

Appendix B Published Evidence Extracts

Introduction & Summary

Description

Opportunities

Key facts
and data

Landscape
change

Analysis



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Statements of Environmental Opportunities:

- **SEO 1:** Plan for the enhancement of the area's rivers, and the expansion of their operational flood plains and associated wetland habitats, aiding the regulation of water flow, improving water quality, benefiting biodiversity, and reinforcing cultural heritage and landscape.
- **SEO 2:** Plan for the landscape-scale enhancement of the area's extensive gravel workings and other open waterbodies (including reservoirs) forming part of the South-West London Waterbodies Special Protection Area, for their contribution to water supply and storage, for their important habitats and recreation facilities, and for their geological interest.
- **SEO 3:** Maintain existing greenspace and plan for the creation of green infrastructure associated with the significant projected growth of urban areas, to reduce the impact of development, to help reduce flooding issues, and to strengthen access and recreation opportunities. Seek links from urban areas to wider recreation assets such as the Thames Path National Trail, National Cycle Routes, and the river and canal network, and promote the incorporation of best practice environmental measures into any new development.
- **SEO 4:** Protect and manage the area's historic parklands, wood pastures, ancient woodland, commons, orchards and distinctive ancient pollards, and restore and increase woodland for carbon sequestration, noise and pollution reduction, woodfuel and protection from soil erosion, while also enhancing biodiversity, sense of place and history.
- **SEO 5:** Develop the recreational, educational and commercial tourism opportunities offered by public access to – and engagement with – the historic buildings and landscapes in the area, such as Hampton Court Palace, Windsor Castle and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, for their contribution to a sense of place and to people's enjoyment and understanding of the area.



Teddington Weir.

Key characteristics

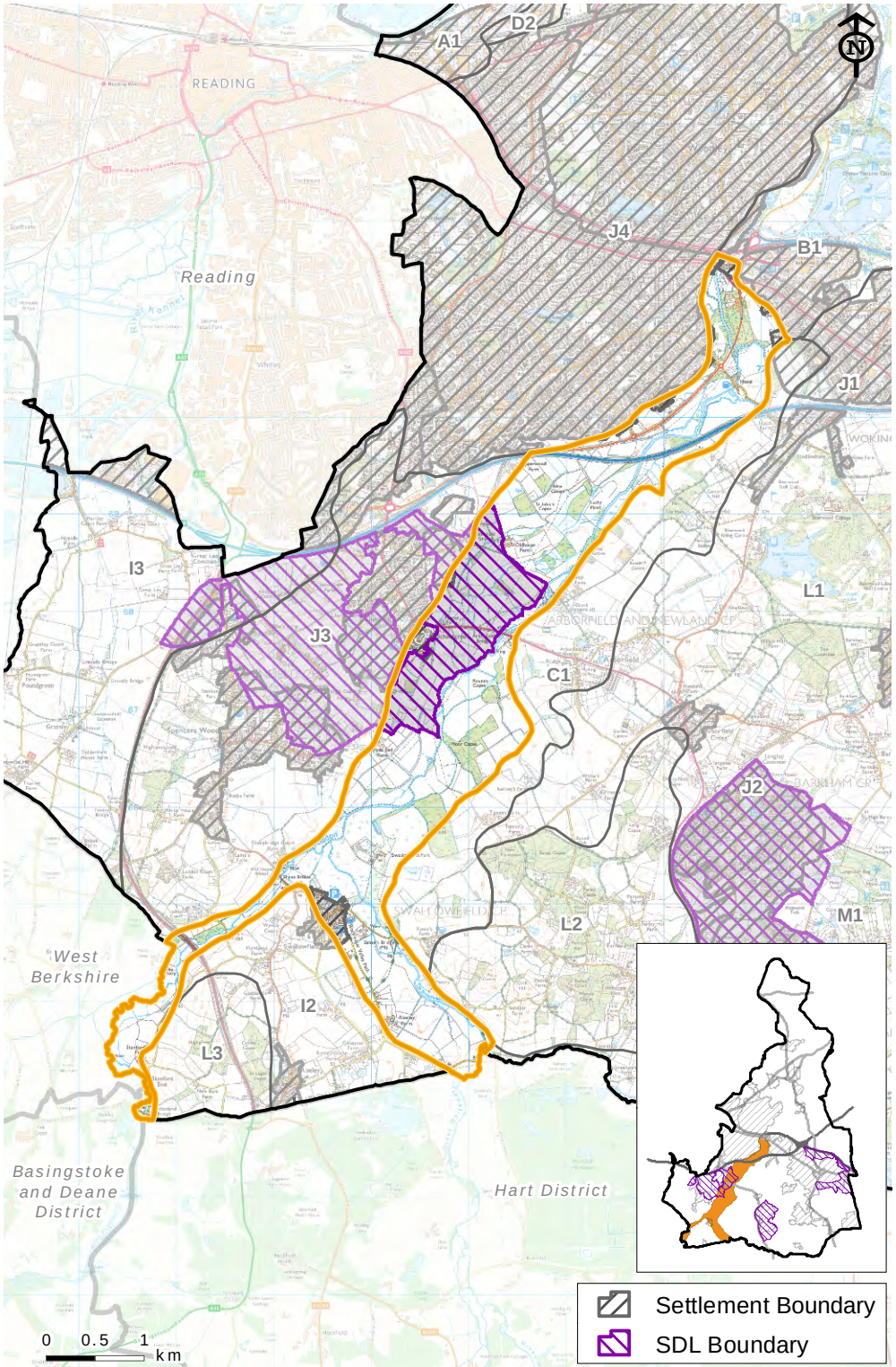
- Flat and low-lying land, rising to low, river-terraced hills, which include the prominent local outcrop of chalk on which Windsor Castle sits.
- The underlying geology is dominated by the London Clay which, over much of the area, is overlain by river-lain sands and gravels.
- The numerous hydrological features provide unity to an area which otherwise lacks homogeneity; these features include the River Thames and its tributaries, streams, lakes, canals and open waterbodies (the result of restored gravel workings).
- Woodlands characterise the north-western area, with the wooded character extending up to the southern edge of the Chiltern Hills.
- Farming is limited. Where it survives, grazed pasture is the major land use within a generally open, flat and featureless landscape. The field pattern is medium-scale and irregular, with smaller fields to the west. Localised areas of species-rich hay meadows provide a splash of colour in summer.
- Although densely populated and developed, pockets of woodland, open grassland, parkland, wetlands and intimate meadows provide escape and tranquillity, and include a variety of habitats supporting important populations of many species, notably stag beetle, shoveler, gadwall and other invertebrates and wildfowl.
- Towards London in the east, the natural character of the area is overtaken by urban influences: a dense network of roads (including the M25 corridor), Heathrow Airport, railway lines, golf courses, pylon lines, reservoirs, extensive mineral extraction and numerous flooded gravel pits.
- There are small but biologically important areas of lowland heathland – especially on higher sandy ground in the north – and a small area to the south falls within the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) buffer zone.
- To the south, the open Thames flood plain dominates, with its associated flat grazing land, becoming characterised by a number of formal historic landscapes on higher ground. Between Hampton and Kew, the River Thames forms the focus of a series of designed landscapes.
- The area has an urban character, and there are very few villages of more traditional character, although almost half of the area is greenbelt land and development has been restricted in areas like Crown Estate land and Eton College grounds.
- The river is closely associated with numerous historic places and cultural events, such as the signing of Magna Carta at Runnymede. Tourists from all over the world are drawn to the rich heritage of the area, flocking to attractions like Hampton Court Palace and Windsor Castle.
- The area is important for recreation, both for residents and visitors. Historic parkland and commons provide access to green space, the Thames Path National Trail runs the length of the NCA, and a variety of activities are enjoyed on the river and other waterbodies.



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Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment

Prepared by LUC for Wokingham Borough Council
November 2019



SUMMARY

This area occupies the flat alluvial floodplain of the River Loddon and its tributaries the Broadwater and the Blackwater. An agricultural landscape of irregular fields, with large scale arable fields on better drained areas and small scale wet meadows on frequently flooded land adjacent to the river. A largely peaceful area, disturbance comes from major roads which cross the floodplain including the M4, and adjacent developments in Earley, Winnersh, the expanding settlement of Shinfield and new Science and Innovation Park.

The southern boundaries of this area are defined by the borough boundary, although the character area extends into the adjoining districts (West Berkshire and Hart). The northern boundary is confined by the industrial edge of Winnersh and the Loddon Bridge, where industry and infrastructure mark the end of the tranquil rural landscape of the Loddon Valley. The eastern and western boundaries are defined by the geological extent of the river alluvium and river terrace deposits which occupy the valley floor and marked changes in topography on the valley sides of the adjacent character areas.



Key Characteristics

- A broad, flat alluvial floodplain around 40-45m AOD underlain by riverine alluvium and river terrace deposits. The alluvial soils are affected by high groundwater levels, while the loamy soils on the low ridges of the river terrace gravels are better drained and in use as arable fields.
- The River Loddon follows a meandering course within braided channels. There are a system of sluices and weirs along the course of the river, at Arborfield, Sheep Bridge and Stanford End. Streams and tributary rivers join the Loddon including the rivers Broadwater and Blackwater in the southeast of the area. There are ponds, oxbow lakes and pools of standing water on the valley floor.
- A wooded backdrop is provided by scattered blocks of deciduous woodland and copses, interlinked woodland belts and scattered mature trees and scrub. The semi-natural woodlands include frequent areas of Ancient Woodland, all of which are designated as LWSs.
- Pasture and arable farmland in medium and large irregular geometric fields, divided by post and wire fencing, post and rail fencing, gappy hedgerows and drainage ditches. The areas closest to the river are affected by flooding and are characterised by pasture and wet meadow.
- Wetland character, including BAP priority habitats of floodplain grazing marsh, wet woodland, lowland fen and lowland meadows which contain characteristic features such as willow pollards. Six areas with wetland character are designated as LWS. South of Sheepbridge an area of waterlogged hay meadow is designated as the Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI, which supports nationally important populations of fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*) and the Loddon pondweed (*Potamogeton nodosus*), while the full length of river north of Sheepbridge is an LWS.
- Important historic riverside features include traditional brick humpback bridges and water mills e.g. Sindlesham Mill and Sindlesham Bridge and the Mill at Swallowfield (all Grade II listed). Moated sites are present at Beaumy's Castle and Sheepbridge Court and designated as Scheduled Monuments.
- Extensive designed parkland landscape at Swallowfield Park (designated as a Registered Park and Garden) which leads down to the River Loddon with grassland and mature oaks and specimen trees including cedars of Lebanon, and a Grade II listed 18th century bridge.
- The GHQ Stop Line (General Headquarters Line), a defensive zone built during the summer of 1940 to contain the threatened German invasion ran east from Bristol to the Thames Estuary and included a section along the Foudry Brook, the Loddon, the Broadwater and the Blackwater.
- Low-density scattered settlement pattern of villages and farmsteads characterised by traditional warm red brick and timber framed vernacular evident in cluster of listed buildings in Swallowfield village Conservation Area.
- Tranquil and rural character away from river crossings and visual influence of large scale settlement in adjacent areas. The south of the area is also a resource of 'dark skies'.
- Little public access to the floodplain except for the Blackwater Valley Path which runs south and east of Swallowfield. Busy roads cross the flood plain, including the A33, M4 and Winnersh and Shinfield Eastern Relief Roads, and create physical and visual severance along the floodplain.
- Pylons, residential and commercial development are distinctive visual features in this open and flat landscape, with development very visible along the edges of this character area. The new landmark Science and Innovation Park building at Shinfield is a notable feature in the

landscape.

Natural Landscape

- A2.1 The character of the Loddon River Valley is influenced by the River Loddon, a tributary of the Thames. The river occupies only a small part of the floodplain and its presence is only revealed close to its banks or in the tranquil water meadows that lie alongside the river. The river is branched and braided, for example north of Arborfield Bridge where a system of sluices and weirs mark the site of the old Arborfield Mill, now a water pumping station. The river also branches significantly at Salter's Bridge, Swallowfield and at Sindlesham Mill, north of the M4. There are also numerous ponds, oxbow lakes and pools of standing water on the valley floor.
- A2.2 The landform comprises a flat floodplain that lies between 40 and 45m AOD. It is underlain by riverine alluvium and younger River Terrace deposits of the Loddon and Brickearth. These give rise to Pelo-Alluvial Argillic Gley soils that are affected by high groundwater levels. The loamy soils that overlie the younger river terrace gravels are better drained and are in use as arable fields. The areas closer to the river are affected by short term flooding and are characterised by pasture and wet meadow. The wet meadows are an important resource and wet woodland provides a sense of enclosure and hidden character that contrasts with the open floodplain beyond. The presence of pollarded willow is characteristic of the river corridor.
- A2.3 The landscape is dominated by mixed agriculture of irregular fields, with large-scale arable fields occupying better drained areas and small scale wet meadows occurring on frequently flooded land adjacent to the river. The fields are divided by drainage ditches and post and wire fencing. Where hedgerows occur they are low flailed, species poor and discontinuous, forming the remnants of a former network.
- A2.4 BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland and coniferous copses and coverts form isolated geometric blocks within the wider mixed farmland. These woodlands provide shelter for wildlife as well as a green backdrop to views across the floodplain. The historic parkland of Swallowfield Park, imparked by Edward III and a royal residence until the Tudor era, has a localised influence on the character of the floodplain with scattered parkland trees (mature oaks) and woodland belts forming features within the open floodplain.
- A2.5 The Loddon River Valley character area has retained significant biological interest and is characterised by scattered BAP priority habitats including wet woodlands and grasslands, which are now mostly restricted to the banks of the river channel. The valley is particularly notable for the nationally important Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI, which comprises a 4km stretch of the River Loddon together with a series of traditionally managed, seasonally waterlogged hay meadows. This site supports rich plant communities and is of special interest for its thriving populations of two rare plants, the fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*) which is now mainly confined to scattered localities in southern Britain, and a national stronghold of Loddon pondweed (*Potamogeton nodosus*). The site is also associated with a number of notable aquatic and wetland mollusc species, including two rare pea mussels (*Pisidium moitessierianum* and *P. tenuilineatum*), and two rare snails *Vertigo antivertigo* and *V. moulinsiana*.
- A2.6 The valley also supports twelve areas designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), for their woodland, wet woodland and fen habitats. These include four Ancient Woodlands. The wet woodlands are dominated by alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and crack willow (*Salix fragilis*) and are particularly notable for supporting important populations of Loddon lily (*Leucojum aestivum*).

Cultural Landscape

- A2.7 As with the Thames Valley, the Loddon was an early focus of human activity and cultivation of the fertile valley floor may have commenced during the Neolithic with cultivation on the valley sides leading to alluvial deposition on the floodplain below. Cropmarks, including ring ditches, and Bronze Age finds, provide evidence of continuous prehistoric/Romano-British settlement and

farming along the Loddon. The Roman road between London and Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester), known locally as the Devil's Highway, runs for a short length across the LCA at Riseley Common.

- A2.8 The area was part of the Royal Forest of Windsor from Norman times but before that, the "-feld" element of place names such as Arborfield and Swallowfield, suggests a largely open and cultivated landscape during the Saxon period. The focus of medieval and later settlement was on the valley sides, with settlement on lower ground consisting mainly of dispersed farmsteads sited at the edges of the floodplain, probably set within open fields along the river gravels and common meadows on the floodplain.
- A2.9 The large straight-sided fields along most of the valley indicate Parliamentary enclosure of early 19th century. Small areas with less regular fields interspersed with small parcels of woodland, shown on the first edition OS map, indicate earlier assart enclosures, although few traces of these survive due to recent amalgamation of fields.
- A2.10 This area has the greatest concentration of moated sites in the borough, due to its physical, defensive, features. In the medieval period the construction of moats was a popular way of enhancing the status and appearance of a manor, or other large house, such as that at Sheepbridge Court. The moated site at Beaumy's Castle is a rare example of one which was designed for defensive purposes. A number of 17th and 18th century country houses were surrounded by areas of landscaped parkland. Traces of parkland are still visible around the site of the now demolished Arborfield Hall, and at Swallowfield Park (Grade II listed Registered Park and Garden), which incorporates the woodland and open parkland of an earlier medieval deer park. Swallowfield Park also has an old walled garden, now planted in the Arts and Crafts Style, and a woodland walk leading down to the quiet flowing River Loddon.
- A2.11 A more recent historic feature of the Loddon Valley is the GHQ Stop Line, a defensive zone built during the summer of 1940 to contain the threatened German invasion. The line ran east from Bristol to the Thames Estuary and included a section through the borough. This swathe of World War II defences consists of pillboxes (concrete defensive bunkers often hexagonal in shape) and the fortified natural defences of the rivers Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater (including in-built chambers for demolition charges in the local bridges).
- A2.12 The Loddon River Valley has a rural, remote character with a dominant settlement pattern of very low density scattered built features, typically traditional brick and timber framed farmsteads, mills and humpbacked bridges at crossing points of the river. Often the settlements associated with water mills, for example old Arborfield village, which was moved post 1607, are located on the adjacent higher ground of the older river terraces or clay farmland and linked to the valley floor by rural tracks and lanes. The village of Swallowfield, which has a Conservation Area, is unusual in that it occupies a site on the valley floor.
- A2.13 The traditional built features within the valley are constructed from traditional warm red brick and timber framing of the 17th and 18th century, with clay tile roofs. This is seen in the scattered farmsteads, mill buildings, bridges and village of Swallowfield. Agricultural buildings often combine the use of weatherboarding with red brick and typically have half-hipped roofs. Flint is also seen in decorative use on gate posts or on churches and in all cases attention to detail is a characteristic of the built environment. There is a range of materials present where new built development has spread onto the valley floor, for example on the edge of Shinfield.
- A2.14 There is a loose network of lanes serving this primarily agricultural landscape, with a limited number of river crossing points. The presence of post-medieval mills at a number of these and other points, e.g. Sheepbridge Mill, Sindlesham Mill, Stanford End Mill, probably reflects the locations of earlier mills.
- A2.15 The floodplain is largely inaccessible by foot apart from public footpaths at the river crossings at Salter's Bridge, Arborfield/Shinfield and Loddon Bridge, and remains a remote, agricultural landscape. There is little use of the river for pleasure craft and limited opportunity for recreation including fishing.
- A2.16 Major infrastructure crosses the valley including the A33 in the south, and the M4, A327 and the new Winnersh Relief Road and Shinfield Eastern Relief Road. The B3270 is also very busy, and lit at night. The main line railway from Reading to Waterloo crosses the valley at Loddon Bridge on the northern border of the area.

Perceptual Landscape

- A2.17 The Loddon valley floor has largely retained a tranquil and remote rural character with limited development. There are, however, views to substantial areas of built development in adjacent areas, for example the residential outskirts of Reading which have a localised impact on tranquillity.
- A2.18 Pylons are detracting features of the valley floor, prominent in views across this open landscape. From the Shinfield Eastern Relief Road and the A327 commercial and residential development is evident on the edges of Shinfield and Arborfield.
- A2.19 In Swallowfield there are views to the Swallowfield Park parkland. South of Sheepbridge views are channelled along the river itself, creating a more enclosed and secluded character.
- A2.20 In his book, 'Our River' George Dunlop Leslie RA recalls collecting foliage and dried reeds at Wargrave, which he took away with him and used to create the pictures painted of the River Loddon.
- A2.21 The critic J.C. Loudon remarked of Swallowfield Park, in 1831, that *'The situation is nearly flat, with a stream passing through it. The house is a large plain building, lately put in thorough repair; and the gardens and grounds are undergoing essential ameliorations'*.
- A2.22 The village of Swallowfield has associations with Miss Mary Russell Mitford who wrote a diary published as 'Our Village' which became a contemporary classic. In 'Our Village' she asks of the *"brimming Loddon"*:
- "Is it not a beautiful river? Rising level with its banks, so clear and smooth and peaceful, giving back the verdant landscape and the clear blue sky, and bearing on its pellucid stream the snowy water-lily, the purest of flowers, like the lady in 'Comus'".*

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- The naturalness of the meandering course of the River Loddon and wide floodplain landscape which provide a strong sense of place.
- The wooded backdrop of mature broadleaved woodland copses and natural riparian corridors including ancient woodland which provides scenic quality and a sense of place, as well as framing views across, into and out of the area.
- Important wetland features / habitats including BAP priority habitats wet woodland and floodplain grazing marsh remnants designated as LWSs, and the nationally important Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI that are uncommon in the borough and provide important ecological habitats.
- Historic riverside features including medieval moated sites, old brick watermills and bridges, the registered historic parkland at Swallowfield and the GHQ Stop Line and associated Second World War features which follow the course of the rivers.
- Sparse settlement pattern of farmsteads and the village of Swallowfield, characterised by a strong local vernacular which contribute to the scenic quality of the area and impart a sense of time depth.
- Remote and rural landscape in the south of the area due to the limited access to the floodplain and absence of development on the valley floor.
- Localised areas with a strong sense of tranquility particularly in the south, with naturalistic qualities and experience of dark skies away from roads and visual influence of large scale settlement in adjacent areas.

Landscape Condition

The meandering course of the river and the flat floodplain landscape is intact. For the most part this is a remote and rural landscape with characteristic riverside features and important wetland habitats which contribute to the overall perception of a landscape in moderate condition. However, views to adjacent large scale development and busy infrastructure corridors, particularly in the north of the area fragment the rural landscape. There are opportunities for improvement and particular enhancement to habitat interconnectivity.

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 and greater flooding which may impact riverside vegetation.
- Hedgerow loss associated with past expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture. The post and wire fencing present is less aesthetically pleasing than a robust hedgerow network would be.
- Incremental loss of species rich grassland due to increasingly intensive grassland management/conversion to arable land.
- Decline in demand for traditional countryside products leading to loss of rural features including pollarded willows on waterside pasture.
- An area of land south of the A327 has been identified as a potential site for extraction of 3.6 million tonnes of sand and gravel which will impact on the tranquillity and rural character of the area but may provide new recreational and biodiversity opportunities depending on the restoration design and management.
- Decline or decay of historic features including the parkland at Swallowfield Park and the GHQ Stop Line.
- Drainage operations associated with development and agriculture affecting river levels and wetland habitats. Climate change is also likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows.
- Pressure for new residential and commercial development and supporting infrastructure both inside and outside the area is continuing to push onto the floodplain and impacting landscape character and with potential for impacts on the rurality and tranquillity of the area. Potential development of a new settlement at Shinfield (Land south of M4 SDL) may affect the tranquillity and character of the river valley at Shinfield.
- There is continuing pressure for new industrial developments, sewage treatment works and commercial premises in the river valleys, often associated with the major transport corridors.
- Increasing use of road network, leading to continuous presence of background traffic noise from the M4 and other major roads across the floodplain including the extension of the Winnersh Relief Road, Shinfield Eastern Relief Road and upgrades to the B3270 and A327.
- Increasing demand for residential, commercial and agricultural large-scale buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements, including development within the South of the M4 SDL and expansion of the Science and Innovation Park.
- 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 open landscape.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Loddon River Valley* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the current rural character with its typical river valley components and sense of remoteness.

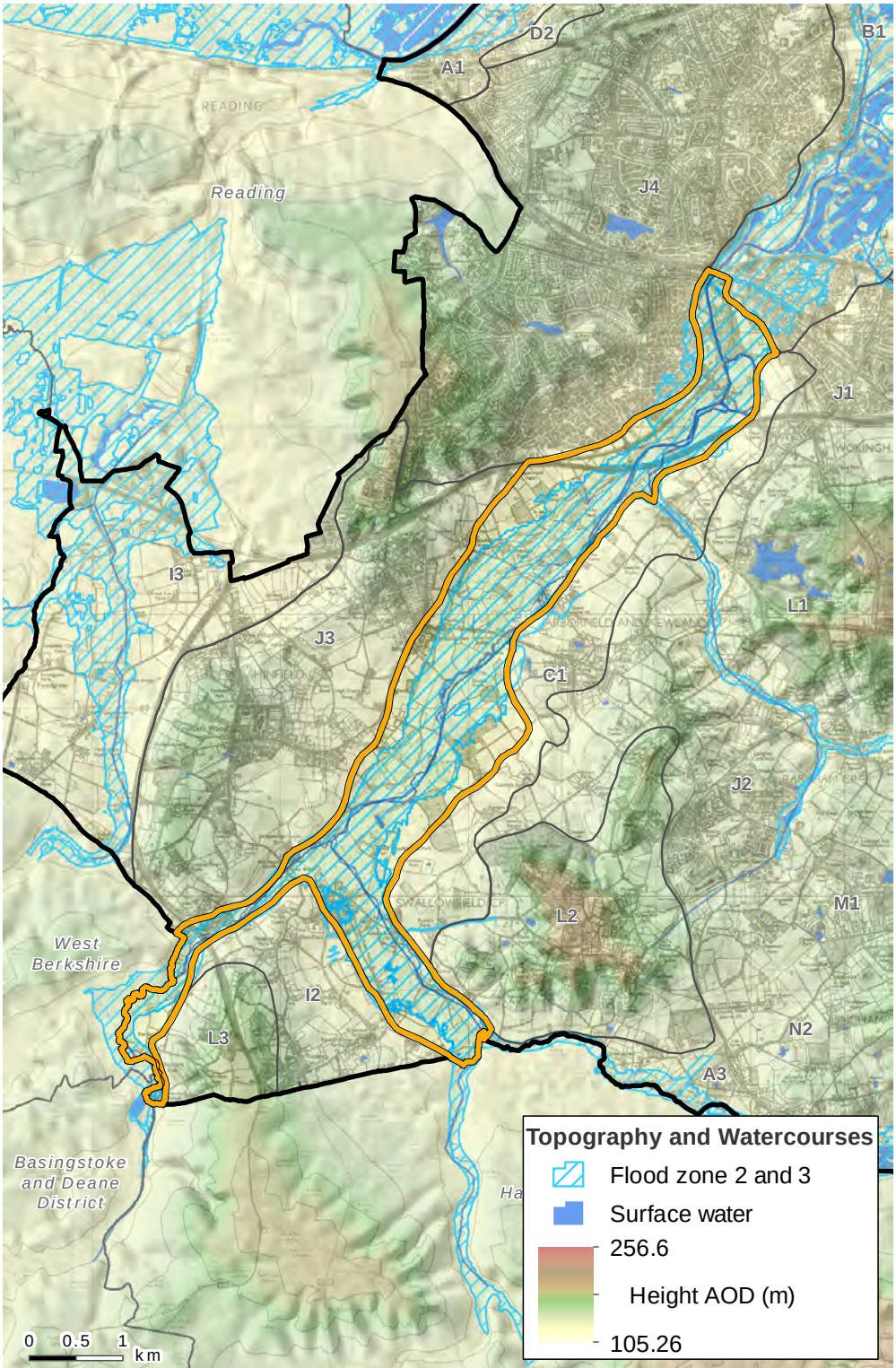
The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the natural habitats including areas of wet woodland and wet meadow. Restore or reinstate hedgerow boundaries with native species and the re-creation of permanent pasture alongside the river.

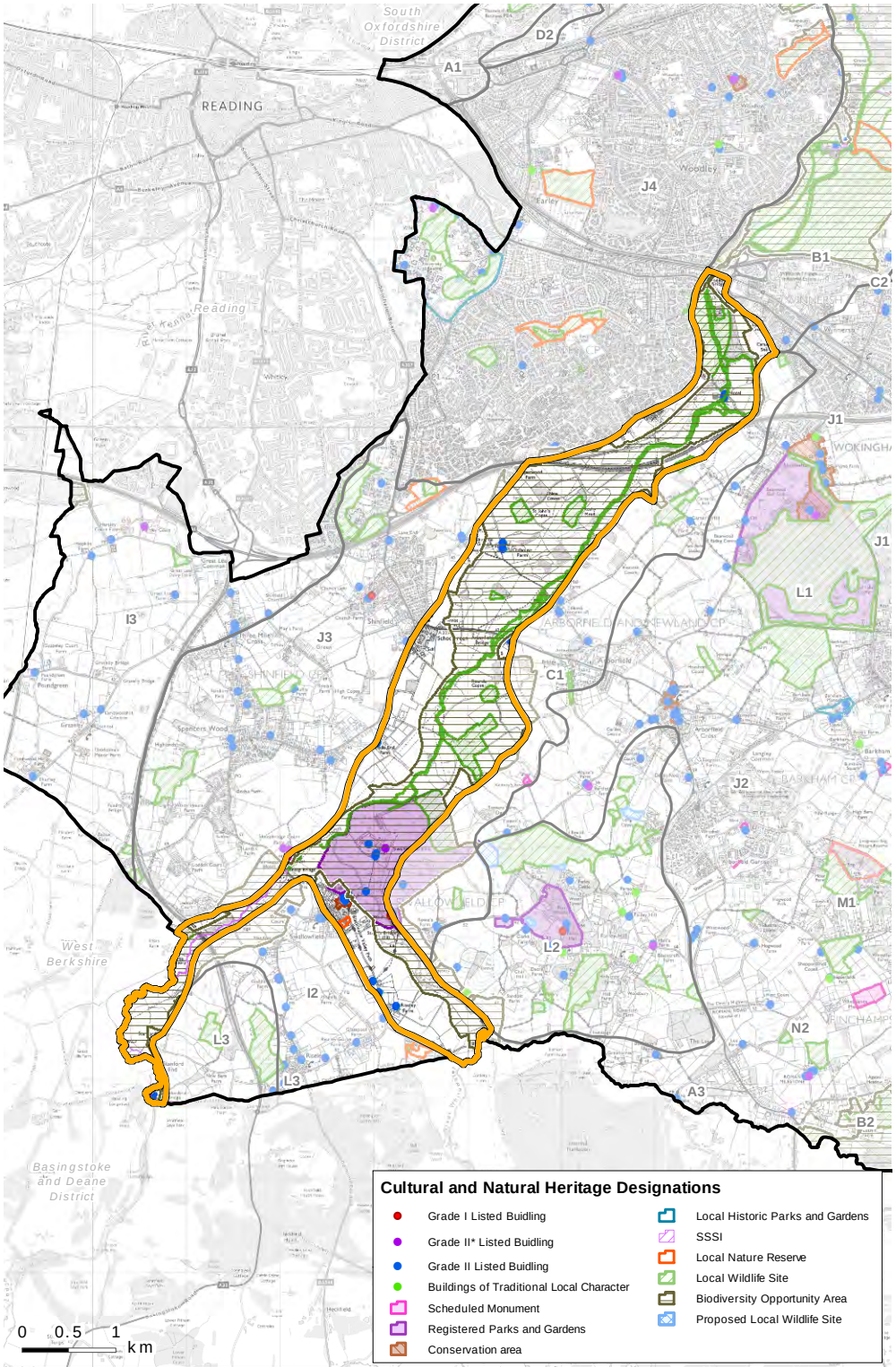
In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern minimising influence from adjacent landscape areas.

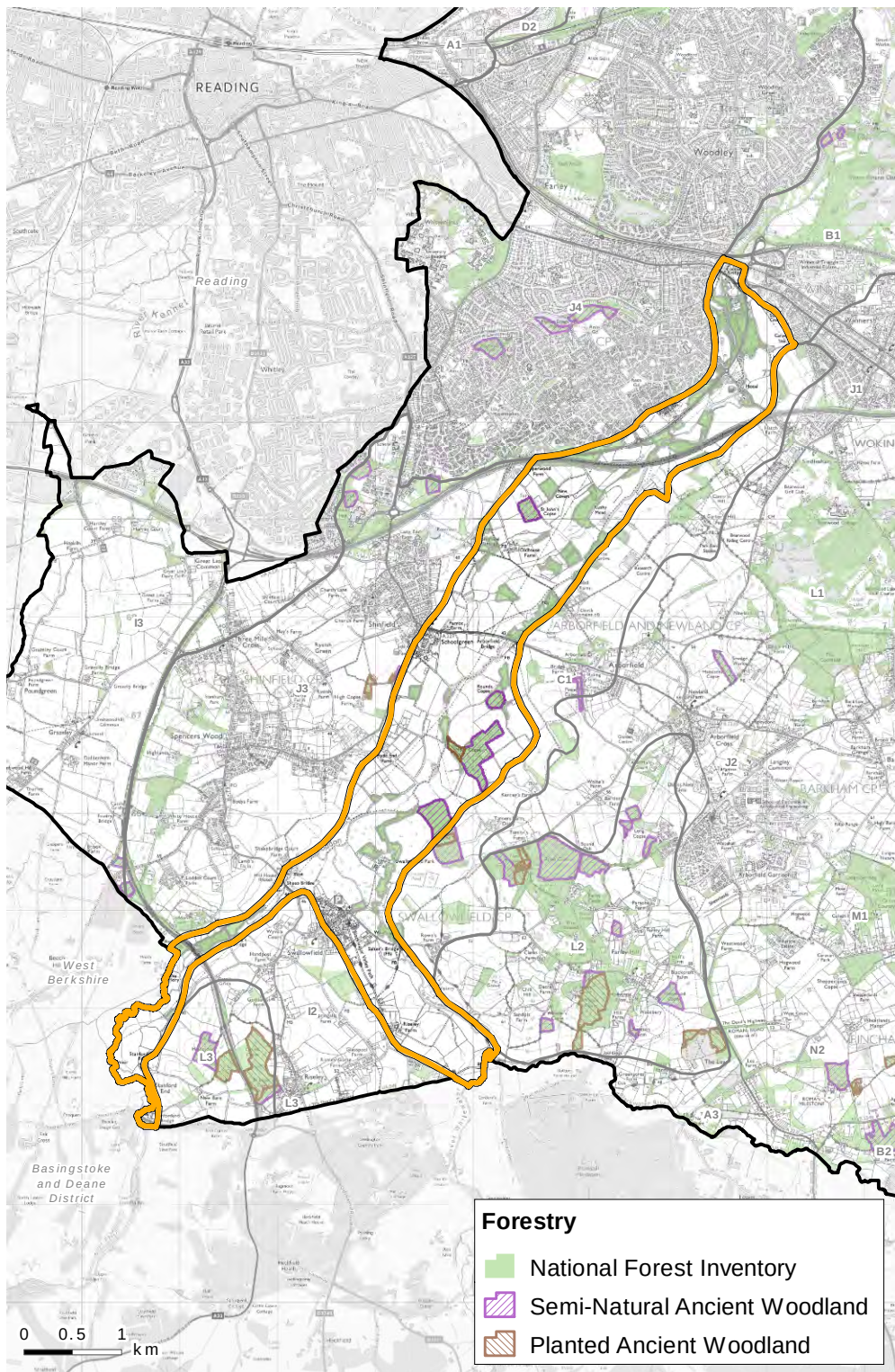
Landscape Guidelines

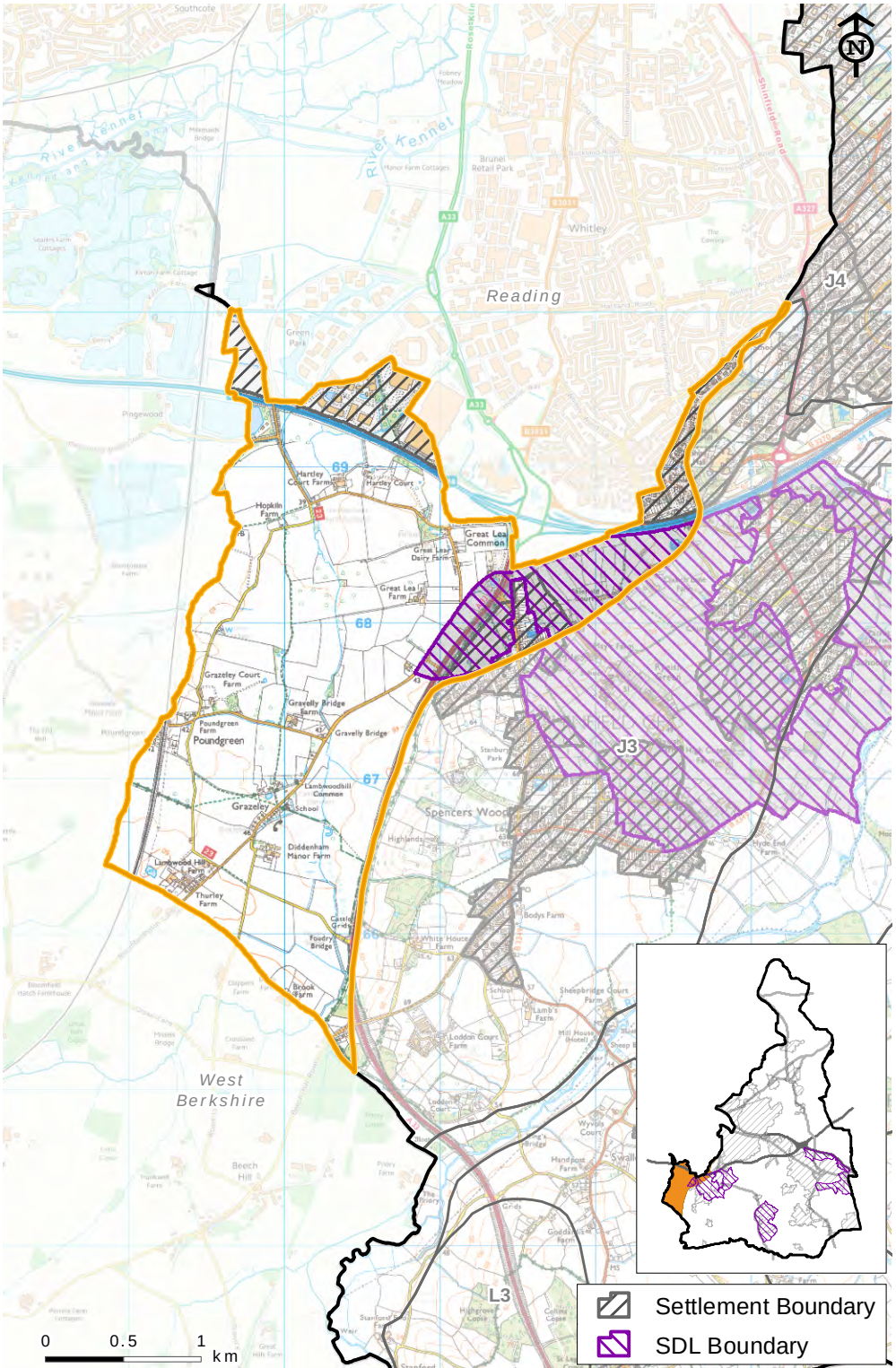
- Conserve the scenic quality and naturalistic character of the river corridor and tributary streams particularly from development, intensification of land use and encroachment by scrub and secondary woodland.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species in order to create green links to other woodland habitats and to dampen extreme river flows within river catchments. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Reinstall or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so. There has been recent planting of new hawthorn hedgerows, and this should be encouraged and continued but with a wider diversity of species.
- 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 protect the landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields and encourage environmentally beneficial management. Encourage the appropriate management of grassland by grazing, particularly at Stamford End Meadows. Consider re-creation of lost wet meadows.
- Conserve, enhance and manage wetland habitats, including BAP priority habitats, particularly from development or changes in land use. The majority of this area is part of the Loddon Valley South BOA. This network of natural habitats has been identified as a target for habitat creation and restoration and positive management of lowland meadow, wet woodland and parkland. The 2003 Environment Agency biodiversity strategy for the Loddon catchment should be used.
- Maintain the prevailing hydrology and water tables to enable anaerobic conditions to preserve archaeological sites in low lying wetland areas, particularly along river corridors.
- Ensure restoration plans for gravel extraction sites are in keeping with character of the landscape and encourage opportunities for habitat creation. Resist proposals that would impact on the intactness or integrity of the landscape or change landscape character.
- Conserve the scenic value of Swallowfield and its Conservation Area and other listed buildings, moated sites, the Registered Park and Garden at Swallowfield and features associated with the GHQ Stop Line.

- Conserve the rural character of the river corridor, to protect the individual identity of settlements such as Swallowfield, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land between Earley and Winnersh.
- Maintain the rural character and sparse settlement pattern of dispersed farms through control of new development and avoiding the spread of development onto the floodplain, particularly in relation to the South of the M4 SDL.
- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – as well as sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes.
- Resist proposals that introduce extensive or obtrusive elements e.g. pylons on the visually sensitive landscape.
- Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate roads, particularly in relation to the new Shinfield Eastern and Winnersh Relief Roads. Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity/remoteness in the landscape, including the experience of dark skies, through the management of development, ensuring development, including infrastructure, does not spread onto the floodplain and that technical solutions to noise and light pollution are used where possible









SUMMARY

A flat agricultural landscape of predominantly large arable fields with occasional sheep grazing. The area is drained by numerous streams and ditches including the tranquil course of the Foudry Brook, overhung by mature trees. A highly rural, even remote, landscape characterised by low density dispersed settlement, connected by sunken lanes with hedge banks. The north of the area is disturbed by modern development on the edge of Reading and the M4.

The Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland character area lies in the far west of the borough and forms part of the wider landscape of the Thames Basin. The southern and western boundaries are marked by the borough boundary, although the character extends into West Berkshire. The eastern boundary is defined by a change in topography where the prominent clay ridge of J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay separates this area from the Loddon Valley. The A33 runs along the foot of this ridge and is used as a pragmatic boundary. The northern boundary is also marked by the borough boundary and the built up area of Reading.



Key Characteristics

- Flat vale landscape lying at 40 to 50m AOD, enclosed to the east by the prominent clay ridge of Spencer's Wood. Underlain by London Clay and alluvium associated with the River Kennet and its tributaries – part of the wider Thames Basin.
- Wetland character in parts due to drainage ditches and small streams which flow north towards the Kennet, including the Foundry Brook, a medium sized stream only visible at close range. Field ponds are also a feature of this area, including Great Lea Pond LWS.
- Largely devoid of woodland with only shelterbelts and small mixed farm woods, with BAP priority habitat mixed lowland deciduous woodland. Norman's Shaw and Wood North of Beech Hill Coverts/Clayhill are of ancient origin and are designated as LWS.
- Large-scale irregular arable fields in the open vale contrast with small scale sheep pasture fields on the edge of settlements some of which now support horse paddocks. The area includes intact 19th century field patterns in the south and small areas of ancient field systems adjacent to the M4.
- Low thorn hedgerows and hedgebanks enclose the fields, with post and wire fences where hedgerows are discontinuous. Hedgerow oaks are a feature of field boundaries with remnant lines marking former field boundaries.
- Remnant parkland around the 18th and 19th century country houses at Grazeley Court Farm and Hartley Court (Grade II* listed).
- Low density scattered rural farmsteads and nucleated hamlets e.g. Grazeley and Poundgreen. The built form is characterised by timber frame, polychromatic Reading brick and thatch with weatherboarding. Many of the farmhouses are Grade II listed. There are a number of Victorian houses in polychromatic Reading brick, including at Three Mile Cross, in the north of the area, which has been extended as part of the South of the M4 SDL.
- The GHQ Stop Line (General Headquarters Line), a defensive zone built during the summer of 1940 to contain the threatened German invasion included a section along the Foundry Brook.
- A network of sinuous single-lane tracks shaded by hedgerows and hedgerow trees link the settlements. Drainage ditches and remnant wayside commons, now only visible as wide grass verges, line the lanes.
- Transport corridors including the A33, M4 and Great Western Railway on the periphery of the area introduce noise and movement.
- Urban fringe land uses close to Reading and the M4 include paddocks and MereOak Park and Ride with larger scale development north of the M4, including Green Park business park. Some agricultural buildings have been converted into small rural business parks e.g. Gravelley Bridge Farm.
- Glimpsed views of Reading urban fringe including Green Park Business Park and a wind turbine north of the M4 contrast with enclosed views along lanes and roads created by mature trees and thick hedgerows.
- Strongly rural agricultural landscape, which is tranquil away from the urban fringe and major transport corridors. The M4 and Reading urban fringe negatively impact on the tranquility. The urban glare makes Reading particularly prominent at night but limited development in the south results in dark night skies.

Natural Landscape

- 13.1 The Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland character area is a lowland landscape, gently shelving towards the River Kennet (near to its confluence with the Thames in Reading) from 50m AOD in the south to 40m AOD, in the north. The area is underlain by London Clay and alluvial deposits associated with the River Kennet and its tributaries. It is drained by a number of streams and drainage ditches that flow north towards the Kennet. Foudry Brook is the main watercourse, and is a medium sized stream that is only visible at close range. Field ponds are a characteristic feature of these clay lowlands.
- 13.2 Great Lea Pond, just south of Reading, contains BAP priority habitat ponds and is a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). Siltation and progressive vegetation colonisation has resulted in little remaining open water at this site. This has led to a decline of notable aquatic species such as water violet (*Hottonia palustris*) and bladderwort (*Utricularia spp.*) and the area is now in need of sensitive management to restore open water communities.
- 13.3 The better drained soils are used as arable land whereas the more waterlogged areas typically associated with the watercourses are characterised by pasture, leading to a mixed agricultural landscape.
- 13.4 The field pattern is irregular with extremely large fields in the open vale and small-scale fields close to settlements such as Three Mile Cross. Fields are divided by low, neatly clipped thorn hedgerows and hedgebanks indicating an ancient enclosed landscape. Where hedgerows are discontinuous post and wire fences act as stock proof barriers. Hedgerow oaks are features of the field boundaries and remain standing even where hedgerows have been lost.
- 13.5 The clay plains were once thickly wooded, but today the landscape is largely devoid of woodland. Small mixed farm woods and shelterbelts are all that remain of the once extensive woodland, although much of the remaining woodland is BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland. Two small areas of ancient woodland in the far southeast of the area are designated as LWS: Wood North of Beech Hill Coverts/Clay Hill and Norman's Shaw. These contain ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) coppice.

Cultural Landscape

- 13.6 This area has considerable evidence of very early agricultural exploitation. A concentration of cropmarks found across this area indicates possible clearance, cultivation and settlement through the prehistoric and Romano-British periods, probably focussed on the Foudry Brook. There are also a number of known small Mesolithic and Neolithic sites and a small Roman settlement.
- 13.7 The settlement names of Grazeley, Thurley and Hartley contain the Anglo-Saxon place name element “-leah” (Old English) 'forest, wood, glade, clearing', and later 'pasture meadow', and the settlement at Hartley is mentioned in Domesday. Notwithstanding that this was once part of the Royal Forest of Windsor, the pattern of medieval and post-medieval settlement is characterised primarily by the dispersed pattern of farmsteads and the lack of any villages, the small agricultural settlement at Grazeley being a late-19th century development.
- 13.8 The presence of former common land is indicated by the names of Lambwoodhill Common, Hartley Common, and Great Lea Common, and a small ovate arrangement of fields at Grazeley may indicate the preservation of a small area of common within the enclosed fields. Traces of former parkland, established around 18th and 19th century country houses, are still evident at Grazeley Court Farm and Hartley Court, which is now Grade II* listed.
- 13.9 Many of the fields in the northern part of the area, as shown on the first edition OS map, were small and irregular in form, frequently with wavy boundaries, suggesting early enclosure of the former open fields and commons. Many of these boundaries have since been lost in the recent amalgamation of fields although a small area of land immediately to the south of the M4 in the eastern part of the character area still has a relatively intact field system with associated hedgerows indicative of an ancient field system. To the south there is a pattern of larger rectangular fields characteristic of early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure which has been retained relatively intact.

- 13.10 This is a highly rural landscape characterised by low density, dispersed settlement of scattered farmsteads, many of which are Grade II listed, and hamlets at Grazeley and Poundgreen. These hamlets are typically nucleated and have retained their rural character. The traditional built form is distinctive for historic timber framed buildings, half-hipped roofs and use of traditional polychromatic Reading brick with weatherboarding on agricultural buildings. The use of clay tiles, along with the soft red brick, also adds warmth to the landscape. Thatch is also a feature of this area, reflecting its association with the Kennet and proximity to reed beds.
- 13.11 Modern development has extended Three Mile Cross further into this character area as part of the South of the M4 SDL (predominantly within J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay). There is no modern vernacular, although brick is the most common material.
- 13.12 Farmsteads and hamlets are linked by a network of ancient winding sunken lanes, lined by hedgebanks and shaded by oaks. Drainage ditches are often located either side of these rural lanes and the remnant wayside commons are visible as wide grass verges with mature oaks.
- 13.13 There is increasing traffic on the minor roads, in part due to the construction of MereOak Park and Ride south of Great Lea Common. This has led to the creation of informal passing points and the erosion of traditional grass verges.
- 13.14 The pattern of small lanes linking the farmsteads has been overlain by more recent communication routes such as the mid-19th century Great Western Railway line between Reading and Basingstoke, the A33 trunk road west of Spencers Wood (forming the eastern boundary of the area), and the M4 motorway. However, there are no junctions or access from the railway line or M4 within this area. During the Second World War, a series of pillboxes were built to support defences all along the Foudry Brook as part of the defensive GHQ Stop Line, designed to hold up armoured German invasion forces, which ran from Bristol to Maidstone and thence from Maidstone to the Wash.
- 13.15 There are limited rights of way in this landscape, and the area remains a working agricultural landscape with little recreational activity. Closer to the M4 plots become fragmented, urban fringe land uses such as factory sites and paddocks increase, and fly tipping is evident. There has been farm diversification with agricultural buildings converted into small business parks e.g. Gravelly Bridge Farm.

Perceptual Landscape

- 13.16 The A33 dual carriageway runs along the eastern boundary of the area and the M4 crosses east to west with a major road junction located just beyond Wokingham's administrative boundary introducing noise and movement into the character area. There are glimpsed views of the Reading urban fringe, including the Green Park business park and wind turbine on the northern fringe of the area.
- 13.17 Away from these major transport corridors the area retains a rural and enclosed character, with views contained by hedgerows and mature standard oaks along the rural lanes. The area is tranquil with dark night skies. Despite busy transport corridors, there is little accessibility into and within the area, leading to a sense of remoteness.
- 13.18 Mary Russell Mitford (1787-1855), perhaps the most famous of Wokingham's writers, once resided at Three Mile Cross (before moving to Swallowfield). From a tiny labourer's cottage Mitford provided an account of country life and character in her book 'Our Village' (1824-1832) revelling in the intimacy which her rural life afforded. Her 'indigenous' accounts provide such vivid pictures of a seemingly idyllic country life which may well apply to the rural landscape around her home:

How beautiful the lane is to-day, decorated with a thousand colours! The brown road, and the rich verdure that borders it, strewn with the pale yellow leaves of the elm, just beginning to fall; hedgerows glowing with long wreaths of the bramble in every variety of purplish red; and overhead the unchanged green of fir, contrasting with the spotted sycamore, the tawny beech, and the dry sere leaves of the oak, which rustle as the light wind passes through them; a few common hardy yellow flowers...flowers of many sorts, but almost of one tint, still blowing in spite of the season, and ruddy berries glowing through all. How very beautiful is the lane.

Sadly, the elm referred to above succumbed to Dutch Elm disease and is no longer a feature of the local landscape.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Rural character of the working agricultural landscape with its mix of large arable fields and smaller areas of pasture bound by thorn hedges and banks with characteristic hedgerow oaks.
- Hidden wetland character of the network of drainage ditches, ponds and small streams, including the Foudry Brook adds visual diversity and important ecological habitats.
- Remnant historic field patterns, both in the south of the area (19th century regular enclosure) and to the east of Three Mile Cross (ancient field system defined by hedgerows and hedgerow oaks).
- Scattered settlement pattern of farm and rural hamlets. Time-depth is provided by the Grade II listed farm buildings.
- The Second World War GHQ Stop Line which follows the course of the Foudry Brook.
- Winding sunken lanes enclosed by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees and historic grassy verges provide a sense of enclosure and scenic quality.
- Strongly rural and remote landscape character due to scarcity of settlement and relative inaccessibility which results in a sense of tranquility and dark night skies.

Landscape Condition

The distinctive flat landform, mixed working farmland with neatly clipped hedges and rural settlement pattern linked by winding rural lanes are in a good condition.

The presence of major transport corridors on the periphery of the area disturbs the rural and tranquil character of the landscape. The proximity of Reading and the development of the South of the M4 SDL have introduced adjoining marginal land uses. The rural roads are increasingly busy, and informal passing points have been created eroding roadside verges. The remnant wayside commons and wetland and woodland habitats would benefit from enhanced management.

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 soil erosion associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.
- Presence of marginal agricultural land, which is of poor visual character, being kept in 'hope' value, particularly around settlement edges and on the urban fringe.
- Pressure for horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- 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 expansion, infill and densification within existing settlements, including expansion of Three Mile Cross into the area as part of the South of the M4 SDL impacting the rural character of the area. There may also be pressure from planned strategic scale development in the area south of the M4 and west of the A33, in the area around Grazeley.
- Pressure for new industrial developments, sewage treatment works and commercial premises, particularly associated with the major transport corridors and Reading fringes.
- Demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- Increasing transport pressures on rural roads as a result of traffic taking diversions to avoid delays in the urban areas leading to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air pollution in rural areas. Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening threatens the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly due to the proximity to Reading, leading to further visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.
- This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies' to the south of the area. Light pollution, particularly along transport corridors and on settlement edges is a key issue affecting the night landscape.
- Decline or decay of the historic and archaeological features of the GHQ Stop Line.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the strong rural character of the open agricultural landscape with its dispersed settlement pattern of historic farmsteads and hamlets linked by winding lanes.

The key aspects to be enhanced and actively managed are the pattern of hedgerows, ancient or mature oaks, wayside commons and rural lanes. The GHQ Stop Line is also a key attribute to be conserved and enhanced. There is an opportunity for woodland planting to integrate the motorway, busy A roads and urban fringes of Reading and Shinfield.

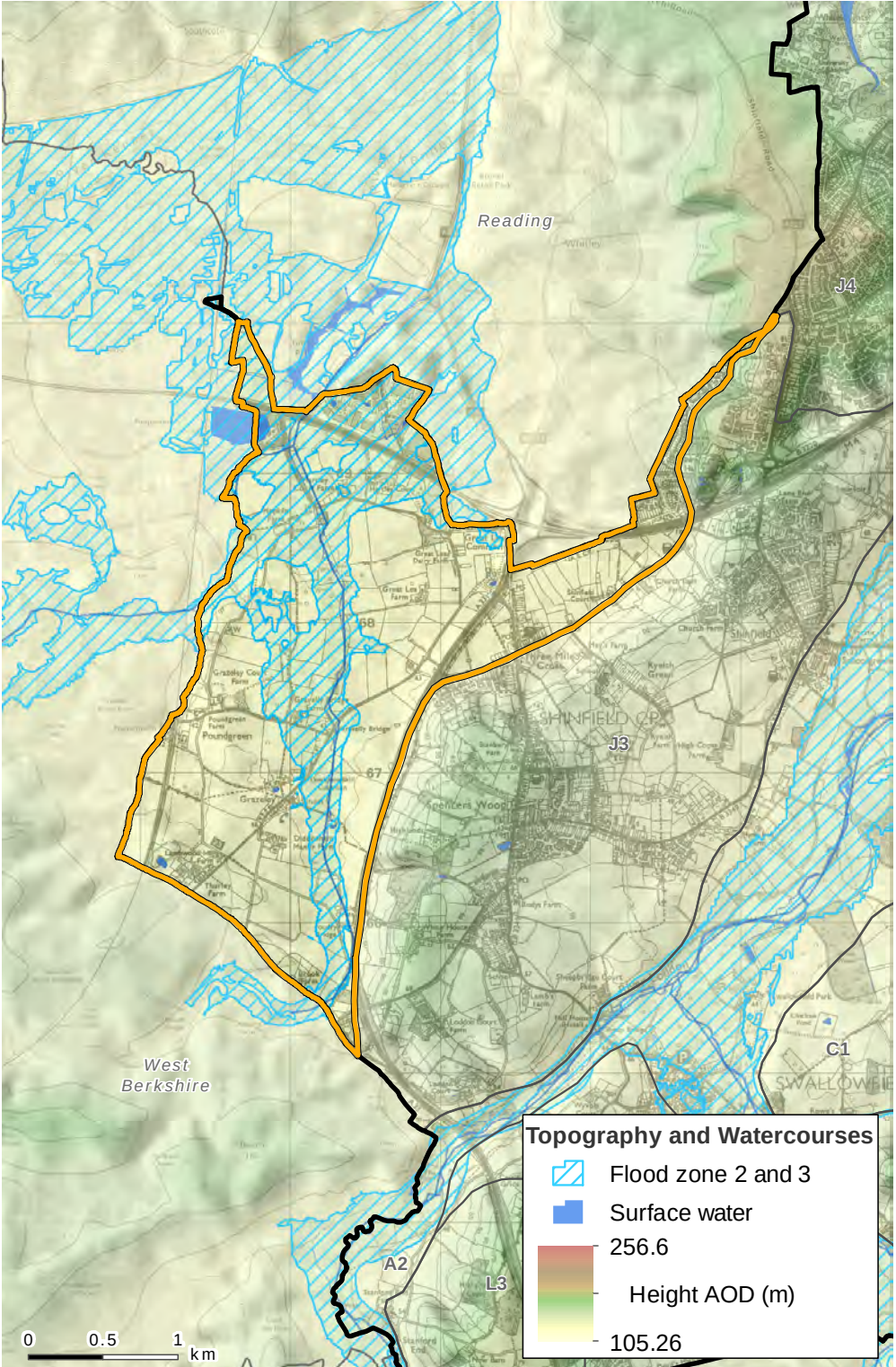
In terms of development, the aim is conserve the rural setting and gaps between settlements and maintain the integrity of settlement identity.

Landscape Guidelines

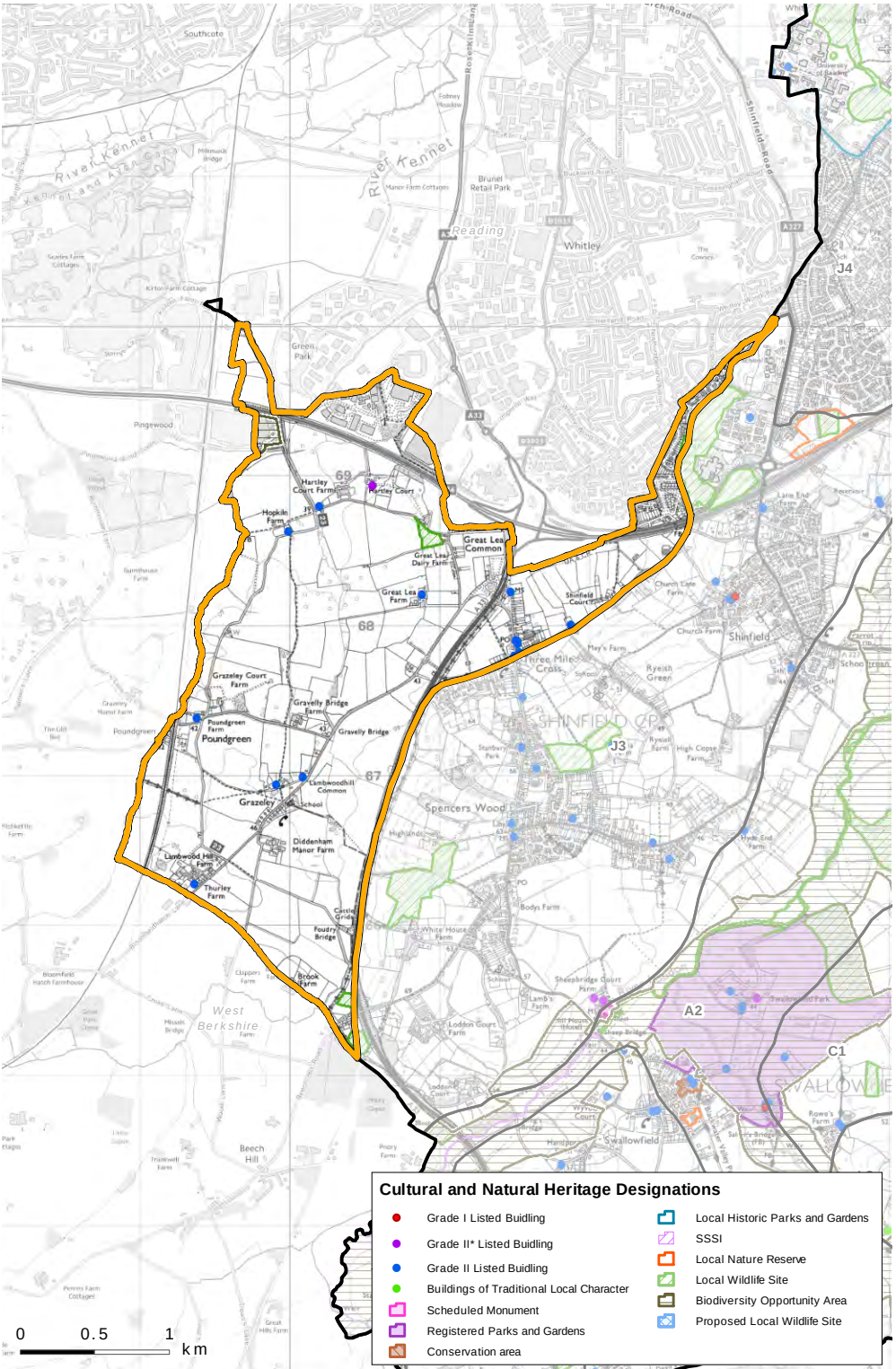
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the farmed landscape. Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed arable fields.
- Conserve, enhance and manage 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. Reinstatement 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.
- Increase the limited extent of native deciduous woodland copses, using locally occurring native species linking to existing BAP priority woodland sites. Conserve remnant ancient

woodlands, woodland copses and remnant standard trees, particularly where they provide screening to the urban fringe. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.

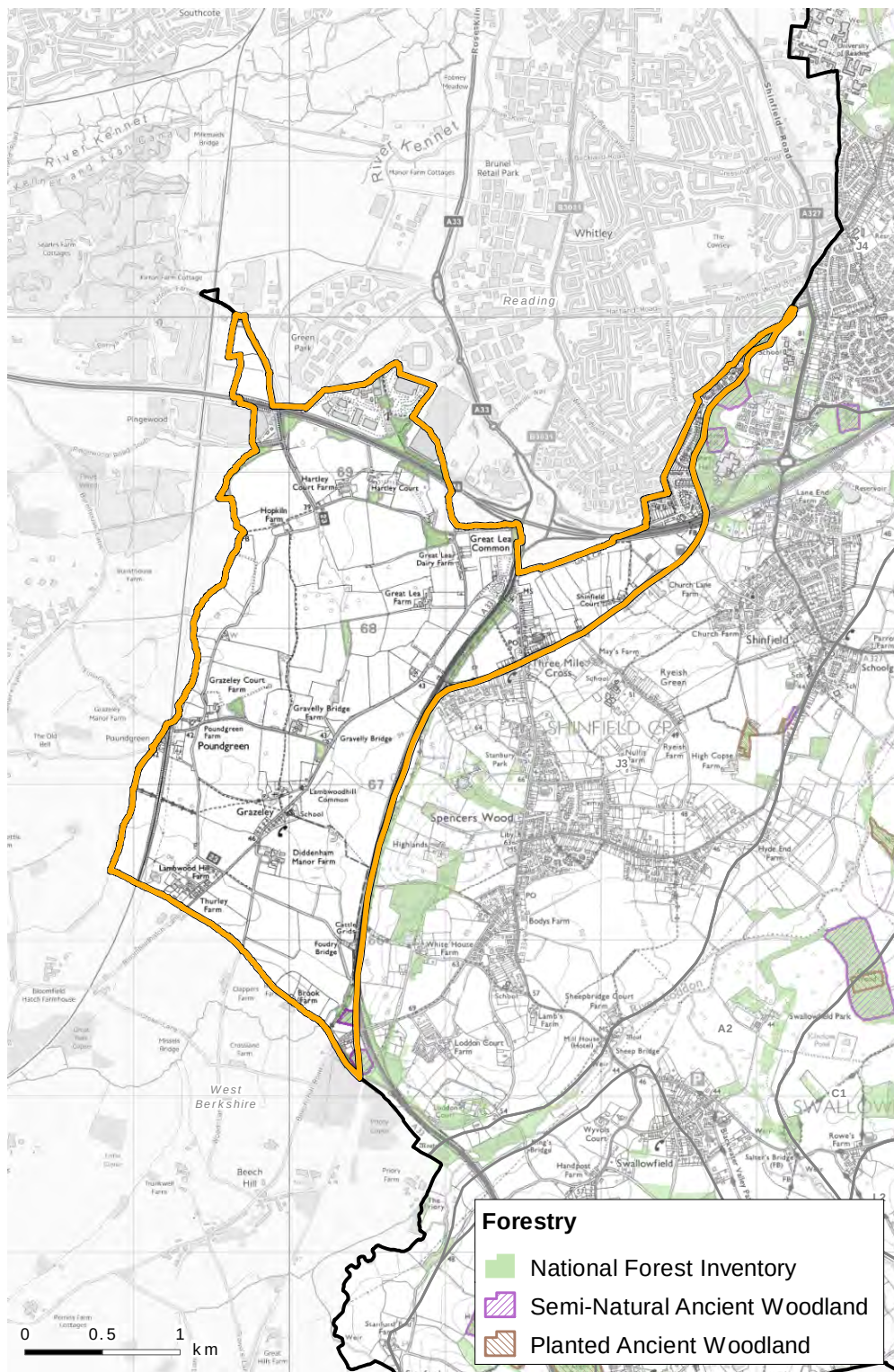
- Conserve and protect the landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields, including historic field patterns (e.g. to the east of Three Mile Cross). Encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- Conserve, enhance and manage the remnant wetland and woodland habitats including LWS particularly from development, changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. Great Lea Pond requires sensitive management to restore open water communities. An appropriate wetland and woodland management regime is critical.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for Reading and Shinfield. Protect undeveloped areas which provide a setting for the clay ridgeline, such as the open countryside on southern edge of Reading (south of the M4 corridor). Integrate any 'set aside' land to enhance its visual character.
- Conserve the rural character of the farmed landscape between hamlets, to protect the individual identity of settlements, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation.
- Conserve features associated with the GHQ Stop Line.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage. Consider the use of traffic calming and access restrictions to maintain the tranquillity of the most rural areas. This would also make the use of rural roads more attractive for cyclists and recreational users.
- Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate new or existing roads into the landscape.
- 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.
- Minimise visual impact of commercial farm enterprises through careful siting and design. Minimise visual clutter including signage.
- Protect the perceptions of rural tranquillity and remoteness, including the experience of dark skies in the landscape, through the management of development.

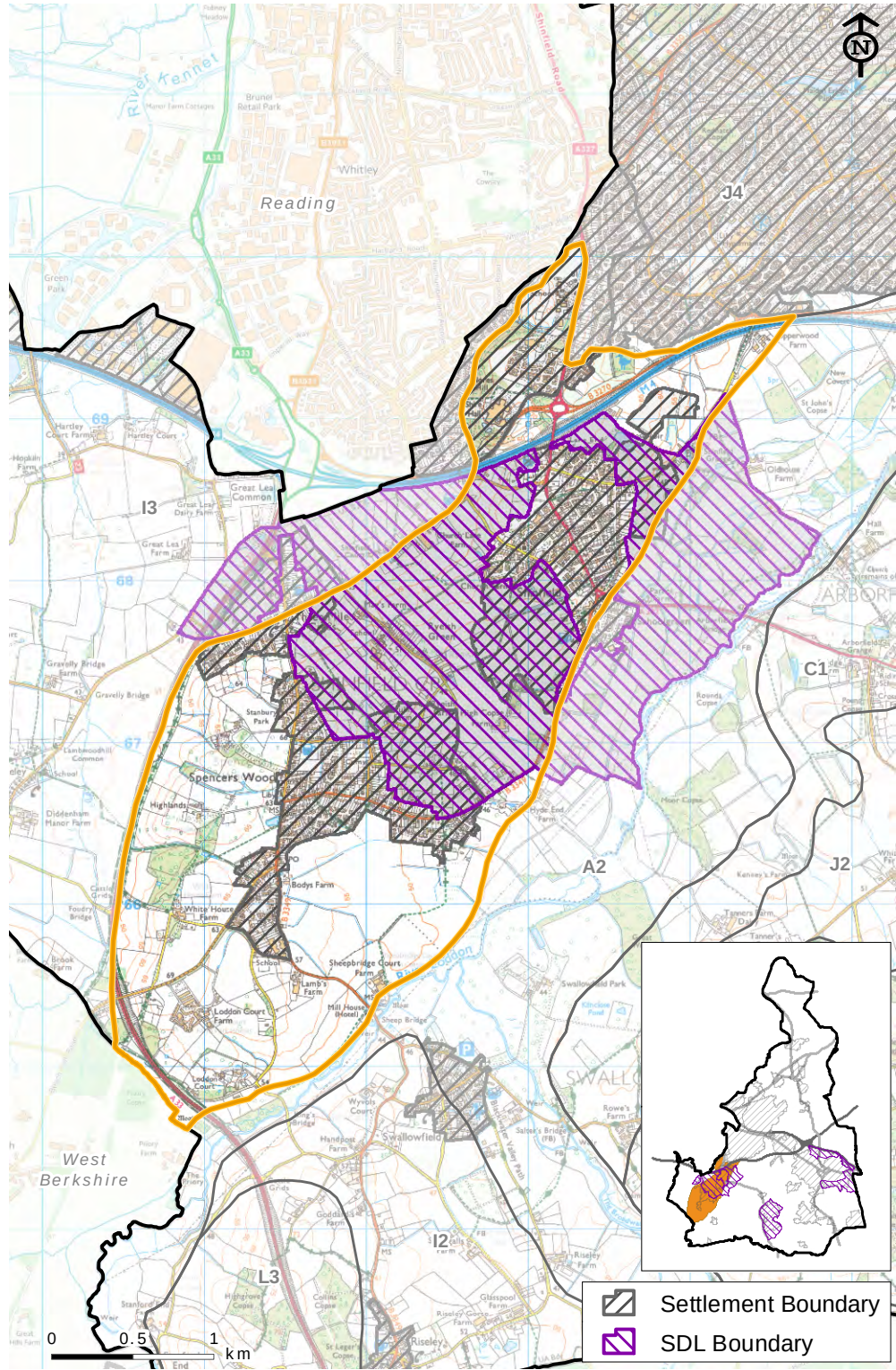


I 3: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland



13: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland





SUMMARY

An undulating landscape of large arable fields with some pasture. Ongoing development in the north of the area, part of the South of the M4 SDL, is increasing the settled character of the area adding to the urbanising influence of its proximity to Reading. The south remains rural with a number of woodlands remnant parklands and open pasture.

The Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay is a locally prominent clay ridge that separates A2: Loddon River Valley on its eastern edge from I3: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland on its western boundary. Both boundaries are defined by topography, where the clay ridge ends. The northern boundary extends into the urban edge of Woodley-Earley, and the southern boundary by the borough boundary, although the landscape character extends into West Berkshire.



Key Characteristics

- Rolling clay ridge above the Loddon Valley to the east and the lowlands to the west, rising to a flat sandy plateau at 66m AOD.
- Small scattered mixed deciduous woodland blocks and copses including some of ancient origin, many designated as LWS, most located on the steep west and south facing slopes of the ridge.
- Fragmented unimproved meadow habitats, with BAP priority habitat lowland meadow, are found on lower slopes, for example Clare's Green Road LWS.
- Large arable fields with some pasture, with an intact hedgerow network and hedgerow oaks. Horse paddocks feature on the edge of settlements or around large farmsteads e.g. Sheepridge Court and Loddon Court Farms. Smaller and irregular field boundaries around Three Mile Cross and Spencers Wood are still evident, indicating early enclosure.
- Remnant parkland at Shinfield Grange, Loddon Court, Shinfield Lodge, Stanbury Park and Highlands. A number of these are clustered along the top of the ridge overlooking the clay lowlands of Grazeley to the west. These parklands contain BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland and ancient woodland. Visually prominent parkland veteran trees include many Wellingtonias, there is a prominent avenue of these trees along the drive to Wellington Court, originally the Stanbury Park estate.
- The GHQ Stop Line and associated Second World War features built during the summer of 1940 to contain the threatened German invasion.
- Densely settled landscape, with new large-scale residential estate development around the substantially 20th century settlements of Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross, as part of South of the M4 SDL.
- To the south of the area, settlement is more scattered with traditional farmsteads many with a strong vernacular of polychromatic Reading brick and weatherboarding. A number of farmhouses are listed including Grade II* Sheepridge Court. There is a permanent mobile home site at Loddon Court Farm and some agricultural buildings have been converted to other uses e.g. Lambs Farm Business Park.
- Network of rural lanes bordered by water-filled ditches connect the original settlement pattern. Some B roads have urbanised features including kerbs and pavements. The A33 form the western border and is very busy, while the M4 crosses the area north of Shinfield, and introduces noise and movement.
- Sense of elevation from the ridgeline and good views over surrounding lowlands including to the Loddon valley and over West Berkshire.

Natural Landscape

- J3.1 The Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay is characterised by a prominent, undulating clay ridge between two lowland areas of A2: Loddon River Valley to the east and I3: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland to the west. The landscape rises to a flat, sandy plateau of 66m AOD at Stanbury Park, deposited as a fifth level terrace of a proto-Thames. The sandy soils of the plateau are acidic and give rise to distinctive vegetation and historic land use of common land around Spencers Wood. There are a number of River Terrace Gravel deposits throughout the area.

- J3.2 The flat plateau area was formerly Spencerswood Common but all common land has now been enclosed. The former common is now a network of fields, woodland and parkland and is characterised by acid-loving species such as Scots pine, birch, holly and rhododendron.
- J3.3 Elsewhere, the rolling agricultural landscape is characterised by a variety of field sizes divided by largely intact hedgerows and mature hedgerow oaks. Arable fields are most prominent, although there is pasture and horse grazing, particularly on the edge of settlements. Temporary planning permission was granted for a solar farm at Sheepridge Court.
- J3.4 There are a number of woodlands, mixed woodland belts and tree clumps associated with designed landscapes or remnant deciduous copses. Much of the woodland, including areas to the north of the M4, contain BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland and are designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). There are areas of ancient woodland, with a history of coppice with standard management. Often this traditional management has ceased, but at Pearman's Copse LWS and LNR this management system has been reintroduced. Old ash stools with field maple (*Acer campestre*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) dominate Pearman's Copse, and it supports a rich woodland flora with around 27 ancient woodland indicator species and a good range of woodland invertebrates.
- J3.5 There are small fragmented areas of unimproved neutral grassland, some recorded as BAP priority habitat lowland meadows. Clare's Green Road Grassland LWS is designated for its botanical interest.
- J3.6 The presence of parkland is a feature of the landscape, with remnant parklands around Loddon Court, Highlands and Shinfield Park at Nores Hill, some of which is BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland. Parkland trees stand out as features against the skyline including individual Wellingtonias and especially the avenue of *Wellingtonias* along the drive to Wellington Court, previously the Stanbury Park estate. The Highlands site is visually open and is a defining feature on the edge of Spencers Wood.
- J3.7 A small area between Loddon Court and Sheepbridge Court Farm is part of the Loddon Valley South BOA. This is mainly concentrated along the course of the River Loddon and Broadwater in A2: Loddon River Valley however the farmland bordering the Loddon is potentially important for farmland birds.
- J3.8 Residential development is a significant land use. Boundaries include rows of conifers and suburban fences that have eroded the rural character of the ridge in places and contrast with the native hedgerows and hedgerow trees of the surrounding farmland. Other features that have an urbanising influence on the landscape are street lighting, white lines and road signs, kerbs and pavements, lay-bys and municipal street furniture along with disturbance generated by road users.
- J3.9 The public open space and SANGS created as part of the South of the M4 SDL between the settlements of Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross is important in maintaining the separation and landscape setting of the three settlements. The southern settlement edge of Spencers Wood is defined by roadside and hedgerow trees.

Cultural Landscape

- J3.10 In common with clay soils found elsewhere in the borough there is little evidence for extensive prehistoric or Romano-British settlement of this area at the edge of the Loddon river valley. By Saxon times it appears likely that settlement and agriculture expanded onto previously marginal areas - the "-feld" element in the name of Shinfield, a Domesday settlement, suggesting a largely open and cultivated landscape in the Saxon period.
- J3.11 In the medieval period in this area, forest law protected the Crown's hunting, timber and other rights over both private and common land in the face of pressure from assart incursions into the woodland for cultivation and pasture. The piecemeal clearance of woodland to form cultivable land by assarting, and later by agreement, continued until the 18th century.
- J3.12 The first edition OS map shows the area to contain numerous small irregular fields with wavy boundaries, indicative of early enclosure of former open fields, as well as of heath and common as

at Spencers Common. Some of the common still existed at the time the map was drawn. With adjoining landscapes of the Loddon (A2, C1) and Farley Hill (L2) these form the largest area of early enclosure landscape in the borough. Some fields around Three Mile Cross and Spencers Wood still show this early enclosure pattern, although much of this has been lost through expanding development or amalgamation of fields.

- J3.13 Spencers Wood takes its name from the Despencer family who owned Beaumys Castle (located on the River Loddon) an important medieval family. Beaumys was later held by Nicholas de la Beche (Seneschal of Gascony and Governor of Edward III's heir the Black Prince) after whom Beech Hill is named.
- J3.14 There was a loose network of winding country lanes, but few major roads until the 18th century. The road between Reading and Basingstoke (now the A33), was established in 1718 and was one of the earliest turnpike roads in Berkshire.
- J3.15 The traditional settlement pattern was of small agricultural settlements at Shinfield and Three Mile Cross, surrounded by quite closely spaced medieval/post medieval farmhouses. The rural farmsteads are often timber framed infilled with soft polychromatic Reading brick with half-hipped clay tiled roofs and brick walls as boundary features. A number of these farmhouses are now listed buildings including the Grade II* Sheepridge Court. Weatherboarding is a distinctive feature. Some of these traditional agricultural buildings are now encapsulated within more recent suburban development where they form landmark buildings. Traces of areas of landscaped parkland associated with country houses are still evident to varying degrees around Shinfield Park (The Grove), Stanbury Park, Highlands and Loddon Court.
- J3.16 The area saw rapid expansion during the Victorian and post-Victorian periods resulting in developments of Victorian semi-detached properties at Spencers Wood, Three Mile Cross and Shinfield.
- J3.17 These settlements are now expanding, as part of the South of the M4 SDL, with estate-type developments with public open space and SANGS between the settlements. The modern built development shows a large range of different house styles and use of materials, with little consistent character of form, although brick is the most common material. The Thames Valley Science Park, in the north of the area between the M4 and Cutbush Lane East, is under development. This includes the Gateway building, which is clad in corten steel giving it a distinctive red appearance and making it highly visible across the landscape. The new Shinfield Relief Road was opened in 2017, connecting the Blackboy Roundabout north of the M4 with the A327 (in A2). This provides access to the Thames Valley Science Park and new development as part of the South of the M4 SDL.
- J3.18 Other significant 20th century additions are the Second World War pillboxes and buried tank ditch located on the southern end of the clay ridge and form part of the defensive GHQ Stop Line, built in 1940 and which extends east along the River Loddon and northwards along the Foudry Brook.
- J3.19 A network of footpaths and narrow tracks provide opportunities for informal recreation, and give the area beyond the settlement a rural character.

Perceptual Landscape

- J3.20 The M4 in the north of the area and the A33 dual carriageway along the western boundary introduce noise and movement into the area although the A33 corridor is well-treed and in a cutting adjacent to the southern end of the clay ridge reducing impacts. Views to Reading and the built up areas north of the M4 introduce an urbanising element.
- J3.21 Away from these transport corridors and settlements, particularly south of Spencers Wood, the area retains a rural character, with views over the surrounding lowland landscapes of the Loddon valley and the arable fields around Grazeley. From the south of the area there are views across West Berkshire towards Stratfield Mortimer and other nearby villages. There are areas along the southern boundary of the area with high levels of tranquillity and dark night skies.
- J3.22 The slopes of the clay ridgeline provide physical and visual separation between the settlements of Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross.

J3.23 Mary Russell Mitford, author of 'Our Village' often walked along Woodcock Lane (a footpath now running along the A33 Swallowfield bypass) of which she wrote:

"In that very lane am I writing on this sultry June day, luxuriating in the shade, the verdure, the fragrance of hayfield and beanfield, and the absence of any noise except the song of birds and the whir of a thousand forms of insect life so often heard among the general hush of a summer noon".

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Remnant historic parklands and visually prominent parkland trees, including many Wellingtonias, especially the avenue of this species which provide time-depth, visual diversity and a sense of orientation to the landscape.
- Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provide a rural character away from the urban areas and provide an important separation between settlements.
- Small-scale woodlands provide visual diversity in the landscape, as well as ecologically important habitats.
- Strong hedgerow network with standard oaks provides a wooded character and visual interest within the rural landscape.
- Network of rural lanes bordered by water-filled ditches provide evidence of the original settlement pattern.
- Views to the surrounding lowlands provide a sense of place and of orientation.
- Undeveloped slopes of the clay ridgeline which is visually prominent and provides separation between settlements.
- The GHQ Stop Line and associated Second World War features which follows the course of the Foudry Brook crossing the southern end of the clay ridge and along the River Loddon.
- Open area of former common land to the west of Basingstoke Road at 'Highlands'.
- Beaumys Castle, a rare example of a defensive moated site in medieval times and on the front line of the GHQ defence in the Second World War.
- Isolated traditional farmsteads and their associated buildings, particularly in the south of the LCA.

Landscape Condition

The survival of former field patterns, the remnants of historic parklands, woodland blocks and the hedgerow network are in good condition. The new South of the M4 SDL and other development, and urban edge of Reading fragment the rural character of the northern part of the area, while the major transport corridors introduce noise and movement, except where well screened by ground modelling or trees.

Key Issues

- Loss of deciduous woodland or changes in woodland structure due to loss of species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands have occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management, leading to a change in character. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Effects on tree heath or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and

climate change.

- Hedgerow and tree loss and soil erosion associated with settlement expansion and intensification of agriculture.
- Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity within the water filled ditches
- Potential for agricultural land to be kept in 'hope' value, and therefore not well managed, particularly around settlement edges and on the urban fringe.
- Pressure for horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- 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 large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure, such as the South of the M4 Strategic Development, impacting landscape character and leading to further pressure to amalgamate the separate settlements
- Pressure to develop the undulating slopes of the clay ridgeline which are visually prominent.
- Pressure for new commercial premises, including the further major expansion of the Thames Valley Science Park, over a 20 year period.
- Increased traffic on rural roads due to expanding residential development leading to further loss of tranquillity, and erosion of road version and demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, associated with the South of the M4 SDL particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.
- Light pollution at night causing 'sky glow'.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.
- Decline or decay of historic features including those of the GHQ Stop Line.

Landscape Strategy

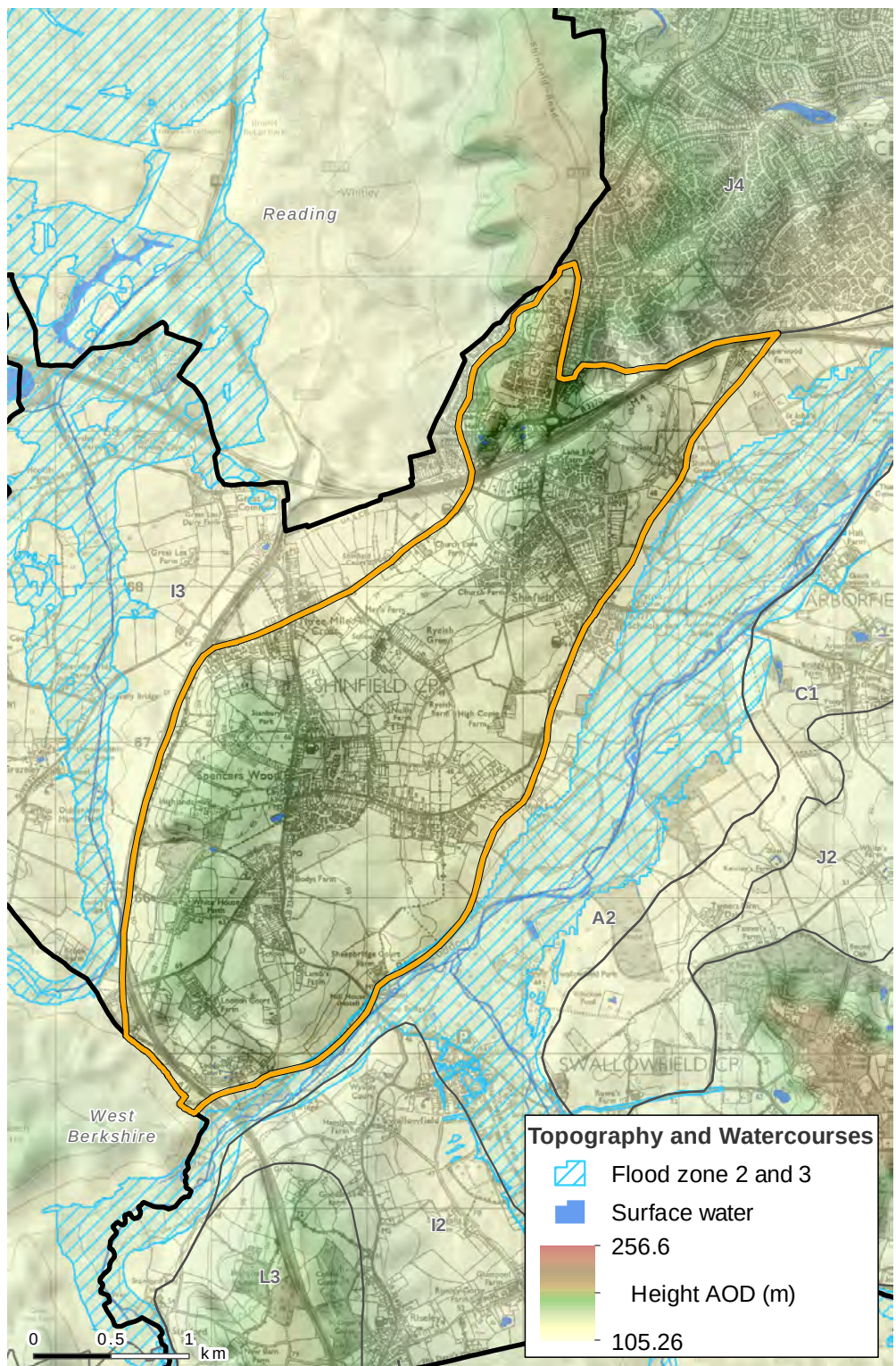
To maintain the landscape character of the *Spencers Wood Farmed and Settled Clay* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the rural character of the agricultural landscape. The key aspects to be enhanced and actively managed are the pattern of hedgerows, remnant parkland, trees and avenues, views to the Loddon Valley and west Berkshire, the rural character of the lanes, and the GHQ Stop Line. There are opportunities for woodland planting to integrate the M4, busy roads and expanding urban fringes of Reading, in particular around the expanding settlements of Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross as part of the South of the M4 SDL.

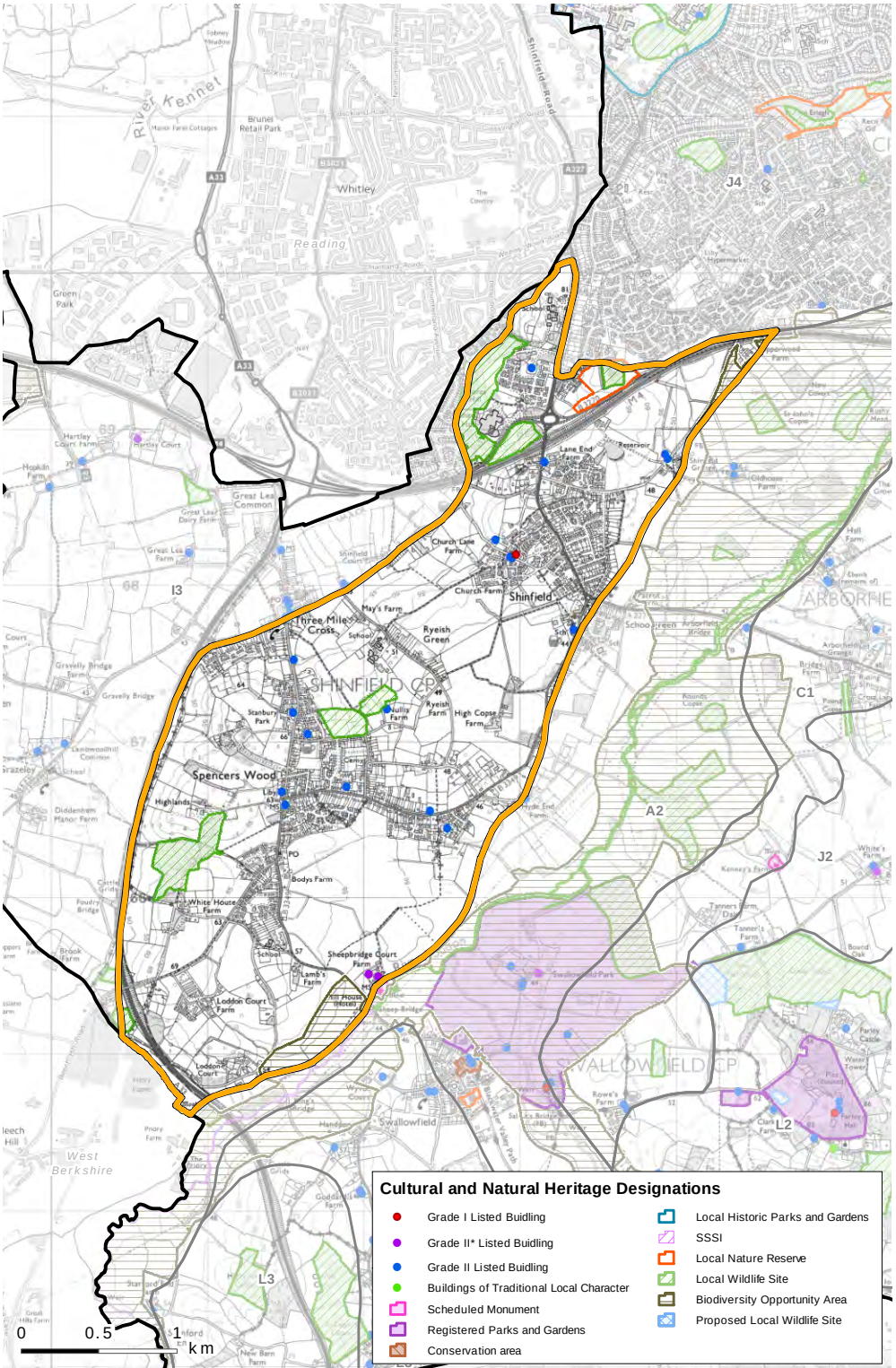
In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the rural character of the landscape and gaps between settlements while maintaining the integrity of settlement identity.

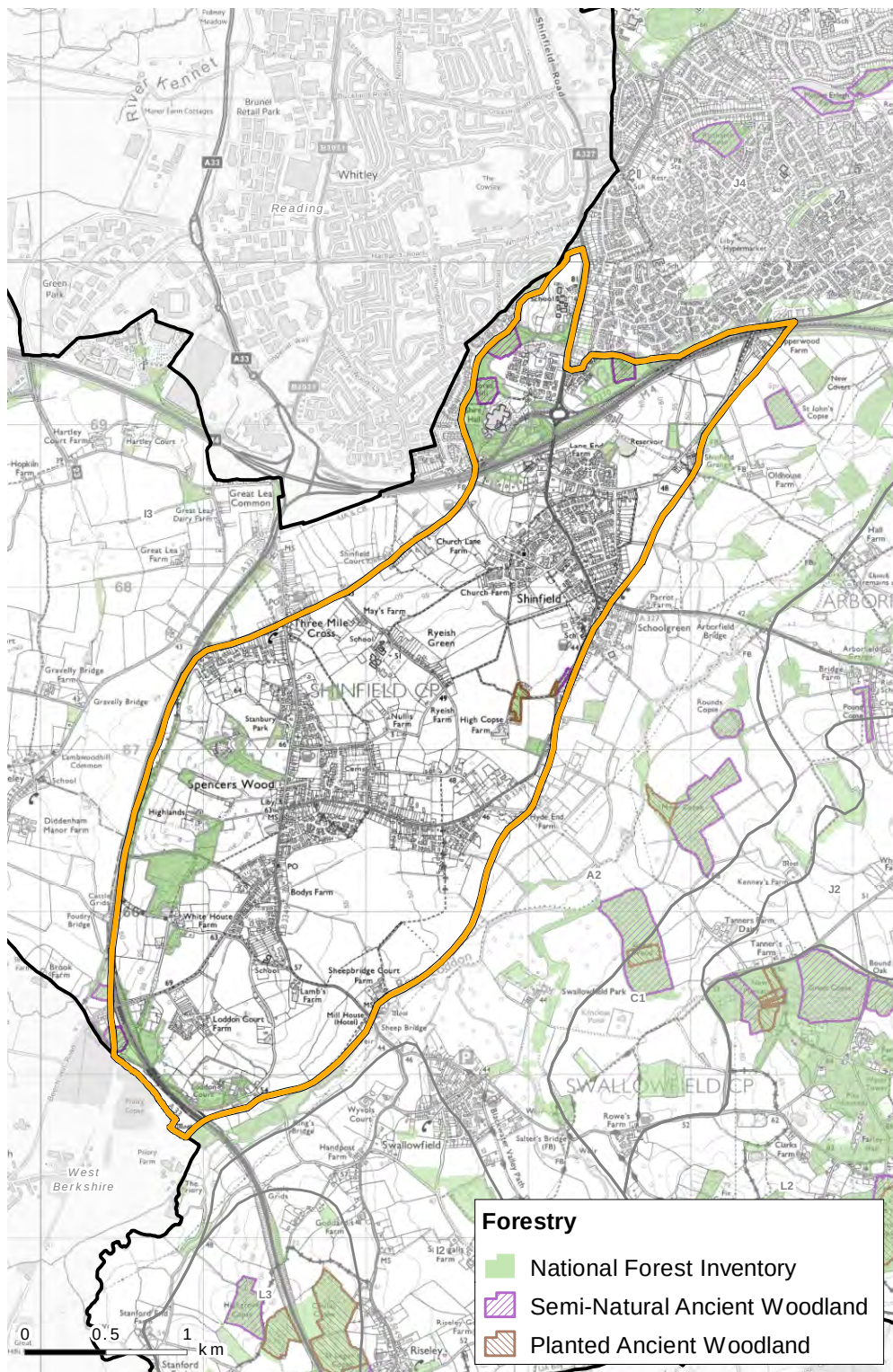
Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape. Conserve ancient woodlands and woodland copses. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- 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 oaks 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.
- Conserve and protect the landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- 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 parkland landscapes associated with former manor houses, particularly in areas of BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland. Plan for the next generation of parkland and avenue trees.
- Conserve features associated with the GHQ Stop Line.
- Conserve, enhance and manage woodland and meadow habitats, particularly BAP priority habitats and LWS, from development and changes in land use. An area of land between Sheepridge Court and Loddon Court Farm is part of the Loddon Valley South BOA. The farmland bordering the Loddon is potentially important for farmland birds such as Yellowhammer. An appropriate woodland and meadow management regime is critical.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries, hedgerows and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas.
- Conserve the open and rural character of the farmed landscape which provides a physical and visual separation or gaps between settlements. Protect the individual identity of towns and villages, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. Resist pressure for development on the slopes or the ridgeline which provides physical and visual separation between settlements, particularly Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage, particularly in the most rural areas.
- 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.
- Use appropriate woodland, hedgerow and tree planting to help integrate roads into the landscape including the Shinfield Eastern Relief Road. Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.

- Take care in the siting and design of vertical elements e.g. communication masts and the siting and design of large agricultural buildings so they do not impact on the valuable characteristics of this 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.









WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

VALUED LANDSCAPES ASSESSMENT

SEPTEMBER 2024

WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape Narrative

Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape Narrative

*We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds,
we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills;
we shall never surrender.*

Winston S Churchill, 4 June 1940¹

'despite initial shortages of weapons and building materials, the defence systems put in place from 1940 to the Spring of 1941 were highly complex and meticulously planned, making full use of landscape features and natural topography, and set back in depth from the coastal front edge in protection of the nation's heartlands. At their most developed in 1941 they would have presented a considerable obstacle to invading German forces;

William Foot in 'Beaches, Fields, Streets and Hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of 1940'²

Introduction

The Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape, encompasses the southern end of a high ridge of clay running from Spencers Wood in the north down to Beech Hill in the south. The valued landscape includes the southern part of the ridge and a substantial part of the floodplain of the Foudry Brook to the west. The ridge rises to a flat sandy plateau at 66m above ordnance datum (AOD) which broadens out at the southern end. The A33 runs north to south through the centre of the valued landscape. The northern part of the clay ridge sits in the southern part of the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' Landscape Character Area (LCA) with an eastern spur extending into the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA to the east. To the west of the A33, the valued landscape encompasses most of the I3 'Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland' Landscape Character Area (LCA).

It is on this high hill, and the fields behind the Foudry Brook, the River Loddon and the Blackwater Rivers, that the defenders made their preparations in the early months of the Second World War. An army fresh from the defeat at Dunkirk augmented later by the old men and the young lads of the Local Defence Volunteers. The valued landscape centres on an important defended location in the General Headquarters (GHQ) stop line that ran from Bath to London and north as far as Peterborough. The whole defence – approximately four hundred and sixty-six miles - was built in a few months in the summer of 1940 using every advantage offered by the topography or other physical geography. This portion of the defences, offering a commanding position above the surrounding countryside, strengthened the gap between the Foudry Brook and Loddon Rivers and blocked a route from the south-west to Reading and London. Whilst the air force fought the Battle of Britain in the skies above, the army were, aided by local contractors and council workers, 'digging in' around the landing grounds, in the fields and streets and, as here, on the hillsides.

¹ A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3. Victoria County History, London, 1923 pages 160-163

² FOOT William, *Beaches, Fields, Streets and Hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of 1940*, 2006, Council for British Archaeology Report 144

But the medieval castle that sits below the hillside, shrouded in woodland, was also a strong point, fortified against attack. Skirmishes preliminary to the English Civil War that took place in the first quarter of the 14th Century (the Despencer War 1322-23) involved the sacking of Beaumys Castle. Later, in 1347, the widow of the Seneschal of Gascony was kidnapped when the Castle was again attacked whilst the King's son, Lionel the first Duke of Clarence (1338-1368), then just a boy, was in residence.

An appeal at Lambs Lane in 2018 found against the Council's case that there was a valued landscape³ encompassing the appeal site. However, that landscape was less well-defined and researched. Further research has been undertaken since that time and this has led to a more closely defined and focused valued landscape.

Attributes of the valued landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The valued landscape sits within the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and farmed Clay', A2 'Loddon River Valley' and I3 'Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland' Landscape Character Areas. The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019) discusses landscape condition in the 'Key Characteristics' of the A2 'Loddon River Valley', J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' and I3 'Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland' LCAs. On landscape condition of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA it states:

*'The meandering course of the river and the flat floodplain landscape is intact. For the most part this is a remote and rural landscape with characteristic riverside features and important wetland habitats which contribute to the overall perception of a landscape in moderate condition. However, views to adjacent large scale development and busy infrastructure corridors, particularly in the north of the area fragment the rural landscape. There are opportunities for improvement and particular enhancement to habitat interconnectivity.'*⁴

For the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA it states:

*'The survival of former field patterns, the remnants of historic parklands, woodland blocks and the hedgerow network are in good condition. The new South of the M4 SDL and other development, and urban edge of Reading fragment the rural character of the northern part of the area, while the major transport corridors introduce noise and movement, except where well screened by ground modelling or trees.'*⁵

The southern part of the LCA is in good condition. Analysis of the landscape on the ground shows that the main transport corridor, the A33, is well screened by trees and cuts in to the lower slopes, traversing the hillside at the extreme southern end of the LCA.

³ APP/X0360/W/18/3199728

⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 57

⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 252

Whilst the north of the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' landscape is more urban, the LCA (2019) confirm the rural character of the southern part of the LCA:

*'The south remains rural with a number of woodlands remnant parklands and open pasture.'*⁶

The LCA, speaking to the well-defined boundaries of the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA states:

*'The Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay is a locally prominent clay ridge that separates A2: Loddon River Valley on its eastern edge from I3: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland on its western boundary. Both boundaries are defined by topography, where the clay ridge ends. The northern boundary extends into the urban edge of Woodley-Earley, and the southern boundary by the borough boundary, although the landscape character extends into West Berkshire.'*⁷

The southern part of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' landscape, containing the lower part of the 'figure C' of the valued landscape, is not greatly affected by the disturbance from the M4 motorway nor the settlements of Earley and Winnersh to the north. It follows the line of the GHQ line, which doglegs running downstream along the River Loddon and then turning right up the River Blackwater at Swallowfield Park, before passing into Hampshire. This part of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA landscape is not only the site of Second World War defences but links the medieval Beaumys Castle with Swallowfield Park, a royal residence from pre-Domesday till the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

Lastly, for the I3 'Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA the LCA (2019) states:

'The distinctive flat landform, mixed working farmland with neatly clipped hedges and rural settlement pattern linked by winding rural lanes are in a good condition.'

*The presence of major transport corridors on the periphery of the area disturbs the rural and tranquil character of the landscape. The proximity of Reading and the development of the South of the M4 SDL have introduced adjoining marginal land uses. The rural roads are increasingly busy, and informal passing points have been created eroding roadside verges. The remnant wayside commons and wetland and woodland habitats would benefit from enhanced management.'*⁸

Scenic Quality – The LCA (2019) summarises the scenic quality of the landscape and identifies valuable landscape attributes that relate to scenic quality.

For the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA it states:

'An undulating landscape of large arable fields with some pasture. Ongoing development in the north of the area, part of the South of the M4 SDL, is increasing the settled character of the area'

⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 248

⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 248

⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 210

adding to the urbanising influence of its proximity to Reading. The south remains rural with a number of woodlands remnant parklands and open pasture.⁹

In the 'Key Characteristics' section of the LCA (2019) it highlights the following relating to scenic quality for this LCA and expands upon them:

Rolling clay ridge above the valley and the lowlands to the west, rising to a flat sandy plateau at 66m AOD; small scattered mixed deciduous woodland blocks and copses; fragmented unimproved meadow habitats: Large arable fields with some pasture, with an intact hedgerow network and hedgerow oaks; remnant parkland; settlement more scattered in south with traditional farmsteads many with a strong vernacular; network of rural lanes bordered by water-filled ditches; sense of elevation from the ridgeline and good views over surrounding lowlands.¹⁰

Regarding the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA, the LCA (2019) states:

'This area occupies the flat alluvial floodplain of the River Loddon and its tributaries the Broadwater and the Blackwater. An agricultural landscape of irregular fields, with large scale arable fields on better drained areas and small scale wet meadows on frequently flooded land adjacent to the river. A largely peaceful area, disturbance comes from major roads which cross the floodplain including the M4, and adjacent developments in Earley, Winnersh, the expanding settlement of Shinfield and new Science and Innovation Park.'¹¹

In the section on 'valuable landscape attributes', it highlights the following relating to scenic quality for this LCA and expands upon them in the text (other features of interest to the adjacent River Loddon Valued Landscape are discussed in the relevant valued landscape narrative):

The naturalness of the meandering course of the River and floodplain; a strong sense of place; the wooded backdrop of mature broadleaved woodland; historic riverside features including medieval moated sites, old brick watermills and bridges; the GHQ Stop Line and associated Second World War features; Sparse settlement pattern of farmsteads ...characterised by a strong local vernacular; remote and rural landscape in the south of the area.¹²

The 2003 Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (BLCA) places this landscape in the K1 'Spencers Wood Settled Farmland' LCA, broadly to the same extent as the LCA (2019) J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA.

The BLCA (2003) identifies: the peaceful, rural quality of the less urbanised areas, the intact historic field boundary pattern with mature oaks and hedgerow standards, the small copses and farm

⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 248

¹⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 249

¹¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 52

¹² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 56

woodlands, all features of the clay ridge particularly its southern and western parts, the wooded horizons and historic parklands are there too.¹³

The BLCA summarises the strength of the landscape character of the K1 'Spencers Wood Settled Farmland' LCA (in extent of its southern parts the same as the borough's J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA) in paragraph 15.24, as follows:

'This landscape has...a certain degree of fragmentation and lack of continuity(although locally varied but not particularly weak or strong)'

And

*'The variability from a more intact system to the south and west to a more settled and urbanised landscape in the north and east affect the overall strength of character.'*¹⁴

A key element of the assessment for this landscape is that it is 'locally varied, but not particularly weak or strong'. Additionally, the variability from a more intact system in the south and west to a more settled and urbanised landscape in the north and east, affect the overall strength of character. Understanding this variability is key when assessing this particular landscape character area. The quality of the southern part of the LCA is high. Therefore, the valued landscape is of high quality. This is apparent when the landscape is seen and experienced by car or, better still, on foot.

Finally, for the I3 'Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA, the LCA (2019) states:

*'A flat agricultural landscape of predominantly large arable fields with occasional sheep grazing. The area is drained by numerous streams and ditches including the tranquil course of the Foudry Brook, overhung by mature trees. A highly rural, even remote, landscape characterised by low density dispersed settlement, connected by sunken lanes with hedge banks. The north of the area is disturbed by modern development on the edge of Reading and the M4.'*¹⁵

In the section on 'Key Characteristics', relating to scenic quality for this LCA, it highlights the following and expands upon them:

'Flat vale landscape enclosed by prominent clay ridge of Spencers Wood; hidden wetland character due to network of drainage ditches, ponds and small streams (e.g.) Foudry Brook that add visual diversity; large-scale irregular arable fields in the open vale contrasted with small scale sheep pasture fields on the edge of settlements; intact 19th century field patterns and small areas of ancient field systems; low thorn hedgerows and hedgerow Oaks a feature of field boundaries; remnant parkland; settlement pattern characterised by low density scattered farmsteads and nucleated hamlets; the GHQ Stop Line and associated Second

¹³ Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003), page 184

¹⁴ Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003), paragraph 15.24, page 185

¹⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 206

*World War features; winding sunken lanes enclosed by mature trees and hedgerows and historic grass verges that provide a sense of enclosure and scenic quality'*¹⁶

Rarity – Assessing rarity of landscape types and individual features is difficult, but a number of sources can assist. The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004) provided an indication of this in the assessment of sensitivity where it assessed the re-creatability of landscape elements. Here it identifies the following as being of local (borough) importance: early inclosure field patterns, mature hedgerows with mature oak standards. The assessment indicates the sensitivity of ancient woodland, pasture with historic field boundaries and the sense of elevation and views across adjacent lowland landscapes. The assessment confirms the national importance of the ancient woodland, which is supported by paragraph 186c) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Another feature that the council's research indicates, which is unique at the county level, is the tank ditch and associated pillboxes and other structures making up part of the Second World War GHQ Stop Line that falls within the valued landscape. The defences in Berkshire tend to follow watercourses and this particular valued landscape, whilst including a significant section of defences along the Foudry Brook is a survival of defences where a gap between rivers required fortification. In addition, the high ground of the ridge gave extensive views across the floodplain of the Foudry Brook to the west. This is a particularly good example of the way these defences responded to the features of the landscape and used them in building the defence in the most effective way possible.

In *'Beeches, field, streets and hills - the anti-invasion landscapes of England 1940'* the author, William Foot, states that:

Despite the passing of 65 years, and all the clearance of defence works that has been carried out, much survives as an evocative reminder of the desperate days of 1940. These concrete and earthwork remains, often hidden by vegetation and abandoned in farmyard and garden, in hedgerow and river valley, on ridge and cliff top, represent more than archaeology, more than illustrations of mid-20th century fortification: they are recent history, history that is closely identified with by all manner of people, part of the nation's endurance and suffering still within the lifetime of many.

In the same novel, English Heritage and the Council for British Archaeology have produced what the late Professor Holmes says in his foreword is a *'wonderful book, just as valuable, in its way, as any antiquarian survey of castle or camp...'*¹⁷. Professor Holmes makes a strong case for the special protection of landscapes of the GHQ Stop Line. He writes *'Our landscape is indeed given added meaning by these defences'*.

Further, William Foot recognises that:

¹⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 207

¹⁷ HOLMES E R in the foreword to FOOT William, *Beaches, Fields, Streets and Hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of 1940*, 2006, Council for British Archaeology Report 144

*'The landscape is given added meaning by the continuing presence of these defences. Through them, in the rise and fall of the land, the course of the valley, the line of the road, and the junction of road and railway, can be seen the movements of armies, the battles that so nearly happened. Time does not destroy the immediacy of the events that came so perilously close. It is important that these defence structures are given recognition. Maintaining the character of complete landscapes of defence is vital for our continuing understanding of the strategies that gave them their purpose.'*¹⁸

The presence of features of archaeological, historical and cultural interest (e.g. buried tank ditches, pillboxes etc.) and the geographical and topographical features modified to create the GHQ Stop Line have created the specific features that, in Professor Holmes's opinion, give 'added meaning' to the landscape.

In addition, the landscape of the Second World War is given added value by its cultural heritage, detailed in published histories, for example in a publication of the Swallowfield History Society where it states:

*'Along this line, to strengthen the defence, were tank traps, one of which was at the Foudry Brook, Grazeley, behind Stanbury. After heavy rainfall the local children would swim in these tank traps but they wouldn't tell their parents'*¹⁹

In the words of Mr Justice Ouseley in *Stroud v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government*²⁰, the GHQ line, and particularly this rare example of a defended site, exhibits the 'sort of demonstrable physical attributes which would take this site beyond mere countryside'.

The LCA (2004), addresses the sensitivity of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA, which identified the naturalness of the river course and its habitats, and the area's tranquil and remote character. The assessment mentions more characteristics but, whilst part of a landscape contiguous with the valued landscape, they are addressed in the River Loddon Valued Landscape narrative. Importantly, the analysis assesses 'views from the adjacent...farmland (J3)' – some of which are from the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape - as being of at least borough importance.

The LCA (2004) identified that the most sensitive characteristics of the I3 'Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA, are: the pattern of ancient hedgerows, mature oaks, ancient woodlands, wayside commons and rural lanes, rural settlement pattern and other perceptual factors such as openness and rural qualities.

These features are also highlighted in various parts of the latest LCA (2019).

¹⁸ HOLMES E R in the foreword to FOOT William, *Beaches, Fields, Streets and Hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of 1940*, 2006, Council for British Archaeology Report 144

¹⁹ Swallowfield History Society – Our village in the Second World War where we are told at page 157 that:

²⁰ Neutral citation number [2015] EWHC 488 (Admin)

Representativeness – ‘Rarity’ is discussed in the previous section. However, the characteristics and features which make a landscape rare in the national context tend to make it distinctive and representative of its type. The valued landscape is, in most ways, representative of many lowland landscapes in the southeast. However, as well as other ‘valuable landscape features’ identified in the LCA (2019), the high clay ridge with its wide sandy plateau is impressive and probably the most discrete of a number of ridges within the Berkshire landscape. In addition, the ridge is situated at the western boundary of the Royal Forest of Windsor. Further, and as discussed above, the land to the west is low-lying floodplain, creating a significant barrier for the mechanised warfare of the Blitzkrieg seen in northern France in the few weeks of the Battle of France in the late spring and early summer of 1940. Whilst the landscape is ‘representative’, the geology, the physical and human geography, coupled with the other attributes discussed in this narrative make it a unique and special valued landscape.

Conservation Interests – In terms of wildlife and biodiversity, the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape provides an important mix of wildlife sites and habitats.

Habitats of principal importance include:

- Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland predominantly on the western and southern sides of the valued landscape. Some of which is Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). There are remnants of Wood Pasture and Parkland remaining in historic parks including the parkland at Loddon Court in the south and Highlands in the north of the valued landscape.
- Traditional Orchards at Hartley Court Farm

The online Ancient Tree Inventory²¹ shows a wide variety of mostly Veteran Trees and Notable trees with aggregations in the parkland at ‘Highlands’ in the north of the valued landscape and the woodlands on the western slopes. There are also veteran and notable trees along the course of the Foudry Brook and in the Grazeley Area of Special Character. Kybes Lane is lined with ancient and veteran trees including a 5.1m girth field maple (*Acer campestre*). There are small sections of ancient woodland in the south-east of the valued landscape around the A33 part of a wider assemblage of woodlands lying to the south-west (a few truncated by the construction of the road). These can be clearly seen in the Forestry maps for the J3 ‘Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay’ LCA in the latest LCA (2019).

Local Wildlife Sites: There are four Local Wildlife Sites within the valued landscape, all of them woodland sites, they are: Norman’s Shaw, Wood North of Beech Hill Coverts/Clayhill, Woods between Whitehouse and Highlands, Great Lea Pond and Beaumys Castle Woodland.

Cultural heritage and built form - the most important features in the landscape are those associated with the GHQ Stop Line and the medieval earthworks of Beaumys Castle.

²¹ The Ancient Tree Inventory is an online resource made available by the Woodland Trust. The Government refers developers to this resource in online planning guidance on Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development – last updated 5th November 2018, available at: <https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/tree-search/>

The GHQ Stop Line is actually a series of defences in depth, which in this valued landscape, wrap around the high clay ridge from the Foudry Brook in the west to the River Loddon in the south-east. They include tank ditches running along the foot of the scarp slope to the south-west of the A33 road (fronting wood road); and a buried tank ditch running parallel to this across land surrounding Loddon Court Farm on the high plateau to the east of the road. There is also a series of pillboxes aligned to provide covering fire to those tank ditches and to defend roads approaching from the west, south and south-east, including a pillbox defending the road bridge at Sheepbridge with a late 20th Century dwelling built over it.

In identifying the extent of the GHQ Stop Line that is covered by the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape, the area of land to the front (west) incorporates the effective ranges of weaponry deployed along the Stop Line during the early part of the Second World War. This is important as it allows the defences of this most crucial part of the nation's history to be read and understood in the context of the designed battle plan and the 'combat zone' in front of those defences.

There are no listed buildings in the eastern part of the valued landscape (east of the A33). The village hall, the former Headquarters of the Local Defence Volunteer (Home Guard) in the Second World War is located immediately adjacent to and fronting the Basingstoke Road, close to the northern edge of the valued landscape. The Home Guard was responsible for manning many of the roadblocks and defences along the length of the GHQ Stop Line. There are listed buildings in the western part of the valued landscape (west of the A33) mostly centred around the Grazeley, Shinfield Area of Special Character, notably the Grade II listed Holy Trinity Church and the Wheatsheaf Inn. A few listed buildings are also centred around Hopkilm Farm, Hartley Court and the Grade I Hartley Court Farm towards the northern part of the valued landscape.

The Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape encompasses the Grazeley, Shinfield Area of Special Character, which is characterised by low-density detached development with some listed buildings, and with significant space between buildings. Church Lane is a particularly narrow country lane, largely enclosed by mature trees and hedgerows, evoking a strong rural character.

Recreational Value - The LCA (2019) assesses public accessibility of the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay', A2 'Loddon River Valley' and I3 'Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland' LCAs.

For the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA it states that there is:

'a network of rural lanes bordered by water-filled ditches connect the original settlement pattern'.²²

Of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA it says:

²² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 249

'There is a loose network of lanes serving this primarily agricultural landscape, with a limited number of river crossing points'.²³

In the I3 'Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA a number of byways and footpaths radiate from the Grazeley Area of Special Character. In the south-east, in the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA, footpath SWAL19 links with the River Loddon Valued Landscape.

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the LCA (2019) which identifies high levels of tranquillity and dark night skies.

Regarding the influence of the M3 and A33 roads on the J3 'Spencer's Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA, it states:

'Away from these transport corridors and settlements, particularly south of Spencers Wood, the area retains a rural character, with views over the surrounding lowland landscapes of the Loddon valley and the arable fields around Grazeley. From the south of the area there are views across West Berkshire towards Stratfield Mortimer and other nearby villages. There are areas along the southern boundary of the area with high levels of tranquillity and dark night skies.'²⁴

For the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA it identified 'valuable landscape attributes' stating that it is a:

'Remote and rural landscape in the south of the area due to the limited access to the floodplain and absence of development on the valley floor.'²⁵

With

'Localised areas with a strong sense of tranquility particularly in the south, with naturalistic qualities and experience of dark skies away from roads and visual influence of large scale settlement in adjacent areas.'²⁶

Lastly, for the I3 'Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA it identified 'valuable landscape attributes' stating a:

'Strongly rural and remote landscape character due to scarcity of settlement and relative inaccessibility which results in a sense of tranquillity and dark night skies.'²⁷

The 'Key Issues' section highlights that:

²³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para A2.14, page 55

²⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), paragraph J3.21, page 251

²⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 56

²⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 56

²⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 210

*'This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies' to the south of the area. Light pollution, particularly along transport corridors and on settlement edges is a key issue affecting the night landscape.'*²⁸

Associations – This landscape has a very high number of important associations with national and prominent figures, and key historic events.

The manors of Shinfield and Swallowfield were important royal manors at the time of Edward the Confessor and held by William I, not to mention King Harold Godwinson (the Anglo-Saxon King and victor at Stamford Bridge who died at Hastings and was written out of Domesday by the new king William I).

In the 13th Century and early 14th Century, Hugh le Despencer (Hugh the elder) and his father (the younger) and grandfather (Hugh Justiciar) held the manor of Beaumys. Hugh (the elder) and Hugh (the younger) were the catalysts, or perhaps the irritants, that set in place the reaction that led to the Despencer War (1321-22) resulting in the forced abdication of Edward II. Hugh (the younger) left no issue, but his family name is celebrated in the village of Spencers Wood, which lies immediately to the north of the valued landscape.

Roger Mortimer (1st Baron Mortimer) and his grandson Roger Mortimer (1st Earl of March and 3rd Baron Mortimer) held lands in west Berkshire, notably Stratfield which became known as Stratfield Mortimer – just a few kilometres to the west of the valued landscape. These powerful Marcher Lords were highly important and influential people in the medieval era. Mortimer raided Hugh le Despencer's manor at Beaumys during the latter's exile, in a precursor of the Despencer War. At the time of the civil war, Despencer was widely known as the King's husband and Mortimer was acknowledged as the Queen's lover. The Victorious Mortimer executed Despencer and King Edward II. Edward's son, King Edward III, executed Mortimer.

Nicholas de la Beche, a high-ranking military officer, was recognised as a national figure. He held Beaumys Manor after Despencer and was granted a license to crenelate in 1338. The fortified manor, subsequently known as Beaumys in which he and later his widow entertained and protected King Edward III's son Prince Lionel, Duke of Clarence, a son of King Edward III. De la Beche was at various times the trusted governor and protector of many of the royal children. Amongst other honours and high officers, he was made Constable of the Tower of London in 1340 and appointed Seneschal of Gascony in 1342. His name is preserved in the corrupted modern name Beech Hill, a village located on the south-western edge of the valued landscape.

Lionel, Duke of Clarence, (b. 29 November 1338, d. 17 October 1368), through whom the House of York later claimed the throne, was at Beaumys Castle when Nicholas de la Beche's widow was kidnapped (and later forcibly married to her captor). Lionel survived the raid. His daughter married Edmund Mortimer the 3rd Earl of March. It is through Lionel and her Mortimer ancestors that the current King traces his descent.

²⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 211

A further association relates to the Duke of Wellington who 'retired' to his estate at nearby Stratfield Saye in 1817. He was active in local affairs and appears to have been held in high regard with numerous notable (and now highly visible) plantings of Wellingtonia trees previously discovered in America (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) being made in his honour. It is these Wellingtonia trees that now adorn the Victorian estates on the high clay ridge that forms this landscape.

One further association from that period, was the author Mary Russel Mitford (1787 Alresford, Hants - 10 January 1855 Swallowfield Berks), a contemporary and acquaintance of Jane Austen, who is best known for *'Our Village'*, a collection of chapters of contemporary village scenes and characters based on her life at Three Mile Cross. She was schooled at Reading Abbey Girls School (also attended by Jane Austen). Mitford met Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 1836, and they became close friends. Mitford was granted a civil list pension in 1837 (she was a favourite of many powerful Victorians including the Queen) partly due to her heroic struggle to support her spendthrift father. In 1842, her father died. A subscription was raised to pay his debts, and the surplus helped ease Mitford's financial burdens. In 1851 she moved from Three Mile Cross to a cottage in Swallowfield, where she died on 10 January 1855. She is buried in Swallowfield churchyard.

The architect of the home defences during the early months of the Second World War was General Edmund Ironside. William Edmund 'Tiny' Ironside, 1st Baron Ironside, GCB, CMG, DSO (6 May 1880 – 22 September 1959) was a career soldier who was the inspiration for author John Buchan's character 'Richard Hannay' in the *'Thirty-Nine Steps'*, *'Greenmantle'* and *'Mr Standfast'*. His life was almost as romantic as Buchan's hero. Towards the end of his career, he was Governor of Gibraltar and later Inspector General Overseas Forces. However, He was recalled and appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff on the outbreak of the Second World War. After nine months, he took Command of Home Forces and, having completed the planning and much of the work for the GHQ Stop Line, was retired in a reshuffle with the rank of Field Marshall on July 19th, 1940. He was replaced by General Sir Allen Brooke fresh from Dunkirk.

It is conceivable that Ironside would have visited this landscape, as the main route from the Reading 'tank island' to Aldershot, the 'home of the British Army', crossed the Loddon at Sheepbridge and passed through the valued landscape. Although no evidence has currently come to light that Ironside did visit this landscape, he would have been aware of the strategic importance of this high point, and of the views the landscape afforded to the west, the likely direction of invasion. He was closely associated with the GHQ line, an important aspect and attribute of this valued landscape.

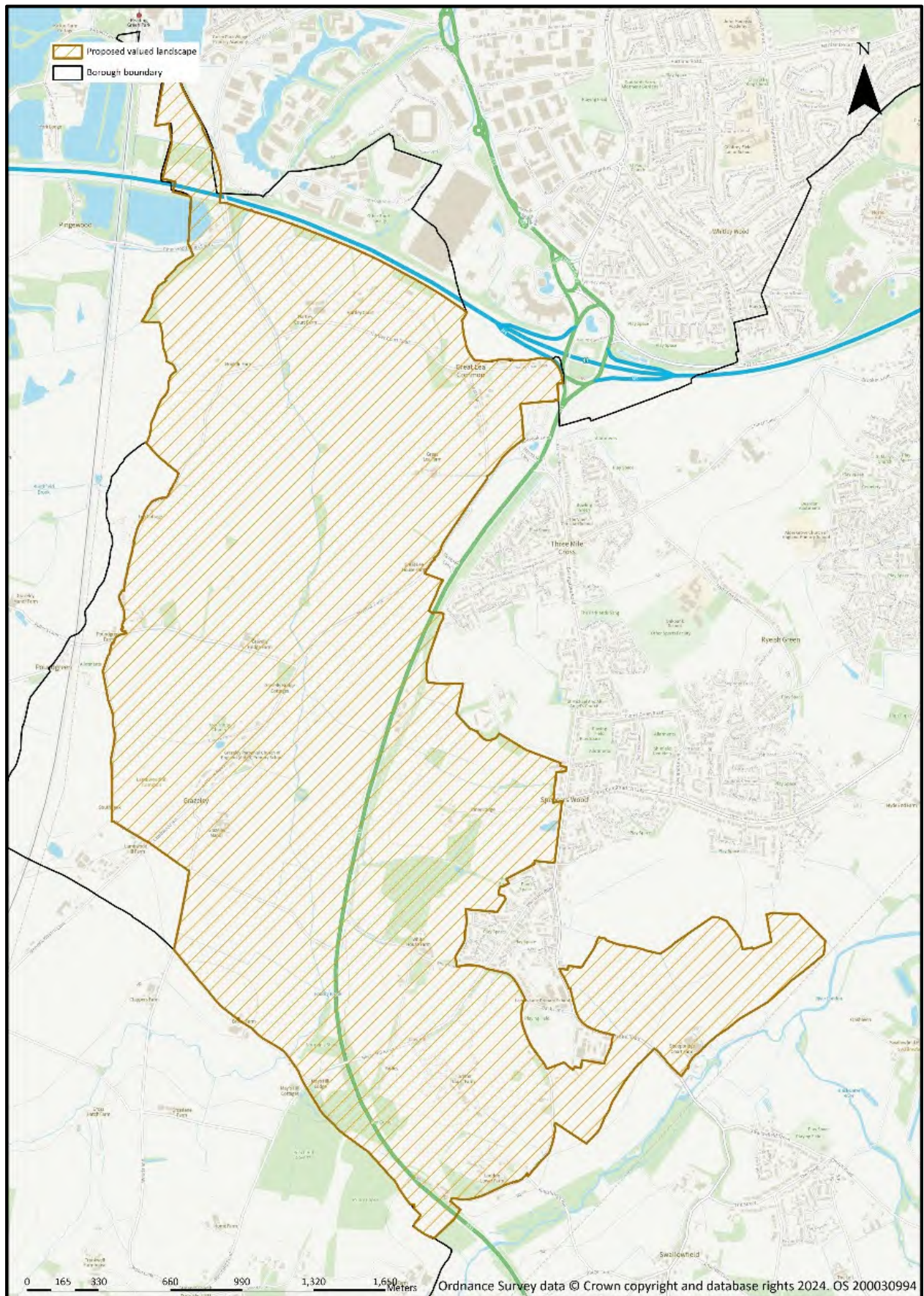
The (GHQ) Stop Line is a key linear feature that spans across the Ridge and Rivers, the River Loddon and, indeed the River Blackwater Valued Landscapes. It was a form of defence-in-depth built across the country as a deterrent against the expected German invasion in the Second World War. The defence line, of approximately 400 miles, was mostly built in 1940, following the British Army's withdrawal at Dunkirk between 26 May and 4 June 1940. With the bulk of the British army's weaponry and armour lost at Dunkirk, the Stop Line used the topography and physical geography of the land to gain advantage in preparing the battle fields for an imminent German invasion.

In Wokingham Borough, the Stop Line used the Foudry Brook, the River Loddon and the River Blackwater as natural tank defences, with the gap between those watercourses being strengthened

by pillboxes, tank ditches and other defences. The Stop Line also made use of the high clay ridge at Spencers Wood which offered a commanding position above the surrounding countryside to the west for observation and artillery.

Many attributes of the Stop Line remain in the borough's landscape, for example: tank ditches, pillboxes, 'hedgehogs' slots, and other structures. In the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape, a Vicker's heavy machine gun emplacement can be found below Junction 11 of the M4 at Shinfield; a buried tank ditch at Lambs Lane, Swallowfield; a pill box with a modern house built over it on Basingstoke Road; and anti-tank post slots on the road bridge at Church Road, Swallowfield. As previously discussed, the value of the Stop Line was recognised by Professor Holmes, who made a strong case for the special protection of these anti-invasion landscapes. These tank ditches and pillboxes, anti-invasion landscapes, defences against Hitler's Blitzkrieg are, ironically, a testimony to the 'spirit of the Blitz', and contribute to the character, quality and value of this valued landscape.

Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape Map



River Loddon Valued Landscape Narrative

River Loddon Valued Landscape Narrative

I spent a fortnight at Wargrave with my friend Mr. Marks. We had perfect weather, the grey morning mists which hung about the river, giving way each day to the sun, the thin sear foliage on the willows softly gleaming out like clouds of gold dust, and in the evening the banks in the lanes bright with numerous glowworms. I made studies here for my picture called "Willow, Willow" from the banks of the Loddon, which joins the Thames at Shiplake Weir

George Leslie Dunlop in Our River (published 1888)¹

Introduction

The River Loddon Valued Landscape runs the entire length of that part of the river within the borough. It mostly occupies the A2 'Loddon River Valley' and B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' Landscape Character Areas (LCA) as identified in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019). The valued landscape occupies the generally flat, alluvial floodplain of the river and parts of the river terraces, from where it enters the borough to the west of Risley, to where it joins the River Thames Valued Landscape upstream of Wargrave.

The valued landscape has important landscape features along its entire length from the Roman Road on its south-western boundary to the Habitats of Principal Importance on the floodplain where it joins the River Thames Valued Landscape. Although bisected by the A329(M) and two railway crossings, it represents a significant green and blue infrastructure corridor running diagonally across the southern half of the borough. It is valued for its character and appearance, biodiversity, history, perceptual qualities, recreational value and associations. The southern half is more natural but the northern part above the A329(M) has been substantially modified, principally by gravel extraction and the development of housing and transport networks. Many of the existing mineral extraction sites have been developed for recreation, in many cases, mitigating for the loss of naturalness through restoration and further management for the public benefit.

Where it has been necessary to indicate which bank of the river a feature of the landscape lies, the normal convention of labelling the left and the right banks viewed when facing downstream have been used in this narrative.

¹ LESLIE, George Dunlop *Our River (The Thames)*, 1881, Bradbury Agnew and Co.

Attributes of the valued landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The valued landscape sits within the A2 ‘Loddon River Valley’ and B1 ‘Loddon River Valley with Open Water’ LCAs. The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) discusses landscape condition in the ‘Key Characteristics’ section of the A2 ‘Loddon River Valley’ and B1 ‘Loddon River Valley with Open Water’ LCAs. On landscape condition of the A2 ‘Loddon River Valley’ LCA, it states:

*‘The meandering course of the river and the flat floodplain landscape is intact. For the most part this is a remote and rural landscape with characteristic riverside features and important wetland habitats which contribute to the overall perception of a landscape in moderate condition. However, views to adjacent large scale development and busy infrastructure corridors, particularly in the north of the area fragment the rural landscape. There are opportunities for improvement and particular enhancement to habitat interconnectivity’.*²

The A2 ‘Loddon River Valley’ LCA landscape, containing the lower part of the valued landscape is not greatly affected by the disturbance from the M4 motorway and the settlements of Earley and Winnersh to the north. Although development pressures continue, the southern part of the LCA still demonstrates many characteristics of the natural river and floodplain.

For the B1 ‘Loddon River Valley with Open Water’ LCA, it states:

*‘This peaceful floodplain landscape in the valley of the River Loddon falls between the urban areas of Woodley and the large villages of Winnersh, Twyford and Charvil. Former gravel extraction has modified the landscape resulting in a mix of land uses including open water bodies, landfill sites, and restored agricultural fields, nature reserves and country parks.’*³

Scenic Quality – The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) summarises the scenic quality of the landscape and identifies valuable landscape attributes that relate to scenic quality.

For the A2 ‘Loddon River Valley’ LCA, it states:

*‘The meandering course of the river and the flat floodplain landscape is intact. For the most part this is a remote and rural landscape with characteristic riverside features and important wetland habitats which contribute to the overall perception of a landscape in moderate condition. However, views to adjacent large scale development and busy infrastructure corridors, particularly in the north of the area fragment the rural landscape. There are opportunities for improvement and particular enhancement to habitat interconnectivity.’*⁴

² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 57

³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 75

⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 57

Within the 'valuable landscape attributes' section for the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA, the LCA (2019) highlights the following relating to scenic quality and expands upon them in the main text:

The naturalness of the River Loddon and wide floodplain; the wooded backdrop of mature broadleaved woodland and natural riparian corridors; important wetland features and habitats; historic riverside features including medieval moated sites, old brick watermills and bridges, registered historic parkland at Swallowfield and the GHQ [General Headquarters] Stop Line and associated Second World War features following the course of the river; sparse settlement pattern of farmsteads and the village of Swallowfield and a strong local vernacular.⁵

Regarding the scenic quality of the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA, it states:

'The undeveloped nature of much of the floodplain crossed by rivers, and characterised by open water bodies and associated wetland habitats are in moderate condition. The urban influence and potential expansion of the settlement edge from Winnersh and Woodley/Earley and the increasing impact of the busy road and rail network means that there is a considerable need but also opportunities for landscape improvements.'⁶

In the 'valuable landscape attributes' section for the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA, the LCA (2019) highlights the following relating to scenic quality:

Undeveloped riverine character with its network of rivers, drainage ditches and restored lakes which provides a strong sense of place; wooded context and fringing carr vegetation with pollarded willows; remnant pockets of traditional pasture, with pollarded willows along banksides and ditches; mosaic of ecologically valuable wetland and woodland; restored gravel works supporting a range of birds and nationally scarce flora; distinctive historic built form clustered at river crossings including historic mills, bridges and listed buildings at Twyford; farms on the floodplain edge giving a sense of time-depth and contributing to scenic quality.⁷

Rarity – Assessing rarity of landscape types and individual features is not simple. However, a number of sources can assist, including the Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004). This archive document provides an indication of rarity in its' assessment of sensitivity where it addressed the re-creatability of landscape elements.

In assessing the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA, as a landscape with high sensitivity to change, it identified the following as being features which would be hard to re-create: the naturalness of the river course and its associated habitats; the presence of mature trees and the area's tranquil remote character and absence of development on the valley floor. Many of the characteristics were noted to be of regional and national importance including: Stanford End Mill and River Loddon Site of Special

⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 56

⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 79

⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 79

Scientific Interest (SSSI); numerous Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and the Registered Park and Garden at Swallowfield Park. Chapter A2 of the LCA (2004) also noted the visual sensitivity to change because of the valley form with its' potential for views from the adjacent river terrace (in the C1 'Arborfield River Terrace' LCA) and farmland (in the J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA).

In looking at the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA, the LCA (2004) identifies the far northern part of the River Loddon Valued Landscape as being of overall moderate sensitivity to change. It identifies wetland habitats as being most sensitive to change and notes that many are of national importance because of the rarity of the flora and fauna present. It appears to give local significance to small areas of land between settlements and the potential for views across the floodplain from the C2 'Hurst River Terrace' LCA lying to the east.

Particularly rare attributes of this valued landscape are: the Registered Park and Garden at Swallowfield Park; the Second World War General Headquarters (GHQ) Stop Line which reinforced the natural barrier of the River Loddon in this southern part; and the high concentration of buildings or sites with moats – medieval feature created for status (for example at Sheepbridge Court) or, as in the case of the fortified Beaumys Castle for defence (although NB Beaumys sits adjacent to the River Loddon but is within the boundary of the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape).

Representativeness – 'Rarity' is discussed in the previous section. However, opposite of rarity is representativeness. Unless a landscape type is particularly common, which this particular valued landscape is not, the characteristics and features which make a landscape rare are also those that make it distinctive and therefore representative of its type. Notwithstanding the many special attributes that make this part of the countryside a valued landscape, the River Loddon is in many ways representative of many lowland river floodplain landscapes in the south east.

Conservation Interests – In terms of wildlife and biodiversity, the River Loddon Valued Landscape provides an important mix of wildlife sites and habitats:

Habitats of principal importance including: lowland mixed deciduous woodland; wood pasture and parkland remaining in historic parks; wet woodland; lowland meadows; coastal and floodplain grazing marsh; ponds; and rivers. Traditional orchards are reported but exist at a very local scale.

The Loddon Valley Gravel Pits and the Loddon Valley South Biodiversity Opportunity Areas lie within the valued landscape and are described in the Berkshire Biodiversity Action Plan⁸.

There are three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the valued landscape: two at Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill SSSI and one at Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI.

First designated in 1952 the Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI designation⁹ states:

⁸ The Berkshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), 2011, Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum

⁹ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1002963.pdf>

'The site comprises Stanford End Mill meadows, a series of traditionally-managed seasonally waterlogged hay meadows, and a 4 km stretch of the River Loddon, a tributary of the River Thames. The valley is situated on Tertiary deposits of Valley Gravel and River Alluvium overlying London Clay.'

And:

'The site is of interest particularly for nationally important populations of two rare plants: the fritillary Fritillaria meleagris, a native bulb of unimproved damp meadows now mainly confined to scattered localities in southern Britain, and the Loddon pondweed Potamogeton nodosus, a very rare aquatic species for which this length of the River Loddon is the national stronghold.'

Additionally, the SSSI designation highlights the following: sparse oak, ash and alder trees giving only moderate shade (that encourages growth of water plants); numerous cricket-bat willows grown commercially; two rare pea-mussels Pisidium moitessierianum and P. tenuilineatum whose presence reflects the high water quality and base-rich conditions. Several uncommon species of mollusc in the meadows, including the snails Vertigo antivertigo and V. moulinsiana which are restricted to fens and marshes; a variety of coarse fish, water voles and nesting birds, including little grebe, moorhen, coot, mute swan and kingfisher.

First designated in 1953, Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill SSSI designation¹⁰ states:

'The woodlands are situated on London Clay, which is largely overlain by alluvium at Sandford Mill and valley gravel at Lodge Wood. The poorly-drained and seasonally-waterlogged soils conform to the Fladbury 3 and Hurst associations, and consist of stoneless, fine, clay-like silts and loams. Both woodlands occur on relatively flat ground which is affected by groundwater and susceptible to intermittent flooding from the Loddon'.

And:

'Although Lodge Wood is shown on Rocque's map of Berkshire in 1761 and may be an ancient woodland site, management has modified its original composition and structure. Both woodlands are dominated by alder and crack willow Salix fragilis, together with some ash. There is a relatively poorly developed understorey which includes hazel, dogwood, elder, blackthorn and red currant Ribes sylvestre. The southern part of Lodge Wood is drier, and dominated by pedunculated oak and ash, with some hawthorn and spindle and occasional planted exotics.'

Of particular interest in the valued landscape is the presence of the Loddon Lily which occurs in only 48 sites in England. The two sites of this SSSI are a stronghold for this species which derives its common name from the River Loddon. At the time of designation, they contained ten percent of the population of the species in England. The designation states:

¹⁰ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1003870.pdf>

*‘Both Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill Woods support large colonies of Loddon Lily or summer snowflake *Leucojum aestivum*. This species has a very restricted distribution in Britain, and is listed in the British Red Data Book of vascular plants. In England it is largely confined to the Thames Basin, with one centre of distribution between Reading and Windsor, and another between Goring and Abingdon. It was first recorded from near Reading in 1799, and from the confluence of the Thames and Loddon in 1809. Because of its mode of dispersal the Loddon Lily is almost wholly associated with rivers, and the majority of colonies are found on islands or in dense willow carr. After flowering in April or May, when it is pollinated by bees, the fruits develop flotation chambers. Although they remain attached to the stem, in the event of flooding the stems break and the fruits are carried downstream and stranded amongst debris in thickets or on flood-plains. The bulbs can also be transported during heavy floods and deposited on river banks.’*

There are three Local Nature Reserves (LNR) within the River Loddon Valued Landscape: Alder Moors, Lavells Lake and Swallowfield Meadow.

Alder Moors LNR is ancient woodland dominated by alder trees. There is a rich ground flora including bluebells, marsh marigolds, primroses and wood anemones. Lavell’s Lake LNR is at the northern most tip of Dinton Pastures Country Park and is managed by Wokingham Borough Council in partnership with the Friends of Lavell’s Lake. Emphasis is placed in encouraging bird species and the site is known nationally for both resident and migratory species. The Friends of Lavell’s Lake record ‘125 species recorded in the breeding seasons since records began in 1979 and 108 in winter’¹¹. Swallowfield Meadows LNR is a small site of only 0.7 hectares. It incorporates four balancing ponds and ditches as part of flood prevention measures. As well as a rich variety of habitats, the ponds and ditches have attracted endangered northern water voles (*Arvicola amphibius*).

The Ancient Tree Inventory¹² shows aggregations of Ancient and Veteran Trees at Swallowfield Park and Dinton Pastures Country Park and a number of large girth pollard willows lining the river and drainage ditches within the floodplain.

There are a number of smaller Ancient Woodlands mostly on higher ground above the river floodplain. Some small areas of ancient woodland are sited on the urban fringes of Woodley in the north of the valued landscape, for example: Sandpit Copse, Norris’s Copse and Alder Moors Copse. Others, like the group of larger than average woodlands between Swallowfield and Arborfield grow in the countryside north-east of Swallowfield Park: Great Wood, Moor Copse and Rounds Copse.

There are 29 Local Wildlife Sites within the valued landscape incorporating a wide range of habitats and a wide variety of species.

¹¹ <http://rva.org.uk/organisation/friends-of-lavells-lake/>

¹² The Ancient Tree Inventory is an online resource made available by the Woodland Trust. The Government refers developers to this resource in online planning guidance on Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development – last updated 5th November 2018, available at: <https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/tree-search/>

Cultural heritage and built form - the valued landscape encompasses parts of the following Conservation Areas: Swallowfield, Twyford Station and Twyford.

The valued landscape forms the setting, and forms part of views in and out, of the Conservation Areas and listed buildings and structures in, and adjacent to, the valued landscape. The locations and forms chosen for such buildings were influenced by the landscape; and the buildings in their turn have helped add features of value to the landscape. The site of Swallowfield Court, a royal building and park, was at the western edge of the Royal Forest of Windsor and, in the crotch of two rivers, would have been more easily defended and imparked. It may have been a defensive position in its earliest origins as, for example, the nearby moated site at Beaumys Castle situated next to the River Loddon in the adjacent Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape. Both sites depended on the low-lying water-logged landscape for the formation of a defensive moat or park boundaries. Another listed building for which the riverside location was essential is the Grade II listed Sandford Mill, an 18th Century building on Sandford Lane which, as a working mill, derived its power from the River Loddon.

The valued landscape has two Grade II Registered Parks and Gardens: Swallowfield Park¹³ and a small portion of Stratfield Saye Park¹⁴ that touches its south-western edge. The parks and gardens are described by Historic England in the National Heritage List for England¹⁵:

Swallowfield Park is a Grade II listed park and garden. The manor of Swallowfield was in royal ownership since before Great Domesday (1086)¹⁶ until the reign of Elizabeth I. The Historic England register entry for the park and garden¹⁷ states:

'Swallowfield Park was enclosed by Edward III in 1354, remaining in royal ownership until the C16. The estate ...passing by marriage into the hands of Henry Hyde (d 1709) shortly before he became second Earl of Clarendon in 1674. In 1685 Lady Clarendon (d 1700) was accompanied to Swallowfield by John Evelyn who wrote an account of the estate in his diary for 22 October 1685, describing the features and plants he found, 'the gardens and waters as elegant as 'tis possible to make a flat [site] by art and industry and no mean experience ... the nurseries, kitchen garden full of the most desirable plants, two very noble Orangeries well furnished, but above all the canal and fishponds. The second Earl rebuilt the house 1689-91, the designs being those of William Talman, Comptroller of the King's Works. Edward Hyde, the third Earl, sold the estate some time before 1718 to the nabob Thomas Pitt, late Governor of Madras, known as 'Diamond Pitt, who bought the estate with part of the proceeds of selling the Pitt or Regent diamond, and died there in 1726. Pitt employed John James to alter the house, and it is also thought that James designed the bridge in the park (Inspector's Report 1990).'

¹³ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000537>

¹⁴ <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000866>

¹⁵ Historic England, *National Heritage List for England- Park Place, and Temple Combe*, last updated 31 January 2020, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000588>

¹⁶ Great Domesday Book, 1086, National Archive E 31/2/2 -

¹⁷ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000537>

And:

'The estate was sold out of the Pitt family in 1737, passing through various families during the remainder of the C18, and being sold to Sir Henry Russell, first Baronet in 1820. The formal landscape of rides present to the south of the house in the 1760s (Rocque, 1761), laid out in patte d'oie form, had disappeared by the 1790s (Pride, 1790), by which time the park had been entirely landscaped. In the early C19 (estate map, 1809) the estate was crossed by a network of ponds and canals, these being removed in the 1850s. The estate remained in the Russell family until 1965 when it was divided up and sold, the house and stables being converted into residential apartments for the Country Houses Association, in which use they remain (1998).'

Stratfield Saye is a Grade II listed park and garden with similarly ancient origins, but its chief interest lies in being the seat of the first Duke of Wellington, the Iron Duke, Arthur Wellesley the victor of Waterloo. The Register entry states:

'A mid to late C18 garden, laid out from 1745 by George Pitt, Lord Rivers, comprising walled and formal compartments and informal, tree-planted pleasure grounds which are set within a landscape park of the same period; the estate was further developed and planted throughout the C19 and C20 by the dukes of Wellington, whose home it became from 1815.'

And:

'A manor was formed at Stratfield Saye in the C11 and was owned by the Stotefield family in the C12. It acquired its present name by the marriage of a Stotefield heiress to Robert de Say. William de Say was granted a licence to inclose his wood to form a park in 1216 and by c 1340, a house had been built there (VCH 1911). In the late C14, the estate passed by marriage to the Dabridgecourt family and remained in their ownership until, in the early C17, their indebtedness to Sir William Pitt enforced conveyance of the estate, in various parcels of land and buildings throughout the 1620s, to the Pitt family. Sir William Pitt is traditionally credited with the building of the present house, on obtaining final possession of the estate in 1630 (CL 1948). The marriage of his grandson, George, to the daughter of John, Earl Rivers (she was the widow of Lord Chandos of Sudeley), brought the connection with the Rivers peerage to the Pitts of Stratfield Saye and when a descendent, another George, was ennobled in 1776, he took the title Baron Rivers of Sudeley. Lord Rivers had succeeded to the estate in 1745 and, through the second half of the C18 until his death in 1803, he made major changes and improvements, these being recorded in some detail in an account written by his steward, Mr Brookes, in a manuscript of c 1810 (CL 1948). Lord Rivers removed the 'regular terraces and square fishponds with clipped hedges and quaint parterres, and felled most of the avenues. The present walled gardens north-west of the house were built and the pleasure grounds planted with an arboretum of exotic trees. The park was greatly enlarged and planted with specimen trees 'which gradually recede into open groves thence by a gentle transition into a depth of thick woodland forming a varied and picturesque horizon, while the course of the River Loddon was widened and smoothed.'

And:

'Following his victory at Waterloo in 1815, the Duke of Wellington purchased the estate in 1817. Probably for financial reasons, none of the various designs for the replacement of the house, prepared by architects such as James Wyatt's eldest son Benjamin Dean Wyatt, and C R Cockerell, were pursued (drawings at Stratfield Saye). The first or Great Duke made a number of additions and alterations to the house, adding the conservatory and the outer wings. Planting in the gardens and park continued throughout the C19 and C20 by the Great Duke and his descendants, the most notable tree species being the Wellingtonia which was first planted at Stratfield Saye by the second Duke in 1854, following its introduction in 1853. The estate remains (1999) in private hands.'

The Roman Road forms the northern boundary of Stratfield Saye Park and the southern edge of the valued landscape. The course of this major Roman transport artery from Londinium (London) in the east, to Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester) in the west, runs along Welsh Lane and crosses the River Loddon just to the south of the borough boundary, a few metres upstream of Stanford End Bridge. The Park is well screened and no features other than trees and hedges, and a Second World War pillbox glimpsed between them, are visible from the valued landscape. This pillbox twinned with one on the other side of Welsh Lane guarded the bridge from attack from the west. Together they formed a forward position of the Second World War General Headquarters Stop Line. This four-hundred-mile defence (in depth) was built using natural defensive features such as rivers and high ground wherever possible. The River Loddon, and other geographical features, were an important part of the natural defences strengthened by structures such as pillboxes and tank ditches rapidly constructed during the summer of 1940 in preparation for the expected German invasion.

In the foreword to *Beeches, fields, streets and hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of England 1940*¹⁸. Professor Holmes makes a strong case for the special protection of landscapes of the GHQ Stop Line. He writes *'Our landscape is indeed given added meaning by these defences'*. Whilst some of the defences have been lost from the landscape the presence of many others (including features of archaeological, historical and cultural interest e.g. buried tank ditches, pillboxes etc.) combined with the geographical and topographical features modified to create the GHQ Stop Line have created the specific features that, in Professor Holmes's opinion give *'added meaning'* to the landscape.

There are thirty-nine listed buildings and structures ranging from the Grade II listed 17th Century Waggon and Horses public house on the Old Bath Road at Twyford, to the Grade II* listed Sheepbridge Court a late 16th and 17th Century farm house on a 13th Century moated site¹⁹, one of two scheduled monuments in the valued landscape (the other being early 13th Century Beaumys Castle²⁰ lying within the buffer zone of this valued landscape but described in the narrative for the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape which is contiguous with the River Loddon Valued Landscape at this point). Moated sites were built between 1250 and 1350 AD and are rare in the south of England and so it is worth noting that there is one other moated site in the vicinity of the valued landscape

¹⁸ HOLMES E R in the foreword to FOOT William, *Beaches, Fields, Streets and Hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of 1940*, 2006, Council for British Archaeology Report 144

¹⁹ Sheepbridge Court moat <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1013336>

²⁰ Beaumys Castle moat <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1013179>

but not within it as currently mapped. The site lies within two-and-a-half kilometres to the north-east of Sheepbridge Court at Kenney's Farm²¹ where a modern house sits with the moat.

A cluster of listed buildings and structures sit on the left bank of the River Loddon just upstream of the A33 crossing. The site of the 12th Century priory of Stratfield Saye (dissolved 1399) lies immediately to the south-west of Beaumys castle on the left bank of the river. The old abbey meadows forming part of the Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI. The site is now occupied by three listed buildings or structures: a Grade II listed, late 17th Century, Dovecote and wall, a Grade II listed 18th Century timber framed granary, and the Priory mansion itself, a Grade II* listed 16th Century extended brick house with some timber framing in older parts with old tile roofs gabled, and one half hipped.

The Waggon and Horses public house, a former 17th Century Inn is Grade II listed and situated on the Old Bath Road at Twyford, convenient for the crossing of the river at the two fords of the braided river channel reflected in the name of the village.

Recreational Value – The LCA (2019) assesses public accessibility of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' and B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCAs. The recreational opportunities of the northern and southern halves of the valued landscape are different and complementary. The southern portion offers fewer opportunities to access the landscape but greater tranquillity. The northern or downstream portion of the valued landscape offers a greater number and variety of riverine and wetland experiences, with reduced tranquillity.

For the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA it states:

*'There is a loose network of lanes serving this primarily agricultural landscape, with a limited number of river crossing points.'*²²

And comments on severance and lack of access, stating there is:

*'Little public access to the floodplain except for the Blackwater Valley Path which runs south and east of Swallowfield. Busy roads cross the flood plain, including the A33, M4 and Winnersh and Shinfield Eastern Relief Roads, and create physical and visual severance along the floodplain.'*²³

Further downstream, in that portion of the valued landscape lying north of the A329(M), located in the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA, the LCA (2019) states there are:

*'Popular recreational landscapes including Dinton Pastures Country Park, Charvil Country Park and Charvil Meadows.'*²⁴

²¹ Kenney's Farm moat <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1013139>

²² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 55

²³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 53

²⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 76

The River Loddon is a landscape valued by local anglers including the seven hundred members of the Twyford and District Angling Club²⁵.

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the LCA (2019) which identifies some disturbance and light pollution along transport corridors, but higher levels of tranquillity and dark night skies in other parts of the valued landscape.

For the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA it identifies 'valuable landscape attributes' stating that it is a:

*'Remote and rural landscape in the south of the area due to the limited access to the floodplain and absence of development on the valley floor.'*²⁶

With:

*'Localised areas with a strong sense of tranquillity particularly in the south, with naturalistic qualities and experience of dark skies away from roads and visual influence of large scale settlement in adjacent areas.'*²⁷

And a:

*'Tranquil and rural character away from river crossings and visual influence of large scale settlement in adjacent areas. The south of the area is also a resource of 'dark skies'.'*²⁸

For the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA, it states that the landscape has:

*'Localised areas of tranquillity particularly around the restored lakes, and away from transport corridors and the visual influence of adjacent settlements.'*²⁹

Associations – This landscape has a very high number of close associations with nationally important figures.

The manors of Shinfield and Swallowfield were important royal manors at the time of Edward the Confessor and William I, not to mention King Harold Godwinson (the Anglo-Saxon King and victor at Stamford Bridge who died at Hastings and was written out of Domesday as the new Norman oligarchy stamped its mark on nation and landscape).

Swallowfield Court continued to be a royal residence on the fringes of the Royal Forest of Windsor and Edward III improved and imparked it in 1354. Swallowfield Court remained an important royal residence and was endowed to Catherine of Aragon, the wife of Henry VIII as part of her dowry.

²⁵ Twyford and District Angling Club website <https://www.tdfc.org.uk/>

²⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 56

²⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 56

²⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 53

²⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 79

A famous non-royal association is with Thomas ‘Diamond’ Pitt (1653 –1726). He was the grandfather to William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham ("Pitt the Elder") and was great-grandfather of William Pitt the Younger, both Prime Ministers. ‘Diamond’ Pitt is best known for his purchase of a 410-carat uncut diamond acquired from an Indian merchant in Madras in 1701.

Pitt bought the diamond for 48,000 pagodas or £20,400 and sent it back to England in 1702 concealed inside his eldest son Robert's shoe. A 141-carat stone, with several secondary stones, was cut from the rough stone. Pitt and his sons took the diamond to Calais in 1717 and the stone was sold to the French regent, Philippe II, Duke of Orléans, for £135,000, becoming one of the crown jewels of France. "Le Régent", as the stone is known, is on display in the French Royal Treasury at The Louvre. With the proceeds of the sale, Pitt bought property including at Swallowfield Court and Swallowfield Park – his favourite residence.

The present house of Swallowfield Court was mainly built by Lord Clarendon in 1689–90. According to the Victoria County History, the gardens of Swallowfield Court were visited and described by John Evelyn, who wrote much about *'the delicious and rarest fruits,' the 'innumerable timber trees in the ground about the seate,' the walks and groves of elms, limes, oaks and other trees, the quarters, walks and parterres, nurseries, kitchen garden, two very noble orangeries, and, 'above all, the canal and fishponds, the one fed with a white, the other with a black running water, stored with pike, carp, bream and tench*³⁰.

A further association relates to the Duke of Wellington who ‘retired’ to his estate at nearby Stratfield Saye in 1817. He was active in local affairs and appears to have been held in high regard with numerous notable (and now highly visible) plantings of Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), a tree discovered after his death but named in his honour. It is these trees that now adorn the Victorian estates on the high clay ridge that forms the core of this valued landscape.

One further association from that period was with the writer Mary Russel Mitford (1787 Alresford, Hants - 10 January 1855 Swallowfield Berks), a contemporary and acquaintance of Jane Austen, who is best known for *‘Our Village’*³¹, a collection of chapters of contemporary village scenes and characters based on her life at Three Mile Cross. She was schooled at Reading Abbey Girls School (also attended by Jane Austen). Mitford met Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 1836, and they became close friends. Mitford was granted a civil list pension in 1837 (she was a favourite of many powerful Victorians including the Queen) partly due to her heroic struggle to support her spendthrift father. In 1842, her father died. A subscription was raised to pay his debts, and the surplus helped ease Mitford's financial burdens. In 1851 she moved from Three Mile Cross to a cottage in Swallowfield, where she died on 10 January 1855. She is buried in Swallowfield churchyard.

The architect of the home defences during the early months of the Second World War was General Edmund Ironside. William Edmund ‘Tiny’ Ironside, 1st Baron Ironside, GCB, CMG, DSO (6 May 1880 – 22 September 1959) was a career soldier. He served throughout the Second Boer War spying on German colonial forces in Southwest Africa. He commanded troops on the front during the First

³⁰ A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3. 1923 Victoria County History, London, pages 267 - 274

³¹ MITFORD Mary Russel, *Our Village*, 1835, Sampson Low, Son & Co

World War before being appointed to a position on the staff. In 1918, he was given command of a brigade on the Western Front. In 1919, he was promoted to command the Allied intervention force in northern Russia following the Bolshevik Government's withdrawal from the First World War. As Governor of Gibraltar, preparing for retirement, he was recalled to the UK and appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff on the outbreak of the Second World War. After nine months, he took Command of Home Forces responsible for preparing the defence of the country for an expected German Invasion. As the architect of an astonishing system of defence lines hurriedly built during the summer of 1940, he retired with the rank of Field Marshall on July 19th 1940. Baron Ironside would have utilised the terrain and landscape in preparation for defence along the GHQ Stop Line and during combat, particularly following the aftermath of defeat in Normandy and retreat from Dunkirk.

River Loddon Valued Landscape Map

