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☐ Adopted Local Plans

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☐ Minerals and Waste Local Plan

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- ☐ Public Rights of Way

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☐ Safety Hazard Areas

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- ☐ Other, including consultees

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☐ Hydrology and Drainage

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☐ Ecology and Environment

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☒ Trees and Landscape

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☐ Ancient Woodland - Natural England's Provisional Inventory

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☐ Grounds Maintenance Boundaries

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☒ Landscape Character Assessment 2019

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☐ Landscape Character Assessment 2004

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☐ Tree Preservation Orders Served or Confirmed

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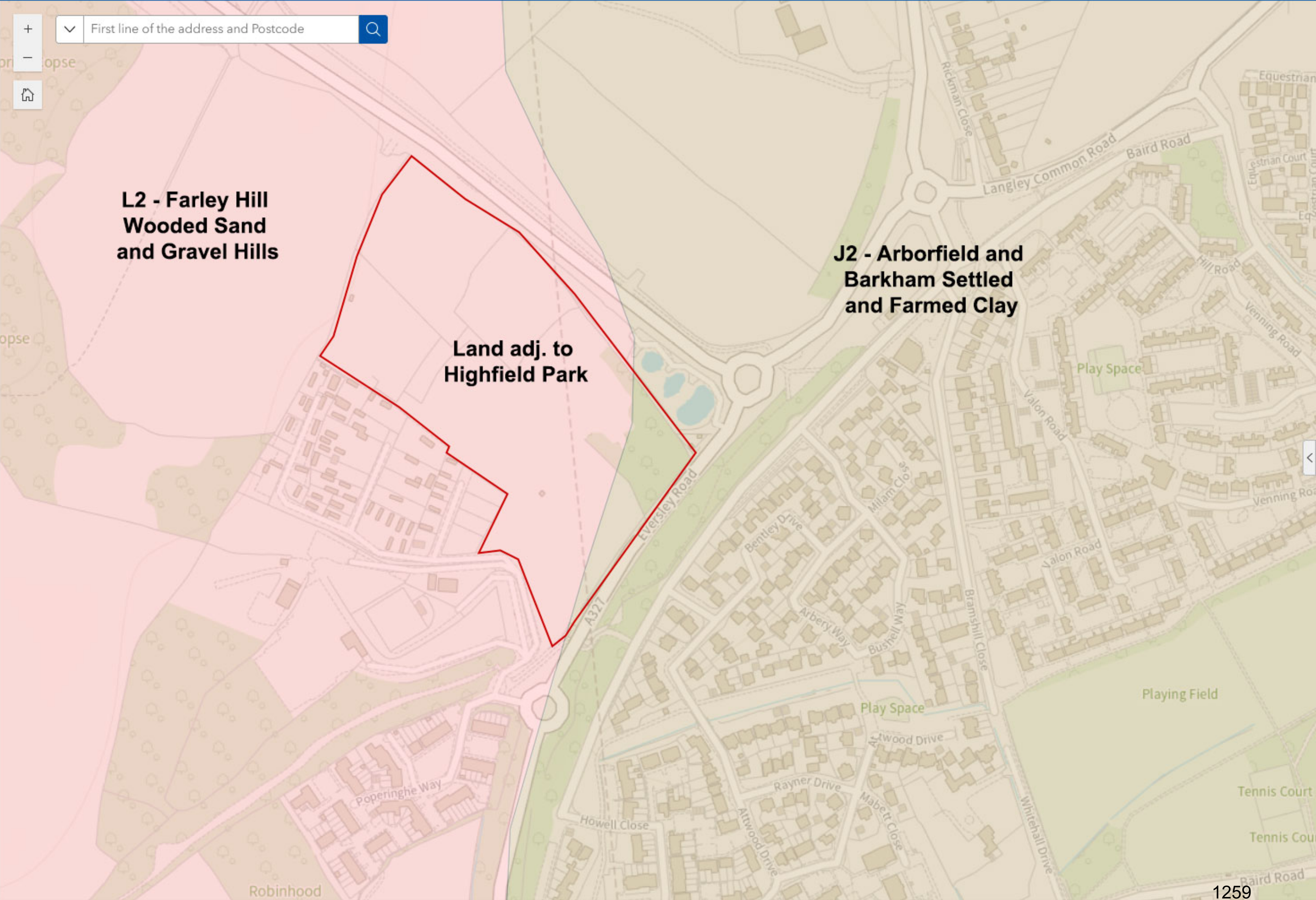
☐ Heritage and Conservation

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- ☐ Article 4 Live

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☒ Boundaries

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Part 2:

The Landscape Character of Wokingham Borough



Landscape Character Classification

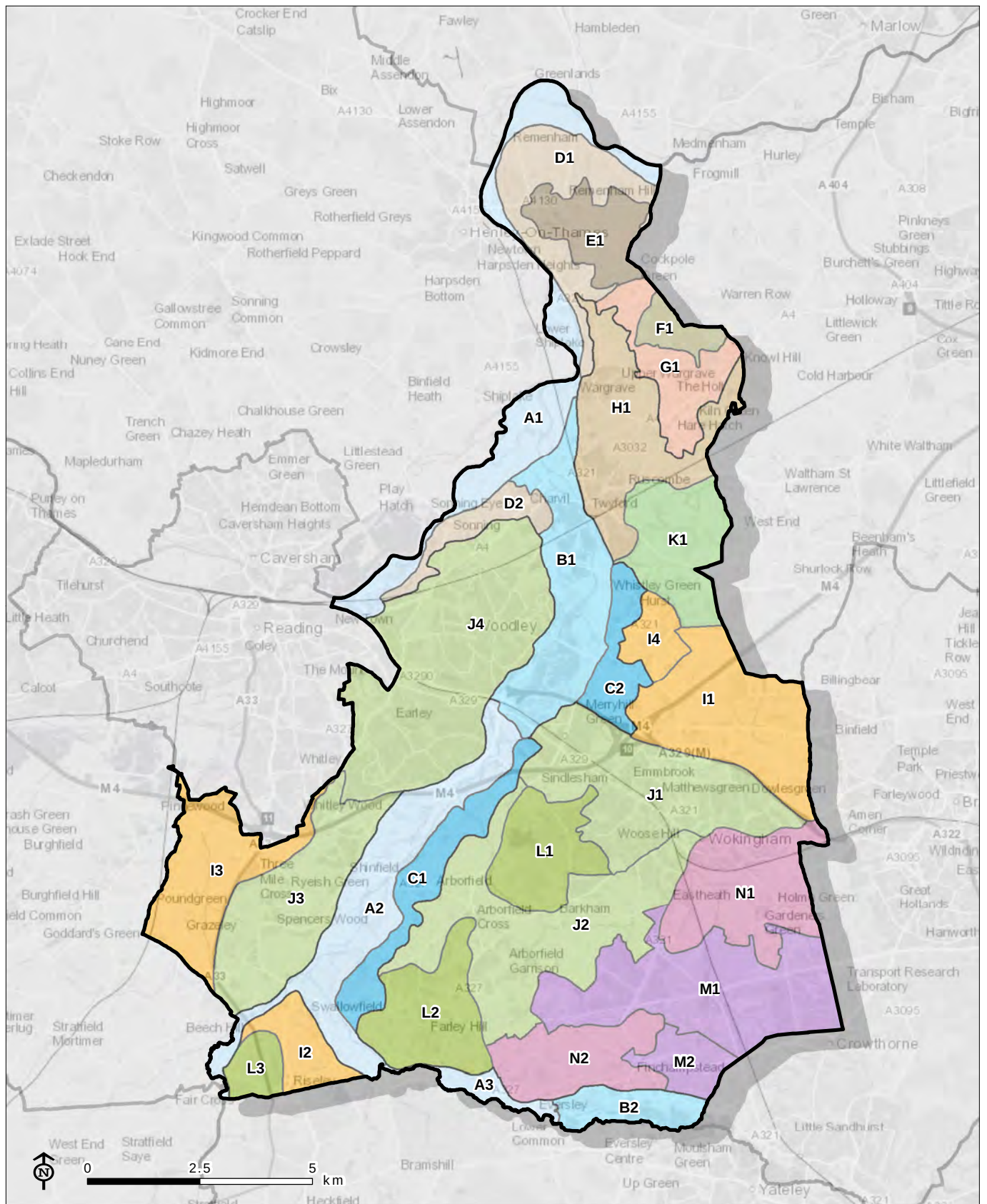
Landscape Types and Character Areas

- 4.1 The updated landscape classification identifies 14 landscape character types each representing a distinct identity and reflecting the range of contrasting landscapes across the borough. These are illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.
- 4.2 The changes in character types represent the gradual change across the borough. The transition between types, both within the borough and across administrative boundaries, is gradual and therefore boundaries are transitional rather than hard lines of change.
- 4.3 Wooded and farmed chalk landscapes associated with the Chilterns AONB, which rise up from the Thames Basin, define the north of the borough (LCTs D: Wooded Chalk Slopes, LCT G: Chalk Slopes and LCT F: Chalk Knolls and the flatter but elevated landscape of LCT E: Chalk Plateau).
- 4.4 Lowland landscapes associated with the wider Thames Valley dominate the centre of the borough, with larger scale arable farmland underlain by chalk (LCT H: Arable Chalk Lowland) or clay (LCT I: Clay Lowland and LCT K: Sand and Clay Lowland). More marginal farmed landscapes (LCT J: Settled and Farmed Clay) particularly along the M4/A329 (M) corridor and adjacent to the urban areas extending from Reading and Wokingham itself are found in this central belt.
- 4.5 Hydrological features dominate these lowlands and the borough is crossed by three river valleys (LCT A: River Valleys) some which have experienced extensive mineral workings creating a landscape of large lakes and ecologically important wetlands (LCT B: River Valley with Open Water) and their associated river terrace landscapes (LCT C: River Terrace).
- 4.6 To the south of the borough, the landscape is smaller scale and predominantly pastoral (LCT N: Pastoral Sandy Lowland) where it is underlain by sandy acidic soils with more undulating heaths and woodlands to the south east (LCT L: Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills and LCT M: Forested and Settled Sands).
- 4.7 Landscape 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. River Valley LCT.
- 4.8 Each landscape type is divided into a number of geographically specific landscape character areas (LCAs). These share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own particular identity or 'sense of place', e.g. Loddon River Valley LCA. The revised classification identifies 28 separate landscape character areas. Some of these cover relatively small areas along the borough boundary which extend into neighbouring authorities. These are illustrated in Figure 4.2.
- 4.9 It is important to note that the boundary between one character area and the next is transitional and there is rarely a clear cut change. The precision of boundaries drawn around landscape character areas and types 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.

Table 4.1: Landscape Character Types and Areas in Wokingham

Ref	Type	Area
A	River Valley	Thames River Valley (A1)
		Loddon River Valley (A2)
		Blackwater River Valley (A3)
B	River Valley with Open Water	Loddon River Valley with Open Water (B1)
		Blackwater River Valley with Open Water (B2)
C	River Terrace	Arborfield River Terrace (C1)
		Hurst River Terrace (C2)
D	Wooded Chalk Slopes	Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes (D1)
		Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes (D2)
E	Arable Chalk Plateau	Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau (E1)
F	Wooded Chalk Knolls	Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls (F1)
G	Farmed Chalk Slopes	Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes (G1)
H	Arable Chalk Lowlands	Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands (H1)
I	Farmed Clay Lowland	Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland (I1)
		Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland (I2)

J	Settled and Farmed Clay	Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland (J3)
		Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay (J1)
		Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay (J2)
K	Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland	Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay (J3)
		Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay (J4)
		Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland (K1)
L	Sand and Gravel Hills	Bearwood Sand and Gravel Hills (L1)
		Farley Hill Sand and Gravel Hills (L2)
M	Forested and Settled Sands	Stanford End Sand and Gravel Hills (L3)
		Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands (M1)
		Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands (M2)
N	Pastoral Sandy Lowland	Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland (N1)
		Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland (N2)



Wokingham Borough boundary

Wokingham LCTs and LCAs 2019

- A - River Valley
- B - River Valley with Open Water
- C - River Terrace
- D - Wooded Chalk Slopes
- E - Arable Chalk Plateau
- F - Chalk Knolls
- G - Farmed Chalk Slopes

Source: LUC, Campaign to Protect Rural England

- H - Arable Chalk Lowlands
- I - Farmed Clay Lowland
- J - Settled and Farmed Clay
- K - Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland
- L - Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills
- M - Forested and Settled Sands
- N - Pastoral Sandy Lowland

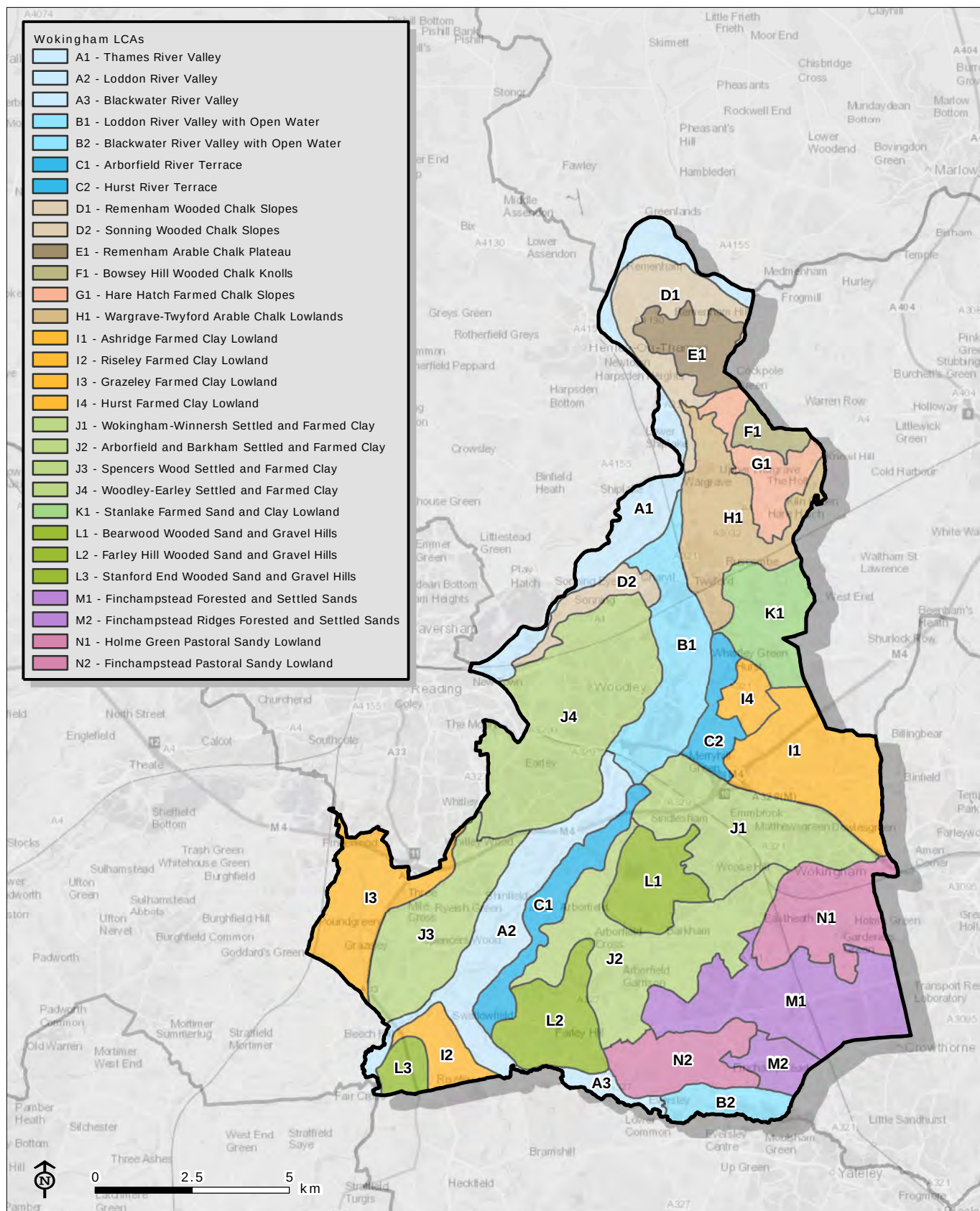
Wokingham - Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 4.1: Landscape character types and areas



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Map Scale @ A4: 1:120,000



Wokingham Borough boundary

Wokingham Landscape
Character Assessment

Figure 4.2: Landscape
Character Areas

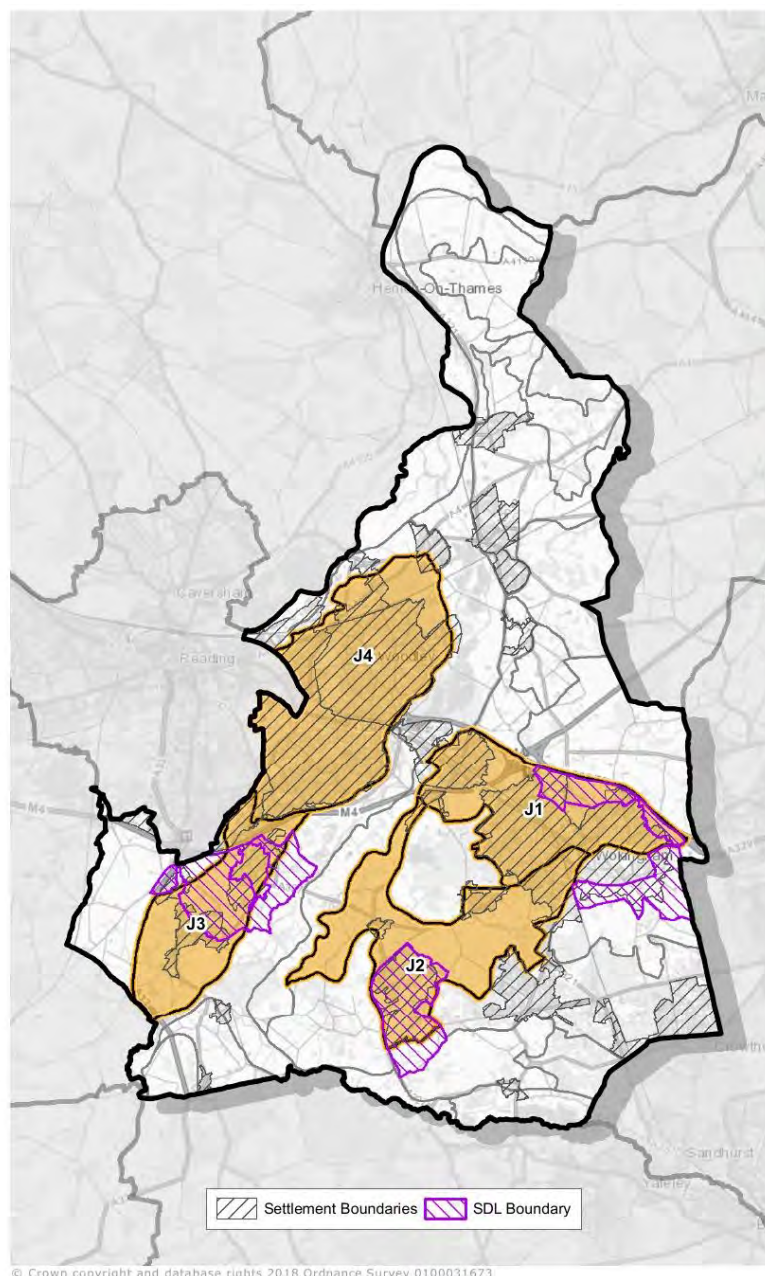
LUC

Source: LUC, Campaign to Protect Rural England

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Map Scale @ A4: 1:140,000

J: Settled And Farmed Clay



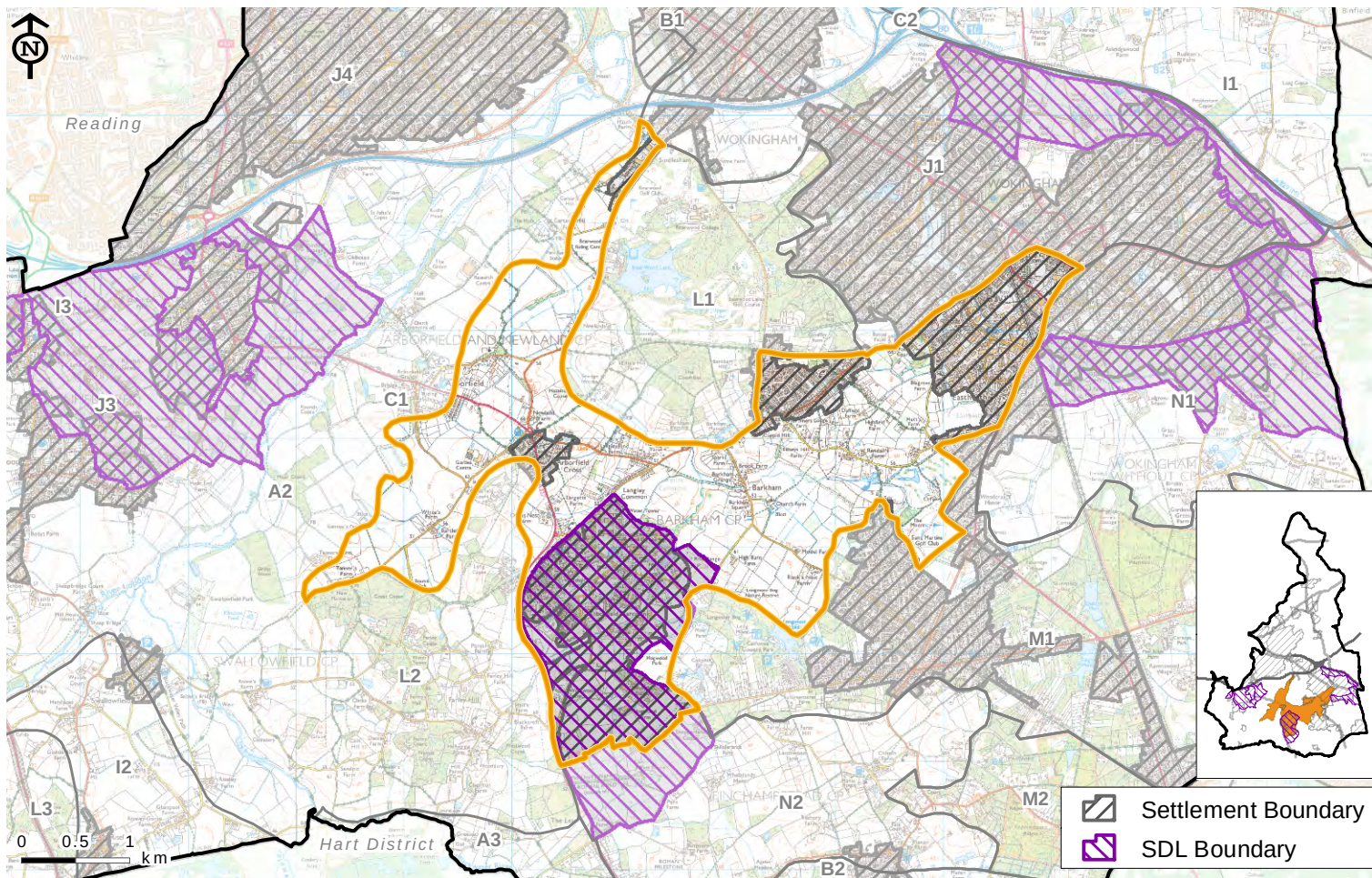
Description

The LCT is characterised by a shelving and undulating landform underlain by London Clay. There are large tracts of post-war settlement, connected by both major and minor roads cutting across the landscape. Areas of large arable fields remain, as well as tributaries draining towards the Loddon.

Landscape Character Areas

The Settled and Farmed Clay LCT is subdivided into four Landscape Character Areas:

- J1: Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay
- J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay
- J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay
- J4: Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay



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.

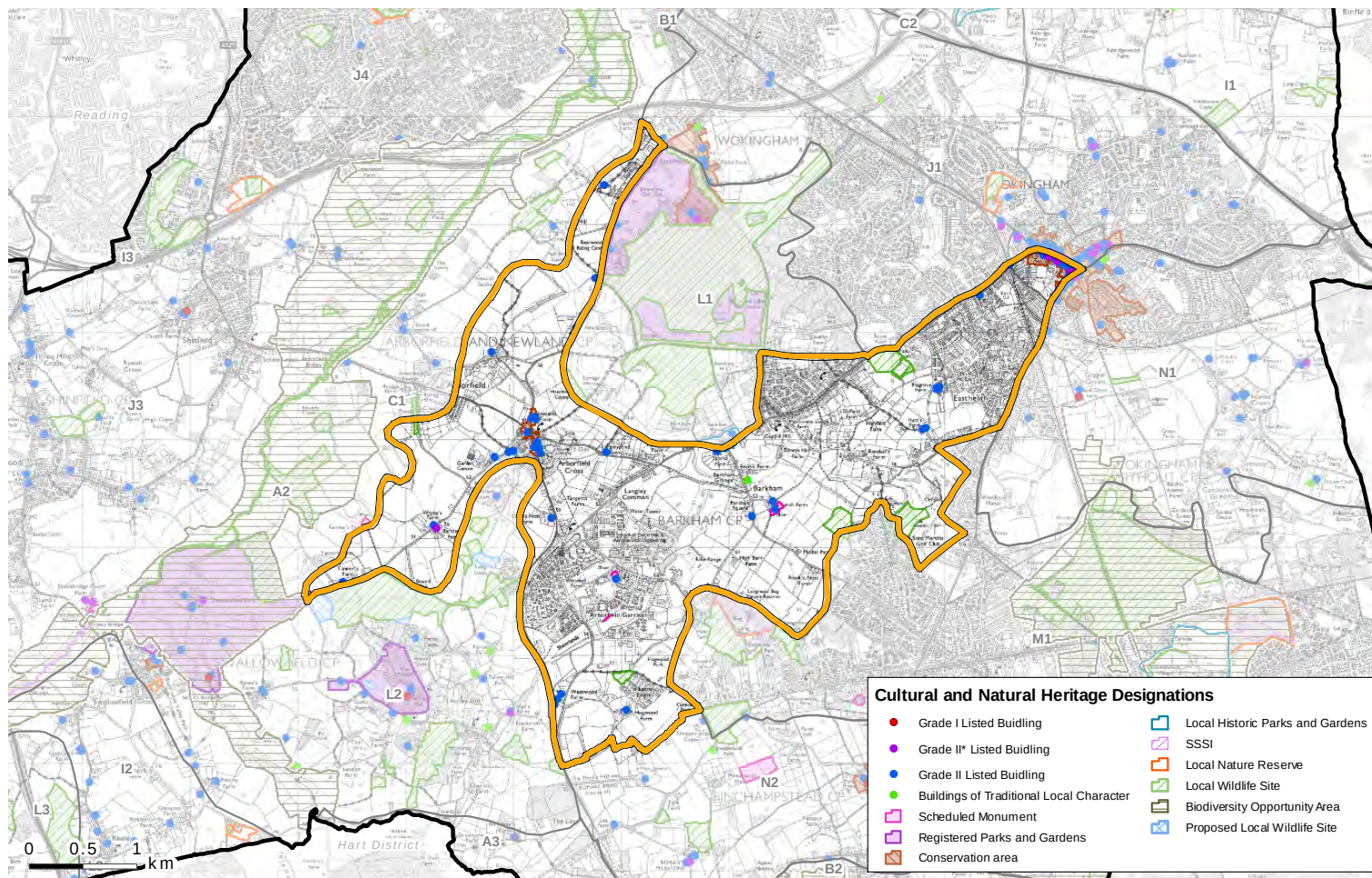
In terms of development, the aim is to integrate new development into its landscape setting, and retain the open and rural character of the landscape between settlements.

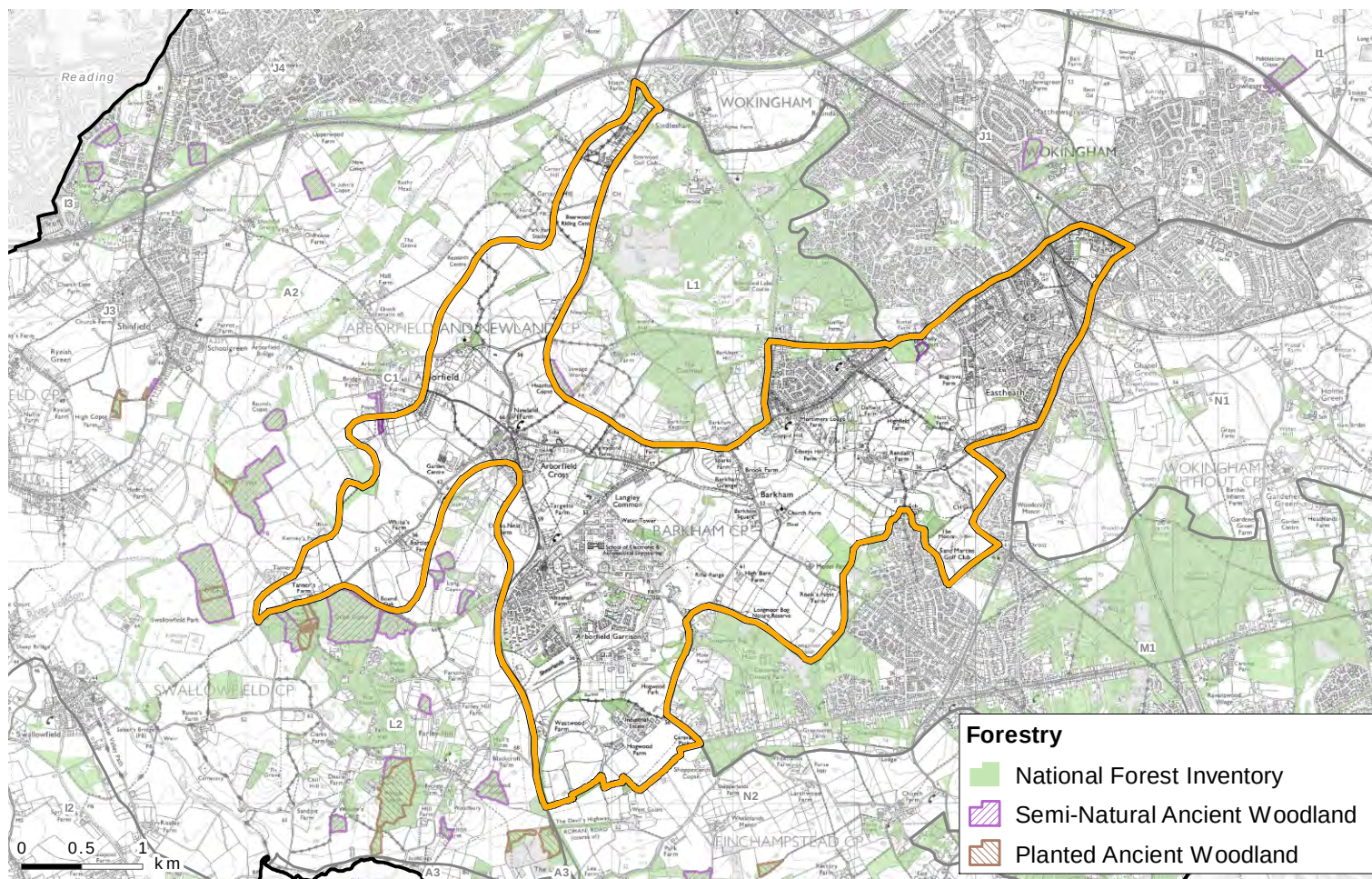
Landscape Guidelines

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

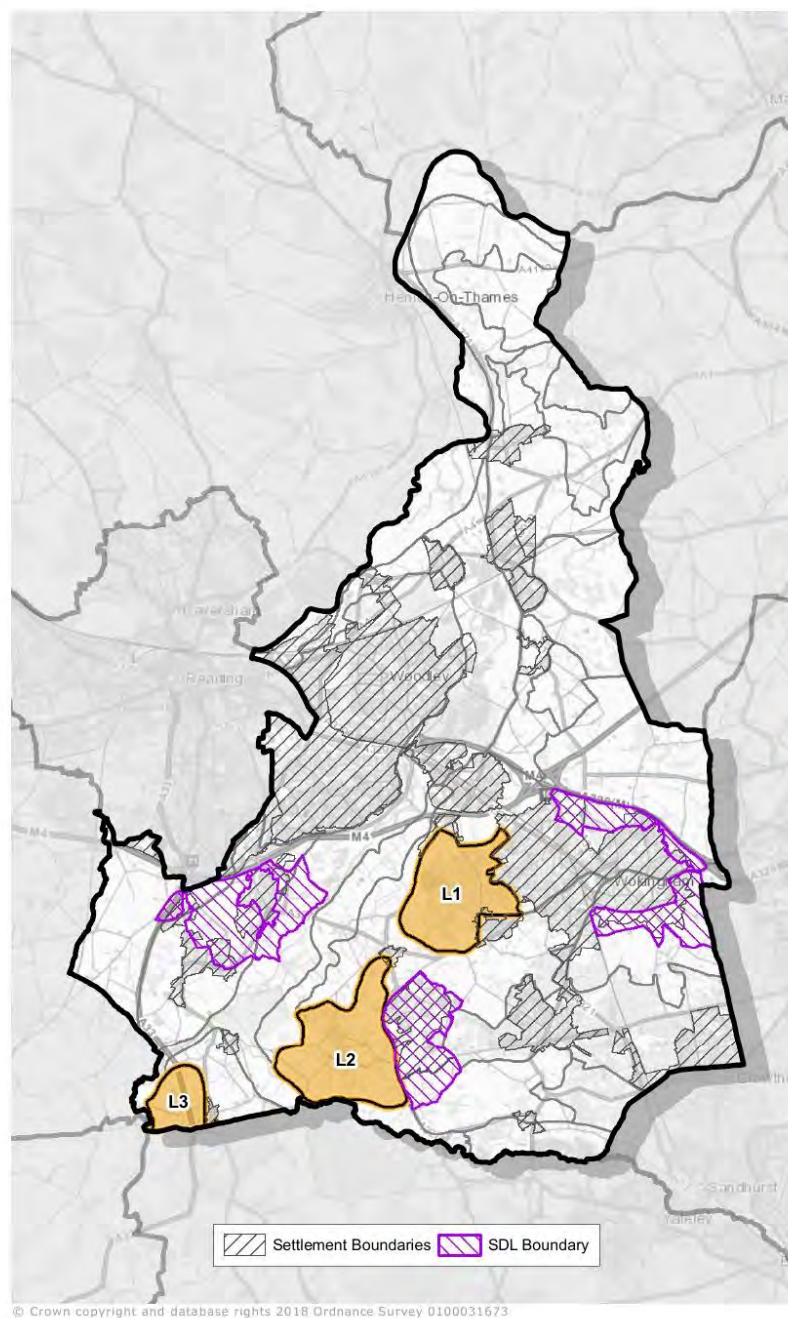
- Conserve woodlands, including ancient woodland, BAP priority habitats and remnant standard trees. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous 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.





L: Wooded Sand And Gravel Hills



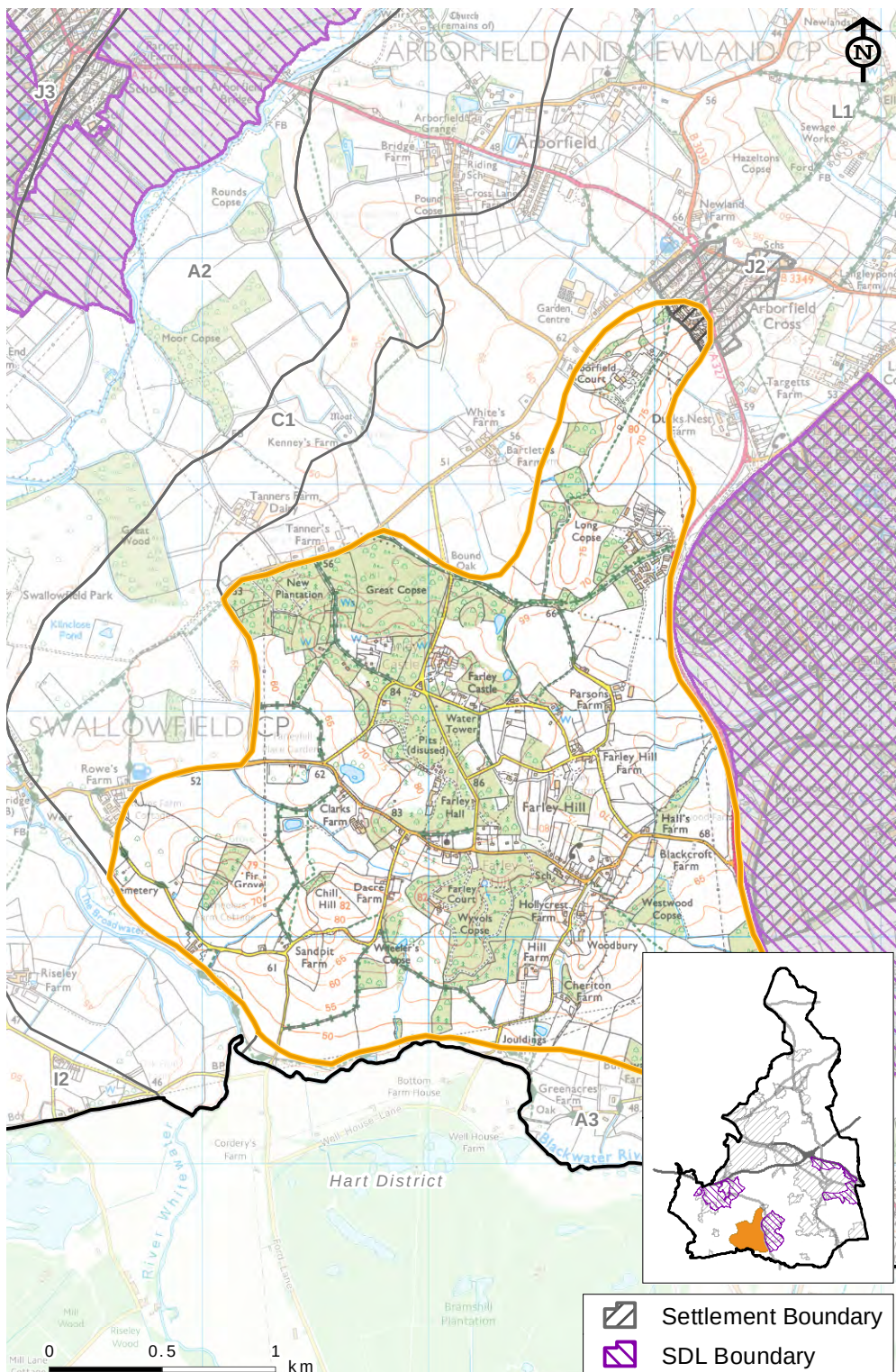
Description

The LCT is characterised by undulating hills formed by sandy Bagshot Beds and river terraces and gravels overlying London Clay. Woodlands with native coniferous element are on the hilltops, with open lower slopes in use for arable farming or pasture. There is sparse settlement, although there is significant historic parkland.

Landscape Character Areas

The Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills LCT is subdivided into three Landscape Character Areas:

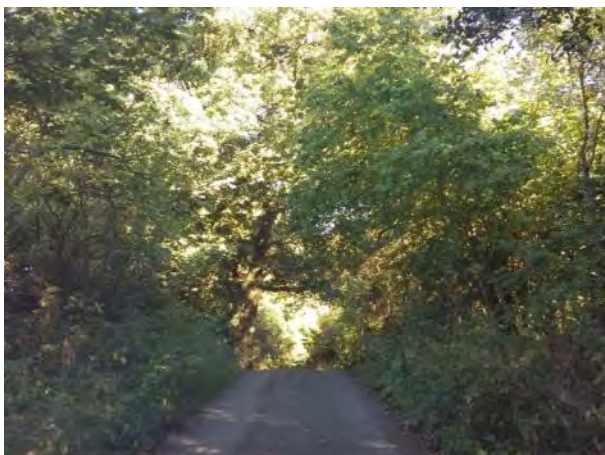
- L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills
- L2: Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills
- L3: Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills



SUMMARY

A discrete elevated landscape of small hills and knolls. The higher areas are wooded, with a distinctive coniferous element interspersed with pastures with arable farming on the lower slopes. Timber framed farmhouses and brick built cottages are linked with a network of winding rural roads and lanes.

The Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills character area is located in the south of the borough and rises from the surrounding lower land of A2: Loddon River Valley and A3: Blackwater River Valley in the west and south and from J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay and N2: Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland to the north and east. The boundaries of the area largely follow the base of the slopes along the 50m contour line. To the east and west of the area where the slopes are not so distinctly defined the boundaries follow a series of minor roads and the A32.



Key Characteristics

- Small undulating hills rising to 80m AOD at Farley Hill. The islands of higher land express the underlying geology, of London Clay overlain by Bagshot Formation sands and Sixth River Terrace deposits, which produce poorer soils making it unsuitable for agriculture. The lower clay slopes support mixed agriculture.
- Small ponds and open water bodies, possibly from former gravel or clay pits are scattered throughout the area, including Farley Hill West pond, a proposed LWS.
- Extensive woodland network of mixed, coniferous and deciduous woodland and copses, including areas of BAP priority habitat and ancient woodland, many of which are designated as LWS. Farley Hill Woods also contains small areas of remnant heathland habitat.
- Intricate small scale landscape with small sinuous pastures enclosed by the woodland, and arable fields on lower slopes bounded by thick overgrown hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Early enclosure field systems cover an extensive area.
- Marginal land uses including pony paddocks with associated stables bound by post and rail fencing and semi-industrial uses of farmland which influence the rural character.
- Some large agricultural buildings which are highly visible within the small scale landscape.
- Historic parkland associated with Farley Hall (Grade I listed). The parkland was laid out in early-mid 18th century, with possible contribution from Charles Bridgeman, and is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden.
- Rural settlement pattern of closely spaced farmsteads, the hamlet at Farley Hill and 18th and 19th century country houses with a strong vernacular of brick, timber-framing, thatch and clay tile. A new estate development on the former Poperinghe Barracks disturbs this pattern.
- Network of footpaths and bridleways and quiet rural lanes and tracks, some sunken, which wind through the woodlands, bordered by bulky hedgerows and often without kerbs or intrusive signage.
- Views to the river valleys of the Blackwater, Broadwater and Loddon, with this area forming a wooded backdrop to views from the surrounding landscape.
- Secluded, remote character of the landscape enclosed within woodland, with an experience of dark skies.

Natural Landscape

- L2.1 The area comprises a convoluted series of small knolls or hills rising to 80m AOD centred on Farley Hill, expressing the geology of London Clay overlain by sands and gravels of the Bagshot Formation, Sixth River Terrace Gravels and Head Gravels. Water shed from the higher land has eroded valleys down the sides of the hills forming a complex and small scale landscape. Streams still flow down these valleys and there are drainage ditches in others. There are disused gravel pits on Farley Hill, and a number of small open water bodies may have been gravel or clay pits. The Farley Hill West Pond is a proposed Local Wildlife Site (LWS) for its very high toad population.
- L2.2 On the central area of Farley Hill the poor fertility of the soil makes it unsuitable for agriculture and here the land use is largely woodland, which ranges across the area both on the hill tops and the sides of the slopes. The woodland is mixed deciduous with conifers, and Scots pine is

particularly noticeable in the Farley Hill area, along with beech, birch, holly, yew and rhododendron. The woods are irregular in outline and vary in size including small blocks loosely connected to the larger areas. These woodlands often have heathy elements as they developed on slightly sandy soils, for example the small remnant area of heath at the Farley Hill Woods complex. Seven of the woodlands are designated as LWS, for the BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland.

- L2.3 On the more fertile soil over the London Clay, the lower slopes of the hills support arable farming mixed with pasture. Areas of rough grazing and paddocks are also evident. Fields are small and sinuous in outline following the varied topography of the hill slopes and often enclosed or partially enclosed by woodland. The hedgerows and hedgerow trees add to the rural, wooded character of the area with their overgrown appearance. The paddocks detract from the unity of the landscape as they are geometric in outline with post and rail fences rather than hedges, although they are small scale. There are large agricultural buildings, and farms with semi-industrial use, including an anaerobic digester plant at Hill Farm and substation and breakers yard south of Ducks Nest Farm, which also disrupt the small-scale field pattern.
- L2.4 The historic parkland of Farley Hall occupies a central block of Farley Hill, bounded by public lanes, with gardens and an early to mid-18th century landscape park possibly designed (at least in part) by Charles Bridgeman, and designated as Grade II Registered Park and Garden. The Hall stands at the edge of the woodland with views across to Swallowfield Park and the Loddon valley. The woodland to the east of the hall may have been part of the pleasure gardens, and the more open terraced lawns to the west give way to parkland running down to the lake. The park extends its influence on the landscape through the lodges, two of which survive, and the holly, yew and laurel hedge along Bunglers Hill. There is BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland recorded.

Cultural Landscape

- L2.5 The Roman road between London and Calleva (Silchester), known locally as the Devil's Highway, enters the area at Lea Copse where it can be traced for a short length. There is however, little evidence of either prehistoric or Romano-British settlement. Place names such as Farley and Langley containing "-leah" (a woodland clearing) indicates settlement in the forest landscape which later formed part of the Royal Forest of Windsor. The area is characterised by a low level of settlement of closely spaced farmsteads linked by a network of lanes, including the former Wokingham Lane which runs west from Langley Common.
- L2.6 The piecemeal clearance of woodland to form cultivatable land by assarting, and later by agreement, can be seen in the pattern of small irregular fields intermixed with woodland around Farley Hill. This early enclosure landscape covers an extensive area, once contiguous with adjacent lands around the Loddon (A2 and C1) and Spencers Wood (J3). A considerable amount of this early field system remains well-preserved.
- L2.7 Later development has also influenced landscape character. The elevated ground at Farley Hill became the site of the 18th and early 19th century country houses and landscaped parks at Farley Hall, Farley Hill Court and Farley Castle (formerly Wragg Castle). The possible 'motte' at Farley Hill Place may be a landscaping feature. Some of the woodland represents 19th century plantation – such as New Plantation at Farley Castle, while the small Farley Hill Common was not enclosed for farmland until 1865.
- L2.8 Settlement in this area is in a regular pattern of farms dispersed on the hill slopes, with the scattered hamlet of Farley Hill crowning the central higher area. Grander historic houses are on the high ground around the village (Farley Hall, Farley Castle, Farley Hill Court and Arborfield Court) backed by the woods, with views out over the hillsides.
- L2.9 There is a rich variety of vernacular materials and architectural styles with timber framed farmhouses and cottages, some infilled with red brick and with thatch or clay tiled roofs. There are also Victorian polychromatic Reading brick houses with clay tiles or slate roofs and decorative barge boards in the hamlet of Farley Wood. Farley Hall is an early 18th century red brick Queen Anne style house, listed at Grade I. The historic parkland around the Hall includes small brick

lodges and the former kitchen garden with a brick gardener's cottage set into the north wall (listed Grade II).

- L2.10 More recent development includes the estate development on the site of the former Poperinghe Barracks off the A327 Eversely Road (formerly part of the Arborfield Garrison) and the conversion of the early 19th century gothic style brick built Farley Castle to apartments.
- L2.11 An intricate network of winding rural roads and lanes, bridleways and footpaths links the farms and hamlets, and are used for recreation. The lanes are highly rural in character, a small proportion are sunken, bordered by bulky hedgerows and by woodland. They are without kerbs, sometimes with rough grassed triangular islands at junctions and with little intrusive signage. The roads are becoming busier, and traffic is now an issue. Informal passing places have also been created.

Perceptual Landscape

- L2.12 The woods form a wooded horizon, framing views across the Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater river valleys and strengthening the wooded character of the borough. The enclosure given by the woods on the hills themselves adds drama to the open views out across the valleys.
- L2.13 There is a quiet and rural ambiance, and although the landscape is accessible, it still feels secluded and tranquil, with dark skies.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Distinctive hilly landform and wooded skyline visible and forming a backdrop in the wider landscape.
- Variety and complexity of mixed broadleaved woodland, some of which is ancient in origin, with high biodiversity value reflected in BAP priority habitats and LWS designations.
- Intimate pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farmland provides scenic quality and visual diversity.
- Recreational value of the network of the tree-lined and enclosed byways and footpaths allowing access and enjoyment of the countryside in close proximity to urban areas.
- Rural pattern of farms and hamlets, which are well integrated into the wooded landscape and display a strong vernacular of timber-framed farmhouses and cottages, with polychromatic Reading brick, clay-tiled or thatched roofs.
- Sunken winding rural lanes and tracks with mature hedgerows are visually appealing and add rural character to the landscape.
- Historic parkland landscape associated with the Farley Hill estate, designated as a Registered Park and Garden, provides a cultural record of the past and layers of history within the landscape.
- Contrast between the enclosure created by the woods and framed views across the Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater river valleys.
- Areas with a strong sense of seclusion and rural tranquility, with naturalistic perceptual qualities and experience of dark skies due to the lack of settlement.

Landscape Condition

This is a distinctive hilly landscape with an intact pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farming interspersed with vernacular settlements. These provide a strong sense of place and strong perceptual

qualities of seclusion and remoteness resulting in a good condition. However increasing traffic levels are affecting the tranquillity of the area. The presence of large agricultural buildings and semi-industrial uses for farms is incongruous, as is the replacement of hedgerows with fencing.

Key Issues

- Loss of structure and species diversity in deciduous woodland has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- Influence of woodland management on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines.
- Hedgerow loss associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Loss of remnant of heath habitats as a result of scrub encroachment.
- Changes in agricultural practice, including conversion of livestock grazing to horse paddocks, are leading to a decline in traditional management regimes and loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Temporary fencing and structures resulting in a decline in rural intactness.
- Lack of 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.
- Potential pressure for more paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a fragmentation of the rural landscape.
- Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special ecological features and other landscape features.
- Demand for new residential development and supporting infrastructure outside the area impacting on landscape character. The proximity of development in relation to the Arborfield Garrison SDL development (in adjoining LCA M1) may affect the tranquillity and character of the area.
- Infrastructure associated with new development outside and inside the area, particularly the Arborfield Cross Relief Road which crosses the north of the area, and increased traffic on the Eversley Road.
- Increase in traffic on small lanes leading to a loss of tranquillity and resulting in unofficial passing places and erosion of verges. This may lead to demands for upgrading the network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening which threatens their intimate rural character.
- Demand for densification and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features, such as the small estate on the former Poperinghe Barracks.
- A modern trend towards close-boarded fencing of garden boundaries leading to the loss of green infrastructure and biodiversity at the local level.

- Pressure for further semi-industrial uses of farmland e.g. anaerobic digestion plant at Hill Farm, which can cause loss of landscape features, and increase traffic to and from the site.
- Potential pressure for built development on the skyline leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the local landscape.
- This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies', particularly to the south of the area. Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the elevated landscape.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing wooded and secluded character.

The key aspects to be conserved are the views, intimate pattern of pastures, tranquillity and dark skies, woodland and arable farmland and rural settlement pattern linked by narrow lanes. There are opportunities to restore and actively manage the historic parkland, ancient woodland coppice and the connecting hedgerows. Marginal farmland and paddocks should also be enhanced.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern, and maintain the low density of development avoiding encroachment from the new development at Arborfield.

Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape, including BAP priority habitats and ancient woodlands, designated as LWS. 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. Plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Conserve the rural qualities of the farmed landscape. 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 as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinstate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so.
- 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 development.
- Conserve and protect the intricate landscape pattern of woodland and mixed pasture and arable fields, and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- Conserve and protect the parkland landscapes, and plan for the next generation of parkland trees, including BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland.
- Conserve, enhance and manage heathland habitats, particularly from changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. An appropriate heathland management

regime is critical.

- Conserve the individual identity of the hamlets, farmsteads and manors through control of new development. In particular avoid the spread of development from Arborfield into the area.
- Enhance informal recreational enjoyment of the landscape but balance this with continued conservation of valuable semi-natural habitats. Consider zoning of activities to ensure ecologically valuable or more sensitive elevated landscapes are protected from damaging activities and ensure appropriate management of informal recreation, particularly in relation to the Rights of Way network and connections to new residential areas.
- Maintain and enhance the character of the rural winding lanes with their unimproved road side verges. Resist unsympathetic highway improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural areas.
- Integrate the new urban edge of the development at Arborfield through planting of woodland and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas.
- Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate new roads, particularly in relation to the Arborfield Cross Relief Road and its connection via Eversley Road.
- 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 impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes. Take particular care to minimise the visual impact of commercial farm enterprises. Restrict unsympathetic boundary changes around existing properties.
- Conserve distinctive wooded character of undeveloped skylines. Consider the impact of any development on skylines, particularly vertical elements which would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas, and the Loddon and Blackwater valleys. Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive skylines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained. 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.
- Protect the framed views across the river valleys
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity and intimate character of the landscape, including the experience of dark skies through the control of development.

