry or horse paddocks, or lack of management leading to scrub invasion and succession of woodland. Although there has been some recovery of heathland since the 1990s, the extent of heathland is still under threat from no or inappropriate management.

Decline in woodland management

- 4.19 There is an ongoing loss of woodland, including valuable semi-natural woodlands, due to development.
- 4.20 The ongoing decline in traditional woodland management practise is leading to under management of farm woodlands and copses resulting in the loss of species diversity. There is pressure on semi-natural woodlands (including ancient woodland) from a lack of management or inappropriate management.
- 4.21 The introduction of coniferous shelterbelts and rectilinear coniferous plantations are also detracting features. This can be compounded by poor management of the plantations including clear felling, which causes rapid change and adverse landscape impacts.
- 4.22 Mature hedgerow trees (particularly oak) are an integral part of the traditional hedge system and contribute to the wooded context of parts of the District. The loss of these trees through senescence, development purposes or climate change and associated pests and diseases together with a lack of replacement is a key challenge to the existing landscape character.
- 4.23 Agricultural intensification and consequent field enlargement leads to direct felling and grubbing up of hedgerow trees. Tree loss is also caused by direct or indirect damage from agricultural machinery, leading to early decline or death.
- 4.24 Neglect of hedgerows leading to the degradation of hedgerows to a line of standard trees or the development of gaps within hedgerows is also an issue. Too frequent or badly timed cutting can also result in gaps in hedgerows or the decline in the variety and age structure of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and ultimately the loss of hedgerows. The use of fencing, which reduces the agricultural necessity for hedge maintenance, has also hastening the decline of the hedgerow network. The agricultural practice of 'ranching' (placing netting around fields to form a grazing block) is contributing to deterioration of internal hedges.

Recreational pressures

- 4.25 Many natural habitats within the District are popular recreational areas, including the chalk downs, Walbury Hill, the heathlands of Snelsmore Common and Greenham Common. The relatively high visitor pressure at certain locations results in a loss of tranquillity, damage or fragmentation of habitats, visual intrusion of car parks or stationary vehicles, increase in noise and pollution and demand for additional facilities. An increased population within the District will add to these pressures.

Mineral extraction

- 4.26 The Kennet Valley between Newbury and Reading has historically been exploited for its high quality sharp sand and gravel deposits. Whilst a number of workings have been successfully restored as lakes for the benefit of wildlife and recreation e.g. around Thatcham, others remain as detractors in the landscape. The majority of the soft sand deposits that have been worked have been found in the AONB, in particular, an outcrop found around Junction 13 of the M4. Following extraction, the restoration of mineral workings is regarded as an opportunity to achieve

wider environmental and public benefits and so ensuring that proposals contribute positively to the landscape character of the surrounding area will be important.

Landscape Character Classification



5 Landscape Character Classification

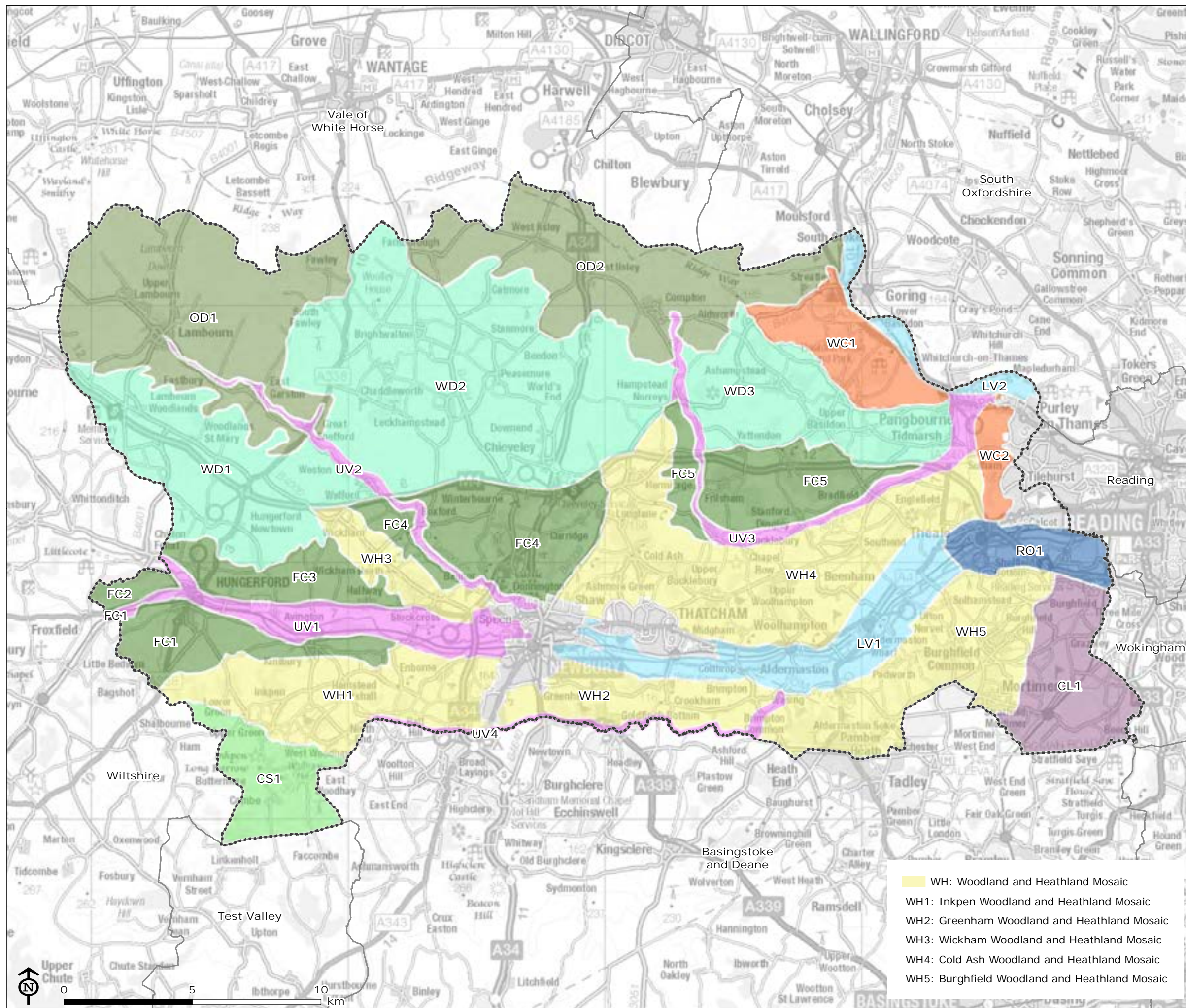
Landscape Types and Character Areas

- 5.1 This Landscape Character Assessment classifies the District into 10 Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and 26 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) as set out in **Figure 5.1**. The boundaries of the Types and Areas are based on consolidation of the classifications used in the three previous studies covering West Berkshire and a review of baseline data. The relationship between the classifications used in each of the earlier assessments is set out in **Appendix 1**.
- 5.2 The precision of boundaries drawn around LCAs and LCTs varies with the scale and level of detail of the assessment. This assessment has been mapped at a scale of 1:25,000 which means that it is suitable for use at this scale. The scale of this classification will need to be taken into account whenever the assessment is used to ensure that the level of detail is compatible with the intended application.
- 5.3 In reality landscape character often does not change abruptly at the boundaries, but displays some degree of transition from one Character Area or Type to another. When using the assessment to consider a location with some proximity to a boundary it is therefore important to also look at the assessment for the neighbouring area.

Table 5.1 Landscape Character Types and Areas in West Berkshire

Ref.	Landscape Character Type	Landscape Character Area (s)
UV	Upper Valley Floor	Kennet Upper Valley Floor (UV1)
		Lambourn Upper Valley Floor (UV2)
		Pang Upper Valley Floor (UV3)
		Enborne Upper Valley Floor (UV4)
LV	Lower River Valley	Kennet Lower River Valley (LV1)
		Pangbourne Thames Lower River Valley (LV2)
RO	Lower River with Open Water	Kennet Lower River with Open Water (RO1)
CS	Chalk Scarp	Walbury Chalk Scarp (CS1)
OD	Open Downland	Lambourn Open Downland (OD1)
		Compton Open Downland (OD2)
WD	Wooded Downland	Shefford Wooded Downland (WD1)
		Peasemore Wooded Downland (WD2)
		Ashampstead Wooded Downland (WD3)
FC	Farmed Chalk Mosaic	Hungerford Farmed Chalk Mosaic (FC1)

		Froxfield Farmed Chalk Mosaic (FC2)
		Elcot Farmed Chalk Mosaic (FC3)
		Winterbourne Farmed Chalk Mosaic (FC4)
		Yattendon Farmed Chalk Mosaic (FC5)
WH	Woodland and Heathland Mosaic	Inkpen Woodland and Heathland Mosaic (WH1)
		Greenham Woodland and Heathland Mosaic (WH2)
		Wickham Woodland and Heathland Mosaic (WH3)
		Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic (WH4)
		Burghfield Woodland and Heathland Mosaic (WH5)
WC	Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes	Basildon Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes (WC1)
		Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes (WC2)
CL	Open Clay Lowland	Grazeley Open Clay Lowland (CL1)



West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 5.1: West Berks Landscape Classification

- West Berkshire District
- Neighbouring Local Authority boundary

West Berks Landscape Character Types & Areas

- CL: Open Clay Lowland
- CL1: Grazeley Open Clay Lowland
- CS: Chalk Scarp
- CS1: Walbury Chalk Scarp
- FC: Farmed Chalk Mosaic
- FC1: Hungerford Farmed Chalk Mosaic
- FC2: Froxfield Farmed Chalk Mosaic
- FC3: Elcot Farmed Chalk Mosaic
- FC4: Winterbourne Farmed Chalk Mosaic
- FC5: Yattendon Farmed Chalk Mosaic
- LV: Lower River Valley
- LV1: Kennet Lower River Valley
- LV2: Pangbourne Thames Lower River Valley
- OD: Open Downland
- OD1: Lambourn Open Downland
- OD2: Compton Open Downland
- RO: Lower River with Open Water
- RO1: Kennet Lower River with Open Water
- UV: Upper Valley Floor
- UV1: Kennet Upper Valley Floor
- UV2: Lambourn Upper Valley Floor
- UV3: Pang Upper Valley Floor
- UV4: Enborne Upper Valley Floor
- WC: Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes
- WC1: Basildon Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes
- WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes
- WD: Wooded Downland
- WD1: Shefford Wooded Downland
- WD2: Peasemore Wooded Downland
- WD3: Ashampstead

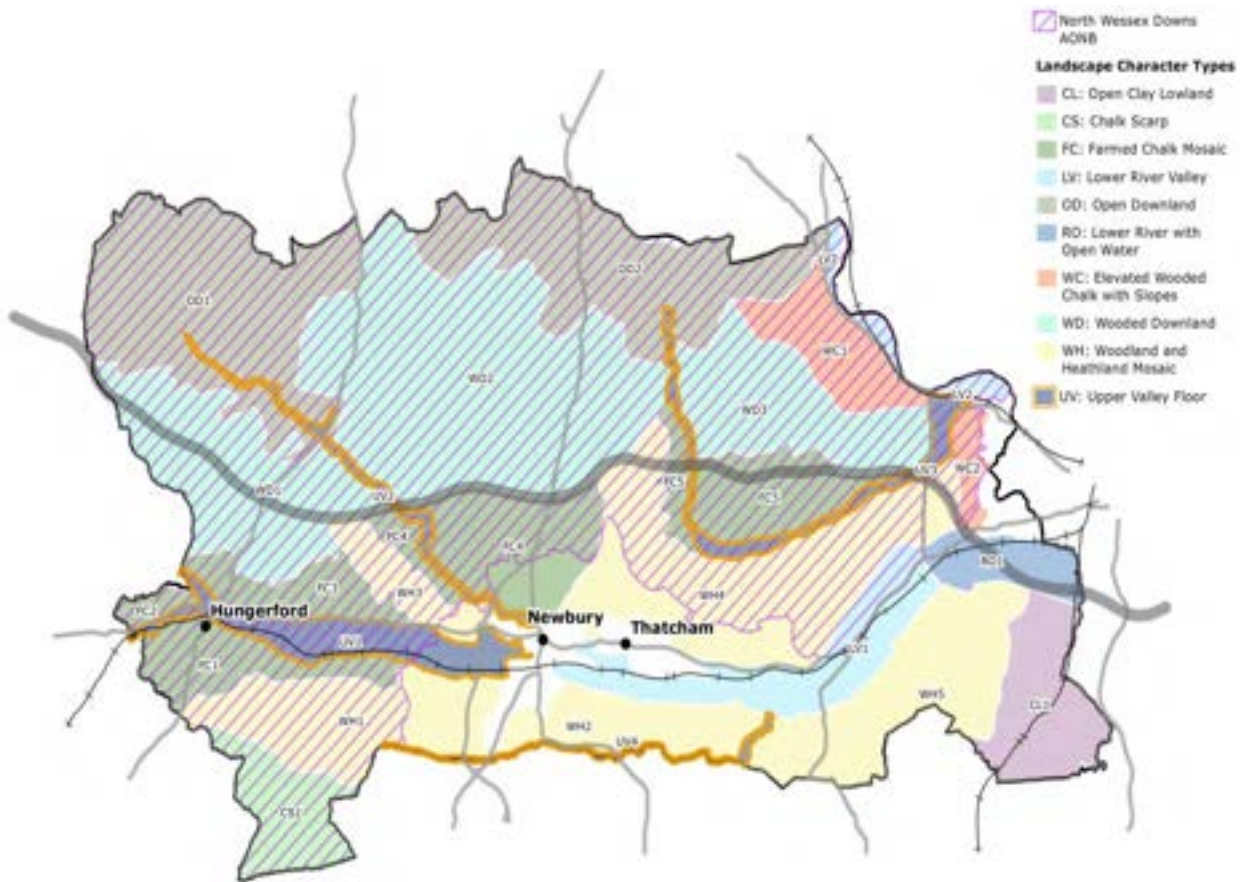
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Part 2: Landscape Character Type and Area Profiles

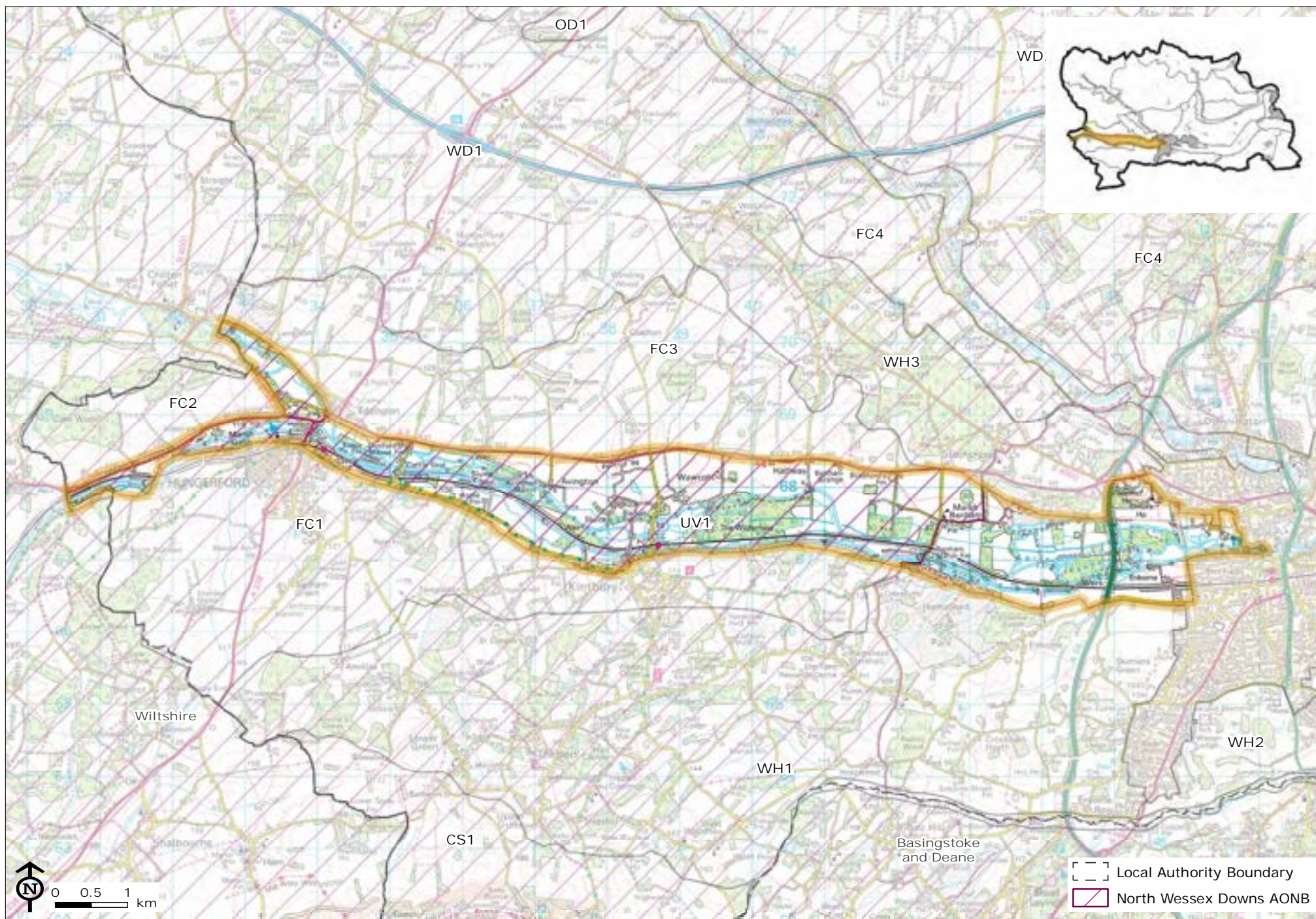


Landscape Character Type UV: **Upper Valley Floor**



The **Upper Valley Floor** LCT is subdivided into four Local Character Areas:

- UV1: Kennet Upper Valley Floor
- UV2: Lambourn Upper Valley Floor
- UV3: Pang Upper Valley Floor
- UV4: Enborne Upper Valley Floor.



SUMMARY

A picturesque flat-floored broad chalk river valley, following the River Kennet eastwards from Hungerford to the urban edge of Newbury. The river is characteristically divided into braided channels, drainage ditches and canals making a complex network of waterways. The river valley floor is predominately pasture, with irregular well-wooded fields, however the valley slopes are mostly under arable cultivation. Valued wetland semi-natural habitats are found along the floodplain. Attractive nucleated settlements are periodically placed along the river channel. The valley slopes give the area a feeling of enclosure.

The northern and southern boundaries of the area are defined by the valley slopes as they rise to higher ground. The western edge meets the District boundary to the east of Hungerford, while to the east the area meets the urban edge of Newbury. The majority of this area forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB, excepting the easternmost extent past Marsh Benham.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Valleys of the River Kennet and River Dun, with gentle sloping sides and a broad flat floor, with underlying chalk and clay geology

The character area follows the River Kennet and its tributaries (including the River Dun), which lie in a relatively flat-floored, broad valley. The valley cuts through chalk, with the southern edge of the valley marked by a chalk escarpment. Towards Newbury, the valley becomes broader. The valley floor is geologically comprised of a thick layer of alluvium and valley gravels, over Chalk, Reading Beds or London Clay geology. The River Kennet is divided and convoluted by multiple winding braided channels, interconnecting canals, weirs and drainage ditches.

2) Land is divided into a varied field pattern, with the valley floor mostly dedicated to pasture and arable fields on the slopes

There is a distinct land use difference between the floodplain and the valley slopes, with the slopes being mostly under arable cultivation and the valley floor predominately used for pasture. Field shapes and patterns range from rectangular to irregular shape. Parts of the character area are also densely wooded, including both ancient woodland and plantation. Past and present gravel extraction has significantly altered parts of the landscape. Designed parkland areas are also present in the valley including Benham Valence Park and Hamstead Marshall Park.

3) Large areas of semi-natural habitat and dense woodland along the river corridor

Large parts of the landscape are designated for wildlife conservation, including the Kennet Valley Alderwoods SAC, Kennet & Lambourn Floodplain SAC and the River Kennet SSSI which covers the length of the river. Other semi-natural habitats include areas of wet woodland, wet grassland, parkland and open water.

4) Designed estate parkland and historic settlements and farms contribute to time-depth

Historic designed parklands in the eastern parts of the area include Benham Valence Park and Hamstead Marshall Park, which have a high concentration of heritage features, including a motte and bailey castle in Hamstead Marshall Park (Scheduled Monument). Historic settlement cores are characterised by traditional vernacular styles, with Hungerford, Kintbury and Marsh Benham also being designated as Conservation Areas. Throughout the rest of the landscape, there are scattered historic farm buildings, many of which are Listed Buildings.

5) Settlement occurs on the higher ground adjacent to the valley floor

Due to the imminent risk of flooding on the valley floor, settlements have established on the higher ground, with larger settlements of Hungerford and Kintbury lying to the south (in FC1). The scattered farmsteads, hamlets and villages often have a long settlement history, evidenced by Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. The area also includes the northern part of the larger market town of Hungerford which originated in medieval times.

6) Transportation routes such as the Kennet and Avon canal run through the area

The Kennet and Avon Canal runs parallel to and sometimes merges with the River Kennet. The northern perimeter of the area is defined by the A4 and is an important connection for this area to Newbury, along with the main railway line to London. Elsewhere, minor roads provide access across the valley, with level crossings over the railway and crossing points over the river/canal often marked by distinctive historic brick bridges.

7) Views from higher ground can be extensive, but may be limited by woodland

Views across the valley can be seen from the higher ground along the A4. Elsewhere, the wooded character limits views. The River Kennet is often masked by a line of poplars and dense woodlands. Other visually important and pleasing features include the traditional canal-side and mill buildings and historic parkland. Overhead power lines can form prominent skyline features.

8) Quiet and remote area which provides recreational opportunities

The valley has a quiet and remote character, allowing visitors to experience closeness to nature. The high hedgerows and surrounding woodlands create a sense of enclosure. Many informal recreational opportunities are available; the Kennet and Avon Canal acts as a recreational waterway with opportunities for fishing and water sports as well as towpaths used by walkers and cyclists.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) Prehistoric evidence in the area is scarce, although this area has likely been the site of human activity since this time. There is also little in the way of evidence from the Roman period, although it is likely that there was activity in this area as surrounding areas of the Kennet valley have significant concentrations of prehistoric and Romano-British activity.
- 2) Some manors in the area including Kintbury-Easton (now thought to be Kintbury Farm) were mentioned in Domesday showing the area had early medieval settlement. Hungerford Park was established in the mid-15th century.
- 3) Designed parklands are a prominent characteristic feature of the area. These include Benham Valence Park and Speen Moor and Hamstead Marshall Park. There are also a number of other parklands which are not designated although remaining features from these areas contribute to the sense of history experienced in the landscape.
- 4) The Kennet and Avon Canal was built between 1793 and 1810. Along its length are sluices, lock gates, warehouses and other industrial archaeological sites from the 19th century. The Great Western Railway (opened in 1847) also follows the valley and became an important industrial feature.
- 5) The stretch of the Kennet and Avon Canal had considerable military use during World War II and there are remnant structures and pillboxes from this time, designed to enforce the canal as a 'stop line' for a German invasion advance.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) Vegetation on the floodplain is diverse and comprises lush floodplain pasture, marsh and reedbeds, lines of willow pollards and poplars plus stands of regenerating alder, birch and oak along the river banks. Hedgerows enclosing the fields also contribute to the ecological networks in the landscape.
- 2) The valley contains significant areas of internationally, nationally and locally designated habitats. The River Kennet itself is an important chalk river habitat and a designated SSSI for the majority of its stretch through the character area. The Kennet Valley Alderwoods SAC/SSSI contains a full transition of habitats from open water through swamp to relatively dry woodland; a rare occurrence in Europe.
- 3) Chilton Foliat Meadows (SSSI) comprises an extensive system of wet neutral meadows, watercourses, tall fen vegetation and scrub. These meadows are in the most part managed traditionally as hay meadows, and support a variety of birds, including high numbers of breeding waders. The SSSI also forms part of the Kennet & Lambourn Floodplain SAC.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES**1) Forms part of the nationally valued North Wessex Downs AONB landscape**

A large part of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation

in this character area include the river valleys, chalk stream and rivers which support diverse species, the mosaic of wetland habitats and woodland and the extensive rights of way¹⁰.

2) The distinct winding watercourses of the valley which give a strong sense of place

The valley follows the winding, convoluted path of the River Kennet which interconnects winding braided channels, interconnecting canals, weirs, drainage ditches, mill streams and pools. This forms a complex and important network of waterways which give the valley a distinct identity.

3) Ecologically valuable habitats along the river corridor

The area has a high density of ecologically important habitats, including internationally, nationally and locally designated sites, including the Kennet Alderwoods SAC/SSSI and River Kennet SSSI. The mosaic of wetland habitats, including the species rich chalk river habitat of the River Kennet, floodplain grazing marsh and reedbeds, support a diverse range of species including birds and a complex array of invertebrates. The dense woodland cover along the valley is also an important semi-natural habitat. Pasture fields also support important mixes of plant species.

4) Important heritage features

Features including historic transportation routes (Kennet and Avon Canal) and a number of designed parklands give the landscape a strong sense of time-depth. Many of the valley settlements are also historic in nature and are often designated as Conservation Areas and/or contain high concentrations of Listed Buildings.

5) Sparsely settled, rural character

Settlement is limited to higher ground along the valley and the undeveloped nature of the valley close to the river creates a peaceful and tranquil quality. Wooded parts of the river valley also create a sense of enclosure.

6) Semi-enclosed character of the valley, with high levels of tranquility

The woodland and the valley land form create a sense of enclosure, which feels far removed from the nearby urban area of Newbury. Intrusive modern influences on the landscape are limited.

7) Importance for recreational activity

Numerous public rights of way and the river and canal provide opportunities for recreation which are particularly valued as a result of their location linking Newbury and Hungerford. These include National Cycle Route 4 and boat hire facilities on the canal.

DETRACTORS

1) Changes in farming practices including a reduction in the viability of livestock grazing

Declining viability of livestock grazing and the consequent impact on a loss of pastoral character which is a valued quality of the area. This has the potential to cause further amalgamation and deterioration in the character of arable fields. Changes in farming practice and the increasing intensity of modern agriculture may also damage buried archaeology. Drainage and improvement of permanent pasture and water meadows may reduce the diversity of riparian vegetation. Loss of traditional field boundaries in some locations has altered the pattern of the landscape and impacted on the ecological networks within the area.

2) Nutrient enrichment of the river from agricultural run-off and water vessels

Nutrient enrichment may cause deterioration in water quality which in turn may have

¹⁰ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

damaging knock-on effects on the aquatic and riparian habitat.

3) New development out of character with local rural context

Ongoing development pressure may lead to the suburbanisation and degradation of the distinct character of the existing valley settlements and their wider rural context.

4) Intrusion from roads and railways in localised areas

The mainline railway and major roads including the A4 and A34 are locally intrusive, introducing noise and movement into this otherwise tranquil and rural landscape.

5) Increased risk of more frequent and severe flooding due to climate change

More frequent/severe flooding may lead to improvements to flood defences which could have an adverse effect on landscape if not sensitively designed.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Continue to conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including the chalk river and mosaic of wetland habitats. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Protect and enhance important semi-natural habitats along the length of the valley

Continue to manage valued semi-natural habitats along the valley, particularly areas of wet meadow, reed bed and woodland. Maintain characteristic braided channels, drainage ditches, mill streams and pools. Effort should be made to maintain or create linkages between fragmented areas of semi-natural habitat to improve ecological resilience.

3) Conserve the traditional agricultural use of the landscape

The current mix of arable and pasture land use should aim to be retained, with particular emphasis on retention of permanent and semi-permanent improved grasslands for grazing. Encourage management and maintenance of hedgerows, replanting and infilling traditional field boundaries where they have become gappy. Hedgerow trees of particular interest for re-planting include willow, oak and ash.

4) Conserve the strong sense of time-depth experienced in the landscape

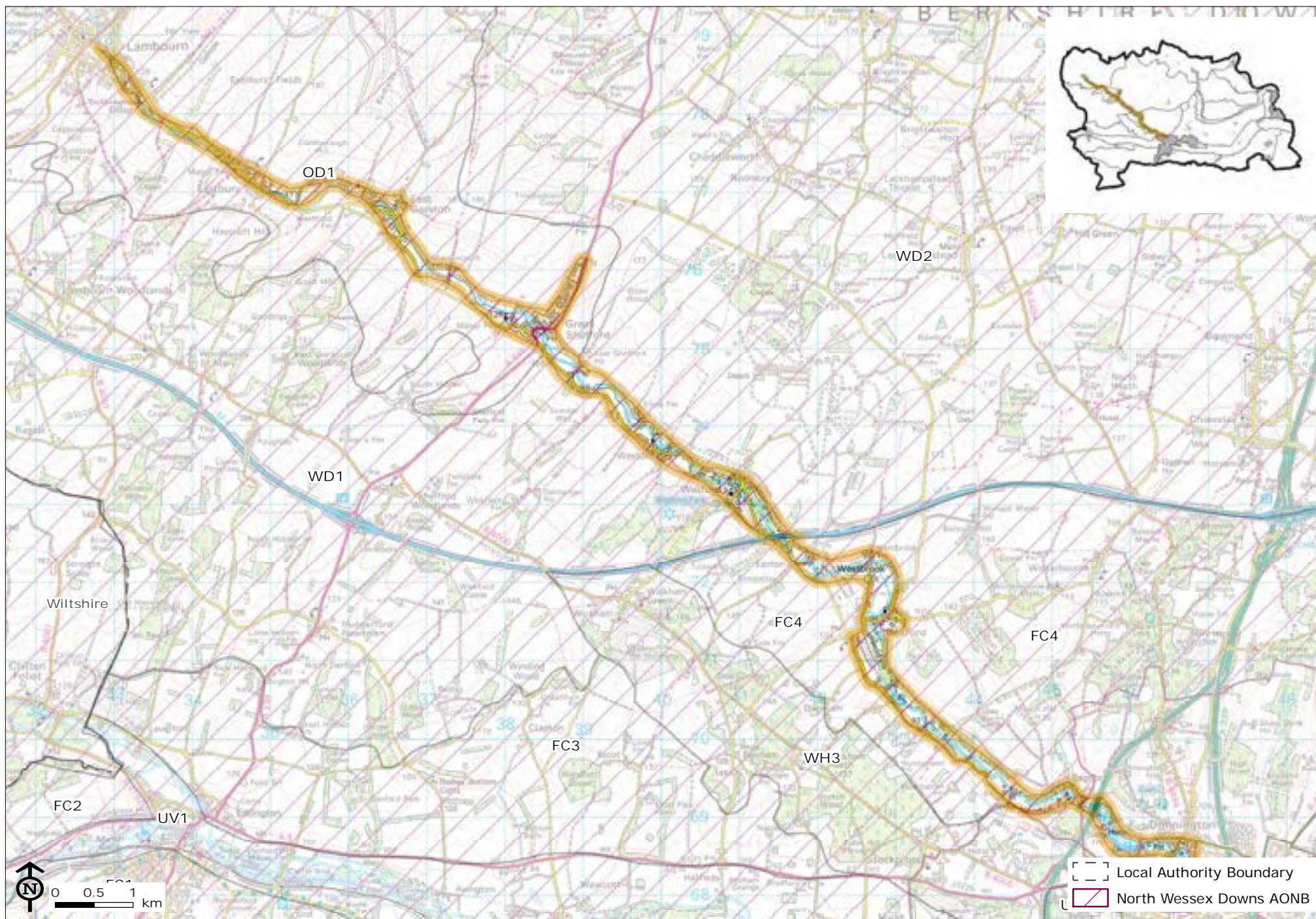
Conserve the setting and integrity of heritage features in the landscape which provide a sense of time-depth and evidence of past land use in the area. In particular, ensure that the remaining estate parkland character is respected, including in areas which are not designated.

5) Positively manage the pressures from recreation

Manage recreational pressure to avoid damage to important landscape or ecological characteristics or perceptual qualities. Encourage restoration of areas eroded by visitor pressure and seek sensitive design solutions to minimise the local impacts of recreation facilities.

6) Conserve the overall sparsely settled and rural character of the landscape

Retain the overall rural character of the valley including its sparsely settled character with its tranquil and enclosed experiential character. Avoid introducing suburbanising features, including excessive lighting which may detract from dark night skies. Ensure development is in-keeping with the existing settlement form and vernacular.



SUMMARY

The Lambourn Upper Valley Floor character area is a narrow chalk valley which follows the River Lambourn as it flows eastwards from Lambourn to Newbury. There is a large amount of equestrian influence particularly in the northern part of the area with many of the fields now serving as pony paddocks, although fields of pasture also remain. A mosaic of wetland habitats occur along the valley corridor, including a number of designated sites. Settlements are small and well-defined in a linear pattern, with red brick being the most common building material. The valley landform creates a sense of enclosure.

To the south east, the character area flows into the urban area of Newbury. To the north west, the valley meets the settlement of Lambourn – beyond this, the valley becomes less defined within the open downland landscape. The sides of the valley are defined where it is incised into the surrounding high ground.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) The River Lambourn Valley floor cuts between areas of open chalk downland

The character area follows the path of the River Lambourn. The valley is narrow, cutting between areas of open chalk downland. As the river flows towards Newbury, it becomes meandering and sometimes braided. As the occurrence of meanders increase, the valley becomes wider.

2) Irregular small field pattern dominated by horse paddocks and wet pasture

This area is known as the 'valley of the racehorse'; the area is dominated by paddocks and other equine infrastructure, particularly in the north. However, cattle and sheep grazed wet pastures, rough pasture, meadow, marsh and broadleaved woodlands become more common in the southern half of the valley past Great Shefford, as the land becomes too marshy for paddocks. Some arable farming is located on higher ground. Field pattern is irregular, with some small sinuous fields which are often divided into paddocks by post and wire fencing and hedges.

3) Large areas of semi-natural habitat, including the chalk river and associated wetlands

The character area contains a high concentration of semi-natural habitats, including a number of internationally and nationally designated sites. The length of the River Lambourn itself is designated as an SAC/SSSI and several areas along the river also form part of the wider Kennet & Lambourn Floodplain SAC. These sites protect a mosaic of wetland habitats, including floodplain grazing marsh, fens, reedbeds and wet meadows. Tracts of mature broadleaved woodland follow the river corridor and also contribute to the semi-natural character of the area.

4) Heritage features include ornamental parkland, remains of a medieval village and clusters of historic buildings within settlements

The valley has a strong sense of time-depth as a result of the presence of heritage features from varied periods of history. These include Bockhampton deserted medieval village, Hug Ditch Court moated site (both Scheduled Monuments) and the Grade II Registered Park and Garden at Donnington Grove close to Newbury. Many of the settlements are historic in origin, such as Eastbury, East Garston, Great Shefford and Boxford. Their historic cores are often designated as Conservation Areas and/or contain high concentrations of Listed Buildings. The distinctive flint Church of St Gregory (Grade II* listed) is located at Welford.

5) Linear settlements are periodically located at intervals along the valley

A series of small settlements are located along the river. These small villages and hamlets such as Weston often express linear shape and strong vernacular character. Building materials are varied, including red brick, stone, flint and chalk and timber framed buildings, with red clay tiles or thatched roofs. The character area also features isolated farmsteads and manor houses within parkland such as Welford House.

6) Access is often limited to minor rural roads and the recreational Lambourn Valley Way

The road network is relatively undeveloped with for the most part only one local minor road running parallel with the river, so can accumulate traffic. The M4 and A34 both cross the valley on embankments, however obstruction is minimised by the dense tree cover. The Lambourn Valley Way is an important recreational trail, following the route of the disused railway along the length of the valley.

7) Outward views are often limited by the valley landform and woodland cover

Due to the enclosed and wooded nature of the valley there are few distant or outward views and so it remains relatively contained. In some locations, views are more open, although still limited by the valley landform. As a result, the valley has a strong sense of enclosure and intimacy, with few modern intrusions.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) Finds from the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age and Roman times have been located in this character area, although they are not extensive.
- 2) The settlement of Lambourn is thought to date back to the Saxon era and may have held a royal residence as it is first mentioned in text by King Alfred around in 888 AD. The street plan in the centre of the settlement suggests it has Saxon origins due to its oval shape.
- 3) Boxford and Welford were both mentioned in the 10th century and Bagnor in Domesday as having a mill, evidence of early medieval habitation in the area. Medieval elements are also present in the churches at East Garston, East Shefford, Great Shefford, Welford and Boxford, although these were altered in the Victorian period. Most historic settlements had developed by the end of the late medieval period.
- 4) Water meadows were extensive in the 18th century, but these were enclosed into fields in the 19th century. Modern agriculture has modified small-scale fields into large fields with drainage leading to the loss of traditional water meadows.
- 5) The Lambourn Valley Railway was constructed through the area in the 1890s. It was closed in 1973 and most elements of it, including stations, were removed, but the line of the railway is largely preserved as a wooded earthwork and forms the basis of the Lambourn Valley Way.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) The chalk lowland river is an important ecological resource and is designated as a SAC/SSSI due to the presence of good populations of the rare/threatened fish species (in a European context) bullhead (*Cottus gobio*) and brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*). Parts of the Kennet & Lambourn Floodplain SAC are internationally important, supporting one of the most extensive known populations of Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) in the UK.
- 2) Much of the floodplain in the lower reach of the area is comprised of formerly managed 'floated' meadows and flood pastures and these are particularly ecologically rich, such as Boxford Water Meadows, which are now owned and managed by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.
- 3) Throughout the whole character area the river is marked by lines of pollarded willow. Woodland takes up a larger percentage of land in the southern extent of the river, with blocks of willow and alder scrub and ash woodland becoming more frequent nearer to Bagnor and Donnington.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Forms part of the nationally valued North Wessex Downs AONB landscape

The majority of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the river valleys, chalk stream and rivers which support diverse species, the mosaic of wetland habitats and woodland and the extensive rights of way¹¹.

2) Ecologically valuable habitats along the river corridor

The area has a high density of ecologically important habitats, including internationally, nationally and locally designated sites.

¹¹ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

3) Semi-enclosed character of the valley, with high levels of tranquility

The woodland and the valley land form create a sense of enclosure and intrusive modern influences on the landscape are limited. A sense of remoteness is experienced within the valley, which feels far removed from the adjacent larger settlements at Lambourn and Newbury.

4) Important heritage and archaeological features

Many of the valley settlements are also historic in nature and are often designated as Conservation Areas and/or contain high concentrations of Listed Buildings. Many of these heritage assets are still in use e.g. Grade II listed Watermill Theatre at Bagnor.

5) Strongly rural character, with limited development

The valley has a strong rural character, with settlement limited to small vernacular villages and scattered farms.

6) Lambourn Valley Way along the river corridor

The Lambourn Valley Way is an important and popular recreational trail, following the route of the disused railway along the length of the valley.

DETRACTORS**1) Decline in traditional pasture management**

A decline in traditional pasture is often associated with replacement by horse paddocks which can dilute the visual character of the area. Farming intensification, particularly draining or improving pasture and meadows on the floodplain has also altered that character of the landscape.

2) Intrusive roads such as the M4 and A34

Major transport corridors create localised noise and visual intrusion. Increased volumes of traffic or an increasing demand for quicker journey times can also result in higher levels of traffic on minor roads. This may lead to the erosion of verges and roadside banks and the introduction of road widening, concrete kerbing and increased signage, creating a suburban context.

3) Continued pressure for development leading to the degradation and suburbanisation of the distinct rural character

This is a particular issue close to existing settlements, where past expansion has eroded the rural characteristics of the landscape in some localised areas with the introduction of inappropriate features such as coniferous hedge boundaries, close board fencing and security lighting.

4) Loss of historic field boundaries and patterns

Modern agricultural modifications have led to the loss of hedgerows, with those that are left often poorly managed and therefore gappy, or containing over mature trees. An increase in horse paddocks has also led to the subdivision of fields and changes in boundary styles.

5) Nutrient enrichment of the river from agricultural run-off

Nutrient enrichment may cause deterioration in water quality which in turn may have damaging knock-on effects on the aquatic and riparian habitat.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) **Conserve and enhance the special qualities of this nationally designated landscape**

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including the chalk river and mosaic of wetland habitats. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) **Conserve the traditional agricultural use of the landscape**

Conserve and enhance the intimate pastoral character of the valley to include a diverse mix of land uses including permanent pasture, wet grassland and riparian woodlands. Possible restoration operations of waterside pastures could take place. Re-planting and improved management practices of hedgerows in the area along with some native tree re-planting.

3) **Restore, extend and manage wetland habitats** that occur along the floodplain, particularly the internationally and nationally important chalk river habitat and areas of floodplain meadow. Linking small fragmented areas of habitat should be a priority.

4) **Conserve the valley floor woodland** to maintain intrinsic landscape and habitat qualities. Explore possibilities for small-scale woodland creation in areas where it could enhance the landscape character and quality. There are opportunities for reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands.

5) **Conserve the strong sense of time-depth experienced in the landscape**

Respect the setting and integrity of heritage features in the landscape which provide a sense of time-depth and evidence of past land use in the area. Features which contribute to the time-depth of the area include historic water mills, water meadows and historic parklands.

6) **Ensure any land management changes are in-keeping with the rural landscape character**

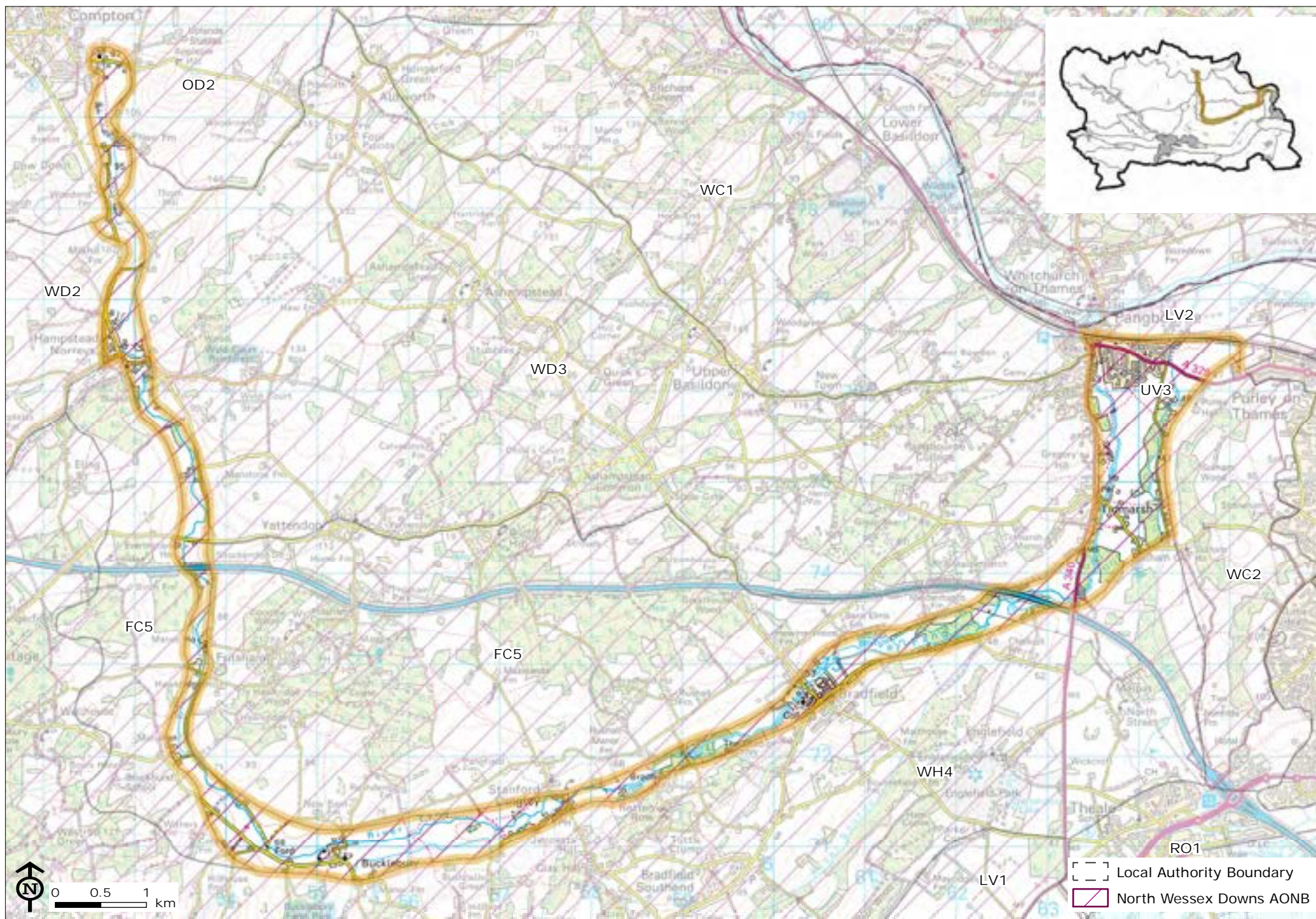
Ensure any horse paddocks are sympathetically integrated into the landscape and ensure that any stables and manèges are carefully sited.

7) **Conserve the distinct character and individual identities of settlements within the valley**

Conserve the overall sparsely settled character in the valley. Seek to avoid linear development and ensure that settlements retain their distinct character and identities. Development should be in-keeping with the existing settlement form and vernacular and should respect the role the wider rural landscape makes to the setting of historic settlement in Bagnor, Boxford, East Garston and Eastbury.

8) **Conserve the overall rural character of the landscape**

Retain the overall rural character of the valley including the tranquil and enclosed experiential character. Avoid introducing suburbanising features, including excessive lighting which may detract from dark night skies. Minimise road improvements which may degrade the rural qualities of the area. Avoid the use of standardised and intrusive urban materials, street furniture, lighting and signage.



SUMMARY

The River Pang runs through a shallow broad chalk valley from Compton to Pangbourne, with a relatively narrow flood plain. The character area has a varied land cover with a mosaic of arable and pastoral land as well as dense woodland and some parkland. The area also supports a range of important habitats including seasonally flooded meadows and damp copses. Settlements are small and attractive often built mostly with red brick. The M4 crosses through the valley. There are also notable archaeological features dating back to Saxon and medieval settlements. Views here can be extensive and overall the area is picturesque with an intimate rural feel.

The northern extent of the character area is close to Compton, where the watercourse originates within the open downland. The River Pang flows south, before running to the east near Bucklebury. The sides of the valley are marked by the transition to higher ground. The eastern extent of the area occurs near the settlement of Pangbourne, where the River Pang meets the River Thames.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) **Shallow valley of the River Pang, carved into the underlying chalk geology with valley gravels and alluvium**

The valley follows the River Pang from its source in Compton southwards until it reaches Bucklebury, where it turns eastward towards Pangbourne. As the river flows eastwards, it becomes more complex and braided. At Pangbourne the river meets the River Thames. The geology of the river valley is a chalk stratum, overlaid by a layer of alluvium and river valley gravels. Outcrops of chalk allow extensive arable agriculture in the upper valley.

2) **A diverse mix of land uses with the presence of both arable and pastoral land divided into a varied field pattern**

Areas north of Hampstead Norreys contain open arable fields divided by trimmed hedgerows. Downstream of Stanford Dingley, there is a more wooded character with deciduous oak and alder woodland patches. Bradfield Hall is an area of parkland maintained as sheep grazed pasture. Near Tidmarsh, the land use is small-scale and irregular, with dense willow and alder woodland and pastures. Near Bucklebury, arable fields are larger, with less defined boundaries often enclosed by low flailed hawthorn hedges and post and wire fences. Divisions tend to run at right angles to the river, which may represent medieval parish boundaries. Smaller irregular fields may be the remnants of late medieval or post-medieval piecemeal enclosure.

3) **Many areas of ecological importance including areas of ancient woodland and nationally designated wetland habitats**

Large amounts of the valley floor are characterised by the presence of semi-natural habitats including floodplain grazing marsh, deciduous woodland and the river itself. Some of the woodland is ancient. Numerous areas are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. The nationally designated Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows SSSI is located close to Pangbourne.

4) **Strong sense of time-depth, with historic villages located along the valley floor**

Historic villages, typically with vernacular buildings centred around a historic church – e.g. Hampstead Norreys and Bucklebury – are located throughout the valley. Many are designated as Conservation Areas with numerous Listed Buildings. Several parklands reach into the valley, including Bradfield Hall and Purley Hall (Grade II* Registered Park and Garden). Fields are mainly post-medieval in origin; prior to this much of the valley slopes were open and used for common grazing.

5) **Small, historic settlements are located at bridging points along the river, with roads limited to narrow rural lanes**

The valley is sparsely settled with hamlets, villages and scattered farms following the river channel or at river crossings. Settlements tend to be small and attractive with differing building materials and styles. Roads are minimal and tend to be rural sunken lanes, often overhung with broadleaved woodland. There is a network of footpaths and bridleways linking historic communities. The M4 cuts through the Pang valley at two separate points, impacting on the visual character and tranquillity of the area.

6) **Varied visual character depending on topography and woodland cover**

In its western part, the valley is more open, with extensive views where hedgerows and woodland allow. In the eastern part of the valley, the valley sides become slightly steeper with more woodland, limiting views and creating a sense of enclosure.

7) **A tranquil and rural river valley, with few modernising features**

The Pang River valley has high levels of tranquillity and retains a rural character with a strong sense of place. Pylon lines, major roads and suburban development can detract from these qualities, although these effects tend to be localised.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) Evidence of prehistoric settlement and Roman era activity in the landscape is limited. The majority of historic features in the landscape are medieval in origin.
- 2) Manor houses in Hampstead Norreys, Frilsham and Bucklebury are likely to have medieval origins. Bucklebury, Bradfield and Stanford Dingley were recorded in the Domesday survey. Many of the historic farm houses in the area were present by the late medieval period.
- 3) Purley, Westbury Farm and Stanford Dingley have fields that are likely to be relict water meadows which could date back to the late 17th century. Field divisions running at right angles to the River Pang may represent medieval parish boundaries. Smaller more irregular fields are likely to be remnants from post medieval piecemeal enclosure.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows (SSSI) is nationally designated for its complex soil assemblages of alluvial loams, gravel terraces and peat deposits which allow a mosaic of damp copses and seasonally flooded meadows to flourish.
- 2) The eastern part of the character area is characterised by dense woodland cover, including ancient woodland. Damp copses support many tree species; whilst these woodland areas are predominantly alder other species present include ash, birch and hazel.
- 3) Wetland, grassland and woodland habitats are often designated as Local Wildlife Sites.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Forms part of the nationally valued North Wessex Downs AONB landscape

The whole of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the river valleys, chalk stream and rivers which support diverse species, the mosaic of wetland habitats and woodlands and the extensive rights of way¹².

2) Important semi-natural habitats along the river corridor

The area has a high concentration of ecologically important habitats including the nationally designated Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows SSSI. The eastern part of the valley is densely wooded, including areas of ancient woodland. A mosaic of wetland habitats is located along the river corridor, including floodplain grazing marsh.

3) Sparsely settled character

Settlement comprises small attractive villages with varied building styles which are located along the river corridor together with scattered farms.

4) Strong rural and tranquil perceptual qualities

The sparsely settled character, expanses of farmland and woodland and rural sunken lanes contribute to the strong rural qualities of the landscape. Levels of tranquillity are high, particularly away from larger areas of settlement (e.g. Pangbourne).

5) Sense of time-depth

A number of features in the landscape contribute to the character area's sense of time-depth, including remnant areas of parkland, historic medieval villages and historic field patterns.

¹² Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

6) Sense of enclosure and isolation

The valley landform and frequent woodland create a sense of tranquillity, enclosure and intimacy.

DETRACTORS**1) Intensification of farming practices**

This has included the loss of hedgerows to accommodate larger farm machinery and the drainage and improvement of permanent pasture and wet meadows to arable fields.

2) Noise and visual pollution created by the M4

The M4 crosses the valley at two separate points. Visual and audial disruption detracts from the peacefulness and tranquillity of the character area.

3) Traffic pressure on minor rural roads

Increased traffic on sunken lanes, which can lead to the erosion of verges, leading to widening and therefore a loss in their character. Signage, fencing and kerbing would all also impact the remote feel of the area.

4) On-going development pressure

Past expansion has eroded the rural characteristics of the landscape in some localised areas close to Reading. Additional development which is out of character with the local rural context would also detract from the distinctive rural character of the villages in the valley.

5) Electricity infrastructure

In the eastern part of the valley, pylons and overhead power lines can detract from the undeveloped, wooded skylines.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY**1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB**

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including the chalk river and mosaic of wetland habitats. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Conserve valley floor woodland

Explore possibilities for small-scale woodland creation in areas where it could enhance the landscape character and quality. There are opportunities for the reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands.

3) Protect and enhance valued semi-natural habitats

Manage valued semi-natural habitats along the valley, particularly areas of floodplain grassland and wetland habitats. Effort should be made to maintain or create linkages between fragmented areas of semi-natural habitat to improve ecological resilience. Ensure that remaining field boundaries are appropriately managed as these also contribute to ecological networks.

4) Conserve the traditional agricultural use of the landscape

Conserve and enhance the intimate pastoral character of the valley to include a diverse mix of land uses including permanent pasture, wet grassland and riparian woodlands. Where possible, seek the restoration of riverside pastures and watercress beds.

5) Conserve features which contribute to the sense of time-depth

Conserve the distinct identity and character of the historic villages in the valley, including the numerous listed buildings and the contribution that the landscape makes to Conservation Areas. Conserve historic field patterns and reinstate hedgerows where they have previously been lost.

6) Maintain public rights of way

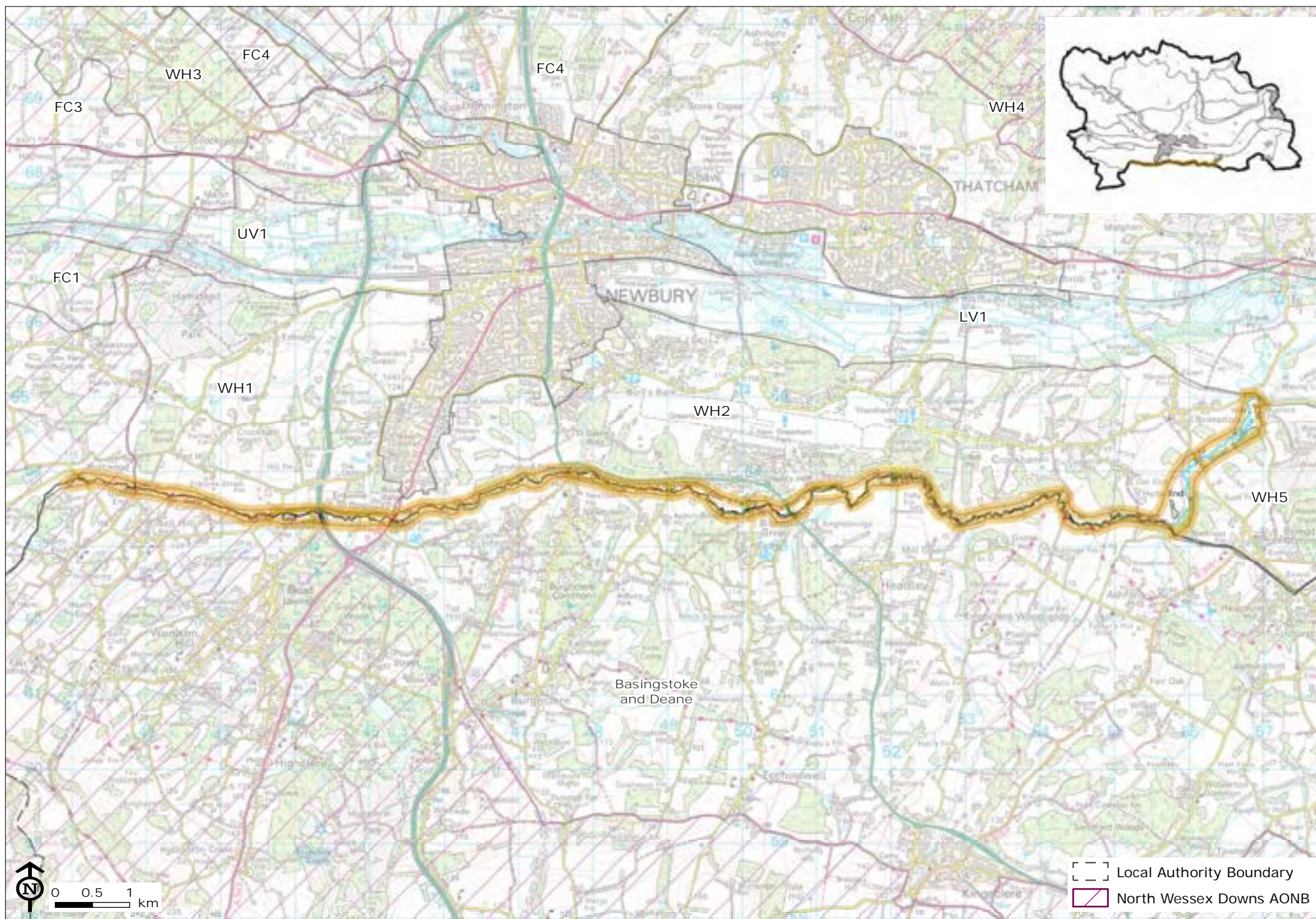
Maintain the network of public rights of way which provide valued opportunities for recreation, including the Berkshire Circular Routes trail. Improve access where routes are more limited, particularly in the western part of the valley.

7) Retain the rural and tranquil character of the landscape

Conserve the farmed character of the valley and its woodland copses, with particular emphasis on the retention of permanent and semi-improved pasture and the prevention of agricultural intensification. Maintain characteristic field patterns and avoid agricultural intensification. Ensure new development does not undermine the balance of the historic settlement pattern and rural character of the area. Any development should be in-keeping with the existing settlement form and vernacular.

8) Conserve the character of minor rural roads

Continue to recognise the contribution the sunken rural lanes make to the character of the rural landscape in any future highway works. Avoid the use of standardised and intrusive urban materials, street furniture, lighting and signage.



SUMMARY

The Enborne Upper River Valley Floor differs from the other upland valleys in the District in the fact that its underlying geology is London Clay compared to the regionally common chalk. It also has a far flatter topography, with the valley being narrow with no defined slopes. The land use is predominantly mixed agriculture with some large tracts of deciduous woodland. Settlement is sparse and where present lacks any consistent character. The area is intruded by multiple busy roads which degrade the local character of the area. As the area is quite flat and well-wooded there are limited views out of the landscape.

Lying to the south of the urban areas of Newbury and Thatcham, the eastern extent of the character area occurs where the River Enborne meets the River Kennet near Brimpton. The southern boundary of the character area is defined by the District boundary with Hampshire. To the north, the land rises up towards adjacent high ground. The western boundary is located to the south of Holtwood, where the valley becomes less perceptible in the landscape.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) **Narrow, relatively flat sided valley of the River Enborne, carved into London Clay geology overlain by gravels**

The Enborne valley is carved into London Clay geology, overlain with valley gravels. As gravels are easily eroded the upper slope has become concave and hummocky. The London Clay is resistant to erosion and therefore forms convex slopes. The river flows eastward along the West Berkshire boundary from Holtwood to Brimpton. The valley boundary is defined topographically, although the river drains a far larger area of the surrounding undulating landform.

2) **Predominantly mixed agricultural land divided into an irregular field pattern with significant areas of woodland**

The land within the Enborne Valley is predominantly used for agriculture, most of which is small, sheep grazed pasture. However, there are also arable practices including the cultivation of vegetable crops such as runner beans. Degraded parkland at Sandleford Priory is located in the mid-section of the character area. There are also a series of woodland blocks within the character area. Field pattern is irregular with a mix of different shapes and sizes.

3) **Important ecological habitats along the river, including ancient woodland and wetland habitats**

Parts of the large Greenham and Crookham Commons SSSI extend into the valley from the north. Floodplain grazing marsh is located along the valley bottom. Linear woodlands follow the course of the river and there are also occasional larger blocks of woodland, including some classified as ancient. A number of these areas are designated as Local Wildlife Sites.

4) **Few heritage features, although contains part of the Sandleford Priory parkland**

Visible historic evidence in the landscape is limited to scattered historic farms/cottages. The character area also contains a small part of the Grade II Registered Sandleford Priory parkland which contributes to time-depth.

5) **Very sparsely settled, with little consistency in the features of the dwellings present**

The area is very sparsely settled with only a few isolated clusters of dwellings and farms of modern and historic origin. Building materials most frequently used here include red brick.

6) **The valley generally retains a rural character, although is intruded by busy major roads**

Despite being relatively rural the character area is significantly influenced by urban infrastructure such as the A34 and A339 which cross the valley, introducing an element of noise and movement. There is a series of dispersed footpaths linking historic routes through some of the more rural parts of the character area.

7) **A sense of enclosure and intimacy experienced due to the topography and woodland cover with limited views in and out**

The valley landform and the woodlands which fringe the valley sides limit outward views and give the landscape an intimate enclosed feel. There are occasional views to features in adjacent landscapes, including the church spire at Brimpton.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) There are few archaeological records for this area, although this is likely to be a result of the limited assessment work carried out in this area to date, rather than that no such evidence exists.
- 2) There is evidence of human occupation in the surrounding landscape during the medieval period, including the scheduled monument at the deserted medieval town of Newtown.

- 3) A small part of the Grade II Registered Park and Garden of Sandleford Priory is located south of Newbury. This parkland is associated with the Grade I listed Sandleford Priory which lies 400 metres to the north of the valley.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) There is dense deciduous woodland, some of which is ancient, following the river in many parts of the character area and these are likely to support rich ecological assemblages.
- 2) Amongst the woodland are tracts of floodplain and grazing marsh and semi-improved grassland habitats, both of which are priority habitats.
- 3) Part of the Greenham and Crookham Commons SSSI is located in the Enborne Valley, which is designated for its varied mosaic of habitats and the plant and animal assemblages they support, including alder, oak and ash woodlands.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Important semi-natural habitats along the river corridor

These include tracts of floodplain and grazing marsh and areas of ancient woodland which contribute to the natural character experienced in the valley.

2) Role of the river valley as the Berkshire/Hampshire boundary

Although the valley is not overly prominent within the landscape, it has long served as the Berkshire/Hampshire boundary, with boundary markers often located on bridges.

3) Sparsely settled rural character

The valley is primarily unsettled with buildings limited to occasional farms and small stretches of linear development. The primary land uses of farmland and woodland create a strong rural character.

4) Sense of enclosure and tranquillity

The dense woodland and valley landform create a sense of visual enclosure. The valley generally has high levels of tranquillity and feels far removed from the urban areas of Newbury and Thatcham.

5) Views to the church spire at Brimpton

Where woodland cover allows, there are occasional views to features on higher ground above the valley, including the prominent spire of the Grade II Listed Church of St Peter at Brimpton.

DETRACTORS

1) Linear development

Despite the absence of settlements within the valley, in some areas linear settlement has been constructed along roads, creating a localised suburban character. Upgrading of roads in these areas can also have a suburbanising impact, with the introduction of kerbs and increased signage.

2) Neglected areas of unmanaged land

Some of the former agricultural land has become marginal due to the construction of roads, leading to abandoned and unmanaged areas. Lack of management is also a problem along

some roads. Fly tipping is also associated with a lack of management.

3) Nutrient enrichment of the river from agricultural run-off

Nutrient enrichment may cause deterioration in water quality which in turn may have damaging knock-on effects to the aquatic and riparian habitat.

4) Loss of tranquillity and rural character close to major roads

A number of major roads cross the valley, with vehicle traffic introducing noise and movement into the otherwise tranquil and rural landscape. This is also the case with major roads running close to the area e.g. the A339 which runs parallel to the river valley in the west of the area.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve the valley floor woodland

Manage the valley floor woodland to maintain intrinsic landscape and habitat qualities. Explore possibilities for small-scale woodland creation in areas where it could enhance the landscape character and quality. There are opportunities for the reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands.

2) Protect and enhance valued semi-natural habitats

Manage valued semi-natural habitats along the valley, particularly areas of wet meadow and marginal vegetation. Efforts should be made to maintain or create linkages between fragmented areas of semi-natural habitat to improve ecological resilience. Ensure that remaining field boundaries are appropriately managed as these also contribute to ecological networks.

3) Conserve the setting of historic features

Respect the setting and integrity of heritage features in the landscape which provide a sense of time-depth and evidence of past land use in the area. These include the Grade II Registered Park and Garden at Sandford Priory and the deserted medieval town of Newton, a scheduled monument.

4) Maintain public rights of way

Maintain and link up public rights of way to improve the recreational resource of the character area, while ensuring that the ecological value and perceptual qualities of the landscape are not adversely affected.

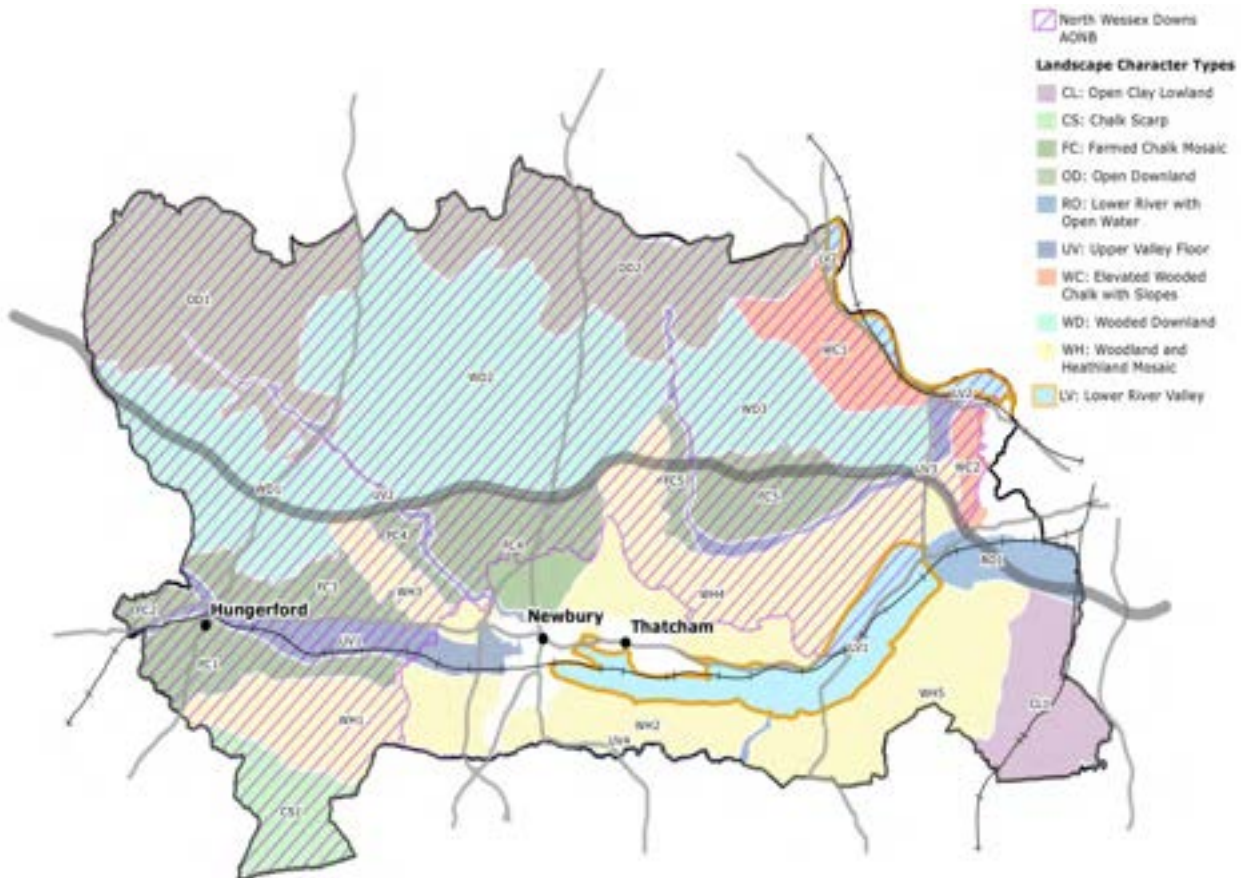
5) Conserve the rural character of the landscape

Conserve the farmed character of the valley and its woodland copses, with particular emphasis on the retention of permanent and semi-improved pasture. Avoid urbanising features within the landscape and retain the overall unsettled character of the valley.

6) Mitigate the adverse influences of the major roads

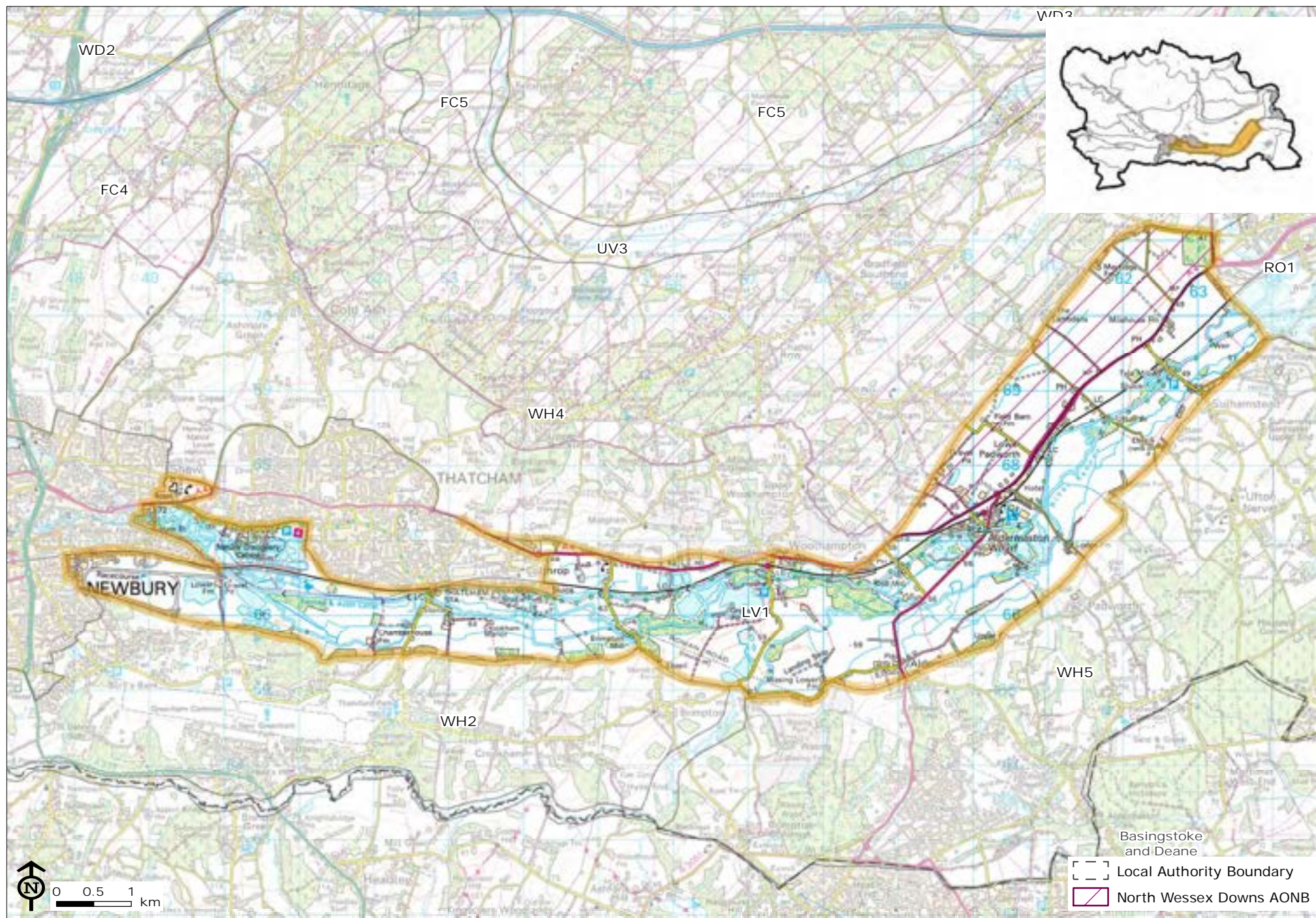
Seek to screen the A34 and A339 into the landscape. Minimise road improvements that may degrade the rural quality of the area, and avoid the use of standardised and intrusive urban materials, lighting and signage measures whenever appropriate.

Landscape Character Type LV: Lower River Valley



The **Lower River Valley** LCT is subdivided into two Local Character Areas:

- LV1: Kennet Lower River Valley
- LV2: Pangbourne Thames Lower River Valley.



SUMMARY

A valley formed by the River Kennet and its tributaries, characterised by a flat and wide valley floor. Pasture fields line the river course, with arable fields present further away from the Kennet. Mature woodland along the valley creates a semi-enclosed character, and provides a rural setting to Thatcham and Newbury. The area is well used for recreation, with Newbury Racecourse, the Kennet and Avon Canal/towpath and many public rights of way attracting visitors.

The area is centred on the wide valley floodplain of the River Kennet from Newbury in the west to near Theale in the east. It is bounded to the north and south by a change in topography, marking the rising slopes of the immediate valley sides. The northern edge of the floodplain (north of the A4), forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Distinctive flat and open lowland landscape, created by the River Kennet and associated channels and drainage ditches

Flat and open broad lowland floodplain, typically 500m to 2km wide, enclosed by well-defined slopes carved into the underlying chalk. The floodplain is defined by extensive alluvial deposits that mask the influence of the underlying chalk strata. There are numerous drainage ditches, and together with the canal system of locks, weirs and its various interconnections with the river, the hydrological system of the valley is complex.

2) Principally pasture farmland used for cattle grazing, with some larger arable fields. Woodland occurs along the river corridor.

The floodplain is mostly pastoral farmland, principally used for cattle grazing. The fields are divided by gappy hedgerows and post-and-wire fences, although some areas still exhibit historic hedgerow patterns. Larger regular arable fields are located on higher ground and are mainly used for cereal production. Woodland is located along the river corridor. Past and present gravel workings also influence character.

3) Internationally and nationally important wetland habitats along the valley floor

Many wetland habitats are found within the Kennet valley, including wet meadow, reed bed and open water as a result of former gravel workings, now regenerating. The majority of the River Kennet is nationally designated as a SSSI, and supports good populations of aquatic invertebrates, birds and fish. The Kennet & Lambourn Floodplain SAC is located in this area and is internationally recognised for its chalk stream habitat.

4) Sense of time-depth with visible heritage features and historic settlements

Historic settlement cores occur at bridging points along the river corridor, including Conservation Areas at Woolhampton and Aldermaston. Other historic features include the remains of St John the Baptist church, a medieval field system and Monkey Marsh Lock along the Kennet and Avon Canal (all of which are also Scheduled Monuments). Significant Mesolithic remains have been located along the river corridor.

5) Sparsely settled, although influenced by Newbury and Thatcham

In the west of the area, modern urban development and industry within Newbury and Thatcham influence landscape character. Elsewhere, settlements are limited to nucleated clusters around former mills and small settlements such as Aldermaston and Woolhampton. Historic churches are often located at the heart of these settlements. There are scattered farms and hamlets often associated with mill buildings; public houses and lock-keepers cottages are associated with the canal.

6) Many public rights of way, particularly along the river

The river corridor includes footpaths and towpaths, which provide access for cyclists and pedestrians. The Kennet and Avon Canal is also popular for canal boating. The rivers are extensively used for waterborne recreation and colourful boats and river barges are an important feature. Other recreational facilities include Newbury Racecourse and a golf driving range. Informal recreation includes the Thatcham Nature Discovery Centre and the well-used public rights of way.

7) Transportation routes, often parallel to the river corridor

Transport corridors follow the length of the valley, including the main railway line and the A4. Large gantries and overhead line equipment along the railway line can be visually intrusive. The electrification of this part of the railway line will also mean that trains will be larger and more frequent. Navigation of the Kennet and Avon Canals and River Kennet has resulted in the presence of numerous locks, weirs and sizable bridges, which are distinctive features within the landscape.

8) Visually semi-enclosed, with strong rural qualities away from large settlements

The Kennet Valley landscape has a semi-enclosed visual character resulting from the well-

developed tree cover along watercourses and the frequent blocks of woodland particularly on open valley slopes. Due to these obstructions, views can be funnelled in places. The unsettled character of the valley creates a rural, tranquil landscape away from the main urban settlements of Newbury and Thatcham. Noise and movement from transportation routes and overhead lines on the skyline can detract from views and perceptual qualities.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The area has a long history of human use and occupation. Evidence of land-use in the deeper past comes chiefly from archaeological remains, including Iron Age and Roman field systems and trackways visible as cropmarks, with aspects earlier than the medieval period generally not now palpable in the landscape.
- 2) Several of the settlements and mill sites are of at least Anglo-Saxon date, being recorded in the Domesday Book. These settlements included larger estate centres at Thatcham and Aldermaston. Modern housing growth has taken place around many of the historic settlements, with growth focused around Midgham, Woolhampton and Aldermaston Wharf.
- 3) In the medieval period the landscape was characterised by open fields along the river gravels and common meadow on the alluvial floodplain, although drainage may have allowed some mixed farming on the floodplain. Extensive water meadows were created along the Kennet in the post-medieval period and remnants of these remain a distinctive feature of the landscape. Other traditional land uses include the coppicing of willow and hazel. In the 19th century Parliamentary enclosure of the floodplain led to the creation of a regular pattern of large rectangular fields.
- 4) The Kennet is an important transportation corridor, being a route of communication and trade as well as a source of resources from prehistory. The Kennet Navigation, an improvement to the river to allow navigation as far as Newbury, was opened in 1723. It was later incorporated into the Kennet and Avon Canal, built from 1793 to 1810, allowing navigation to Bath. Later in 1847, the Berkshire and Hampshire Railway was opened, roughly following the alignment of the river.
- 5) The main factors in changes during the 20th century have been agricultural change and gravel extraction. Gravel extraction has led to the modification of large portions of the valley floor, including areas around Midgham Marsh, Aldermaston Wharf and Woolhampton. Some areas of former quarry have been restored to arable land (e.g. between Woolhampton and Brimpton). Disused quarries have often been left to flood and form artificial lakes. Large industrial and commercial areas such as Colthrop and Hambridge Lane have also been constructed close to Newbury and Thatcham.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) There are extensive wetland habitats along the river corridor, many of which are internationally, nationally or locally designated for their nature conservation value. The length of the River Kennet between Woolhampton and Newbury is designated as a SSSI. Parts of the Kennet & Lambourn Floodplain SAC and the Thatcham Reedbeds SSSI are located south of Thatcham. Many of these habitats have their origins in the extensive commonly-owned water meadows which existed along the Kennet floodplain in the post-medieval period. Other important wildlife areas include flooded gravel extraction pits such as the SSSI at Aldermaston Gravel Pits, which is a haven for wildfowl.
- 2) Typically, the valley floor includes tracts of pasture and arable farmland interspersed with blocks of woodland. Some of this is willow and alder scrub, while there are also large stands of poplar and willow managed commercially in some areas. Areas of unimproved pasture and water meadows are becoming increasingly reduced following drainage for arable farming.
- 3) The flora of the River Kennet is species-rich and diverse and supports abundant populations of aquatic invertebrates. The Kennet provides a habitat for kingfishers, grey wagtail, mute swan,

little grebe, and sedge and reed warblers.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Forms part of the nationally valued North Wessex Downs AONB landscape

The north eastern part of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the river valleys, chalk stream and rivers which support diverse species, a mosaic of wetland habitats and woodlands and extensive rights of way¹³.

2) Ecologically valuable habitats along the river corridor

The area has a high density of ecologically important habitats, and internationally, nationally and locally designated sites, including the River Kennet SSSI, parts of the Kennet & Lambourn Floodplain SAC and the Thatcham Reedbeds SSSI. The mosaic of wetland habitats including restored sand and gravel workings support a diverse range of species including birds and a complex array of invertebrates.

3) Numerous heritage assets and historic landscape features give the landscape a sense of time-depth

These include the historic settlements at crossing points along the river corridor, which are often designated as Conservation Areas (including Woolhampton, Aldermaston Wharf and Aldermaston) and the Scheduled Monuments (including the Remains of St John the Baptist church and a medieval field system) from various periods of history and industrial heritage associated with the Kennet and Avon Canal.

4) Strong rural and sparsely settled character

The character area remains relatively rural and sparsely settled, with much of the area retaining its agricultural character, despite its proximity to major settlements such as Newbury and Thatcham to the west of the area.

5) Valued destination for recreation

Public rights of way within the character area are abundant and well used, as well as water based recreation/boating providing access and leisure opportunities 'on the doorstep' for those who live in urban areas such as Thatcham and Newbury. The colourful boats and river barges are an important visual element of the valley. Former gravel pits provide opportunities for informal recreation, including the Thatcham Nature Discovery Centre.

6) Distinctive visual character

The valley has a distinct visual character; despite being semi-enclosed, views within the valley can be extensive and open. Where woodland allows, there are views to the higher ground of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

DETRACTORS

1) Impacts of improvements and intensification of the railway line

Large, visually intrusive gantries have been installed as part of the electrification of the railway. Some bridges have been upgraded and are greater in height to accommodate the new infrastructure. More frequent trains introduce more noise and movement in the valley landscape and have a knock on effect on road traffic at level crossings.

¹³ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

2) Increasing development pressures

The pressure for development adjacent to the larger urban areas of Newbury and Thatcham is encroaching on the valley floor character resulting in a blurring of the physical distinction between the two settlements. This is particularly apparent around the community hospital and golf driving range at Henwick.

3) Changes in farming practices including a reduction in the viability of livestock grazing

Declining viability of livestock grazing and the consequent impact on a loss of pastoral character which is a valued quality of the area. This has the potential to cause further amalgamation and deterioration in the character of arable fields. Changes in farming practices and the increasing intensity of modern agriculture may also damage buried archaeology. The loss of traditional field boundaries has also had an adverse effect on the landscape.

4) Past and present impacts of industrial use

Past mineral extraction has created an industrialised character in some parts of the landscape. This has been further exacerbated in the urban fringe areas of east Newbury, Thatcham and Theale by the spread of commercial and industrial land use onto the valley floor. In some places former sand and gravel pits now contain large areas of open water which are important wildlife sites.

5) Nutrient enrichment of the river from agricultural run-off and water vessels

Nutrient enrichment may cause deterioration in water quality which in turn may have damaging knock-on effects to the aquatic and riparian habitat.

6) Increased risk of more frequent and severe flooding due to climate change

Flooding events within the character area have become more frequent and severe in recent years. This may result in pressures for further flood control measures, which may be unsympathetic to the landscape. The River Kennet and the Kennet and Avon Canal may also need management to ensure that effects from increased flow are minimised to protect surviving historic features e.g. locks and bridges.

7) Development of large infrastructure such as solar farms and waste management facilities

There are a number of solar farms within the character area which can be visually detracting. There is also an Integrated Waste Management Facility at Padworth Sidings. Overhead power lines run the length of the valley and are prominent features on the skyline.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY**1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated AONB landscape**

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including the chalk river and mosaic of wetland habitats. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape and its setting.

2) Conserve and restore the traditional valley landscape

Conserve traditional pasture land, especially close to the watercourse, and encourage ecologically-beneficial management of both pasture and arable land including minimising use of fertilisers, especially around ecologically valuable sites. Re-instate lost hedgerows and promote good management of existing hedgerows.

3) Restore, extend and manage wetland habitats that occur along the floodplain

Manage the wetland habitats, particularly the internationally and nationally important chalk river habitat, areas of floodplain meadow and reed bed. Linking small fragmented areas of

habitat should be a priority.

4) Conserve the valley floor woodland

Conserve woodland on the valley floor to maintain intrinsic landscape and habitat qualities. Explore possibilities for small-scale woodland creation in areas where it could enhance the landscape character and quality. There are opportunities for reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands.

5) Conserve and enhance heritage features in the landscape

Respect the setting and integrity of heritage features in the landscape which provide a sense of time-depth and evidence of past land use in the area.

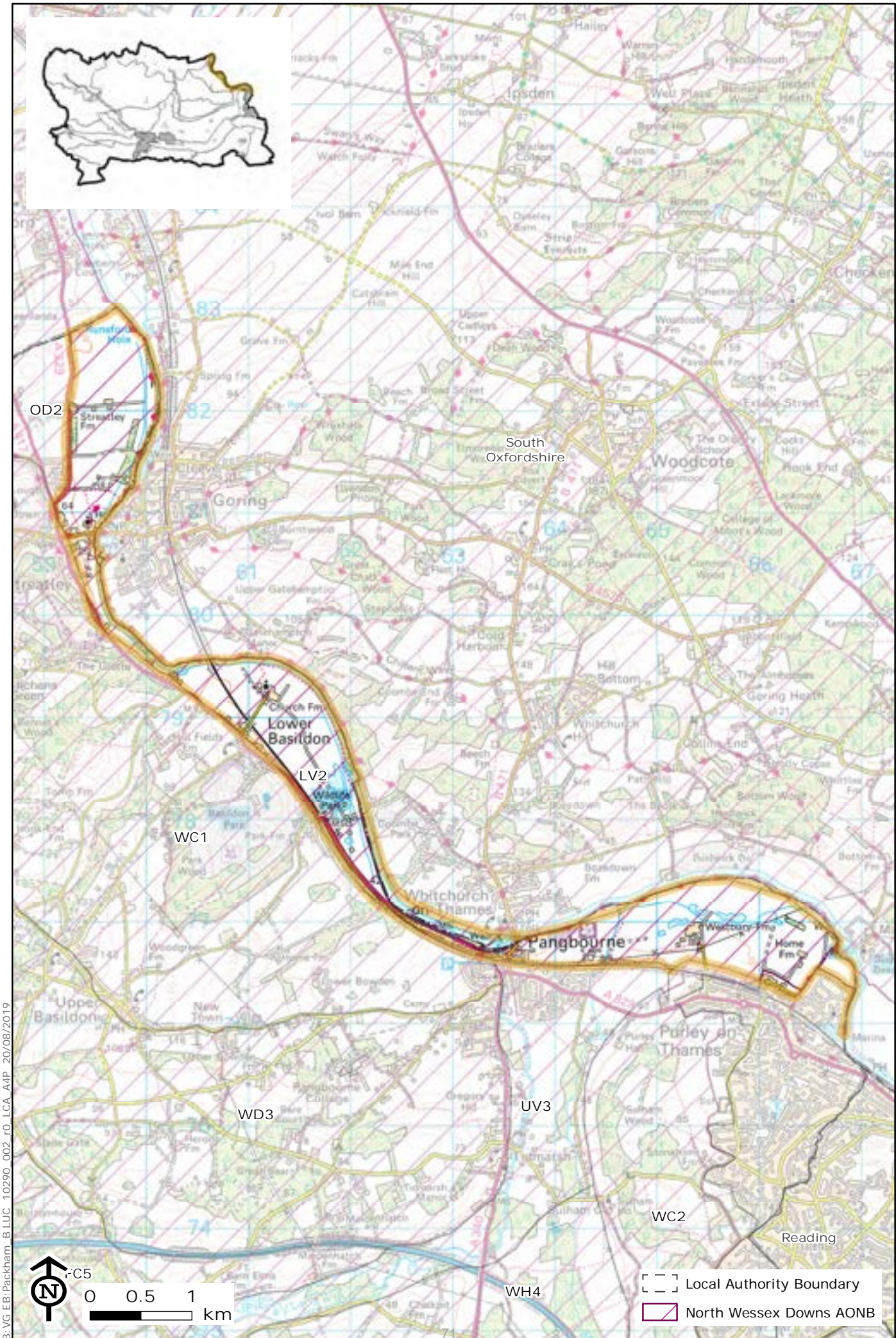
6) Manage recreational pressure

The pressure from both formal and informal recreation should be managed in order to avoid damage to important landscape or ecological characteristics or perceptual qualities. Encourage restoration of areas eroded by visitor pressure and seek sensitive design solutions to minimise the local impacts of recreation facilities.

7) Conserve the distinct identities of individual settlements

Conserve the overall sparsely settled character in the valley. Seek to avoid unsympathetic linear development and ensure that individual settlements retain their distinct identities. Respect the role the landscape plays in the setting of historic settlement cores in Aldermaston Wharf, Aldermaston and Woolhampton. Conserve the role that the valley floor character plays in the setting of the individual identities of Newbury and Thatcham.

LCA LV2: Pangbourne Thames Lower River Valley



SUMMARY

The valley of the River Thames and its tributaries, characterised by a flat valley bottom enclosed by steep sides. The area is principally used for livestock grazing with fields enclosed by a network of hedgerows. The north of the area forms part of the dramatic Goring Gap and is overlooked from adjacent high ground (including parts of the Chilterns AONB). The valley is sparsely settled, although it is influenced by the adjacent settlements of Pangbourne, Streatley, Goring and Purley on Thames.

The area is centred on the River Thames valley located between Streatley and Pangbourne to the west of Reading, and is bounded by the West Berkshire District border. The character area extends beyond the District border into Oxfordshire. The western extent of the area is marked by the valley sides and change in topography. The area forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB, up to the Mapledurham Lock.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Broad, flat valley floor of the River Thames and associated drainage ditches and other small watercourses

A flat low-lying landscape (generally below 50 m AOD), with the wide and deep meandering natural corridors of the River Thames enclosed by chalk escarpments. The Thames Valley is a major physical feature separating the two chalk upland blocks of the North Wessex Downs and the Chilterns. The river runs within a level floodplain, which narrows between steep wooded slopes at Goring Gap. The floodplain is defined by extensive alluvial and gravel deposits that mask the influence of the underlying chalk strata. The soils are freely-draining brown earths.

2) Fields are mainly Parliamentary enclosures used for cattle grazing, with hedgerows and ditch field boundaries

The floodplain is dominated by permanent cattle pasture or improved grassland for hay or silage-making. Some intact meadowland is present, including Pangbourne Meadow. The fields are generally large scale and rectilinear in pattern with hedgerows of varying condition and ditch boundaries. Tree-lined streams and ditches provide landscape structure. Areas of valley floor woodland occur, mainly willow and poplar plantations.

3) Locally important wetland habitats along the river corridor

Wetland habitats including wet meadow, reed bed and gravel workings introduce a varied texture within the floodplain landscape and are of ecological importance. Streatley Meadows, Child Beale Meadows and Purley Park & Mapledurham Weir are designated as Local Wildlife Sites for their wet grassland habitats.

4) Heritage assets and historic landscape features confer visible time-depth

The character area contains the sites of medieval churches, including the flint Grade I Listed St Bartholomew's Church at Lower Basildon. A number of farm buildings within the area are Listed Buildings. A dovecote at Streatley is designated as a Scheduled Monument.

5) Historic villages occur at crossing points of the Thames

Medium sized settlements are located at the important bridging points of Streatley-Goring and Pangbourne-Whitchurch (both of which contain Conservation Areas). These are distinctive settlements of attractive redbrick buildings. Lower Basildon forms a small linear settlement on the A329 skirting the floodplain. There is also a scattering of small farmsteads and associated cottages throughout the floodplain.

6) Important transportation networks, often parallel to the river corridor

The valley forms an important communications corridor utilised by road, rail and river traffic. The Thames is also popular for boating and the well-used Thames Path National Trail runs along the edge of the river, providing opportunities for access.

7) Views out are limited by the valley landform, particularly at the Goring Gap

Where woodland cover allows, there are funnelled views along the valley. At the Goring Gap, the valley narrows significantly creating a sense of enclosure. The valley is strongly overlooked, particularly to the north by adjacent high ground including Lardon Chase. Elsewhere, the landscape is large-scale and open, although views southwards are more limited by plantations and windbreaks. North of Purley on Thames, a pylon line marks the skyline.

8) Well-defined and picturesque valley landscape, with a pastoral character

A dramatic valley landscape particularly when viewed from elevated viewpoints in adjacent areas. Well defined by the wooded escarpments, the valley floor has a lush pastoral character away from the busy main road and railway line. In the east, there are localised urban fringe influences, with uses such as business parks, sewage farms and road and rail transportation corridors.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The area has a long history of human use and occupation. Evidence of land-use in the deeper past comes chiefly from archaeological remains, including finds of Palaeolithic tools and cropmarks evidencing settlement and agriculture of later prehistoric to Romano-British date.
- 2) Several of the settlements and mill sites are of at least Anglo-Saxon date, being recorded in the Domesday Book.
- 3) Villages such as Streatley and Basildon were located at the edge of the valley floor with open fields on the valley floor and common meadow grazing next to the river on the floodplain. Some areas of open field and meadow land had been enclosed into fields by the 18th century, and farms established amongst these fields. The remaining areas of open field, meadow and most downland were enclosed into fields by Act of Parliament in the early 19th century.
- 4) Extensive settlement growth took place around Streatley in the late 19th and early 20th century and was spurred on by the construction of the railway through the area. The housing of this period is typified by large detached villa properties.
- 5) There are two WWII structures from the GHQ stop-line, a pillbox and gun-emplacement, which are important remnants from this period of history in the landscape.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) This area is strongly influenced by the River Thames and associated wetland vegetation communities along the riparian corridors and adjacent floodplain, including wet meadows and reed beds. Three Local Wildlife Sites within the area are designated for their important wetland habitats which support breeding birds and invertebrate species.
- 2) There are also important woodland habitats, found in small copses and blocks as well as lines of willow and alder scrub fringing the immediate river corridor. Mature trees in fields and along field boundaries also contribute to the wooded character of the landscape.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The majority of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the river valleys, chalk stream and rivers which support diverse species, the mosaic of wetland habitats and woodlands and extensive rights of way¹⁴.

2) Numerous areas of semi-natural habitats along the river corridor

The character area contains a range of important ecological habitats including wet meadows and reed beds which are important for breeding birds and invertebrates. Three Local Wildlife Sites are located in the area. Woodland and scrub fringing the river add to the diversity of habitats within this landscape and link up habitats.

3) Strong rural character throughout much of the valley

The landscape remains rural for the most part, with livestock farming remaining a major land use. Settlement is focused on the adjacent settlements of Streatley, Lower Basildon and Pangbourne, interspersed with sparsely scattered farms and cottages.

4) Important heritage features

There are numerous features in the landscape which provide evidence of historic land use and

¹⁴ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

settlement in this area. These include the historic St Bartholomew's Church and historic village cores including Streatley which give the landscape a strong sense of time-depth.

5) Recreational value

The Thames Path National Trail is an important route through the area. Recreational use of the river, Beale Park Wildlife Park and St Bartholomew's Church (which is open daily to visitors) also draw visitors to the area.

6) Distinct visual character of the valley

The narrow valley has a sense of enclosure providing funnelled views along the valley. Fields are often open and vast allowing long views along the floodplain and to the valley slopes which have wooded horizons. The valley is located between the Goring Gap, and is overlooked from the adjacent chalk escarpments of the North Wessex Downs and the Chilterns.

DETRACTORS

1) Continued pressure for development

This is a particular issue close to the more settled areas, where past encroachment of development has had an adverse impact on the rural qualities of the character area. Ongoing development pressure may lead to the suburbanisation and degradation of the distinct character of the existing valley settlements and their wider rural context.

2) Decrease in traditional agricultural activity

Floodplain grazing pasture is characteristic of this area, however there is declining viability for this type of farming, which could result in land use changes. This may include an increase in intensive arable farming as well as paddocks. Loss of traditional field boundaries in some locations has altered the pattern of the landscape and impacted on the ecological networks within the area.

3) Intrusive modern features including telecommunication masts and electricity infrastructure

These features can infringe on the open and natural views of the character area. Linear elements are dominant within the landscape and can detract from landscape character.

4) Nutrient enrichment of the river from agricultural run-off and water vessels

Nutrient enrichment may cause deterioration in water quality which in turn may have damaging knock-on effects to the aquatic and riparian habitat.

5) Increased risk of more frequent and severe flooding due to climate change

Flooding events within the character area have become more frequent and severe in recent years. This may lead to improvements to flood defences which could have an adverse effect on landscape if not sensitively designed.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its chalk rivers and mosaic of wetland habitats and woodlands. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Conserve and enhance the traditional small-scale grazed floodplain landscape

Conserve traditional pasture land, especially close to the watercourse, and encourage

ecologically-beneficial management of both pasture and arable land including minimising use of fertilisers, especially around ecologically valuable sites such as Pangbourne Meadows. Reinstall lost hedgerows and promote good management of existing hedgerows.

3) Conserve and enhance valued areas of woodland

Encourage renewed management of neglected pollarded willows and replanting of poor and gappy hedgerows. Explore possibilities for small-scale woodland creation in areas where it could enhance landscape character and quality. There are opportunities for the reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the woodlands.

4) Restore, extend and manage important wetland habitats

Continue to manage valued semi-natural habitats along the floodplain, particularly areas of wet meadow, reed bed and marginal vegetation. Effort should be made to maintain or create linkages between fragmented areas of semi-natural habitat to improve ecological resilience.

5) Conserve historic features within the landscape

Respect the setting and integrity of heritage features in the landscape which provide a sense of time-depth and evidence of past land use in the area.

6) Conserve and enhance the rural character of the landscape

Conserve the open farmed character of the floodplain and its small woodland copses, with particular emphasis on the retention of permanent and semi-improved pasture. Avoid modernising features within the landscape and seek to screen the visual impacts of existing detractors such as telecommunications masts and overhead lines.

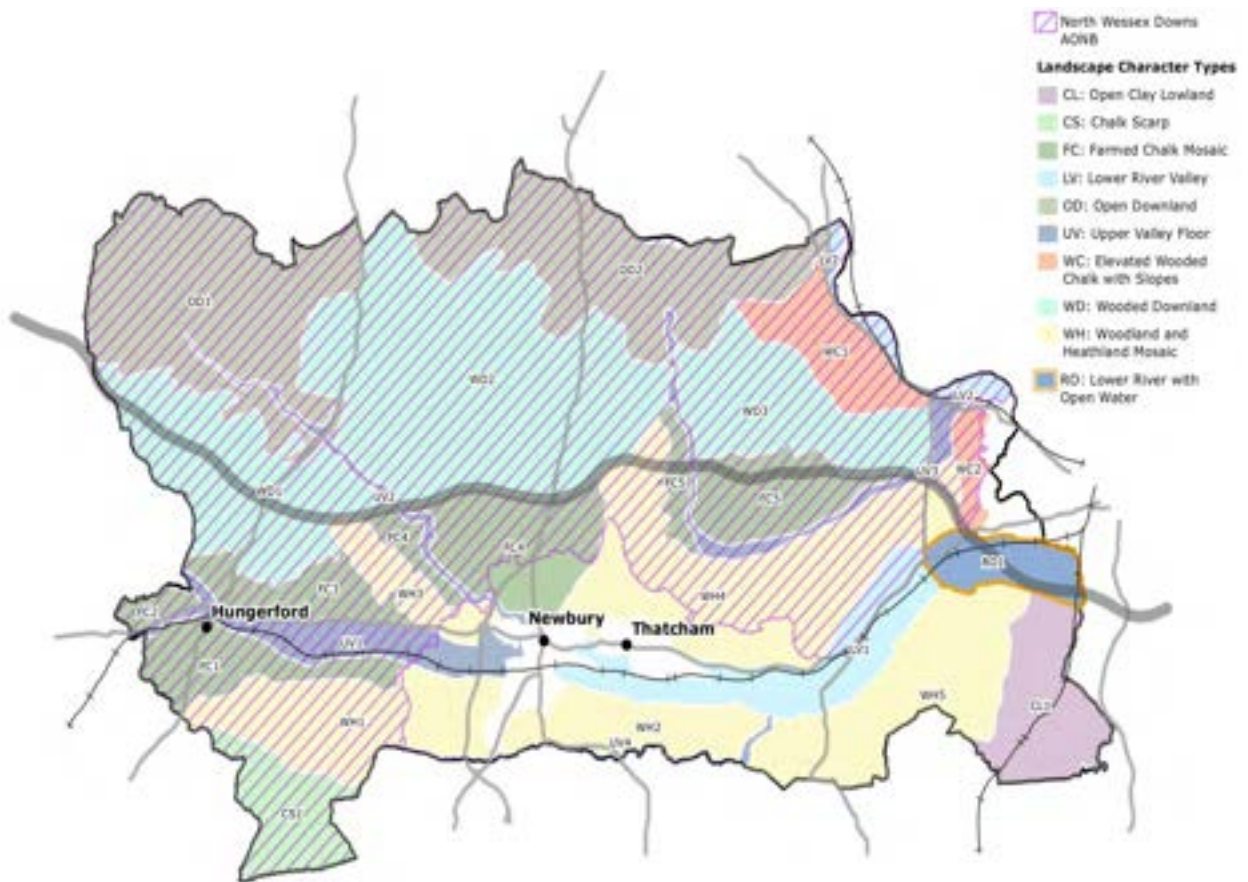
7) Retain the characteristic settlement pattern within the valley

Conserve the overall sparsely settled character in the valley. Seek to avoid linear development and ensure that the existing settlements retain their distinct identities. Respect the rural valley setting of the landscape which contributes to the character of the historic settlement cores in Streatley, Lower Basildon and Pangbourne.

8) Manage recreational pressure

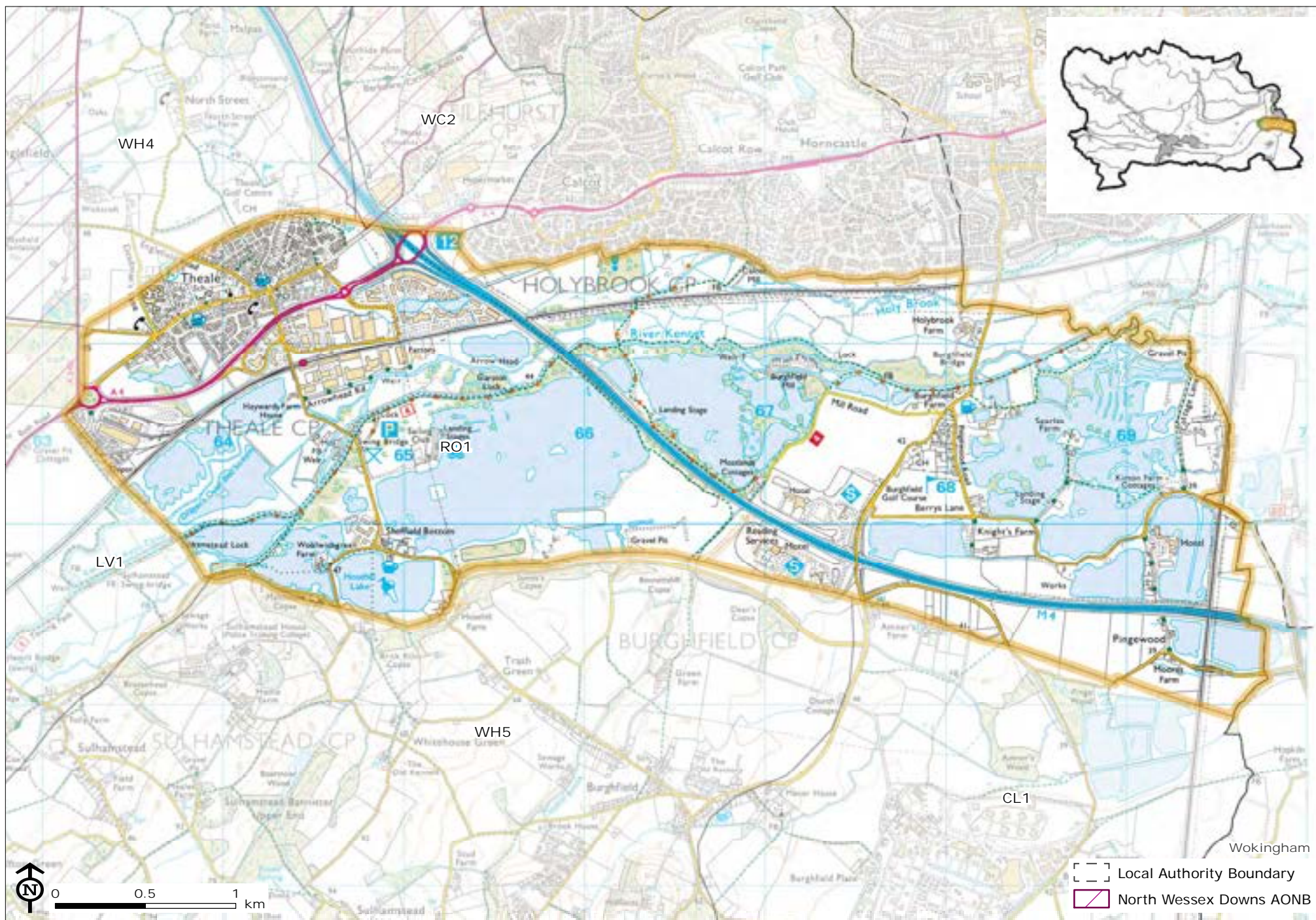
Positive management of recreation is required to avoid damage to important landscape or ecological characteristics or perceptual qualities of this character area. Encourage restoration of areas eroded by visitor pressure and seek sensitive design solutions to minimise the local impacts of tourist and recreation facilities.

Landscape Character Type RO: **Lower River with Open Water**



The **Lower River with Open Water** LCT is present in one location:

- RO1: Kennet Lower River with Open Water.



SUMMARY

This part of the Kennet valley river corridor is characterised by large expanses of open water created in former gravel pits and sand extraction workings. The historic settlement of Theale is located in the west; elsewhere settlement is limited to historic farmsteads, although adjacent urban development to the north impacts on landscape character. Industry including factories and sewage treatment works and major transport infrastructure including the M4 motorway and mainline railway are dominant features. The landscape is important for informal recreation with visitors attracted by numerous rights of way, the Kennet and Avon Canal, and more formal recreation at a sailing club and golf course.

The northern edge of the character area is defined by the urban edge of Reading. The southern boundary marks the transition of the valley to higher ground. The District boundary defines the area to the east and a railway line also crosses the landscape at this point. In the west, around Theale, the valley becomes less clearly defined and opens out to a broad floodplain of the Kennet. The valley edge to the south west is defined by a low tree lined escarpment.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) **Broad, open valley of the River Kennet, underlain by chalk geology with gravel and sand deposits**

A broad and open river valley, following the River Kennet and Holy Brook. The underlying geology of the character area is chalk and Reading beds bedrock. Historically there were large deposits of gravel and sands which have been exhausted through extraction and now form substantial lakes.

2) **Land use dominated by gravel pit lakes, industry and transport infrastructure**

Land use is characterised by the former gravel pits, the majority of which are now open water. Some of the remaining gravel pits are still active, while others have been infilled. Amongst the lakes are pockets of isolated agricultural land and a number of small woodland blocks and belts, mostly plantation or secondary regeneration on former meadows and fields. Other land uses include Arlington Business Park, south of Theale, with its ornamental landscape setting, transport infrastructure, including Reading motorway service area and a disused golf course.

3) **Former gravel pits and flood plain habitats are locally important for wildlife**

Restored gravel pit lakes and associated woodland are important for wildlife and some have been designated as Local Wildlife Sites e.g. Hosehill Lake Local Nature Reserve and Theale Lake Gravel Pits. Pockets of deciduous woodland and floodplain grazing marsh adjacent to the river are also of ecological importance.

4) **A modern landscape dominated by transport corridors and gravel extraction with surviving small scale heritage features**

Past intensive industrial activity in this area has resulted in the loss of much of the time-depth within the landscape. A number of heritage features remain, including Listed farmhouses and locks and bridges along the Kennet and Avon Canal. Sheffield Lock is designated as a Scheduled Monument and lies within the Sheffield Bridge Conservation Area. There are three conservation areas located in the core of Theale and which contain numerous listed buildings including the distinctive Grade I Listed Church of the Holy Trinity.

5) **Settlement in the area is sparse, excepting the large historic village of Theale**

The character area is influenced by the dense urban development within Reading to the north. Within the character area itself settlement is sparse; development consists of isolated farmsteads, thatched cottages, mill buildings and recreational centres. The largest settlement in the character area is the historic village of Theale which has expanded across the valley slopes. Other development includes large structures associated with industry and buildings within Reading motorway services and commercial development at Arlington Business Park.

6) **Transport links are a dominant feature, particularly the M4, railway and canal**

The character area is defined by the presence of large transportation routes, which cut through the area. These include the Kennet and Avon Canal, the mainline railway to London and the M4. In the western part of the area the railway line divides the more urban area to the north from the more rural area to the south. The M4 is elevated on an embankment and forms a large visual intrusion on the otherwise flat landscape. Minor roads cross between the gravel pit lakes and have often been upgraded to accommodate HGV traffic.

7) **Destination for formal and informal recreation activity**

The proximity of this area to Reading means it is a popular recreation destination for pedestrians, cyclists and boat users, particularly the locally popular Sheffield Bridge with picnic area. Public rights of way include the towing path along the canal (which also forms part of National Cycle Route 4). Formal recreational facilities include a sailing club and a golf course.

8) **Often visually enclosed by woodland, with views opening out over the lakes**

Woodland along roads and surrounding the gravel pit lakes generally screens views and creates visual enclosure. The M4 motorway embankment is a visually prominent feature in the valley. Views over the lakes are open and expansive. Overhead electricity infrastructure is visible

above the tree line.

9) Tranquillity is limited by the motorway and nearby urban development

Noise and movement from the major transport routes limit levels of tranquillity, along with urban influences from the adjacent urban area of Reading. Traffic and associated lighting from the M4 creates considerable noise and light pollution that have had a significant urbanising effect on much of the area although there are pockets of more tranquil areas such as Sheffield Bridge Conservation Area and Sheffield Bottom.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The valley has seen intensive past human activity and has been in use for settlement and agriculture since the later prehistoric period. The majority of underlying land-use patterns, however, have their roots in the medieval period when a system of small settlements set amidst fields, woods and commons was established. This was subject to reorganisation in the 19th century, through parliamentary enclosure, and further rationalisation with the onset of mechanised agriculture in the 20th century resulting in larger and more regularly-shaped fields. Traces of the preceding rural landscape can be seen most clearly in the several farmhouses which continue in use as homes and have their origins in the 16th century, with several having externally-visible timber framing.
- 2) In the early 20th century the predominant land use was dairy farming however by the 1930s the first gravel extractions began. These operations expanded significantly over the course of the 20th century, becoming the primary land use in the character area. The extensive gravel extraction is likely to have led to the loss and destruction of archaeological evidence along the valley floor. Following the closure of the majority of gravel pits in the area, a number have been restored as lakes. Some of the hedgerows and ditches around lakes are survivals of earlier fields and meadows.
- 3) Theale is an historic rural settlement which began to grow in size and develop some urban characteristics, particularly inns and townhouses, in the 18th century due to the rise in coaching traffic, and an attendant need for servicing facilities, along the London to Bath road. The Grade I Listed Church of the Holy Trinity was also constructed in the 19th century.
- 4) The Kennet is an important transportation corridor, being a route of communication and trade as well as a source of resources from prehistory. The Kennet Navigation, an improvement to the river to allow navigation as far as Newbury, was opened in 1723. It was later incorporated into the Kennet and Avon Canal, built from 1793 to 1810, allowing navigation to Bath. In 1847, the Berkshire and Hampshire Railway was opened, roughly following the alignment of the river. The M4 motorway was constructed between 1961 and 1971, utilising the east-west corridor through the landscape provided by the river.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) Many of the gravel pit lakes and associated woodland are important wildlife habitats. A number of these are designated as Local Wildlife Sites, including Theale Lake Gravel Pits and Burghfield Lake Gravel Pits. Hosehill Lake is also a Local Nature Reserve which is managed by the Berkshire Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.
- 2) There are large expanses of floodplain grazing marsh priority habitats adjacent to the river corridor. The River Kennet itself is a chalk river and a valued semi-natural habitat. The Kennet Valley provides a habitat for a large nightingale population.
- 3) Areas of deciduous woodland habitat are located along the corridor of the river and the canal and along the motorway corridor. Strips and blocks woodland are also located in the fringes of the gravel pit lakes. Linear woodlands provide important connectivity between semi-natural habitats.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Semi-natural habitats associated with distinctive gravel pit lakes

Restored gravel pit lakes, hedgerow and woodland belts and blocks and remaining pastures form a network of semi-natural ecological habitats including priority habitats such as floodplain grazing marsh and deciduous woodland. A number of the gravel pits are locally designated for their nature conservation value. They form a key component in this rich emerging landscape as it continues to mature.

2) Sparse settlement pattern

Whilst settlement is relatively sparse throughout the character area, those buildings present often have picturesque and historic qualities particularly around Sheffield Bridge which is designated as a Conservation Area.

3) The historic village of Theale

The historic parts of Theale are designated as Conservation Areas and contain a number of listed buildings including the Grade I Listed Church of the Holy Trinity.

4) Important provision of recreational amenity

The proximity to urban areas makes the recreational opportunities of this area particularly important, with nature reserves surrounding former gravel pits providing scenic areas. The network of public rights of way and canal creates an accessible landscape well used for walking, riding and boating.

5) Historic transport routes including the railway and canals

There is evidence that the area has been used as a transport link since prehistoric times. The Kennet Navigation improvement to the river opened in 1723 and was later incorporated into the Kennet and Avon Canal. Sheffield Bridge is a Conservation Area and contains Sheffield Lock, which is a scheduled monument and Grade II listed. The railway route is also particularly long-standing, having been established in 1847.

DETRACTORS

1) Past and present gravel pit extraction resulting in an industrialised landscape

The industrial scale exploitation of this area is evident from the sequence of gravel pits that dominate this landscape. Although some have been restored as lakes for the benefit of wildlife and recreation, others, particularly in the eastern part of this area, remain as detractors from the landscape character giving parts of the area a bleak and abandoned feeling.

2) Large-scale transport infrastructure

Major transport corridors including the M4 and main railway line to London cross through the centre of this character area. Together these contribute to significant noise and visual pollution, detracting from the peace and tranquillity of this otherwise relatively rural area. These routes also sever the landscape and reduce habitat connectivity.

3) Upgrading of rural roads

Some parts of the landscape continue to be used for industrial purposes, resulting in frequent HGV movements in the character area. There has been past upgrading of narrow rural roads to accommodate large vehicles, which has degraded their character.

4) Fragmented and degraded remaining agricultural land

Several pockets of agricultural land remain, however these are highly fragmented and often largely degraded or unmanaged.

5) Pressure for new development

The location of this area close to existing urban areas results in ongoing pressure for new residential development. This is particularly acute between Theale and Calcot.

6) Prominent large-scale buildings

There are number of large structures within the character area, associated with industrial and commercial parks, out of town shopping centres and motorway services. These buildings are often visible above the tree line and are prominent on the skyline. Large structures can also detract from the setting of nearby historic buildings.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Continue to promote the appropriate restoration of former gravel pits

Enhance this maturing landscape through the opportunities presented through the further restoration of former gravel pits. They present an opportunity for recreation and nature conservation enhancement through the diversification of habitats as well as improving the visual character of the area.

2) Conserve and enhance hedgerows, woodland strips and remaining areas of pasture

Conserve features which are valued semi-natural habitats and which provide visual and audial screening of transport corridors. Planting may also act as a tool for reducing air pollution from the major transport infrastructure which crosses through the character area. Remaining areas of pasture land along the river corridor should be conserved, with pasture land restored/created where appropriate.

3) Respect the setting of historic features within the landscape

Ensure that any changes in land use or new development do not detract from the integrity of the heritage features within the landscape, including the historic farm buildings, areas of settlement designated as Conservation Areas and the Kennet and Avon Canal.

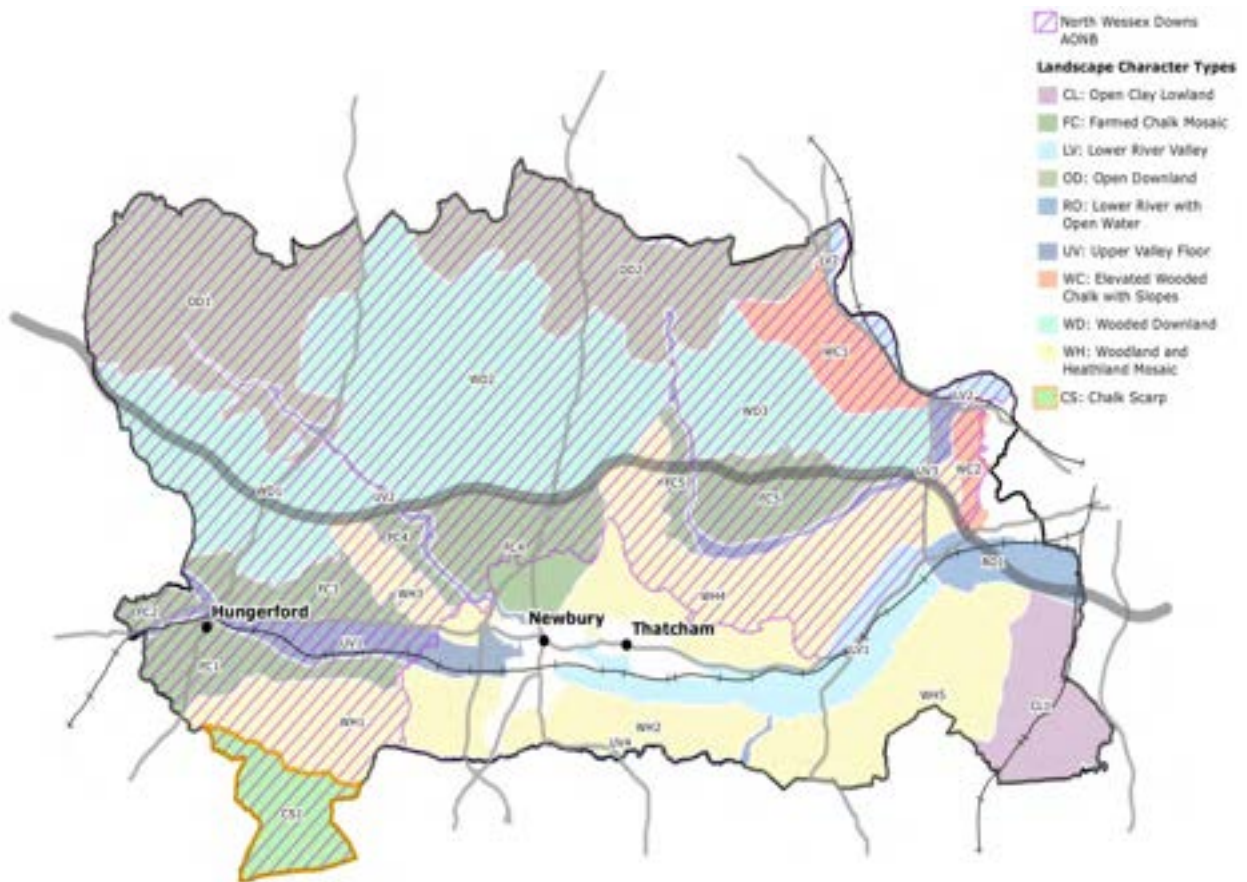
4) Maintain distinction and sense of separation between the settlements of Theale and Calcot

The distinction between the separate settlements of Theale and Calcot and the role of the landscape as a setting to the character of those individual settlements should be respected.

5) Mitigate the adverse influence of major transport infrastructure and maintain character of rural lanes

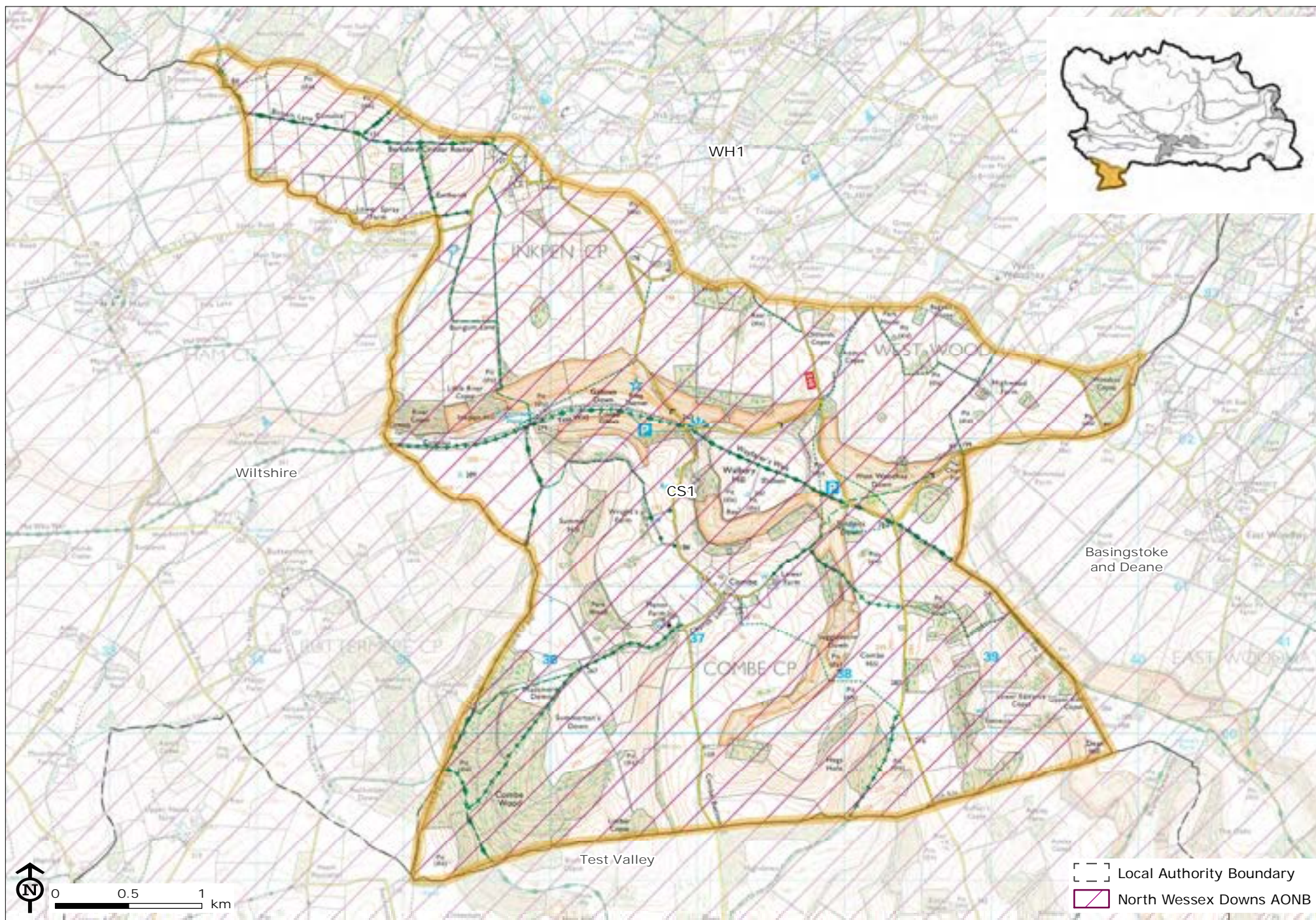
Seek to further screen the M4 and railway into the landscape. Minimise road improvements that may degrade the rural quality of the area and avoid the use of standardised and intrusive urban materials, street furniture, lighting and signage measures wherever appropriate.

Landscape Character Type CS: **Chalk Scarp**



The **Chalk Scarp** LCT is present in one location:

- CS1: Walbury Chalk Scarp.



SUMMARY

A distinctive area dominated by the dramatic chalk escarpment at Walbury Hill extending to the undulating scarp footslopes to the north and part of the wooded dipslope to the south. The area has diverse land use, with pasture on the slopes, arable fields on the flatter valley floors, and areas of woodland and chalk grassland. The sparse settlement contributes to its remote and very rural character. The top of the escarpment, with its panoramic views, is popular for recreation, with public rights of way running across the higher ground.

The area is defined to the north by the distinct geological and topographic transition from the chalk to sand. On all other sides it is defined by the West Berkshire district boundary and the chalk dipslope landscape continues into Wiltshire and Hampshire. The whole area forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) **Dramatic steep chalk scarp landform culminating in Walbury Hill, the highest point in Berkshire and including a part of the more extensive dipslope**

The chalk has been uplifted to form a dramatic scarp slope running east-west, forming the spine of this landscape. Walbury Hill at 297 m AOD is the highest point in Berkshire, and the highest chalk hill in England. The elevated narrow undulating plateau reduces to a thin ridge at Combe Gibbet by the deeply set combe on the southern side. This marked indentation of the southern slopes is a general feature of this area, and many of the south-facing slopes form steep escarpments.

2) **Diverse and distinctive pattern of land use**

The steep scarp slope is predominantly sheep pasture, although some scrub has developed where grazing has ceased. The plateau tops and dipslope are dominated by regular arable fields, with some amalgamation into vast fields. Pre-Parliamentary boundary fields which curve with the topography of the land provide attractive links between the upper slopes and combe valleys, bounded by an interconnected hedgerow network. Sinuous woodlands and scrub clinging to the steep slopes emphasise the sharp changes of slope, and a few sharp-edged coniferous plantations have been planted. There are also numerous disused chalk pits within the combe valleys.

3) **Important floristically-rich chalk grassland habitat and semi-natural woodland**

The area is extremely rich in chalk grassland, which survives in abundance on the steep slopes, through maintenance by sheep grazing. The importance of these chalk grassland habitats is shown by the several SSSI national designations in the area. The area also supports a number of semi-natural woodlands. The woodlands are varied, ranging from oak woodland, beech hangers, combe woodlands and scrub regeneration.

4) **Scattered and isolated farmsteads set into sheltered valleys**

Isolated farmhouses are scattered across the more sheltered parts of the dipslope. Combe is an isolated settlement south of Walbury Hill, with a distinctive timber bell turreted church. The few very narrow lanes weave over the hilly terrain taking oblique routes up the steep slopes and winding along the combe floor. The lanes are sunk deeply into the landform, with steep earth banks and overhung by a tunnel of woodland.

5) **Recreational routeways and visitor facilities located along the ridge top**

The landscape is popular for recreation, with the Wayfarers Walk and Test Way following the ridgeway. There are two car parks located on prominent scarp-top locations and a panoramic viewpoint is also provided. Much of the scarp is also open access land, and popular with hang gliders, paragliders and radio enthusiasts.

6) **Important historic character**

Archaeological features, including the Neolithic long barrow at Combe Gibbet and Walbury Iron Age hillfort, crown the scarp summit and are highly visible and defining features of the character area. The scarp top route is reputed to be of Roman origin, and there are cultural and romantic associations with Combe Gibbet. A replica gibbet at the top of Combe Gallows marks where George Broomham and Dorothy Newman were gibbeted in 1676 after their execution for murdering Broomham's wife Martha and son Robert. Historic features away from the scarp include Inkpen House and Registered Park and Garden, formerly the rectory for the church of St Michael.

7) **Panoramic views from the remote and exposed ridgeline**

The chalk scarp forms a prominent landmark visible for long distances within the Berkshire landscape and adjoining districts. The remote and exposed ridgeline also offers extensive panoramic views. In contrast, the interconnected hedgerows and sinuous woodlands create a strong framework and sense of enclosure in some areas. A modern telecommunications tower has been erected near Combe Hill in the east of the area and is a dominant feature.

8) Strong sense of tranquility and remoteness

This small area contains some of the most dramatically beautiful landscape in the District. Exposure to the elements, and the high elevation giving spectacular views from the ridge at Combe Gibbet, make this an exhilarating location, which feels far from modern day life.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The character area has seen intensive past human activity and appears to have been in use for settlement and agriculture since at least the later prehistoric period. There are also traces of ceremonial and burial activity from the Neolithic, in the form of Combe Gibbet long barrow, attesting a human transformation of the landscape even earlier. Combe Gibbet long barrow and the Walbury Hill Iron Age hillfort (both Scheduled Monuments) are impressive and clear reminders of the time-depth of human activity.
- 2) The extent to which patterns of settlement in the deeper past influences that of the present landscape is currently unclear. The majority of underlying land-use patterns, however, have their roots in at least the medieval period. During this period a system of common farming centred on small nucleated settlements, such as Combe, developed. Some of this appears to have entailed assarting of woodland and there are woods which show signs of having been assarted and fields which appear to have been created by this process. Other fields are often small and irregular in these locations, with sinuous edges, and some reflect later medieval and early post-medieval enclosure of formerly common resources (such as open fields and grazing). Formal enclosure by Act of Parliament in the 19th century produced regular, rectangular fields. Many of the droveways or tracks may have medieval origins.
- 3) Large scale changes in tree cover have taken place across the area, with the replanting of some areas of ancient woodland, and creation of numerous small plantations, particularly in the north. All the plantations are small and rectilinear in shape, and do not fit with the established grain of the landscape. Under-grazed sections of downland have also been colonised by trees, leading to the growth of secondary woodland. The overall rise in tree cover has given this area a much more densely-wooded appearance than was previously the case.
- 4) Listed Buildings include the church of St Michael and its 17th century former rectory, Inkpen House (all Grade II*). Inkpen House with its associated formal gardens is a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden, and there is a Conservation Area coincident with it. Both Combe and Eastwick farms probably represent shrunken or deserted medieval villages. At Combe, the church of St Swithin and Manor Farm are Listed Buildings, Grade I and II respectively, and there are a number of Grade II Listed tombs in the church's graveyard.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) The area has a diverse range of chalk habitats including chalk grassland, semi-improved grassland and deciduous woodland. Many of these areas are designated nationally as SSSI, areas of designated ancient woodland and locally as Local Wildlife Sites. The woodlands provide important local habitats, and offer food and shelter to a number of birds and mammals. Ash and field maple dominate the more calcareous soils, whilst the acidic clays support birch and pedunculate oak.
- 2) The Inkpen and Walbury Hills SSSI contains the largest area of unimproved chalk downland in Berkshire, as well as the best examples of ancient ash-wych elm woods in the county. The other SSSI at West Woodhay Down, Combe Wood and Linkenholt Hanging Woodland and Hogs Hole are also designated for chalk grassland and ancient woodland. The areas are often traditionally managed, and support a diverse flora and fauna.
- 3) The vast Combe Wood and Linkenholt Hanging SSSI situated in a sheltered valley to the southwest of the area is a good example of ancient woodland and incorporates small areas of chalk grassland and scrub, which are relicts of open downland. The woodland itself has developed good structural diversity and this together with its humid, sheltered position provide

excellent conditions for epiphytic lichens and bryophytes.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The entirety of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation include the woodland cover and varied field patterns, connected hedgerows, remnant chalk grassland, rich archaeological history including Iron Age defences and sense of remoteness and tranquillity.¹⁵

2) Spectacular panoramic views and prominent skyline

This small area contains some of the most dramatic landscape in the District. The steep chalk scarp, including Walbury Hill, the highest point in Berkshire, has sinuous and sculptural qualities and provides extensive panoramic views. The scarp top with its archaeological features has a strong visual presence and is visually prominent within the wider surrounding landscape.

3) Mosaic of land use

The strong landform and rural farmed landscape form a rich and varied landscape. The open elevated scarp contrasts with the sheltered combes to create an idyllic rural image which is characterised by the positioning of the farmsteads and lack of visually intrusive elements.

4) Ecologically valuable habitats with extensive swathes of chalk grassland and ancient woodland

The chalk bedrock and thin soils have resulted in the important floristically-rich chalk downland sward, and the area has large, intact remnants of this habitat (SSSI designated). The ancient and semi-natural woodland in the combe valleys and on the lower slopes is a further valued habitat.

5) Sunken rural lanes

The few narrow lanes weave up the steep slopes and are often deeply sunken and overhung, proving a memorable experience travelling through them.

6) Features of historical and archaeological importance

Listed Buildings are clustered around Combe and south of Lower Green. The scarp crest also includes a series of Bronze Age barrows and the 33ha Iron Age hill fort on Walbury Hill. This series of barrows and earthworks demonstrates the importance of this area in later prehistory, and their prominence on the scarp adds interest to this landscape.

7) A landscape valued for its range of recreational opportunities

A large part of the area is Open Access Land, supplemented by numerous rights of way including the scarp top Wayfarers Walk and Test Way, and bridleways. Scarp top car parks facilitate recreational use including hang-gliding and access to viewing points.

8) Sense of remoteness and tranquillity and cultural associations

The elevation, and ancient ambience/ archaeological remains provide a strong sense of remoteness combined with continuous human use of this landscape. Local legends and cultural/romantic associations at Combe Gibbet add to the time/depth character of this area.

¹⁵ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

DETRACTORS

1) Changes in farming practice

Agricultural change over the second half of the 20th century has greatly increased the arable extent in this character area, through reorganisation and amalgamation into very large arable fields. Changes to agricultural management are leading to a subtle and incremental decline in condition. This includes the declining viability of sheep grazing, leading to scrub encroachment and consequent loss of the chalk grassland habitat, or to alternative uses such as horse paddocks which will also damage the chalk grassland. Ploughing marginal land on escarpment edges has further eroded the extent of chalk grassland, although positive management is now seeking to conserve and enhance this habitat.

2) Loss and decline of hedgerow boundaries

Loss of field boundary elements in the latter half of the 20th century, especially hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, has led to much larger arable fields. This is compounded by the poor management of the remaining hedgerows.

3) Lack of woodland management

The presence of unsympathetic and incongruous straight-edged coniferous woodlands, which are stark against the rolling landform. The rise in tree-cover during the 20th century has given the area a much more wooded appearance than was historically the case.

4) Communications development pressure

Demand for telecommunications towers, potentially also for wind turbines and other tall structures requiring an elevated position in the landscape, which would disrupt the skyline and impact on the secluded rural character.

5) Increasing recreational pressure

The popularity of the area for recreation has resulted in damage to archaeological features, fragile chalk grassland and visual impacts. The problems include the prominence of cars located along the ridge top, erosion of 'honeypot' sites.

6) Loss of tranquillity and peacefulness

The impact of all of the above leading to a loss of special qualities of tranquillity and peacefulness within this quiet rural landscape.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its woodland cover, varied field patterns, hedgerows, remnant chalk grassland, Iron Age defences and sense of remoteness and tranquillity. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Conserve and enhance chalk grassland

Seek to conserve and enhance the chalk grasslands and extend and connect isolated chalk grassland habitats along steeper slopes. Seek to enhance the visual appearance of grassland managed as horse paddocks.

3) Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements

Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows, and encourage restoration/reinstatement of hedgerows and associated margins within expansive arable fields. Hedgerow trees arising from unmanaged hedgerows require thinning to select best specimens

for retention. Restoration of hedgerows to define combe-bottom and link to wooded areas would enrich the landscape in visual and habitat terms.

4) Encourage appropriate woodland management

Follow the characteristic patterns of the existing native woodland, such as small beech woodland copses and combe woodlands. Any new plantings should be designed with curvilinear edges responding to local topographical detail and avoiding hard straight edges particularly across, or up and down steep valley sides. Phased removal/conversion of the existing coniferous woodland should be considered and irregular edges promoted. There are opportunities for reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands.

5) Maintain characteristic sparse pattern of development and the clear scarp top skyline

Any large scale or visually intrusive development would be detrimental within this visually prominent landscape. Conversions of existing barns and farm buildings should conserve the intrinsic character and detail.

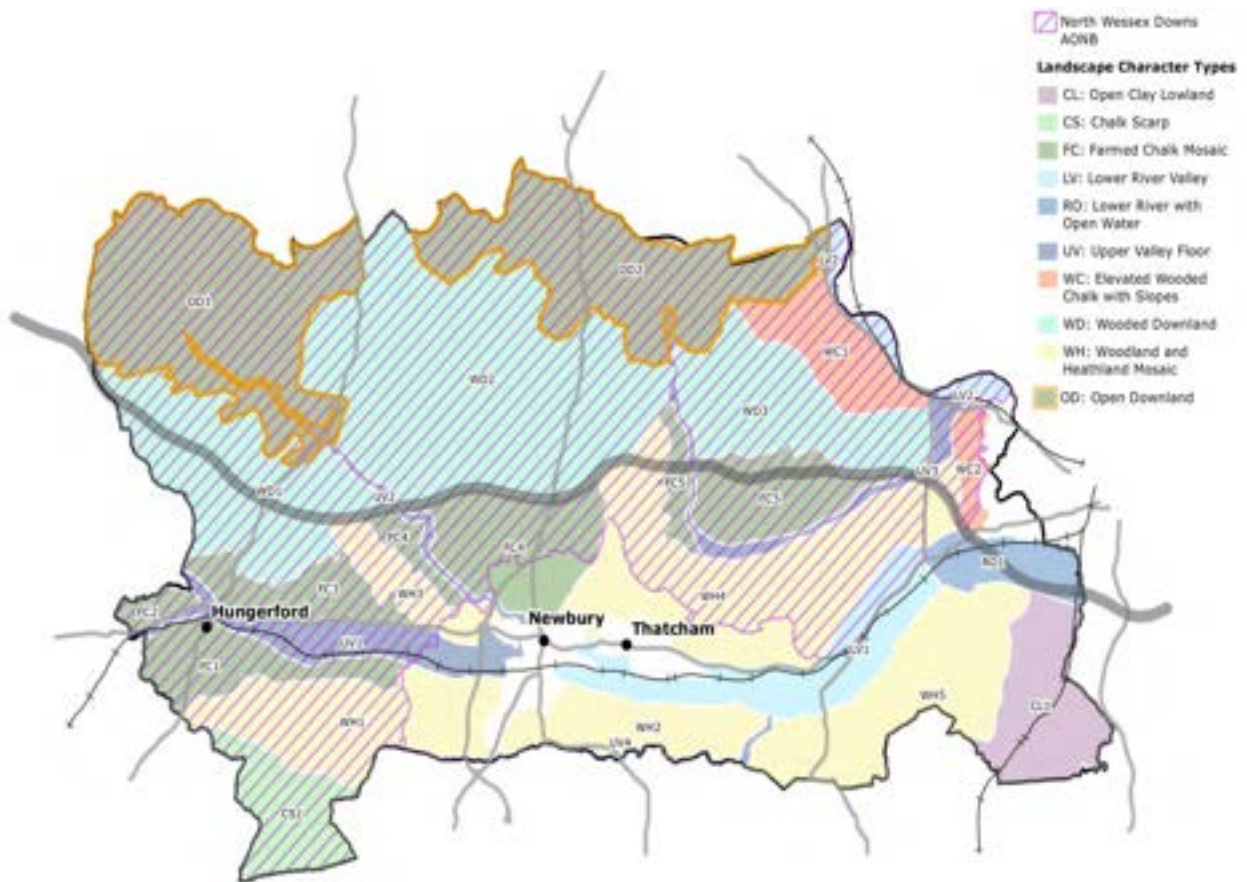
6) Manage recreation impacts

Encourage restoration of areas eroded by visitor pressure and seek sensitive design solutions to minimise the local impacts of recreation facilities.

7) Seek to maintain the sense of openness and views

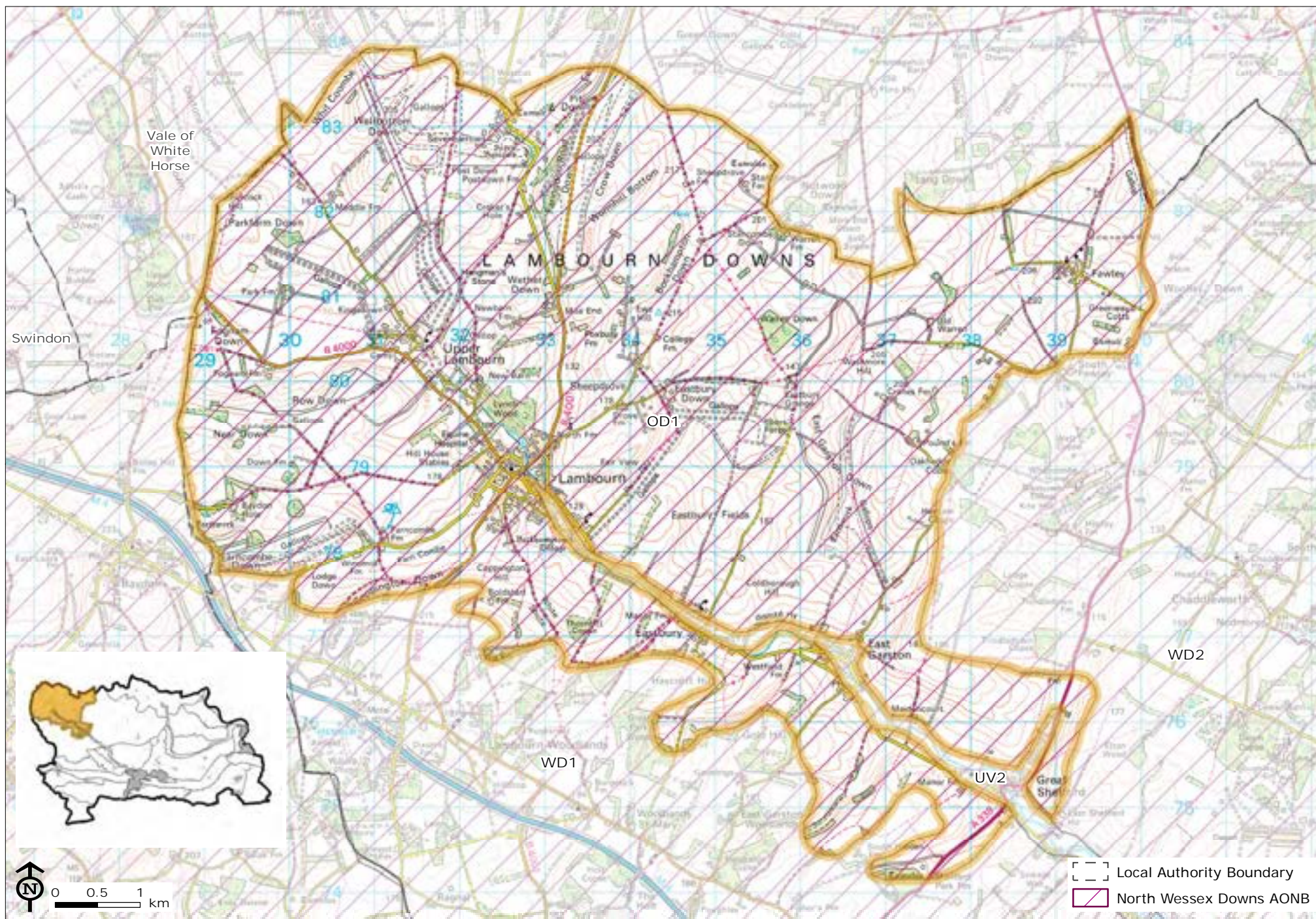
Consider the impact on the open skylines and sensitive ridgelines of any development, especially in the adjacent landscape character areas.

Landscape Character Type OD: **Open Downland**



The **Open Downland** LCT is subdivided into two Local Character Areas:

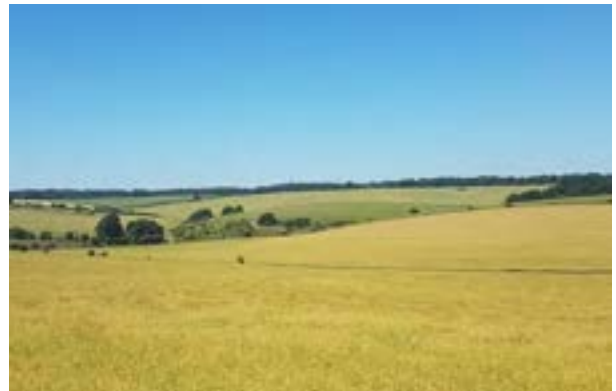
- OD1: Lambourn Open Downland
- OD2: Compton Open Downland.



SUMMARY

The northern part of the Lambourn Valley is steeply undulating with dramatically rolling hills, comprised mainly of large-scale arable agriculture. Fragmented chalk grasslands and occasional wooded areas are also present. The landscape is open, exposed and remote. Settlement is sparse, with the hamlet of Fawley on higher ground and the two villages of Lambourn and Upper Lambourn in their well-contained valley setting. Horse racing is a prominent industry here; and the area has numerous associated studs farms, stables and gallops. There are clear cultural and historical connections to the area's deeper past, including prehistoric barrows which form prominent landscape features.

The area is defined in the north and west by the District boundary with the open downland landscape continuing beyond. The south and eastern borders are defined loosely by topography and landcover, and mark the change to a lower and more wooded landscape. The whole area forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Dramatic rolling chalk landform, incised by distinctive dry valleys

Predominantly underlain by Upper and Middle Chalk, with some areas of Lower Chalk, this landform is steeply undulating, with notably gently rounded or flat-topped summits. Soils are predominantly thin light, free draining calcareous and nutrient poor black or brown, with deeper soils in combes and dry valleys. The area is incised by wide dry valleys, with numerous distinctive winterbournes or seasonally flowing streams and springs, which historically rise every seven years. The River Lambourn rises at Upper Lambourn, but it is frequently dry in these upper reaches.

2) Open downland dominated by large-scale arable farmland

Large-scale arable farmland dominates this area and fields are often without significant physical division, emphasising the scale and structure of the landscape. Where division does exist, it is often post and wire fencing, which is almost invisible from longer distances and adds little sense of enclosure to the area. Remnant hedgerows tend to be single lines of hawthorn with extensive gaps. Woodlands are limited in extent and include thin linear skyline shelterbelts, distinctive clumps of beech, and isolated mixed woodland blocks.

3) Steep scarp slopes support fragmented chalk grassland

The most ecologically significant habitat is the surviving unimproved chalk grassland, which mainly occurs as small fragmented blocks, usually on steep slopes. A number are designated as small chalk grassland SSSIs in the western part of the Lambourn Downs.

4) Prominence of the horse racing industry

The horse racing industry is a principal component of the downland economy in the area, giving rise to it being known as the Valley of the Racehorse, and recognised as a nationally important centre for the racehorse industry. The Lambourn and Upper Lambourn area contains numerous gallops, stud farms, stables, paddocks and bridleways, both within the villages and on historic farms on the surrounding downs. Horses grazing, ridden or in transit are common sights along the winding roads.

5) Sparsely populated beyond the valley floor

Lambourn and Upper Lambourn are nestled within a valley, largely screened from the surrounding downland by topography and tree cover. The settlements show a varied built character, including traditional knapped flint and brick with thatched roofs but also 1960s housing estates on the eastern side of Lambourn and a mix of later development on the western side. Elsewhere the area is sparsely populated, consisting of scattered farmsteads and equestrian establishments and the small nucleated village of Fawley.

6) Few roads but a strong rights of way network

Aside from the B4000 and B4001, which follow dry valleys and link Lambourn to the valley floor settlements beyond, the road network is restricted to minor tracks which connect farms on the higher downs. In contrast there is an extensive network of public rights of way through the area, with numerous tracks, byways and footpaths.

7) Strong cultural and historic association and resonance

This landscape is the product of 5000 years of human activity, and prehistoric funerary monuments are a characteristic feature. There are prominent barrows located on ridges and hilltops, including the complex of barrows spanning Neolithic and Bronze Age burials at Lambourn Seven Barrows. Lynchets, formed along the downhill side of a plot by ploughing, and banks provide above-ground evidence for the extensive later prehistoric field systems, trackways and settlements which once occupied the downs.

8) Dramatic remote and windswept landscape with open and expansive views

The open downlands have few vertical elements resulting in a sense of exposure and permitting vast and panoramic views across the landscape. Occasional beech clumps and prominent prehistoric barrows crown the downland summits, forming highly visible landmarks.

Long views can be gained across a series of subtly receding ridges, which form strong open horizons. The degree of exposure to the elements is fairly extreme: in winter this can be a bleak, prairie-like landscape, but given clear skies, the scale of the landscape is awe-inspiring.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) Bronze Age barrows are relatively widespread on the northern slopes of the Lambourn Valley, including two scheduled barrows at Stancombe Hatts, part of a larger cemetery extending into Oxfordshire, and the Seven Barrows beneath Faringdon Road Down to the north of Lambourn. Lambourn is believed to have been a Saxon Royal manor, and much of the layout of the village is medieval. The main streets retain a large number of historic buildings dating from the 18th century.
- 2) Medieval settlement was concentrated along the valley bottoms, although some settlement did exist on the downland. Throughout the medieval period much of the land remained as common open grassland, the downs dominated by sheep for wool production, with arable cultivation on the lower slopes and in the more sheltered valleys. With the decline of the wool trade, areas of downland reverted to scrub, or later were enclosed for arable cultivation as regular fields bounded by hedges. Some small, irregular copses are the survivors of medieval and post-medieval assarts.
- 3) In the 18th century north-south routes from Abingdon through Fawley to Hungerford and East Ilsley to Newbury, were improved through turnpiking. Although there was a medieval market at Lambourn, trade along the principal communication routes along the Kennet ultimately favoured the towns along the Kennet valley rather than the Open Downland.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) The most ecological significant habitat is the surviving unimproved chalk grassland, which mainly occurs as small fragmented blocks on steep slopes. These include a number of small chalk grassland SSSIs in the western part of the Lambourn Downs, for example Croker's Hole, noteworthy for its thriving population of nationally scarce bastard toadflax, and Seven Barrows which supports a rich chalk flora amid a diverse butterfly community.
- 2) The dominant land use is arable farmland which is largely managed under intensive systems. These may still support a characteristic range of wildlife including rare and colourful arable weeds, such as fumitories, slender tare and shepherd's needle, which are dependent on a regular cropping regime and survive in the less intensively managed field margins. Spring-tilled arable crops on stony chalk soils provide essential breeding sites for stone curlew.
- 3) The Open Downs also support an important range of farmland birds. Skylark and yellowhammers remain relatively common and widespread, while grey partridges, lapwings, turtle doves and corn buntings can also still be found.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The entirety of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the presence of dry valleys and long steep scarps, chalk grassland and chalk streams, the limited tree cover, equestrian activity, and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity¹⁶. The AONB Management Plan specifically refers to the special

¹⁶ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

qualities of the Downs Plain and Scarp landscape, which plunges down from the chalk plain to the Vale of White Horse, creating a dramatic recognisable horizon.

2) Chalk grassland habitats

The nationally significant areas of chalk grassland surviving on the steep scarp slopes and dry valley sides form an important component of the chalk grassland resource of the AONB. The grassland supports a range of flora, diverse butterfly communities, invertebrates and birds.

3) The traditional landscape associated with the horse racing industry

Lambourn and Upper Lambourn are both working villages in the 'Valley of the Racehorse' and attract visitors and businesses to its many gallops, stud farms and stables. The traditional gallops landscape and views of racehorses training are valued features.

4) Recreational value

There is a network of footpaths, bridleways and byways, used by horse riders, walkers and cyclists for quiet enjoyment of the countryside.

5) Strong cultural resonance

There are visible features from many periods of history, but with particularly strong associations with the prehistoric in the form of dramatic visible monuments e.g. the barrows at Lambourn Seven Barrows and Stancombe Hatts) as well as lynchets and banks defining prehistoric field systems, trackways and settlements. This creates an ancient ambience to the landscape, and adds to the area's distinctiveness and sense of place.

6) Extensive panoramic views contribute to remoteness and tranquillity

The Open Downlands are characterised by their dramatic remote and windswept landscape of rolling arable and pastoral fields. The downland has very few vertical elements resulting in a sense of exposure and permitting vast and panoramic views across the landscape. A more wooded character prevails in the Lambourn Valley, with Lynch Wood prominent, screening the settlements and adding to the perception of remoteness from the higher ground.

DETRACTORS

1) Loss and fragmentation of chalk grassland

Decline in viability of sheep farming leading to the loss and further fragmentation of chalk grassland pasture.

2) Increased plantation tree cover

Tree cover has increased, with the majority of plantations created through the Woodland Grant Scheme in the late 20th century. Most were created as small rectilinear shelter features, and do not usually fit with the established landscape e.g. at Lambourn. The new woods do not have the same biodiversity as ancient woodlands, and planting may have damaged or removed historic features such as woodbanks.

3) Change in farming practices

The 20th century saw existing fields amalgamated into larger holdings through boundary removal and reorganisation, and many historic features, including hedgerows, were removed. This trend also saw the enclosure of the majority of the remaining downland for further large arable fields. An increase in larger agricultural barns disturbs the open horizon and interrupts the sinuosity of the smooth downland landscape.

4) Change in horse racing industry

The trend within the horse racing industry is to move yards away from traditional sites within settlements to new greenfield sites closer to the gallops. The development of new facilities of this type could threaten the historic character of the area, and the move towards all weather gallops threatens the survival of traditional grass gallops. If built and managed sensitively, all weather gallops need not have an adverse impact on the landscape. The removal of all stables

from village centres would alter the current landscape character of the area.

5) Development pressures

Increasing demand for housing and equine centre expansion around Lambourn, Upper Lambourn and ribbon development along the rural lanes which are not in keeping with the existing settlement pattern. Additional traffic pressure could also lead to the unsympathetic upgrading of rural roads. Telecommunications infrastructure or wind turbines (including in adjacent areas) may be intrusive on the sensitive skyline.

6) Management of footpaths, bridleways and byways

Some routes used by walkers, horse riders and cyclists are suffering from a lack of maintenance. As this continues it reduces the appeal of these rights of way for recreational users. Further degradation of these paths may also cause a visual eyesore within the landscape.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its chalk grassland, chalk streams and dry valleys. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Seek opportunities for habitat restoration

Extend and link isolated and fragmented chalk grassland sites, including managing gallops to favour chalk grassland species. Encourage permanent removal of land from arable production, for management as grazed downland or pasture. Encourage scrubland and regeneration of native woodland, but not to the detriment of the general sense of openness that allows appreciation of the form of the chalk landscape.

3) Appropriate woodland management and creation

Replace existing plantations with more appropriate native beech or oak when they come to renewal. Ensure that new tree planting avoids the visually and archaeologically erosive impacts of recent plantations. Opportunities to soften the impact of recent plantations should be encouraged.

4) Appropriate hedgerow management

Sensitive siting and replanting of hedgerows is desirable to replace existing degraded or removed hedgerows, reintroduction of coppicing of hazel lining old tracks. However, the overall sense of open horizons should be maintained, and hedgerows should not be introduced where there is no evidence they were traditionally in that area.

5) Conserve the characteristic settlement pattern

The overall aim should be to conserve the sparse pattern of development of distinct villages at Lambourn, Upper Lambourn and Fawley interspersed with isolated farms. Any new large agricultural buildings or equestrian facilities should be sensitively designed to ensure they can be fully integrated into the landscape. New horse gallops should be carefully sited to avoid unsympathetic lines cutting across the landscape, and their impacts should be minimised through roadside hedgerow restoration and ecological enhancement, such as wildflower seeding.

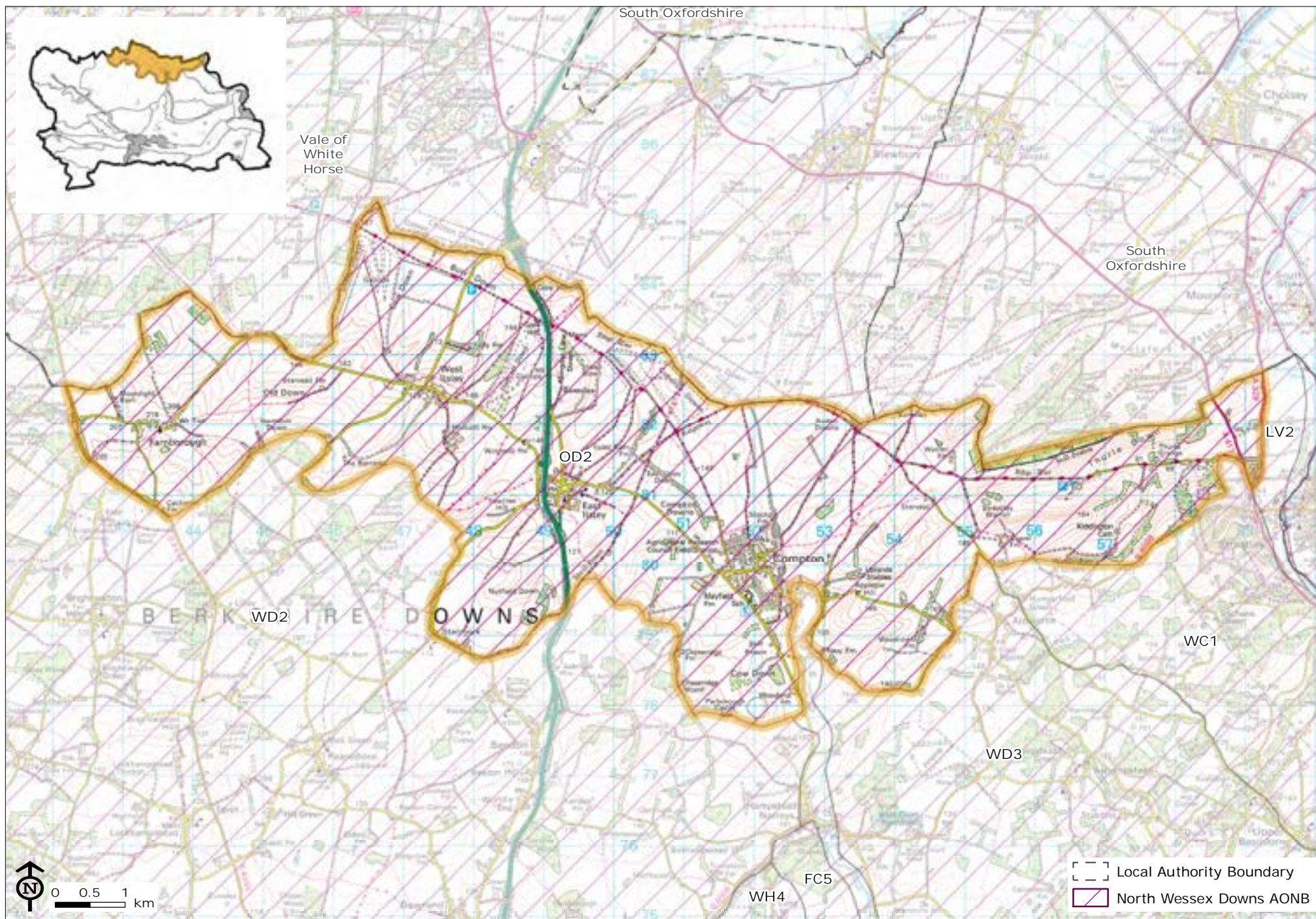
6) Conserve and enhance the archaeological features of the area

The cultural importance of archaeological features should be maintained, and protected against inappropriate agricultural activities and recreational pressures. Opportunities should be taken to reconnect the archaeological features to their landscape context e.g. Lambourn Seven

Barrows

7) Conserve the sense of openness and remoteness

The aim should be to avoid compromising long open views and conserve the sense of openness and remoteness. Maintain the clear ridges and skylines avoiding any tall/vertical structures that break the skyline. Distinctive beech clumps and wooded horizons should also be conserved.



SUMMARY

The area is a rolling downland landscape, characterised by flat-topped hills intersected by concealed dry valleys. Fields are large and often without physical division, forming large geometric blocks of arable land. The horse racing industry is a prominent feature of the landscape. The area is comparatively well-settled, with some villages, including East Ilsley and Compton, set within the lower dry valleys. Prehistoric barrows, ancient tracks and medieval villages are visible features within the present landscape.

The area extends in the east from Farnborough and to the west just north of Streatley. The northern edge of the area is defined by the district boundary with the chalk extending beyond. The southern border is loosely defined by topography, and marks the top of an internal scarp slope and the transition to the lower and more wooded dipslope landscape. The whole area forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Strong structural landform of rolling downland with round or flat-topped hills

Chalk geology creates the characteristic strong structural landform of rolling uplands, with round or flat-topped hills, intersected by dry valleys. The plateau rarely rises above 200m and dips gently to the south. The landscape becomes more sharply incised and dramatic towards Thurlle Down in the east, which forms part of the downland scarp above the Thames Valley, and on the escarpment along the northern edge of the area. Shallow well-drained calcareous soils predominate on slopes and crests, with thicker soils in the valley bottoms. Surface water in this landscape is largely absent with the exception of rare seasonal ponds and streams.

2) Open downland dominated by large-scale arable farmland with occasional small areas of woodland

Large-scale arable farmed landscape, with large, rectilinear fields which are often without physical division. Where hedgerows do occur they are usually scanty, hard-trimmed hawthorn, or remnant individuals which have grown into isolated small trees. Post and wire fences are used to define some fields but are almost invisible in the larger landscape adding to the sense of openness. An irregular scattering of linear shelterbelts and small tree groups dot the landscape and mark isolated farmsteads. A larger area of coniferous and deciduous woodland, Westridge Copse, occurs on steeper slopes at the eastern end of the character area.

3) Steep scarp slopes support fragmented chalk grassland

The thin soils on the steep slopes of the escarpment within and along the northern edge of the area are important for the small areas of unimproved flower-rich chalk grassland that they retain, supporting an important range of plant and butterfly communities. This is predominately at Streatley Warren, but there are a few other isolated patches across the area. In addition to the close grazed chalk grassland, these steep slopes also contain a mosaic of chalk scrub, including juniper and small beech hangers and hazel coppice.

4) Presence of the horse racing industry

The horse racing industry is a characteristic feature of the landscape; gallops exist among the modern fields on former downs distinguished by their formal white painted fences and there are areas of studs and paddocks particularly around West Ilsley and Compton.

5) Distinct settlements in the west, with sparse settlement in the east

The area is more settled than the Lambourn Downlands, and contains the linear settlements of Farnborough and West Ilsley and the nucleated valley floor settlements at East Ilsley and Compton. These retain a strong rural character, and Farnborough, West Ilsley and East Ilsley are all centred around a historic core, all of which are designated Conservation Areas. Despite its medieval origins as two separate villages of Compton and East Compton, Compton today has a much more modern character. The east of the character area is more sparsely settled with only scattered farmsteads, and the dispersed outskirts of the adjacent settlement of Streatley in the Pang Valley.

6) Accessible downland

The exposed higher land is crossed by tracks, byways and footpaths, many of which are ancient. The roads and lanes tend to follow the sinuous dry valley bottoms linking the dispersed settlements. The Ridgeway National Trail crosses the landscape in the north following the elevated ridge of the chalk scarp, and has two associated car parks. Each village has its own associated area of downland and a network of radial lanes connecting into the higher surrounding land.

7) An ancient feeling landscape, connecting the modern age to prehistoric times

The landscape is rich in visible archaeological features, imparting an ancient and timeless quality, including Perborough Castle Iron Age hill fort, Lowbury Hill, earthworks, barrows, and the Ridgeway and other drove roads. The general lack of settlement in the east, and the dark skies throughout the area add to the perception of time-depth. The presence of the A34 cutting across the downland is a more modern feature

8) Open and expansive panoramic views

There are extensive views from this area into Oxfordshire, with broad sweeping lines and vastness of the sky and wide horizons. The Ridgeway National Trail provides dramatic views over the Thames valley towards the Goring Gap and the Chilterns AONB, and north over the Vale of the White Horse towards the Didcot Power Station cooling towers and chimney. The sky and weather conditions have a considerable effect on the perception of the Open Downland, which can vary from bleak and exposed under inclement conditions to exhilarating and breath taking when pleasant conditions prevail.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) Early prehistoric monumental architecture features strongly and includes the Neolithic long barrows at Sheep Down. The Ridgeway ancient track, which runs along the top of the east downs, is thought to have its origins in the later prehistoric period, and to have continued as a communication route and droveway into the medieval period. Some of the more sinuous land boundaries and trackways may be late medieval, and trackways such as Halfpenny Catch Lane are probably old droveways.
- 2) The historic settlement pattern was dominated by nucleated villages sited on the valley floor, such as East Ilsley, East Compton and Compton. This trend was so strong across most of the area that other forms of settlement were almost totally absent. East Ilsley was an important local market in the late medieval period, and remained one of the last unenclosed parishes, with the open field finally being divided into private fields in the late 19th century, while its downs remained unenclosed into the 20th century.
- 3) Throughout the medieval period much of the land remained as common open grassland, the downs dominated by sheep for wool production, with arable cultivation on the lower slopes and in the more sheltered valleys. With the decline of the wool trade, areas of downland reverted to scrub, or later were enclosed for arable cultivation as regular fields bounded by hedges. Irregular copses may be survivors of earlier assarts; however the majority of field patterns are medium-large Parliamentary character. There are also significant areas of ladder type fields typical of the chalk e.g. around East Ilsley. Tracks leading out from the villages up to the downland provide the framework for these enclosures, likely created to bring downland or surviving open fields into enclosure.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) The most ecological significant habitat is the surviving unimproved chalk grassland, which mainly occurs as small fragmented blocks on steep slopes. Streatley Warren has been designated as a SSSI for its unimproved flower-rich chalk grassland, which has been maintained by grazing. The diversity of plant life provides habitats for insects and other invertebrates. Skylark, grey partridge and lapwing all feed and nest in the open grassland, while the associated areas of scrub are inhabited by a variety of bird species including willow warbler, blackcap, lesser whitethroat and yellowhammer.
- 2) There are a number of Local Wildlife Sites, around half of which are woodland, some containing ancient woodland, and half grassland.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The entirety of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the presence of dry valleys and long steep scarps, chalk

grassland and chalk streams, limited tree cover, equestrian activity, and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity¹⁷. The AONB Management Plan specifically refers to the special qualities of the landscape where the Downs Plain and Scarp plunges down from the chalk plain to the Vale of White Horse, creating a dramatic recognisable horizon and the Open Downland extending to the east overlooking the Thames at Streatley.

2) Chalk grassland habitats

The isolated blocks of chalk grassland surviving on the steep scarp slopes and dry valley sides form an important component of the chalk grassland resource of the AONB, and are nationally significant. The grassland supports a range of flora, diverse butterfly communities, invertebrates and birds.

3) Traditional equestrian activity associated with the horse racing industry

Compton has been a centre for equestrian excellence, and is where the 1967 Grand National winner Foinavon was trained by John Kempton, and is now buried. Equestrian centres are clustered along the northern slopes, and include horse gallops with regular formal white-painted fences and the large buildings of stud farms. These now have a distinctive presence in the landscape.

4) Recreational value

A network of footpaths, bridleways, byways and rights of way can be found radiating out from settlements, and down the dry valleys, creating opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the countryside. The Ridgeway National Trail brings visitors from further afield to walk on the ancient track.

5) Settlement pattern of medieval villages

The area is more settled than the other area of Open Downland, with traditional nucleated villages of medieval origin. The villages retain their historic cores and are generally well contained within their downland setting.

6) Strong cultural resonance and time-depth

There are visible features from many periods of history, but with particularly strong associations with the prehistoric, in the form of dramatic visible monuments e.g. Perborough Castle Fort, as well as the medieval settlements and associated field patterns. This creates an ancient ambience to the landscape.

7) Extensive panoramic views contribute to remoteness and tranquillity

The Open Downland is characterised by the dramatic remote and windswept landscape of rolling arable and pastoral fields. The downland has few vertical elements resulting in a sense of exposure and permitting vast and panoramic views across the landscape, and notably across the lower lying landscapes to the north of the AONB.

DETRACTORS

1) Loss and fragmentation of chalk grassland

The downs have been enclosed into fields and only small strips of downland grassland remain. The decline in viability of sheep farming has also contributed to the loss and further fragmentation of chalk grassland pasture.

2) Change in farming practices

20th century agricultural mechanisation led to an almost total re-organisation of the fieldscapes into very large arable fields, and few historic enclosures remain unaltered.

The Iron Age hill fort of Perborough Castle and the surrounding Celtic field system in the south

¹⁷ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

of the area have been damaged through increased ploughing, while the Neolithic long barrow at Sheep Down is on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. An increase in visually intrusive larger agricultural barns also disturbs the open horizon and interrupts the sinuosity of the smooth downland landscape.

3) Change in horse racing industry

The trend within the horse racing industry is to move yards away from traditional sites within settlements to new greenfield sites closer to the gallops. The development of new facilities of this type could threaten the historic character of the area, and the move towards all weather gallops threatens the survival of traditional grass gallops. If built and managed sensitively, all weather gallops need not have an adverse impact on the landscape.

4) Development pressures

Increasing demand for housing, equine centres and infrastructure, particularly around Compton, and ribbon development along the rural roads. These are not in keeping with the existing settlement pattern. Additional traffic pressure could also lead to the unsympathetic upgrading of rural roads e.g. signage, fencing and kerbing. Increased footfall also puts pressure on the public rights of way network, especially the Ridgeway National Trail. The pressures for development beyond the AONB has visual impacts on the view from and 'setting' of key features of this landscape such as The Ridgeway as well as increasing demand for recreation and housing.

5) Visual and audible intrusion from the A34

The A34 is an obvious detractor to this otherwise rural landscape, and even in relatively remote areas of the downs the noise from the road is present.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its chalk grassland, chalk streams and dry valleys. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Seek opportunities for habitat restoration

Extend and link isolated and fragmented chalk grassland sites, particularly along the western scarp. Consider managing gallops to favour chalk grassland species, and encouraging permanent management as grazed downland or pasture. Instigate appropriate woodland management for the linear hanging woodlands, including integration of existing coniferous woodlands.

3) Appropriate hedgerow management and creation

Sensitive siting and replanting of hedgerows is desirable in order to replace existing degraded or removed hedgerows. Reintroduce coppicing of hazel lining old tracks.

4) Maintain quality of rights of way, including the Ridgeway National Trail

Footpaths, byways and bridleways should be managed and enhanced for their recreational value, and new paths brought into use e.g. potential for cycle trail along the old railway route from Didcot. The Ridgeway National Trail and its setting, including the views to the Goring Gap and the adjacent vale should also be conserved. Vehicular access to the Ridgeway should be monitored and managed to reduce landscape impacts.

5) Conserve the characteristic settlement pattern

New development should respect existing settlement patterns, and should avoid spreading further along rural roads. Any new large agricultural buildings or equestrian facilities should be

sensitively designed to ensure they can be fully integrated into the landscape. New horse gallops should be carefully sited to avoid unsympathetic lines cutting across the landscape, and their impacts should be minimised through roadside hedgerow restoration and ecological enhancement, such as wildflower seeding.

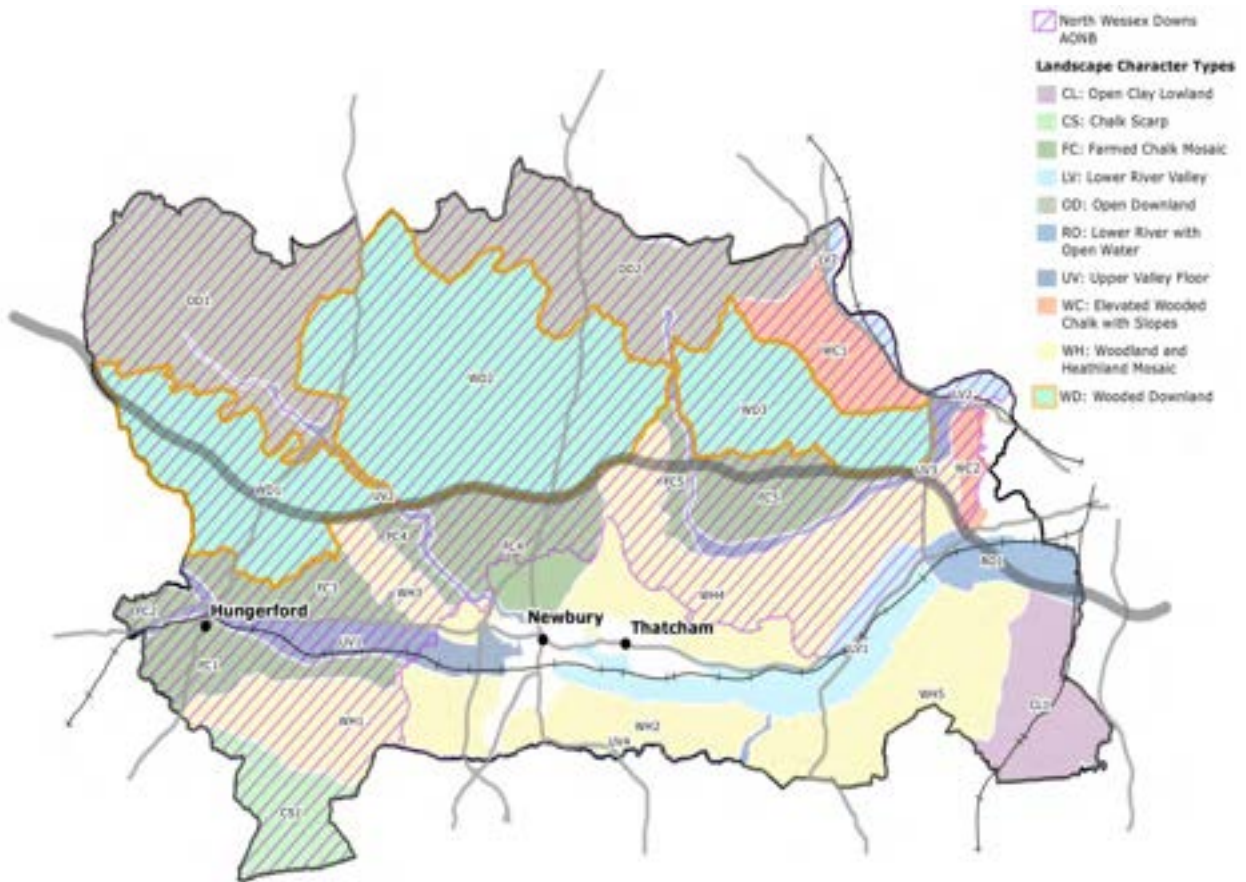
6) Conserve and enhance the archaeological features of the area

The cultural importance of archaeological features should be maintained, and protected against inappropriate agricultural activities and recreational pressures. Opportunities should be taken to reconnect the archaeological features to their landscape context e.g. Perborough Castle Fort through proactive management.

7) Conserve the sense of openness and remoteness

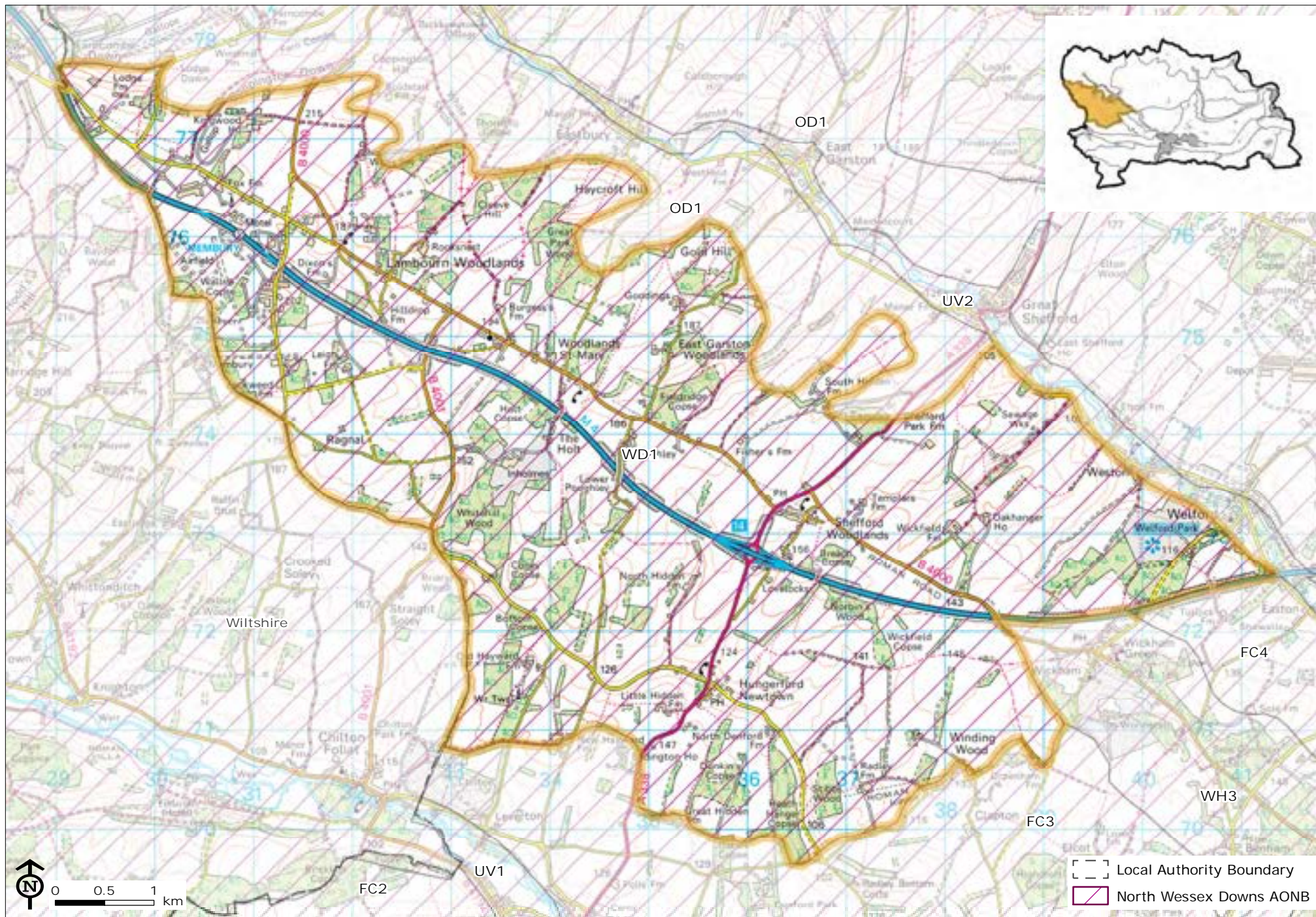
Clear ridges and skylines should be maintained avoiding tall structures which could break the horizon and be prominent in long views outside this area. Strategic wooded horizons should be retained.

Landscape Character Type WD: **Wooded Downland**



The **Wooded Downland** LCT is subdivided into three Local Character Areas:

- WD1: Shefford Wooded Downland
- WD2: Peasemore Wooded Downland
- WD3: Ashampstead Wooded Downland.



SUMMARY

A rolling chalk landscape that is characteristically well-wooded between mixed arable and pasture land use. On the steeper slopes there are also areas of calcareous chalk grassland. The area is predominantly rural, with small settlements, such as Shefford Woodlands and Woodlands St Mary, tending to follow the route of the old Roman road. The M4 motorway bisects the landscape. Views are varied; in some areas woodland creates a sense of enclosure, while other areas are more open and expansive.

To the north, the landscape becomes more sloping and dramatic as it transitions to the Open Downland Landscape Character Type. The character area slopes down towards the Lambourn Valley to the north and east. The District boundary marks the western edge of the Character Area, while to the south the landscape begins to slope down towards the upper slopes of the Kennet Valley and Hungerford beyond. The whole of the character area falls within the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Strong rolling landform with scarp and dipslopes, underlain by a chalk plateau

A strongly rolling landscape with gently domed hilltops, dry valleys with notable scarp and dipslope landform. Elevation ranges from 100m to over 200m AOD in a number of places, including the Membury Earthwork and at Cleeve Hill. Underlying geology comprises a chalk plateau incised with dry valleys containing clay-with-flint deposits.

2) Mixed farmland, divided into large-scale fields bound by mature hedgerows and broken up by blocks of woodland

The character area has a mosaic of arable and pasture farmland, as well as large blocks of woodland, particularly on ridge tops. Arable land is well supported by the clay soil and where slopes are too steep to farm, unimproved grassland is present. The field pattern is predominantly large scale. Shape varies from rectangular to irregular, and the fields are confined by mature hedgerows, shelterbelts and distinctive ridgetop ancient semi-natural woodlands. Equestrian usage is prominent around Kingwood Stud.

3) Ridgetop woodlands and calcareous grasslands form important semi-natural habitats

A well-wooded landscape, which includes many ancient woodlands. Oak and ash are the most dominant tree species appearing in hedgerows and within fields. Conifer plantation woodland can also be found in shelterbelts. Larger woodlands include Balaam's Wood, Coldridge Copse and Whitehill Wood. Calcareous grasslands are found on the steeper slopes, including the nationally important Westfield Chalk Bank and Cleeve Hill SSSIs.

4) Visible archaeological remains from various eras of history

Historic features include Bronze Age bowl barrows along ridgelines and a large Iron Age hillfort at Membury (designated as a Scheduled Monument). A Roman road which connected Corinium (Cirencester) to Calleva (Silchester) bisects the landscape. A number of post-medieval farms and cottages scattered throughout the landscape are designated as Grade II Listed Buildings. Parts of the former RAF operated remains of Membury airfield, which is now privately run, are visible in the west of the character area.

5) Sparse settlement, comprising hamlets and scattered farms, cottages and stud farms

A series of hamlets, including Lambourn Woodlands, Woodlands St Mary and Shefford Woodlands, follow the route of the old Roman road (Ermin Street) which is now the B4000. Beyond this settlement is limited to a number of scattered farmhouses, isolated cottages and stud farms. Building materials vary throughout the character area and include redbrick, flint and render and weatherboard. Churches and barns form local landmarks.

6) Access via a variety of routes, including motorway and major roads contrasting with a network of rural lanes, byways, tracks and footpaths

The B4000 and the M4 run adjacent to each other and bisect the area. The A338 forms a major route running north-south. Elsewhere, the landscape is accessed via a network of ridge top roads and deeply sunken lanes with overhanging wooded banks. In addition to the roads and lanes, there are multiple byways, tracks and footpaths connecting the area, including small parts of the Lambourn Valley Way.

7) Sheltered, wooded character restricts views and creates an enclosed landscape which contrasts with panoramic views experienced from vantage points

Due to the wooded character of the area views are often restricted, particularly from sunken lanes and footpaths with high banks and hedges. Open downland summits create prominent skylines and offer long distance panoramic views, particularly in the north of the area. Skylines are generally undeveloped and often marked by the frequent woodland although a mast near Membury forms a locally prominent skyline feature.

8) A traditional rural landscape with few modern intrusions

The picturesque qualities of this area are reflected in the designation of the whole of this character area as part of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The frequent woodland and limited settlement in this area result in high levels of relative tranquility. Major roads within the landscape (including the M4) create localised visual and audial disruption.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) At Membury there is a large Iron Age hill fort, which is a visually prominent feature in the western part of the character area.
- 2) The B4000 follows the route of an old Roman road (Ermin Street) which connected Corinium (Cirencester) to Calleva (Silchester). There is also evidence of another Roman road to the east of Radley Farm in the south of the character area.
- 3) The current woodland pattern is likely to have been shaped by historical woodland clearance for agriculture.
- 4) Occasional parklands were located in the character area, including Inholmes Park and Welford Park. The features are still visible in the landscape, although adjacent farmland has reduced their size from their historic extent.
- 5) Small disused pits are scattered throughout the character area and provide evidence of the past industrial use of the area.
- 6) Membury Airfield was constructed in 1942 and was used by the USA RAF and the RAF until 1947. It is now privately owned and operated. The aircraft hangers have been converted into industrial units and form part of Membury Business Park. Other parts of the site now form part of Membury motorway service area.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) Notable habitats include the nationally important Westfield Chalk Bank and Cleeve Hill SSSIs. These sites support unimproved calcareous grassland with diverse floral communities including orchid species.
- 2) Frequent woodlands are located throughout the character area, including a large proportion of ancient woodland sites. Tree species include larch, scots pine, beech and sycamore. Oak and ash are the most dominant tree species in the area, appearing in hedgerows and the occasional mid-field specimen. Some previously coppiced, hazel ash and sycamore woodlands also remain which support diverse ground flora. Orchards are associated with farms, including a large example to the south of Hungerford Newtown.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The whole of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, chalk grassland, Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments, Roman remains and the dispersed settlement pattern¹⁸.

2) Well-wooded character, including areas of ancient semi-natural woodland

The character area is densely wooded, with blocks of woodland, frequent in-field trees and mature trees along field boundaries and roads. Many of the woodlands are ancient semi-natural woodlands, and are often designated as Local Wildlife Sites.

3) Nationally and locally designated semi-natural habitats

The landscape contains a high concentration of important semi-natural habitats, including many nationally and locally designated sites. The areas of lowland calcareous grassland on Westfield

¹⁸ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

Chalk Bank and Cleeve Hill are particularly valued, with both sites designated as SSSIs.

4) Strong rural character due to sparse settlement and limited modern influences

The area is predominantly rural with a sparsely settled character. Where settlements do occur, the highly wooded nature of the character area helps to screen them and creates a perception of seclusion. The sunken rural lanes and network of public rights of way also contribute to the rural character of the landscape and are valued for recreation.

5) Frequent archaeological features which create a strong sense of time-depth

Archaeological features from various eras of history are located in the area, creating a strong sense of time-depth. These include Bronze Age monuments, the route of an old Roman road and former parklands. In many places, the irregular field patterns are historic, likely dating from the medieval period when the woodland was asserted.

6) Expansive open views from higher ground

Where woodland allows, views can be experienced from high points in the landscape, including Cleeve Hill. In some places, past field boundary removal has created large open fields which enable long views across the character area.

7) Sense of enclosure and high levels of tranquillity

The frequent woodland and the sunken rural lanes often create a strong sense of enclosure. The sense of enclosure contrasts with the expansive views experienced from some locations. Away from the major roads, there are high levels of tranquillity.

DETRACTORS

1) Over intensification of arable farming practices

There is a trend towards larger agricultural holdings and subsequent intensification of agricultural practices. Intensification of arable agriculture may degrade or destroy habitats or natural features amongst the farmland, including hedgerow removal so that fields can accommodate larger farm machinery. Intensification may also lead to a reduction in livestock farming which could in turn result in scrub encroachment and neglect of marginal land or conversion to other uses such as paddocks.

2) Lack of appropriate woodland management in some areas

Some woodlands are lacking in appropriate management. This is a particular issue for those with ancient semi-natural origin which would traditionally be coppiced or managed as wood pasture. The clear felling of plantations has a negative impact on the visual qualities of the area. The introduction of coniferous shelterbelts can also be a detracting feature.

3) Noise and visual pollution created by the M4

The M4 runs directly through the centre of the character area and is prominent within the landscape. Visual and audial disruption detracts from the peacefulness and tranquillity of the character area.

4) Ongoing pressure for development

Pressure for further development may lead to development which is out of character with the existing sparsely settled character of the small hamlets and suburbanising features being introduced which may detract from the rural qualities of the area.

5) Increased traffic near Membury motorway service area as well as on the rural lane road network

Pressure on rural roads with increased traffic which may lead to requirement of road improvements (e.g. road widening) that may degrade the rural qualities of the character area. These are particularly intrusive on sunken rural lanes. A loss of tranquillity is likely to occur with increased levels of traffic and development.

6) Localised modern intrusions on the landscape

Membury Business Park has increased in size in recent years and the large structures and communications mast are locally detracting.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including areas of ancient semi-natural woodland and archaeological features. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Conserve woodland, trees and hedgerows within the landscape

As woodland is one of the key characteristic features, reintroduction of woodland management practices such as coppicing to ancient and semi-natural woodlands is recommended. The pattern of woodland and hedgerows should also be conserved, focusing on hedgerow management and the restoration of historic hedgerow boundaries. New plantation woodlands should be managed sympathetically so they do not intrude on the visual character of the area. Large areas of clear felling of conifer plantations should be avoided.

3) Protect and enhance semi-natural habitats including lowland calcareous grassland

The conservation of areas of nationally significant lowland calcareous grassland should continue, with the restoration/creation of this habitat undertaken where possible. Effort should also be made to link up habitats where possible to increase resilience and connectivity.

4) Conserve historic features within the landscape

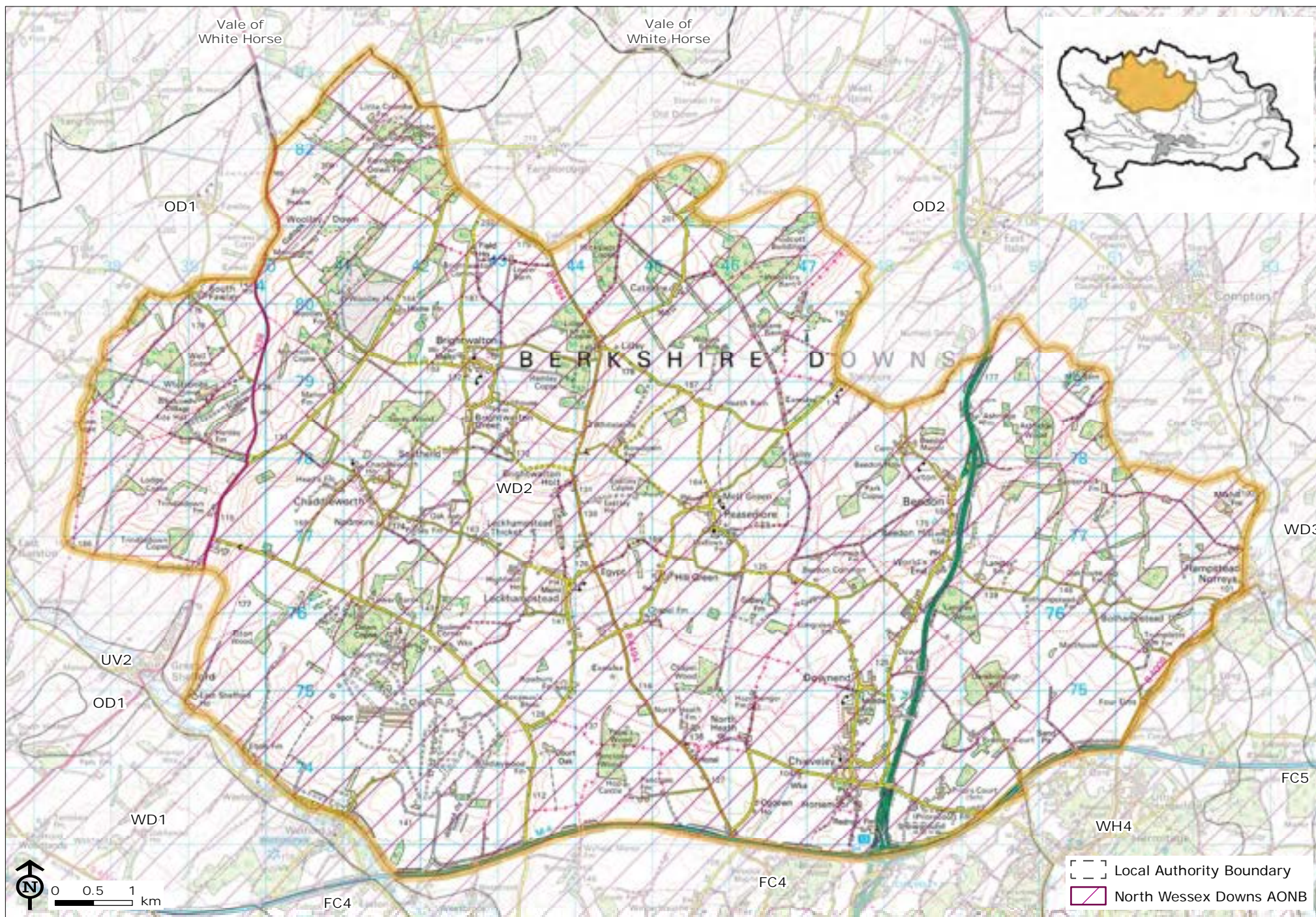
Respect the setting and integrity of heritage features in the landscape which provide a sense of time-depth and evidence of past land use in the area. These include the Iron Age monuments (e.g. Membury Camp), Roman roads, parkland areas (e.g. Inholmes Park and Welford Park) and historic farms and field patterns.

5) Conserve the sparsely settled and rural character of the landscape

The distinctive settlement pattern of small hamlets, villages and scattered farmsteads should be conserved. Any new buildings should be in keeping with the character area using appropriate building materials and following the local vernacular detailing.

6) Conserve characteristic winding lanes and extensive public rights of way

Maintain extensive public rights of way to allow the continued recreational use of the area. Minimise road improvements that may degrade the rural quality of the area including the use of standardised materials in any highway works.



SUMMARY

The upland chalk plateau is open and vast, with undulating and irregular topography. A patchwork of large arable and pastoral ladder fields with areas of woodland scattered between them are characteristic to the area. Settlement comprises small hamlets and villages scattered across the AONB landscape. A generally rural landscape, often with high levels of tranquillity.

To the north, the landscape becomes more strongly undulating as it transitions to the Open Downland landscape type. To the south and south-west, the land begins to slope down towards the Lambourn Valley. The M4 marks the southern boundary of the area. To the east the landscape slopes down to the Pang River Valley around Hampstead Norreys. The whole of the character area forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) A vast, open landscape with strong rolling topography underlain by a chalk plateau

Strongly rolling landform of chalk, with flat-topped or gently rounded hills and wide dry valleys. The area forms part of a dipslope, sloping gently towards the low lying clay pastures and river gravel deposits of the Kennet Valley to the south. Areas of clay-with-flints are deposited particularly in the higher sections of the plateau. Soils contain heavy reddish brown clay.

2) Patchwork of large arable and pasture fields divided into a mixed field pattern

There is a mix of large arable and pasture fields, enclosed by hedgerows and woodlands. In the more open, arable areas crops are predominantly of cereals, oil seed rape and linseed. There is also some use for short-term grass leys. Fields are divided into a varied pattern of informal post-medieval enclosures and regular parliamentary enclosure. Hedgerow loss has created large prairie fields in places. Elsewhere, thick, diverse hedgerows containing frequent mature oak and ash hedgerow trees divide the fields. RAF Welford, now an ammunitions compound for the US Air Force, is situated in the southwest of the area.

3) Well-wooded landscape, with some ancient semi-natural woodlands

The woodlands within the character area (including many ancient semi-natural woodlands) are diverse and support a variety of habitats. Ashridge Wood is a designated SSSI, while a number of other woodlands are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Coniferous shelterbelts and plantations are occasional features. There are important areas of semi-improved and calcareous grasslands amongst the farmland.

4) Historical features include evidence of medieval settlements and historic churches

Scattered barrows provide evidence of prehistoric use of the area. There is some evidence of medieval settlement within the area, with a medieval moated manor at Brightwalton and Whatcombe medieval village (Scheduled Monument). Many of the small villages of the area are historic and are mentioned in the Domesday Survey; their historic cores designated as Conservation Areas. These include Chieveley, Chaddleworth, Brightwalton and Brightwalton Green and Hill Green. Villages tend to be nucleated round historic churches that form key landmarks. The area around Woolley Park, near Brightwalton, has a historic estate character.

5) Settlement pattern of small villages and scattered farms

The area is sparsely covered with small nucleated and linear villages and hamlets. There is also a scattering of solitary farm houses, agricultural buildings and manor buildings. Building materials common in the area are red brick, clay tile, weatherboard and thatch, with most buildings displaying vernacular character. Settlements are often located around a historic church, such as Peasemore, Catmore and Brightwalton.

6) Dense networks of rural lanes and public rights of way

The villages and farms are connected by a network of rural lanes which often follow ridgelines or the course of dry valleys. The M4 motorway forms the southern boundary of the character area while the A34 and A338 cross through it in the east and west respectively. Villages are linked by a series of winding tracks, footpaths and other rights of way which make the area permeable and accessible for recreation.

7) Views are extensive, although woodland restricts visibility in places

Extensive views are experienced, particularly from the northern part of the character area and from the edge of the escarpment. Where there are prominent blocks of mixed woodland and shelterbelts, there are restricted views and semi-enclosed character. Skylines are generally undeveloped and are often marked by woodland. Footpaths often run between high banks and hedges, so views are restricted.

8) A strongly rural landscape, with high levels of tranquillity

Generally, the landscape retains a strongly rural character, with its sparsely settled character, frequent woodlands and large expanses of farmland. The majority of the area experiences high levels of tranquillity, although intrusive features such as the M4 motorway and A34 can detract

from tranquillity in localised areas.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) Prehistoric remains are limited, although there are a few isolated Bronze Age round barrows on ridgelines.
- 2) Many of the small villages within the area are mentioned in the Domesday Survey. There are a few examples of medieval settlements within the character area; these include the moated manor at Brightwalton and the deserted medieval hamlet of Whatcombe, designated as a Scheduled Monument. Lanes surrounding Brightwalton such as Old Street Lane and Hangman's Stone Lane may also be old medieval or post-medieval droveways.
- 3) Several parklands are evident in the character area; Wooley Park is a former deer park, originating from the 17th century.
- 4) Land use in the medieval period was a mixture of farming and commons. Small irregular copses of trees between fields remain from medieval and post-medieval assarting of woodland. 20th century reorganisation of fields has altered the agricultural character of the landscape in some areas.
- 5) Development in the 20th century includes RAF Welford, opened in 1943 for use by both the RAF and US Army Air Forces. It is still in use as a munitions depot. Newbury Showground also lies north of the M4, east of Chieveley and has been the home of the Newbury and District Agricultural Society since 1984 and holds a number of events including the Royal County of Berkshire Show.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) There are diverse woodland habitats in this character area (including many ancient semi-natural woodlands). Some of the ancient semi-natural woodlands include formerly coppiced woods of ash, maple and hazel with oak standards. Ashridge Wood is of particularly high importance and is a designated SSSI for its dry ash-maple woodland with southern calcareous hazel-ash woodland. Species here include oak, wych elm, cherry, and whitebeam. Many other woodland areas are designated as Local Wildlife Sites.
- 2) Areas of semi-improved grassland and lowland calcareous grassland are found amongst the farmland. Occasional small orchards are also associated with farms.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The whole of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, historic parklands and sparsely settled character, with winding, sunken lanes¹⁹.

2) Frequent woodlands including some with ancient semi-natural origin

The character area is densely wooded, with blocks of woodland, frequent in-field trees and mature trees along field boundaries and roads. Many of the woodlands are ancient semi-natural woodlands, and are often designated as Local Wildlife Sites.

3) Variety of historic features which create a sense of time-depth

¹⁹ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

Archaeological features create a strong sense of time-depth in the landscape, including the burial mounds located on hills and the variety of medieval settlements which are nucleated around historic churches.

4) Strong rural character with sparse settlement

The area is predominantly rural with a sparsely settled character. Where settlements do occur, the highly wooded nature of the character area helps to integrate them into the landscape. The deeply incised sunken lanes contribute to the rural character of the area.

5) Recreational value

The dense network of public rights of way provides valued opportunities for recreation and a sense of escape from more urban centres. These include the Downland Villages Riding Route promoted on the OS map. Other recreational opportunities are provided by a private golf course. Visitors are also attracted by events held throughout the year at Newbury Showground.

6) Presence of long wooded views

There are extensive views, particularly from the higher ground in the north of the area. Sinuous dry valleys, woodland blocks, hedgerows and free standing trees act as skyline features and add complexity and interest to views.

DETRACTORS

1) Intensification of arable farming

Intensification of arable agriculture may degrade or destroy habitats or natural features amongst the farmland, including hedgerow removal so that fields can accommodate larger farm machinery. Intensification may also lead to a reduction in livestock farming which could in turn result in scrub encroachment and neglect of marginal land or conversion to other uses such as paddocks.

2) Historic loss of hedgerow boundaries

Past loss of hedgerows has altered the character of the landscape in some areas, creating large-scale expansive fields. Remaining hedgerows in intensively farmed arable areas can also suffer from inappropriate management or neglect.

3) Lack of appropriate woodland management in some areas

Some woodlands are lacking in appropriate management. This is a particular issue for those with ancient semi-natural origin which would traditionally be coppiced or managed as wood pasture. Clear felling of plantations can have a negative impact on the visual qualities of the area. The introduction of coniferous shelterbelts can also be a detracting feature.

4) Ongoing pressure for development

Increasing pressure for development may lead to a loss of traditional rural character in small nucleated hamlets and villages. Poorly sited and designed new development would fail to reflect the historic form of settlements and building groups, their character and setting.

5) Increased levels of traffic on minor roads

Pressure on rural roads with increased traffic which may lead to the requirement for road improvements (e.g. road widening) that may degrade the rural qualities of the character area. This could be particularly intrusive on sunken rural lanes. A loss of tranquillity is likely to occur with increased levels of traffic and development.

6) Localised intrusions from the M4 and A34

The M4 motorway runs along the southern boundary of the character area and bisects with the A34 which is a major route running through the east of the area, creating noise and visual disturbance in the landscape.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including ancient woodlands, historic parklands and the sparsely settled character. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Conserve and enhance areas of woodland

The reintroduction of woodland management practices such as coppicing to ancient and semi-natural woodlands is recommended. The pattern of woodland and hedgerows should also be conserved, focusing on hedgerow management and the restoration of historic hedgerow boundaries. New plantation woodlands should be managed sympathetically so they do not intrude on the visual character of the area. Large areas of clear felling of conifer plantations should be avoided.

3) Conserve the sense of time-depth in the landscape

The setting of historic features should be respected, including the nationally significant remains of medieval villages and barrows. Historic field patterns should be retained, with field boundaries restored where they have previously been lost.

4) Conserve the overall sparsely settled and rural character of the landscape

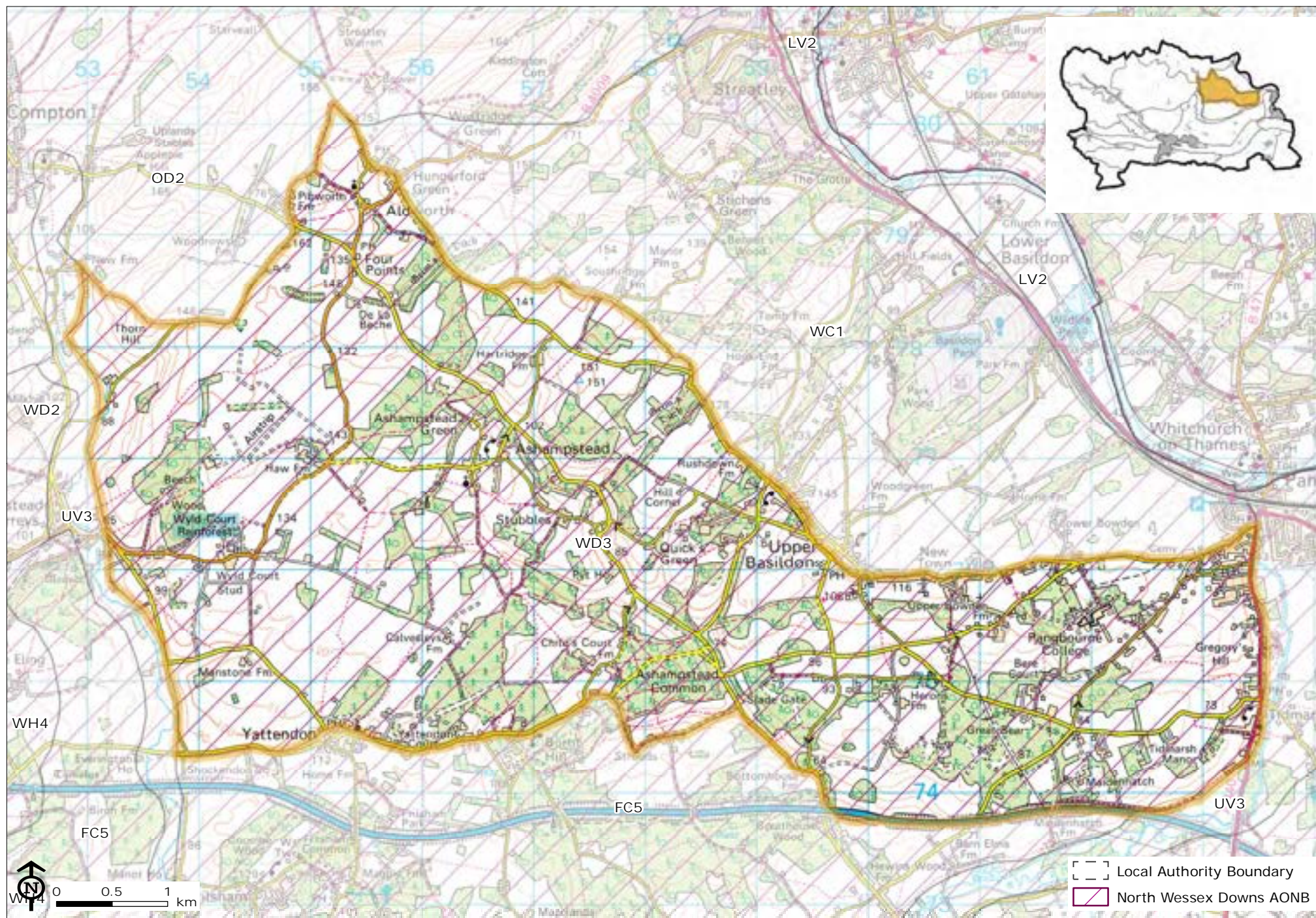
The distinction between separate settlements and the role of the landscape as a setting to the character of individual settlements should be respected. Any new buildings should be in keeping with the rural character of the area using appropriate building materials following the local vernacular detailing.

5) Conserve characteristic winding lanes and extensive public rights of way

Maintain extensive public rights of way to allow the continued recreational use of the area. The rural character of roads and lanes should be maintained, avoiding upgrading (e.g. widening and increased signage) that may degrade the rural quality of the area. Characteristic hedgerows should also be maintained and reinstated where appropriate.

6) Conserve the perceptual qualities of the landscape and key views

Retain the strong sense of tranquillity in the landscape and the sense of enclosure experienced in the wooded areas and along the sunken roads and trackways. Conserve key views from the higher ground including the upper slopes of the dry valleys.



SUMMARY

An elevated chalk plateau characterised by a series of deeply incised dry river valleys. The area is extensively wooded with areas of ancient woodland and some traditional pasture. Settlements in the area such as Ashampstead are small and attractive, and the area itself is particularly rural. There are some historic features in the area dating back to the Bronze age and Roman or early medieval times. The landscape is enclosing with few viewpoints, the strong assemblage of landscape features here makes the area visually rich.

The character area extends from Hampstead Norreys in the west to Tidmarsh in the east. To the north around Aldworth the landform becomes more dramatic with steeper slopes and higher elevations. The winding route of the Pang River Valley means that it borders the area to both the east and west. To the south, around Yattendon, Ashampstead Common and Maidenhatch, the land becomes less elevated as the landscape transitions to the Farmed Chalk Mosaic type. The whole of the character area is contained within the North Wessex Down AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Elevated chalk plateau with rolling topography and deeply incised dry valleys

The character area is an elevated rolling chalk plateau, situated between the valleys of the Pang and Thames Rivers. The plateau has pronounced escarpments and is dissected by a series of steep, deeply incised dry valleys including the distinctive Ashampstead valley. Geologically, the area comprises chalk rock overlain by a thick deposit of clay-with-flint. This geology produces heavy brown clay loamy soils.

2) Mixed arable and pasture fields which vary in pattern as a result of historic enclosure

In flatter areas, land use is dominated by large arable fields. Pasture is most common where slopes are steeper, particularly along escarpments of the dry valleys. There is a mix of different field shapes, sizes and patterns likely to relate to enclosure at different points in history, including post-medieval assarting of woodlands and formal parliamentary enclosure.

3) Strongly wooded character with remnant herb rich calcareous grasslands contributing to semi-natural character

Extensive woodland forms a complex mosaic within the farmland. Broad linear tree belts of both deciduous and mixed woodland intersect fields. There are also large geometric blocks of conifer plantations, particularly in the south of the area. Near Ashampstead there is a long roadside avenue of lime trees. Much of the woodland is ancient, with numerous areas designated as Local Wildlife Sites. A series of remnant herb-rich chalk grasslands are also present, particularly along steeper slopes.

4) Historical features present include a Bronze Age barrow and Grim's Ditch

Archaeological features present in the character area include a singular Bronze Age round barrow on Folly Hill, to the east of Hampstead Norreys and Grim's Ditch (Scheduled Monument). The embankment of Grim's Ditch runs through the character area in several interrupted sections, with its presence marked by a line of mature trees. The historic cores of several of the villages are designated as Conservation Areas, including Ashampstead, Aldworth and Yattendon.

5) Scattered villages and hamlets linked by a network of rural lanes and footpaths

The area is mostly rural with numerous small distinctive villages and hamlets located around crossroads or small village greens. There are also scattered red brick farm houses throughout the character area. Ashampstead is an example of a traditional village occurring on a spur overlooking the dry valley. Winding minor roads and rural lanes cross the open plateaus and sinuous dry river valleys. The area is also well supplied with tracks and footpaths. The M4 motorway forms the southern edge of the character area on an embankment.

6) Open views from downland summits contrast with the enclosed nature of the valleys and woodlands which limit views

Views are often restricted within dry enclosed valleys and wooded areas, creating a sense of enclosure. Conversely, some downland summits provide effective viewpoints. In areas where fields are larger more and open there is an experience of large skies and expansiveness. Skylines are generally undeveloped and are characterised by woodland, although an overhead power line with transmission towers running in the east of the area from Bowden Green to Maidenhatch forms a locally detracting feature on the skyline.

7) Strongly rural and tranquil landscape, with few modern influences

The landscape retains its rural character, and often has intimate and enclosed perceptual qualities. The area is generally remote and tranquil; modern intrusions are limited and their impacts tend to be localised.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) Grim's Ditch, a linear earthwork of putative Bronze Age origin, crosses the landscape and is thought to have functioned as a territorial boundary. It survives as an above ground earthwork in sections and, as well as being Scheduled Monuments, these have also influenced the layout of later land-use. There is also a Bronze Age round barrow on Folly Hill to the east of Hampstead Norreys.
- 2) A large number of small, disused pits are scattered across the landscape, providing evidence of the past industrial uses of the area.
- 3) The field pattern here is likely to be the result of informal assarting of woodland in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. More sinuous field margins are likely to be a product of medieval or post-medieval enclosure that may have followed existing tracks. Straight edged fields are most likely from formal parliamentary enclosure occurring in eighteenth or nineteenth century.
- 4) Pangbourne College was built by John Belcher in 1897-98, in a redbrick William and Mary style. It was opened as The Nautical College, Pangbourne in 1917 to prepare boys for careers in the Merchant Navy.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) There is a large quantity of woodlands in the area with a mix of types present including deciduous and mixed woodland, conifer plantations and areas of ancient semi-natural woodlands. The most prevalent woodland tree species are being beech, oak, ash, cherry, and whitebeam. Woodland areas tend to be large with interlinking corridors between them. Some woodland areas extend in sinuous lines along the edge of steep slopes and escarpments.
- 2) Among the farmed landscape there are areas of unimproved chalk grasslands, particularly on steeper slopes. Remnant orchards are also associated with farms.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The whole of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations and more open farmland areas where sunken lanes heighten the sense of seclusion²⁰.

2) Strong wooded character, including areas of ancient semi-natural woodland

The character area is densely wooded, with blocks of woodland, frequent in-field trees and mature trees along field boundaries and roads. Many of the woodlands are ancient semi-natural woodlands, and are often designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Woodlands within this character area often occur in interconnected blocks forming important ecological corridors.

3) Remnant semi-natural habitat amongst the farmland

Areas of herb-rich unimproved calcareous grassland are often located amongst the farmland, particularly on the steeper slopes which have escaped agricultural improvement.

4) Sparsely settled character and rural qualities

There is a lack of development and modernising features in the landscape, which is characterised by expanses of farmland and woodland. There are several small distinctive villages and hamlets within the character area that generally occur around crossroads and which are

²⁰ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

centred around village greens. A number of these settlements have a historic character, including several Conservation Areas at Ashampstead, Aldworth and Yattendon.

5) Historical features which create a sense of time-depth

Archaeological features create a strong sense of time-depth in the landscape, including the putative Bronze Age earthwork of Grim's Ditch which crosses the character area from east to west and the round barrow on Folly Hill. Field origins are often medieval or post-medieval.

6) Recreational value

Numerous tracks and public rights of way which provide recreational opportunities throughout the landscape. Ashampstead Common is a former deer park and now contains open mixed woodland with ancient yew trees. The Common is crossed by a network of footpaths and bridleways, and is a popular recreation spot, especially for birdwatching. The Living Rainforest at Hampstead Norreys is also popular with visitors.

7) Strong sense of tranquillity and enclosure

The well-wooded nature of the area creates a strong sense of enclosure, with limited views out and high levels of tranquillity. Some areas are relatively remote and inaccessible. Modern intrusions in the landscape are limited, further enhancing the rural character of the area.

DETRACTORS

1) Intensification of arable farming

Intensification of arable agriculture may degrade or destroy habitats or natural features amongst the farmland, including hedgerow removal so that fields can accommodate larger farm machinery. Intensification may also lead to a reduction in livestock farming which could in turn result in scrub encroachment and neglect of marginal land or conversion to other uses such as paddocks.

2) Lack of appropriate woodland management in some areas

Some woodlands are lacking in appropriate management. This is a particular issue for those with ancient semi-natural origin which would traditionally be coppiced or managed as wood pasture. Clear felling of plantations can have a negative impact on the visual qualities of the area. The introduction of coniferous shelterbelts can also be a detracting feature.

3) Intrusive features including electricity infrastructure

Pylons and overhead lines cross the landscape and form prominent skyline features above the otherwise undeveloped, wooded skylines.

4) Increased traffic pressures and subsequent loss of tranquillity

Pressure on rural roads with increased traffic which may lead to the requirement for road improvements (e.g. road widening) that may degrade the rural qualities of the character area. This can be particularly intrusive on sunken rural lanes. A loss of tranquillity is likely to occur with increased levels of traffic and development.

5) Intrusion from the M4 motorway on rural and tranquil qualities

The M4 runs along the southern edge of the character area and creates localised noise and visual disturbance in the landscape.

6) Ongoing development pressure

Ongoing development pressure may lead to the suburbanisation and degradation of the distinct character of the existing rural settlements and their wider rural context. This is primarily an issue on the edges of the character area, close to larger settlements such as Pangbourne. Poorly sited and designed new development would fail to reflect the historic form of settlements and

building groups, their character and setting.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) **Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB**

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its ancient woodland habitat, sunken rural roads and sparse settlement pattern. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) **Conserve and enhance important semi-natural habitats**

Conserve and enhance important areas of semi-natural habitat which occur amongst the farmland, including remnant chalk grassland sites. Where possible, additional chalk grassland habitats should be restored. Linkages between semi-natural habitats should be conserved or created to improve resilience and connectivity.

3) **Retain the wooded character of the landscape**

Ancient semi-natural woodlands should be conserved, with traditional management techniques such as coppicing reintroduced where appropriate. Conserve and create woodlands to link up areas of semi-natural habitat and improve connectivity.

4) **Ensure the appropriate management of plantation woodlands**

Parts of this area are used for growing Christmas trees; plantation woodlands should be managed sympathetically so they do not intrude on the visual character of the area. Large areas of clear felling of conifer plantations should be avoided; instead selective felling should be adopted to utilise natural regeneration and reduce the landscape impact of felling. Where new plantations are created, care should be taken to minimise single species planting or the planting of exotic conifers.

5) **Conserve the sparsely settled rural character of the landscape**

The distinction between separate settlements and the role of the landscape as a setting to the character of individual settlements should be respected. Any new buildings should be in keeping with the rural character of the area using appropriate building materials following the local vernacular detailing.

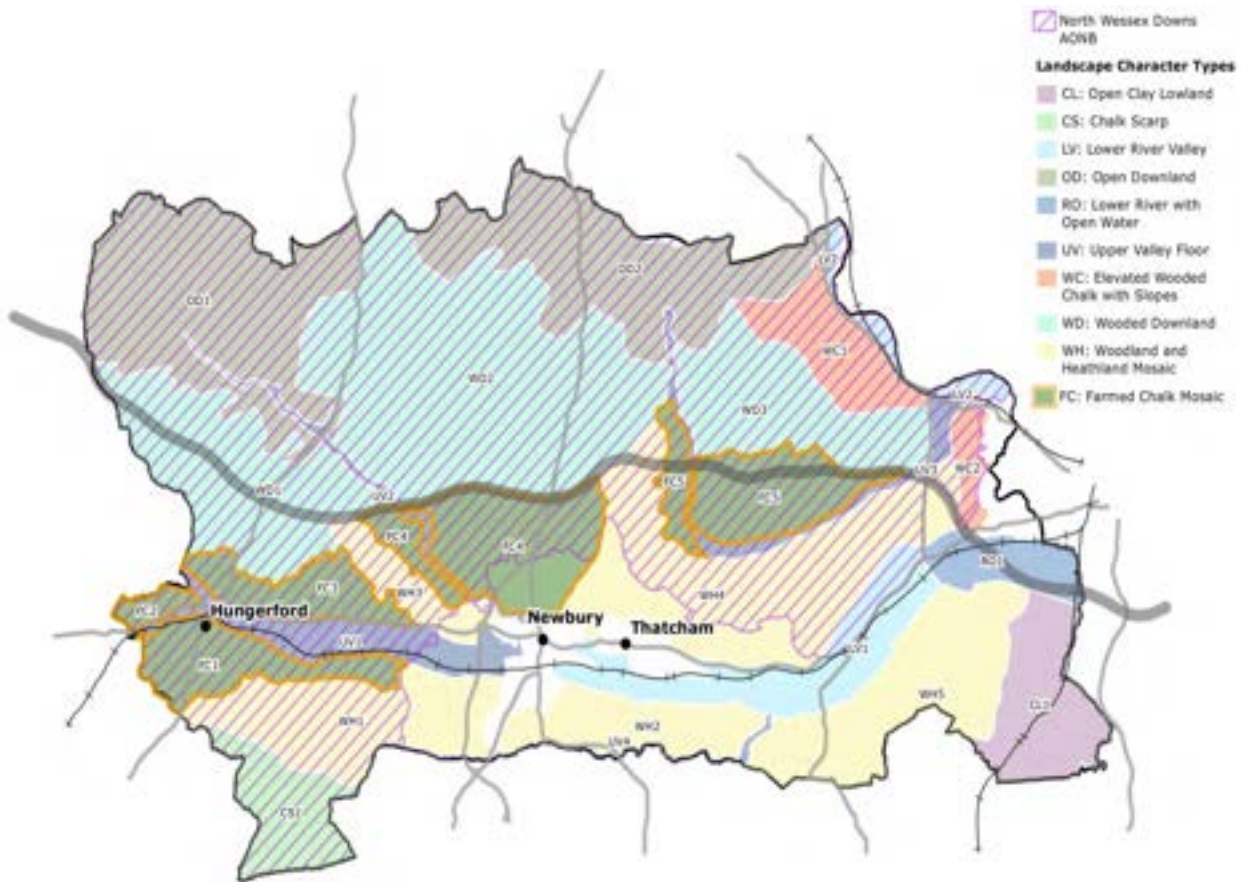
6) **Conserve characteristic winding lanes and extensive public rights of way**

Maintain extensive public rights of way to allow the continued recreational use of the area. The rural character of roads and lanes should be maintained, avoiding upgrading (e.g. widening and increased signage) that may degrade the rural quality of the area.

7) **Conserve and enhance historic features which create a sense of time-depth in the landscape**

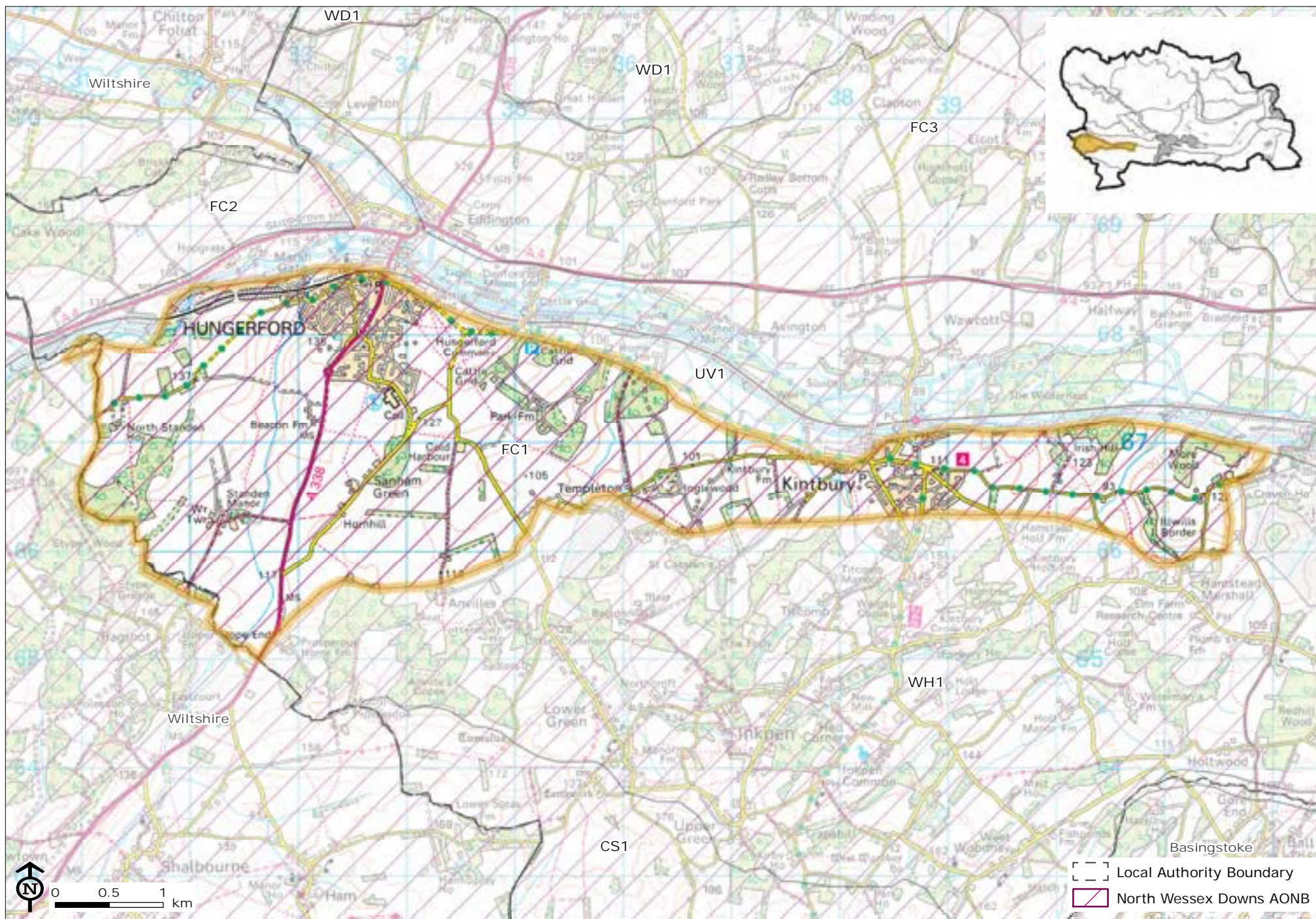
Historic features of the landscape should be sensitively managed including the Bronze Age barrow on Folly Hill and Grim's Ditch. The setting of historic features should be respected. Historic field patterns should be retained, with field boundaries restored where they have previously been lost.

Landscape Character Type FC: **Farmed Chalk Mosaic**



The **Farmed Chalk Mosaic** LCT is subdivided into three Local Character Areas:

- FC1: Hungerford Farmed Chalk Mosaic
- FC2: Froxfield Farmed Chalk Mosaic
- FC3: Elcot Farmed Chalk Mosaic.



SUMMARY

The area is an open and gently rolling landscape, on the chalk slopes to the south of the Kennet Valley dominated by large arable fields with blocks of woodland. Settlement is concentrated at Hungerford and Kintbury.

The area is bounded to the north by the valley of the River Kennet and to the west by the District boundary with Wiltshire. The south and eastern borders are more transitional associated with a change in geology resulting in a more mixed wooded and heathland landscape. The whole area forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Gently rolling chalk landform, rising from the Kennet Valley

A predominantly chalk landscape, capped in places by a variety of alluvial, sandy, clay-with-flints and gravel formations and small areas of Reading Beds. A steady slope up from the Kennet valley becomes a variably shelving, gently rolling and subtly undulating landform. Where the slopes are incised with valleys the landscape becomes more undulating and creates the impression of subtly interlocking hills emphasised by the woodland cover in places. Small surface streams in the lower reaches of the dry valleys feed into the river Kennet. There are also springs and waterbodies across the area.

2) Large rolling cereal fields interspersed with blocks of mixed woodland

A pattern of large and rectangular rolling cereal fields, with some isolated trees remaining in fields. Field divisions vary, from overgrown hedgerows and linear coniferous shelterbelts (particularly south of Hungerford) to post and wire or non-existent boundaries. Often the only definition between the lanes and fields are low grassy banks with considerably deteriorated hedgerows. Around Kintbury the fields are smaller and more intimate in scale with a good hedgerow structure. Small coverts and some larger blocks of mixed woodland, predominately on the clay capped ridges, create a wooded framework. The extent of woodland increased in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. There is a strong parkland feel at Hungerford Common (also known as Common Port Down) with its long mature avenues of trees, although no registered parklands are present. Free-range pig units and occasional pastoral fields occur around farmsteads and settlements, and provide variation from the large fields of cereal crops.

3) Range of habitats including deciduous (ancient) woodland, semi improved grassland and floodplain grasslands

The area is rich in habitats, supporting ancient woodland, deciduous woodland, semi-improved grassland e.g. at Irish Hill, and floodplain grassland by the watercourse at Standen Manor. A number of the areas of ancient woodland are designated as Local Wildlife Sites e.g. Lady's Wood, and three nationally important SSSIs are present in the area.

4) Sparse settlement outside of Hungerford and Kintbury

The small nucleated town of Hungerford is the main settlement in the area. It has a strong distinctive character with a historic core and extensive 20th century expansion to the south. Development is typically on the lower slopes above the valley floor. The western part is highly visible across the undulating landscape from the north. The smaller settlement of Kintbury has similarly expanded but retains a strong rural character and vernacular. The farmed area is sparsely settled with isolated historic farmsteads and manor houses such as Standen Manor and Inglewood connected by small rural lanes bound by overgrown hedgerows.

5) Dense rural lane network, well-connected by public rights of way

A simple, dispersed pattern of small quiet lanes through the area. The road network is constrained by the river and the Kennet and Avon Canal, which designate the crossing points across the valley. There is an extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and byways, and open access land at Hungerford Common.

6) Quiet, open rural character

A largely open landscape as a result of recent removal of field boundaries, although there are areas with a small-scale and intimate nature. Where a more wooded character prevails e.g. at Hungerford Port Down, the landscape becomes more enclosed. This is a simple and expansive landscape, with a coherent and intact rural character.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) A small number of irregular fields represent medieval and post-medieval assarts. Some small woods and copses survive, on steeper slopes and ridge tops. Fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries probably result from 17th and 18th century informal enclosure, often following

ridgelines or valley bottoms. Most fields are large and regular however and derive from formal parliamentary enclosure. This underlying character, coupled with more recent removal of field boundaries, form very large 'prairie' fields and confers a largely open character to the landscape.

- 2) Many of the area's quarry pits for chalk, clay and gravel may have their origins during the later medieval period. These continued to be worked on a small-scale basis into the early modern period.
- 3) The agricultural landscape has been subject to considerable modification. The majority of historic enclosures have been reorganised into modern fields more suited to mechanised agriculture. The arable extent has been further increased through the enclosure of previously non-arable areas. Conversion of parkland to arable fields has been common, and is most visible between Hungerford and Kintbury.
- 4) There are a number of former country estates within the area including Standen Manor and Inglewood House. The latter was rebuilt and is now a retirement village, although it still retains Grade II listed ancillary buildings including a clock tower.
- 5) Hungerford High Street and the properties leading off it are typical of burgage plots associated with the town's medieval layout, but no outwardly medieval buildings survive. It is possible that Hungerford Port Down was established during the late 12th century when Hungerford was laid out, and it was definitely in existence by the end of the medieval period. The lined avenues of ornamental trees were planted in the 19th century.
- 6) Hungerford has a traditional high street comprised of houses and shops fronting the street. Many are Georgian in appearance and render and red and blue brickwork are common features. The 19th century town hall stands out on the high street due to its classically influenced design and execution in red brick with stone detailing. Although Kintbury was granted the rights to weekly markets and annual fairs in 1267 it was eclipsed by the larger settlement of Hungerford. Kintbury grew due to its role supplying the whiting (chalk) industry for paint. Both towns contain Conservation Areas, both of which are mainly within LCA UV1. Settlement growth in the 19th and 20th centuries has focussed around these two towns with only small growth around other historic settlement nuclei in the area. Both Hungerford and Kintbury have expanded since the 1970s with the additions of several large housing estates around the fringes of both settlements.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) The area supports ancient woodland, deciduous woodland, semi-improved grassland and floodplain grassland.
- 2) Three SSSIs and areas of ancient woodland demonstrate the national importance of the ecology of this area, and many of the areas of ancient woodland are also designated as Local Wildlife Sites. The Hampstead Marshall SSSI is designated for its geological importance.
- 3) Irish Hill Copse SSSI is an area of ancient woodland which provides habitats for a wide range of ground flora including wild daffodil and bluebell. Foxley Covert is an area of ancient woodland and a Local Wildlife Site which supports brown hare. Freeman's Marsh SSSI (mainly within A1) is designated for its unimproved meadows, marsh and reedbed.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

This character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this

character area include the mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, connecting boundary elements and sunken lanes which heighten the sense of seclusion²¹.

2) Wooded framework

Strong mixed wooded horizons provide visual enclosure and a wooded backdrop to and frame views from settlements, which is particularly apparent at Hungerford.

3) Field patterns and hedgerows

An agricultural tapestry extends across the sloping sides of the River Kennet. Large rolling arable fields are a distinct characteristic of this area. Where hedgerows have been maintained they create an intimate character and add a layer of complexity to an otherwise simple rural landscape.

4) Important ecological habitats

The area is rich in habitats, supporting ancient woodland, semi-improved grassland, floodplain grassland and an important hedgerow network, in places. The rural commons and marsh at Hungerford are valued locally, while many of the ancient woodland sites are designated at a local or national level.

5) Distinctive character of rural settlements

Hungerford and Kintbury contain predominantly red brick houses and maintain their historic cores (predominately within LCA UV1). The built environment forms an integral part of the local character and distinctiveness of the area and adds to the diversity of the landscape as a whole. The rural setting of both towns, with views across agricultural land and woodland, and sparse additional settlement is also valued. The Common forms an important gateway to Hungerford from the east.

6) Recreational value

An accessible landscape, enjoyed by residents and visitors as an area for walking, cycling and horse riding along bridleways, footpaths, and the quiet rural lanes. The open access land at Hungerford Common is also used extensively. The area provides links with the recreational facilities in the adjacent Kennet valley, including the Kennet and Avon Canal to the north.

7) Quiet, rural landscape forming the setting to the Kennet Valley

A simple, quiet and open landscape, which feels quintessentially 'English'. The slopes provide a rural setting to the adjacent river valley (UV1).

DETRACTORS

1) Loss of traditional woodlands

In the past, traditional woodlands have been replaced with linear coniferous tree belts. The rectilinear coniferous plantations do not fit within the landscape pattern, and this is particularly visible between North Standen Farm and Hungerford.

2) Loss and decline of hedgerow boundaries

Loss of hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees has reduced the variety and scale of the landscape in some areas. This is compounded by the poor management of the remaining hedgerows, resulting in a reduction of biodiversity.

3) Changes to farming practice

Intensification in farming has led to loss of environmental assets, particularly conversion of permanent pasture to arable fields. An increase in monoculture, particularly from arable and grazing lands to large fields of oil seed rape has led to visual monotony in some areas of the

²¹ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

landscape.

4) Unsympathetic and incremental expansion of settlements

The valley settlements of Hungerford and Kintbury have expanded out onto the surrounding valley slopes with pressures for further expansion out into this open chalk farmland landscape. Poorly sited and designed new development would fail to reflect the historic form of these settlements and building groups, their character and setting.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its ancient semi-natural woodlands, varied field patterns and connecting hedgerows. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements

Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows, and encourage restoration/reinstatement of hedgerows within expansive arable fields. Where appropriate, conserve the wooded context of settlements, to contain and filter the impact of built form.

3) Promote appropriate woodland management

This is particularly important for ancient and semi-natural woodland areas but also relevant to more recently planted woodland areas. Appropriate coppicing, pollarding, planting, thinning and management of invasive species and disease should all be encouraged. New woodland planting should aim to provide enclosure and link isolated hilltop woodland blocks. It is important to ensure that woodland boundaries are sensitive to landform. This will also help diversify the landscape character to reduce visual monotony of arable fields.

4) Seek to promote enhanced management of horse paddocks, and particularly boundary associated elements

Ensure any horse paddocks are sympathetically integrated into the landscape and ensure that any stables or manèges are carefully sited.

5) Conserve architectural character of settled areas and existing settlement pattern

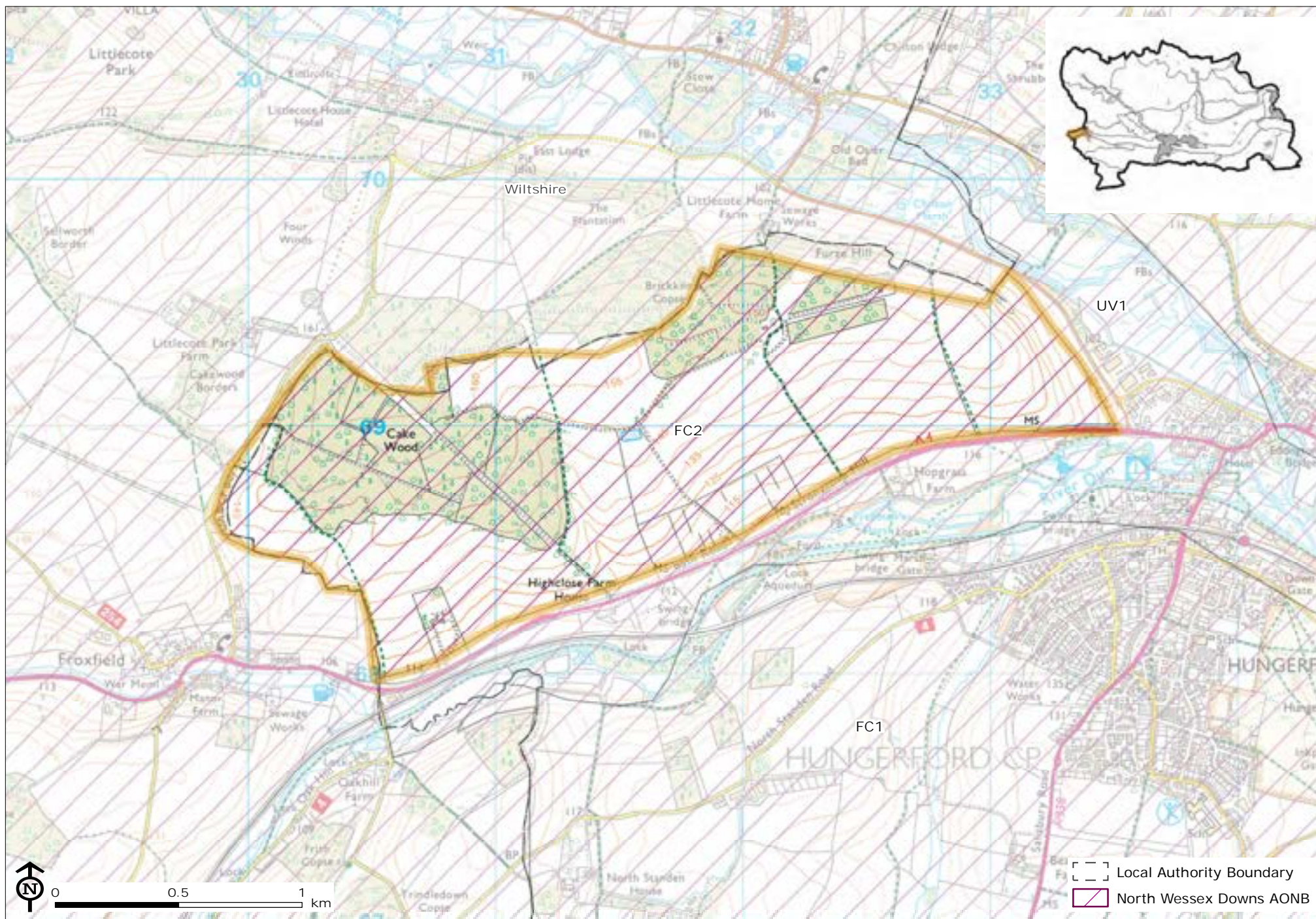
Development should conserve the open rural landscape. The scale of new buildings should fit with the traditional existing buildings, and employ local vernacular detailing. Views out of settlements and the general sense of openness should be maintained, recognising opportunities for mitigation and integration of the southern edge of Hungerford within the wider landscape.

6) Conserve the rural, undeveloped rural character and qualities and role of this area as the backdrop slopes and setting for the Kennet Valley

The rising slopes and ridgeline are particularly sensitive in this respect.

7) Positively manage the pressures from recreation

Manage recreational pressure to avoid damage to important landscape or ecological characteristics or perceptual qualities. Encourage restoration of areas eroded by visitor pressure and seek sensitive design solutions to minimise the local impacts of recreation facilities.



SUMMARY

A small area sloping relatively steeply down from a ridge crest along its northern boundary to the A4 on the edge of the valley floors of the River Dun to the south (along which the Kennet and Avon Canal also runs) and the River Kennet to the east. The LCA is dominated by large arable fields with few field boundaries, which creates an open character. Mixed woodland on the valley crest is a visually striking feature in views from the Dun and Kennet valleys. There are only a few isolated buildings in this rural and geographically small area, but the A4 is an intrusive element.

The area is located between the River Kennet and its tributary the Dun, to the north and west of Hungerford. It is bounded to the north and west by the District boundary. There is no significant distinction between landscape character in this area and into Wiltshire to the west, where the village of Froxfield lies just beyond the border, other than a gradual increase in woodland cover. The whole area forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Steeply sloping topography underlain by chalk

A predominantly chalk landscape, capped around Furze Hill by plateau gravels. It is a variably undulating landform, forming the southern side of a ridge between the Kennet and Dun river valleys, sloping up to the higher chalk downs.

2) Predominately large arable fields, with an absence of field boundaries

The sloping topography of this area is accentuated by very large arable fields with few hedgerows or fences. Some land at Cobbs Farm has been converted to vineyards.

3) Mixed woodland on hill crest

The crest of the hill is covered by an extensive area of mixed woodland, creating a strong wooded context. This is formed of two areas of ancient woodland, and a more modern rectilinear plantation south of Furze Hill.

4) Limited settlement

This small area is largely agricultural, and settlement is limited to agricultural buildings, isolated houses and a farm shop at Cobbs Farm. The eastern part of the area has close physical and visual links with Charnham Park Industrial Estate.

5) Recreational opportunities

The area contains a number of footpaths which link to the Kennet valley to the south and into Wiltshire in the north.

6) Tranquil rural landscape

The wooded, elevated ground in the northern part of the area provides tranquillity and separation from urban influences in the valley below, but the A4 introduces noise and movement along the southern edge of the character area.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The area is part of the royal forest of Savernake, a hunting preserve only for the monarch, which was at its greatest extent in the 12th century. Designation as a royal forest meant that an area was under Forest Law and not necessarily that it was densely wooded. Whilst there is some historic woodland cover, in the form of the ancient woodland of Cake Wood, this LCA also has traces of medieval open field systems showing that, despite its use as a hunting preserve, farming was undertaken at the same time. The land was disafforested (returned to the operation of common law) in the mid-16th century.
- 2) The open field systems appear to have been enclosed into fields by the 18th century. The majority of these were regularly-shaped, suggesting that they may result from agreements between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise holdings in the common fields or grazing.
- 3) By the end of the 20th century the majority of historic enclosures had been reorganised into modern fields more suited to mechanised agriculture, and the arable acreage further increased through the enclosure of previously pastoral areas.
- 4) The line of the former south drive of Littlecote House, a Tudor manor just across the border in Wiltshire, runs through Cake Wood and is marked by a track. The grounds of Littlecote House were set out during the late 17th and early 18th centuries, as an extensive deer park with rides and avenues. It is thought that the drive through Cake Wood was added at this time. The Georgian lodge situated on the A4 (Bath Road) gave access to the drive.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) Ancient and semi-natural woodland dominates the hill top at Cake Wood and Brick Kiln Copse. These areas of woodland are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Red kites are often seen in the area.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

This character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands and plantations and sense of seclusion²².

2) Strong wooded context and setting

Mixed woodland on the crest of the hill is a visually prominent feature, and provides a wooded backdrop to the large arable fields and setting to the adjacent valleys. It is also an important historic and biodiversity feature.

3) Expansive views and tranquil ridge crest

The general absence of built development and elevation above the valley floor settlement and roads, make this a largely tranquil area, away from the A4. In areas where woodland is absent there are expansive views out over the adjacent valleys.

DETRACTORS

1) Management of ancient woodland

A decline in traditional management techniques including coppicing has led to the decline of areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland.

2) Influence of the A4 (Bath Road)

The A4 is an increasingly busy road, and causes some loss of tranquillity to the adjacent area.

3) Loss of field boundaries

Absence or poorly managed field boundaries on the lower ridge create a very open arable landscape.

4) Recreational pressure

There is pressure from both informal recreation along the public footpaths and the visitor facilities at Cobbs Farm.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its ancient semi-natural woodlands and connecting hedgerows. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the

²² Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

special qualities of the landscape.

2) Conserve existing mixed woodland and enhance field boundaries

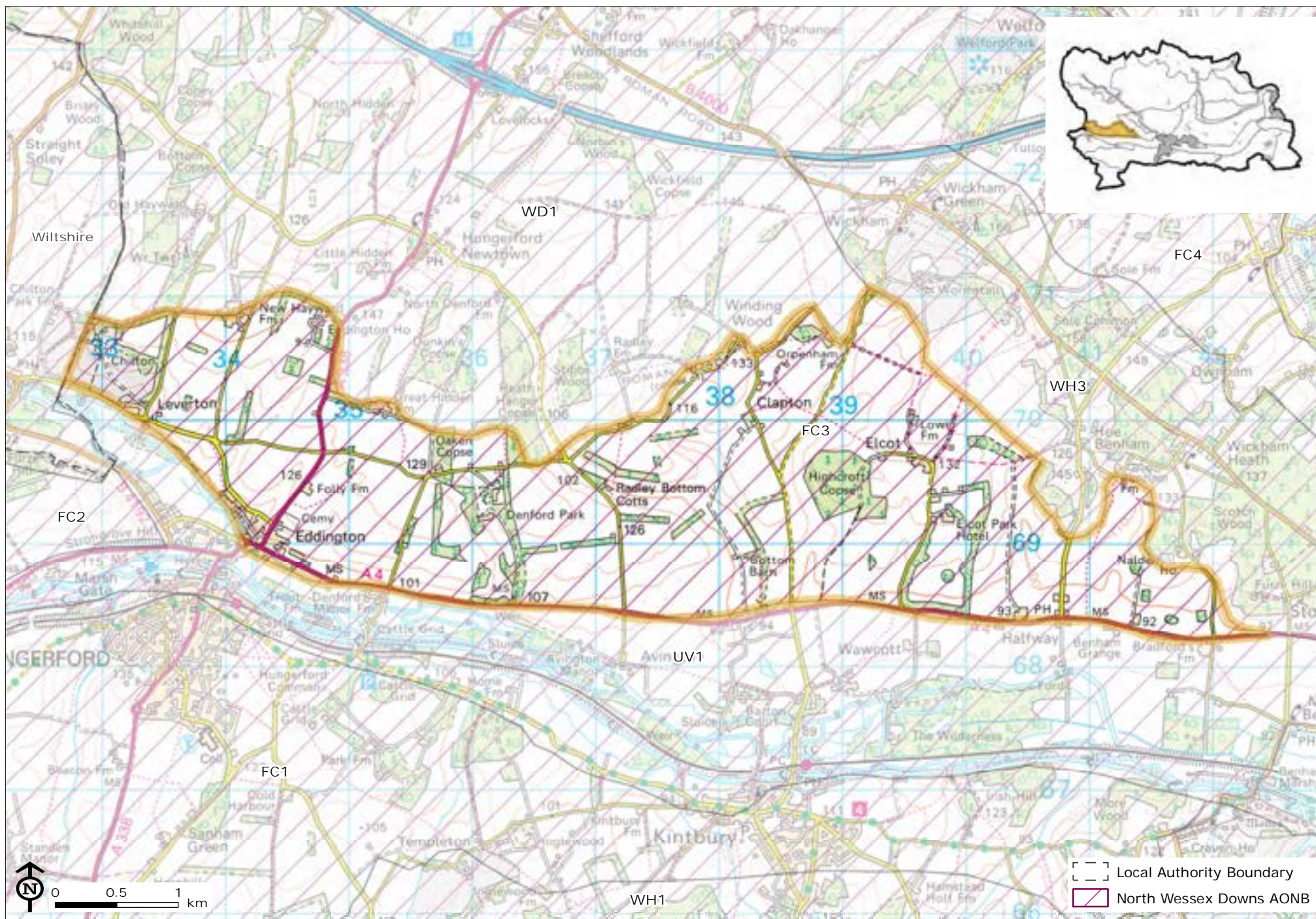
Take opportunities to strengthen the existing ancient and semi-natural woodland. There is scope to introduce hedgerow planting, to link to the woodland and create a more connected landscape.

3) Conserve the sense of separation between the ridge and development along the valley floor below and the undeveloped character of the slopes

Development extending upslope from the valley floor would represent a significant change in the existing sparse development pattern, to the detriment of the rural isolation of the higher ridge.

4) Manage recreational pressure

Positive management of recreation is required to avoid damage to important landscape or ecological characteristics or perceptual qualities of this character area. Encourage appropriate and sustainable farm diversification projects and seek sensitive design solutions to minimise the local impacts of tourist and recreation facilities.



SUMMARY

This is an open and gently rolling landscape sloping generally down towards the A4 and the River Kennet, dominated by large arable fields but with several distinctive dry valleys. Some woodland is present, particularly along the valleys and associated with ornamental parkland landscapes. Settlement is sparse, and limited principally to the valley side settlement of Eddington, which meets Hungerford at the River Kennet, with occasional scattered farmhouses and other dwellings including manors and associated parklands on the slopes.

The area is bounded to the south by the A4 and to the west by the District boundary which passes through the parkland around Chilton Lodge. The northern and eastern extents are more transitional, as the topography changes and the area becomes more wooded, particularly to the east (Woodland and Heathland Mosaic). The whole area forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Gently rolling landform underlain by chalk, rising from the Kennet Valley

A predominantly chalk landscape, capped in places by valley gravels. It is a variably shelving, gently rolling and subtly undulating landform, forming a transitional lowland area between the valley and higher chalk downs. Where the slopes are incised with dry valleys the landscape becomes more undulating and creates the impression of subtly interlocking hills in places, emphasised by the woodland cover.

2) Large rolling cereal fields, with some blocks of mixed woodland

The area comprises a mixture of small pastoral and larger rolling arable fields divided by straight-edged shelterbelts, many with conifers, and overgrown hedgerows, although sometimes the field boundaries have been lost resulting in a more open character. The area has a well-treed character, including some irregular valley side woods. Occasional pasture fields confined to areas around farmsteads and settlements, and in parkland add variety to the primarily arable landscape.

3) Sparse pattern of settlement

The area is sparsely settled with settlement comprising scattered hamlets (Clapton and Elcot) and farmhouses, the small valley side settlement of Eddington, which abuts Hungerford across the River Kennet, and the small hamlet of Halfway. Eddington has a small Conservation Area around its historic core and several Grade II Listed Buildings, but the busy A4 has a strong influence. Grade II Listed Buildings also exist at the hamlets although several of the farm buildings in this area are large industrial sheds.

4) Large houses with parklands

Grander residences located along gentle 'spurs' exploit views to the Kennet at Elcot, Denford and Chilton. These houses are the focus of valley side parklands, although none are on the Register of Parks and Gardens.

5) Quiet, open rural character and undeveloped backdrop to the Kennet Valley

The sparse settlement pattern and rolling hills create an open and rural character, largely undisturbed other than where traffic on the A4 creates some intrusion along the southern edge of the area. The A338 is also a busy road but is largely screened from the surrounding countryside by well-treed hedgerows. The slopes provide a rural backdrop to the River Kennet.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) Most fields are large and regular, as a result of formal parliamentary enclosure and more recent removal of field boundaries to form very large, 'prairie' fields. A small number of irregular fields represent medieval and post-medieval assarts. Some small woods and copses survive, on steeper slopes and ridge tops. Some of the fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries following ridgelines or valley bottoms represent 'ladder' fields, and probably result from 17th and 18th century informal enclosure.
- 2) Many of the area's quarry pits for chalk, clay and gravel may have their origins during the later medieval period. These continued to be worked on a small-scale basis into the early modern period.
- 3) Remaining areas of open fields and most areas of common land were enclosed by Act of Parliament by the early 19th century. A significant loss of ancient woodland occurred in the latter half of the 19th century when an extensive area of Winding Wood, next to Clapton, was cleared for fields.
- 4) There was a mix of hamlets and large farms on the upper valley sides. Some hamlets are the centres of manors and seem to be shrunken medieval settlements, such as Elcot. Farms were fairly evenly distributed across the upper slopes of the valley and generally lie in areas of irregular early enclosure. Most farms are named after nearby places or topographic features.

- 5) Extensive parklands e.g. Chilton Estate were established on the lower slopes of the valley in the 18th and 19th centuries. The extent of the parkland has remained fairly stable, despite change in uses, as Elcot Park is now a hotel. Denford Park housed Norland College from 1967 to 2002, but has returned to residential use.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) The area contains woodland, pasture and grassland habitats. There are two small areas of designated ancient woodland present at Oaken Copse and Highcroft Copse. These have both been protected as Local Wildlife Sites, for their important woodland habitats.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

This character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, connecting boundary elements and historic parkland²³.

2) Strong wooded context

Mixed woodland is a visually prominent feature, and provides a wooded backdrop to the large arable fields. The numerous irregular valley side woods also break up the landscape, and provide visual interest. The woodland provides an important historic and biodiversity feature.

3) Large houses and their parklands

Positioned to take advantage of views across the valley below, these add variety and interest to the landscape, with associated designed parkland as at the Chilton Estate, Denford Park and Elcot Park, although none are on the Register of Parks and Gardens.

4) Open, tranquil rural character and backdrop to the Kennet Valley

This is a sparsely settled rural area. Containment provided by the undulating landform and by tree cover means that for much of the area there is little intrusion from development. The undeveloped slopes provide a rural backdrop to the River Kennet.

DETRACTORS

1) Loss of semi-natural woodlands

In the past, replanting has replaced traditional woodlands with linear coniferous tree belts resulting in the loss of an important ecological and visual feature of the area. The linear coniferous tree belts cut across the landscape pattern.

2) Loss and decline of hedgerow boundaries

Loss of field boundary elements in the latter half of the 20th century, especially hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, has reduced the variety and increased the scale of the landscape in some areas.

3) Changes to farming practice

Intensification in farming has led to loss of environmental assets particularly conversion of permanent pasture to arable fields. Many areas are now dominated by horse related

²³ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

infrastructure including extensive paddocks.

4) Introduction of large agricultural buildings

There has been some development of large agricultural buildings on the valley floor, which do not fit into the grain of this landscape, and which detract from the open character.

5) Traffic pressure on minor rural roads

Increased traffic on the rural roads, including larger vehicles, which can lead to the erosion of verges and banks, leading to widening and therefore a loss in their character. Signage, fencing and kerbing would all also impact the remote feel of the area.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its ancient semi-natural woodlands, connecting hedgerows and historic parkland. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Conserve existing mixed woodland and enhance field boundaries

Take opportunities to strengthen existing ancient and semi-natural woodland. There is scope to introduce further hedgerow planting without detracting significantly from the open, expansive character of the landscape. Ensure that tree cover continues to provide screening along the A338 and A4.

3) Retain the sense of separation between higher ground and development along the valley floor below maintaining the open undeveloped valley slopes and crests

Development extending upslope from the valley floor at Eddington would represent a significant change in the existing development pattern, to the detriment of the rural isolation of the higher ground to the north. Similarly, new farm buildings should aim to relate to less exposed parts of the valley slopes.

4) Conserve and manage elements of ornamental parkland landscapes that survive on the valley sides

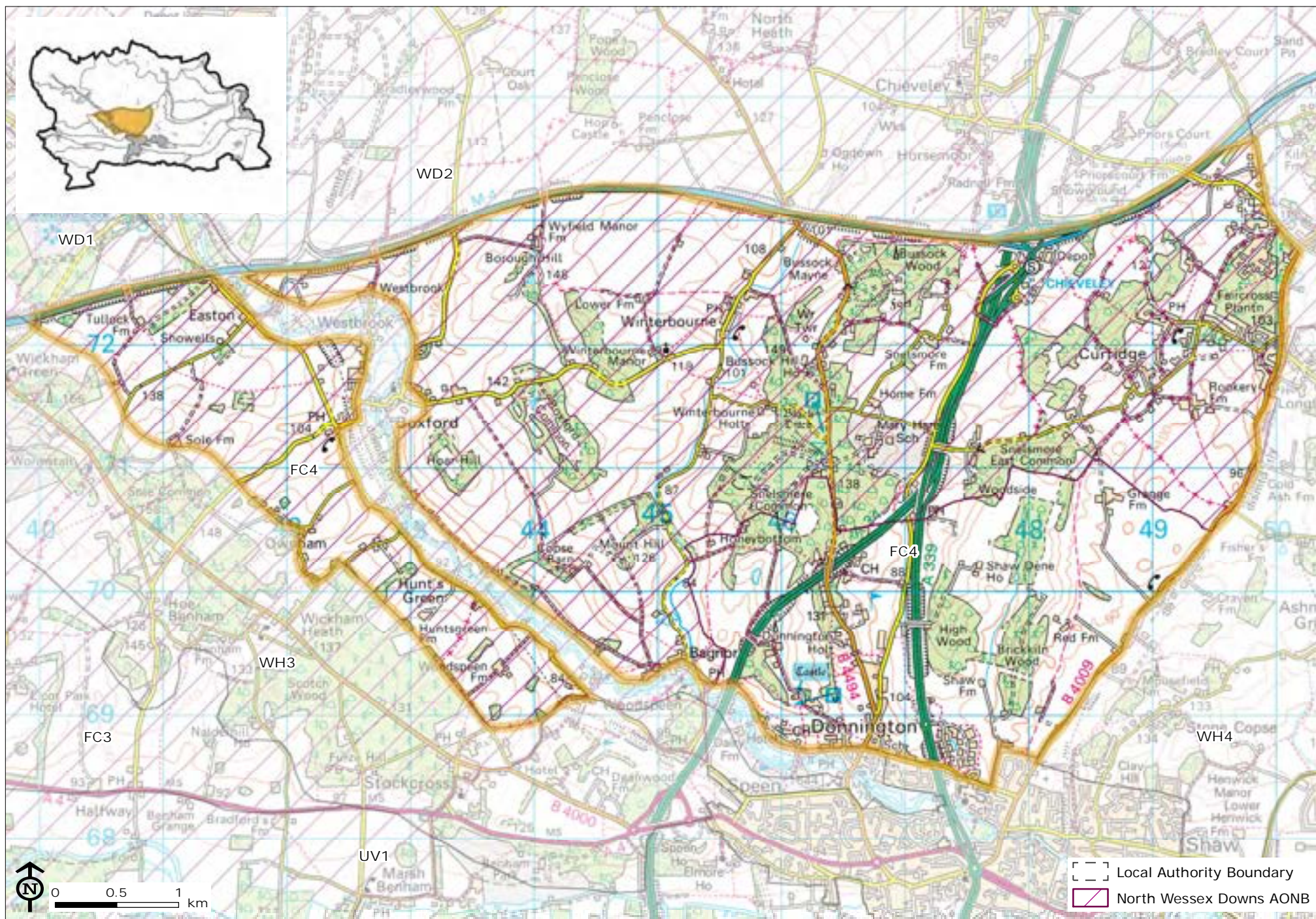
Ensure appropriate management of remaining elements of ornamental parkland landscapes, which are mainly unregistered e.g. Chilton Lodge, Leverton Manor, and Denford Park. Consider restoration of these features where appropriate.

5) Seek to promote enhanced management of horse paddocks, and particularly boundary associated elements

Ensure any horse paddocks are sympathetically integrated into the landscape and ensure that any stables or manèges are carefully sited.

6) Conserve the character of minor rural roads

Continue to recognise the contribution the enclosed rural lanes make to the character of the rural landscape in any future highway works. Avoid the use of standardised and intrusive urban materials, lighting and signage.



SUMMARY

A generally large open and gently rolling landscape, rising from the Lambourn Valley. The area has more surface water and streams than is typical in Farmed Chalk Mosaic areas. There are extensive areas of interconnected woodland, particularly on the higher ground, and heathland is present at Snelsmore Common. An accessible landscape, with many public rights of way, it is relatively sparsely settled with the exception of Donnington in the south of the area. The area is predominately rural and tranquil, although the A34, A339 and M4 introduce noise and movement.

This large area is bisected by the River Lambourn valley (LCA UV2) in the west. It is bounded by the M4 to the north, while the southern extent is determined by the settlement edge of Newbury. The eastern and western edges are transitional zones based on geology into the Woodland Heathland Mosaic type. The majority of the area forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB, the exceptions being the slopes around Newbury.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Open and gently rolling landform, rising from the Lambourn Valley

A predominantly chalk landscape, with clay and gravel drift deposits including some gravel capped ridges. It is a variably shelving, gently rolling and undulating landform, forming a transitional area between the Lambourn valley and higher chalk downs. The area around Curridge has a more irregular local hummocky landform. Boxford Chalk Pit and Winterbourne Chalk Pit are designated as SSSIs for their geological interest, and Chieveley Old Kiln Quarry and Snelsmore Common as RIGSSs.

2) Presence of surface water and small streams

A direct consequence of the underlying geological and soil conditions is the presence of surface water due to impeded drainage, with surface springs along the clay interface and a highly divided network of small streams. The Winterbourne Stream is seasonal, and influences the western part of this area. There are numerous wells and springs, particularly in the wooded areas e.g. Bussock Wood and Holly Copse.

3) Diverse land use of large rolling arable farmland and extensive woodland, plus areas of heathland and parkland

This area has a variety of land uses including cereal fields, some vegetable growing, pastures, paddocks and woodlands. Field patterns are generally large and regular, often with very straight edges, although around Curridge the pattern is more irregular and sinuous. Many field boundaries have been removed and those that remain are often thin, heavily flailed hawthorn hedges creating a very large scale and open character. Extensive and interconnected woodlands on the higher land create a well-wooded character throughout the area. Extensive planting of mixed woodland plantations and shelterbelts along the A34, to mitigate its impacts on the landscape, adds to this wooded character. There are some areas with a parkland character, such as around Winterbourne Manor, and areas of remnant heathland are present in Snelsmore Common.

4) Generally sparse and dispersed settlement pattern in the wider rural area

Curridge, Winterbourne and Donnington are the only settlements in the area, aside from housing on the fringes of Bagnor and Boxford, rural villages which lie principally within the Lambourn Valley. Denison Barracks, home to the 77th brigade army unit lies on the fringes of Hermitage to the north of Curridge. Curridge has a dispersed form mainly dating from the late 20th century, while Winterbourne and Donnington are more linear. Close to Donnington and the edge of Newbury, housing has spread along the roads leading into this area in the form of Edwardian villas and late 20th century large detached houses. Away from these villages settlement is sparse, particularly west of the A34, with scattered red brick farm and larger buildings nestling into the landscape along a series of farm tracks, e.g. Mary Hare School between Snelsmore Common and the A34. The Vodafone HQ on the settlement edge at Shaw is well screened by trees.

5) Busy major roads contrast with rural road network

The M4 forms the northern border to this area, with the A34 and A339 bisecting the area. These introduce noise and movement into the landscape, although planting along the route of the A34 has now matured and partially limits views of the road. Away from the busy roads there is a rural road network, which is particularly sparse east of the A339. Many of these lanes are sunken, bordered by wide verges and overhung by woodland.

6) Historic and archaeological landscape relating to strategic position at intersection of east west and north south routes.

The Iron Age hillfort at Bussock Camp was one of a series of forts flanking the Kennet Valley. There are also linear earthworks at Snelsmore Common. Donnington Castle dates to 1386 and rebuilt during the Civil War.

7) An accessible landscape

There is extensive access into the area through the network of green lanes, byways and

footpaths, including the Lambourn Valley Way. Snelsmore Common and Country Park is also an area of open access heathland widely used for recreation.

8) Low wooded horizons contrast with open rural landscape

Low wooded horizons create localised areas of enclosure and containment in an otherwise large-scale and open landscape which contrasts markedly with the intimate landscapes of the wooded heaths and commons to the east and west, and the intervening Lambourn valley. Away from the busy roads, the paucity of settlement and vehicular access makes this a more remote and isolated area.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) A small number of more irregular fields represent medieval and post-medieval assarts, with some 'ladder' fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries following ridgelines or valley bottoms resulting from 17th and 18th century informal enclosure. Most of the open fields and some downland had been enclosed into private fields by the start of the 18th century. Boundary removal, including of historic hedgerows, and reorganisation has rationalised these into fields suited to modern mechanised agriculture, and construction of the M4, A34 and A339 intensified the reorganisation of fields. Some isolated historic fields do survive around Boxford and Bagnor. Large areas of paddocks have been created from historic fields around settlements.
- 2) Earthworks, including the Back Ditch, run across the centre of Snelsmore Common, indicating that by the Iron Age this landscape was widely (though probably not densely) settled, a pattern that continued into the medieval period. The Iron Age hillfort at Bussock Camp was part of a series of hillforts on the higher ground flanking the Kennet valley, and survives as substantial wooded earthworks within Bussock Wood.
- 3) There is evidence of Romano British settlements around Boxford, including two villa sites. Excavations in 2017 uncovered a nationally important mosaic. These finds indicate the presence of high-status Romano British occupation.
- 4) Parklands are present at Donnington Grove and Winterbourne House. Donnington Castle dates from 1386 but was extensively rebuilt during the Civil War, when it was a besieged royalist stronghold. A golf course was established within its grounds during the 1990s, reusing the 18th century mansion as a club house. The golf course has utilised some of the original landscaping features including the lake, tree lines and avenues. Arlington Manor was built in the mid-19th century, and the estate and house were sold for use as the Mary Hare School in 1947, after it was requisitioned for military use in the Second World War.
- 5) Snelsmore Common and Snelsmore East Common remain as common land today. Snelsmore Common was requisitioned for military use during WWII, and several concrete roads constructed during this phase of use remain on the common. A lack of grazing on the commons has led to them becoming substantially wooded-over, which is being tackled by management and conservation work.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) Historically woodland was concentrated to the east of the Lambourn valley, with very sparse tree cover to the west. The eastern area has retained its historic wooded character, although blocks of ancient woodland have been cleared of native species and replanted as mixed broadleaved and coniferous plantations. The replanted woods are very large in size and lack the biodiversity of ancient woodlands. Several areas of ancient and other old woods have been cleared over the course of the 20th century, mainly for housing.
- 2) The highly variable land cover supports a range of woodland, pasture, arable land and small areas of remnant heathland. Much of the woodland is designated as Local Wildlife Sites. The mainly deciduous woodland gives way to important areas of grassland. The higher ground copses are generally formed of oak, beech and birch, with occasional Scots pine.

- 3) Snelsmore Common SSSI is the largest and richest remaining area of heathland in west Berkshire, and has a variety of woodland and heathland habitats comprising dry heath, wet heath, valley mire (bog), birch woodland and ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland. Valley mire is particularly of interest both botanically and for well-preserved peat remains. Management is currently carried out by hand to conserve this important open heathland habitat. The woodlands support a variety of birds, and the heathland, scrub and scattered trees of the common are also attractive to many birds. The increasingly rare nightjar also occurs here, one of the few Berkshire localities in which it can be found.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The majority of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, remnant heathland and more open farmland areas where sunken lanes heighten the sense of seclusion²⁴.

2) Snelsmore Common

The common is the largest and richest remaining area of heathland in West Berkshire and is an important area for recreation, reflected in its designation as a Country Park.

3) Woodlands and strongly wooded horizons

The wooded context helps integrate settlements within the landscape, and creates a unifying backdrop for the area, which is visible from many other areas in the District. The woodland restricts views within the area, and creates an enclosed landscape.

4) Rural character away from major roads and urban edges

Landform and tree cover mean that away from the urban edge of Newbury and the M4, A34 and A339 there is a rapid transition to a more intimate rural landscape, with small traditional villages and farmsteads nestling into the landscape.

5) Winding rural roads and sunken lanes

Sunken lanes lined by overgrown hedgerows and wide grass verges running down the valley sides to the Lambourn heighten the sense of seclusion and intimacy within the area. These contribute to the area's rural feel, even in close proximity to Newbury.

6) Historic landscape character

This area is particularly rich in historical and archaeological features, which combine with the parkland areas and woodland limiting urban influence to evoke a perception of strong time-depth in the landscape.

DETRACTORS

1) Decline in extent of heathland

Up until the early 1990s, afforestation and, as a result of lack of grazing, the development of scrub woodland, had resulted in a significant reduction in the extent of open heathland. However since then there has been some recovery of the latter as a result of clearance and ongoing management of invasive vegetation.

2) Loss and decline of hedgerow boundaries

²⁴ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

Loss of field boundary elements in the latter half of the 20th century, especially hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, has reduced the variety and scale of the landscape in some areas. This is compounded by the poor management of the remaining hedgerows.

3) Lack of appropriate management of woodland

A decline in traditional management techniques including coppicing has led to the decline of areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland.

4) Changes to farming practice

Intensification in farming has led to loss of environmental assets particularly through the conversion of permanent pasture to arable fields. There remains an area of pig farming near Easton. Increase in horse paddocks and some subdivision of fields into fenced horse paddocks has occurred e.g. in the vicinity of Bagnor and Boxford.

5) Mineral extraction

There is both historic and ongoing mineral extraction around Curridge and J13 of the M4. This can have a negative impact on the landscape, and careful consideration needs to be taken as to the future of such sites after the extraction has finished.

6) Intrusive influence of major road network

The A34 and A339 bisect the area, and the M4 motorway acts as the northern boundary. All of these introduce noise and movement, and disturb the rural tranquillity of parts of the area, although mitigation planting has taken place to reduce the visual and aural disturbance.

7) Increasing development pressures

Pressure for further residential, commercial and also educational development may lead to development which is out of character and which detracts from the rural qualities of the area. Development may also have an impact on the rural lane network, as traffic increases, and suburbanising features are added e.g. kerbing and signage.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its historic parklands and remnant heathland. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Conserve and restore heathland characteristics

Take opportunities for restoration of habitats and reinstatement of features that have been lost, including management of areas of re-wooded common land to reintroduce a stronger heathland presence and link existing small, fragmented sites. Consider potential for reintroduction of grazing management.

3) Conserve and extend existing mixed woodland

Appropriate woodland management is particularly important for ancient and semi-natural woodland areas but also relevant to more recently planted woodland areas. Appropriate coppicing, pollarding, planting, thinning and management of invasive species and disease should all be encouraged. New woodland planting should aim to provide enclosure and link isolated hilltop woodland blocks to the more wooded adjacent landscape areas. New woodland planting should also aim to further mitigate the impact of the M4. It is important to ensure that woodland boundaries are sensitive to landform and do not cut across slopes.

4) Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements

Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows, and encourage

restoration/reinstatement of hedgerows within expansive arable fields. Where appropriate, conserve the wooded context of settlements, to contain and filter the impact of built form. In many cases, stubs of removed boundaries remain and could be utilised in hedgerow replanting.

5) Opportunities for restoration of completed extraction sites

Opportunities should be taken for the sympathetic planting, enhancement, and restoration of completed extraction sites. The location of the site should influence the future of the site, to complement surrounding landscape. In some locations there may be the potential to leave the site as a water body managed for ecology, rather than restoring the site to its original ground level.

6) Mitigate the adverse influences of the major roads and maintain character of rural lanes

Seek to further screen the M4, A339 and A34 into the landscape. Minimise road improvements that may degrade the rural quality of the area and avoid the use of standardised and intrusive urban materials, street furniture, lighting and signage measures whenever appropriate.

7) Maintain the rural settlement character

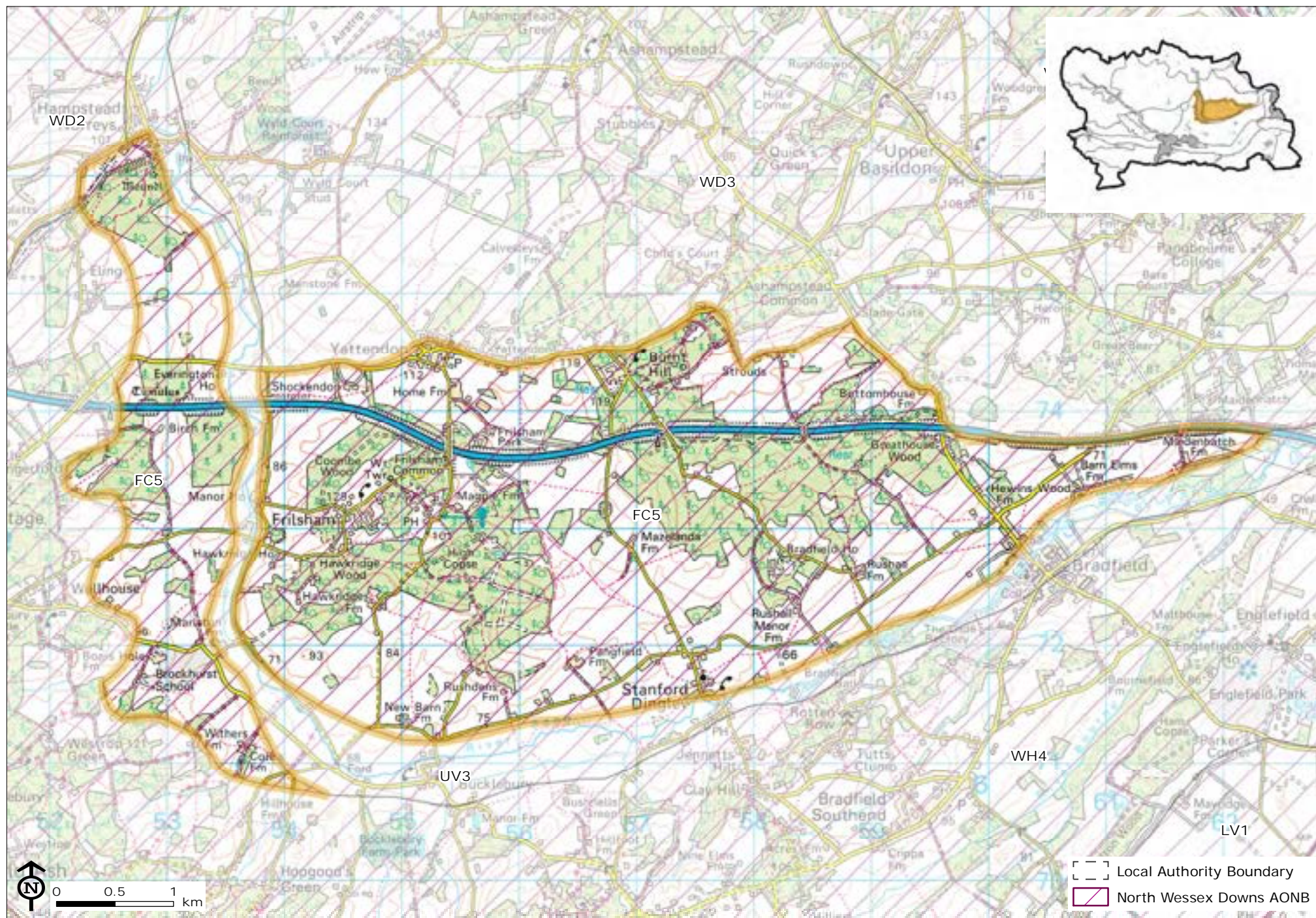
Seek to conserve the dispersed pattern of settlement, formed of small hamlets and loose linear settlements each with their own identity. Any new large agricultural or commercial buildings should be sensitively designed to ensure they can be fully integrated into the landscape.

8) Seek to promote enhanced management of horse paddocks, and particularly boundary associated elements

Ensure any horse paddocks are sympathetically integrated into the landscape and ensure that any stables or manèges are carefully sited.

9) Actively manage and conserve features of historic significance

Preserve the sense of time-depth in the area, through conservation of historic elements such as Bussock Wood hillfort and Donnington Castle.



SUMMARY

This is a topographically varied area, with an undulating landform, generally sloping towards the Pang valley (LCA UV3) which bisects the area north-south and also forms most of its southern boundary. The area is dominated by woodland, creating an enclosed character. There is a strong presence of surface water and streams. The woodland is interspersed with arable and pasture fields. Settlement is concentrated in small villages at Frilsham and Yattendon in the north and Stanford Dingley to the south, with many scattered farmhouses. The M4 cuts across the centre of this otherwise rural landscape.

Beyond the Pang Valley to the south, and also to the west of the area, farmland rising to a wooded ridge is characterised as the Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic (WH4). To the north there is a transition to the rising Wooded Downland LCT, although towards the eastern end of the area the boundary is more clearly defined by a steep sided dry valley and, in part, by the M4. The whole area forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Geologically and topographically varied with steep and gently undulating slopes

Plateau and valley gravel drift deposits overlaying chalk, London Clay and Reading Beds have created an undulating topography with both steep and gentle slopes. The varying geology has resulted in the areas being dominated by nutrient-poor soils.

2) Presence of surface water and small streams

A direct consequence of the underlying geological and soil conditions is the presence of surface water due to impeded drainage, with surface springs along the clay interface and a highly divided network of small streams. This is particularly prevalent between Frilsham and Stanford Dingley.

3) Diverse land cover, dominated by woodland

Linked blocks of mixed woodland throughout the area create a strong sense of enclosure. Deciduous blocks associated with former commons, e.g. Ashampstead Common and Frilsham Common, are dominated by pioneer and succession woodland with birch and willow. There is a high proportion of coniferous woodland planted along the M4. The woodland is interspersed with a mixture of areas of fragmented and open arable farmland and pastoral fields. There are numerous disused gravel and sand pits which sometimes scar the landscape. Although most enclosed meadows were also reorganised, blocks survive between Everington and Hampstead Norreys and around Stanford Dingley.

4) Small-scale settlement pattern with traditional vernacular villages

Settlement is small scale and concentrated at Frilsham and Yattendon. Yattendon is a traditional nucleated village on the northern edge of the character area and contains yellow brick and white-painted Georgian houses surrounding a central square. The small red brick settlement of Frilsham is located on the upper slopes of the Pang valley surround by wooded common land. The smaller village of Stanford Dingley lies at a crossing point of the River Pang and contains brick and timber framed buildings. Both Yattendon and Stanford Dingley contain Conservation Areas. There are clusters of red brick farmhouses throughout the area. Small estates and large detached houses have been built around Yattendon in the late 20th century, but this has not greatly expanded the built-up area of either settlement. Settlements are connected by rural roads/lanes.

5) An accessible landscape

An extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and byways pass through this landscape, connecting the small settlements, including Berkshire Circular Routes linking to the Pang valley and settlements.

6) Rural and tranquil landscape

Away from the visually and aurally intrusive M4, which severs the area, this is an enclosed and peaceful rural landscape, with the undulating landform adding interest and providing some glimpsed longer views, typically framed by woodland.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The mostly medieval in origin fields had been enclosed by the 18th century, mostly through piecemeal enclosure. Areas of regularly-shaped early enclosures existed e.g. between Yattendon and Beche Farm, and the only Parliamentary enclosures were at Frilsham. The valley floor meadows were mostly enclosed into pasture fields, although those around Frilsham and between Bucklebury and Stanford Dingley were turned into water-meadows during the 18th century.
- 2) This was a well-wooded area, with the highest concentration of woodland in the south. Common heathland grazing areas e.g. Burnthill and Ashampstead Commons were located within the fields and woods. Unlike many commons, these were not later enclosed, although

Ashampstead Common was substantially wooded over by the late 19th century and was no longer an open heathland area.

- 3) There has been no change in the overall amount of woodland; however large areas of ancient woodland have been replanted. Large new commercial tree plantations have been created from former fields at several locations e.g. between Frilsham and Yattendon.
- 4) The Scheduled bowl barrow at Everington provides evidence of Bronze Age communities. A Romano-British villa near Eling was discovered in the 19th century. Yattendon and Frilsham were all recorded in Domesday, and Hampstead Norreys' motte and bailey castle was built in the medieval period.
- 5) The medieval landscape of the area was characterised by nucleated hamlets and villages, mostly sited on the valley floor and surrounded by open fields on the valley slopes and with common meadow grazing by the riverside. Yattendon was an exception to this pattern and lay at the junction of several routes through the area on the crest of the eastern watershed. Some individual farms existed as part of the settlement pattern, located either on the valley floor between villages or on the upper slopes of the valley.
- 6) Minor parklands existed at Marlston House, Frilsham Park and Yattendon Park. Much of the parkland in the area has been enclosed and converted to arable fields and many parks now have only small stubs of grounds immediately around the house, such as Frilsham Park. Housing has since been developed on sections of Yattendon Park and a school established at Marlston House.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) Woodland is important to the area, and the woods are of ecological significance, with many substantial areas of ancient woodland, which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. The woodland is interspersed with fragmented and open arable farmland and pastoral fields, and occasional areas of remnant calcareous grassland.
- 2) Combe Wood SSSI contains ancient woodland supporting a range of semi-natural woodland stand types. The ground flora is diverse and includes many species which have restricted distribution in Berkshire.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The whole of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations and more open farmland areas where sunken lanes heighten the sense of seclusion²⁵.

2) Wooded horizons

The wooded context helps integrate settlements within the landscape, and creates a unifying backdrop for the area, which is visible from many other areas in the District. The woodland restricts views within the area, and creates an enclosed landscape. The sense of intimacy is enhanced when travelling along the wooded rural lanes and along the dry valley on the north-eastern edge of the LCA.

3) Diverse land cover

The varied geological pattern of clays, silts, sands and gravels has produced a highly diverse land cover mosaic of woodland and pasture, with areas of more open arable farmland on the

²⁵ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

slopes dropping down to the Pang Valley.

4) Historic landscape character

This area is rich in historical and archaeological features e.g. the motte at Hampstead Norreys, which combine with the parkland areas and woodland limiting urban influence to evoke a perception of strong time-depth in the landscape.

5) Peaceful and rural character

Attractive rural villages are joined by an intricate network of winding rural roads and sunken lanes overhung by woodland. Away from the influence of the M4 the area feels remote and tranquil.

DETRACTORS

1) Loss of heathland habitats

There has been a decline in the extent of heathland vegetation through changing land use patterns, including conversion to forestry or lack of management leading to scrub invasion and succession of woodland.

2) Lack of appropriate management of woodland

In the 20th century ancient woodland was cleared and replaced with predominately coniferous plantations. This is likely to have damaged or removed historic features such as woodbanks, as well as reducing biodiversity in the area. A decline in traditional management techniques including coppicing has contributed to the decline of areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland. Geometric forms of coniferous plantations, particularly around the M4, do not fit well within the landscape.

3) Loss and decline of hedgerow boundaries

Loss of field boundary elements in the latter half of the 20th century, especially hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, has reduced the variety and scale of the landscape in some areas.

4) Changes in farming practice

Major changes in the 20th century include removal of historic field boundaries to better suit modern agriculture, and conversion of former water meadows to arable. Agricultural intensification has led to a loss of environmental assets, including the conversion of permanent pasture to arable land and increased demand for horse paddocks.

5) Intrusive influence of M4

The M4 bisects the area, isolating the north and south. The motorway introduces noise and movement, and locally disturbs the rural tranquillity of the area. The construction of the M4 also further contributed to the reorganisation of the landscape by disrupting and truncating fieldscapes. Some regular plantations were planted which screen the motorway but do not 'fit' with the local character.

6) Increasing development pressures

Increasing development pressures in the area, not only to construct new buildings but also in redeveloping smaller houses into large single dwellings. Incremental changes are also changing the character of the rural villages e.g. entry gates, security lighting and paddocks.

7) Increasing traffic and pressures on the rural lane network

Development pressures have also led to increased traffic on the lane network, and the consequent suburbanisation of the roads including kerbing, widening and signing, which damages the character of the winding lanes.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY**1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB**

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including the mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations and more open farmland areas with sunken lanes. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Diversification of plantations and creation of new woodland

Increase the broadleaved element to some of the existing plantation blocks, and create more variable edges to soften the geometric forms, particularly close to the M4. New tree planting should be aware of impacting on the archaeological record.

3) Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements

Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows, and encourage restoration/reinstatement of hedgerows. In many cases, remnant boundaries could be utilised in hedgerow replanting. For example farmers around Frilsham are putting in new hedgerows, increasing both the number and quality of hedgerows in the area.

4) Mitigate the impact of the M4, and enhance integration into the wider landscape

Mixed coniferous and broadleaved plantations have been created along the M4 motorway. The mix of broadleaf and coniferous woodland should be maintained, with more broadleaf plantations as the coniferous plantations mature and are felled.

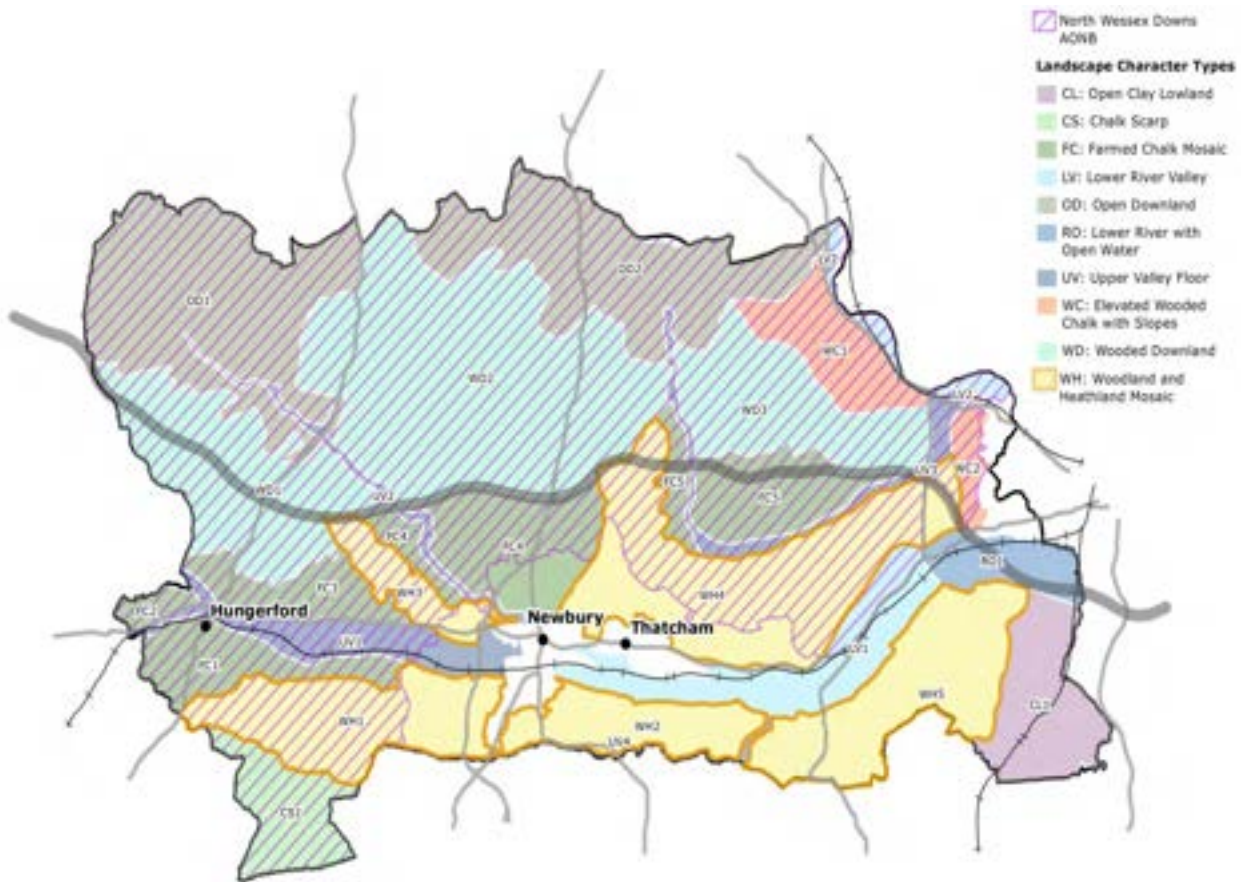
5) Conserve rural settlement character

The pattern of scattered peaceful and rural nucleated villages, each with their own identity, should be respected. Settlement edges should continue to be integrated within the rural landscape setting with strengthened hedgerows and woodland planting to provide containment. Telecommunications masts are an obvious detractor on the skyline, and care should be taken when siting these to ensure the visual impacts are minimised.

6) Retain the rural character of the lanes

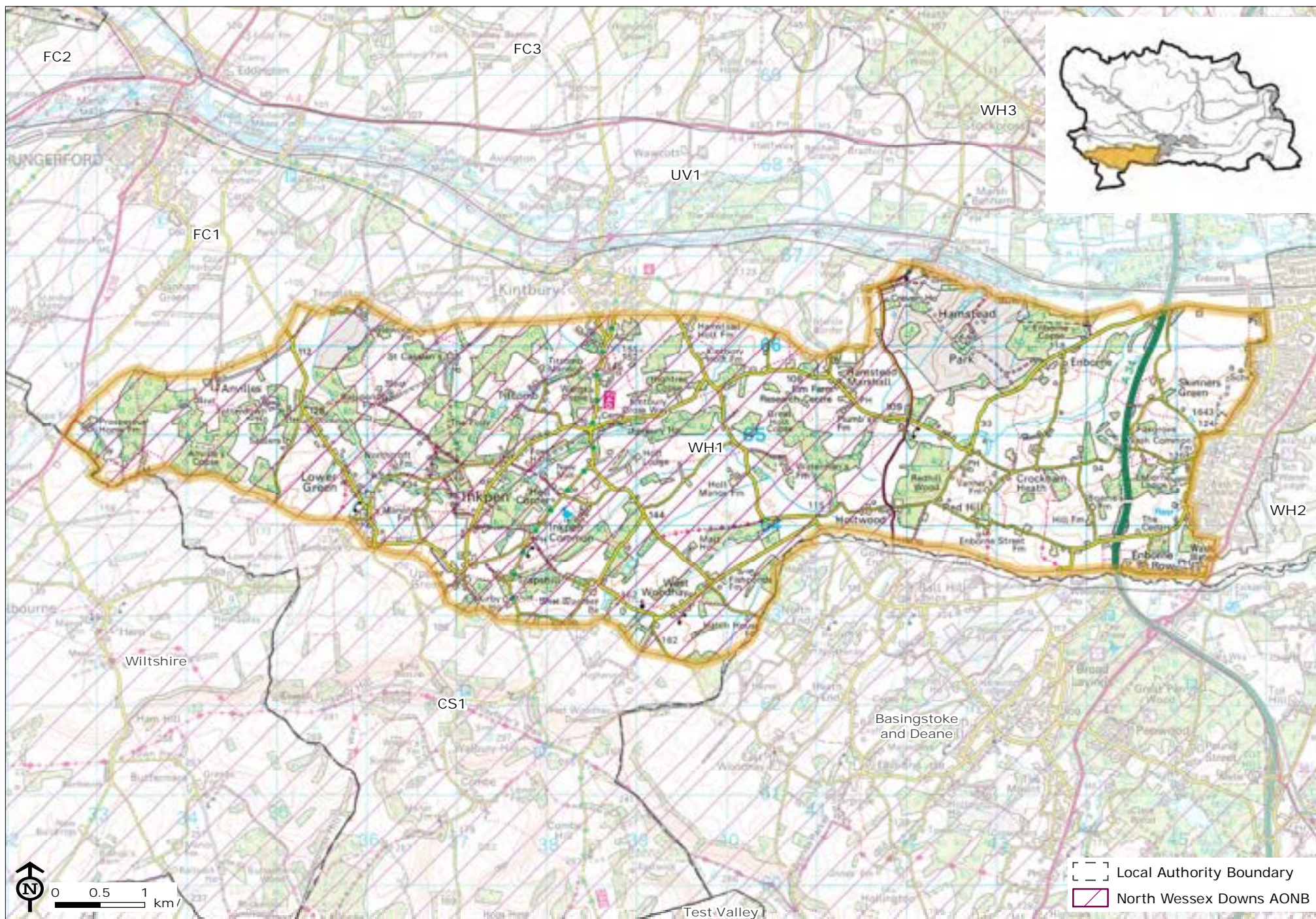
Minimise road improvements that may degrade the rural quality of the area, such as the use of standardised materials more suited to an urban environment. Many lanes are single track with few passing places.

Landscape Character Type WH: **Woodland and Heathland Mosaic**



The **Woodland and Heathland Mosaic** LCT is subdivided into five Local Character Areas:

- WH1: Inkpen Woodland and Heathland Mosaic
- WH2: Greenham Woodland and Heathland Mosaic
- WH3: Wickham Woodland and Heathland Mosaic
- WH4: Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic
- WH5: Burghfield Woodland and Heathland Mosaic.



SUMMARY

A topographically complex area with ridges and shallow valleys, incised by numerous small streams flowing from the spring line where the chalk meets the clay. Woodland dominates the land cover, interspersed with arable and pasture fields and small areas of heathland. The extent of connected woodland creates an enclosed and very rural character despite the extent of settlement. The open areas have views across to Walbury Hill which forms a prominent backdrop. It is crossed by a network of rural lanes which provide a framework for the linear settlement pattern, particularly around Inkpen.

The western edge is delineated by the District boundary. The dramatically rising slopes of the chalk scarp at Walbury Hill mark the south extent of the area and Newbury to the east. The northern edge towards Kintbury and Hamstead Marshall is created by the transition in geology to the valley of the River Kennet, and the less-wooded farmed chalk mosaic on the valley slopes. The area to the west of Park Lane forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB; the essential character of the area extends beyond the AONB boundary towards Newbury, with the presence of parklands a feature as at the surviving coherent parkland at Hamstead Marshall.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Geologically and topographically varied with undulating slopes rising from the rivers Enborne and Kennet

The area is underlain by a mosaic of clays, gravels and sands, creating a complex micro topography of undulating hills, consecutive ridges and small shallow valleys.

2) Presence of surface water and small streams running parallel to ridges

The spring line, where the chalk meets the clay, cuts across the area, resulting in an extensive network of small streams, springs and wells. The watercourses are frequently dammed, so that standing water within small on-stream ponds is a visible element.

3) Patchwork of land use, dominated by woodland including areas of common and parkland

The area has a strongly wooded character, composed of numerous interlinked woodland blocks, including ancient woodland, that enclose irregular assarted damp pastures and unimproved grasslands. There are also heathland remnants such as at Inkpen Common, which is a remnant of the former Inkpen Great Common. Evidence of medieval deer parks remain as areas of parkland, for example around the Grade II Registered Hamstead Marshall Park.

4) Varied field pattern with strong hedgerows

A mosaic of small irregularly shaped fields of arable/pasture, often with wooded margins or contained by thick hedges, characteristic of piecemeal and informal medieval assarting and enclosure. In some areas the hedgerows dividing the pastures have been lost resulting in a larger and more open landscape.

5) Ecologically important network of ancient woodland and heathland habitats

There is considerable diversity within the wooded framework, and light sands and gravels create a heathy character in places. This is illustrated by commons of birch and bracken, heathy rides through the woodlands, and areas of poorer acid pasture. There are also important small areas of remnant heath as for example at Inkpen Common SSSI. The valley woodlands include wet valley alderwood and the woodland edges frequently have less dense stands of birch and hazel with a bracken understorey. Elsewhere there are coppices within oak woodland.

6) Tight network of rural lanes, often bounded by banks form the framework for loose, linear settlements

This character area is crossed by a tight network of rural lanes often bounded by banks. These form the framework for settlements, which are predominantly linear villages, such as Lower Green and Inkpen. More recently growth around Inkpen has linked up previously distinct historic settlement nuclei to create a larger village. Small hamlets and farms and studs are dispersed throughout the area, plus some modern estate and bungalow development. However, the combination of wooded land cover and gently undulating landform means that buildings are generally well integrated into their landscape context. The A34 crosses across the east of the area and Newbury forms the eastern boundary.

7) Intimate small scale rural character including dark skies

The landscape has a coherent character, with a consistent framework provided by the strong structure of woodlands, hedgerows and trees. This creates a small scale, enclosed and intimate rural character. The tranquillity is enhanced by a lack of intrusion of modern life into the majority of the area (away from the A34), and there are very dark skies.

8) Spectacular views to the Walbury escarpment

Much of the area has views to the Walbury escarpment and Walbury Hill which forms a prominent backdrop.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) This was a more wooded area than adjacent parts of the District and much of it was found as large, often contiguous blocks of woods. These were a mix of ancient and other old woods. Discrete woods such as Curr and Hightree Copses south-east of Kintbury created wooded areas in their own right. Progressive woodland clearance through the process of assarting resulted in a mosaic of irregularly shaped fields with wooded margins or contained by thick hedges.
- 2) The chalk, clay and gravel quarry pits may have later medieval origins, and continued to be worked on a small-scale basis into the early modern period. The medieval landscape of small fields interspersed with commons, woods and heath was gradually enclosed, with most land enclosed by the 18th century. Commons and woods were the last to be enclosed, and only a stub of Inkpen Common remained after the early 19th century.
- 3) As with other wooded parts of the District evidence of pre-medieval activity is limited and comprises archaeological remains of later prehistoric field systems and documentary references to settlements extant at the time-of the Norman Conquest. This does not indicate that the area was not settled and used during the preceding periods, merely that evidence for this has not yet been found – possibly as the wooded nature of the landscape can militate against the discovery of earlier archaeological remains. A settlement at Inkpen was mentioned in a charter of 935 AD, while Enborne and Hamstead Marshall are both mentioned in Domesday. During the post-conquest period, two motte and bailey castles were built on a low spur with wide views over the Kennet valley at Hamstead Marshall, and a third mound, 800m to the east, is suggested as being a siege work for attacking the mottes. There is a further possible motte at West Woodhay.
- 4) The Forest of Berkshire, a royal hunting preserve, encompassed the areas north of the Enborne and Kennet so this area was subject to Forest Law. Even after extensive disafforestation in 1227, these gravel plateaux retained a predominantly wooded character and their continued value as hunting grounds is evident in the large number of deer parks created in the medieval period. Many survive today as landscaped parks attached to country houses e.g. Hamstead Marshall, first recorded in 1229 and now a Registered Park & Garden (Grade II).
- 5) The First Battle of Newbury (1643), a key engagement in the Civil War, took place on the plateau and valley side west of Newbury around Wash Common. The core of the battle site is a Registered Battlefield but, owing to the degree of subsequent rationalisation of field systems and construction of the A34 Newbury bypass, the land cover bears relatively few similarities to that the battle was fought on. There are, however, significant below-ground archaeological remains associated with the battle.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) There are a diverse range of habitats within the area, a large number of which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites, and a few nationally important SSSI. The woodland, much of which is semi-natural and/or ancient, is particularly important, as are the grassland and parkland habitats and the wet and dry heathland.
- 2) The SSSIs include Catmore and Winterley Copses, which has one of the richest flora of any Berkshire woodland. Inkpen Crocus Fields SSSI is an important grassland site for the Red Data Book spring crocus (*Crocus vernus*), which is an alien species known to have been present at this site since 1800.
- 3) Avery's Pightle Nature Reserve is one of the few unspoiled meadows left in Berkshire, and is a haven for insects, butterflies and birds.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The character area lying west of Hamstead Marshall and Holtwood forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the presence of parklands, ancient semi-natural woodland, remnant heathland, connecting hedgerows and overhung lanes creating a sense of seclusion²⁶.

2) Varied land cover mosaic including connected network of woodland and heathland and important ecological habitats

The variety of woodland forms, including valley woodlands and wooded ridgelines, the presence of heathland, streams and ponds, and the varied field pattern, make this an interesting and intimate landscape. The heathland, ancient woodland, grassland habitats and the hedgerow network are all of ecological importance, and are valued nationally, at a county level, and locally as calm and peaceful areas. There is increasing management to restore areas of heathland.

3) Historic landscape character

The historic parkland and estates combine with the woodland which isolates and insulates settlement and development to evoke a strong time-depth. The mosaic of small irregular assorted fields contained by thick hedges and woodland is a key feature.

4) Intimate small scale rural character/dark skies

The woodland cover and landform mean that there is a rapid transition from the urban edge of Newbury to a more intimate rural landscape. The area feels very rural and quiet, and is valued by the local community for its dark skies and peaceful surroundings, which feels far away from modern life.

DETRACTORS

1) Change in land use pattern

The 20th century saw reorganisation of fields to create larger, more regular holdings suitable for mechanised arable farming; creation of plantations on former fields; loss of historic farms and smallholdings; and regeneration of scrubby woodland and plantations on former heaths.

2) Loss and decline of hedgerow boundaries

Loss of field boundary elements in the latter half of the 20th century, especially hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, has reduced the variety and scale of the landscape in some areas. This is compounded by the poor management of some remaining hedgerows.

3) Decline in woodland management

Traditional woodland management techniques including coppicing are declining, posing a long-term threat leading to a decrease in landscape quality in this area. Conversion of deciduous woodland to mixed or coniferous monoculture plantation is also an issue, particularly with unsympathetic plantations that replace the irregular field pattern with more geometric forms. In some cases management of the plantations by clear fell has caused rapid change and adverse landscape impacts.

²⁶ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

4) Decline and fragmentation of heathland habitats

Changing land use patterns including conversion to forestry (in the past) or lack of management has led to scrub invasion and development of woodland. Heathland requires grazing and/or management to be maintained.

5) Increase in paddocks

There has been a growing number of ad-hoc paddocks created on the edges of villages, which can have a suburbanising effect as the influence of settlement is extended into the countryside through the subdivision of fields and changes in boundary styles.

6) Increasing traffic and pressures on the rural lane network

Development pressures have also led to increased traffic on the lane network, and the consequent suburbanisation of the roads including kerbing, widening and signing, which damages the character of the winding lanes.

7) Localised intrusion of roads

The A34 runs through the east of the area, and has a visible and audible presence, although mitigation planting has matured and screens some of this disturbance.

8) Development pressures

Increasing development pressures in the area, not only to construct new buildings but also in redeveloping smaller houses into large single dwellings. Incremental changes are also changing the character of the rural villages e.g. entry gates, security lighting.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY**1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB**

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its historic parkland, ancient semi-natural woodland, remnant heathland, connecting hedgerows and overhung lanes creating a sense of seclusion. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape. Recognise the value of the area extending from the AONB boundary to the A34/Newbury as part of the setting of the AONB.

2) Promote appropriate woodland management

This is particularly important for ancient and semi-natural woodland areas but also relevant to more recently planted woodland areas. Appropriate coppicing, pollarding, planting, thinning and management of invasive species and disease should all be encouraged. It is important to ensure that woodland boundaries are sensitive to landform, and to consider potential for diversification of some plantations to include more broadleaved elements and restoration of heathland.

3) Conserve and enhance heathland character

Take opportunities for restoration of habitats and reinstatement of features that have been lost, including management of areas of recently wooded common land to reintroduce a stronger heathland presence and link existing small, fragmented sites.

4) Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements

Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows, and encourage restoration/reinstatement of hedgerows. Restore traditional grass verges which line the rural lanes.

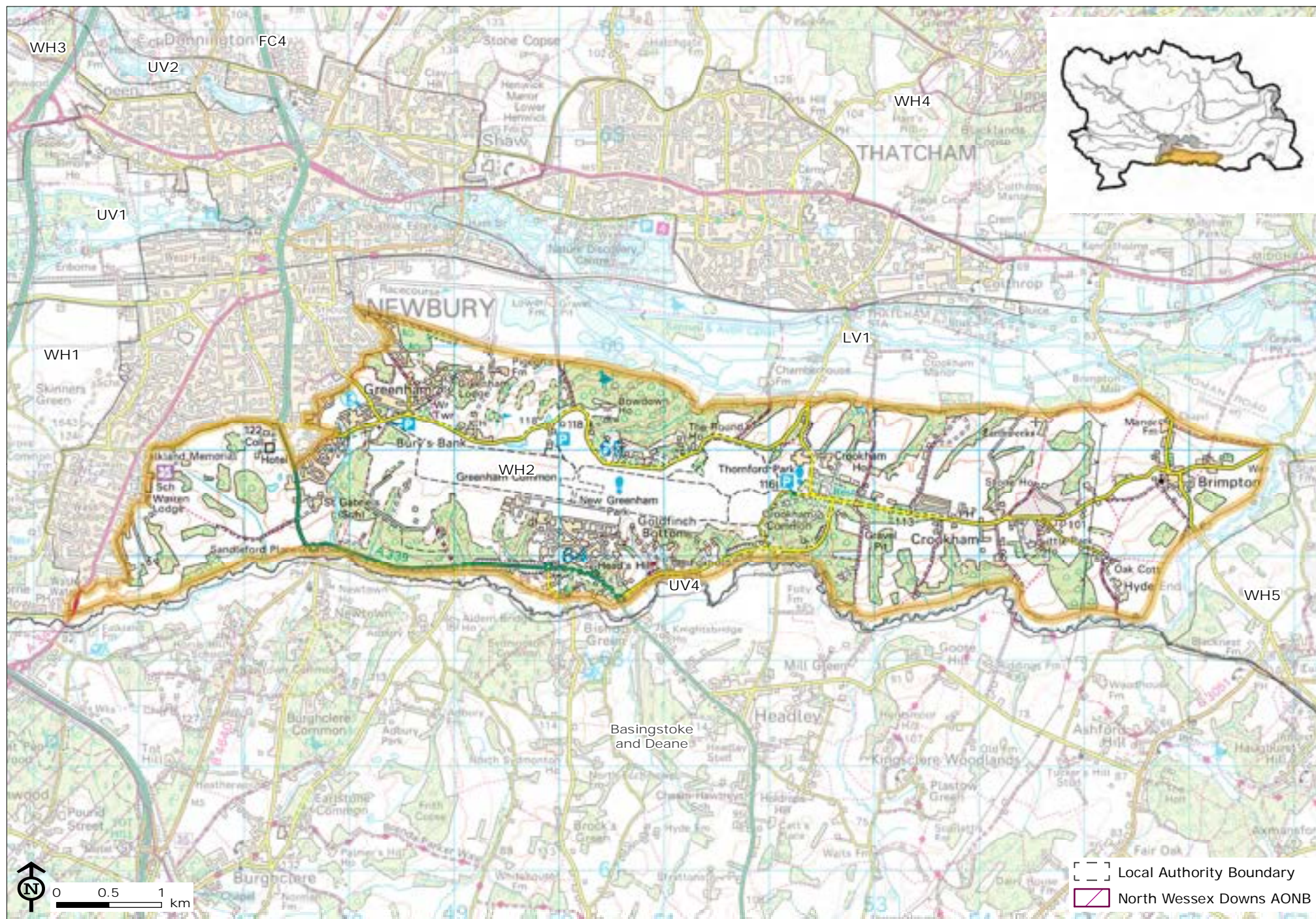
5) Maintain the distinctive patterns of settlement and rural character

Conserve the pattern and character of small hamlets and loose linear settlements, each with

their own identity. Large scale development would not be in keeping with this rural landscape. The gradual expansion, merging and coalescence of linear settlement will result in a more suburban character. Redevelopment of smaller houses into large residences with associated boundaries, lighting and other structures also changes the rural character. The retention of dark skies in this area is a key consideration for any development. Settlement edges should continue to be integrated within the rural landscape setting with strengthened hedgerows and woodland planting providing containment.

6) Conserve the existing character of the rural lanes

Minimise road improvements that may degrade the rural quality of the area. Take opportunities to restore hedgebanks, ditches and verges. Replant hedges on banks where these have been lost, including individual oak trees planted at irregular intervals to maintain continuity and enhancement of the existing landscape character.



SUMMARY

The area, which lies to the east of the southern part of Newbury and extends towards Brimpton, is defined by gentle undulating slopes, which rise to the flat-topped Greenham and Crookham Common. This is a large expanse of recovering heathland (common land), and is surrounded by valley woodlands. The western area, around the Common, has been greatly influenced by the former airbase. The eastern part of the character area around Brimpton and Crookham is distinguished by the presence of a mix of arable and pasture contained by a network of woodlands.

The area is bounded by the river Enborne to the east and south, which also marks the District boundary with Basingstoke and Deane. Newbury delineates the western boundary, with the river Kennet Valley marking the northern boundary. Boundaries of the LCA are principally determined by geology and topography relating to the sand and gravel on clay and the rising slopes above the valleys.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Gently undulating slopes leading to flat-topped ridge at Greenham and Crookham Common

The gravel-covered plateau is around 115 to 120m AOD. The plateau edge is relatively clearly defined by gentle slopes and wooded gullies, which descend through sandy Bagshot Beds to London Clay in the lowest valley bottoms. During World War II the plateau was artificially levelled and some of the gully heads filled in.

2) Presence of surface water and small streams running parallel to ridges

A direct consequence of the underlying geological and soil conditions is the presence of surface water due to impeded drainage caused by the subsurface pan of the podzols and low permeability of the clay. These conditions have resulted in the presence of surface springs at the interface with the clay and a highly divided network of small streams draining to the River Kennet to the north and River Enborne to the south.

3) Large open expanse of heathland, surrounded by woodland

A large, flat and open expanse of heathland and acid grassland covers Greenham and Crookham Common on the plateau, and areas of exposed gravels are also visible. Much of the Common is bounded by post and wire mesh fences and a ditch, although the land is publically accessible. Surrounding the plateau are areas more typical of this landscape type, consisting of large, predominantly deciduous woodlands which form a regular pattern of linear ghyll woodlands in undulating wet gullies leading down to the Kennet and Enborne Valleys. Between these woods there is a mosaic of arable and pastoral land use.

4) Legacy of the military airbase on Greenham and Crookham Common

The former Greenham Common Airbase dominates the landscape. Although much of the defensive infrastructure and the peace camps have been demolished or removed, former military buildings lie around and within the Common and the former HQ buildings on the southwestern edge have been converted and, together with some new development, incorporated into Greenham Business Park. These include Listed Buildings and the former GAMA missile shelter complex which is a Scheduled Monument. The exclusion perimeter fence remained in place until 2000 before the Common was reopened with unrestricted public access. It is now a popular open space for local residents but still retains many tangible features of its military past such as the control tower, which has been renovated into a visitor centre and community hub, and missile shelters. The Common is now managed by Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

5) Scattered dispersed settlements, separated by expanses of woodland and heathland in the west

Greenham lies very close to the edge of Newbury in the west, creating a more suburban character. Settlement at Bury's Bank and scattered farms are separated by expanses of woodland, farmland and common land, while Crookham is now dominated by a caravan parks. Brimpton in the west is more nucleated village, focused around the junction of Brimpton Road, Brimpton Lane, Crookham Common Road and Wasing Road.

6) An accessible landscape of open access land and rights of way

There are extensive areas of Open Access land on the Common, linked to a network of footpaths. The area is used extensively for leisure activities, both formally through golf courses e.g. Newbury and Crookham Golf Club, and informal recreation.

7) Open views from the plateau

Greenham Common provides views over the valleys to the north and south.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The heathland may have been in existence for several millennia as it is thought that it was

created due to the exhaustion of the area's poor soil by farming up to the Bronze Age. The heathland was used as common grazing and a source of fuel from at least the medieval period and, unlike the majority of commons in the district, it remained unenclosed and in use into the 20th century. One of the earliest English golf courses existed on Crookham Common from the 1870s until the construction of the airbase (see below).

- 2) Historically the majority of fields were sited on the less undulating areas between dry valleys, and were irregular in shape. Most had been enclosed by the start of the 18th century. The settlements along the Enborne were supported by a mix of assart fields and a strip of enclosed riverside meadows, while most woodland areas were ancient or semi-natural.
- 3) Parklands are present in a few locations including Crookham House, and the more substantial Sandleford Park, which was an Augustinian priory until the dissolution of the monasteries. Sandleford Priory itself is a Grade I Listed Building; an important surviving 14th century house remodelled in the late 18th century, it is now used as a school. Capability Brown was involved in the design of the parkland, which is now a Registered Park and Garden. The land west of the A339 remains rural in character and combines blocks of ancient woodland, some uncommon types of pre-18th century fields, and the degraded remains of the western part of Sandleford Park.
- 4) Prior to the late 20th century, rural settlement was limited to villages, hamlets and small unplanned squatter settlements around the Common. Brimpton contains a few Grade II Listed Buildings, and its historic core has been designated as a Conservation Area.
- 5) The establishment of the substantial and contentious airbase at Greenham and Crookham Common during the Second World War altered this landscape dramatically. It was operational from 1942 – 1994, initially as a WWII RAF base and later as a USAAF base housing cruise missiles with the capability to launch nuclear attacks on Russia. It occupied the majority of the contiguous commons of Greenham and Crookham. As well as the military infrastructure at the Common, the base also attracted long-term peace camps, particularly around its gates, demonstrating against the presence of nuclear arms. Construction and landscaping occurred, including the erection of further buildings, runways and substantial new roads to replace the narrow lanes and tracks.
- 6) The base was decommissioned in 1994 and much of the land returned to the local authority. Restoration has removed most of the runway and associated structures with much of the site beginning to revert to heathland. Many of the surviving military buildings were altered as they were adapted to new uses, although a few have been retained for their historic interest, chiefly as a document of the response to the nuclear threat posed by Russia during the Cold War, and are designated heritage assets. The large sections of the Common which were not included within the airbase have become densely wooded, due to a lack of grazing and management. These areas changed from visually open to highly enclosed areas.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) The area is important for its heathland habitats with Greenham and Crookham Common forming the largest area of lowland heath in West Berkshire. The Common is particularly important for rare ground-nesting birds, including nightjar, woodlark and lapwing and is designated an SSSI.
- 2) There are also multiple areas of ancient woodland located on the slopes of the plateau, many of which are designated as ancient woodland, Local Wildlife Sites, and one SSSI at Bowdown and Chamberhouse Woods.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Extensive heathland, acid grassland and woodland

The open expanse of heathland and acid grassland on Greenham Common combined with

ancient woodland and linear ghyll woodlands create important habitats, with the heathland important for rare ground-nesting birds.

2) Scenic and open views from the plateau

Sandleford Priory provides important open views southwards towards Penwood and Newtown. Greenham Common provides views over the valleys to the north and south.

3) Heritage and cultural associations

The presence of the airbase and Ministry of Defence land at Greenham Common has had a significant impact in the 20th and 21st centuries. Although many of the buildings are non-traditional and utilitarian, they are evidence of the important phase of our culture and international relations, represented by the designation of surviving structures (Scheduled Monument and Listed Buildings). Sandleford Priory and parkland are also important parts of the historic environment in this area, evidence of time-depth beyond the military intervention.

4) Recreational value

Much of the Common is now publically accessible and used extensively for recreation and leisure by the local communities. The control tower has been renovated and is now used as a visitor centre and community hub.

5) Tapestry of agricultural land

The pattern of fields, woodland and commons separating settlements can give individual settlements an intimate and secluded feel, contrasting with the open nature of the Common.

DETRACTORS

1) Development pressure

The Newbury settlement boundary has extended into this area to account for allocated development, particularly at Sandleford Park, and there is continued pressure for further development south of Newbury and at Greenham Business Park. The rural settlements of Brimpton and Crookham Common have been extended resulting in a more modern suburban character.

2) Loss and decline of hedgerow boundaries

Loss of field boundary elements in the latter half of the 20th century, especially hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, has reduced the variety and scale of the landscape in some areas, as seen between Brimpton and Hyde End. This is compounded in places by the need to enhance management of the remaining hedgerows.

3) Changing land use patterns resulting in gradual loss of landscape variation and biodiversity

The 20th century saw the majority of fields rationalised into larger and more regularly shaped holdings more suited to mechanised agriculture, and the removal of large numbers of field boundaries. Conversion to forestry and lack of management over the last century has led to the loss and decline of deciduous woodland, with its associated variety and ecological interest. Afforestation and, as a result of lack of grazing, the development of scrub woodland, resulted in a significant reduction in the extent of open heathland; however there has been a significant recovery of the heathland as a result of restoration projects.

4) Recreational pressure

The increase in recreational uses of the Common since it has been restored to publically accessible land has had an adverse impact on the local wildlife, particularly ground-nesting birds disturbed by dogs and walkers.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Restoration of heathland

This landscape type represents a major opportunity for further heathland restoration to link existing small, fragmented sites. Areas of recently wooded heath are a key target for restoration. The Living Landscape project led by West Berkshire Council and Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust covers 27km² of the Common, and between 2010 and 2013 the project increased the area of heathland by 8%. The focus on restoration and management should continue.

2) Retain and enhance open views

The open views experienced from Sandleford Priory and Park and Cookham Common should be considered in all land management, which may include development outside of the District.

3) Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements

Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows, and encourage restoration/reinstatement of hedgerows where appropriate particularly to provide further integration of development and along lanes.

4) Promote appropriate woodland management

This is particularly important for ancient and semi-natural woodland areas but also relevant to more recently planted woodland areas. Appropriate coppicing, pollarding, planting, thinning and management of invasive species and disease should all be encouraged. It is important to ensure that woodland boundaries are sensitive to landform, and potential for diversification of some plantations to include more broadleaved elements.

5) Balance recreational pressures

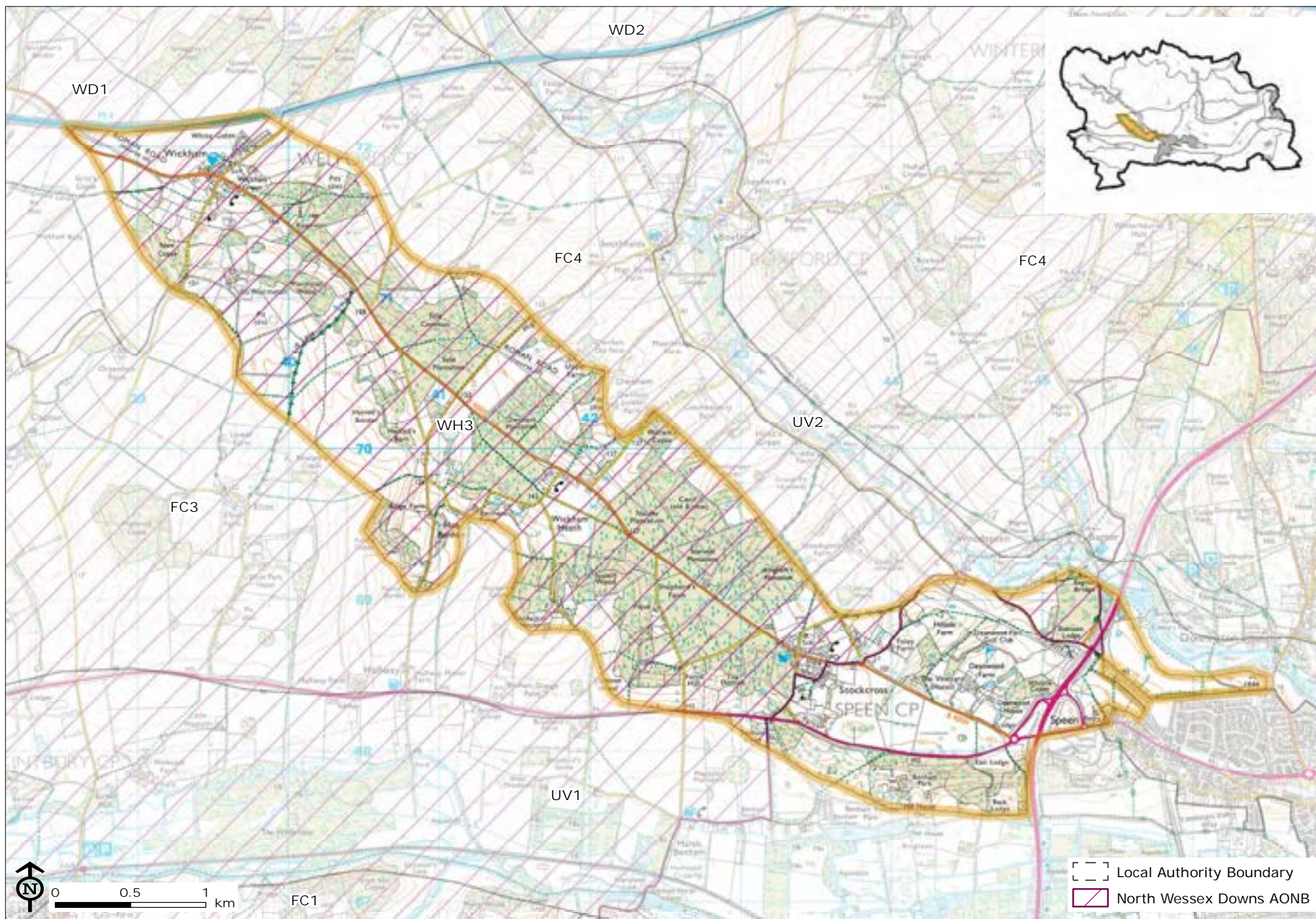
A balance should be found to enable local communities to use and enjoy the area for recreational and leisure activities, while continuing to conserve and enhance habitats to allow wildlife to thrive. The Greenham and Crookham Commons Management Plan sets out a zoning system which operates during the bird nesting season (March to July), and also aims to keep the Commons 'wild', with no provision of formal furniture or litter bins.

6) Ensure integration of new development into the landscape

Any new development should be integrated into the landscape. There is an opportunity to enhance the urban-rural interface in this area at Newbury. The distinction between separate settlements and the role of the landscape as a setting to the character of those individual settlements should be respected. Further opportunities for woodland planting and screening should be considered.

7) Conserve the strong time-depth experienced in the landscape

Conserve the setting and integrity of heritage features in the landscape, which provide a sense of time-depth and evidence of past land use in the area. In particular, seek ways to restore the Grade II Registered Park and Garden at Sandleford Priory, which is on the Heritage at Risk Register, and maintain the historic interest of the military interventions at Greenham Common.



SUMMARY

This is a small and visually distinct character area formed by a gravel ridge from the boundary of the M4 in the north west to the outskirts of Newbury in the south east. It is heavily wooded and contains small areas of heathland, with dispersed linear settlements, such as Wickham Heath, along the central B4000 ridgetop road. It has a quiet and enclosed rural nature.

The boundaries are defined by the gravel geology, raised topography and extent of woodland which distinguishes it from the more open farmland landscapes on the edges of the Lambourn and Kennet valleys to the east and west. The majority of the area is within the North Wessex Downs AONB, the exception being the area east of Stockcross to the edge of Newbury.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Distinct wooded gravel ridge separating the more open landscapes on the valley edges

A central gravel-capped ridge of Reading Beds overlain by London Clay forms a broad flat-topped plateau between the valleys of the Kennet and Lambourn. Either side of the plateau are short steep slopes that drop down to the valleys. Soils are mostly stony podzols and brown sands.

2) Extensive dense woodland, with small areas of heathland

Dense woodland cover predominates in this area and is the defining influence upon landscape character. It includes deciduous oak and sweet chestnut woodland as well as coniferous plantation, managed on a commercial scale. The plantations were predominantly planted on areas of former heathland. There are a number of ancient woodlands along the ridge and small patches of heathland within the woodland matrix, which add to the interest of the landscape. Pasture fields have been assarted at the woodland edge, but elsewhere the fields tend to be larger and more regular with fencing or relatively intact hawthorn hedgerows. An area of largely unmodified historic enclosures remains between Hoe Benham and Ownham (in LCA FC4), while Sole Common has remained unenclosed.

3) Dispersed linear settlement pattern along straight ridge top road

The B4000 follows the ridgeline and is lined with traditionally linear settlements e.g. Wickham Heath. Stockcross and Wickham are now more nucleated. Buildings are mostly of red brick but flint is also used, for example in the construction of the church at Wickham. The A34 cuts across the ridge at the eastern end of the area. Settlement growth has occurred at all historic settlement nuclei, except Hoe Benham.

4) Historic parklands are a characteristic feature

Areas of parkland are evident, defined by well-established pastures with mature free-standing trees. Benham Park and Wickham House have their origins in medieval deerparks, and are both still associated with their estate houses. The parks at Foley Lodge and Deanwood have largely been adapted for recreational use and are now home to the Vineyard Hotel at Stockcross and a small golf course, whereas the park at Wormstall has remained largely unaltered.

5) Quiet, intimate and secluded character

The plateau ridge and large woodland cover means that there are many secluded locations within this area, despite the proximity to main roads.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The B4000 from Speen to Lambourn Woodlands is part of a long-distance Roman road connecting the towns of *Calleva Atrebatum* (Silchester) and *Glevum* (Gloucester).
- 2) This was a largely open landscape into the 18th century, centred on the extensive Wickham Heath heathland common, which occupied most of the ridge. Some early enclosure fields were present around the fringes of the common. The majority of this common was enclosed into fields in the early 19th century by a series of Acts of Parliament with only a small portion around Sole Common remaining unenclosed into the 20th century.
- 3) The historic settlement pattern was dispersed, with settlements located on the edge of the common heath. Stockcross and Wickham seem to be common-edge settlements but the nature of Hoe Benham is less clear. The settlement at Wickham Heath was established in the 19th century, perhaps to resettle commoners turned out when the Act to enclose the common was implemented. Stockcross also seems to have grown substantially in the early 19th century and this may also have been due to resettlement of commoners, although it is also an estate village. Parks are present in the area; some are small in extent, such as Foley Lodge and Deanwood. Wormstall is a large landscape park created or enlarged in the later 18th century,

possibly over an extant or deserted medieval settlement. Parts of Benham Park and Donnington Grove Registered Park and Gardens are within this character area, both are listed at Grade II.

- 4) Some of the action of the Second Battle of Newbury (1644) took place between Speen Hill and Donnington. The majority of evidence for the battle comes from below-ground archaeological remains and surface finds of projectiles. Though the landscape has been modified to some extent from the time of the battle the availability of cover provided by historically wooded areas can still be appreciated.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) This area contains no statutory designations, although there are a number of ancient woodlands, and Local Wildlife Sites. These include Sole Common Pond Nature Reserve, protected for its heathland, bog and mire, and a section of Benham Park and Speen Moor which contains woodland, wet woodland and parkland.
- 2) The north east of the character area is adjacent to the Kennet and Lambourn and River Kennet SAC and SSSI, and is important as a setting to this internationally important river.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The character area lying west and northwest of Stockcross forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the presence of parklands, ancient semi-natural woodland, remnant heathland, connecting hedgerows and overhung lanes creating a sense of seclusion²⁷.

2) The visual and perceptual role of the wooded ridge

The woodlands create a unified character within the area, and provide a rural and wooded approach and gateway into Newbury, along the B4000, as well as in views from adjacent valley edges. The seclusion and extent of woodland also create a sharp transition from the urban edge and roads.

3) Linear ridgeline settlements

The small settlements of Stockcross, Wickham Heath and Wickham occur along the B4000 which follows the ridgeline. There is a strong vernacular of predominately red brick buildings with some flint e.g. Wickham church.

4) Historic landscape character

The historic parkland and estates combine with the woodland which isolates and insulates settlement and development to evoke a strong time-depth.

5) Quiet, intimate and secluded character

The presence of secluded locations within this area, due to the plateau ridge and woodland cover, is valued.

²⁷ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

DETRACTORS

1) Extensive plantation monoculture

There is a lack of woodland diversity, which combined with commercial forestry management including large areas of clear fell can be visually intrusive. Some of the conifer plantations are straight-edged, creating a new and visually dominant land use. The large plantations have also altered the feel of the character area, from visually very open with views into the Kennet and Lambourn valleys and to the high downs, to a very enclosed area with short horizons due to the density and extent of tree plantations.

2) Decline in heathland habitats

There has been a past decline in the extent of heathland vegetation through changing land use patterns, including conversion to forestry or lack of management leading to scrub invasion and development of woodland.

3) Loss and decline of hedgerow boundaries

Loss of field boundary elements in the latter half of the 20th century, including mature hedgerow trees, has reduced the variety and scale of the landscape in some areas. This is compounded by the need to enhance management of the remaining hedgerows.

4) Intrusion of M4 and A34

The M4 along the northern boundary and the A34 in the east of the area are both aural and visual detractors, and some marginal areas have an abandoned appearance near the motorway.

5) Development pressure

There is increasing development pressure, particularly near the edge of Newbury. This has resulted in a loss of tranquillity along the ridgetop due to an increase in traffic on the B4000.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its historic parklands, remnant heathland and extensive broadleaved woodland. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape. Opportunities should be taken for landscape scale conservation projects.

2) Conserve and enhance heathland character

Take opportunities for restoration of habitats and reinstatement of features that have been lost, including management of areas of recently wooded common land to reintroduce a stronger heathland presence and link existing small, fragmented sites.

3) Promote appropriate woodland management

This is particularly important for ancient and semi-natural woodland areas but also relevant to more recently planted woodland areas. Appropriate coppicing, pollarding, planting, thinning and management of invasive species and disease should all be encouraged. It is important to ensure that plantation boundaries are sensitive to the landform of the wooded ridge. Aim to diversify some plantations to include more broadleaved elements.

4) Conserve and strengthen field boundaries

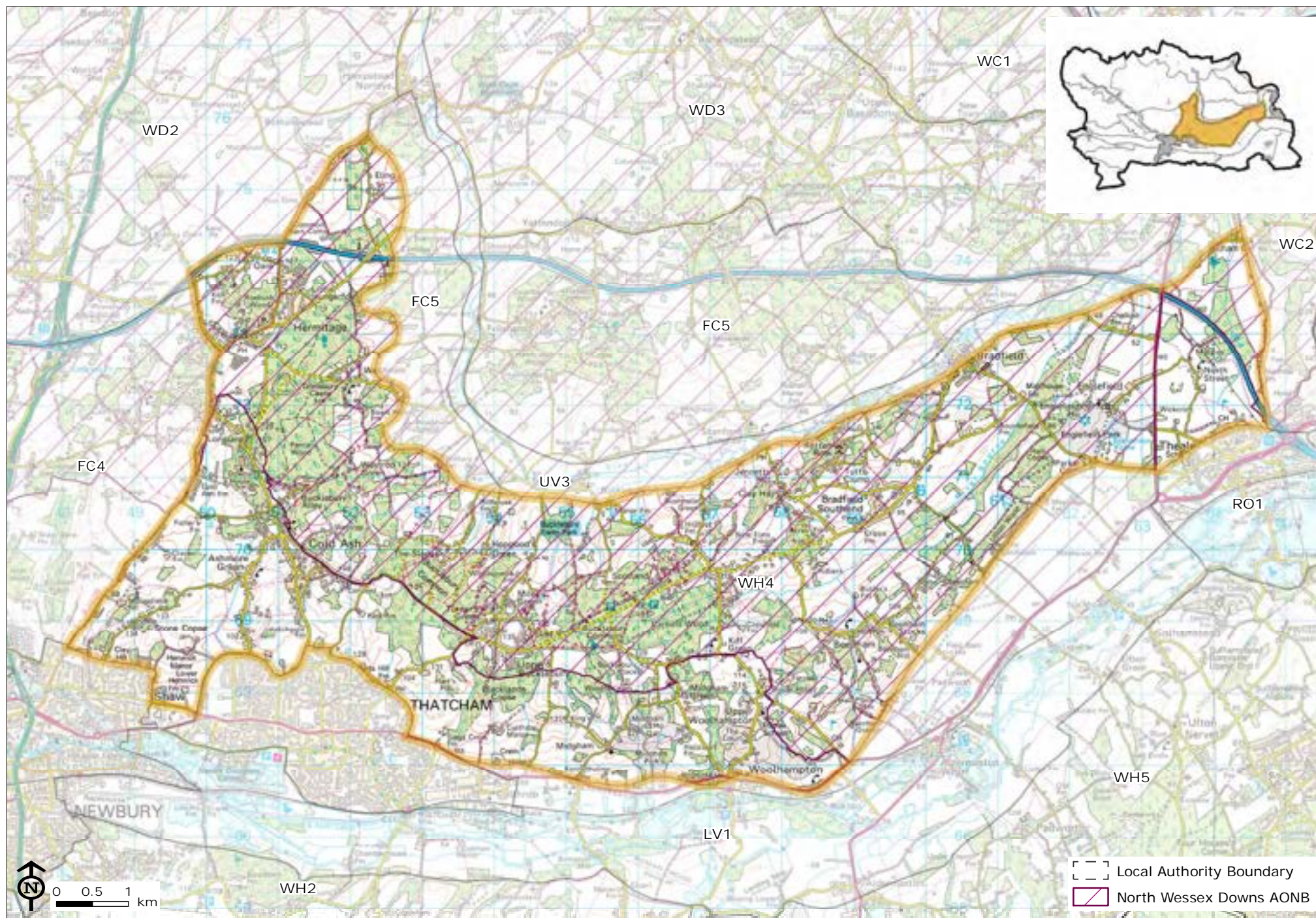
Including the characteristic wooded boundaries and seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows. Restore or reinstate boundary hedgerows around horse paddocks.

5) Maintain wooded horizon and rural approach to Newbury

Seek to maintain the B4000 as a rural, unlit road to maintain the rural approach to Newbury and conserve wooded boundaries and dark skies.

6) Maintain the distinct and separate small rural settlements, avoiding expansion and coalescence along roads

Conserve the dispersed settled character along the ridge. Seek to avoid linear development and ensure that settlements retain their distinct character and identities. Development should be in-keeping with the existing settlement form and vernacular, and should respect the role the wider rural landscape makes to the Benham Park Conservation Area in particular.



SUMMARY

An area dominated by an east-west orientated, heathland ridge and characterised by varied topography, from flat plateau areas to steeply undulating slopes. Woodland is a key component in the varied and attractive land cover mosaic, giving it a distinctive role in providing a rural setting to the adjacent towns of Thatcham and Newbury and also in containing settlement within the area and contributing to the rural character.

The northern and southern extents of the character area are clearly defined by the valleys of the River Pang and River Kennet respectively, to the north of the urban edges of Thatcham, Newbury and Theale. To the east a narrow but prominent band of elevated, wooded chalk slopes separates the character area from Reading, and to the west the B4009 marks a transition to a belt of open, arable, farmland on the chalk. The eastern half of the character area, and land to the north of the ridge between Cold Ash and Woolhampton, forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Geologically and topographically varied with steep and gentle undulating slopes rising to a central ridge

Plateau gravel drift deposits and sands and gravels overlaying clay have created an undulating topography with both steep and gentle slopes rising to a central ridge between Bradfield Southend to the east and Ashmore Green to the west.

2) Presence of surface water and small streams

A direct consequence of the underlying geological and soil conditions is the presence of surface water due to impeded drainage, with surface springs along the clay interface and a highly divided network of small streams. The Bourne, a tributary of the River Pang, follows a prominent valley running eastwards from the eastern end of the central ridge, and numerous smaller streams run down from north and south from the main ridge line. In the Beenham and Bradfield Southend areas the streams have become deeply incised, creating pronounced ridges.

3) Complex pattern of land cover, dominated by woodland and with remnant heaths

The area is distinctive for its varied geological pattern of clays, silts, sands and gravels, which result in nutrient-poor soils. The mixed sand, clay and gravel substrate creates a mosaic of land cover including damp pasture, paddocks and heathland, the latter concentrated in Bucklebury, but woodland is a prominent landscape element. Most former heathland is now tree-covered, with coniferous plantation and regenerated woodland, and interlinked linear woodland extends down the slopes from the ridge across the clay towards the valley landscape, including thin wooded valleys centred on minor tributary streams such as The Bourne. On localised tracts of more fertile loamy soils, mostly on lower, gentler slopes such as those dropping towards the Pang Valley and to the south-east near Beenham, there are areas of arable farmland.

4) Varied field pattern with strong hedgerows

There is a varied field pattern with irregular fields, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons indicative of medieval and post-medieval assarts. Fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries predominate, and represent 'ladder' fields probably resulting from the 17th and 18th century informal enclosure. Field boundaries include dense and intact hedgerows with trees, with larger amalgamated fields present in some areas.

5) Parklands are a characteristic feature

Areas of parkland are evident, defined by well-established pastures with mature free-standing trees. Some are still associated with their estate houses, as at Englefield, whereas other areas of parkland stand-alone e.g. Woolhampton Park.

6) Relatively densely settled, particularly along the ridge, but with woodland containment

A fairly well-populated area with numerous, mostly linear, villages along the ridge (including Bradfield Southend, Beenham, Cold Ash and Hermitage), with further settlement spread out along the roads during the 20th century. Smaller hamlets and farmsteads are often located on the mid slopes, whilst larger private residences and large institutional buildings, such as Douai Abbey and several private schools, are scattered throughout the woodlands. The main building material is brick and tile, although timber framing and thatch also occur. Tree cover means that settlements typically feel rural and isolated, with many houses set back from the road and fronted by trees (this is particularly the case at Upper Bucklebury), although modern development is more evident towards the western end of the character area at Cold Ash, Ashmore Green, Hermitage and along the B4009.

7) A minor road network contained by the wooded landscape

Busier roads, notably the M4, are limited to the fringes of the character area, and within the area the undulating and wooded landscape contains and limits the influence of roads. On the ridge slopes, winding rural lanes pass through open and wooded landscapes, and are

frequently overhung by deep grassy or woodland banks.

8) An accessible landscape

An extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and byways pass through this landscape, connecting the small settlements, and many of the woodlands and commons have open access.

9) Quiet, intimate and secluded character

The varied landform and land cover means that there are many secluded locations within this area, despite the relatively dense settlement pattern, and a sense of elevated separation from the urban areas to the south west.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The area contains evidence for human activity since the later prehistoric period. Few traces of this survive in the present landscape but notable instances include possible Iron Age or Romano-British enclosure earthworks in woodland (north of Hermitage and in Robin's Copse near Cold Ash) and the Iron Age hillfort, Grimsbury Castle. Other notable features related to earlier exploitation of the landscape are the medieval fish ponds on Bucklebury Common and "The Avenue", Bucklebury, a double avenue of mature oaks reputedly planted to commemorate a visit by Elizabeth I.
- 2) The Forest of Berkshire encompassed the areas north of the Enborne and Kennet, making this area subject to Forest Law. Even after extensive disafforestation in 1227, these gravel plateau areas retained a predominantly wooded and heathy character and their continued value as hunting grounds is evident in the large number of deer parks created in the medieval period. Many of these deer parks were refashioned in the 18th century as formal designed parks and gardens, as at Englefield House, the only Registered Park and Garden in the area.
- 3) Present-day settlement is dispersed across the area and was probably formed by encroachment into areas of common and woodland, although dates and patterns of encroachment are not clearly understood and it is not sufficient to label all common-edge and roadside settlements as being post-medieval in origin - they may have much earlier origins.
- 4) Principal land use changes in the 20th century were the removal of field boundaries to suit mechanised arable farming, plantation of coniferous woodland on heathland and to replace deciduous tree cover, and regeneration of woodland on former heaths as a result of a decline in grazing.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) Much of the woodland on clay soils is ancient, and the damp and spring flushed woodlands are also valuable habitat. On the steeper slopes there are many small assarted pastures, some of which are traditionally managed and species rich, but others are now used for horse grazing.
- 2) Former heathland commons located on flatter ridge-top areas where plateau gravels overlay the sands and gravels of the Bagshot Beds, are a particular feature of the area. These are now largely covered by regenerating woodland, due to lack of traditional grazing management, but small patches remain and around 60 hectares between Bucklebury and Chapel Row have been restored.
- 3) The area contains many features of biodiversity interest with four SSSI, three of which are woodland including the nationally important woodland Old Copse, Beenham, which has been managed on a traditional coppice-with-standards system and supports many species indicative of ancient woodland.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The eastern half of the character area, and land to the north of the southern edge of the ridge between Cold Ash and Woolhampton forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, remnant heathland and open farmland, deriving from the area's varied geology, and the sense of seclusion often engendered from this mix, are noted as special qualities relating to this character area²⁸. Historic parklands are also noted as being a particular feature of the lowlands above the Kennet Valley.

2) The visual role of the wooded ridge crest and slopes

The woodlands along the east–west ridge create a unifying backdrop for the larger settlements to the south of the area and within the AONB to the north. Views from the ridge are frequently limited by tree cover, creating a secluded character, but open locations provide views south to similar woodland and heathland mosaic forming the southern side of the Kennet valley, and north to AONB chalk downland rising to a wooded ridge to the north of the Pang. Open farmland on the lower slopes contributes to a sense of separation between the elevated character area and the towns of Thatcham and Newbury in the valley below.

3) The varied land cover mosaic and important habitats

The variety of woodland forms, including valley woodlands and wooded ridgelines, the presence of heathland, rivers and the varied field pattern, make this an interesting and intimate landscape. The ecological importance of heathland, ancient woodland and grassland habitats adds to landscape interest.

4) A very rural character away from major roads and urban edges

Landform and tree cover mean that away from the urban edges of Thatcham and Newbury and from the M4 there is a rapid transition upslope to a more intimate rural landscape, with small traditional villages and farmsteads and dark skies. The transition in character along Stoney Lane between Shaw and Ashmore Green is an example of this. The wooded context of settlements and roads helps integrate their built form into the landscape.

5) Recreational value

The strong network of public rights of way, the extensive areas of open access land and the proximity of these to the large settlements of Newbury and Thatcham give the character area a high recreational value.

6) Historic landscape character

The vernacular character of many of the settlements, the parklands and estates that bring order to the landscape, historic field patterns and the role of woodland in limiting urban influence, combine to evoke a perception of strong time-depth.

DETRACTORS

1) Past hedgerow loss for arable farming

Loss of field boundary elements in the latter half of the 20th century, especially hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, reducing the variety and scale of the landscape in some areas. This is chiefly evident in locations away from woodlands and steeper slopes.

2) Changing land use patterns resulting in gradual loss of landscape variation and biodiversity

²⁸ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).²⁹ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

Conversion to forestry and lack of management over the last century led to loss or decline of deciduous woodland, with its associated variety and ecological interest. Afforestation and, as a result of lack of grazing, the development of scrub woodland, resulted in a significant reduction in the extent of open heathland; however there has been some recovery of the latter as a result of clearance of invasive vegetation carried out since the early 1990s. Dairy farming has now ceased in the area, and animal husbandry has been reduced to sheep and cattle raising. The main farming activity is cereal and rape seed production.

3) Increase in horse paddocks

Paddocks with weak boundary features (e.g. post and wire fences) and poor quality grassland have a localised detrimental impact on landscape character, often typifying settlement fringes.

4) Impact of the M4 on character

The M4, which passes through short sections of the character area at the far eastern and north-western ends, and the A4 which forms the southern boundary between Thatcham and the eastern end of Woolhampton, are audibly intrusive locally; however visually their impact is limited by tree cover alongside the routes and/or within the wider landscape, and for parts of the M4 by cut grading.

5) Decreasing separation/coalescence between settlements

The expansion of Thatcham and Newbury since the mid-20th century, and also of villages within the character area, has reduced the physical and perceptual separation between settlements. This is particularly evident at the western end of the character area, where there is near coalescence along the main connecting roads between Newbury and Thatcham, Cold Ash, Ashmore Green, Curridge and Hermitage.

6) Increased suburbanisation

Modern housing along main routes and on adjacent cul-de-sacs, together with street lighting and pavements, has introduced suburban characteristics to some places, particularly where there is less tree cover to mask changes e.g. the southern end of Cold Ash and linear development along the B4009 Long Lane just north of Shaw. Incremental development of the countryside settlements is also an issue, including the enlargement of curtilages, security lighting, entry gates etc.

7) Loss of gradation between settlement and countryside

Farm buildings and small pasture fields adjacent to settlements have proved vulnerable to development (typically of small residential clusters), due in the former case to presence of existing structures and in the latter to the screening/containment provided by boundary features. However, farm buildings, even when development has left them adjacent to settlement edges, contribute to rural character when they retain a relationship with farmland; and small enclosures, even when used as paddocks, form a transition between settlement and countryside that can contribute positively to landscape character, particularly when they retain a relationship with a historic settlement core.

8) Increased traffic on the rural lane network

There is pressure on the network of rural lanes, many of which are single track with few passing places. Heavy traffic on narrow lanes has a significant impact on countryside character, but standard highway improvements such as widening, kerbing, signage and broad visibility splays can create a more urban character which is out of context as well as encourage greater usage.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its

varied landscape of woodland, heathland and farmland. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Conserve and restore heathland characteristics

Take opportunities for restoration of habitats and reinstatement of features that have been lost, including management of areas of re-wooded common land to reintroduce a stronger heathland presence and link existing small, fragmented sites. Consider potential for reintroduction of grazing management.

3) Promote appropriate woodland management

This is particularly important for ancient and semi-natural woodland areas but also relevant to more recently planted woodland areas (e.g. alongside the M4). Appropriate coppicing, pollarding, planting, thinning and management of invasive species and disease should all be encouraged. Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnected valleys: the aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in areas which have been converted to coniferous monoculture plantation, and to ensure that woodland boundaries are sensitive to landform.

4) Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements

Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows, and encourage restoration/reinstatement of hedgerows within expansive arable fields and around horse paddocks. Preserve the wooded context of settlements, to contain and filter the impact of built form.

5) Retain the distinction between and individual identity of settlements

Retain a sense of distinction between individual settlements through a clear understanding of the role of landform, tree cover and rural buildings in characterising settings and in forming boundaries that conserve and enhance distinctions in character – e.g. the historic farmstead at Henwick, along a rural lane, contained by tree cover and on rising ground, marks a rapid change to a rural landscape from the nearby edge of Thatcham. Avoid extended linear development along roads, which creates a more developed character resulting in the loss of individual settlement identity. More small scale focused development set back from main routes often has less impact on character and can be more readily contained by landscape.

6) Conserve elements that mark a transition between settlement and countryside

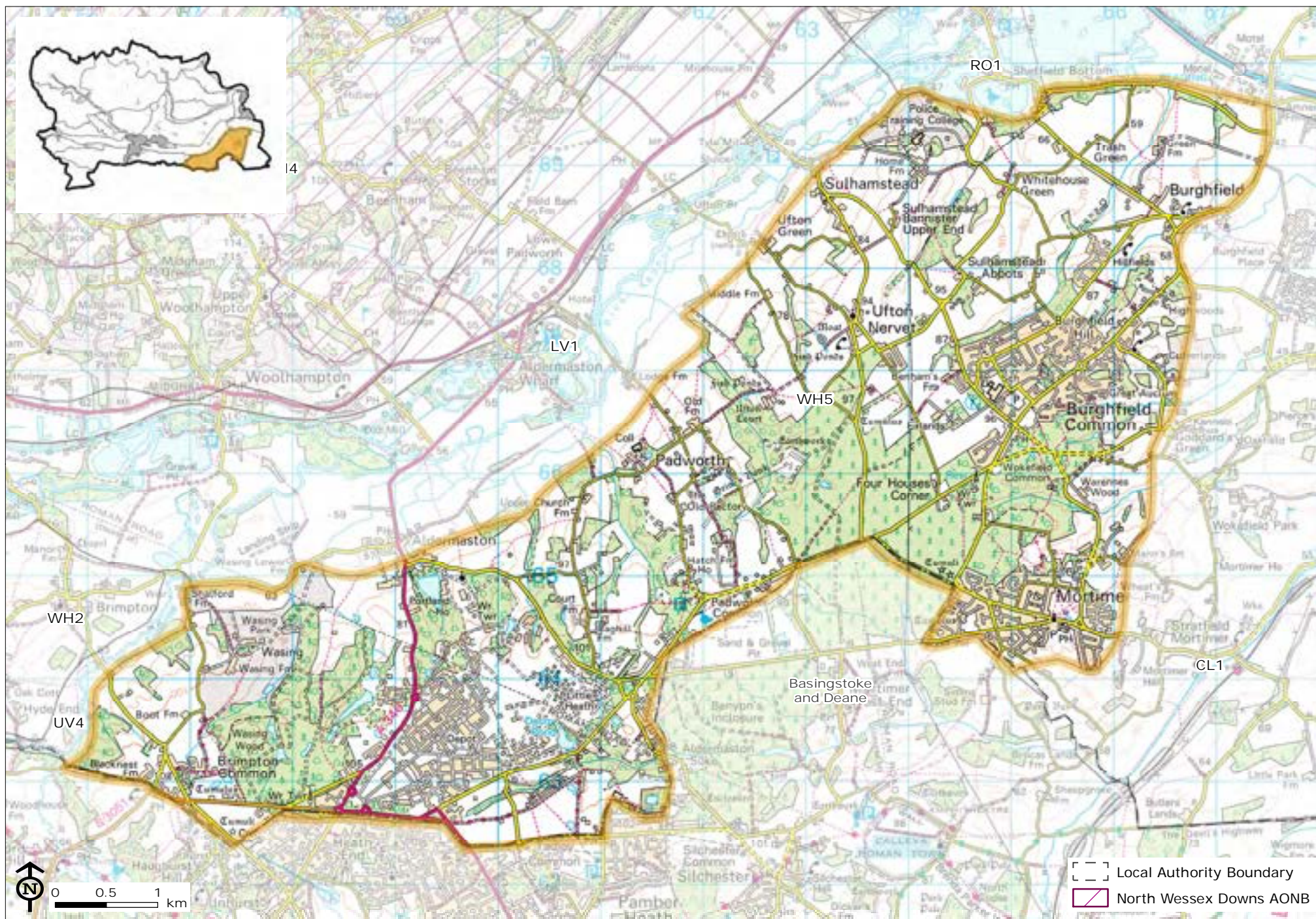
Where possible retain small, enclosed fields around villages, and farm buildings which contribute positively to rural character.

7) Conserve the existing character of rural lanes and public rights of way

Avoid measures to ease traffic flow that would have an adverse impact on character. Retain and manage hedgerows, ditches and verges and replant hedges on banks where these have been lost, including individual oak trees planted at irregular intervals to maintain continuity and enhancement of the existing landscape character. Consider potential to designate Quiet Lanes, and measures to discourage the use of narrow lanes as 'rat runs' or by overly large vehicles – e.g. adequate signage and lower speed limits.

8) Maintain open views from routeways

Whilst woodland and hedgerow planting is generally to be encouraged, sporadic long views across open land add to the variety that characterises this area. Gaps between dwellings that offer views across open farmland help to retain rural settlement character.



SUMMARY

A well-wooded plateau visually dominates this area, which extends from Brimpton Common in the west to Burghfield and Mortimer in the east, but sizeable areas of built development, including the extensive MoD property at Aldermaston operated by AWE, have a significant localised impact on landscape character. A more traditional rural character predominates on the slopes that form the northern part of the character area, to which historic houses and parklands make a significant contribution.

The area is defined to the south by the District border, where the adjacent landscape in Hampshire has similar characteristics, and to the north by a transition into the valley of the River Kennet. The narrower valley of the River Enborne marks the western edge and to the east there is a transition to open clay lowlands. Similar woodland and heathland mosaics occur to the north of the Kennet and west of the Enborne.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Geologically and topographically varied landscape with a flat plateau and undulating margins

A relatively flat, east-west oriented ridge top, formed from gravel drift deposits overlying clays, incised by numerous narrow valleys with undulating margins which drop into the broader Kennet Valley to the north, and its tributaries to the east.

2) Presence of surface water and small streams

Acidic sandy layers have resulted in the formation of podsol soils where drainage is impeded by a layer of hardpan, and the clay bedrock beneath has low permeability. These conditions have resulted in the presence of surface springs, ponds and numerous streams, including short watercourses draining northward into the River Kennet and a more complex network, including Burghfield Brook, Lockram Brook and West End Brook, flowing eastwards through clay lowlands before turning north to join the Kennet. Although frequent, watercourses typically are not visually prominent due to the extent of their containment by tree cover.

3) Complex pattern of land use, dominated by woodland

The mosaic of land cover includes arable fields, damp pasture, paddocks, woodland and small areas of remnant heathland. Woodland dominates the plateau area, notably the large coniferous plantations on former heathland to the west of Burghfield Common that extend southwards into Hampshire, but is frequent throughout the character area. There is a significant proportion of ancient woodland, including wet woodland, mostly associated with the steeper valley sides such as Padworth Gully and Brent's Gully. Field boundaries are a variable mix of hedgerows and fences, with larger hedges often linking woodland blocks, and/or associated with watercourses, but weaker field boundaries in some arable areas. Larger fields are evident on the sloping fringes of the Character Area.

4) Large areas of Ministry of Defence owned land

A significant element of this landscape is the large area of Ministry of Defence owned land at AWE Aldermaston, a security-fenced site covering over 270 hectares, much of which is occupied by industrial built development and hardstanding. There are also fenced MoD storage depots at Padworth, which have storage structures and earthworks but are more open in character.

5) Development influences the character of the plateau

Although contained within the wider landscape by tree cover, built development and associated traffic has a significant influence. Mortimer, Burghfield Common and Tadley (the latter just across the border into Hampshire) are urban settlements that expanded significantly in the second half of the 20th century, in association with growth of the defence establishments at Aldermaston and just to the east of the character area at Burghfield. There has also been commercial development at several industrial estates adjacent to AWE Aldermaston, and the volume of traffic on the roads in this area reflects the proximity of employment centres and settlement.

6) Historic, rural character on northern slopes

The village of Aldermaston, which straddles the northern edge of the character area, retains a historic character, with numerous listed buildings, despite the presence of the A340. Elsewhere settlement is limited to smaller villages and hamlets, where 20th century development has in some instances had an influence on historic character (e.g. Ufton Nervet and Sulhamstead) but which retain a rural setting and are linked by an indirect network of minor roads. The northern slopes of the area, with long views across the Kennet Valley, were historically a desirable location for the siting of large country houses, and a number of historic houses remain, notably at Wasing, which also has a sizeable parkland, Ufton Court, Aldermaston Court and Padworth House.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The area contains evidence for human activity since the later prehistory but the majority of this comes from buried archaeological remains. There are few traces which survive at a scale appreciable in the in the present landscape but notable exceptions are the Bronze Age barrow cemeteries at Brimpton Common and Holden's Firs and the linear earthwork, Grim's Bank, thought to be of later prehistoric date. The route of the Roman road Ermin Way, linking *Calleva Atrebatum* (Silchester) to *Glevum* (Gloucester), passes through the Character Area.
- 2) Many of the settlements including Burghfield, Padworth and Wasing are recorded in Domesday. Deer parks associated with great houses were established during this time. By the 18th century these had changed use, often becoming landscape parks ranging in size from the very large, such as at Wasing, to small formal parks around manor houses, as at Ufton Court. Most parks have in turn changed use or shrunk, with large areas of former grounds being turned over to agriculture, paddocks or commercial and institutional use. Wasing Park, Aldermaston Court and Folly Farm at Sulhamstead are all Registered Parks and Gardens, the latter designed by landscape architect Gertrude Jekyll.
- 3) Settlement was dominated by small villages and hamlets such as Ufton Nervet and Mortimer. Aldermaston was the only large nucleated village and is an exception to the overall pattern of settlement, created in the 17th century to resettle displaced villagers more the enlargement of Aldermaston Park. Farms were sparsely distributed across the western part of the area, becoming more common east of Aldermaston.
- 4) A historically well-wooded area, the majority of land was enclosed into irregular-shaped fields by the 18th century. Commons of varying sizes were found across the area with the largest examples situated adjacent to the Hampshire border. Almost all the common land was enclosed by the early 19th century, although small stubs of Padworth and Burghfield Commons remained open into the 20th century.
- 5) An immense amount of military development took place during the 20th century with the construction of the two Atomic Weapons Establishments at Aldermaston, a wartime airfield, and the former munitions factory at Burghfield (in LCA CL1). Both bases originated in the Second World War and largely erased earlier land-uses on their sites. AWE Aldermaston was constructed at Aldermaston Park and a few traces of the park's landscaping remain within the complex. A surprising survival within AWE Aldermaston is one of the best preserved stretches of Grim's Bank.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) The area has a variety of important wildlife habitats, including ancient woodland, heathland, meadows and pasture, open water and parkland. There are three nationally important SSSI sites at Wasing Wood Ponds, Decoy Pit, Pools and Wood, and West's Meadow. The two pond sites are both former gravel extractions, and have particularly important habitats for aquatic insects. Decoy Pit, Pools and Wood is especially important for its mosaic of habitats including woodland, heathland, grassland and small waterbodies. West's Meadow consists of two small fields of unimproved pasture, containing over 80 species of grassland plants.
- 2) There are also many areas of ancient woodland, the vast majority of which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. The other Local Wildlife Sites in the area are designated for their woodland habitats and ponds with wet woodland.
- 3) Padworth Common is designated as a Local Nature Reserve, containing heathland, woodland, ponds and alder-lined gullies. There are also small areas of remnant heathland within the woodland between Burghfield Common and Mortimer, and at Little Heath within the AWE Aldermaston site.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) The visual role of woodlands

The area's extensive woodlands play an important role locally, by containing urbanising influences and maintaining distinction between settlements, and at a wider scale by providing a southern backdrop to views from the North Wessex Downs AONB, the boundary of which follows the northern edge of the Kennet Valley.

2) The varied land cover mosaic and important habitats

The variety of woodland forms, including valley and plateau woodlands, the presence of heathland, streams and ponds, and the varied field pattern, enhance landscape character. The ecological importance of heathland, ancient woodland and grassland habitats adds to landscape interest.

3) Historic houses, parkland and agricultural estates enhance traditional, rural character

Away from the coniferous plantations, settlements and MoD owned establishments, the Wasing and Englefield estates account for much of the area's farmland. The historic houses and parkland associated with these well-maintained estates enhance the sense of time-depth.

4) Open views across the Kennet Valley

The northern slopes provide long views across the Kennet Valley, which contribute to a sense of rural separation.

DETRACTORS

1) 20th century decline in heathland and native woodland habitats

Changing land use patterns, including conversion to forestry and lack of grazing, led to significant loss of heathlands and broadleaf woodland, but there has been some reversal of this in recent decades, in part due to the influence of Environmental Stewardship schemes.

2) Impact of built development

The development of AWE Aldermaston and expansion of nearby settlements has had a detrimental impact on rural landscape character, through loss of existing landscape elements (including most of the former Aldermaston Park), the urbanising influence of new buildings and (at Aldermaston) security fencing, and the volume of traffic on local roads. Residential development since 2000 has been more limited, with woodland providing a significant constraint to development, but small-scale growth nonetheless has an incremental impact.

3) Limited public access

In contrast to most other areas in the Woodland and Heathland Landscape Type, there is a fairly limited network of public rights of way.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance heathland character

Take opportunities for restoration of habitats and reinstatement of features that have been lost, including management of areas of recently wooded common land to reintroduce a stronger heathland presence and link existing small, fragmented sites.

2) Promote appropriate woodland management

Conserve and restore deciduous woodland habitats, promoting appropriate woodland management including coppicing and pollarding, in particular for ancient and semi-natural woodland areas. Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded

ridges and interconnected valleys. The aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in areas which have been converted to coniferous plantation and ensure that woodland boundaries are sensitive to landform.

3) Maintain the role of woodland in containing and separating development

Land of the fringes of settlements should be positively managed to avoid settlement coalescence and/or suburbanisation of the fringe.

4) Seek opportunities to enhance recreational access

An increase in provision of open access land, and off-road connectivity between existing rights of way, would be desirable e.g. in association with any new development or removal of commercial forestry plantations. On the existing road network, consider potential to designate Quiet Lanes, and measures to discourage the use of narrow lanes as 'rat runs' or by overly large vehicles e.g. adequate signage and lower speed limits.

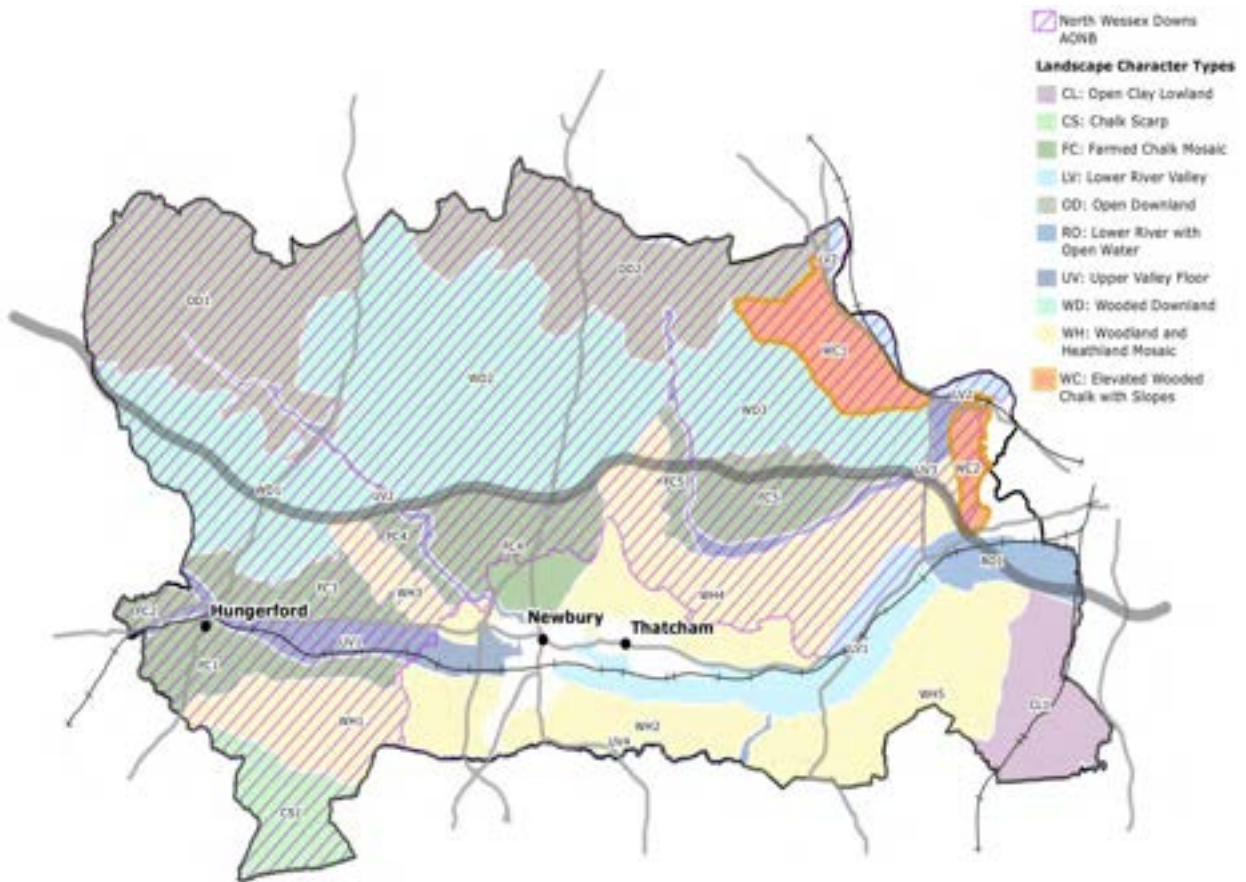
5) Enhance boundaries of AWE Aldermaston

Any opportunities to enhance the boundaries of the military institution, in particular at the various access gates, to reduce the visual impact of the site, should be explored.

6) Positive restoration of gravel pits

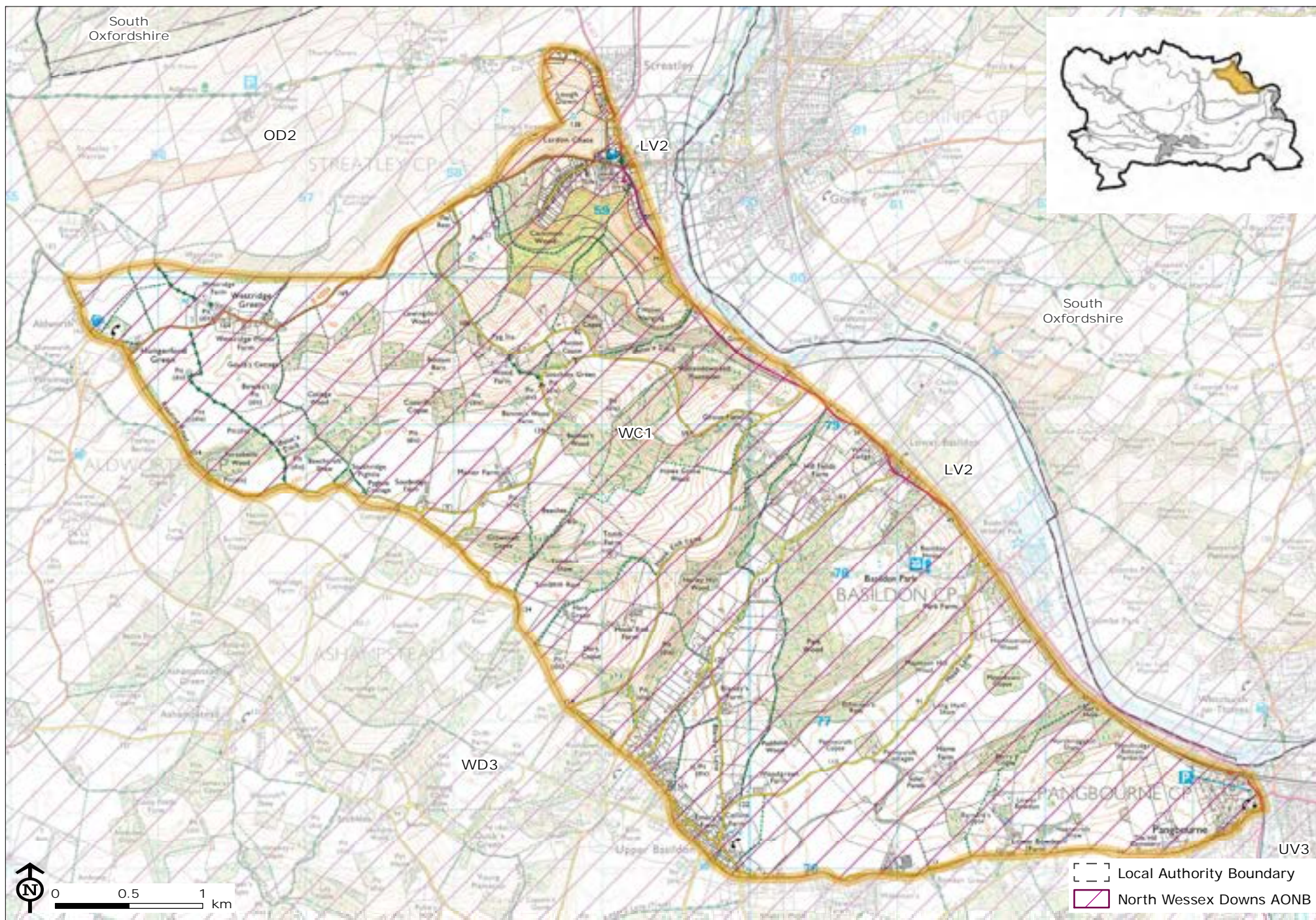
Gravel extraction does not currently have a significant landscape impact in this area, with only one active site (off Raghill, to the west of Padworth Common), but potentially could due to the presence of sands and gravels. Where such works occur, opportunities should be taken for completed pits to be restored to enhance ecological value and integration into the landscape.

Landscape Character Type WC: **Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes**



The **Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes** LCT is subdivided into two Local Character Areas:

- WC1: Basildon Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes
- WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes.



SUMMARY

This dramatically undulating landscape, from Streatley and Aldwoth in the north to Upper Basildon and Pangbourne in the south, is incised with steep dry valleys and is predominantly chalk geology. Land use is mostly mixed arable; large woodland blocks and some parkland areas are also present. The woodland blocks present represent a good ecological habitat with many of ancient origin. Upper Basildon is a long, arcing linear settlement, extending for 3km along a ridge of high ground which also forms part of the character area boundary. There are panoramic views from elevated areas, although these are limited due to the wooded nature of the area. The area forms a dramatic wooded setting to the Thames.

The eastern/north-eastern edge of the area meets the Pangbourne Thames Valley. To the north, the landscape rises up to dramatic slopes of the Open Downland, while to the south/south-west the landform is less undulating as there is a transition to the Wooded Downland type. The character area is entirely within the North Wessex Downs AONB.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Elevated and dramatic rolling topography underlain by chalk geology

The area slopes up from the valley of the River Thames to the north east, with the rolling landform becoming increasingly dramatic in the north of the area, where it is incised by dry valleys. There is a prominent escarpment at Lardon Chase and a series of bold headlands above the Thames valley near the Goring Gap. The underlying geology is chalk, overlain by plateau gravel in some areas to the south.

2) Land use is mixed agriculture divided into a varied field pattern, with areas of woodland and historic parkland

The majority of land cover is mixed farming containing both arable land and pasture. Field pattern shows evidence of historic assarting, likely to have happened informally in 17th-19th century. Sinuous irregular field margins are often a result of late medieval enclosure. Parliamentary enclosure is responsible for the more geometric, straight-sided fields following Upper Basildon. Deciduous and mixed woodland blocks semi-enclose the fields and are supplemented by hedgerows. Historic parkland at Basildon Park is a prominent land use in the centre of the area.

3) Extensive areas of semi-natural habitat including ancient woodland and calcareous grassland

A well wooded landscape with large areas of mixed woodland, including ancient woodland. Designated sites include Holies Down SSSI and Lardon Chase SSSI (recognised for their unimproved chalk grassland habitat), as well as numerous Local Wildlife Sites. Pockets of lowland calcareous grassland also occur amongst the farmland.

4) Designed parkland, prehistoric earthworks and historic farms contribute to time-depth

Time-depth is associated both with historic landscape elements and particular designated heritage assets. Grim's Ditch, a linear earthwork of putative Bronze Age origin, crosses the landscape and much its surviving above-ground sections are Scheduled Monuments. Many of the scattered farms and cottages are Listed Buildings and contain elements of late medieval to earlier post-medieval date. The Grade II Registered Park and Garden at Basildon Park is a large area of parkland, with lawns and ornamental trees, laid out around the Grade I Listed Building of Basildon House. The core of the park is owned and managed by the National Trust.

5) Sparsely settled rural area with small villages and hamlets

Settlement is generally sparse throughout the character area and limited to scattered farms and cottages, but also includes the small villages of Aldworth and Westridge Green, the elevated fringes of the Thames-side settlements of Streatley and Pangbourne, and the linear settlement of Upper Basildon, which forms an arc along the south western edge of the character area and leaves only a narrow gap to Pangbourne. Upper Basildon also extends westwards into the Wooded Downland LCT to join the hamlet of Quick's Green. The cores of Pangbourne, Streatley and Aldworth are designated as Conservation Areas.

6) Access is provided by narrow lanes and a dense network of public rights of way

Rural lanes take advantage of open plateau lands and dry sinuous valley bottoms. Often these have an intimate character surrounded by tall hedgerows. There is a good provision of public footpaths and rights of way here. Open Access Land on Lardon Chase/Lough Down contributes to the recreational resource of the area.

7) Spectacular views from higher ground, sometimes interrupted by energy infrastructure

Spectacular views can be seen over Goring Gap from the National Trust parkland and elevated lanes (e.g. Stitchens Green) also offer expansive views. Elsewhere, views can be limited by the frequent woodland cover. The dense tree cover also creates wooded skylines which rise above adjacent lower lying landscapes, including the Thames Valley. Overhead lines and pylons form prominent skyline features in places.

8) A sense of enclosure is often experienced due to the frequent woodland, creating an intimate and tranquil landscape

Due to its high level of woodland cover, much of the area has a strong sense of enclosure. Tall hedgerows along lanes create an intimate character, which in spring are lined with hawthorn and blackthorn in flower. The frequent woodland and limited settlement and roads in this area result in high levels of relative tranquility, although traffic noise from the A329 can be a detractor.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The area has seen intensive past human activity and has been in use for settlement and agriculture since at least the later prehistoric period. The majority of evidence for this comes from below-ground archaeological remains but some notable heritage assets from the deeper past influence the present landscape. Grim's Ditch, a linear earthwork of putative Bronze Age origin, crosses the landscape and is thought to have functioned as a territorial boundary. It survives in sections as an above ground earthwork. These earthworks are all Scheduled Monuments, and have also influenced the layout of later land-use.
- 2) The majority of land-use patterns underlying the present landscape, however, have their roots in the medieval period. Much of the area comprised farmland, commonland and woodland.
- 3) The designed parkland of Basildon Park was laid out in the later 18th century around a Palladian mansion. The majority of parkland is lawn with ornamental scattered trees and plantations. A large area of ancient woodland was incorporated into the western edge of the park. During the Second World War the park was requisitioned and served as a US army base and prisoner of war camp. Whilst officers were accommodated in the house, servicemen lived in Nissen huts constructed on the fringes of Park Wood. A concrete hut, known as Ivy Cottage, is thought to be the only surviving hut from the WWII camp. Practice firing trenches were also constructed in this area and are still visible.
- 4) In the modern period, re-organisation of historic enclosures had led to dilution of the historic character of the landscape in some locations.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) Nationally significant areas of lowland calcareous grassland are located on higher ground in the north of the character area, including Holies Down SSSI and Lardon Chase SSSI.
- 2) The character area is densely wooded and includes areas of ancient semi-natural woodlands. Many of these woodlands are designated as Local Wildlife Sites, including Bennets Wood, Harecroft Wood and Harley Hill Wood.
- 3) A large area of wood pasture and parkland UK BAP Habitat is located at Basildon Park. Several small areas of traditional orchard UK BAP Habitat near Upper Basildon.
- 4) Tall hawthorn and blackthorn hedgerows which form boundaries around fields and along roads contribute to habitat connectivity and the natural landscape.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB

The entirety of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation in this character area include the presence of country houses and landscaped parks and gardens, chalk grassland, broadleaved woodland and wood pasture habitat and a sense of

remoteness and tranquillity.²⁹

2) Nationally and locally designated semi-natural habitats

The landscape contains a high concentration of important semi-natural habitats, including many nationally and locally designated sites. The areas of lowland calcareous grassland on Lardon Chase and Holies Down are particularly valued, with both sites designated as SSSIs.

3) Historic estate character

The Grade II Registered Park and Garden of Basildon Park occupies a central position in the character area and contains a wealth of features which contribute to the historic character of the landscape, including gatehouses, lodges and boundary walls, in addition to the Grade I Listed Basildon House. Basildon Park also contains valued semi-natural habitat, including areas of wood pasture and parkland BAP Priority Habitat.

4) Sense of time-depth due to presence of visible archaeological features and historic field patterns

Archaeological features create a strong sense of time-depth in the landscape, including the putative Bronze Age earthwork of Grim's Ditch which crosses the character area from east to west. The field patterns are often of medieval origin, although in some places these have modified for modern agricultural purposes. Remaining historic field patterns in the north of the area should be preserved.

5) Strong wooded character, including areas of ancient semi-natural woodland

The character area is densely wooded, with blocks of woodland, frequent in-field trees and mature trees along field boundaries and roads. Many of the woodlands are ancient semi-natural woodlands, and are often designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Woodlands within this character area often occur in interconnected blocks forming important ecological corridors.

6) Recreational value

A dense network of public rights of way provides recreational opportunities throughout the landscape. The National Trust property of Basildon Park draws people to the area. Open Access Land at Lardon Chase is also a valued destination for recreation.

7) Generally sparsely settled with strong rural character

There is a lack of development and modernising features in the landscape, which is characterised by expanses of farmland, woodland and semi-natural grassland. The narrow rural laneways which are sunk into dry valleys and bound by high hedgerows create the perception of a sense of escape and isolation from nearby urban areas. Near the linear settlement areas, the rural perceptions are diluted.

8) Expansive open views and setting for the River Thames and Chilterns AONB

Views can be experienced from high points in the landscape including Lardon Chase. The expansive view over the Goring Gap to the hills and ridges of the North Wessex Downs beyond is a well-known vantage point. The open views provide a stark contrast with the sense of enclosure which is often experienced throughout the landscape. The wooded slopes form a dramatic setting to the River Thames and the Chilterns AONB.

DETRACTORS

1) Historic loss of hedgerow field boundaries

There has been some loss of hedgerow boundaries around arable fields, including mature hedgerow trees, resulting in large open fields with an intensively farmed character.

2) Changes in farming practice altering the character of the rural landscape

²⁹ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

These changes include a reduction in livestock grazing and intensification of arable practices. Less grazing can cause marginal land to become neglected or converted to other uses such as equine paddocks. Intensification of arable agriculture may degrade or destroy habitats or natural features amongst the farmland.

3) Lack of appropriate woodland management in some areas

Some woodlands are lacking in appropriate management. This is a particular issue for those with ancient semi-natural origin which would traditionally be coppiced or managed as wood pasture. The clear felling of plantations has a negative impact on the visual qualities of the area. The introduction of coniferous shelterbelts which are not in keeping with the landscape can also be a detracting feature.

4) Impacts of future tall structures on skylines

Existing electricity infrastructure impacts the landscape, with pylons and overhead lines forming prominent features above the undeveloped, wooded skylines. Localised visual intrusions including tall structures such as masts on the open summits are also an issue.

5) Increased traffic pressures and subsequent loss of tranquillity

Pressure on rural roads with increased traffic which may lead to requirement of road improvements (e.g. road widening) that may degrade the rural qualities of the character area. Loss of tranquillity with increased traffic and development.

6) Ongoing development pressure

Historically there has been linear development on the edges of the character area, particularly around Upper Basildon. As well as diluting the rural character of the area, this has also resulted in an erosion of settlement separation between formerly distinct areas.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its historic parklands and dense woodland. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Ensure appropriate management of field boundaries

Replace lost hedgerows where they have lost and promote appropriate management techniques for remaining hedgerows including the replanting of hedgerow trees.

3) Protect and enhance ancient semi-natural woodland and lowland calcareous grassland

The conservation of areas of lowland calcareous grassland should continue, with the restoration/creation of this habitat undertaken where possible. Ancient semi-natural woodlands should be conserved with traditional management techniques such as coppicing reintroduced where appropriate. The re-planting of native hardwoods should be encouraged, in particular beech, ash and oak species.

4) Ensure the appropriate management of plantation woodlands

Management of plantation woodlands should be appropriate for the landscape. Large areas of clear felling of conifer plantations should be avoided; instead selective felling should be adopted to utilise natural regeneration and reduce the landscape impact of felling. Where new plantations are created, care should be taken to minimise single species planting or the planting of exotic conifers.

5) Conversion of farm buildings and new agricultural buildings should be in keeping

with the existing built character

Existing barns and farmhouses are an important visual element in the landscape. Any conversions of old farm buildings should conserve the intrinsic character and detail of the buildings. New agricultural buildings should be in keeping with traditional building of the character area to avoid visual intrusion, and large scale developments should be sensitive of the existing grouping of farm buildings.

6) Conserve and enhance archaeological features and the sense of time-depth

Historic features of the landscape should be sensitively managed including Grim's Ditch and Basildon Park. For Basildon Park, active parkland management should plan for future changes, including the replanting of trees where necessary. The setting of historic features should be respected. Historic field patterns should be retained, with field boundaries restored where they have previously been lost.

7) Conserve the recreational value of the landscape

Maintain the network of public rights of way and areas of Open Access Land which provide valued recreational resource.

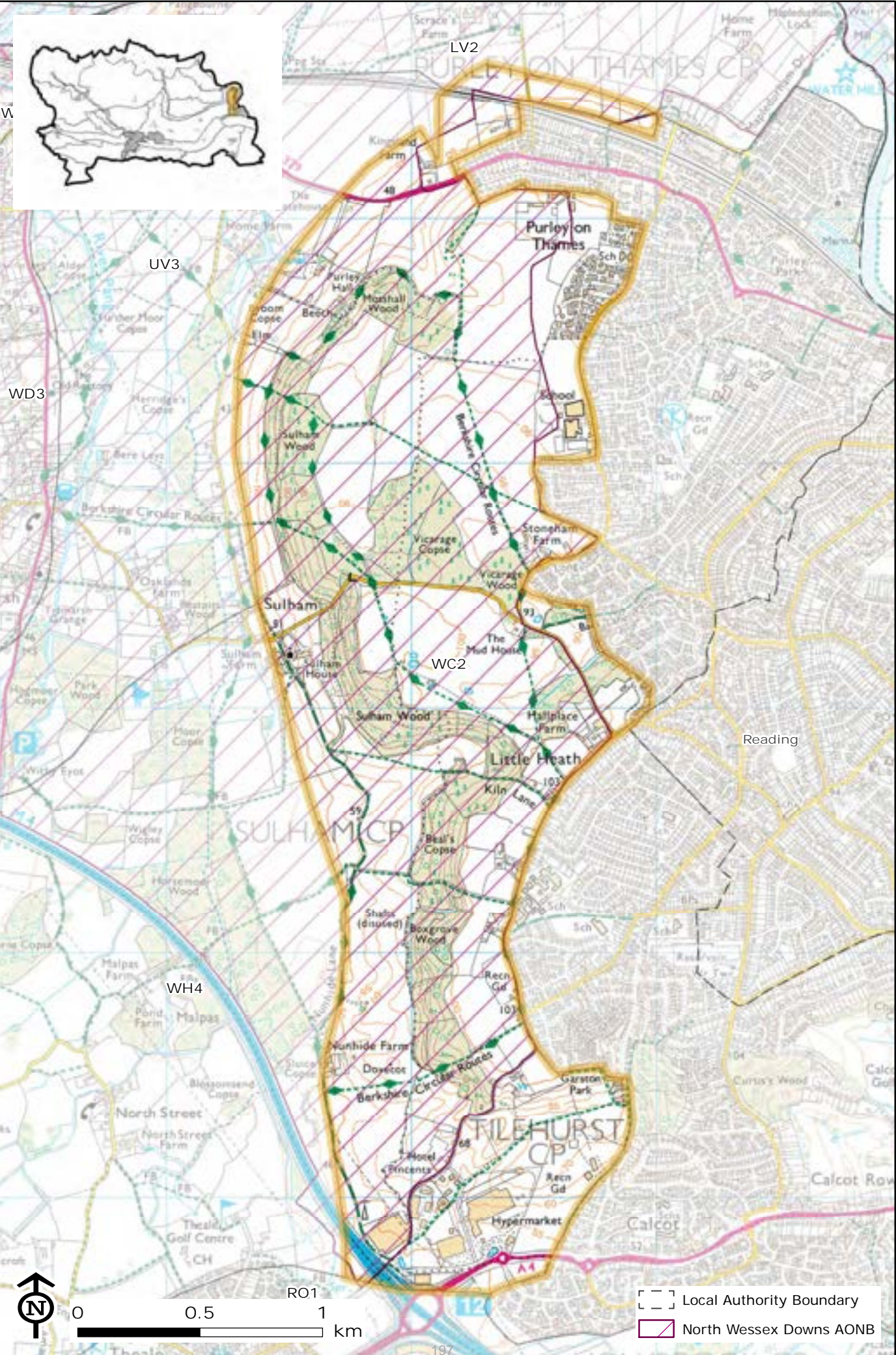
8) Conserve and enhance the tranquil rural qualities and sparsely settled character

Further inappropriate expansion of linear settlements should be resisted and development of new housing/large agricultural buildings on the open slopes avoided. Any new buildings should be in keeping with the character area using appropriate building materials and following the local vernacular detailing. Maintain the rural character of roads and lanes, avoiding upgrading (e.g. widening and increased signage).

9) Conserve extensive views and role of the area as part of the wooded setting to the Thames and Chilterns

Ensure views over the Goring Gap and along the Thames Valley, particularly from Lardon Chase are retained and not degraded by development or land use changes within or outside of the character area. Maintain the rural wooded backdrop in views to the area considering the impact of any change on these views, and particularly changes which would disrupt the overall wooded character or break the skyline.

LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes



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SUMMARY

This small area on the western edge of Reading has an undulating chalk topography with a steep slope dropping from the east to the west of the area. The slope is densely wooded, while on flatter ground there is extensive arable agriculture with larger fields; elsewhere smaller pasture fields remain. The area is sparsely settled, with the small village of Sulham and scattered farms. An out of town retail centre is located adjacent to the M4 and A4 at the southern edge of the character area. Where the ground is elevated it provides extensive views, but overall the wooded character make it feel enclosed.

The majority of the character area is within the North Wessex Downs AONB, excepting some areas immediately adjacent to the urban edge of Reading. To the west, the land flattens into the valley bottom of the River Pang (LCA A3). The edge of Reading forms the eastern boundary. The valleys of the River Thames and the River Kennet form the northern and southern boundaries respectively.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) Steeply sloping landform, underlain by upper chalk geology

The area is characterised by a steep slope running north-south, with more elevated land in the east. Elsewhere, the landform is gently undulating. The geology of the area is upper chalk, overlain in parts by Reading beds and London clay.

2) Land use is primarily mixed farmland and woodland, with some historic parkland

Arable farming has created larger fields, with occasional smaller fields retained as pasture. A large band of interconnected mixed woodland runs in a broad dense strip along the steeper ground. Some woodlands are commercially managed conifer plantations. Field origins are medieval or post-medieval assarting of woodland; creating enclosed irregular pasture or arable fields. In the west of the character area field amalgamation has created larger fields. Purley Park introduces a historic estate character in the west of the area.

3) Semi-natural grassland and woodland along the ridgeline contribute to natural character

Woodland concentrated along the central ridge slope includes areas of ancient semi-natural woodland, a number of which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Within the farmed landscape there are areas of lowland calcareous grassland. The network of hedgerows and occasional in-field ponds also contribute to the natural character of the area.

4) Time-depth given by the estate landscape of Purley Park and historic farms

The estate at Purley Park Registered Park and Garden (Grade II*) is an 18th century formal landscape park which contains a number of Listed Buildings. Elsewhere, there is a scattering of historic farm buildings constructed in a traditional vernacular, a number of which are Listed Buildings.

5) Sparsely settled with scattered farms and houses and the village of Sulham

Settlement is limited to the village of Sulham which is nucleated around a flint church, manor houses (including the Grade II* Purley Hall) and scattered historic farms. Red brick is the principle building material here. Surrounding the east of the character area are the outskirts of Reading and Purley on Thames, which sometimes encroach into the area including. There is an out of town retail and employment area at the Calcot M4/A4 junction.

6) Access via occasional rural lanes and a dense network of public rights of way

Roads are limited to occasional rural lanes which cross the character area. A good network of footpaths and bridleways provide access, many of which are based historic routes and form part of the Berkshire Circular Routes. The M4 runs along the south west of the character area and introduces movement and noise.

7) There are expansive views from elevated areas, although woodland can create a sense of enclosure

Extensive views are experienced from some vantage points and are particularly prominent from the western edge of Sulham Wood, which looks out over the Pang Valley. Other areas have a sense of enclosure due to the densely wooded character. The wooded skylines are prominent above the adjacent valley landscapes. There are views north across the Thames to prominent ridges including Boze Down.

8) Strong rural character despite close proximity of urban development

An aesthetically pleasing rural landscape with a strong sense of tranquillity, although there can be urban fringe influences immediately adjacent to the urban edge or major infrastructure including the M4.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) The area has seen intensive past human activity and has been in use for settlement and agriculture since at least the later prehistoric period. The majority of evidence for this comes from below-ground archaeological remains and there are few traces of this that influence the present landscape. Some evidence of activity from the prehistoric period has been recovered from the area and includes Palaeolithic flintwork from the Sadler's Farm site (east of Sulham Wood) and transitional Palaeolithic/Mesolithic flintwork from Nunhide Farm.
- 2) Cropmarks thought to be of later prehistoric/Romano-British field systems and settlements have been mapped east of Sulham Wood.
- 3) The area lay partly within the royal forests of Pamber and Fremantle, established in the medieval period. These were areas of mixed land-cover, including areas of woodland, in which the right to hunt was restricted to the monarch, as well as other activities, and were under Forest Law. Following disafforestation in the post-medieval period, woodlands in the area were gradually subject to piecemeal clearance and enclosure (assartment) into fields. Woodland remains mainly on steeper slopes and ridge tops and indicates areas where farming practices were impractical.
- 4) Sulham dates back to the early medieval period and is mentioned in Domesday as having a church; the current gothic-style Victorian church is thought to stand on the same site.
- 5) Purley Park is an early 18th century formal landscape park and is a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden; many of its buildings are also Listed. The parkland contains a number of traditional estate features, including walls, gates and stable buildings. The Grade II* Listed central house is earlier in date, c.1609, and the park also contains a temple commemorating the battle of Culloden.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) The character area is densely wooded, with a mix of coniferous plantation and deciduous woodland (some which is ancient in origin). Highly wooded areas with different compositions including ancient semi-natural woodland and mixed woodland provide vital ecological habitats. Woodland particularly on the plateau tops is considerably dense and mixed.
- 2) Woodland blocks are mostly interconnected within the character area, with a network of good hedges containing oak trees further acting as wildlife corridors between them. The variety of vegetation here makes the area particularly habitat rich.
- 3) Significantly large sections of the woodlands are of ancient semi-natural origin and are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Wide grassy verges along lanes are also present here.
- 4) Small copses of woodland, in-field ponds and grass buffer strips on the edges of arable land provide valued habitat among the farmland.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

The majority of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation include the presence of country houses and landscaped parks and gardens, broadleaved woodland and wood pasture habitat and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity³⁰.

2) Strong wooded character, including ancient woodland

The dense woodland along the ridge includes many areas of woodland which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites for their conservation value. The wooded skylines of the ridge provide a setting and prominent backdrop to settlements within the adjacent Pang Valley, including the village of Sulham.

3) Valued area for recreation

Extensive public rights of way connect the landscape to nearby centres of population, providing opportunities for informal recreation. These include the Berkshire Circular Routes trail.

4) Strong rural character and sense of tranquillity and wooded setting

This is especially valued given the close proximity of the urban edges of Reading. The sense of enclosure provided by the frequent woodland and the winding rural lanes which cross the landscape result in the perception of the area being far removed from the nearby urban environment. The wooded slopes provide an important setting to the wider urban area help integrate Reading within its landscape context.

5) Historic features including parkland

Historic features in the landscape contribute to the sense of time-depth experienced in this area. The designed parkland of Purley Hall originates from the early 18th century and introduces a historic estate character to the landscape. Fields are generally medieval in origin, although many have been modified to accommodate modern agriculture, diluting historic field patterns.

6) Extensive views from vantage points

Where woodland cover allows, there is inter-visibility with other areas of high ground within the AONB including Boze Down to the north.

DETRACTORS

1) Ongoing development pressure

Due to its proximity to Reading the character area is under continued development pressure. New development in the north of the area near Purley on Thames and in the south adjacent to the A4 has encroached into the character area. Land uses associated with the urban area, including recreation grounds, schools and retail areas can create an urban fringe character in the otherwise strongly rural landscape.

2) Changes in farming practices

Intensification of arable agriculture has led to change in character, with the removal or alteration of field boundaries and other features such as in-field ponds. Reduction of livestock numbers can result in an increase in scrub encroachment and poorly managed field boundaries. Close to the urban area, there is likely to be ongoing pressure for hobby farms and horse paddocks.

³⁰ Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

3) Lack of appropriate woodland management in some areas

Some woodlands are lacking in appropriate management. This is a particular issue for those with ancient semi-natural origin which would traditionally be coppiced or managed as wood pasture. The clear felling of plantations has had a negative impact on the visual qualities of the area.

4) Increase in traffic on rural roads

There is pressure on the network of rural lanes from traffic using them to access the urban area which creates noise pollution and a loss of tranquillity in the rural landscape. As a result, there may be a possible need for road improvements (e.g. road widening or increased signage) that could degrade the character of the area.

5) Intrusion of the M4 and large commercial buildings on rural and tranquil qualities

The M4 runs along the south west edge of the character area and creates noise and visual disturbance in the landscape. Large structures within a retail park also occupy the southern part of the character area and introduce urbanising features into the landscape.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY**1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB**

Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its historic parklands and dense woodland. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.

2) Protect and enhance important semi-natural habitats

Protect and enhance areas which are valued for nature conservation, including the numerous Local Wildlife Sites. Conserve and enhance other features which contribute positively to the natural character of the area, including in-field ponds, hedgerows and hedgerow/in-field trees.

3) Promote appropriate woodland management and creation

Seek to manage woodlands using traditional practices such as coppicing. Diversification of plantation woodlands and planting of native broadleaved trees and mixed stands also serve as good opportunities to enhance the woodland character of the area. Selective tree felling rather than clear felling should be encouraged in plantations to avoid cleared areas that are discordant with the surrounding area.

4) Conserve rural character and role as wooded setting to Reading

The sparse and dispersed settlement nature of the area should be conserved where possible, to avoid gradual merging and coalescence with the nearby suburban areas. The visual impact of urban fringe areas on the character area should be screened using existing features including the woodland. Any new development should be in-keeping with the existing settlement pattern and vernacular.

5) Conserve the valued historic features of the landscape

Conserve parkland areas by continuing their active management, including the planting of new parkland trees. Views of parkland should also ideally remain visible from the surrounding area as a positive feature of the landscape. Ensure that any modifications to historic farm buildings within the landscape do not detract from their character.

6) Conserve characteristic winding lanes and extensive public rights of way

Maintain extensive public rights of way to allow the continued recreational use of the area and minimise road improvements that may degrade the rural quality of the area. Avoid the use of standardised and intrusive urban materials, street furniture, lighting and signage whenever

appropriate.

7) Conserve important views and vantage points and role as wooded setting to Reading and the Pang valley

Ensure that important views and vantage points are not obstructed, in particular those areas which allow inter-visibility with other high points in the North Wessex Downs AONB and consider change in the context of its role as a wooded setting to the Pang Valley and Reading, e.g. conserving undeveloped skylines.

- CL1: Grazeley Open Clay Lowland.

LCA CL1: Grazeley Open Clay Lowland



SUMMARY

A rural area, characterised by mixed agricultural use lying to the east of Burghfield Common and Mortimer. It is typical of a lowland farming area, with mature oak trees within hedgerows and free-standing in fields, a series of minor waterways and small red brick settlements. The woodland copses, species-rich hedgerows and streams provide connected habitats. The area has high relative levels of tranquillity, despite its close proximity to major transport routes.

The southern extent of the area is marked by the 'Devil's Highway' Roman road which also forms the District boundary. To the west the landscape becomes more undulating as it transitions to the sandy geology of the Woodland and Heathland Mosaic Landscape Type (LCA WH5). The eastern boundary is defined by the extent of West Berkshire District. The distinct valley of the River Kennet flows to the north.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

1) A broad, flat to gently undulating landscape, underlain by London Clay with valley gravel deposits and crossed by streams and brooks

A broad and flat to gently undulating landform, centered on the junction of several valley systems and the floodplain for the Foudry Brook and other minor tributaries to the River Loddon. There are also areas of standing water including small lakes and farm ponds. The underlying geology is London Clay, overlain by valley gravel deposits in some areas.

2) Traditional lowland mixed farming landscape divided into large-scale fields bounded by hedgerows

The area is predominantly rural with mixed arable and pastoral farming, divided into large-scale fields. These farmed areas are broken by small woodlands, particularly on steeper gravel ridges. Fields are divided by hedgerows that are normally flailed, but which in some places have become gappy and fragmented. In other places hedgerows are well developed with many mature oak trees within them, as well as standards in fields. AWE Burghfield and a golf course are also prominent land uses within this area.

3) Ancient woodland, meadows and wetland habitats intersperse the farmland

Numerous areas of ancient woodland occur amongst the farmland, including some which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Wetland habitats include parts of the Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI. Areas of semi-natural grassland and lowland meadows provide wildlife interest. Some species rich-hedgerows form part of a wider habitat network. The north of the area contains areas of open water associated with former industry.

4) Time-depth is evidenced by historic farm buildings and former Roman routes

A number of Listed Buildings are located in the landscape, including several Grade II Listed farmhouses. Grade II* Listed Buildings include St Benedict's School, The Priory at Beech Hill, the Church of St Mary The Virgin and structures at Mortimer Railway Station. The Roman Road known as the Devil's Highway provides evidence of Roman occupation of this area. The road was likely used by inhabitants of the nearby Roman town at Silchester.

5) Sparsely settled rural area with small villages, hamlets and scattered farmsteads

Lying to the east of Burghfield Common and Mortimer, settlement is relatively sparse in the rural character area with several hamlets and villages and a scattering of dispersed farmsteads. Both nucleated and linear patterned settlements exist here with the largest village being Beech Hill, located on a ridge. Buildings are mostly red-brick built and sometimes with burnt header course detail.

6) Winding lanes connect the rural hamlets and villages

Winding lanes cross this rural area and are typically bound by grass verges and water-filled ditches. Small bridges cross the minor brooks present in the character area. The M4 runs along the northern border of the character area which creates noise and visual obstruction, while a railway line runs through the west and the A33 along the eastern boundary.

7) Varied visual character – enclosed areas contrasting with more open areas

From some vantage points, there are expansive views across the large fields enabled by low hedgerows. Elsewhere, mature trees and thick hedgerows restrict views and create a sense of enclosure, particularly along some roads. Churches at Stratfield Mortimer and Beech Hill provide important local focal points. Overhead power lines and pylons form prominent features on the skyline and detract from views in places.

8) Strongly rural agricultural landscape, with high levels of relative tranquillity

This is a typical lowland mixed farming landscape with a traditional rural character resulting from farmland interspersed with mature oak trees in fields and hedgerows. Limited development means the area supports dark night skies. There are few modern influences within the landscape however intrusions such as the M4 along the northern boundary and the A33 along the eastern edge of the area can negatively impact on tranquillity.

Evidence of Past Use and Cultural Evolution

- 1) There are few historic artefacts that have been found within the character area but the proximity to the Roman road known as the 'Devil's Highway' and the Roman town at Silchester make it probable that the area was exploited in that era. It is possible that Stratfield Mortimer has been settled since the Saxon period as there is a grave slab from this era in the churchyard here.
- 2) Much of the framework of the landscape dates back to before the 18th century as most settlements, fields and tracks were in existence by this time. Changes in farming have led to modification of the majority of the historic enclosures.
- 3) Historically settlement was fairly sparse and characterised by hamlets at Stratfield Mortimer and Beech Hill, common edge settlements at Grazeley Green and Goddard's Green, and a scatter of farmsteads in between. Most housing growth has been small in scale and has occurred around the historic settlement at Beech Hill.
- 4) There were a number of deer parks in the area, although these are no longer present. Park Farm and Little Park Farm mark the sites of old deer parks.

Natural Landscape and Priority Habitats

- 1) A network of well-developed, species rich, hedgerows with mature oak trees divides the fields. Small wooded copses and lines of trees fringing the minor watercourses enhance the landscape and also provide important habitats.
- 2) Many of the woodlands here are of ancient semi-natural origin and a number are designated as Local Wildlife Sites including Little Copse and Pinge Wood.
- 3) Several brooks and streams cross the area, with associated wetland habitats. Part of Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI is located in the south-eastern corner of the character area and is protected for chalk stream habitats and seasonally waterlogged hay meadows which support diverse plant and animal species.
- 4) In addition to deciduous woodland UK BAP priority habitats, there are also areas of lowland meadows, purple moor grass and rush pastures and floodplain grazing marsh.

VALUED FEATURES AND QUALITIES

1) Well-wooded character of the landscape including ancient woodland

Woodland resource within the area includes blocks of deciduous woodland amongst the farmland (including ancient woodland) and large mature oak trees both within hedgerows and as field specimens.

2) Sense of time-depth in buildings and surviving historic field patterns

Scattered historic farm buildings (some of which are Listed) and surviving historic field patterns from the late medieval/early post-medieval period provide evidence of the historic land use of the area and contribute positively to its character.

3) Valued for recreation

The landscape is crossed by a network of public rights of way including parts of the Berkshire Circular Routes and the Devil's Highway/Park Lane which are used for informal recreation. Golfing facilities at Wokefield Park represent formal recreation activity.

4) Important semi-natural habitats relating to the network of streams

A diverse range of semi-natural habitats occur within the landscape. These include semi-natural grassland and wetland habitats, including a network of streams and brooks. Several

areas are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI is nationally recognised for its river and grassland habitats.

5) Strongly rural landscape with high levels of tranquillity and dark night skies

The limited settlement and modern influences in this area means that it is predominantly rural, with high levels of tranquillity and dark night skies.

6) Rural setting to existing settlement

Settlement is limited to small villages and scattered farmsteads. The rural landscape provides an undeveloped backdrop and setting to existing settlement.

DETRACTORS

1) Development pressures for residential and commercial use

The proximity of the landscape to Reading results in the area being under pressure for both residential and commercial development. New development out of character with the local context would detract from the rural quality of this landscape and impact tranquillity and dark night skies, changing the character of the small settlements in this area.

2) Lack of appropriate woodland management in some locations

Possibility of decline in farm woodlands and mature trees where they are not replaced. Reintroduction of traditional management techniques including coppicing

3) Decline in hedgerow quality and loss of farm ponds

Poor management of hedgerows and intensive flailing has resulted in some hedgerows becoming gappy and of poor quality. Intensification of farmland has also resulted in the loss of some valued features including in-field ponds.

4) Noise and visual disruption from transport routes

Noise and movement emanating from busy transport routes including the nearby M4, A33 and the railway line are locally intrusive in places and have a negative impact on the rural and tranquil qualities of this mostly undeveloped landscape.

5) Intrusive features including electricity infrastructure

Pylons and overhead lines cross the landscape and form prominent skyline features above the otherwise undeveloped, wooded skylines. Large-scale fencing around the Atomic Weapons Establishment complex at Burghfield can also intrude on the rural character of the landscape. There are also some urban fringe influences.

6) Increased levels of traffic on rural roads

Traffic pressures leading to a decline in the quality of the rural character of rural lanes through erosion of verges and the introduction of inappropriate management including widening, kerbing, urban signage and roadside furniture.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

1) Conserve and enhance woodland, trees and hedgerows within the landscape

Trees should be conserved, including areas of ancient woodland (many of which are Local Wildlife Sites) and hedgerow and in-field oaks. New trees should be planted where appropriate. Additionally, protect linear groups of riparian trees, such as alder and willow following watercourses. Encourage farming practices that retain and enhance the species rich hedgerows. Prevent removal of further hedgerows for field enlargement, and replant those that have been lost, where appropriate.

2) Protect and enhance semi-natural habitats

Ensure the appropriate management of nationally and locally valued semi-natural habitats. Seek to link up habitats where appropriate to improve their ecological resilience. Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI is currently assessed as being in 'favourable' condition, which should be maintained.

3) Conserve the distinct rural character of the area

New development should be sympathetic to the rural character of the area. Avoid introducing suburbanising features such as coniferous hedge boundaries, close boarded fencing and security lighting on the edges of settlements.

4) Maintain the network of public rights of way and rural lanes

Ensure that the recreation value of the landscape is retained by maintaining the existing network of public rights of way and linking up routes where possible. Conserve the character of rural lanes and ensure that any road improvements are not detrimental to their character. Avoid the use of standardised and intrusive urban materials, street furniture, lighting and signage whenever appropriate.

5) Respect the form and vernacular of existing settlements in the landscape

Ensure that any new development is in-keeping with existing settlement form and vernacular. The built environment forms an integral part of local character and distinctiveness and adds to the diversity of the landscape as a whole.

6) Conserve and enhance historic features within the landscape

Ensure that the integrity and setting of historic features which give the landscape a sense of time-depth are conserved and enhanced. These include historic field patterns and historic farm buildings, many of which are Listed.

Appendix 1: Relationship to Landscape Classifications used in Earlier Studies

This assessment builds upon the existing local authority scale assessments from 1993 and 2003 as well as the 2002 North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (which covers 74% of the District). The West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment supersedes both the Newbury District Landscape Assessment (1993) and Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003) but continues to sit alongside the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002) which covers a broader area.

The table below indicates the relationship between the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Types (as presented in this assessment) and the North Wessex Downs AONB landscape types, Berkshire and Newbury landscape types.

West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Type (2019)	North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Type (2002)	Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Type (2003)	Newbury District Landscape Assessment Landscape Type (1993)
CL (Open Clay Lowlands)		(L) Open Clay Lowlands	(12) London Clay (15) London Clay with Gravel Ridges
CS (Chalk Scarp)	(2) Downland with Woodland (6) Vales	(D) Chalk Scarp	(2) Chalk Dipslopes and Lowlands, and Chalk with Tertiary or Gravel Deposits (5) Southern Chalkland
FC (Farmed Chalk Mosaic)	(2) Downland with Woodland (3) Wooded Plateau (8) Lowland Mosaic	(G) Farmed Chalk Mosaic	(2) Chalk Dipslopes and Lowlands, and Chalk with Tertiary or Gravel Deposits (3) Western Wooded Chalkland (11) Wooded Lowland Farming (13) Gravel Plateau Woodlands with Pasture and Heaths (14) Plateau Edge Transitional Matrix (18) Parkland
LV (Lower River Valley)	(6) Vales (7) River Valleys	(B) Lower Valley Floor	(7) River Valleys (8) Kennet Valley (10) Thames Valley (17) Large Scale Valley Farmlands

OD (Open Downland)	(I) Open Downland	(E) Open Downlands (N) Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes	(1) Chalk Uplands (2) Chalk Dipslopes and Lowlands, and Chalk with Tertiary or Gravel Deposits (4a) Eastern Chalkland – Open Downland
RO (Lower River with Open Water)		(C) Lower River with Open Water	(8) Kennet Valley (9) Kennet Valley - degraded
UV (Upper Valley Floor)	(7) River Valleys	(A) Upper Valley Floor	(6) Lambourn Valley Upper (6a) Lambourn Valley Lower (7) Pang Valley (8) Kennet Valley (16) Small Scale Wooded Valley Farmland
WC (Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes)	(2) Downland with Woodland	(N) Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes	(2) Chalk Dipslopes and Lowlands, and Chalk with Tertiary or Gravel Deposits (4) Eastern Chalkland – Wooded (13) Gravel Plateau Woodlands with Pasture and Heaths (14) Plateau Edge Transitional Matrix (18) Parkland
WD (Wooded Downland)	(1) Open Downland (2) Downland with Woodland	(F) Wooded Downland	(1) Chalk Uplands (2) Chalk Dipslopes and Lowlands, and Chalk with Tertiary or Gravel Deposits (3) Western Wooded Chalkland (4) Eastern Chalkland – Wooded (13) Gravel Plateau Woodlands with Pastures and Heaths (18) Parkland

WH (Woodland and Heathland Mosaic)	(8) Lowland Mosaic	(H) Woodland and Heathland Mosaic	(11) Wooded Lowland Farming
			(12)
			(13) Gravel Plateau Woodlands with Pasture and Heaths
			(14) Plateau Edge Transitional Matrix
			(18) Parkland
			(18a) Parkland - Degraded

The key differences between the **North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002)** and the **West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment** are:

- 1) Landscape type *8 Lowland Mosaic* has been subdivided at the West Berkshire scale into the chalk based landscapes of the *Farmed Chalk Mosaic (FC)* and the more acidic ridges of the *Woodland and Heathland Mosaic (WH)*.
- 2) Landscape type *2 Downland with Woodland* has been subdivided at the West Berkshire scale into its constituent elements of *Wooded Downland (WD)*, *Chalk Scarp (CS)* and *Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes (WC)* in order to distinguish the more rolling landscapes of the general wooded downland area from that of the dramatic scarp at Walbury Hill and the distinctive slopes overlooking the River Thames near the Goring Gap, which continue in the east of Berkshire (outside of the AONB Boundary).
- 3) There are boundary differences between North Wessex Downs landscape types 1 and 2 and West Berkshire types OD and WD, around South Fawley (OD1/WD2) and around Farnborough and Stanmore (OD2/WD2). This represents the transitional nature of the change from open to wooded downland where in this assessment in relation to the surrounding downlands this landscape is considered to be more 'wooded' than 'open' whereas in the North Wessex Downs assessment the reverse was true in considering the whole of the downland stretching into Wiltshire. Since the issues and considerations for development in these landscape types are similar it is not thought that this will present problems for the use of the assessment.

The key boundary changes between the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003) and the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment are:

- 1) The Open Downland type has been subdivided into two LCAs rather than five (OD1 and OD2). This is due to the lack of discernible difference in the characteristics and visual appearance of these areas.
- 2) The Farmed Chalk Mosaic type has been subdivided into five LCAs rather than six (FC1-FC5). The Boxford and Winterbourne character areas have a consistent character and visual interaction across the river valley, and are therefore treated as one character area, in a similar manner to the Yattendon character area.
- 3) There is a boundary difference between the Woodland and Heathland Mosaic and the Open Clay Lowland (WH5 and CL1). This represents a clearer distinction between the lowland area and the higher ground.
- 4) Two areas of Kennet Lower River Valley to the west of Newbury have been reclassified into Lambourn Upper Valley Floor (UV2) and Kennet Upper Valley Floor (UV1). The northern section is still part of the Lambourn, as the two rivers have their confluence east of Newbury. The boundary between the Kennet Upper Valley Floor and Kennet Lower River Valley has been redrawn so that it is separated by Newbury.

Variations between the **Newbury District Landscape Assessment (1993)** and the **West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment** are more numerous, due chiefly to a greater subdivision of landscape character types, although the Newbury District study did not define separate landscape character areas within these types. Chief differences are:

- 1) *Parkland* and *Parkland - Degraded* were identified as distinct types, whereas the new assessment references these within the context of broader character areas.
- 2) More transitional areas are identified around the gravel plateaux that occur to the north and south of the Kennet Valley, using the *Plateau Edge Transitional Matrix* type. The new assessment has accommodated these transitions within the broader *Woodland and Heathland Mosaic* (WH) and *Farmed Chalk Mosaic* (FC) types.
- 3) The Newbury study identified small areas of *London Clay with Gravel Ridges*, *Small-scale Wooded Valley Farmland* and *Large Scale Valley Farmland*. As with the 2003 Berkshire study, these variations are accommodated within the revised typology and character areas.

Appendix 2: Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum (sea level).
Agricultural Land Classification	The classification of agricultural land in England in Wales.
Analysis	The process of breaking the landscape down, usually in descriptive terms, into its component parts in order to understand how it is made up.
Ancient woodland	Woodland which is believed to have had a continuous woodland cover since at least 1600AD and has only been cleared for underwood or timber production. It includes ancient semi-natural woodland and plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS). It is an extremely valuable ecological resource, with an exceptionally high diversity of flora and fauna.
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – a statutory national landscape designation to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. The North Wessex Downs AONB covers 74% of West Berkshire.
Approach	The step-wise process by which a landscape assessment is undertaken.
Arable	Land used for growing crops.
Assart	The informal enclosure of private farmland by encroachment into woodland or heath.
Assessment	An umbrella term used to encompass all the many different ways of looking at, describing, analysing and evaluating landscape.
BAP	UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species and habitats were identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK BAP. The original lists of UK BAP priority habitats were created between 1995 and 1999 and were subsequently updated in 2007. See http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5155 for further information.
Biodiversity	The measure of the variety of organisms present in different ecosystems.
Brownfield site	Previously developed land.
Built form	The characteristic nature of built development.
Carr woodland	Marsh or fen woodland in waterlogged terrain. Characteristic trees include alders and willows.
Characteristic	An element that contributes to local distinctiveness (e.g. narrow

	winding lanes, vernacular building style).
Classification	A process of sorting the landscape into different types, each with a distinct, consistent and recognisable character.
Condition	A judgement on the intactness and condition of the elements of the landscape.
Conservation Area	An area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. A Designated Heritage Asset.
Coppicing	The traditional method of woodland management in which trees are cut down to near the ground to encourage the production of long, straight shoots, which can subsequently be harvested.
Description	Verbal description of what a landscape looks like. This is usually carried out in a systematic manner, but it may also include personal reactions to the landscape.
Disafforestation	Removal of areas from a Forest and associated Forest Law, not necessarily a loss of any woodland in the former Royal Forest.
Drift	The name for all material of glacial origin found anywhere on land or at sea, including sediment and large rocks.
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment– a procedure to be followed for certain types of project to ensure that decisions are made in full knowledge of any likely significant effects on the environment.
Element	A component part of the landscape (e.g. hedges, roads, woods).
Enclosure	The placing in private hands of land to which there was previously common rights; the merging of strip fields to form a block surrounded by hedges.
Equine development	A term used to describe areas on the fringes of settlements which are dominated by horse paddocks, stable buildings and associated paraphernalia.
Eutrophic	The state of a water body when it has an excess of nutrients usually derived from agricultural fertilisers. The process by which a water body becomes overloaded with nutrients is known as eutrophication and leads to a dense plant population, the decomposition of which kills animal life by depriving it of oxygen.
Feature	A prominent, eye-catching element (e.g. wooded hilltop, church spire).
Floodplain	The area that would naturally be affected by flooding if a river rises above its banks.
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System

Grassland	Land used for grazing. Grassland can be improved (by management practices) semi-improved (modified by management practices and have a range of species less diverse than unimproved grasslands), or unimproved (not treated with fertiliser, herbicide or intensively grazed and consequently species diversity is high).
Greenfield site	Land which has not previously been used for built development.
Habitat	The natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism.
HLC	Historic Landscape Characterisation – a method of analysing and recording historic elements that make up the landscape today, using historic and modern mapping, aerial photographs and documents.
Hydrology	The science dealing with the occurrence, circulation, distribution, and properties of the waters of the earth and its atmosphere.
Intact	Not changed or diminished.
Land cover	Combinations of land use and vegetation that cover the land surface.
Landmark	An object or feature of a landscape or town that is easily seen and recognized from a distance, especially one that enables someone to establish their location.
Landscape	The term refers primarily to the visual appearance of the land, including its shape, form and colours. However, the landscape is not a purely visual phenomenon; its character relies on a whole range of other dimensions, including geology, topography, soils, ecology, archaeology, landscape history, land use, architecture and cultural associations.
Landscape character	A distinct pattern or combination of elements that occurs consistently in a particular landscape.
Landscape character area (LCA)	A unique geographic area with a consistent character and identity, which forms part of a landscape character type.
Landscape character type (LCT)	A generic term for landscape with a consistent, homogeneous character. Landscape character types may occur in different parts of the county, but wherever they occur, they will share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation or human influences.
Landscape condition	Based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional and ecological perspectives. It reflects the state of repair or intactness of individual features or elements (relating to that feature's primary condition or ultimate <i>desire</i>).
Landscape strategy	Principles to manage and direct landscape change for a particular landscape type or character area including identification of any

	particular management needs for specific elements.
Landscape value	The relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. A landscape may be valued by different communities of interest for many different reasons. Value can apply to areas of landscape as a whole or to individual elements, features and aesthetic or perceptual dimensions which contribute to the character of the landscape. There are a range of factors that can help in the identification of a valued landscape and these include: landscape quality (condition), scenic quality, rarity, representativeness, conservation interests, recreation value, perceptual aspects and associations.
Listed Building	A building or structure considered by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to be of special architectural or historic interest. A Designated Heritage Asset.
Local Plan	A Local Plan sets out planning policies for an area. The Local Plan for West Berkshire is part of the overall Development Plan for West Berkshire.
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
Marl	Sedimentary rock of soil consisting of clay and carbonate of lime, formerly used as fertilizer.
Marl pit	A small pit resulting from the extraction of marl, which has often subsequently been filled with water to form a small field pond.
Natural character	Character as a result of natural or semi-natural features such as woodland, grassland, hedgerows etc.
NCA	National Character Areas - defined within the <i>National Character Area Study, Natural England (2013)</i> - NCAs divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNR	National Nature Reserve
Nucleated settlement	A settlement that is clustered around a centre, in comparison to a linear or dispersed settlement.
Open-field system	An area of arable land with common rights after harvest or while fallow. The fields date from the medieval period and are usually without internal divisions (hedges, walls or fences).
OS	Ordnance Survey
Outcrop	The emergence of a stratum, vein or rock at the surface.
Parliamentary fields / enclosure	Fields formed by a legal process of enclosure (or inclosure), typically during the 18 th and 19 th centuries – by passing laws causing or forcing enclosure to produce fields for use by the owner

	(in place of common land for communal use).
Pastoral	Land used for keeping or grazing sheep or cattle.
Pollarding	A traditional woodland management practice in which the branches of a tree are cut back every few years to encourage new long, straight shoots for harvesting. Differs from <i>coppicing</i> because the cuts are made at sufficient distance from the ground to prevent them from being eaten by animals.
Ramsar site	Wetland site as designated by criteria agreed at the Ramsar convention.
Registered Battlefield	A site included on Historic England's Register of Historic Battlefields, a Designated Heritage Asset
Registered Park or Garden	A site included on Historic England's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, a Designated Heritage Asset
Remediation	Process by which a contaminated or damaged site is repaired and brought back into more general use.
Remnant	A part or quantity left after the greater part has been used, removed, or destroyed.
Riparian habitat	Riverbank habitat.
SAC	Special Area of Conservation – an area designated to protect the habitats of threatened species of wildlife under EU Directive 92/43.
Scheduled Monument	Nationally important monument which is included in the schedule compiled and maintained by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. A Designated Heritage Asset.
Semi-natural vegetation	Any type of natural vegetation which has been influenced by human activities, either directly or indirectly.
Sense of Place	A person's perception of a location's indigenous characteristics, based on the mix of uses, appearance and context that makes a place memorable.
Sensitive	The response to change or influence.
Skyline	The outline of a range of hills, ridge or group of buildings seen against the sky.
SPA	Special Protection Area (for birds) – an area designated to protect rare and vulnerable birds under EU Directive 79/409.
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest– identified protected area of nature conservation and scientific value identified by Natural England as being of national importance.
Time-depth	The time-period expressed in the landscape, or the extent to which the landscape reflects a certain time period (a landscape with

	greater time depth will comprise older elements than a landscape with lesser time depth).
Topography	Combinations of slope and elevation that produce the shape and form of the land surface.
Valued attributes	Positive features and characteristics that are important to landscape character and that, if lost, would result in adverse change to the landscape.
Vernacular	Buildings constructed in the local style, from local materials. Concerned with ordinary rather than monumental buildings.
Veteran tree	A tree which is of great age for its species and is of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically.

Appendix 3: Community Consultation Workshop Attendees

Attendees at Community Workshop 03.07.18
Beech Hill Parish Council
Brimpton Parish Council
Brimpton Parish Plan Team
Burghfield Parish Council
Burghfield Neighbourhood Planning Group
Cold Ash Parish Council
Compton Parish Council
Compton Neighbourhood Planning Group
Hamstead Marshall Parish Council
Hermitage Parish Council
Hungerford Neighbourhood Planning Group
Hungerford Town Council
Inkpen Parish Council
Lambourn Parish Council
Peasemore Parish Council
Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council
Tilehurst Parish Council
Wokefield Parish Council
Yattendon Parish Council
WBC Member for Cold Ash
WBC Member for Newbury
Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust
North Wessex Downs AONB
WBC Development Control

WBC Archaeology Service
WBC Rights of Way Team
WBC Minerals and Waste Team
WBC Planning Policy Team

Appendix 4: Community Consultation Workshop - record of comments

Comments provided at the consultation event, and in subsequent responses, helped to inform the definition of assessment area boundaries, the descriptions of key characteristics, valued features and qualities, detractors and landscape strategy.

Southeast table

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
Greenham Woodland and Heathland Mosaic	LCA boundary will need to change to reflect the allocated Sandleford development	Scenic views from Greenham Common over valleys to north and south.	New Greenham Park – visual impact
		Greenham Common brings people in from the wider area for recreation.	Gravel extraction is an issue around Brimpton (also in Burghfield Woodland and Heathland Mosaic LCA). Proposed developments could have a significant impact on traffic and hence landscape character.
		Extent of recreational use has had some adverse impact on birds.	Sandleford housing allocation
Grazeley Open Clay Lowlands	Grazeley Garden Village development will reduce extent of the LCA	Valued dark night skies. Mortimer is recognised as a dark village in the Neighbourhood Development Plan.	Proposed Grazeley Garden Village development seen as a significant detractor
	Recommended boundary amendment: move boundary west to edges of Mortimer and Burghfield Common	Rural character is valued.	Solar farm development
		Historic churches at the village centres	AONB status of most of the District is seen as increasing development pressure in this LCA.

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
Kennet Lower River Valley	Area of Kennet to west of Newbury should be included with Kennet Upper Valley Floor, and small area to the north of that should be part of Lambourn Upper Valley Floor	Close relationship between landscape and ecological value of the river	Solar farm development – at least four.
	Funnelled views along Kennet Valley	Internationally important Mesolithic remains	Gravel workings have a negative impact but sites restored as lakes, with ecological interest, are looked on more favourably. Restoration to former appearance also an option, but waterbodies seen as offering more defence against future development (e.g. solar farms).
		Very popular with walkers	Increased canal boat traffic seen as having some adverse ecological impact on condition of River Kennet.
		Tranquillity of the river valley	Traffic increase with associated development (e.g. on A4) - including parking. Bridging points on rivers are particularly affected.
			Electrification of railway – overhead gantries – very prominent – more trains, larger trains.
			Extent of development around Theale detracts
			New housing on Newbury racecourse
			Coalescence of Thatcham and Newbury
			Big floods in 2014 and also in 2007 –

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
			expected to double in volume with climate change.
Burghfield Woodland and Heathland Mosaic	Gravel pits – extraction all over Burghfield	It was noted that Detailed Emergency Planning Zones (DEPZ) around AWE Burghfield and Aldermaston (the “blast zone”) have a constraining impact on development	Large estates that own much of the land (e.g. Wasing) have introduced hedge planting and other landscape/biodiversity enhancements under agri-environment schemes.
		Link to Silchester by Roman Roads – association with the area	Traffic impact and noise from AWE Aldermaston and Burghfield
		Varied views – enclosed with occasional vantage points	Gravel extraction is an issue around Brimpton (also in Greenham Woodland and Heathland Mosaic LCA). Proposed developments could have a significant impact on traffic and hence landscape character.
		Views to wooded skylines in AONB and to south Wiltshire.	Number of paddocks increasing
		Rural character is valued	AONB status of most of the District is seen as increasing development pressure in this LCA.
		Tumuli are a valued historic feature	Tumuli are often damaged by recreation activity (a wider issue across the District)
			Diversification of estates.
			Development at Shalford of 2000 homes.
			Gravel pits – restore ecologically rather than use as landfill sites.

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
			Two large developments in Burghfield – pond house farm –man behind the Hollies nursing home - allocated in local plan but not in planning system.
			Tree cover should be conserved/ enhanced
			Development in the south of the District has poor links to transport infrastructure
			New development not in keeping with form and vernacular of existing developments (a wider issue across the district).
Enborne Upper Valley Floor	River Enborne is major tributary of the Kennet – flood water.	Natural beauty and tranquillity of the river valley	
	River Enborne forms historic boundary between Berkshire and Wiltshire	Shalford Bridge is a heritage feature	
		Views to the church spire in Brimpton from the valley	
Kennet Lower River with Open Water		WWII defence sites important archaeology	Conflict between recreation and wildlife conservation in former gravel pits.
		UKs largest nightingale population.	Gravel pits – restore ecologically rather than use as landfill sites.
General Points		Wrong that AONB landscapes should automatically be more valued than	Leaving verges to grow long can have adverse impact on some wildflower species,

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
		non-AONB, when some of the latter have more landscape quality than some locations within the AONB.	which are outcompeted by species such as cow parsley.
		Successful rural economy should be valued for funding management of the landscape.	

Northeast table

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic	Landscape is dominated by roads, they aren't minor	Rivers/chalk stream valuable	Heathland should be preserved and maintained
	Heathland is concentrated in Bucklebury, isn't dominant across the area	Views from the Downs	Noise of M4 detractor at Hermitage
		Views from Cold Ash	Wooded landscape can lead to social isolation
		Recreation very important – informal recreation, walking, cycling and horse riding	Cold Ash – relationship with Thatcham, road noise from M4
		Dark skies	Hermitage Farms switched from arable farming (stewardship schemes encourage farmers to have mixed farms) animal/woodland enhancement
		Artists – including contemporary	Settlements merging – need to retain distinctiveness
		Wildlife corridors	
		How development sits well within the landscape – particularly wooded landscape around Hermitage	Cold Ash/Hermitage - traffic management through villages needs to be better
Yattendon Farmed Chalk Mosaic		Tranquillity and remoteness very important. NE groups working to	Farmers putting in new hedgerows particularly in Frilsham area is an

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
		preserve this	enhancement.
		Ancient monuments e.g. Grimsbury Castle motte and bailey at Hampstead Norreys	Yattendon - traffic management through village needs to be better
			Horse paddocks changing the landscape
			Mismatch of mobile phone masts
			Fly tipping has increased
Basildon Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes	-	-	-
Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes	Purley Park is predominantly housing	Fighting to preserve AONB west of Tilehurst	
		Accessibility is good – best of both worlds	
Ashampstead Wooded Downland		Tranquillity and remoteness very important. NE groups working to preserve this	
General Points			Active brand routes for cyclists e.g. Newbury to Didcot cycle route along old railway line Encouraging recreational use – formal and informal. Using wasteland
			Working with landowners to enhance footpaths

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
			Opportunity to get developers to do more for biodiversity
			Ring roads positive for villages – not a consensus on views
			Opportunities for woodland restoration
			Opportunities to plan more holistically
			Landscape buffers

Southwest table

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
Inkpen Woodland and Heathland Mosaic	Parks to west of Newbury should be part of Newbury itself	Dark skies	Manage small scale incremental lighting – entry gates, security etc.
	Could Hampstead be better related to Hungerford	Peace and tranquillity	Prevent sprawl
	Farmed chalk to the west	AONB	Concern over redevelopment of small houses
	Is the area to east of Hampstead Marshall actually a different character area to the area within the AONB?	Hedgerows and woodland	Woodland management – poor Forestry Commission management at Inkpen plantation
	Subdivide AONB/non AONB	Heritage	
Wickham Woodland and Heathland Mosaic		Pleasant avenue forming green ‘treed’ gateway into Newbury B400	Campaign to register second battle of Newbury site at Speen
			Maintain green approach along B4000
Hungerford Farmed Chalk Mosaic		Excellent bridleway and Rights of Way network linking to Kennet cycling and horse riding along quiet lanes	Development south of Hungerford – changes to the open rural landscape due to planting to contain development – loss of openness and views
		Agricultural tapestry extending across sloping sides of Kennet	
		Important hedgerow network	

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
		Rural commons and marsh at Hungerford	
		Rural views from Hungerford	
Froxfield Farmed Chalk Mosaic	Small area in West Berks – check what classification in adjacent Wilts is and ensure ties in with NWD AONB classification (may need to keep as small area)		
Elcot Farmed Chalk Mosaic		Agricultural tapestry linking Kennet to Downs – hedges, rights of way, quiet lanes	
Boxford Farmed Chalk Mosaic and Winterbourne Farmed Chalk Mosaic	Amalgamate due to visual interaction across and consistency in character	Hedgerow network	
Walbury Hill Chalk Scarp		Cultural/romantic associations	
		Combe Gibbet (hideout along Winchester – Oxford/London route) – fulcrum	
		Highest point – exposed beacon visible and backdrop over much of the area	
		Hill and scarp is an important landscape feature in Borough	

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
		Old Roman route	
General Points	Agreement that level of classification of types and areas is about right and clarity of colour and place specific character area names work well and is consistent with NWD AONB	Rights of way network is excellent in SW of borough providing opportunities along valleys, downs and countryside	Small scale incremental changes, e.g. lighting, have an adverse impact. Over development of large ostentatious dwellings – fencing, boundaries etc., loss of tree cover
	Need to ensure consistency with NWD AONB classification and classification over borders e.g. Wilts) in making any boundary amendments		Loss of dairy farming – now all arable with more intensive crop rotations
			Some estates are notable for restoration of hedgerows – a positive change
			Traffic along rural lanes with associated character changes – erosion of verges etc. is a key issue throughout
			General opportunities for enhancement: Quiet Lanes Restoration of hedges Woodland planting Better protection of trees/TPOs Affordable housing

Northwest table

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
Blewbury Open Downlands	Blewbury Down is outside West Berkshire – new name needed. Ridgeway/Compton?	Not as much horse industry as Lambourn, but still present.	Closure of Pirbright Institute in Compton – currently being developed for housing and workshops
	Include Four Points and Aldworth within Open Downlands	Foinavon won Grand National in 1967, trained and buried at Compton	New sheep sheds at Compton 10-15 years ago – would be better to develop here than elsewhere although not currently designated for housing.
		Heritage – Perborough Castle, Lowbury Hill (Civil War), Medieval village in Compton allegedly killed off by Black Death	Dairy shut 10 years ago, new one west of Compton – has returned to part of the landscape
		Rural and tranquil	Would be best to concentrate development within Compton rather than ribbon expansion
		Birds including red kites, lapwings	Cheseridge Farm and Mayridge Farm bought by Dyson – sheep units turned into self-storage units. Potential for Dyson to make employment?
		Dark skies	New gas mains facility between Compton and East Ilseley. Very intrusive floodlights disturb dark skies
			Conserve railway bridge
			Restore/enhance footpaths. Potential for cycleway along old railway line

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
Lambourn Open Downlands	Wooded horizons not everywhere, but very distinctive when present – clumps of beech	Working village	Flooding – roads conduit for surface water – storm drains would help
	Seasonal stream (winterbourne) at top of upper valley	Conservation Areas and historic buildings	Recently built Eastbury water pump should help with serious flooding problems in the village.
	Importance of ground water levels and springs	Lots of birds and butterflies	Local housing for local people required
		Gallops	Conditions of byways terrible
			Pig farming not an issue
			Many newly ploughed fields at the moment – possible change in agricultural practice/intensity
			Sheepdrove Organic Farm expanding. Conference centre opened 2004, weddings/natural burials/farm
Peasemore Wooded Downland	Villages all small (not medium)	Frequent views from higher ground	Little to no change since 2003
		Rural	Potential for increase in residential development, but would need new infrastructure and employment
		Old churches	Increase in traffic on main roads, especially A34

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
		Iron Age settlements south of Peasemore	Pubs converted to housing
		Development moved in Chieveley due to views from recreation ground	Bakery moved out of Chieveley to Oxford Road (old A34), and increased in size
		Views from Chieveley Manor down to valley	
Lambourn Upper Valley Floor	Seasonal. Floods every ~15 years	Pretty villages e.g. Eastbury	Housing not sensibly sited along river – lots of damage in floods
Winterbourne Farmed Chalk Mosaic	Mineral extraction around Curridge – soft sands	Snelsmore Common and perimeter	M4 J13 has historic and ongoing mineral extraction. Sympathetic planting./enhancement/restoration when completed
Shefford Wooded Downland		Membury Fort (on District border)	Increasing traffic to the industrial area around Membury Services (M4)
			Creep of industrial area at Membury
			Rooksnest and Inholmes estates combined, owned by Sackler family. Intensive farming including grain handling.

Additional consultation comments received by email

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic			In the Cold Ash/Ashmore Green area, all farms have ceased dairy farming. Animal husbandry has largely reduced to sheep and cattle raising and grazing for livery stable horses. Aside from this, the residual farming activity is cereal farming and rape seed production.
Hungerford Farmed Chalk Mosaic		Views from Hungerford town looking out to the countryside are treasured and should be protected	General lack or reduction in biodiversity; less bird song and insects particularly midges. Number of hedgerows has depleted and there is an increase in monoculture: change to large fields of oil seed rape from a previous diverse use of arable and grazing land.
		Please refer to Landscape Sensitivity Study of Hungerford carried out as part of the Local Development Framework in 2009, which includes photos of the area and provides necessary detail.	
Lambourn Open Downland			Groundwater flooding. Windsor House Paddock, Crowle Road, Lambourn. Whilst this paddock is part of the route by which surface water flows off the surrounding hills, through the paddock and down the line of an old watercourse (now built over) towards the River Lambourn in the centre of Lambourn, it is also subject to flooding when the water table rises, as

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
			<p>happened in 2014. This is the result of rising ground water.</p> <p>There are also springs which rise along the B4001 Wantage Road and under North Farm Close. The water from these flows into the village along roadside ditches, unless the flow is so great they overflow, flooding fields and threatening houses, as happened in 2014. This picture shows the rising water to the northeast of North Farm Close as it approached the houses. The Wantage Road, which was flooded, is behind the evergreen. (Photos provided)</p>
			<p>There has been a considerable amount of in-filling and back-filling in Lambourn. Larger developments along the line of the old railway, parallel to Bockhampton Road, have crept up the valley side. Old farmyards, the old coal yard on Newbury Street and the backs of what were probably burgage plots in the High Street have been developed.</p>
			<p>There are fewer racing stables in the centre of the village. Windsor House, at the junction of Crowle Road and the High Street is still operating, although under pressure from proposed development.</p>
			<p>More establishments associated with racehorse training are being developed, both in Upper Lambourn and along the Baydon Road towards Lambourn</p>

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
			Woodlands, near Farncombe Farm.
Lambourn Upper Valley Floor			<p>Ground water flooding. The following pictures show the impact of ground water flooding in February 2014. Flooding of this magnitude does not happen often, but it is far from a "once in a generation" event and some flooding occurs in most years as the springs rise. Heavy rain over the late autumn/winter period will result in the springs rising high up the valley in February.</p> <p>The water pouring over the bank and down the road came from the springs and well along the B4000 Ashbury road and bubbled out of the ground. The aquifer was full and the water table very high.</p> <p>The watercourse which forms the upper reaches of the River Lambourn begins further down the valley. The High Street is the easiest route for water flowing out of the ground to reach the river.</p>
			More establishments associated with racehorse training are being developed, both in Upper Lambourn and along the Baydon Road towards Lambourn Woodlands, near Farncombe Farm.
Shefford Wooded Downland			<p>Membury: Industrial land use now stretches from the Parish border along Ermin Street and the M4 to Rooksnest Farm. This includes the Membury Industrial area, the</p>

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
			<p>Membury Business Park and Lowesden Works (Lambourn Business Park). This is generating more heavy traffic along Ermin Street and the small feeder roads. Neighbouring farms are also expanding their operations (notably the Rooksnest/Inholmes land holding) and the installation of the large "Kurtsystem" racehorse training machine at Kingswood Stud (<i>see YouTube – Kurtsystems – Revolutionary Hi-Tech Racehorse Pre-Training</i>) is adjacent. All this is changing the character of this area of the Shefford Wooded Downland.</p>
Inkpen Woodland and Heathland Mosaic		Dark Skies- to enjoy the stars at night. Great protection against at light pollution and external lighting - see the draft Local Plan for Windsor & Maidenhead for good policies.	
		Peace and Tranquillity - noise in the countryside is magnified due to the quiet surroundings so loud noise is unacceptable. A policy on the control of noise please.	Greater protection for the AONB status - as promised in the Government's 25 year environment plan announced in January- to boost wildlife and support the recovery of natural habitats and connect people with nature.
			Development should respect the landscape and character of the area - not build great mansions in the countryside but retain the smaller dwellings. Policy for the size on new development.
			Protection of hedgerows to protect the

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
			wildlife.
			Protection of heritage sites -do not allow development to crowd or have a negative impact on heritage sites.
			Manage and prevent sprawl - to enable villages to keep their identity and individuality to recognise green gaps and green wedges between development.
Enborne Upper River Floodplain	Just noticed that the Enborne is referred to as the historic Boundary between Berkshire and Wiltshire. It is in fact Hampshire.		
Blewbury Open Downland	Blewbury Down is outside West Berkshire – new name needed. “Ridgeway” or “Compton” proposed	Horse racing industry with ancient gallops	Pirbright Institute in Compton now closed providing a brown field site opportunity for sustainable development – housing, light industrial units etc.
	Include Four Points cross roads and Aldworth village within boundary	Race horse Foinavon trained by John Kempton won the Grand National in 1967 was trained and buried at Compton	The area of new sheep sheds erected by the Pirbright Institute to the North of site 10-15 years ago are not presently designated for housing but would lend themselves to such development – the ground is low lying and reduces impact of development when viewed from the North
		Heritage – Perborough Castle (Iron Age hill fort), Lowbury Hill (possible Romano-British temple), Compton Magna in vicinity of the church allegedly killed off by Black Death 1349	Dairy buildings to the North of Compton demolished 10-15 years ago was returned to part of the landscape and new dairy built on the West side

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
		Rural and tranquil	It would be best to concentrate development within and around Compton rather than ribbon expansion
		Birds including red kites, lapwings.	2500 acres of farmland including Cheseridge and Mayridge Farms recently bought by Dyson. Latter has seen major grain store development and other buildings maybe turned into self-storage units. Potential for Dyson to make employment?
		Dark skies	New gas mains facility between Compton and East Ilsley is very intrusive with floodlights disturbing dark skies.
			Conserve railway bridges.
			Potential for cycleway along old railway line.
			Conserve cricket pitch within the Pirbright Institute area
General/All			Can I make one initial comment and that concerns noise. On our table we concentrated on the visual aspects of landscape and failed to consider the other senses. In my view the one which has changed the most over the last 16 years and which has the most impact, on a day to day level, is noise. The increase in traffic and other noises associated with the built environment have, to my mind, increased and it is now more difficult to find a 'quiet spot'. You showed a slide of the night sky

Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Landscape classification and key characteristics	Landscape value	Change / Detractors / Issues and opportunities (all viewed as negative impacts unless otherwise stated)
			<p>and I would suspect that if it was possible to construct one for noise it would show similar attributes.</p> <p>Can I suggest that noise impact is quite different from visual impact in that wide open vistas can often let sound travel long distances while more closed in areas do, to some extent, ameliorate the spread of noise. As such I consider that a noise impact assessment is just as important as a visual impact assessment.</p>

Appendix 5: User guide

The LCA forms a sound evidence base to conserve and enhance the varied character and valued attributes of West Berkshire's landscape when considering new development or land uses – and to pursue opportunities to enhance and strengthen the local distinctiveness of West Berkshire's landscape. The need for this evidence base is all the more apparent in the context of continual pressures to accommodate new development and land uses within the District.

This LCA can be used to consider landscape character when planning any type of change. It is therefore designed to be used by all involved in decisions about proposals for change and development. The flow chart below aims to assist in using the LCA and is arranged around a number of key stages, setting out a series of questions as prompts to assist in using available information to shape proposals and assist in planning decisions.

