

Part 2:

The Landscape Character of Wokingham Borough



Landscape Character Classification

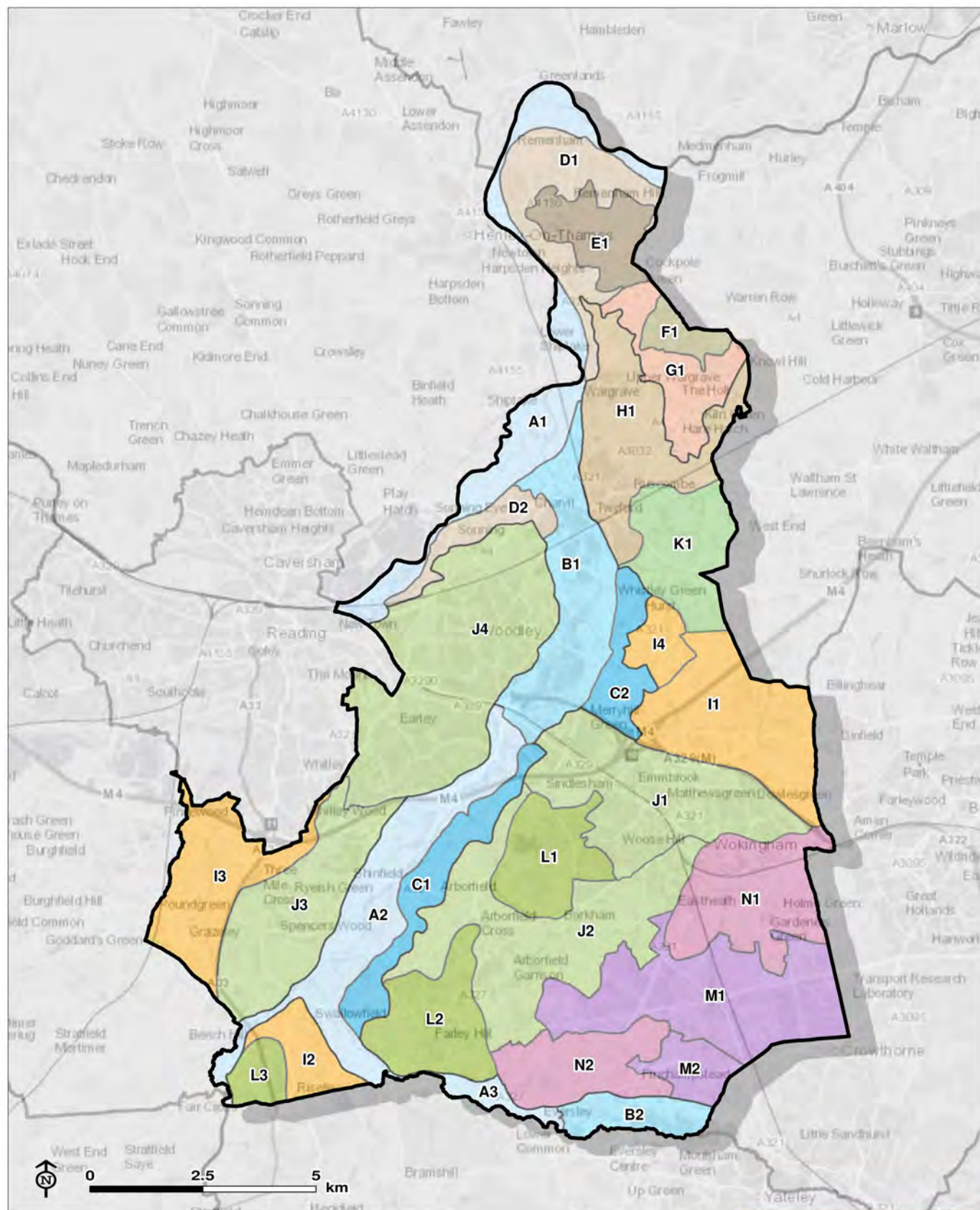
Landscape Types and Character Areas

- 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 (I3)
		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

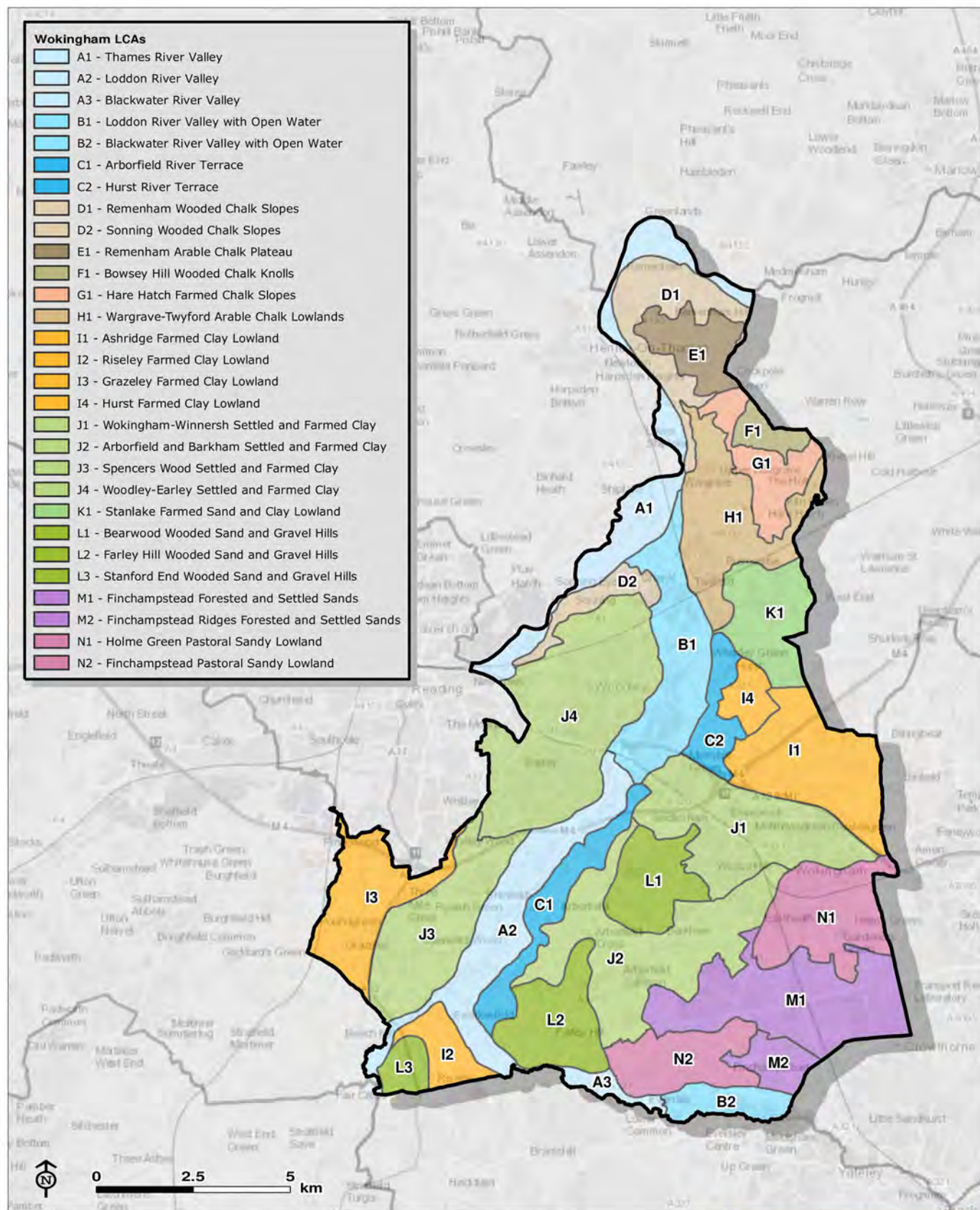
Wokingham - Landscape Character Assessment

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**

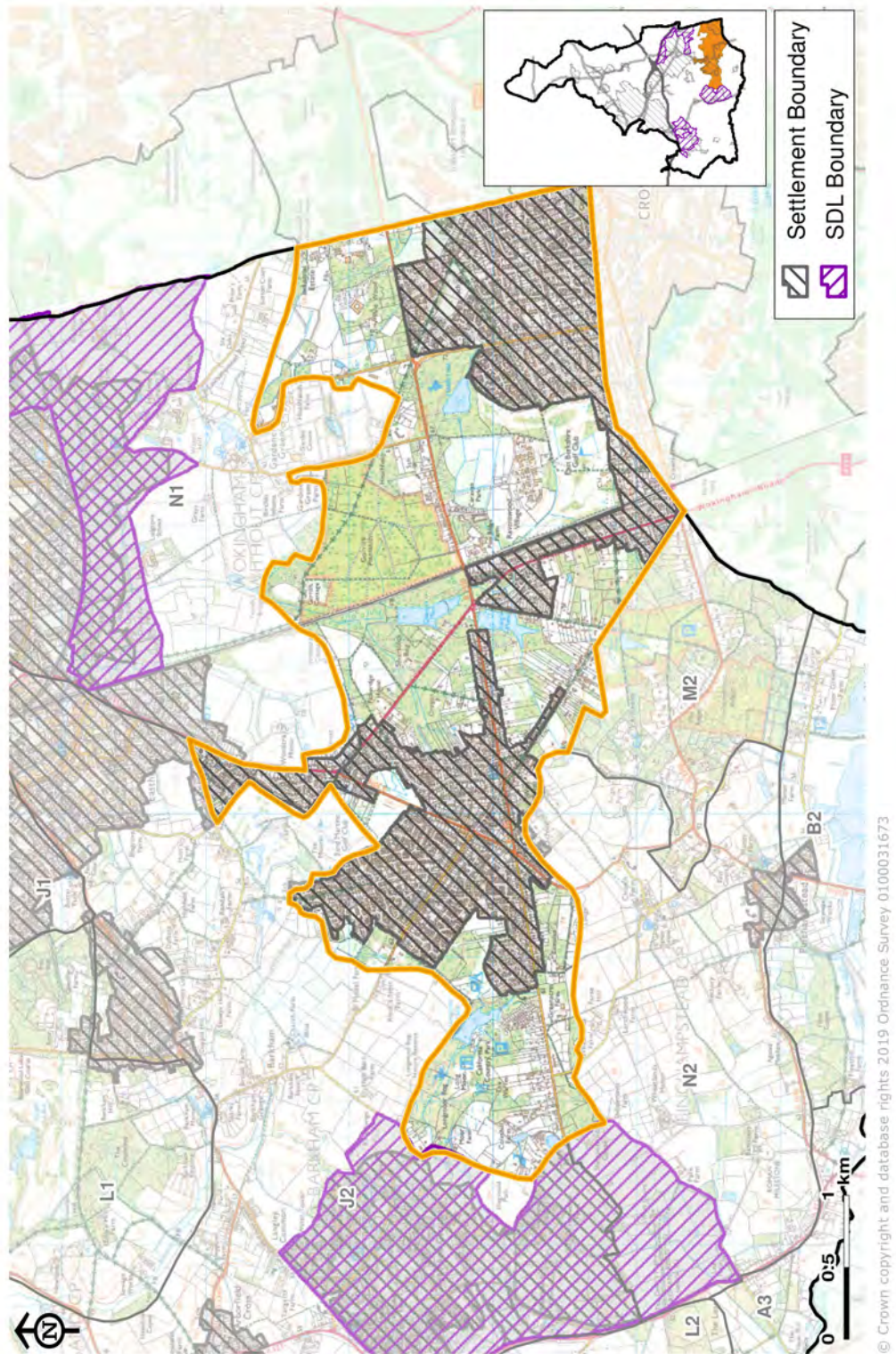
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Source: LUC, Campaign to Protect Rural England

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Map Scale @ A4: 1:140,000

M1: Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands



SUMMARY

An elevated plateau characterised by its densely wooded context, which creates a strong sense of enclosure. The woodland is varied with semi-natural areas and forestry plantation interspersed with heathland. Low density settlement is arranged along linear rides or in the settlements of Finchampstead (north) and part of Crowthorne. Away from areas of settlement, the landscape has a remote character, although it is still accessible due to numerous footpaths.

The eastern boundary of this area is defined by the borough boundary, although the character area extends into Bracknell Forest District. The northern and western boundaries broadly follow the edge of the woodland or settlement and changes in the underlying geology, from sands to clay and river terrace deposits. To the south the boundary is defined by the transition to the more open and topographically varied character of M2: Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands and N2: Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland.



Key Characteristics

- **An elevated landscape** rising to 90m AOD, comprising a shelving plateau, underlain by acidic sands. The infertile sandy soils influence land cover and ecological character.
- **Large swathes of interconnected forestry and woodland** dominate the area, which has little farmland. These consist of large coniferous plantations as well as mixed woodlands with sandy heaths. Stands of Scots Pine and exotic species are particularly distinctive.
- **A number of large lakes**, including Longmoor Lake, King's Mere and Queen's Mere, originally excavated in late 19th century for brick making, now form a focus for recreation.
- **The underlying heathland character** typifies areas of woodland clearings such as California Park and adjacent to roads.
- **Rich semi-natural habitats** associated with the poorly draining acidic soils including BAP priority habitat lowland heathland and lowland dry acid grassland. Large acidic lakes or meres are surrounded by wetland and wet woodland; Longmoor Bog and Heath Lake are nationally important SSSIs.
- **Long straight roads** such as Nine Mile Ride (which originated as historic 'rides' created through the historically open landscape of the Royal Forest of Windsor) give a strong linear character to the landscape. Characterised by roadside rhododendron 'hedges' and occasional colourful patches of gorse and heather.
- **The locally listed historic park at Ravenswood**, which originated as a medieval deer park within the Royal Forest of Windsor.
- **Strong settlement character**, with a low density pattern of detached houses lining the historic rides, which have provided a framework for settlement. Residential properties of relatively unremarkable post-war and modern suburban character in a variety of styles.
- **Good public accessibility** including formal parks such as California Country Park, LNR (including Longmoor Bog and Heath Lake) and areas of open access Forestry Commission land (such as Gorrick Plantation) connected by a network of bridleways and footpaths.
- **Localised area of remoteness** within woodlands and smaller areas of pasture, mire and heath, which provide a sense of tranquility.
- **A highly enclosed landscape** created by the often continuous swathes of dense woodland, except for framed views along the rides.

Natural Landscape

- M1.1 The character of the area is dominated by the presence of underlying sandy formations including the Bagshot Beds, fine to medium grained sandy deposits with clay and silt. There are localised deposits of the Camberley Sand Formation and Windlesham Formation and Sixth River Terrace at the highest elevation. These create gley-Podsols which impede drainage and create nutrient-poor acidic conditions unsuitable for arable farmland and dominated by forestry and woodland.
- M1.2 There are no watercourses. However, there are several relatively large lakes or meres and numerous small ponds located across the plateau, which originate from historic brick pits. The most significant of these are Longmoor Lake, Queen's Mere, King's Mere and Heath Lake. These water bodies tend to be acidic and are surrounded by boggy and marshy areas created by the

poorly draining soil, such as Longmoor Bog and Silverstock Bog. The largest meres contain BAP priority habitat eutrophic standing waters and mesotrophic lakes.

- M1.3 The principal land cover outside of settled areas is woodland frequently used as recreation areas. The dense woodland is varied with mixed woodland and large areas of forestry plantations which are tolerant of the underlying sandy and acidic soil conditions. It is also notable for the high incidence of conifers including Scots Pine and exotic species. The largest continuous swathe is Gorrick Plantation, owned by the Forestry Commission, located south of Gardeners Green. The plantations are managed on a commercial rotation, with public access permitted. Within woodland clearings a more colourful heathy character is evident with areas of heathland vegetation including bracken, gorse and heather. Elsewhere, much of the woodland is mixed with both coniferous and broadleaved species. BAP priority habitats lowland mixed deciduous woodland and wet woodland are both present.
- M1.4 The sandy acidic soils support a large number of sites with significant biological interest. The most characteristic are the sandy heaths, valley bogs, wet woods, and large expanses of mixed secondary woodland and includes BAP priority habitats lowland fens, lowland dry acidic grassland and lowland heathland. Longmoor Bog and Heath Lake are nationally important and designated as SSSIs and are also protected as LNR. Longmoor Bog is one of the few base-poor valley mires remaining in Berkshire, and comprises well-developed wetland carr, mire, dry acid woodland and wet heath which supports several regionally restricted plants such as round-leaved sundew and common cotton grass and several species of bog moss. Heath Lake consists of a small shallow lake, surrounded by birch and pine woodland with areas of relict heathland. The site is of interest for its populations of restricted aquatic plants.
- M1.5 The area also contains seven Wildlife Heritage Sites, the majority of which are lakes and open heath surrounded by mixed woodland. These acid woodlands are characterised by birch, pine, oak and sweet chestnut, but many have been colonised by invasive rhododendron, which also grows along the roadsides in this area

Cultural Landscape

- M1.6 Two round barrows northwest of Warren Lodge suggest there may have been Bronze Age expansion of settlement from the valleys onto less favourable sandy soils within this area. This led to the early development of commons and heathland as the ground was cleared and cultivated, and the soils depleted.
- M1.7 The Roman road between London and Calleva (Silchester) runs east-west through the area, and is known locally as the Devil's Highway. There are remains of the agger (earthen embankment) surviving in Crowthorne and Finchampstead parishes.
- M1.8 During the medieval period, this area was part of The Royal Forest of Windsor. At this time an area around the current site of Ravenswood was established as a deer park, Bigshotte Railes, one of a handful of Railes Parks in the Forest. Ravenswood Park is identified as a Local Historic Park and Garden. The Royal Forest of Windsor was enclosed in the early half of the 19th century, and the last remnants of heaths were replaced by plantations by 1857. A number of historic straight rides through this forested landscape e.g. Nine Mile Ride were created for Queen Anne (and later George III), so that when she was unable to hunt, she could follow in her carriage.
- M1.9 The built character of the landscape is one of the dominant elements affecting landscape character. Much of the settlement is characterised by long narrow land-parcels associated with individual dwellings, strung out along the long linear rides such as Nine Mile Ride (A340), Duke's Ride and Heath Ride. The scenic woodland landscape, close to London, made the heathland a popular setting for country houses surrounded by mostly small ornamental and landscaped parks. Sections of the rides have been suburbanised with kerbs, lighting, signage and roundabouts, but remain characterised by roadside rhododendron 'hedges', and occasional colourful patches of gorse and heather with occasional views into woodland or forestry plantation. The rides are interconnected, which has led to many of the linear settled areas joining and the subsequent infill of the intervening areas with more settlement. In terms of character, the settled landscape is predominantly low-density two-storey residential and bungalows set in large gardens. The buildings are set back from the road behind walls and fences and the gardens retain mature

conifers, particularly Scots Pine. Schools and shops are associated with the residential areas but there are no large-scale industrial or commercial buildings.

- M1.10 The settlement is almost entirely post-Victorian and includes a high proportion of post-war and modern estate dwelling. There is no obvious local vernacular, and generally the architecture is unremarkable, although some Victorian buildings with yellow brick and bargeboards, such as Crowthorne Station, stand out. The absence of churches or obvious centres of development is notable.
- M1.11 The woodland and wetlands provide the focus for recreational use in this area. The main 'formal' recreation area is California Country Park, first developed in the early 1950s as a holiday camp, which is focussed on Longmoor Lake and includes an outdoor swimming pool, caravan and camping park, visitor centre and café. Many of these areas are interconnected by the extensive system of bridleways and footpaths throughout this area, which permit long circular walks and also connect to the nearby town of Wokingham. In addition to the informal natural landscape there is also one golf course, the Royal East Berkshire Golf Course, on the edge of Crowthorne and well integrated into the surrounding wooded landscape.

Perceptual Landscape

- M1.12 The interconnected rides and subsequent infill of the intervening areas with settlement give the perception of an area considerably more settled than is actually the case, with an impression of extended linear ribbon development along roads.
- M1.13 Away from the areas of settlement, the landscape demonstrates a strong sense of enclosure and remoteness, with few views afforded by the often continuous swathes of large coniferous woodland, except for vistas along the historic rides, including views from this area up the avenue of giant redwoods on Wellingtonia Avenue (LCA M2). It remains a landscape highly valued for recreation and relative tranquillity.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- **The elevated plateau and wooded skyline** visible and forming a backdrop in the wider landscape.
- **Large expanses of mixed woodland containing mature trees** which are important ecological habitats and provide a sense of place and history as well as opportunities for recreation. Stands of Scots pine provide characteristic landmark features.
- **The distinctive pattern of interconnected woodland and forestry, interspersed with sandy heaths, lakes, bogs and wet woodland** and occasional pastoral fields which provide scenic quality and visual diversity (a variety of colours and textures and changing seasonal interest) and provide a naturalistic sense of place to the suburban development.
- **Acid heathland, large lakes and bogs** which provide nationally important BAP priority habitats, nationally recognised as SSSIs, as well as opportunities for recreation.
- **Distinctive long straight historic roads following the route of rides through the former Royal Forest of Windsor** which provide a cultural record of the past as well as allowing views into a landscape well enclosed by trees.
- **The locally listed historic park at Ravenswood**, one of only four medieval deer parks in the district.
- Settlement pattern of low density post-war properties in large plots along long straight rides and notably **the occasional wooded gaps between areas of settlement**. Integration of development in the wooded landscape and absence of commercial, industrial buildings /large or tall built structures.

- **Valued areas for recreation** including tracts of open access land and the extensive network of bridleways and public footpaths which allow enjoyment of the landscape.
- **The continuous network of woodland and forestry which helps to provide physical and visual separation between settlements** and to filter and screen views to the settlements within the area, as well as provide an attractive setting to housing.
- **Important vistas to the Wellingtonia Avenue** (within LCA M2) which provides a sense of place.
- **Localised areas with a sense of tranquility and even remoteness**, removed from the roads and visual influence of settlement, which provide an escape in close proximity to the urban population.

Landscape Condition

The landscape is in overall **good condition**, with a distinctive pattern of built and natural elements, including woodland, wetland, open pasture, and heathland habitats, with large lakes, continuous interconnected forestry and a cohesive settlement character. Although much of this landscape has a 'suburban' character it does have a very strong sense of place; however there has been fragmentation of heathland and wetland habitats.

Key Issues

- Changes in deciduous woodland structure through loss of species diversity and spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species. The expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands in the past has resulted in a change in character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and heathlands as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- The influence of woodland fell cycles within forestry has an influence on wider landscape character, particularly along wooded ridgelines.
- Changes in management that could result in loss and fragmentation of heathland or wetland habitats as a result of scrub encroachment or conversion to forestry.
- Drainage operations associated with development altering ground water levels and affecting wetland habitats.
- High demands for recreation due to proximity to large centres of population, particularly mountain biking and quad biking, leading to erosion and impact on tranquillity. Erosion of rights of way, special archaeological, ecological and other landscape features is a continuing concern in this well-populated area.
- Pressure for intensification of golf courses that have an impact on the character of the landscape.
- Pressure for new residential development and supporting infrastructure, both inside and outside the area, impacting on landscape character. Development of a new settlement at the Arborfield Garrison SDL and the extension of the existing Hogwood Industrial Estate immediately to the west of the LCA (in adjoining LCA J2) could potentially impact California Country Park.
- Continued pressure for expansion, infill and densification within existing settlements, particularly at Crowthorne, leading to loss of open pasture, heathland and woodland habitat and potential

amalgamation with adjacent settlements, such as development at Oakham Park (off Old Wokingham Road and Hatch Ride) and extension of the caravan site on the east shore of Longmoor Lake. There is also pressure for backland development to the rear of properties of Nine Mile Ride and unauthorised development between Nine Mile Ride and Ravenswood Park potentially eroding the landscape of the parkland.

- Continuing pressure for new roads or improvements to existing roads, in this well-populated and commercially vibrant area, impacting tranquillity, particularly in relation to the Arborfield Garrison development and the consequent increase in traffic along Nine Mile Ride.
- Continued pressure for infill development between settlements, particularly along the A321 and B3016 along the southern side of Wokingham, and where the landscape provides tranquil, distinct gaps, and 'breathing space' of rural character between built forms.
- Increasing suburbanisation including frontage development and the use of close board fencing along the rides, which is incongruous to the character of the area and also leads to tree losses which themselves harm the character of the area and the Green Rides.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the elevated landscape and in views to the wooded backdrop from elsewhere.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance existing character. The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the characteristic forestry and woodland; the rarer open landscapes of heath, mire lakes and pasture; important wildlife habitats; historic landscape features associated with the Royal Forest and recreational use. In particular there is an opportunity to consider restoration of heathland within the woodland context. The aim should be to link and connect existing heathland areas.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve and enhance the rural setting and gaps between settlements and maintain the low density domestic character of development.

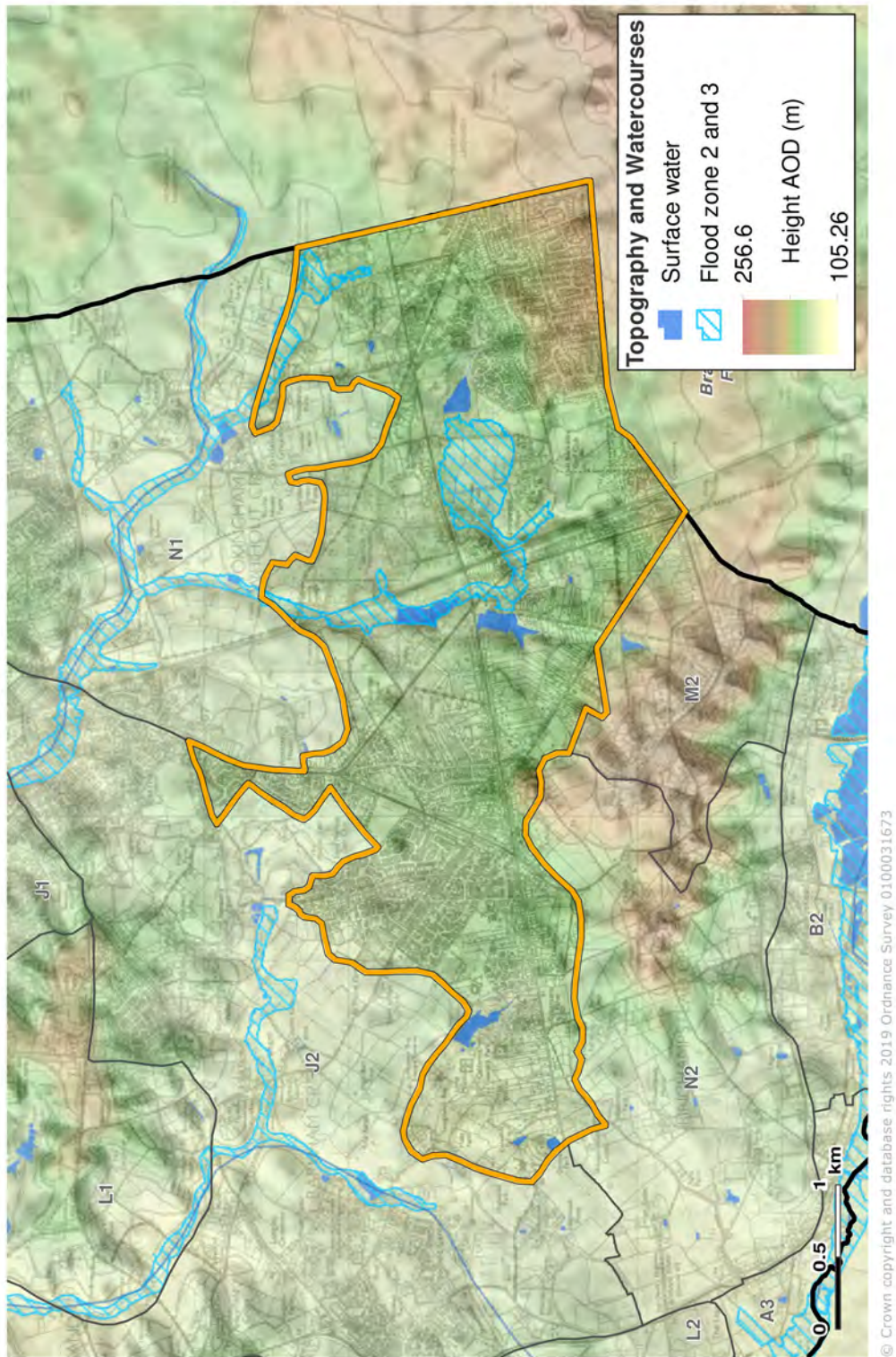
Landscape Guidelines

- **Conserve distinctive wooded skylines.** Consider the impact of any development on skylines, particularly where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. 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.
- **Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape.** Increase the extent of BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland in the forested areas using locally occurring native species in order to create a more mixed woodland character. Retain open areas of heath, mire, lakes and pasture within the forested areas and existing views into these areas, especially from historic rides. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- **Conserve, enhance and manage heathland, grassland, and wetland habitats** particularly BAP priority habitats, from development, changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. An area of land centred around Gorrick Plantation, Queen's Mere and King's Mere is part of the Thames Basin Heaths BOA. This network of natural habitats, which extend into Bracknell Forest, has been identified as a target for habitat creation and restoration and positive management of heathland and bog habitats. An appropriate heathland management regime is critical.
- **Enhance integration of recreation** into the landscape, avoiding features which would lead to

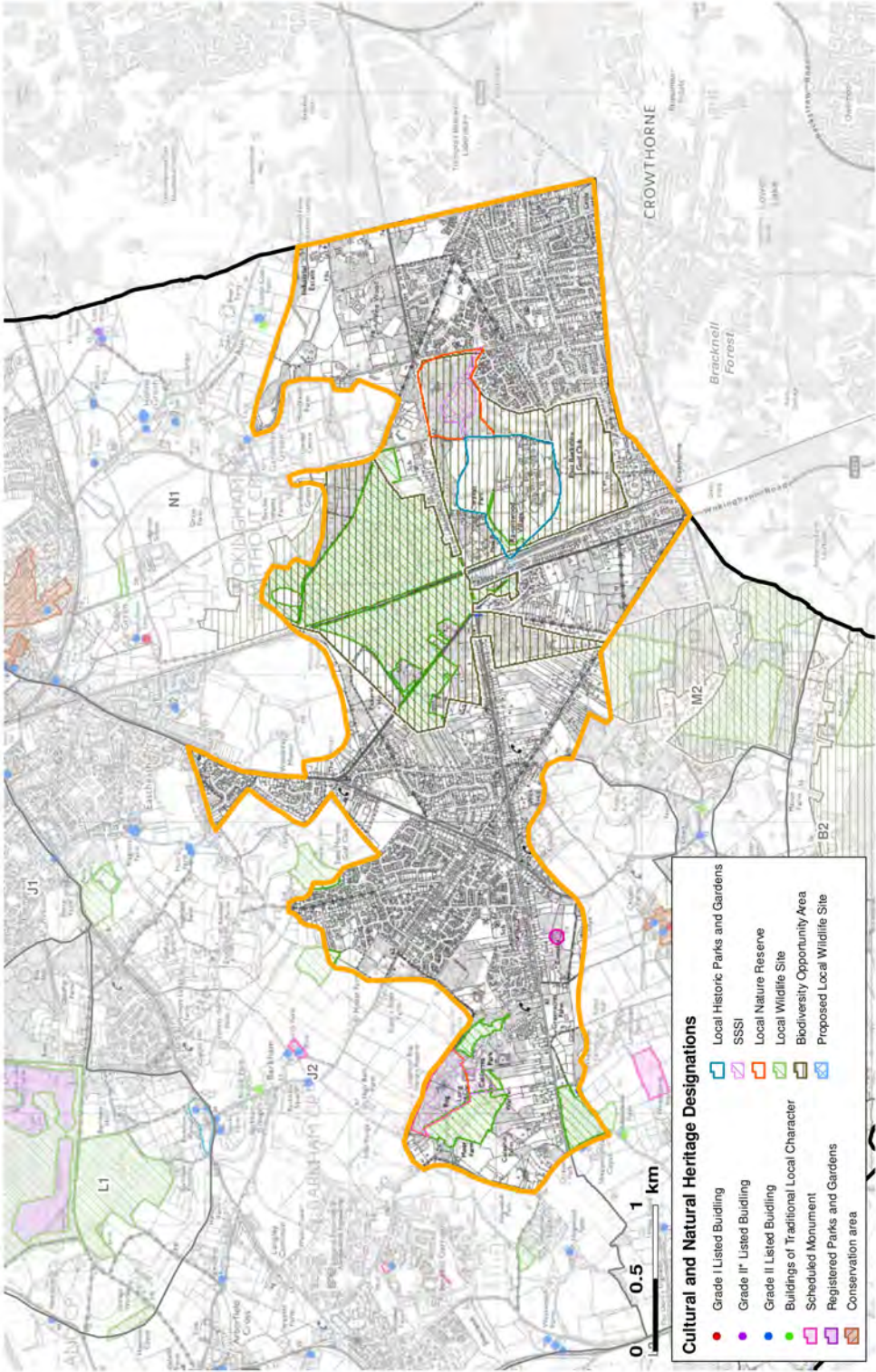
greater (sub) urbanisation of the rural character.

- **Enhance informal recreational enjoyment of the landscape** but balance this with continued conservation of valuable landscapes, heritage assets and 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.
- **Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges** through wooded boundaries and large-species trees and maintain the important vistas along rides. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land adjacent to Arborfield Garrison in the western part of this area.
- **Enhance sense of place through careful planning and 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 and particularly vertical elements on valuable attributes.
- **Conserve the rural character between adjacent towns and village centres**, to protect the individual identity of settlements, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation that helps define them. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land remaining along the B3016 and the A321 between Finchampstead and Wokingham, retain blocks of woodland along the rides and rear of properties under threat from backland development.
- **Consider undertaking character appraisals/village design statements** of key settlements in Wokingham Borough e.g. Finchampstead to identify features worthy of conservation. Maintain the **small scale, low density domestic character of settlement** set within large plots avoiding greater densities of development or tall/large structures.
- **Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate roads** in relation to proposed junction improvements and the extension of Nine Mile Drive to the west of the character area. Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads, while retaining existing views to open countryside and wooded ridges. Minimise fencing and other boundary structures.
- **Conserve and enhance historic features associated with the Royal Forest of Windsor** including the medieval parkland at Ravenswood and the straight rides.
- **Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution** through the sensitive siting of any new development, especially any proposed night-time lighting.

M1: Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands



M1: Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands



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M1: Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands

