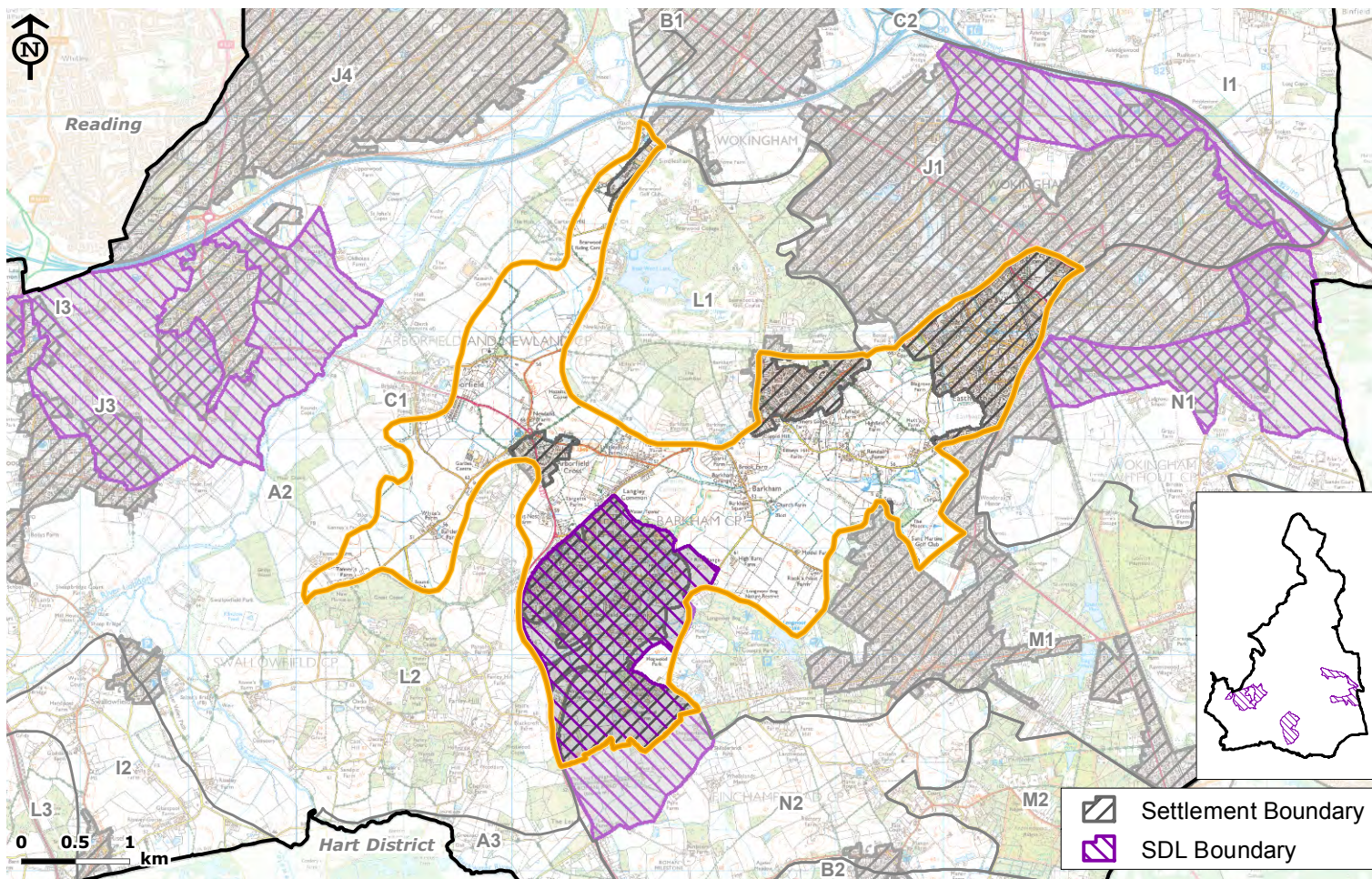




SUMMARY

A gently undulating landscape, principally in agricultural use. Large arable fields bound by hedgerows dominate, with smaller fields of sheep pasture and horse paddocks close to settlements.

The western boundary abuts the lower lying C1: Arborfield River Terrace defined by the 50m AOD contour line. Higher areas of Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills (L1 and L2) confine the clay to the north and south and the boundary follows the base of the hill slope. The eastern boundary extends to Wokingham, while the south-eastern boundary is the well-defined edge of the forested area of M1: Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands.



Key Characteristics

- **A gently undulating landscape** between 50m and 65m AOD, underlain by London Clay with localised areas of River Terrace Gravels. Shallow wooded valleys follow the course of the Barkham Brook, which is geologically marked by areas of alluvium.
- **Consistent pattern of water bodies** including streams, drainage channels, ditches and open water bodies of various sizes resulting from the clayey and loamy soils which impede drainage.
- **Wooded context** provided by characteristic mature hedgerow and in-field trees, combined with woodland belts, with BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland, and the wooded horizons of the surrounding hills. This creates a loose sense of enclosure.
- **Arable farming dominates, with pasture on higher ground and horse paddocks near settlement.** Fields are large and geometric, bound by fragmented hedgerows supported by post and wire. Fields used for paddocks are often subdivided with horse tape.
- **Small-scale wet woodland and wetland habitats** scattered on the edge of the area, often designated as LWS. BAP priority habitat wet woodland is found at Bottle Copse and The Moors, with wet meadow and wet grassland found at Brook Farm Meadow LWS.
- **A dense settled character influenced by modern development including the new garden village on the site of Arborfield Garrison** and the southern edge of Wokingham which incorporates an industrial estate. There is little consistent style or form.
- **Older scattered settlement of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages** at Barkham and Arborfield Cross. The buildings have traditional vernacular of timber framing and clay tiles, exemplified by the Conservation Area at Arborfield Cross. A number of farmhouses are listed, including Grade II* Barlett's Farmhouse.
- **A network of busy local roads cross the area.** They tend to be rural in character, with ditches, hedges and hedgerow trees, sometimes opening directly onto the arable fields. The A327 adds noise and movement to the area.
- **Public rights of way** run between the settlements, and provide access for recreational use.
- **A rural character away from development and roads**, with views across to adjacent character areas including across the Loddon Valley.
- **A historic road, now represented by footpaths, lanes and Victorian carriageways**, that appears on Norden's map of 1607, connecting Swallowfield Park via Arborfield Cross and the Coombes (in LCA L1), with Wokingham.

Natural Landscape

- J2.1 The area is gently undulating at between 50m and 65m AOD. In some areas it is more rolling with steeper slopes, for instance where it narrows between the two areas of hills to the west forming a shallow valley between Barkham and Arborfield. Locally these shallow valleys and the wooded area around them are known as 'The Coombes', which extends into L1.
- J2.2 Predominately underlain by London Clay with the sand of the Bagshot Formation in the east and localised Fourth and Fifth River Terrace gravel deposits in the far northern tips. Small areas of Alluvium follow the courses of the network of streams associated with the Barkham Brook.

- J2.3 The soils tend to have impeded drainage or high groundwater and there is a consistent pattern through the area of drainage channels, streams, ditches and open water bodies of varying sizes. There are small-scale wetland characteristics around the water bodies, including wet meadow, wet grassland and BAP priority habitat wet woodland at Brook Farm Meadow and The Moors, both designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).
- J2.4 The principal land uses are settlement and agriculture. Arable cultivation dominates agricultural land use in large geometric fields with sheep pasture on higher ground. Post and wire fencing is a common replacement for gaps in the hedgerows. Smaller horse paddocks with post and rail fencing are associated with settled areas such as the fringes of Wokingham. The large-scale landscape acts as an important separation between settlements.
- J2.5 Trees are an important element in the landscape, including mature hedgerow trees and remnant hedgerow trees in fields. These combine with woodland belts and the wooded horizons of the surrounding hills to create a rural character to the area, which is influenced by modern development on the urban fringe. Shelterbelts and small farm woodlands are typical lowland oak woodland, some with hazel coppice. Pound Copse and Bottle Copse are both LWS, comprising BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland and ancient woodland of neglected coppice, dominated by oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*).

Cultural Landscape

- J2.6 It is likely that the clay soils, being difficult to work, remained predominantly wooded until Saxon times and were not settled during the prehistoric or Romano-British periods. There was a Domesday settlement at Barkham, although the present village has shifted. Its original site is marked by the position of the church, and a late medieval/post-medieval moat manor at Church Farm. There is a second possible moat at the site of the former Biggs Farm, now within the Arborfield Garrison.
- J2.7 Wokingham (described more fully in J1) was first recorded in 1146, and was granted a market in 1219. Although the village of Arborfield Cross developed at a major junction of roads, the area as a whole contained few rural villages and settlement outside Wokingham consisted mainly of dispersed farms.
- J2.8 Parliamentary enclosures produced the regular, straight-edged field boundaries that are particularly prevalent in the areas of former commons, such as at Langley Common and Barkham Common, areas of which remain well-preserved. Across the rest of the area, however, the predominantly irregular field boundaries indicate the voluntary enclosure of earlier field systems.
- J2.9 Later developments have considerably changed the landscape. In particular the development of the Army Remount Depot during the First World War and later the headquarters of the Corps Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Training Establishment in World War II led to the formation of Arborfield Garrison. Second World War pillboxes are to be found secreted in the countryside. Apparently designed to defend the garrison and routes to London the most evident today is the one covering Barkham Bridge on the B3349. The military moved out of Arborfield Garrison in 2016 and the site, and land to the south which was not part of the former garrison, is being developed as part of the Arborfield Garrison SDL, which once completed will provide up to 3,500 homes.
- J2.10 Modern estates of large 'executive style' homes at Arborfield Garrison have little consistent character or form, although brick is the most common material. The suburbs of Wokingham extend into this character area at Eastheath, and there are industrial estates on the edge of Wokingham and near Hogwood Farm. The built edge of Arborfield Garrison SDL is currently abrupt, however SANGS to the south and east will integrate the settlement within the wider countryside as planting matures.
- J2.11 An older pattern of farmsteads and villages includes part of Arborfield, Arborfield Cross, and Barkham. The rural farmsteads and hamlets are largely traditional buildings, timber framed or brick with clay tiles, with weatherboarded barns, as shown by the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area. Many of the farmhouses are now listed buildings, including the Grade II* 16th century Barlett's Farmhouse.

- J2.12 There is a regular network of roads throughout the area which tend to have a rural character with ditches, hedgerows and hedgerow trees, although increased traffic is having a negative impact. Rural tracks, bridleways and, less frequently, footpaths give access for recreational use, for instance to the ancient settlement of Barkham and to fishing ponds. Opportunities for formal recreation are provided by Greenfields Carp Fishing and the Sand Martins Golf Club, both on the edge of Finchampstead.
- J2.13 The A327 runs along much of the edge of the Arborfield Garrison SDL, and is much busier than other roads. New roads proposed as part of the Arborfield Garrison SDL will link the settlement to the A327 west of Arborfield, extend Nine Mile Ride from Finchampstead and upgrade the single lane Barkham Bridge.

Perceptual Landscape

- J2.14 This landscape has a wooded context from hedgerow trees and wooded horizons outside of the area, which creates a loose sense of enclosure to the north and south. There are views across the adjacent character areas to the east and west, including across the Loddon Valley.
- J2.15 The A327 introduces noise and movement to the area, however as it is now bounded by the Arborfield Garrison SDL it is less disruptive to rural character. Away from the settlements there is generally a rural character, enhanced by hedgerows and the large fields which act as separation between settlements.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- **Barkham Brook and associated wetland** which provide important ecological habitats including wet meadow and BAP priority habitat wet woodland.
- **Pattern of arable and pastoral fields**, which provides a rural character away from settlement, and creates an important separation between settlements.
- **Mature hedgerow trees and in-field trees** which provide a wooded character and visual interest within the landscape.
- **Historic Second World War pillboxes** and other defence works, which are now a scenic part of the landscape.
- **Rural settlement pattern** of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages outside the urban area which provides a rural character and a link to the past.
- **Recreational value** of the network of rights of way between settlements.
- **Views across the landscape** to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and to the wooded hills to the north and south provides a loose sense of enclosure.

Landscape Condition

The landscape is in overall **moderate condition**, due to the pattern of arable and pastoral fields, and remnant wetland influences associated with Barkham Brook. However, the hedgerow network is fragmented and the introduction of further development through the Arborfield Garrison SDL and associated infrastructure will further fragment the rural settlement pattern altering the character of the area.

Key Issues

- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and wet woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change. Climate change is also likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows.
- Hedgerow loss and replacement with fencing associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Loss of structure and species diversity of the woodland belts has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture.
- Lack of the recruitment of young trees (through natural regeneration or planting) required to rebalance the age structure of parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the character of the landscape.
- Pressure for more horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to an accumulation of shelters, vehicles and equipment.
- Pressure for large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure impacting landscape character. Rapid rate of change due to ongoing redevelopment and expansion of Arborfield Garrison including development of 3,500 homes as part of the Arborfield Garrison strategic development but includes two areas of SANG to the south and the east of the SDL.
- Continuing pressure for new roads including the proposed Arborfield Cross Relief Road, Nine Mile Ride Extension and upgrading the Barkham Bridge will increase the fragmentation of the landscape and visual intrusion of transport corridors.
- Increased traffic on rural roads due to expanding residential development in the area leading to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air pollution in rural areas.
- Light pollution at night causing 'sky glow'.
- High demands for recreation continue to threaten the tranquillity of the landscape. Recreational pressure can lead to erosion of special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features and is a continuing problem in this well-populated borough.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the remaining rural character of the landscape. The key aspects to be conserved and enhanced are the field pattern with mature hedgerow trees, wetland and woodland habitats, rural lanes and historic features.

In terms of development, the aim is to integrate new development into its landscape setting, and retain the open and rural character of the landscape between settlements.

Landscape Guidelines

- **Conserve the scenic quality and naturalistic character of the Barkham Brook.**

- **Conserve woodlands, including ancient woodland, BAP priority habitats and remnant standard trees.** Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- **Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland,** using locally occurring native species in order to provide screening of roads and development and linking woodland habitats. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- **Conserve the open and rural qualities of the farmed landscape** which provides a physical and visual separation or gap between settlements. Protect the individual identity of towns and villages, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land between Arborfield Garrison and Barkham, and Barkham and Wokingham town, and Arborfield Garrison and Arborfield Cross.
- **Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields** by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.
- **Conserve and manage hedgerows with standard trees** as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinstall or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so. Plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting.
- **Manage the integration of equine related activities into the** landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and control of associated built elements.
- **Conserve and protect the landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields** and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- **Conserve, enhance and manage wetland and woodland habitats** including within LWS. Protect the habitats from development, changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. An appropriate wetland and woodland management regime is critical.
- **Consider undertaking character appraisals/village design statements of key settlements** such as Arborfield and Barkham to identify distinctive features worthy of conservation such as local style and vernacular. Conserve the value of Arborfield Cross Conservation Area and the listed and historic buildings, including farmhouses, and non-designed heritage assets such as Second World War defences.
- **Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges** through wooded boundaries and large-species trees to provide visual screening and create a positive interface between the built up and rural areas particularly around Wokingham town, Arborfield Garrison, and Finchampstead.
- **Enhance sense of place through careful design** (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the potential impacts of any new development on valuable attributes.
- **Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes** resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage particularly in the most rural areas.
- **Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate new roads** in relation to proposed Arborfield Cross Relief Road and the extension of Nine Mile Ride. Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.
- **Conserve views to distinctive wooded horizons.** Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements, which have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated landscape.

- **Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution** through the sensitive siting of any new development, including infrastructure, and especially any proposed night-time lighting.

