



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

VALUED LANDSCAPES ASSESSMENT

SEPTEMBER 2024

WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Landscapes play an important role in helping to define the varied character of places. This assessment has been prepared to help understand the landscape characteristics and attributes of Wokingham Borough, and whether there is evidence to support identification as a 'valued landscapes'. This assessment therefore presents the background evidence, including the relevant legislation, planning policy and guidance and the methodology.
- 1.2 In total 13 areas have been identified as valued landscapes. **Appendix 3** sets out a series of valued landscape narratives to help explain and justify the identification of each of these areas. This assessment demonstrates how evidence has been used to inform and identify valued landscapes and builds on work undertaken at earlier stages of plan making, notably the Valued Landscape Topic Paper (2020).
- 1.3 The objectives of this assessment are to:
 - Review the borough's landscapes to identify the landscapes of the highest quality and most value that could potentially merit designation as valued landscapes in line with current best practice and guidance; and
 - Provide an up-to-date evidence base and justification for any recommended valued landscapes.
- 1.4 The identification of the valued landscapes has evolved through comprehensive desktop analysis, the knowledge and experience of specialist officers and an understanding of recent case law and appeal decisions. Comments made by individuals, landowners and organisations through earlier stages of plan-making have also helped to inform and redefine the boundaries of recommended valued landscapes.
- 1.5 Work on the borough's valued landscapes also builds on the council's latest Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), (2019), as well as the 2004 Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment and offers an objective description of the landscape including its features and attributes. The LCAs provide an evidence base to support planning policies and more widely guide decision making around development and the management of future change. They are designed to be used both as a positive tool to guide new development or land uses in a way that understands and responds to local variations in landscape character and to protect and enhance the special qualities and local distinctiveness of the borough's landscape. The updated LCA contains more detailed evaluative information to provide greater understanding of key sensitivities and values to help in decision-making and accommodating change by providing an understanding of what is valued and why.

2. What makes a landscape?

- 2.1 The landscape is made up of a series of layers, the underlying geology forming a series of plateaus, hills and valleys. One important element of this layering is the exposed surface rock, that has been subjected to processes of weathering and erosion as well as the effects of fungi, plant root action, soil microbes and larger animals (both wild and domesticated) to create soils. Soils are the basis for the ecosystems that sustain human life.
- 2.2 Initially, only local people modified the landscape, creating settlements, structures, ancient trackways and developing forms of agriculture. Over time, the civilisations and cultures in the landscape add further layers through the creation of boundaries, transport networks, buildings and cultural, recreational and religious sites. More recently, people have invested time, expertise and money in the building of infrastructure, commercial centres and housing, exerting strong influences over the landscape, often from afar.
- 2.3 Today, people continue to shape and influence the appearance of the landscape. They bring ownership and knowledge of the landscape and its management, often feeling a strong connection and affiliation to it. The associations and affections people have all contribute to make up the character of the landscape. A persons' experience of a landscape can also support their enjoyment of a recreational activity.
- 2.4 The Landscape Institute's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Revision 3, (2013) quoting guidance on Landscape Character Assessment from 2002, states:

'Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It provides the setting for our day-to-day lives. The term does not mean just special or designated landscapes and it does not only apply to the countryside. Landscape can mean a small patch of urban wasteland as much as a mountain range, and an urban park as much as an expanse of lowland plain. It results from the way that different components of our environment – both natural (the influences of geology, soils. Climate, flora and fauna) and cultural (the historical and current impact of land use, settlement, enclosure and other human interventions) – interact together and are perceived by us. People's perceptions turn land into the concept of landscape.' (Swanwick and Land Use Consultants, 2002: 2).

- 2.5 Article 1 of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) (2007) also defines landscape as *'an area perceived by people whose character is the result of action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'*.¹ The ELC considers that all landscapes matter, be they ordinary, degraded, or outstanding.

¹ European Landscape Convention (2000) The European Landscape Convention, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016802f80c6>, page 9

3. National policy and guidance context

- 3.1 At an international scale, the UNESCO Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention recognises the twin roles of nature and people in the development of landscapes:

‘Cultural landscapes are cultural properties and represent the “combined works of nature and of man” designated in Article 1 of the Convention. They are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal.’²

- 3.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023)³, sets out the broad vision for how the planning system will contribute to national life. Paragraph 7 deals with sustainable development, which includes social progress, economic wellbeing and environmental protection. Amongst other matters, it states:

‘At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’⁴.

- 3.3 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF sets out three ‘overarching objectives’ to achieve sustainable development. They are an economic, a social and an environmental objective.

- 3.4 Landscape is an important element of national planning policy, with Paragraph 8c) of the NPPF stating:

‘c) an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy’.

- 3.5 In pursuing the environmental objective, paragraph 84 of the NPPF states:

‘Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless on or more of the following circumstances apply:

(e) the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:

- is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and*
- would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.’*

² UNESCO Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, 10th July 2019, paragraph 47.

³ The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023)

⁴ The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023), paragraph 7

- 3.6 This is reflected in paragraph 180, requiring development to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, and requiring it to protect and enhance valued landscapes. It states:

‘Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

(a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

(b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland’

- 3.7 For plan-making, Paragraph 20 of the NPPF states that:

‘Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places and make sufficient provision for:

d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.’

- 3.8 In addition, paragraph 181 of the NPPF states:

‘Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value’.

- 3.9 The NPPF continues that plans should:

‘...take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries’.

- 3.10 The national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides further detail to the NPPF. The PPG notes:

‘Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals for development affecting these areas will be assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures, such as appropriate design principles and visual screening, where necessary. The cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully.’ (Paragraph: 036 Reference ID 8-036-20190721)

- 3.11 The NPPF does not limit the consideration of landscape value to currently designated landscapes. This was recognised in the Secretary of State’s decision letter following a planning appeal at Land at North and South of Flitch Way, Pods Brook Road, Braintree, Essex (2019), which stated that:

‘If planning policies can only protect and enhance undesignated valued landscapes if they have an identified quality in the development plan, this would prevent any new undesignated valued landscapes from being protected by planning policies. Valued Landscapes have only existed as a planning consideration since the first version of the NPPF in 2012. The majority of local planning authorities do not have an adopted post-2012 development plan, which might be expected to identify valued landscapes and their quality. Restricting valued landscapes to either statutorily designated landscapes or those identified in development plans would in practice very substantially reduce protection.’⁵

- 3.12 Several other organisations also consider landscapes and valued landscapes. For example, Natural England defines ‘landscape value’ in their ‘An approach to landscape character’ guidance⁶ (2014) as:

‘The relative value or importance attached to a landscape (often as a basis for designation or recognition), which expresses national or local consensus, because of its quality, special qualities, including perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness, cultural associations or other conservation issues’.

- 3.13 The Landscape Institute further defines landscape value in their ‘Assessing landscape value outside national designations’ (Technical Guidance Note 02/2021) as:

‘The relative value or importance attached to different landscapes by society on account of their landscape qualities’.⁷

- 3.14 Technical Guidance Note 02/2021 is clear that where value has been placed on a landscape by a local planning authority, this should be defined in a development plan document⁸, e.g. a local plan. Together, national policy and current best practice and guidance provide the basis from which policies and plans can be prepared to assist in recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

- 3.15 No part of Wokingham Borough is currently a nationally designated landscape: National Park or National Landscape. However, the Chilterns National Landscape closely abuts northern parts of

⁵ Paragraph 105, Secretary of State’s decision letter with respect to Land at north and to the south of Flitch Way, Pods Brook Road, Braintree, Essex, CM77 6RE, APPLICATION REF: 15/01538/OUT, PINS APP/Z1510/W/18/3197293, dated 13th June 2019.

⁶ Natural England (2014) *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment*, available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691184/landscape-character-assessment.pdf

⁷ Glossary, Landscape Institute, ‘Assessing landscape value outside national designations’ – Technical Guidance Note 02/2021

⁸ Paragraph 2.2.4, Landscape Institute, ‘Assessing landscape value outside national designations’ – Technical Guidance Note 02/2021

the borough and in 2013, the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB - the body with special responsibility for the AONB), submitted proposals to English Nature for a review of the boundaries. Given the proximity of the Chilterns National Landscape and the high quality and unspoilt rural nature of the landscapes on the chalklands to the north of the borough, it was inevitable that areas within Wokingham Borough were assessed by the CCB at that time. However, no review of the AONB boundaries was undertaken by Natural England at that time.

- 3.16 The Glover Review into the nation's designated landscapes was commissioned by Government in May 2018 and published in September 2019. Amongst other things, the 'Landscapes Review' recommended that Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be re-branded as 'National Landscapes'. The Review saw 'strong merit' in the re-designation of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB – now the Chilterns National Landscape) as a National Park. In addition, the Review found that amending the boundaries of the existing National Landscapes, like the Chilterns '*needs to work faster and better*' and that there should be a renewed vigour in the process for boundary changes.
- 3.17 The then government responded to the Glover Review in January 2022. Part of the government's response was to commission a review of the Chilterns National Landscape's boundaries.
- 3.18 The Chilterns Conservation Board has stated:

'In July 2021, Natural England announced a new programme for landscape designation, including considering a proposal to extend the Chilterns AONB. Natural England appointed specialist consultants to undertake the technical assessments for the Chilterns AONB boundary review at the end of 2022⁹. We are pleased to say that significant progress has been made on the project to date, including a recent stakeholder engagement event with local specialists. This informal engagement helped strengthen proposals in advance of the statutory and public consultation, currently scheduled for spring/summer 2024.'

- 3.19 A combination of the policy and guidance discussed above provides firm justification to assess local landscape designations when preparing the council's new local plan – the Local Plan Update. Indeed, it is clear that valued landscape remains an important policy in general terms and should be strategically assessed through the local plan-making process, and should also be addressed through day-to-day development management and planning enforcement decisions.

⁹ Chilterns National Landscape (2024) Chilterns AONB boundary review – project update, available at: <https://www.chilterns.org.uk/news/chilterns-aonb-boundary-review-project-update/>

4. Local policy context

- 4.1 The Wokingham District Local Plan (WDLP) was adopted in 2004. Although the plan has been superseded by more recent local plans, the WDLP provides some useful context for a number of technical matters, including landscape and landscape character.
- 4.2 The WDLP identified a number of local designations, including gaps and wedges, setting of settlements and 'areas of special landscape importance' (ASLI). Six ASLIs were identified in the WDLP, either based on existing designations set out in the Berkshire Structure Plan (2001) or new designations. The areas were: the Blackwater Valley, Farley Hill, Bearwood, Swallowfield/Beech Hill and Wargrave to Cookham (as shown in Figure 1 below).

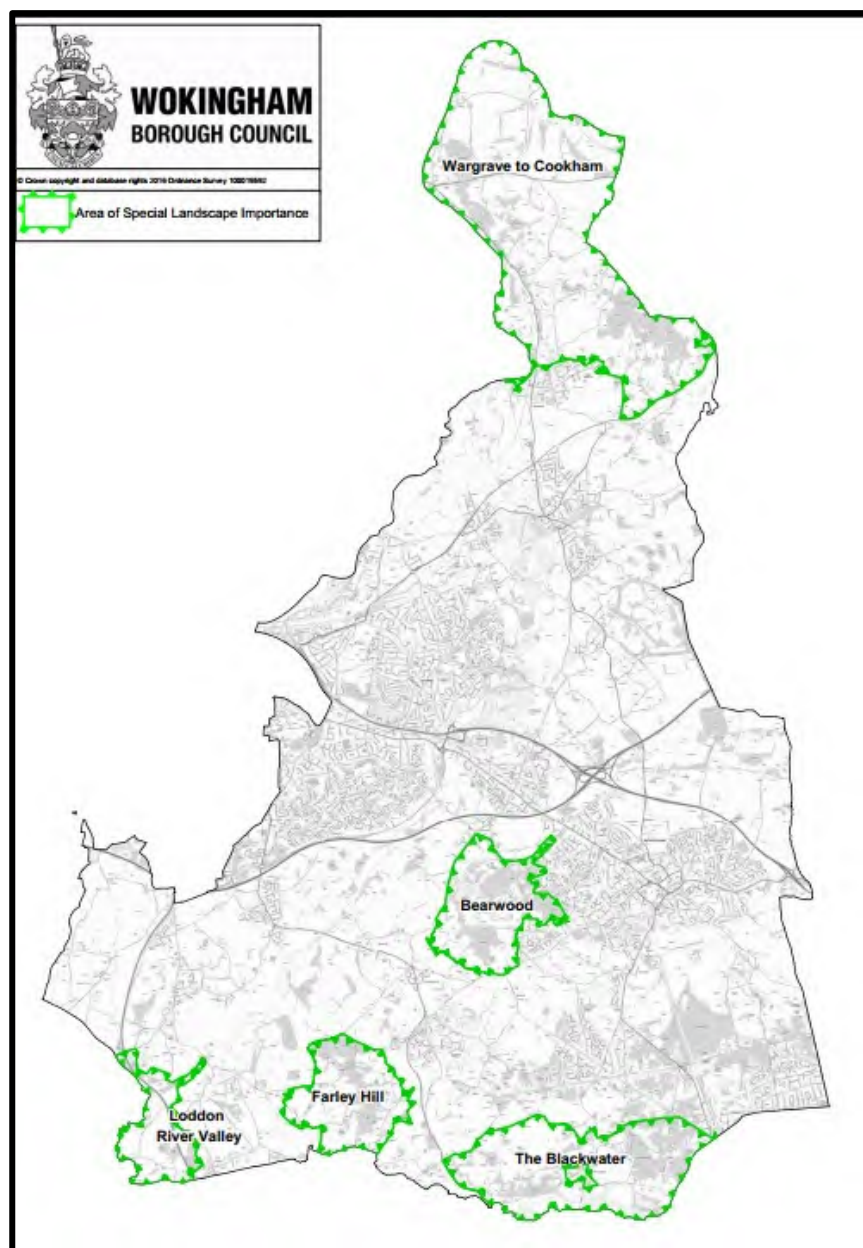


Figure 1: Map showing the extent of the Areas of Special Landscape Importance in the Wokingham District Local Plan

4.3 The objectives of the policy were to:

- Protect the ASLI from development that would detract from its rural character and special landscape qualities;
- Enhance the rural character and landscape qualities by encouraging appropriate management;
- Have regard to the effect of any development on the character and setting of land surrounding an ASLI; and
- Identify criteria for an ASLI based on national guidance and best practice published by the former Countryside Commission's Landscape Assessment Guidance (1993).

4.4 Policy WLL2: Areas of Special Landscape Importance of the WDLP stated that:

"Within the designated Areas of Special Landscape Importance, as defined on the Proposals Map; land uses or built development will not be permitted that would have a detrimental impact on the open, countryside character, or special landscape qualities of the area. This includes any development that results in the removal or erosion of landscape features, such as ponds, chalk outcrops, woodland, copses and hedgerows."

4.5 The WDLP also identified several 'gaps' and 'green wedges' to help maintain the important separation between settlements. These areas were mostly retained from previous adopted local plans, except where specific proposals in the WDLP required a change.

4.6 Policy WCC2: Green Wedges and Gaps stated that:

"Development will not be permitted within important open areas, defined as green wedges and gaps on the proposals map, that would threaten their essential function in the physical and visual separation of settlements that are close together."

4.7 The WDLP proposed several new designations, as well as proposing several amendments to existing boundaries designated in the Berkshire Structure Plan. The Planning Inspector examining the WDLP considered these proposed designations, and concluded (at paragraph 2.2) in his final report that:

"The Local Plan needs to make it clear why extra protection is necessary, and an evaluation should be carried out to establish the boundaries of each designation."

4.8 The Inspector recommended, in his report of January 2014, that the starting point for such an exercise should be a district-wide landscape assessment, based on a character approach, looking at the countryside as a whole and identifying the character of different areas.

4.9 The Inspector did not dispute the evidence presented by the council at that time, albeit he did conclude that the proposed local designations were *"carried forward from the adopted Local Plans on the basis of landscape surveys carried out several years ago and without any subsequent review"*. The Inspector recommended that the existing local designations were

retained, and the study immediately reviewed, along with a full review of the local designations so that assessments were based on more factual information.

- 4.10 The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004) was reviewed, with the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) containing more detailed evaluative information to provide greater understanding of key sensitivities and values. Both documents have informed the production of the narratives that sit behind each proposed valued landscape.

Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010)

- 4.11 The Wokingham Borough Core Strategy local plan (2010) proposed to carry forward Policy WCC2 of the WDLP, with an updated policy proposing additional protection for land that forms the countryside between settlements. The Inspector concluded (at paragraph 7.4) of their final report that:

“The local community and many representors are agreed that the protection of the local identity of the settlements in the Borough is a sound objective. Given the pattern of development that exists in the Borough, south of the green belt, where a number of settlements are close together, I recognise that some form of local designation to protect particularly sensitive area from development that leads to the coalescence of towns and villages may be appropriate. However, I share the concerns of some developers that the CS mechanism of a policy based on the detailed gaps as shown on the WDLP, carried forward into the new proposals map, is unduly restrictive.

- 4.12 The Inspector therefore deleted the draft policy along with the saved gaps on the proposals map. Nevertheless, the Inspector did recommend in the report (paragraph 7.6) that:

“the issue of identifying any other key gaps should be addressed as part of the Site Allocations DPD (the MDD local plan) when the justification for any gaps and the precise definition of boundaries could be re-examined with proper scrutiny.”

- 4.13 The Planning Inspectors examining both the WDLP and the Core Strategy did not rule out local landscape designations in future plan-making. It is also recognised that there has been a change in the local policy context and circumstances in the borough. For example, parts of the landscape have changed due to physical and cultural influences, including development (for example the Strategic Development Locations), agriculture practices, and other land-uses.

Adopted Local Planning Policy

- 4.14 The current development plan for Wokingham Borough includes the Core Strategy and the Managing Development Delivery (MDD) local plan (2014). Core Strategy Policy CP11 (Proposals outside Development Limits) affords protection to the separate identity of settlements and maintains the quality of the environment subject to certain criteria.

- 4.15 MDD Policy CC02 (Development Limits) complements policy in the Core Strategy and ensures that development proposed at the edge of settlements respects the transition between the built-up area and the open countryside by taking account of the character of the adjacent countryside and landscape.
- 4.16 MDD Policy TB21 (Landscape Character) also complements policy in the Core Strategy and ensures that proposals demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality, landscape strategy, landscape sensitivity and key issues. The policy also ensures that proposals retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.
- 4.17 MDD Policy TB26 (Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character) identifies specific areas or groups of buildings that are of a consistent period or character, and which reflect the area's past. These areas hold particular local value, recognised through their local listing as Areas of Special Character. Areas of Special Character have therefore been factored into the assessment, and they and their features are identified in the narratives (see **Appendix 3**).

Emerging Local Planning Policy

- 4.18 The council is preparing a new local plan – the Local Plan Update (LPU), that will guide sustainable development across the borough in the period to 2040. A series of public consultations have been undertaken to inform the LPU. A key stage was consultation on the Draft Plan (2020) for around 8 weeks from February to April 2020.¹⁰
- 4.19 The Draft Plan proposed a spatial strategy to meet development needs and a series of development management policies to guide future decisions on planning applications. Policy NE6 (Landscape Character, Value and Green Routes) set out the proposed policy approach to the protection and enhancement of landscape character across the borough. The policy proposed to designate 11 areas as 'valued landscapes'. This assessment builds upon this earlier work.
- 4.20 Development proposals in these valued landscapes are expected to protect and enhance the valued landscapes as a whole. The council takes this to include protecting and enhancing their character, quality, attributes and their interpretation. This policy approach reflects national planning policy and has been supported at planning appeals, where Planning Inspectors have recognised that planning policies may seek to protect specific areas for their local landscape value. This approach also seeks to ensure that where development is proposed, sensitive design and planning enhances important features or attributes that contribute to making a valued landscape.

¹⁰ Right Homes, Right Places - Draft Plan Consultation, February 2020, available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/emerging-local-plan-update/previous-consultations>

- 4.21 The approach to sensitive design and planning within a valued landscape was recognised by several Inspectors including one at Land at West Street, Coggeshall, Braintree¹¹, who concluded that paragraph 109 of the NPPF (2012) requirement to protect and enhance valued landscapes did not necessarily prohibit development, but rather it requires *'careful consideration to ensure that development protects and enhances what is valued'*.

¹¹ Land at West Street, Coggeshall, Braintree District, APP/Z1510/W/16/3160474, decision dated 12th July 2017, paragraph 45.

5. An Introduction to valued landscapes

- 5.1 Reference to ‘*protecting and enhancing valued landscapes*,’ in NPPF paragraph (180(a)) highlights a wider recognition of valued landscapes in the context of enhancing and preserving the natural environment. Natural England (2014) defines ‘landscape value’ as:

‘The relative value or importance attached to a landscape..... which expresses national or local consensus, because of its quality, special qualities including perceptual aspects, such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness, cultural associations or other conservation issues.’¹²

- 5.2 The Landscape Institute’s Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (Revision 3, 2013) provides a summary of the range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes. These factors are widely used when considering the value that can be attached to landscapes and are set out in Box 5.1 from the GLVIA below.

Box 5.1

Range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes

- **Landscape quality (condition):** A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.
- **Scenic quality:** The term used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the senses (primarily but not wholly the visual senses).
- **Rarity:** The presence of rare elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a rare Landscape Character Type.
- **Representativeness:** Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements which are considered particularly important examples.
- **Conservation interests:** The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest can add to the value of the landscape as well as having value in their own right.
- **Recreation value:** Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important.
- **Perceptual aspects:** A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notably wildness and/or tranquillity.
- **Associations:** Some landscapes are associated with particular people, such as artists or writers, or events in history that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of the area.

Based on Swanwick and Land Use Consultants (2002)

Figure 2: Range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes; Source: Box 5.1 of The Landscape Institute’s Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (Revision 3, 2013)

¹² Natural England (2014) An approach to Landscape Character Assessment, available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691184/landscape-character-assessment.pdf

5.3 The GLVIA refers to a sub-set of attributes that make up the higher-level set of ‘factors’ in Box 5.1: ‘elements’, ‘features’, ‘types’, ‘characters’ and even ‘evidence of experience’, other attributes are even less concrete, for example ‘wildness’, ‘tranquillity’, and ‘associations’ may be still harder to pin down. From the council’s perspective all of these can be pinned down to ‘attributes’ on the ground or sometimes a lack of something, for example, in the case of ‘tranquillity’, a lack of noise. Each ‘factor’ is evidenced by a set of ‘attributes’ of the kind discussed in many Inspectors appeal decisions.

5.4 As noted in Box 5.1, many factors are considered when assessing landscapes, and valued landscapes. Amongst other factors, which are referred to later in this assessment and covered in further detail in the accompanying narratives, landscapes can be valued for their culture, heritage, recreational value or conservation interests.

5.5 The NPPF sets out how the historic environment includes:

‘All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora¹³’.

5.6 Historic landscapes have been included in this assessment of features and attributes likely to raise the landscape above that of ordinary countryside and uses information from a variety of sources. This includes information from the East Berkshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Study (HLCS) for East Berkshire (2019). The East Berkshire HLC is a way of assessing and recording the historic character of the present landscape, which looks beyond archaeological features, historic buildings or ornamental landscapes to all parts of the landscape that have been affected by human interaction. Understanding the depth of history is an integral part of understanding a landscape and the features that contribute to its character and quality ¹⁴

5.7 Historic England’s ‘Guiding principles for Historic Landscape Characterisation’ recognises that landscape in an intensively occupied, used and experienced place like Britain is more about history than geography; that its most important characteristic is its time-depth, the appreciation that change and earlier landscapes exist in the present landscape¹⁵. The presence of cultural and historic features, such as listed buildings, field patterns, hedgerows and other features can also contribute in a positive way to appreciating the historical significance of a landscape. Such features can therefore give an area an important dimension of time-depth¹⁶.

¹³ National Planning Policy Framework (2024), Annex 2: Glossary, available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

¹⁴ Berkshire Archaeology (2019) East Berkshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC), available at:

https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/eastberks_hlc_2019/downloads.cfm

¹⁵ Historic England (2024) ‘Guiding principles for Historic Landscape Characterisation’, available at:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/methods/characterisation/historic-landscape-characterisation/#:~:text=Guiding%20principles%20for%20HLC&text=The%20value%20of%20habitats%2C%20communities,acknowledgement%20of%20their%20historical%20meaning.>

¹⁶ Land East of Knowle Lane, Cranleigh, Waverley Borough, APP/R3650/W/23/3326412, decision dated 22 January 2024, paragraph 29.

- 5.8 Hedgerows, ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees all contribute significantly to time-depth. Annex 2 in the NPPF (February 2024) defines ancient woodland as ‘*An area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD*’ and ancient and veteran trees as ‘*A tree which, because of its age, size and condition, is of exceptional biodiversity, cultural or heritage value*’. Indeed, as well as ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees, the government recognises the cultural heritage value of what it calls ‘long-established woodland’ – woodland present since at least 1893 - in its policy paper ‘*Keepers of time: ancient and native woodland and trees policy in England*’¹⁷. Such attributes have been factored into the assessment.
- 5.9 In addition, sites of value for nature conservation were included in the initial heat mapping when identifying ‘hotspot’ areas through the layering of multiple attributes (explained further in **Section 6**) and further build on the Wokingham Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) (2012-2024). The BAP outlines landscape-scale biodiversity and wildlife aspirations which are dependent on such landscape features as chalk soils that can form chalk grassland or low-lying waterlogged land that can create wet woodland. It is such landscape attributes as these upon which wildlife and biodiversity depend.
- 5.10 Locally valued landscapes also form part of the strategic approach in maintaining and enhancing the borough’s distinctive ecological network of habitats and communities; in supporting wider green infrastructure; and in planning for the enhancement of natural capital, (a key objective recognised in paragraph 180(b) of the NPPF). Known widely as ‘ecosystem services’, a landscape will provide key environmental products, and processes, for example: the hydrological systems including floodplains that perform a vital flood control function for the wider community¹⁸. Other products of ecosystem services in the landscape include helping to address and mitigate the impacts of climate change; and encouraging healthy and active lifestyles. Ecosystem services are often the result of the interaction of human and natural systems, and the way in which environments are designed and managed¹⁹. This concept has been considered and factored into the assessment.

Case law and planning appeal decisions: Plan-making

- 5.11 Further to the range of factors touched upon in Box 5.1 above, planning appeal decisions and court rulings/judgements can shed further light on how to interpret national policy and guidance, some of which are highlighted below. A systematic approach to assessing valued landscapes, based on the factors set out in GLVIA Box 5.1, has been supported by Inspectors at planning appeals and in the High Court.
- 5.12 Mr Justice Ouseley, in *Stroud v SoSCLG*²⁰, has said that a valued landscape would be required to have:

¹⁷ Keepers of time: ancient and native woodland and trees policy in England, Published 27 May 2022, HM Government.

¹⁸ Landscape Institute (2021) ‘Assessing landscape value outside national designations’ – Technical Guidance Note

¹⁹ Landscape Institute (2016) Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 02/2016 – Ecosystem Services, available at: https://landscapewpstorage01.blob.core.windows.net/www-landscapeinstitute-org/2016/03/Ecosystem-Services-TIN-2_16.pdf

²⁰ [2015] EWHC 488 (Admin) paragraph 16.

‘...demonstrable physical attributes which would take this site beyond mere countryside, if I can put it that way, but into something below that which was designated’.

- 5.13 A valued landscape, therefore, does not have to be designated but it must demonstrate attributes or features that take it above the ordinary, rather than just its popularity. This conclusion is supported in a number of appeal decisions, notably the Inspector’s decision letter following a hearing for land at Peasdale Hill Field, Market Harborough (2024)²¹, which stated:

*‘.....Whether an area is ‘valued landscape’ is a matter of planning judgement. A consideration is whether the landscape has any physical qualities that take it out of the ordinary, however, it is not necessary for a landscape to be nationally or locally designated to be a ‘valued landscape’.*²²

- 5.14 Further, the decision letter following a public inquiry at Aylesbury Road, Wendover (2017)²³ states:

‘... The small site itself may not exhibit any of the demonstrable physical features but as long as it forms an integral part of a wider ‘valued landscape’ I consider that it would deserve protection under the auspices of paragraph 109 of the Framework. To require the small site itself to demonstrate the physical features in order to qualify as a valued landscape seems to me to be a formulaic, literal approach to the interpretation of the question and an approach which could lead to anomalies. It could lead to individual parcels of land being examined for physical characteristics deterministic of value.’

- 5.15 The Wendover appeal decision also gave valuable guidance on how to address the issue of the character, quality and extent of a given ‘landscape’ in the context of plan making:

*‘Further I do not accept that the Stroud case is authority for the proposition that one must only look to the site itself in seeking to identify demonstrable physical characteristics. In examining matters Mr Justice Ouseley confirmed that the Inspector was entitled to come to certain judgments about the factors and evidence in relation to matters outside the confines of the site itself. When assessing what constitutes a valued landscape I consider it more important to examine the bigger picture in terms of the value of the site and its surroundings. That is not to borrow the features of the adjoining land but to assess the site in situ as an integral part of the surrounding land rather than divorcing it from its surroundings and then to conduct an examination of its value’.*²⁴

²¹ Land at Peasdale Hill Field, Middleton, Market Harborough, APP/U2805/W/21/3275791, decision dated 22nd January 2024, paragraph 28

²² Land at Peasdale Hill Field, Middleton, Market Harborough, APP/U2805/W/21/3275791, decision dated 22nd January 2024, paragraph 28

²³ Land north of Aylesbury Road, Wendover, Buckinghamshire, APP/J0405/W/16/3158833, decision dated 9th October 2017, paragraph 65. Note this planning appeal was decided upon an earlier version of the National Planning Policy Framework.

²⁴ Land north of Aylesbury Road, Wendover, Buckinghamshire, APP/J0405/W/16/3158833, decision dated 9th October 2017, paragraph 65

- 5.16 The importance of identifying and assessing the area is supported in the same paragraph of the Wendover appeal where the Inspector stated:

'In coming to a view as to whether or not a site falls to be classed as a valued landscape within the terms of the Framework, it seems to me that one first has to consider the extent of the land which makes up the landscape under consideration before examining whether or not there are features which make it valued'.²⁵

- 5.17 The particular importance that local people place on the landscape and their affiliation to local areas is an important reason for carrying out a strategic valued landscape assessment of the borough. Through this process, this assessment will help preserve and enhance the best of the borough's landscapes, in a sustainable way for the benefit of all.

- 5.18 Importantly, valued landscapes are particular and special to each locality. They will vary widely across the nation. It is therefore not possible to set a national standard for valued landscapes and each case must be considered on its merits. Importantly what is considered valued landscape in one borough or district may not make the grade in another. In the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note on this matter it states:

'The character and quality of landscapes across England are variable and what may be defined as reaching the 'valued landscape' threshold/criteria in one part of the Country may be considered to be an 'everyday landscape' in another.'²⁶

- 5.19 Whilst the borough has a wealth of strong landscapes with many fine and fascinating attributes, there are attributes with particular resonances for local culture and subtleties that can only be understood in the context of local landscapes in and around the borough. This concept too has been considered and factored into the assessment.

²⁵ Land north of Aylesbury Road, Wendover, Buckinghamshire, APP/J0405/W/16/3158833, decision dated 9th October 2017, paragraph 65

²⁶ Landscape Institute (2021) 'Assessing landscape value outside national designations' – Technical Guidance Note

Case law and planning appeal decisions: Decision-taking

- 5.20 As referred to in Section 3, paragraph 180 of the NPPF requires planning policies and decisions to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, and to protect and enhance valued landscapes. In addition, paragraph 84 supports development of isolated homes in the countryside, provided they meet one or more of the following circumstances in (a) to (e), where (e) is related to a design being of exceptional quality.
- 5.21 A design that would meet the 'exceptional quality' requirement, under paragraph 84(e), for isolated homes in the 'mere' countryside, therefore, has to be, 'truly outstanding'. In addition, it should reflect the 'highest standards' of design and act as an exemplar for design in rural areas. Further, design of 'exceptional quality' must 'significantly enhance its immediate setting' and be 'sensitive' to the characteristics that define the local area. How much more so than for an isolated home in a valued landscape.
- 5.22 It seems that the requirement in paragraph 84(e) comes close to reflecting, but is less than, that applied to development in a valued landscape. The requirement in paragraph 180(a) of the NPPF relating to valued landscape, requires development to 'protect and enhance' (emphasis added) (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan). This requirement therefore sets a higher bar in decision-taking than policy relating to development in 'mere countryside' (as covered by paragraphs 84 and 180(b) of the NPPF that requires development to 'contribute to and enhance').
- 5.23 Examples of true paragraph 84(e) exceptions are rare, most of those cited appear to have been previously developed sites of some description, a trend that is likely to continue. Notwithstanding this, paragraph 84(e) does provide justification that development can occur, provided it can be demonstrated that the proposal would protect and enhance the valued landscape through sensitive planning and design.
- 5.24 Famously, planning permission for a new three-bedroom dwelling built in the form of a medieval castle at Castell Gyrn, Denbighshire, was initially refused but won at appeal following intervention from Clough Williams Ellis and others. The dwelling, in what is now the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape (designated 1985), was designed as his own home by architect John Taylor of Chapman Taylor architects. Construction took 17 years, from 1977 to 1994.
- 5.25 Interestingly, there have been a number of significant changes to the development since the death of the architect in 1998 (Planning applications include for: single and two-storey extensions, a family spa, a four-bay garage, a swimming pool, and most recently, a manège). As might be expected, responses to these applications by the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee have varied on a case-by-case basis. The original three-bed dwelling of forty-seven years ago has six bedrooms. This is a good example of how a development in a previously undeveloped landscape can act as a magnet or focus for further development. Cumulative impacts can be a material consideration in the determination of

planning applications and should be carefully considered in light of the Valued Landscape Assessment.

- 5.26 A more recent planning application related to paragraph 84(e) of the December 2023 NPPF - at Land adjoining Pentire House, The Leas, Kingsdown, Dover, CT14 8ER²⁷ – that was allowed at appeal in July 2017 (hence the reference to the ‘paragraph 55’ in the original, 2012, NPPF). The Statement of Common Ground confirmed agreement that the energy efficiency measures proposed were ‘outstanding’. The contested issues were whether the proposal significantly enhanced the immediate setting and whether it was ‘sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area’.

- 5.27 The main issue, as identified by the Inspector, was:

‘The extent of compliance with the fourth bullet point of paragraph 55²⁸ of the National Planning Policy Framework and in particular the requirement to ‘significantly enhance its immediate setting’ and ‘be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area’, having regard to the site location within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Heritage Coast.’

- 5.28 Discussing paragraph 55 compliance in paragraph 12, the Inspector stated:

‘Paragraph 55 requires that local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as are listed in the four bullets points. The fourth is the only relevant one to this proposal and this requires an exceptional quality or innovative nature of design of the dwelling. The passage continues; such a design should; be truly outstanding or innovative, helping to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; reflect the highest standards in architecture; significantly enhance its immediate setting; and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.’

- 5.29 In this paragraph, the Inspector highlighted the need for truly outstanding or innovative design, helping to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas and significantly enhancing the immediate setting.

- 5.30 Turning to immediately place more emphasis on sustainability than on aesthetics, in paragraph 13, the Inspector stated:

‘The Statement of Common Ground confirms agreement as to the outstanding qualities of the energy efficiency measures and that the matters of whether the proposals significantly enhance the immediate setting and are sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area are the main areas of disagreement. Nevertheless, since the application is before the Secretary of State as if made to him in the first instance, it is necessary to consider those matters of agreement in addition.’

²⁷ APP/X2220/W/16/3158585, Land adjoining Pentire House, The Leas, Kingsdown CT14 8ER, decision of Inspector S J Papworth DipArch(Glos) RIBA.

²⁸ National Planning Policy Framework, (March 2012), Department for Communities and Local Government

- 5.31 Discussing matters of design, primarily from the perspective of the architect's client, and then from the perspective of the designated landscape, the Inspector noted, in paragraph 14:

'The appellant gave a presentation of the design process and ethos for the building and its site treatment, and it is clear that the project has been designed in a thorough and highly competent way. The requirements of the client have, quite rightly, been at the forefront of the arrangement of spaces and their location on the site together with their orientation to take account of views and sunlight at any particular time of day. To those functional requirements has been overlaid consideration of the constraints of the site and its surroundings, the public viewpoints around the site and the technical requirements of the house's intended environmental and ecological credentials.'

- 5.32 It seems clear from this, that the focus of the Inspector in this part of his decision letter was on the architecture first and on the landscape only after the functional requirements of the architecture, from the client's perspective, had been addressed.

- 5.33 Importantly, the Inspector, in discussing the need to be 'truly outstanding or innovative' in paragraph 18, stated:

'These two limbs are stated as alternatives, and it was agreed at the hearing that innovation is of necessity a moving target; what was innovative at one could become a mainstream expectation sometime later.'

- 5.34 Further in paragraph 18, the Inspector highlight:

'The use of the chalk roof appears innovative in combining a technical function of heat retention outside the insulation with a visual link to the underlying rock and its outcrop on the cliff-face.'

- 5.35 Again, in paragraph 18 of his decision, the Inspector states:

'The appearance of the building and its landscaping would be outstanding in its use of materials and response to the topography and orientation, being a freeflowing sculptural form that is elevated where desirable for the internal functions and outward views, and low where those considerations do not apply and a more immediate link with its garden is appropriate. The plan form and sectional shape combine to present an exciting but restrained form, punctuated where required by openings and enlivened by the articulation along the north facing walls.'

- 5.36 Concluding paragraph 18, the Inspector states:

'Taking full account of the information provided and enlarged upon at the Hearing, it is concluded that this part of the requirement is met and that in fact there are sufficient aspects of the overall scheme that are both outstanding and innovative'

- 5.37 One difficulty with innovative work is that it is sometimes so cutting-edge, that it is in practice not always implementable. In this case, an application to vary the condition relating to the chalk roof structure was received in November 2020. The reason given for the application to vary the condition regarding the roof was:

‘Design loadings for previous roof finish too heavy and technical issues with chalk slurry causing malfunction of rainwater harvesting system’

- 5.38 Even where it appears very likely that very high standards will be met, and a building will be truly outstanding, planners and planning committees should be cautious. The sad and salutary tale of Hamilton Palace in Sussex stands as a warning, especially against particularly grandiose schemes.
- 5.39 Planning permission for Hamilton Palace, a new mansion, reportedly designed to be larger than Buckingham Palace, was approved in the early 1980s with construction commencing in 1985. Visible from various viewpoints, including the South Downs National Park, the building remains unfinished having the appearance of a derelict ruin but without the picturesque qualities of an ancient ruin.
- 5.40 As with National Landscapes and National Parks, where the prime purpose of these designations is to protect and enhance the natural beauty of the area, the impacts of development on valued landscapes must be carefully scrutinised, in the light of the Valued Landscape Assessment. Each case should be considered on its merits with care to take into account all relevant issues including the following: cumulative impacts, whether claimed innovations are likely to be achievable, whether a project can or will be built and the likely impacts of permitted development.

Summary

- 5.41 The council has, through this process, identified by hotspot analysis and other means, defined many of the attributes, and determined the extents of the thirteen largest valued landscapes in the borough. In line with the NPPF, the council seeks through this study, through policy, and through the judgement of planning and enforcement officers (informed and supported by specialist officers), to protect and enhance such landscapes and any other such smaller landscapes whose attributes indicate that they are worthy of such special protection under paragraph 180 of the NPPF. In doing so, the council will seek to be convinced that proposals will be limited to that proposed and not grow out of proportion, will be achievable (particularly where relying on arguments over innovation) and will not be either so grandiose as to dominate the landscape or so large a project as to be unachievable.

6. Assessment methodology

- 6.1 This chapter sets out the methodology used to identify and assess areas of valued landscapes within the borough. This comprehensive methodology takes account of both quantitative and qualitative data that together help to inform the process. Whilst the Valued Landscape Topic Paper (2020) predated the Landscape Institute's 'Assessing landscape value outside national designations' – Technical Guidance Note (2021), the Valued Landscape Assessment has had regard to current best practice and guidance and has been informed by numerous planning appeal decisions. A four-step process has assisted in identifying, describing and delineating the boundaries of areas of valued landscape. The approach has included a review of existing assessments, policies, strategies, guidelines and recent surveys and analysis. These were recognised by Inspectors²⁹ and the Landscape Institute³⁰ as key elements to consider when undertaking an assessment of landscape in undesignated areas to determine its landscape value. The process also draws on the knowledge and experience of officers, whilst noting that ultimately, determining whether an area is a 'valued landscape' is to some extent a matter of planning judgement.³¹
- 6.2 The assessment process was iterative and rigorous, though it was centred largely on available information at the time of publication and therefore is likely to be subject to change as our knowledge and understanding of the landscape evolves. Indeed, our understanding of the value of some attributes has been enhanced by original research work undertaken in the field and in the archives, for example at recent planning appeals.
- 6.3 It is clear, therefore, that no assessment of the value of a landscape can be full and final. It is not possible to know the complete history of a landscape, understand all the ecology, comprehend the full range of land uses, or comprehensively interpret and assess the sum of all the parts. As well as this, the way in which landscapes are valued is a dynamic process that can change over time³². New methods are becoming available as our understanding and experience in evaluating landscapes continues to grow. For example, the development of the concept and design of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and their place in valued landscapes. Another example is the development of archaeological techniques that allow assessments to be carried out effectively, over the landscape scale.
- 6.4 Other changes that can impact valued landscapes positively or negatively include new infrastructure; cultural changes; and ecological enhancements. This is not new; in recent years the ancient woodland inventory has been updated to include woodlands smaller than two hectares. This was because of advances in GIS technology and a drive by council officers in partnership with government bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGO) to protect such sites. In addition, the current review of boundaries in the Chilterns National Landscape

²⁹ Land East of Knowle Lane, Cranleigh, Waverley Borough, APP/R3650/W/23/3326412, decision dated 22 January 2024, paragraph 18.

³⁰ Landscape Institute (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (GLVIA3)

³¹ Land at Peasdale Hill Field, Middleton, Market Harborough, APP/U2805/W/21/3275791, decision dated 22nd January 2024, paragraph 28

³² Land East of Knowle Lane, Cranleigh, Waverley Borough, APP/R3650/W/23/3326412, decision dated 22 January 2024, paragraph 27.

highlights the need for thinking to evolve around the discovery, assessment and designation of landscape.

- 6.5 Additionally, valued landscape areas can be affected by processes and activities outside the planning system, such as lawful changes in agricultural activities and practices. In some instances, a new valued landscape that is not currently designated in the LPU may also be discovered separately through the planning appeal process (either inside or outside the borough).
- 6.6 Finally, some small hotspots in the analysis have not been included because they are currently seen as being too small and too isolated from the main extent of the thirteen valued landscapes identified in this assessment. It may be that future research identifies them as valued landscapes in the same way as occurred at the Foxley Lane appeal site.
- 6.7 As the understanding and value of landscapes is a dynamic process that can change over time, where a new valued landscape has been identified, it will be considered on its merits until it can be part of a review of the borough's valued landscapes through a future local plan process.
- 6.8 The following diagram shows the assessment methodology for valued landscapes.

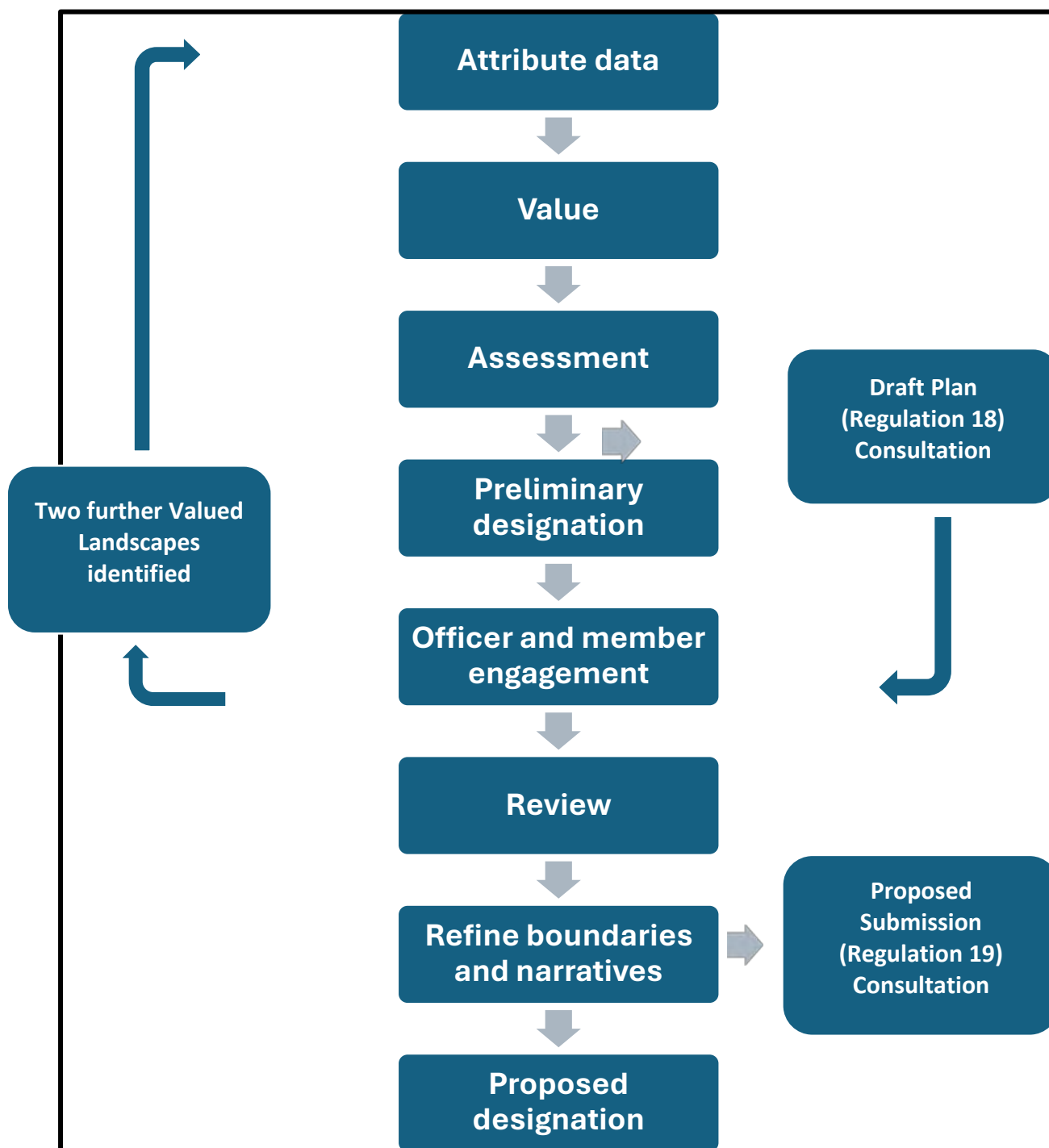


Figure 3: Valued Landscape assessment methodology

Step 1: Attribute data

- 6.9 The first step for the assessment was to digitally layer maps showing the ‘demonstrable physical attributes’ referred to by Mr Justice Ouseley³³. This was achieved by layering maps of ‘attributes’ over one another and adding a narrow buffer zone to show the influence such attributes carry across the landscape and how they influence neighbouring spaces through short, medium and longer distance impacts.
- 6.10 The aim of this process was to build an initial heat map showing the sum of those factors and attributes, highlighting the spatial distribution of highly valued landscape areas across the borough which would form the basis for a more in-depth assessment by officers to work out the extent and character of each valued landscape. This builds on the statement of the Inspector in the Aylesbury Road, Wendover appeal inquiry, who concluded it was important to determine the extent of the landscape before deciding on whether it is a valued landscape.
- 6.11 Referring to the Nanpantan Road appeal³⁴, the Inspector in the Aylesbury Road, Wendover decision further draws attention to the relationship between people and place and its importance in defining and refining the concept of ‘landscape’ as opposed to ‘land’:

‘To my mind the term ‘landscape’ denotes an area somewhat wider than the appeal site in this case. In this regard I note the reference of my colleague in the Loughborough appeal to the GLVIA definition of landscape as ‘an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors’. I endorse the view that ‘it is about the relationship between people and place, and perceptions turn land into the concept of landscape’³⁵

- 6.12 This speaks to the importance of the local plan process and the need to consult the public. It is clear, from Mr Justice Ouseley’s judgement³⁶, that not all land ‘valued’ by the public is ‘valued landscape’. However, from both the Nanpantan Road and Aylesbury Road appeal decisions it is noticeable that the relationship between people and place is important in understanding the role and function of landscape. In this light, the assessment and review of the character and extent of areas identified by the valued landscape assessment are informed by previous consultation stages on the local plan, as well as cross-boundary discussions and through on-site assessment.

³³ [2015] EWHC 488 (Admin) paragraph 16.

³⁴ Land South of Nanpantan Road, Loughborough, APP/X2410/W/15/3028159 and APP/X2410/W/15/3028161, decision dated 16th January 2017

³⁵ Land north of Aylesbury Road, Wendover, Buckinghamshire, APP/J0405/W/16/3158833, Paragraph 67, decision dated 9th October 2017

³⁶ [2015] EWHC 488 (Admin) paragraph 9.

Step 2: Value data

- 6.13 The Attributes Table in Appendix 1 sets out the data used to inform the digital layering process to build a high-level heat-map of the whole borough which mapped grid squares of 25m x 25m. The features and attributes included in this table were drawn from a wide range of datasets, including European, national and local nature and heritage conservation designations. Other datasets were drawn from specialist research. Notably, the colour coded tranquillity mapping³⁷ and the dark skies mapping³⁸ from studies produced by CPRE, which have provided the basis for the tranquillity and night light scoring. The scoring system was drawn up by a selection of officers with skill sets covering landscape architecture, trees, ecology and cultural heritage. The scoring was balanced to reflect the relative importance and comparability of each 'attribute' across and within the various 'factors' (**Appendix 1**). The scoring was weighted by attribute, with the highest score of 1, and the lowest score of 0.
- 6.14 Amongst other attributes, key attributes that are present in most of the identified valued landscapes are long linear features. For example: main rivers and other watercourses, historic straight rides, national trails, and the Second World War General Headquarters (GHQ) stop line (blue). The research into this feature was undertaken as part of unfolding valued landscape discussions in planning appeals. Further detail on the long linear features and their contribution to the valued landscape is contained in the narratives, with a brief summary provided below.
- 6.15 A number of roads and public rights of way, running through the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape are laid out over earlier historic straight rides designed to allow royalty to follow the stag hounds by carriage as they hunted in the Royal Forest of Windsor. Parts of this landscape are deeply rural but in other areas low-density residential development lines the 'straight rides'. Homes are mostly set back from the road, characterised by substantial front gardens, with attractive landscaping of mature trees, hedges and shrubs. The depth of woodland flanking the straight rides in more rural areas has been noted by Inspectors in planning appeals and is discussed later.
- 6.16 Another striking feature of the borough's parkland landscapes is the tree-lined Wellingtonia Avenues, of which there are four excellent examples remaining at: Wellingtonia Avenue, Finchampstead; Yeldall Manor, Wargrave; Bearwood House (the site of Reddam House School), Sindlesham; and lining a private road to the site of a former mansion at Wellington Court, Spencers Wood.
- 6.17 The General Headquarters (GHQ) Stop Line is another long linear feature that is present in the borough's landscape. The stop line was a series of defences-in-depth designed to protect London and the industrial heart of the Midlands, in the event of an invasion, during the Second World War. The Stop Line, built in the summer of 1940, used the topography and physical geography of the landscape to create a strategic advantage by means of static defence.

³⁷ Based on Tranquillity mapping for CPRE by Northumbria University. cf Tranquillity Mapping: Developing a Robust Methodology for Planning Support Technical Report on Research in England, January 2008 (revised)

³⁸ Based on Campaign to Protect Rural England dark skies analysis. cf Night Blight – mapping England's night pollution and dark skies, CPRE, June 2016

Designed to slow and alter the direction of an attack, the Stop Line was in fact an ‘anti-invasion landscape’. It was a literal last-ditch defence composed of: high ground with observation posts and artillery; rivers and flooded river valleys; tank ditches and concrete pillboxes; ‘dragon’s teeth’ and ‘hedgehogs’. All these features and attributes were deployed in depth across a deep swathe of countryside, and many remain in the landscape as reminders of Britain’s “finest hour”³⁹.

- 6.18 In Wokingham Borough, it was the south-western landscapes of the borough that were chosen as the location for the GHQ Stop Line. This was because of the location lying to the south of Reading, and due to the strong natural defensive features, for example: the high clay ridge at Spencer’s Wood; the Foudry Brook and the rivers Loddon, Broadwater and Whitewater.
- 6.19 The value of such landscapes was recognised by Professor Holmes (Professor of military history and formerly the senior officer in the Territorial Army) who noted that the attributes remaining from the Stop Line give a ‘*wonderful snapshot of the physical framework for a battle that happily never took place*’ but more importantly, that ‘*our landscape is indeed given added meaning by these defences*’⁴⁰.
- 6.20 Some areas identified in the methodology are not highlighted by the heat map, including, associations, woodland in depth and SANG but are now considered to be attributes which raise the landscape above that of mere countryside and therefore have a strong affinity with the attributes highlighted in Box 5.1 and Appendix 1.
- 6.21 ‘Associations’, in the context of valued landscapes, are the connection of a particular landscape with a person or work of note, contributing to perceptions and the understanding of the character, quality and appearance of that landscape. This was recognised in Table 1 of the Landscape Institute’s Technical Guidance Note 02/2021 titled ‘*Assessing landscape value outside national designations*’, where a range of factors have been identified for consideration in an assessment of landscape value⁴¹. The guidance notes that associations with pieces of well-known literature, poetry, art, television, film and music, or with a particular famous person or influential figure can contribute to our perceptions of the landscape. Many associations were recognised in the narratives accompanying the initial assessment in 2020.
- 6.22 The concept of ‘associations’ was cited by the Inspector in the Land South of Westleaze, Charminster appeal decision⁴² (dated 13th December 2019), who concluded that a development proposal would cause potential harm to a Grade II listed manor house and the surrounding landscape associated with an English novelist. The Inspector in his decision letter stated the following:

‘For some 350 years the Trenchards, a family with a history of landownership and political influence in Dorset, owned Wolfeton House. One member of the Trenchard family is

³⁹ Quote from a speech delivered by [Winston Churchill](#) to the [House of Commons of the United Kingdom](#) on 18 June 1940

⁴⁰ 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

⁴¹ Landscape Institute (2021) ‘Assessing landscape value outside national designations’ – Technical Guidance Note, Table 1

⁴² Land South of Westleaze, Charminster, Dorset, APP/D1265/W/18/3206269, decision dated 19th December 2019

purportedly the character upon which Thomas Hardy's Mayor of Casterbridge is based, this association creates communal interest in the House for those with an interest in Hardy's literature as evident from the representations of the Thomas Hardy Society. Moreover, that interest is one for which being able to appreciate how the environment might have felt for that character at that point in time is of relevance and brings a social and literary aspect to significance of the asset and its setting.'

- 6.23 Furthermore, within the council's neighbouring authority of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, the consideration of historic associations with Sir Stanley Spencer was cited by an Inspector in the Stable Cottage, Poundfield Lane, Cookham appeal decision (dated 15th May 2019). The application site was also situated within the Cookham Conservation Area and the Inspector concluded that:

'The character and appearance of this western part of the CA is quite distinct and the areas of open space, undeveloped land and generally rural feel, are key features. There are strong associations between the CA and the English painter, Sir Stanley Spencer (Spencer), who lived in Cookham for much of his life. Spencer set many of his works in the village and its surroundings, including the painting titled Poundfield (1935), which depicts, albeit in a somewhat idealised way, a view towards the appeal site and the setting of Englefield House.'

- 6.24 In assessing the potential harm caused by a development proposal to the Cookham Conservation Area, the Inspector concluded in his report that:

'In terms of the magnitude of the harm to the CA, I assess that it would not breach the 'substantial harm' threshold set out in the Framework. However, whilst it would amount to 'less than substantial harm', it would not be insignificant. In reaching that view, I have given appropriate weight to the Village Design Statement and its guidance, which specifically identifies the importance of this open area and its cultural heritage associated with the paintings of Spencer. Introducing built form, even limited to one dwelling, into this part of the CA would cause harm and, if permitted, would denude the identified special qualities of this part of the CA and its cultural significance.'

- 6.25 The Box 5.1 factor of 'Associations' is discussed in the text of each valued landscape narrative, and those 'attributes' that are currently known are described (see **Appendix 3**).
- 6.26 Woodland is clearly identified as an attribute where it holds conservation value. For example, irreplaceable habitats, such as ancient woodland, in the NPPF, holds wildlife and cultural heritage value. In addition, other woodlands such as broadleaved woodland, are identified as a priority habitat by Natural England. Both these designations of woodland are clearly 'attributes' of the landscape. Woodland also has amenity value that is not currently recognised by any formal designation. This amenity value has been recognised in several planning appeal inquiries, particularly development proposals in the area identified as the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape.

- 6.27 The contribution that this ‘woodland in depth’ makes to the borough’s landscape was recognised by the Inspector conducting a planning appeal for Land at Pineridge Caravan Park, Nine Mile Ride and Land at New Acres, Nine Mile Ride⁴³. In their decision, the Inspector agreed with the appeal decision on the adjacent land at Pineridge Caravan Park, which was dismissed in February 2015. The Inspector acknowledged, in paragraph 181, that:

“The Inspector for the 22 pitch site, pointed to the depth of woodland blocks strengthening the remote woodland character of the area and sense of enclosure in this location. She noted that the assessed landscape character was associated with a very strong sense of place and distinctive pattern of elements. She found that the 22 pitch site would fail to reinforce the linear pattern of development along the Nine Mile Ride because of its position set well back from the Ride and the depth and shape of the site. She considered that it would consolidate the in-depth, atypical settlement form of the adjacent mobile homes parks, and, consequently, cause harm to landscape character.”

- 6.28 In the Pineridge and New Acres appeal decision, the Inspector highlighted distinctions between that site and the appeal site, paragraph 181:

“Nevertheless, I believe that similar considerations apply to the appeal sites in terms of the consolidation of the in-depth, atypical form of the adjacent lawful mobile home parks. Although the caravans are low in height, they have relatively little space between them and, together with associated residential paraphernalia, serve to accentuate the intrusion of urban and domestic elements into the countryside”

- 6.29 Features of woodland in depth, from the occasional wooded gaps between areas of settlement to larger areas of forestry or former forestry, contribute to the character, quality and value of the borough’s landscape, mostly notably in the area identified as the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape.

- 6.30 SANG is the name given to green space that is of a quality and type suitable as an alternative for the enjoyment of, mainly, dog-walkers that would otherwise disturb the sensitive habitats of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). According to Natural England’s ‘Guidelines for creation of SANG’ (August 2021) SANGs may be created from existing open space with no existing public access or limited public access, existing open space which is already accessible, but could be changed in character to make it more attractive to the specific group of visitors, or land which is in another use that could be converted to SANG⁴⁴.

- 6.31 Generally, where SANG falls within or on the edge of a valued landscape it has been included within the boundary of the valued landscape. Whilst SANGs are often newly created landscapes, much planning and effort has been made to ensure they are attractive and have high recreational, aesthetic and wildlife conservation value. This value will increase as such sites mature. The Natural England guidance on SANGs creation states:

⁴³ Land at Pineridge Caravan Park Nine Mile Ride, Wokingham (APP/X0360/C/15/3141001) and Land at New Acres, Nine Mile Ride, Wokingham (APP/X0360/C/15/3141000), decisions dated 19th July 2017

⁴⁴ Natural England (2021) Guidelines for Creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) – August 2021, page 1

'The effectiveness of SANGS as mitigation will depend upon the location and design. These must be such that the SANGS is more attractive than the SPA to users of the kind that currently visit the SPA.'

- 6.32 To be effective SANGs should have features that make them more desirable for dog-walkers than the SPAs, (principally the Thames Basin Heaths). It is these designed-in or borrowed landscape features that set SANGs above 'mere countryside'. There may be some exceptions (for example some of the early 'spaghetti SANGs' with highly contrived and convoluted footpaths) but, in general SANGs have been included within valued landscapes.

National policy designations

- 6.33 It was decided that some designations and policy constraints should not be included as a factor as part of this methodology. For example, the Green Belt was not included because it is not an indicator of landscape quality but a planning designation which seeks to check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas and to safeguard the countryside against encroachment.
- 6.34 Whilst the relative weighting given to each attribute, (scores out of one), was a matter of professional judgement, it is important to note that the initial heat mapping of the borough was a qualitative exercise designed to highlight hot spots for further consideration, not a quantitative exercise to attribute a numerical score to each grid square.
- 6.35 The attributes could then be displayed based on two calculations, one based on the sum score, and one based on the average. The sum score was considered the most robust approach as it closely reflects the Box 5.1 assessment of landscape, and the concept that landscape is itself not an average of its parts, but a sum of its parts. The requirement in paragraph 180 of the NPPF is to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscape and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. But in any case, the thrust of plan-making and decision-taking is to plan, design and build out negative or detractive elements in the landscape adding to the quality and character of the landscape not averaging it out. Indeed, the environmental objective, one of only three overarching objectives of the NPPF is 'to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment'⁴⁵.

Step 3: Assessment

- 6.36 The third step of the process was to consider how to display the data, in order to interrogate it in more detail and thereby determine which areas of the borough were sufficiently attribute-rich to warrant further investigation.
- 6.37 At a national level, 9.3% of land in England is designated as a National Park and 15% as National Landscape (formerly AONB). In addition, there are other designations such as UNESCO World Heritage Sites - cultural landscapes of international importance. Therefore, whilst some of

⁴⁵ NPPF (December 2023) §8(c)

these designations overlap, just over 25% of the landscape in England is designated at a national level. When considering this in the context of the borough, areas that fell wholly within the highest scoring 25% of landscape in the borough were identified. This exercise highlighted those areas of landscape that displayed the highest number of features and attributes of valued landscape importance.

- 6.38 This process was carried out in order to examine ‘*the bigger picture in terms of the value of the site and its surroundings*’ per the Wendover appeal, which led on determining the character, quality and extent of the surrounding landscape. The process effectively narrowed down the assessment to the highest performing quartile of countryside landscapes in the borough.
- 6.39 The filtering out of parts of the countryside also meant the rejection of some areas of potentially valued landscape, for example sites that were perhaps too small to be considered a ‘landscape’ for the purposes of this exercise⁴⁶, or sites that were too urban in nature, for example some of the Sites of Urban Landscape Value. The latter are addressed under a separate policy designation and are the subject of a separate assessment⁴⁷. Notwithstanding this, some Conservation Areas are included in the valued landscape areas, especially where they represent small rural villages, for example Remenham Henley Bridge and Remenham Church.
- 6.40 This stage also identified each of the potential valued landscapes. This involved examination of the data, and checking the aggregation of physical attributes through a desk-based exercise. The process also involved site visits and the experience and background knowledge of officers.
- 6.41 The process of uncovering the identity of each valued landscape was an iterative one involving interrogation of the digital layering data and hot-spot analysis, as well as cross-referencing and further scrutinising these layers using aerial photographs and historic mapping. The views of council officers, across disciplines and departments were taken into consideration including those from planning, landscape architecture, arboriculture, ecology and cultural heritage. It was important that each valued landscape was recognisable and understandable by a range of professionals as well as by the public.
- 6.42 This process resulted in a ranking of all the contiguous areas of valued landscape ‘hot-spots’. The top 30 performing areas based on the layering of data were then re-assessed to allow for areas of valued landscapes to be conjoined, or separated out, in recognition of their geography, characteristics and features respectively. **Table 1** below sets out how these were grouped together to form 11 distinct and recognisable valued landscapes. The area hot spots have remained unchanged since the Draft Plan Consultation (2020). A map showing the outputs from this exercise is shown in **Appendix 2**.

⁴⁶ Land north of Aylesbury Road, Wendover, Buckinghamshire, APP/J0405/W/16/3158833, decision dated 9th October 2017, paragraph 67

⁴⁷ Sites of Urban Landscape Value Assessment (September 2024)

Table 1: The amalgamation of Valued Landscape area hot-spots into 11 Valued Landscape Areas

Ranking	VL, SULV or other
1A	River Thames VL
2A	River Thames VL
11	River Thames VL
28	River Thames VL
1B	River Loddon VL
21	River Loddon VL
1C	Ridge and Rivers VL (previously known as the Spencers Wood Southern Ridge VL)
20	Ridge and Rivers VL (previously known as the Spencers Wood Southern Ridge VL)
1D	Forest and Rides VL
3	Forest and Rides VL
10	Forest and Rides VL
16	Forest and Rides VL
18	Forest and Rides VL
26	Forest and Rides VL
2B	Remenham Chalk VL (previously known as the Chilterns Chalk VL)
4	Barkham and Bearwood VL
13	Barkham and Bearwood VL
17	Barkham and Bearwood VL
22	Barkham and Bearwood VL
29	Barkham and Bearwood VL
5	River Blackwater VL
6	Bowsey Hill VL
23	Bowsey Hill VL
7	Haines Hill VL
9	Haines Hill VL
14	Haines Hill VL
8	Billing Bear VL
12	Billing Bear VL
27	Billing Bear VL
15	Riseley Woods VL
19	SULV
24	Whiteknights campus - University of Reading
25	SULV
30	SULV

6.43 Areas 1A, 2A, 11 and 2B share the defining feature of the River Thames and thus fall naturally into the River Thames Valued Landscape. However, the River Thames Valued Landscape and the Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape were considered distinct entities that were separated rather than conjoined through the process.

- 6.44 This landscape-led process was further aided by the Landscape Character Assessments. However, it is important to note that the Valued Landscape Assessment is different from Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and, consequently, the valued landscape boundaries do not always coincide with LCA boundaries. This is particularly true where valued landscapes have attributes that cross LCA boundaries, such as rivers, geology, old roads, or other historic features.
- 6.45 It is worth reiterating that those areas of countryside located outside of valued landscapes are still considered to have value. Plan-making and decision-taking are still required to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, as set out in NPPF paragraph 180(b).

Step 4: Preliminary designation

- 6.46 The fourth step in the process was to determine the boundaries of each of the identified valued landscapes. This process has resulted in some overlapping layers. Landscape is a continuum, and many boundaries will be on zones of transition. As the Government's boundary review of the Chilterns National Landscape shows, there is also a socio-political element in the definition of boundaries. A degree of professional judgement is therefore required.
- 6.47 The boundaries of the valued landscapes and their distribution across the borough are shown on Map 1 below. They were provisionally delineated as part of the Draft Plan Consultation (2020), and included an indistinct buffer zone, set at a width of 100m an easily managed metric equivalent of roughly half a furlong (or furrow long – an old medieval measurement with resonances in the historic landscape, horse-racing and even cricket). The measurement of earlier landscapes, particularly medieval ones, was based on ergonomics or everyday items: the inch, yard, rod, pole, perch, furlong and mile all relating to the sizes of parts of the body or every-day, often agricultural, objects. An inch being a thumbs width or the length of three grains of barley laid end-to-end. Like the circle and square that circumscribe Michaelangelo's Vitruvian Man, the boundaries of the traditional landscape are mapped out in and by human proportions. Hence the buffer zone of 100m or half a furlong, being modern but with historic and ergonomic resonances. Fifty metres of the buffer was therefore drawn within the valued landscape boundary and fifty metres outside. The buffer was intended to act as a guide for planning professionals and the public, and also as a transition zone between the part of the landscape that is 'mere countryside' and the 'valued landscape'.
- 6.48 A map of the 11 valued landscapes proposed in the Draft Plan Consultation (2020) can be found below. A narrative for each valued landscape was set out in the Valued Landscapes Topic Paper (2020). The narratives were developed with reference to both the 2004 and 2019 versions of the borough-wide Landscape Character Assessments.

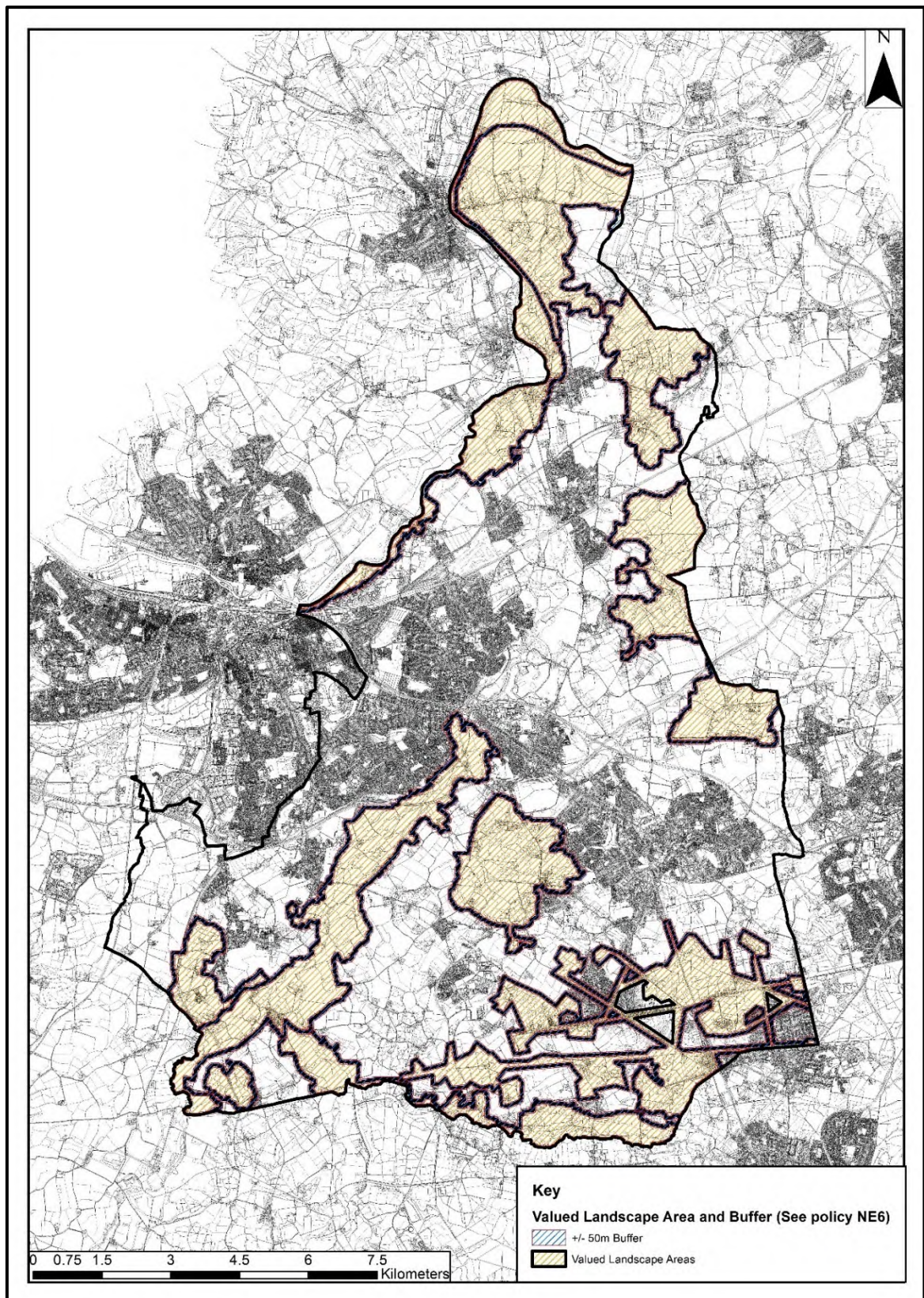


Figure 4 Valued landscape areas and buffer proposed in the Draft Plan Consultation

Consultation and engagement

- 6.49 The Draft Plan Consultation was undertaken from February 2020 to April 2020. The plan included Policy NE6: Landscape Character, Value and Green Routes. Representations submitted in response to the consultation identified some key issues that helped to refine the policy for the next stage of the LPU. Key comments are summarised below, and all comments received from the consultation are summarised and are available to view in the Consultation Statement.⁴⁸
- 6.50 There was general support for the policy from town/parish councils and residents recognising that valued landscapes should continue to protect and enhance key features of the landscape, which contribute to the character and distinctiveness of the borough.
- 6.51 No objections were received from neighbouring councils to the proposed valued landscape areas or the methodology.
- 6.52 Natural England and the Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) also supported the policy and recognised that such features could contribute towards the ecology and character of the borough.
- 6.53 Developers/landowners expressed concerns about the policy approach as it was considered too onerous and disproportionate for locally designated landscapes compared with the protection afforded to nationally designated landscapes in national policy. Some developers/landowners suggested that designating large areas of the borough as valued landscape was inappropriate.
- 6.54 A summary of the key issues raised on the methodology are grouped into categories and are set out below.

Purpose:

- Draft Plan Policy NE5: Landscape and Design, provides adequate level of protection for local landscapes that fall short of national designation.
- The plan should distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites.
- The wording of Policy NE6 sets a test that development will only be permitted where it protects and enhances the factors set out in the GLVIA, Box 5.1. This would most likely prohibit development.
- Locally valued landscape designations were removed from the Core Strategy (2010) following advice of the Government's former Countryside Agency (now Natural England) in their 2006 'Review of Local Landscape Designations', which concluded that

⁴⁸ Draft Plan Consultation Regulation 18 Report on Initial Consultation Outcomes, available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Wokingham%20Borough%20Draft%20Local%20Plan%20Regulation%2018%20Report%20on%20Initial%20Consultation%20Outcomes%20-%20Jan%202021.pdf>

blanket designations should be scrapped due to the unnecessary prevention of sustainable development.

- The most recent borough-wide Landscape Character Assessment (2019), although following a similar approach to identifying previously designated Areas of Special Landscape Importance (ASLI), does not provide a judgement on the quality or sensitivity of the landscape, only its condition.
- The council has not referenced the previously designated ASLI as defined in the 2004 Wokingham District Local Plan, nor the assessments of quality and sensitivity used in the Landscape Character Assessment (2004).
- The extent of the land which makes up a landscape should be defined first, before looking at the features that make it valued, as cited in the Aylesbury Road, Wendover appeal decision.

Methodology:

- The delineation of valued landscape boundaries is arbitrary rather than based on how a landscape is perceived or experienced.
- The boundaries of proposed valued landscapes include land within the buffer of the defined 'valued landscape' when it may not exhibit the attributes of a valued landscape or be inter-related physically or visually with the valued landscape.
- The identification of historic rides as a valued landscape is an unusual approach because the historic routes are retained in the road pattern, and many of these have the characteristic of tree lined roads. The area should be reduced to outside the urban areas where the historic character (rides backed by woodland blocks) is retained.
- First stage of the process regarding mapping demonstrable physical attributes is flawed as there is no reference to the 'factors' and 'attributes' as being of a nature to contribute to an area being more than 'mere countryside' as per the Stroud judgement decision by Mr Justice Ouseley.
- GLVIA3 guidance sets a number of key principles, such as normally avoiding numerical scoring for assessing landscapes due to the spurious levels of precision that such judgements can imply. This approach leads to large numbers of 'hot-spots' being identified, of which all are later designated as 'valued landscapes'.
- The Valued Landscape Topic Paper does not provide the 'working out' regarding areas initially identified as having potential for inclusion, but then sifted out at a later stage.
- The mapping of the demonstrable physical attributes does not reference rarity and representativeness which are considered key to establishing whether a landscape is not just 'mere countryside'.
- The scoring is biased towards conservation interests, as this factor accounts for almost 80% of the potential score weighting.
- Scoring system is compounded in Stage 3 of the process, by an automatic designation of the top 25% 'hotspots' mapped as valued landscape. The process does not consider the need to sense check the desktop results with a physical experience of the proposed areas.

- The delineating of boundaries for the proposed valued landscapes is inconsistent with the approach endorsed by the Aylesbury Road, Wendover appeal decision.
- The latest Landscape Character Assessment (2019) departs from the approach in the Landscape Character Assessment (2004), with judgements limited to the condition of the landscape and a list of valuable landscape attributes.

6.55 Representations submitted to the Draft Plan Consultation (2020) also expressed their views and concerns towards certain valued landscapes, in particular the proposed valued landscapes of Billingbear, Spencers Wood Southern Ridge, River Loddon, Barkham and Bearwood, and Forest and Rides:

Billingbear Valued Landscape

6.56 A landowner/developer objected to the extent of the proposed valued landscape proposed Billingbear Valued Landscape as it extended towards the east and included part of their land promoted for development at Land at Ashridge, Wokingham. The developer/landowner submitted a Landscape Briefing Note as part of their representation to the Draft Plan Consultation (2020), which recommended the area's exclusion from the Billingbear Valued Landscape. A summary of the key issues along with an officer response is set out in **Appendix 4**.

Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape

6.57 Some developers/landowners expressed concerns to the area proposed for the Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape as it included two parcels of land promoted for development through the local plan process: Land at Highlands, Basingstoke Road (5SH017) and Land at Beech Hill Road and Lambs Lane (5SW015). Landowners/developers submitted evidence which assessed the methodology used to support the valued landscape designations and questioned the appropriateness of the Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape. A summary of the key issues along with an officer response is set out in **Appendix 4**.

River Loddon Valued Landscape

6.58 A landowner/developer expressed concerns that the Topic Paper did not make a judgement on how the relevant factors (set out in the GLVIA; Box 5.1) resulted in the landscape character being more than 'mere countryside'. It was considered that it is not the number of features that make a landscape valued, but the inter-relationship and interaction of the features, which combine to make an out of the ordinary landscape.

6.59 A landowner/developer also commented that the boundaries of the proposed valued landscapes did not follow recognisable features on the ground, as is usual practice for defining designations and landscape character areas. It was also suggested that the proposed buffers were arbitrary, rather than based on an appreciation of any physical or visual inter-relationships with the valued landscape.

- 6.60 Landowners / developers also recommended some detailed amendments to the boundaries of this valued landscape. A summary, along with an officer response is set out in **Appendix 4**.

Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape

- 6.61 Barkham Parish Council suggested that the boundaries of the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape should be amended to include the whole 'Area of Special Character' as designated in the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan, as well as extending further to include the gap between Barkham and Wokingham. A summary of the Parish Council's comments, along with an officer response is set out in **Appendix 4**.

Forest and Rides Valued Landscape

- 6.62 Barkham Parish Council suggested that the boundaries of the proposed Forest and Rides Valued Landscape should be amended to include the four-line lime tree avenue associated with Bearwood Estate. This is recognised by the Parish as an attractive landscape feature and is designated as a 'Locally Valued Natural and Historic Asset' in the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan. A summary of the Parish Council's comments, along with an officer response is set out in **Appendix 4**.
- 6.63 Whilst a number of responses were received to specific valued landscapes, this has not led to a change in the number of valued landscapes that are identified (with the exception of the Alexander Pope and Farley Hill Valued Landscapes, as explained in paragraph 6.77), but rather has assisted in refining and updating the boundaries.

Boundary review

- 6.64 Following review of the responses to the consultation, the boundaries of the proposed valued landscape areas have all been reassessed. It should be noted that landscape is a continuum, and boundaries will often represent zones of transition, but to make the valued landscape designation clearer and to simplify its use, the boundaries have been refined so that, wherever possible, they follow identifiable features on the ground such as field boundaries or roads. A consequence of this is that the valued landscapes may, therefore, include some areas that may not 'exhibit any of the demonstrable physical features' but nonetheless form an integral part of the wider valued landscape. This is, of course, consistent with the Aylesbury Road, Wendover decision. (Paragraph 65).
- 6.65 The buffers that had been previously identified for each valued landscape in the Draft Plan Consultation (2020) have been removed following ground truthing by council officers, as a more tightly defined boundary is considered more practical for implementation in decision taking.
- 6.66 In some cases, the boundaries of valued landscapes have been extended to incorporate features or attributes identified on the hotspot analysis but not captured in the drafting of the valued landscape areas. Boundaries have also been extended where an area adjoining a settlement edge would leave a small, anomalous gap. Likewise, there are also instances where areas within a valued landscape were encompassed by the boundary but showed fewer or none

of the attributes identified in the hotspot analysis. Where this was the case, the area's inclusion (or exclusion) was assessed on its own merits and on a case-by-case basis. All inclusions and exclusions were considered in the context of each land parcel as part of the wider valued landscape and the wider landscape.

- 6.67 As previously noted, planning inspectors are able to identify valued landscapes as part of the planning appeal process. Where a decision from a planning inspector has identified a valued landscape, for instance at the Foxley Lane planning appeal, it has informed the council's assessment of that landscape and its attributes. This has resulted in two newly identified valued landscapes: the Alexander Pope Valued Landscape and the Farley Hill Valued Landscape. The Alexander Pope Valued Landscape is contiguous with the Billingbear Valued Landscape but was considered sufficiently distinct to merit its own separate designation (see Appendix 3). The Farley Hill Valued Landscape appeared on the hot-spot analysis, conjoined with the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape, but was later identified as a separate and distinct valued landscape. The extent of the Alexander Pope and Farley Hill valued landscapes are shown in **Appendix 5**, with their respective narratives set out in **Appendix 3**.

Refinement of boundaries and narratives

- 6.68 The tables below identify changes to the extent of the valued landscapes between the Valued Landscape Topic Paper (2020) and the Valued Landscape Assessment (2024). A change to the extent of the area is shown as either an inclusion or exclusion of a specific land parcel. Such changes followed further analysis, including outputs from the hotspot analysis, map-based analysis, site visits and other data including from planning files. The narratives have also been reviewed as part of this process to capture any additional features identified in a valued landscape.

Table 2: Additional features included in valued landscapes

Valued landscape	Feature	Justification
Barkham and Bearwood	Barkham Church and Manor, Barkham Area of Special Character	This Area of Special Character comprises the site of the original medieval village centre including church, extant moated manor site, collection of listed buildings along Barkham Street including Barkham Square, Spark's Farm and Barkham Manor.
Barkham and Bearwood	Barkham Brook	The area around the Barkham Brook includes: a number of Public Rights of Way; the Barkham Road Green Route; part of a Medieval common (Langley Common); a Second World War pill box: and features shown on the Norden 1607 Map of the Forest of Windsor (including Hazelton's Copse). Barkham Brook, its associated wetland and other habitats provide important ecological habitats and ecosystem services.

Valued landscape	Feature	Justification
Barkham and Bearwood	Bailiff's Cottage and adjacent farm buildings	Bailiff's Cottage was the house of the estate Bailiff for Barkham Manor Estate. The site and the historic buildings are associated with Barkham Manor and situated on the north-eastern edge of the Barkham Church and Manor Area of Special Character.
Barkham and Bearwood	Limmerhill field	Limmerhill comprises two fields in a high-quality valley landscape part of the setting of a historic route from the Crown's medieval stud at Swallowfield, via Wokingham, to Windsor. The area provides important separation of Barkham and Wokingham and, adjacent to the fields is Ye Olde Leathern Bottel public house, a feature in this landscape since at least 1790 when it appears on Thomas Pride's map of the area around Reading.
Barkham and Bearwood	Avenue of lime trees at Nashgrove Ride, Barkham	The avenue of lime trees situated a third of a mile (500m) to the East of Barkham Church are identified in Policy IRS4 and Map K of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (2020) as a locally valued heritage asset. The avenue is a distinct landscape feature and was planted by John Walter III of Bearwood to create a route for his sons to travel to Wellington College.
Barkham and Bearwood	Important views and vistas identified in Annex V of the made Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan	Annex V of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (2020) identifies important views and vistas which present an exceptional panorama of the landscape. Notable features include views from Arborfield Cross towards The Coombes and views from Barkham Road and Barkham Street.
Billingbear	Collection of buildings along Forest Road and Maidenhead Road	A small hamlet of distinctive buildings (notably Ashridge Manor and its pleasure grounds) and patchwork of small fields surrounding Maidenhead Road and Forest Road lined with hedges and hedgerows.
Bowsey Hill	Recognised Green Route along the A4	Continuity of the recognised green route and its flanking vegetation along the A4.
Bowsey Hill	Area of parkland at Linden Hall	Include features of the former park of Linden Hall, notably the serpentine lake, Grade II listed building and parkland.

Valued landscape	Feature	Justification
Bowsey Hill	Collection of historic buildings in the Kiln Green, Wargrave Area of Special Character	This Area of Special Character comprises a collection of historic and listed buildings in a linear pattern, set back from the A4, notably Scarletts Farm.
Bowsey Hill	Collection of historic buildings in the Ruscombe Conservation Area	A small cluster of buildings and tightly knit cottages in the core of the historic village settlement, notably Church of St James, a Grade I listed building and Church Cottage, a Grade II listed building. The area of open space adjacent to the church is all that remains of the former village green.
Forest and Rides	Finchampstead Village Area of Special Character	The historic core of the village comprising small open spaces with linear development along roads. A small group of older buildings, notably The Verge and The Thatched Cottage, both Grade II listed buildings, which are centred around the Finchampstead Baptist Church, a Grade II listed building. Buildings are mostly set back from the road and bordered by hedges and mature trees.
Forest and Rides	Sand Martins Golf Course	A recreational facility for residents. The golf course is in a park-like setting with trees and lakes. The area is identified as a green wedge in the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan as the golf course assists in maintaining the distinction between built-up areas and countryside; and maintaining separation between Finchampstead North and Wokingham Town.
Forest and Rides	Area of woodland at Pinewood	On the site of a sanatorium, the Pinewood Centre is surrounded by tall pine trees in a woodland setting in Bagshot Sands. The sunlight and drier fresh air of the open pine wood and heathland landscape was considered beneficial to patients recovering from tuberculosis in the first half of the 20 th Century and the centre, which surrounded the woodland, was home to victims of gas warfare and other servicemen in the First World War and Second World War.
Haines Hill	Non-designated heritage assets and listed buildings along Hinton Road	Either side of Hinton Road are several historic buildings of varying ages, including the Green Man Public House and St Swithin's. The buildings are situated on the eastern edge of the Village Centre,

Valued landscape	Feature	Justification
		Hurst Area of Special Character, and are both non-designated heritage assets.
Riseley Woods	Fields adjacent to Barge Lane	The Riseley Woods Valued Landscape includes a line of fields situated on the eastern boundary of the River Loddon Valued Landscape. To exclude these fields from the Riseley Woods Valued Landscape would be anomalous as they provide a line of single depth and contribute to the positive night light experience across this area.
Remenham Chalk (formerly Chilterns Chalk)	Areas of high chalk at Cockpole Green	The areas of high chalk at Cockpole Green are a particular hotspot for night light and offer a high degree of tranquillity. The underlying geology and rareness of chalk habitats are important attributes of this landscape. The topography of this area is more open and is an important aspect for the enjoyment of the landscape, which is often lost in more enclosed chalkland areas.
River Blackwater	Historic building and flanking vegetation along New Mill Road	New Mill Road is flanked by a combination of vegetation, hedgerows and trees. The road also comprises several historic buildings and a footpath (FINC3).
River Loddon	Pillbox along the GHQ stop line	The presence of archaeological, historical and cultural features such as pillboxes and other structures associated with the Second World War and construction of the GHQ Stop Line create specific attributes of this landscape.
River Thames	Archaeological features and Scheduled Monuments along Milestone Avenue	The boundary of the valued landscape runs south down Milestone Avenue to encompass the four Scheduled Monuments and other archaeological features of crop marks, enclosures and pits and ring ditch cropmarks.
River Thames	Bank of vegetation along the Great Western Railway line and part of the Scheduled Monument at Brunel railway bridge	The boundary of the valued landscape includes the bank of vegetation along the Great Western Railway line and to encompass part of the Brunel railway bridge that falls within Wokingham Borough. The railway bridge is situated at the confluence of the River Kennet and is Grade II listed dating back to the 19 th Century. The bridge was designed and built by

Valued landscape	Feature	Justification
		the celebrated British civil engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel. It is recognised of great historical significance and rarity being the only GWR bridge that is of Brunel's design and construction.
Ridge and Rivers (formerly Spencers Wood Southern Ridge)	Land to the west of the A33	The presence of archaeological, historical and cultural features such as pillboxes and other structures associated with the Second World War and construction of the GHQ Stop Line create specific attributes of this landscape. The valued landscape therefore crosses the A33 to encompass land to the west, where the Foudry Brook and surrounding land formed the front line of the defence in depth of the GHQ Stop Line Blue. The valued landscape also encompasses other attributes, notably the Grazeley Area of Special Character and Foudry Brook.
Ridge and Rivers (formerly Spencers Wood Southern Ridge)	Scheduled Monument at Beaumys Castle	Beaumys Castle is a recognised landscape feature in the Spencers Wood and Southern Ridge Valued Landscape. The moated manorial site is situated to the north-east of Priory Farm and is a Scheduled Monument, which is associated with influential and national figures in history dating back to the medieval era.

Table 3: Features excluded from a valued landscape previously identified in the Draft Plan Consultation

Valued landscape	Feature	Notes
River Blackwater	Damaged landscape of the scrapyard and businesses fronting Part Lane	National guidance for the designation of National Parks and National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) suggests that incongruous or unsightly development should generally be excluded from designation.
River Loddon	Built development at Shinfield Studios and British Museum	Land benefits from planning permission for film / television and storage uses and is therefore excluded, however the boundary of the valued landscape is redrawn to include the fields and woodlands at St John's Copse, New Covert and Upperwood Farm and the vegetation to the west of the Public Right of Way (SHIN39).
River Loddon	Land identified for built development at the proposed Loddon Valley Garden Village Strategic Development Location	The valued landscape previously identified in the Draft Plan included most of the land proposed for a new garden village at Hall Farm / Loddon Valley. The boundary of the valued landscape has been reviewed and focuses on particular features, such as the River Loddon, Barkham Brook and wider floodplain.
River Thames	Access road for Thames Valley Park	National guidance for the designation of National Parks and National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) suggests that incongruous or unsightly development should generally be excluded from designation.
River Thames	Park and Ride site at Thames Valley Park	National guidance for the designation of National Parks and National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) suggests that incongruous or unsightly development should generally be excluded from designation.
Ridge and Rivers (Spencers Wood Southern Ridge)	Land at Stanbury House	Land benefits from planning permission for housing at Stanbury House (ref: 221904). The boundary of the valued landscape deviates around the rear of this land, but encompasses the hedges, trees and new planting and the Wellington Court SANG.
Ridge and Rivers (Spencers Wood Southern Ridge)	Service station along the A33	National guidance for the designation of National Parks and National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) suggests that

Valued landscape	Feature	Notes
		incongruous or unsightly development should generally be excluded from designation.
Ridge and Rivers (Spencers Wood Southern Ridge)	Mereoak Park Caravan Park	National guidance for the designation of National Parks and National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) suggests that incongruous or unsightly development should generally be excluded from designation.

Recommended designations

6.69 Based on the evaluation presented in Section 6, the council's judgement is that the areas listed and as identified in **Appendix 5** and below merits their recognition as valued landscape in the Local Plan Update:

1. Alexander Pope Valued Landscape
2. Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape
3. Billingbear Valued Landscape
4. Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape
5. Farley Hill Valued Landscape
6. Forest and Rides Valued Landscape
7. Haines Hill Valued Landscape
8. Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape
9. Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape
10. Riseley Woods Valued Landscape
11. River Blackwater Valued Landscape
12. River Loddon Valued Landscape
13. River Thames Valued Landscape

6.70 A narrative for each valued landscape is presented in **Appendix 3**, including the recommended boundary, description and a discussion on the factors and attributes of the landscape, guided by Box 5.1 of the Landscape Institute's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (Revision 3, 2013).

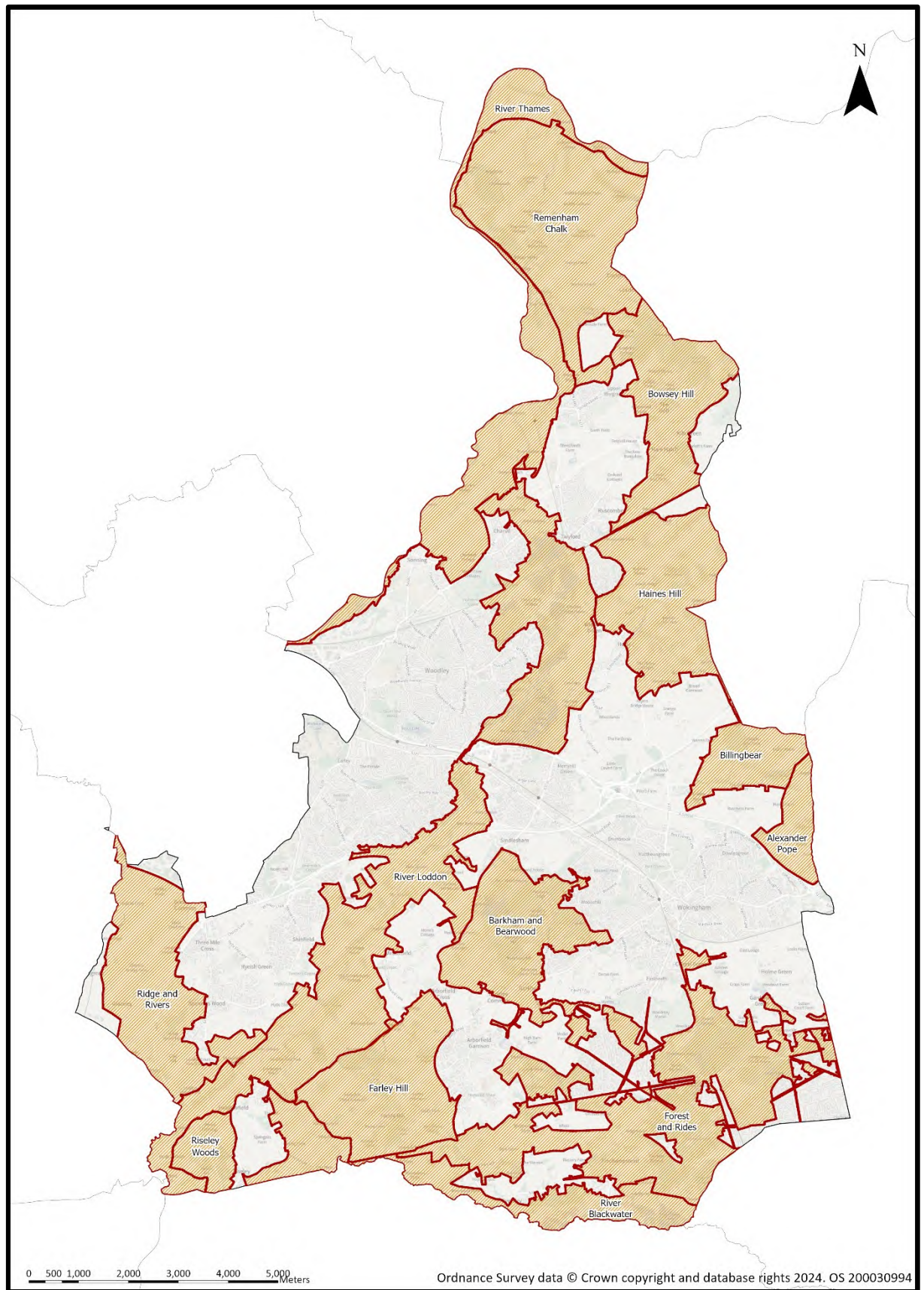


Figure 5 Map of proposed valued landscapes

7. Cross Boundary matters

- 7.1 Landscape is not confined to specific administrative boundaries and there are cases where some of the valued landscapes identified can spill over into neighbouring administrative areas. For the purposes of this study, only the sections of the valued landscape that fall within the borough have been mapped and included as part of the valued landscape areas.
- 7.2 Valued landscape assessments carried out by neighbouring councils in the future may result in newly identified valued landscapes. Where this is the case, this will be considered in an updated assessment through a future local plan process. Land previously not judged to be 'valued landscape' sandwiched between the edge of another valued landscape and the borough boundary may, in the light of future survey by neighbouring authorities, be considered important as part of a larger continuum of valued landscape spanning the borough boundary. For example, part of the floodplain and course of the River Loddon is proposed as a valued landscape in Basingstoke and Deane Borough's emerging Local Plan Update 2021 to 2040⁴⁹. The proposed Loddon Floodplain Valued Landscape touches the southern boundary of the River Loddon Valued Landscape at Welsh Lane, where failing to include the 'island' of landscape between the two valued landscapes could, in the words of the Inspector in the Aylesbury Road Wendover appeal, 'lead to anomalies'.⁵⁰
- 7.3 The Billingbear valued landscape is located adjacent to the administrative boundary of Bracknell Forest. The landscape here is open and rural in nature and forms part of the separation between the settlements of Binfield (in Bracknell Forest) and Wokingham town. The Bracknell Forest Landscape Character Assessment (2015) classifies this area of landscape as the C1 'Binfield and Warfield Clay Farmland' Landscape Character Area. The Bracknell Forest LCA identifies some key valued features and characteristics of the C1 LCA, including the parkland landscapes, such as Billingbear Parkland (partly within Wokingham Borough) and Popes Meadow and the adjacent landscape which play a role in maintaining the separation between the settlements of Binfield and Wokingham town. The Foxley Lane application for 350 homes in part of the same settlement gap was dismissed at appeal in February 2018. In the appeal decision, the Inspector found that the development would result in:

'...significant harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape, which I judge to have sufficient qualities to be deemed to be valuable. There is conflict with the development plan here (EN8, EN20 and H5) and the proposal runs counter to the NPPF objective to protect and enhance valued landscapes. The harm to landscape attracts significant weight'.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan Update 2021 to 2040 – Draft for Regulation 18 Consultation (January 2024); Policy ENV1, available at: <https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/content/doclib/4126.pdf>

⁵⁰ Land north of Aylesbury Road, Wendover, Buckinghamshire, APP/J0405/W/16/3158833, decision dated 9th October 2017, paragraphs 64 and 65

⁵¹ Land south of Foxley Lane, Binfield, Berkshire, APP/RO335/W/17/3177088, decision dated 26th February 2018, paragraph 87, page 17

- 7.4 Whilst the built development of the appeal decision relates to land largely outside of Wokingham Borough, it is of significance here, given that the planned open space for the site straddled the borough boundary and, in addition, formed part of the same wider landscape and settlement gap as the conjoined Billingbear Valued Landscape and Alexander Pope Valued Landscape.

8. Concluding remarks and recommendations

- 8.1 The process and methodology outlined in this assessment demonstrate that a robust and ambitious approach was taken to identify 13 valued landscapes across the borough. Each valued landscape will serve an important purpose in helping to inform plan making and decision taking.
- 8.2 The valued landscapes identified through this assessment will be designated in the Local Plan Update in recognition of their distinctive character to the borough's landscape. It is recommended that the valued landscape policy should make direct reference to the factors set out in the Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) Box 5.1.⁵²
- a. Landscape quality (condition)
 - b. Scenic quality
 - c. Rarity
 - d. Representativeness
 - e. Conservation interests
 - f. Recreation value
 - g. Perceptual aspects
 - h. Associations
- 8.3 The factors above represent those features and attributes that make the landscape worthy of additional protection, and which development proposals within the valued landscapes must seek to protect and enhance. Proposals affecting valued landscapes must protect and, where appropriate, enhance the valued landscape as a whole and the special features, characteristics and qualities of the landscape. An extract of Policy NE6 is set out below.
- 8.4 The new local plan policy also seeks to embody the principles of blue-green infrastructure planning⁵³, to deliver a wide range of benefits for residents, visitors and businesses, and to provide clarity to landowners and developers.

⁵² The Landscape Institute's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (Revision 3, 2013)

⁵³ Green Infrastructure (GI) is a network of high-quality green and blue spaces and other environmental features.

Policy NE6: Valued Landscapes

1. The following areas, as defined on the Policies Map, are designated as valued landscapes in recognition of their distinctive character to the borough's landscape.
 - Alexander Pope;
 - Bearwood and Barkham;
 - Billingbear;
 - Bowsey Hill;
 - Farley Hill;
 - Forest and Rides;
 - Haines Hill;
 - Remenham Chalk;
 - Ridge and Rivers;
 - Riseley Woods;
 - River Blackwater;
 - River Loddon;
 - River Thames.
2. Development proposals located within or affecting a valued landscape should have particular regard to the following attributes:
 - a) Landscape quality (condition);
 - b) Scenic quality;
 - c) Rarity;
 - d) Representativeness;
 - e) Conservation interests;
 - f) Recreation value;
 - g) Perceptual aspects; and
 - h) Associations.
3. Development proposals affecting valued landscapes will only be supported where they protect and, where appropriate, integrate with and/or enhance the special features, characteristics and qualities of the landscape, unless the benefits of the development in that location clearly outweigh the harm.

- 8.5 The valued landscapes are shown in **Appendix 5**, and individually in their respective narratives set out in **Appendix 3**.

Appendices

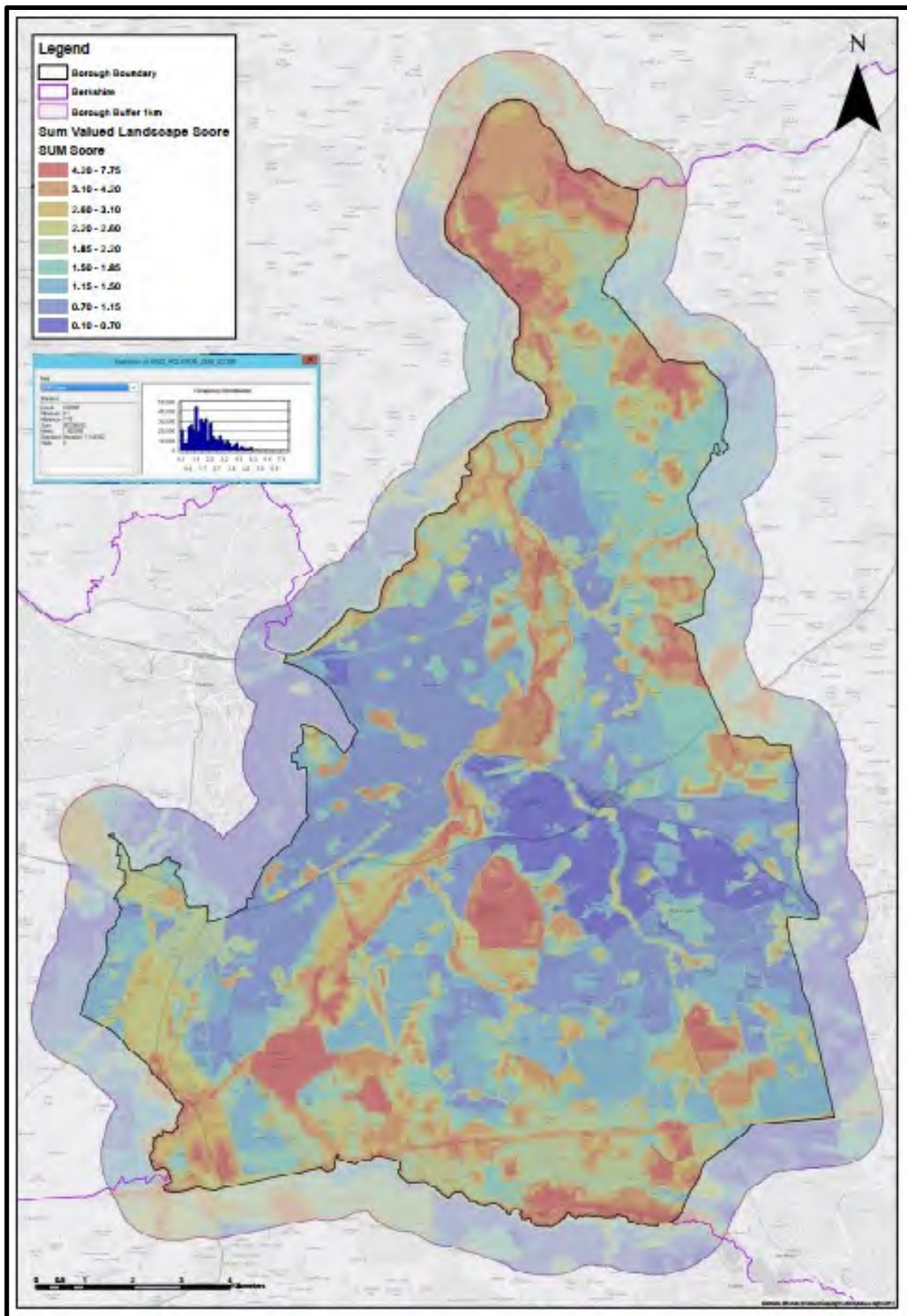
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Appendix 1: Attributes Table

Factor	Attribute	Source	Scores
Landscape Quality	A1 - Landscape Character Assessment - Quality	S1 – Landscape Character Assessment	High = 1; Moderate = 0.5; Low = 0
Landscape Quality	A2 – Long linear features	S1 – Environment Agency Main river drainage	Inside buffer = 1
Landscape Quality	A2 – Long linear features	S2 – GHQ Stop Line (Blue)	Inside buffer = 1
Landscape Quality	A2 – Long linear features	S4 – National Trails	Inside buffer = 1
Landscape Quality	A2 – Long linear features	S5 - Roman Roads	Inside buffer = 1
Landscape Quality	A2 – Long linear features	S6 – Historic Straight Ride	Inside buffer = 1
Scenic Quality	A1 - AONB	S1 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Natural England	Present = 1; Inside buffer = 0.75
Scenic Quality	A2 - Parks and gardens	S1 – National Historic Parks & Gardens	National = 1
Scenic Quality	A2 - Parks and gardens	S2 – Local Parks and Gardens	Local = 0.75
Scenic Quality	A2 - Tree Preservation Orders	S3 – Tree Preservation Orders	Present = 1; Inside 100m = 0.6; Inside 500m = 0.3; Outside = 0
Scenic Quality	A3 - Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings	S1 – Conservation Areas	Present = 1
Scenic Quality	A3 - Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings	S2 – Listed Buildings Curtilages	Present = 1
Conservation Interests	A1 – Designated Sites	S1 – Special Area of Conservation	Present = 1
Conservation Interests	A1 – Designated Sites	S2 – Special Protection Areas	Present = 1

Factor	Attribute	Source	Scores
Conservation Interests	A1 – Designated Sites	S3 – Sites of Special Scientific Interest	Present = 1
Conservation Interests	A1 – Designated Sites	S4 – National Nature Reserves	Present = 1
Conservation Interests	A1 – Designated Sites	S5 – Local Nature Reserves	Present = 0.75
Conservation Interests	A1 – Designated Sites	S6 – Local Wildlife Sites	Present = 0.75
Conservation Interests	A1 – Designated Sites	S7 – Local Green Space	Present = 0.75
Conservation Interests	A1 – Designated Sites	S8 – Historic England Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest	Present = 0.5
Conservation Interests	A2 – Biodiversity Opportunity Areas	S1 – Biodiversity Opportunity Areas	Inside = 0.5; Outside = 0
Conservation Interests	A2 – Biodiversity Opportunity Areas	S2 – Living Landscape	Inside = 0.25; Outside = 0
Conservation Interests	A3 – Ancient Woodland	S1 – Ancient Woodland Inventory	Present = 1; Inside 50m = 0.75; Inside 100m = 0.5; Outside = 0
Conservation Interests	A4 – Public Open Greenspace	S1 – Natural Greenspace or parkland	Present = 1
Archaeological	A1 – Archaeology	S1 – Scheduled Ancient Monuments	Present = 1
Archaeological	A1 – Archaeology	S2 – Historic Environment Record	Present = 0.5
Perceptual aspects	A1 - Tranquillity	S1 – CPRE Tranquillity Mapping	>100 = 1; 70-100 = 0.9; 30-70 = 0.8; 10-30 = 0.65; -30-10 = 0.5; -50--30 = 0.35; -90--50 = 0.2; -110--90 = 0.1; <-110 = 0
Perceptual aspects	A2 – Dark skies	S1 – CPRE Night Light Mapping	< 0.25 = 1; 0.25-0.5 = 0.9; 0.5-1 = 0.7; 1-2 = 0.5; 2-4 = 0.3; 4-8 = 0.1; 8-16 = 0.05; 16-32 = 0.01; >32 = 0

Appendix 2: Valued landscape hot-spot analysis output



Appendix 3: Valued landscape area narratives and maps

1. Alexander Pope Valued Landscape
2. Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape
3. Billingbear Valued Landscape
4. Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape
5. Farley Hill Valued Landscape
6. Forest and Rides Valued Landscape
7. Haines Hill Valued Landscape
8. Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape
9. Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape
10. Riseley Woods Valued Landscape
11. River Blackwater Valued Landscape
12. River Loddon Valued Landscape
13. River Thames Valued Landscape

Alexander Pope Valued Landscape Narrative

Alexander Pope Valued Landscape Narrative

'In all, let Nature never be forgot. But treat the goddess like a modest fair, Nor overdress, nor leave her wholly bare; Let not each beauty ev'rywhere be spied, Where half the skill is decently to hide. He gains all points, who pleasingly confounds, Surprises, varies, and conceals the bounds. Consult the genius of the place in all;'

*Alexander Pope, Epistles to Several Persons,
Epistle IV to Richard Boyle Earl of Burlington (April 1731)*

Introduction

The **Alexander Pope Valued Landscape** occupies the gently undulating countryside to the north-west of Popeswood village and the former residence of the poet Alexander Pope at Pope's Manor (formerly Whitehill House, Binfield).

The hot spot analysis only lightly highlighted this valued landscape, but it was identified in another source – a Planning Inspector's decision for a site at Foxley Lane that straddled the boundary with Bracknell Forest¹. The Inspector recognised, in paragraph 25 of their decision that the landscape had 'attractive characteristics', particularly noting the 'wholly rural whilst being on the edge of the settlement', 'the levels of enclosure afforded by tree and hedgerow cover surrounding and within the site', 'the undulating topography', 'bucolic appearance', 'views into the site from the public right of way to the south, Murell Hill Lane to the east, Foxley Lane to the north'. In concluding that the landscape was a valued landscape, the Inspector stated, in paragraph 28 of the decision, that:

'Even so, the attractive and available views over the land, the presence of woodland, trees and hedgerows, rolling topography and fieldscape, the walks adjacent to the land along country lanes which are designated as part of a Ramblers Route, the absence of built development, and the perception of the land as quintessential English countryside, provide significant reasons to enable me to make the judgement that this location is rightly assessed as a valued landscape by the local population. The landscape has sufficient features and characteristics of quality which set it above the ordinary. I accept that it should be regarded as valued in the terms set out in the NPPF'

The assessment of this valued landscape, therefore, had to, as it were, attempt to fine tune the landscape analysis to include those attributes identified by the Inspector in the Foxley Land inquiry and to attempt to include all those parts of the landscape that exhibited those features in sufficient abundance and spread. In addition, the recreational opportunities of SANG landscapes have become more apparent through the evolution and refinement of the assessment and, whilst not included in the original hotspot analysis, the large SANGs to the south of the Alexander Pope Valued Landscape are included.

¹ APP/R0335/W/17/3177088 Land south of Foxley Lane, Binfield, Berkshire, Inspector Philip Major BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

The valued landscape sits in the centre east of Wokingham Borough, to the south-east of the Billingbear Valued Landscape and shares a small part of its south-eastern boundary. The north-western boundary of the Alexander Pope Valued Landscape lies along the hedgerows enclosing fields forming the immediate setting of the Wicks Green and Monks Alley Conservation Area (in Bracknell Forest) and forming views from the STNH27 and STNH2 byways open to all traffic. The western edge of the valued landscape is defined by Warrenhouse Road and the A329(M) forms the south-western boundary. The valued landscape lies adjacent to the borough boundary with Bracknell Forest in the east. The valued landscape sits wholly within the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' Landscape Character Area (LCA) identified in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019).

The valued landscape (including the special landscape that falls within Bracknell Forest to the east) forms a green wedge that connects Pope's Manor with the wider landscape. The valued landscape has important physical attributes identified by a Planning Inspector, but it also forms the wider setting of the poet's home during his formative years. The poet, who wrote *Windsor-Forest*, about the Royal Forest of Windsor, was demonstrably influenced by his childhood landscape. As an influential father of landscape design and a 'prophet', foretelling and influencing the art and science of town planning, Pope was not just influenced by this landscape but, more than any other literary figure, influenced the modern landscape and the professions of landscape architecture and town planning. It is the close association of the open landscape and its attributes with the poet and his home at Pope's Manor that is so important in this locality.

Attributes of the valued landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The valued landscape sits wholly within the I1 ‘Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland’ Landscape Character Area. The LCA (2019) discusses landscape condition, it states:

‘The rural character of the landscape with its variety of characteristics such as the wooded ridgelines with small tributary valleys, woodlands and sparse settlement are in good condition. However, former coppice woodlands have been neglected, and many hedgerows have been lost. There is also an erosion of tranquillity due to the disturbance from the motorways.’²

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

- *Strong rural character of the rolling agricultural landscape with its subtle wooded ridges, large woodlands and sparse settlement which create a strong sense of place;*
- *Large deciduous woodland blocks, including BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland, provide scenic variety and a sense of enclosure in the open landscape as well as important ecological habitats;*
- *Characteristic, mature in-field and roadside oaks in the open arable fields which provide a sense of place;*
- *Wooded skyline which provides a backdrop to the surrounding areas;*
- *Remote quality due to the scarcity of settlement and relative inaccessibility by footpath which results in a sense of tranquility despite proximity to urban centres and motorways;*
- *Association with Alexander Pope who was inspired by this landscape; and*
- *Distant framed views over the surrounding landscape, including to Wokingham town and wooded horizons outside the borough which provides a sense of place and orientation.*³

Within the ‘Key Characteristics’ section for the I1 ‘Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland’ LCA, the LCA (2019) highlights the following relating to scenic quality and expands upon them in the main text:

- Large scale rolling to gently undulating landform;
- Numerous farm ponds, drainage channel and small watercourses ;
- Network of small streams;
- Large geometric blocks of deciduous woodland;
- Woodland BAP priority habitat (many designated local wildlife sites) ...some of ancient origin; wooded horizons;
- Agricultural landscape; oak standards ...a common feature of fields and along roadsides;
- Pastoral farming; sparse settlement;

² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 189

³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 189

- Historic parks and gardens;
- Straight and narrow roads with banks and ditches; and
- Rural and peaceful character; framed and distant views over the surrounding area.⁴

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. It states:

‘Key characteristics that would be difficult to replace /restore if changed, particularly the ancient woodland and remaining rural peaceful character. However, most of the characteristics are of local importance, although may be highly valued due to their increasing scarcity in the region.’⁵

The NPPF identifies ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees as ‘irreplaceable habitats’, and even notable trees and oak standards would take a hundred or more years to replace. Sparse settlement is impossible to replace in any meaningful sense.

Even features of the landscape that have been taken for granted for generations, for example, the patchwork of small fields used for pasture and / or hay are becoming less economically viable leading to problems of succession in farming. There are also infrastructure problems resulting from, as well as feeding into, this lack of viability. In addition, pressure from other land uses (for example housing and infrastructure, commercial and industrial uses) has led to erosion of agricultural landscapes, in particular methods of traditional pastoral farming in the English lowlands. The mosaic of small pasture fields, (arable and woodland), lined and connected by hedgerows with hedgerow trees, as well as the relative tranquillity of the valued landscape are becoming rarer in the region, and are therefore key attributes that contribute to the rural character.

The ‘large scale rolling to gently undulating landform’ is not in itself uncommon but it would be impossible or at least impractical to re-create as would the ‘framed and distant views over the surrounding area’. These are considered to be of county significance.

Particularly rare, and impossible to re-create, is the association of this landscape with the poet Alexander Pope and his former home at Popeswood Manor. Other examples of landscapes closely associated with artists of Pope’s calibre are the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)) intimately linked with the painter John Constable; and the South Downs National Park which encompasses the Hampshire Hangers and the village of Steep, intimately linked with the poet Edward Thomas.

Representativeness – ‘Rarity’ is discussed in the previous section. However, the opposite of rarity is representativeness. The characteristics and features which make a landscape rare are also those that make it distinctive and therefore both define and make any landscape representative of its type. Notwithstanding the many special features that make this part of the countryside a valued

⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 188

⁵ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 13.31, page 254

landscape, Pope's patchwork landscape is in many ways representative of many lowland pastoral landscapes in the South-East of earlier years but, because of competing land uses, and increasing urbanisation across the region, decreasing numbers of such landscapes remain for future generations.

Conservation Interests – In terms of wildlife and biodiversity, the Alexander Pope Valued Landscape provides a locally important mix of wildlife habitats:

Habitats of principal importance include a number of lowland mixed deciduous woodlands, and these are generally well connected by hedgerows, themselves priority habitats.

A number of the deciduous woodlands on the site are ancient semi-natural woodlands: Top Copse, Long Copse, Swain's Copse, Pebblestone Copse, woodland at Marshfield House, a small woodland to the West of Chapman Drive, and a small remnant of a larger wood remaining at Keephatch SANGs. Ancient woodlands are identified in the National Planning Policy Framework as 'irreplaceable habitats'. In addition, there is a notable aggregation of ancient and veteran trees in the valued landscape, many of which are English or Pedunculate oaks (*Quercus robur*).

Local Wildlife Sites include woodland sites at Pebblestone Copse, Long Copse, Swain's Copse, and a sliver of Pocket's Copse. The latter lying predominantly in Bracknell Forest.

The Stokes Farm SANGs Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) includes provision for enhancing and managing the sites for the recreation and wildlife including *'the provision of two new pond scrapes which is a Priority Habitat and Wokingham BAP Habitat'*. The Amen Corner SANGs encompass ancient woodland, coppice and some poorer quality hedgerows and grassland.

Cultural heritage and built form - the valued landscape sits to the west of Popeswood and stretches northwards to the west of the Wicks Green and Monks Alley Conservation Area. Whilst the Alexander Pope Valued Landscape is contiguous with the Billingbear Valued Landscape to the north and west, this area, with its small-scale patchwork of fields, old hedgerows and ancient woodlands, is subtly distinct from its larger neighbour.

According to the Conservation Area Appraisal for Wick's Green, Binfield⁶ produced by Bracknell Forest Council, the key characteristics of the conservation area and its landscape are:

- A well-established street pattern
- Eight listed buildings (a further two listed buildings lie within Wokingham Borough).
- Rural lanes unaffected by the suburban expansion of Binfield
- An historical context including:
 - Important early structures at The White Gate and Binfield Place
 - A series of large Georgian houses in landscaped grounds
- Vernacular buildings providing evidence of an agricultural past – barns and cottages

⁶ Bracknell Forest Council (2018) Conservation Area Appraisal: Wick's Green, Binfield, available at: <https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning/conservation-areas/conservation-areas-bracknell-forest>

- Significant open spaces at the Recreation Ground and the FWE Goates Cricket Ground
- Considerable tree cover including important specimen trees

Whilst the study area was truncated at the Bracknell Forest/Wokingham Borough boundary, it is considered that, had the study area been based on the wider landscape rather than being limited by the administrative boundary, it is likely that two additional listed buildings - Grade II Wiltshire Cottage (List Entry Number: 1313129), Grade II Marchfield House (List Entry Number: 1319116), and their grounds - would have been recommended for inclusion in the Conservation Area.

The valued landscape also forms the setting, and forms part of views in and out, of the Conservation Area and listed buildings and structures in the valued landscape.

There is another aggregation of listed buildings at Rushtons Farm. The barn and cart shed are all Grade II listed buildings framing the traditional farmyard that appears on 19th century maps.

Other listed buildings include the Grade II listed Whitehouse Farm Cottage. Fox and Hounds Farm is identified as a building of traditional local character (non-designated heritage asset).

There are two archaeological sites within the valued landscape centred around Stokes Farm. According to Berkshire Archaeology, prehistoric and medieval items were recovered following an archaeological survey on the land⁷.

Recreational Value - Across the wider I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA, the LCA (2019) states:

'There are few footpaths and little access across the large arable fields'.⁸

However, when teasing out the boundaries of the valued landscape it becomes clear that the average density of public rights of access is enhanced in this valued landscape area. The following five PRoWs pass through the valued landscape: Footpaths STNH 24, 25 and WOKI 37 and Byways Open to All Traffic; STNH 27 and 28.

Further, areas of SANG are included in the valued landscape, and whilst they are less tranquil, the recreational and wildlife conservation opportunities compensate. The SANGs comprise Keeppatch Meadows at North Wokingham and Stokes Farm located to the north-east of the A329(M) motorway. The SANG (in Wokingham Borough) proposed as part of the appeal at Land south of Foxley Lane, Binfield is also included in the Alexander Pope Valued Landscape. As the appeal was dismissed, the SANG has not come forward. Nevertheless, the Inspector's decision recognised the recreational value of the proposed SANG (in paragraph 84):

'The development would provide SANG alongside the wider open space. But that is not, in itself, a benefit of the scheme. It is mitigation for the impact of the scheme. That said, I

⁷ Ford Steve. 1987. East Berkshire Archaeological Survey. Page 49. [Bibliographic reference / SRW12644]

⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para I1.12, page 188

accept that the SANG would be considerably greater in extent than required by guidance, and would provide public access to parts of the countryside not currently accessible’.

Remoteness is included in the list of Valuable Landscape Attributes in the LCA (2019), it states:

*‘Remote quality due to the scarcity of settlement and relative inaccessibility by footpath which results in a sense of tranquility despite proximity to urban centres and motorways’.*⁹

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the LCA (2019) which states:

*‘This landscape is open and large scale permitting intermittent framed and distant views, although screening planting along the motorways disturbs this open character. Away from the motorways the area has a peaceful and rural character, with localised experience of dark skies to the north of the area’.*¹⁰

The influence of the motorways is discussed in the section examining landscape condition where the LCA (2019) notes: *‘an erosion of tranquillity due to the disturbance from the motorways’*. However, it is notable that the Inspector in the Foxley Lane inquiry, (describing the landscape in paragraph 25), stated:

‘I was struck by the sense that it is wholly rural whilst being on the edge of the settlement. ...Whilst there is a distant hum from the nearby A329(M) this does not intrude to any significant degree.’

In paragraph 26, the Inspector continued:

‘From none of these locations is there a strong sense that there is a significant urban area nearby. Binfield is largely screened by vegetation but even where apparent it is manifested in low density and relatively low key buildings. The urban nature of the settlement only becomes apparent when the site has been left behind. This effect is emphasised by the fact that Murrell Hill and Foxley Lanes are themselves tree lined and typical of lanes which would be found in rural locations. In my judgement it is appropriate to regard the site as profoundly rural in its overall character.’

Addressing the patchwork of fields within the I1 ‘Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland’ Landscape Character Area the LCA (2019) states:

*‘To the south of Forest Road, and east of Ashridgewood Farm, there is a pattern of medium to large field with wavy boundaries. The first edition OS map shows a pattern of smaller irregular fields interspersed with areas of surviving woodland, indicating early assart incursions of the forest. However, there has been a considerable degree of boundary loss since then, resulting in medium to large, but still irregular fields.’*¹¹

⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 189

¹⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para I1.15, page 188

¹¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para I1.10, page 187

However, in the valued landscape, and particularly in the east and north, the fields are generally more intact and appear smaller. Within the valued landscape, the field pattern more closely reflects the late 19th century field pattern shown on early OS maps.

Associations – Pope's Epistle IV, a poem to Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington, Of the Use of Riches 1731, is a tribute to Lord Burlington's good sense, taste and right 'use of riches' in architecture and gardening. Just a generation before the industrial revolution, Pope also called in his prescient poetry for respect for the 'genuine order' of nature as Mavis Batey, the author of *Alexander Pope: the poet and the landscape*, puts it. The echo of Pope's call is still heard through the climate change and extinction debates of this century, some three hundred years later. Closer to home to this document, 'Pope's doctrine - 'in all, let Nature never be forgot' - would likewise condemn a formal garden planned on a drawing-board without regard to the character of the site'¹². Developers, land managers and planners will all be familiar with the need for the value of a thorough assessment of a site, or in this case the wider landscape, informing the best use of the earth's riches.

The same is true of any development proposed without reference to the prevailing character or atmosphere of the site and surroundings. It could be said that Pope's doctrine was an early indicator to the introduction of Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC 2003) where there is a duty, for every public body, to:

'take action, consistent with the proper exercise of its functions, to conservation and enhancement of biodiversity'. Mavis Batey continues: 'Pope's owner of taste in the Burlington mould, who would himself direct his landscape improvements, would prefer 'spontaneous beauties' and, as stated in the prefatorial Argument, would seek to adapt all 'to the Genius and Use of the Place, and the Beauties not forced into it, but resulting from it'.

Pope's home lies outside the Wokingham Borough portion of the landscape identified as valued landscape. However, his association with this landscape, particularly that part closest to his home is of great importance, not only for his poetry but also for his influence on landscape design, and through this on town and country planning.

Other associations include one with the De La Beche family who also owned land in Swallowfield and Beech Hill (Bec Hill or Beche Hill). More famously, the family, which flourished in medieval times, is associated with the Berkshire village of Aldworth where many of the family are buried and where, for their seven-foot effigies, the knights of that line are known as the Aldworth giants. John De La Beche, the brother of Nicholas De La Beche of Beaumys Castle, Swallowfield (the Seneschal of Gascony), held the manor of Binfield and died in 1328.

The Inspector's decision at Foxley Lane picks up on views from Murrell Hill Lane and the footpath to the south of the site. The decision (paragraph 25) also picks up on the following features which contribute to the assessment that the landscape is valued:

'the sense that it is wholly rural', 'the levels of enclosure afforded by the tree and hedgerow cover surrounding and within the site', 'giving the undulating topography a bucolic

¹² Mavis Batey, in *Alexander Pope : the poet and the landscape*

appearance when seen from surrounding public viewpoints’, ‘The retention of much of the hedgerow pattern’, ‘some [retained] sense of historic field patterns (albeit that some hedgerows have been removed over time)’, ‘distant hum from the nearby A329(M) this does not intrude to any significant degree’, ‘Views into the site are from the public right of way to the south, Murrell Hill Lane to the east, Foxley Lane to the north, and less significantly from Binfield Road some distance to the west’.

And in paragraph 26:

‘[No] strong sense that there is a significant urban area nearby’, ‘Binfield is largely screened by vegetation’, ‘but even where apparent it is manifested in low density and relatively low key buildings’, ‘This effect is emphasised by the fact that Murrell Hill and Foxley Lanes are themselves tree lined and typical of lanes which would be found in rural locations’, and the Inspector says ‘In my judgement it is appropriate to regard the site as profoundly rural in its overall character’.

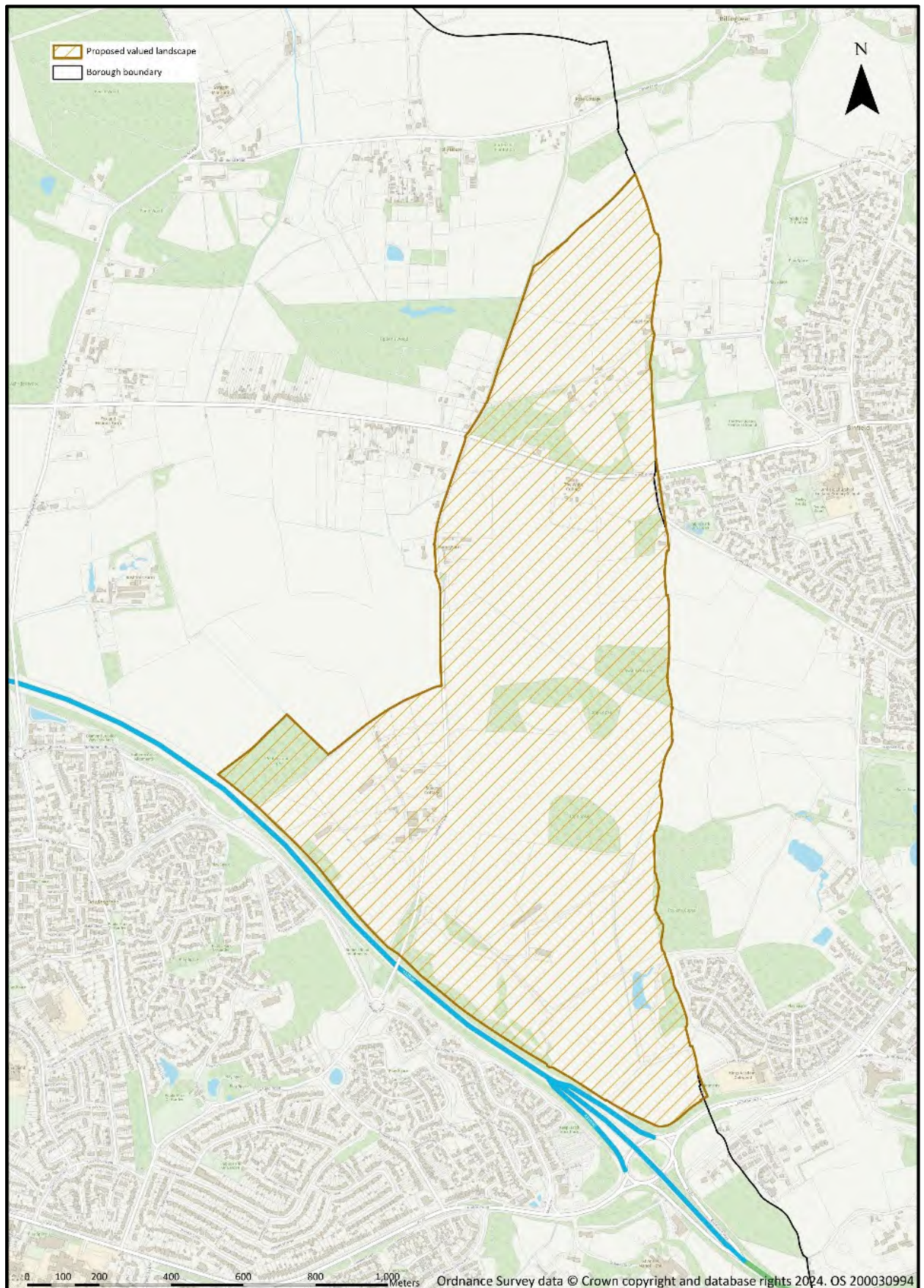
Even negative points do not deter the Inspector, in paragraph 27 he states:

‘I note that public access to the site is not formally available’ and whilst ‘there is tolerance of local residents using it responsibly for access and recreation’ the Inspector found that this ‘cannot weigh strongly in favour of any judgement on whether the site should be regarded as part of a valued landscape’.

This stems from the levels of enclosure afforded by the tree and hedgerow cover surrounding and within the site, giving the undulating topography a bucolic appearance when seen from surrounding public viewpoints. The retention of much of the hedgerow pattern across the site is a significant feature and does retain some sense of historic field patterns (albeit that some hedgerows have been removed over time). Whilst there is a distant hum from the nearby A329(M) this does not intrude to any significant degree.

Views into the site are from the public right of way to the south, Murrell Hill Lane to the east, Foxley Lane to the north, and less significantly from Binfield Road some distance to the west.

Alexander Pope Valued Landscape Map



Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape Narrative

Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape Narrative

On June [1614], being Ascension day, she being by chance at play with other young maidens and children at a place not far from the enclosure, some speeches were used by the young people there that Arrowsmith had brought freestones to the enclosure and threatened very insolently to build a house on the common there, enclosing a great part of Bear Wood to his own use in despite of all men and debarring the inhabitants thereabouts from their common.

Bacon v Allwright: bill of information; interrogatories; depositions - answer of Margaret Allwright¹

Introduction

In the north, the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape centres on the Registered Park and Garden of Bearwood, and in the south of the area it centres on the ancient Langley Common and course of the Barkham Brook, many of the landscape features of which appear on Nordens 1607 map of the Royal Forest of Windsor.

To the north lies the Sindlesham Conservation Area and in the extreme south of the valued landscape lies the medieval village of Barkham. The western boundary broadly follows Mole Road (B3030) from Arborfield to Sindlesham. The eastern boundary of the valued landscape incorporates Fox Hill and the woodlands forming the western edge of the settlement of Wokingham and a degree of separation from Barkham. The valued landscape sits in the southern part of Bishops Bear Wood, a traditional chase of the Bishops of Salisbury from before the Norman Conquest to the reign of Elizabeth I when the chase was incorporated into the Forest of Windsor; England's principal royal hunting forest. Whilst not included in hot-spot analysis to date the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019) identifies it as a 'valuable landscape attribute':

Barkham Brook and associated wetland which provide important ecological habitats including wet meadow and BAP priority habitat wet woodland.²

¹ STAC 8/20/22 Attorney General v Allwright, Court of Star Chamber: Proceedings, James I, Berkshire, 1614

² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 240

Attributes of the valued landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004) categorises this area as L1 ‘Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills’. It confirms that this is a high quality landscape with strong character and a strong sense of place (paragraph 16.26). The Assessment confirms that the landscape is in good condition (paragraph 16.26) and states that:

*‘the landscape strategy is to conserve and strengthen existing character, including woodland and features associated with the historic landscape’.*³

The J2 ‘Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay’ Landscape Character Area lying to the south-west is described as being of moderate quality, moderate character and moderate condition. The part lying to the east of Arborfield is arguably of higher quality than this would suggest, because of its visual and cultural links with the L1 ‘Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills’ Landscape Character Area to the east. It is true that this part of the landscape has far fewer woodlands and hedgerows, but it is very likely that it has had an open character for many centuries, probably as part of a medieval strip farming system associated with the village of Arborfield Cross.

The urban conurbation of modern Reading is visible from high points along Mole Road (B3030) but not generally from the land to the east of this road, where the landscape is more contained by the high land occupied by Mole Road and the settlement of Arborfield Cross. The tranquillity and relative remoteness of this landscape is thus preserved by this important western part of the landscape. The landscape strategy of the J2 ‘Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay’ Landscape Character Area is to enhance:

*‘the historic field system, habitats... rural lanes and wooded valleys... and more general improvements to woodland, farmland and habitat management’.*⁴

Scenic Quality – The Barkham Village Design Statement (2007) refers to the parish of Barkham lying principally in open farmland which rises gently toward the ridge known as Barkham Hill. The parish boasts a number of significant landscape features and views recorded in the Statement. The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (2020) identifies several important views and vistas within the Arborfield and Barkham neighbourhood area. The Plan recognises that, in addition to Bearwood Park and The Coombes, there are many wooded areas and copses that are fragments and reminders of earlier times, when the area was heavily wooded before being cleared for cultivation⁵. The views and vistas identified in the Plan⁶ are incorporated in the valued landscape area.

The Coombes area was also identified in the Wokingham and District Local Plan (2004) as an Area of Special Landscape Importance.

³ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.27, page 374

⁴ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 14.44, page 319

⁵ Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036 (2020), Annex V – Landscape and Important Views, available at: <https://arborfield.org.uk/documents/annex-v-landscape-and-important-views-3-3mb/>

⁶ Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036 (2020), Map D – Important Views and Vistas, available at: <https://arborfield.org.uk/documents/map-d-important-views-and-vistas/>

The LCA (2004) states that the strong character of the L1 'Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills' Landscape Character Area is:

'related particularly to the synergy between the topography, woodland and historic ambience which create a distinctive landscape with a strong sense of place'.⁷

The good condition of the landscape:

'relates to the privacy and secrecy resulting from the relative absence of intrusive infrastructure and development (including roads), the dense woodland character accentuating the landform which creates intimacy and the contrasting context of undulating coombe pasturelands'.⁸

The overall strategy is to 'conserve and strengthen the existing character' and identifies the 'woodland and the features associated with the historic landscape' as the key characters to be conserved.

An important aspect of landscape that has been identified in the LCA (2004) is the 'locally distinctive Rhododendron Drive'⁹. Whilst this is at odds with a note to enhance 'woodland habitat' it is true that – for a few brief weeks in the year - the 'Rhododendron Drive' or more properly the Rhododendron-lined Bearwood Road is a spectacular landscape feature when in bloom.

Whilst the landscape of the J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' Landscape Character Area is described as being of only moderate scenic quality, the LCA (2004) does pick out the 'notable characteristic[s]' of the Barkham Brook; geometric field systems; arable and pastoral lands; and a wide range of habitats. The LCA identifies the following as being 'features of particular uniqueness or distinctiveness' which lie within the LCA: moats; and 'the coombes' wooded valleys. The strategy for this landscape is set out in the LCA (2004) as 'enhancement' including: the historic field system, habitats, moats, rural lanes and wooded valleys (which are to be retained and respected); and more general improvements to woodland, farmland and habitat management.

Rarity – The bulk of the valued landscape centres on the Registered Park and Garden of Bearwood and is thus clearly of national importance and also rare at a national level. Whilst the Reading Football Club training ground development has undermined the character of the Park's second phase of development, in this instance, it has compensated in valued landscape terms because of the increased recreational interest offered by the sports facility. It should be recognised that this development was completed prior to the identification of the valued landscape, and there is a clear policy position in the Local Plan Update to ensure that proposals affecting valued landscapes demonstrate that they protect and enhance the special features, characteristics and qualities of the landscape, unless the benefits clearly outweigh the harm.

⁷ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.26, page 373

⁸ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.26, page 373

⁹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.27, page 374

The southern part of the valued landscape incorporates much of the countryside falling within Langley Common; an historic area of common land with interesting history including the conflict between the Crown's agent and Sir Robert Arrowsmith and the Commoners of the Forest. The land appears to have lain on the northern side of the boundary between the Royal Forest and the traditional Bishops Bearwood Chase (the private chase of the Bishops of Salisbury before the time of Queen Elizabeth I) and 'Bigshotte Walke' an administrative area of the Royal Forests of Windsor. The land is bounded by Public Rights of Way from Arborfield Cross, through the Coombes, to the Ye Old Leathern Bottel public house on Barkham Road – a line following the modern day Cole, Coombes and Sandy Lanes. The southern boundary of Langley Common follows the lanes and footpaths linking Arborfield Cross, Barkham and the Barkham Road. These lanes form the boundary between Bearwood Walk and Bigshotte Walk. This land was mapped in 1607 by the cartographer John Norden who produced two slightly different maps, one for King James I (British Library Version)¹⁰ and one for his son Arthur Prince of Wales (Royal Heritage Collection)¹¹. The maps are amongst the earliest of accurate, modern maps. They are a detailed assessment of the Royal Forest of Windsor, its' boundaries, roads and trackways, towns and villages, deer parks and other features including an estimate of the number of deer kept in each of the sixteen 'walks' or administrative boundaries within the Royal Forest.

Many of the features shown persist to the present day including: the villages and towns of Arborfield Cross, Barkham (with its medieval centre around the re-built church), and Wokingham; river crossings; the name of 'Langley' Heath or Common, which appears on modern maps as well as Thomas Pride's 1790 map of the environs around Reading (as does Ye Old Leathern Bottel public house); trackways or roads which criss-cross the landscape (including the northern boundary to Langley Common - a medieval road from the Royal residence at Swallowfield Court to Wokingham); the sites or early names of farms like Randall's Farm and Evendon's Farm still persisting in the landscape: ancient woodland including Hazelden's copse (now Hazleton's copse). Ancient woodland is defined as woodland persisting since 1600, partly because this is a time when high quality maps started to become available and also the time after which the planting of new plantations began. The presence of Hazelden's Copse is a rare example in this valued landscape of an ancient woodland appearing on an ancient map from the first decade of the 17th century and persisting to the landscape of today.

Representativeness – As previously noted the northern part of the valued landscape is entirely taken up by the nationally important Registered Park and Garden of Bearwood. The LCA (2004) discusses sensitivity finding that overall, the J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' Landscape Character Area is of 'moderate sensitivity' and values 'most characteristics at the local scale'. However, in highlighting valued characteristics, the LCA (2004) states that *'the peaceful rural qualities are rare at a regional or even national level'*.¹² The ways the many woodlands and trees *'form shelterbelts and woodlands that restrict view and reduce visual sensitivity'*¹³ is also discussed.

¹⁰ Norden 1607 Map

¹¹ Norden 1607 Map

¹² Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 14.45, page 319

¹³ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 14.45, page 319

In the assessment of the L1 'Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills' LCA the LCA (2004) highlights the sensitivity of the woodland due to its many functions in acting as a backdrop to surrounding landscapes and accentuating undulating landform, providing wildlife habitat, providing a wooded backdrop to the western edge of Wokingham town, and being an integral part of the listed historic parkland estate.¹⁴ The wooded context and 'private' secluded character are again highlighted as being important characteristics. The woodland is clearly of an importance and value over and above the 'mere countryside'.

Conservation Interests – In terms of wildlife and biodiversity the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape provides an important mix of habitats: Pasture and Lowland Mixed-Deciduous Woodlands, and Wood Pasture and Parkland, these last two being Habitats of Principal Importance. Riverine habitats are also found but on a smaller scale in the Barkham Brook. They are, however, closely linked with the habitats of the adjacent River Loddon Valued Landscape and the western and south-western boundaries clearly reflect this for reasons of interconnectivity of habitat and green infrastructure.

Habitats of principal importance:

- Wood Pasture and Parkland habitat are present within the valued landscape. Indeed, much of the northern part is historic parkland. However, because of its use as an educational establishment little is currently done to manage the ancient and veteran trees and woodlands in the park for biodiversity enhancement.
- Blocks of scattered Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland grow throughout the Bearwood Park parkland in the northern part of the valued landscape. A large block of lowland mixed deciduous woodland occurs in The Coombes; an area of varying topography of high importance for other landscape factors. There are a number of areas of Ancient Woodland located in the central west-east band of the landscape. As might be expected for woodland persisting in a landscape with an ancient use as a common, the woodlands are discrete and have generally well-defined boundaries – with some good examples of wood banks and ditches – and in this case there is good evidence for them on early maps (principally Norden - 1607).

The Ancient Tree Inventory¹⁵ shows a wide variety of notable Ancient and Veteran Trees with noteworthy aggregations around Barkham Manor (a selection of half a dozen ancient and veteran oaks - all over 6m in girth - in pasture and woodland to the north of the listed building). There is an avenue of notable Wellingtonias (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) at Bearwood Park. This avenue is one of a handful in the borough which were planted seemingly because of the close association of the borough and its inhabitants with the first Duke of Wellington (1769 - 1852) – the hero of Waterloo. The Duke died at about the time of the 'discovery' of the Wellingtonia tree by Augustus T. Dowd in 1852. The first seeds and seedlings were commercially available in the UK shortly afterwards and were popular with landowners.

¹⁴ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.28, page 374

¹⁵ 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 Coombes Local Wildlife Site (LWS) is an area of 33 hectares, located in woodland in the centre of the valued landscape. The site consists primarily of an area of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland that varies in its structure and species mix. Much of the site is also a Local Geological Site (LGS). There are some features indicative of long-established woodland, including wood banks and ditches with associated mature trees, and 23 long-established woodland indicators. There are also poor areas where *Rhododendron* dominates the shrub layer, shading out field layer species.

Cultural heritage and built form - the valued landscape encompasses and forms an important part of the setting of the Sindlesham Conservation Area to the north; a nineteenth century model village built of polychromatic Reading brick in the Jacobean style by John Walter III, who also built Bearwood House. The Arborfield Cross Conservation Area lies to the south-west and takes in fine views of the valued landscape from its vantage point on the ridge forming the south-western edge of the catchment of the Barkham Brook.

The valued landscape forms the setting for these conservation areas as well as for the individual buildings and structures in the landscape. Indeed, the form and location of many of the principal buildings is, in a major part, a response to the historical, geological, topological and geographical features of the landscape, in which they sit.

Notable buildings outside the conservation areas include: the Grade II listed, late 17th century Mole Bridge Farmhouse and the Grade II listed, 17th century, The Glen, in the west of the valued landscape. There are notable medieval buildings around Barkham village including the Grade II listed, 15th Century, Sparkes Farmhouse, Church Cottage (on a moated site) and the late 16th Century Langleypond Farmhouse, which has been assessed by some as being a Tudor hunting lodge and a tangible link between the medieval hunting and modern settlement of this landscape. There is also a fine assembly of farm buildings: engine shed, barns, and cattle sheds at Newlands farmyard on the edge of the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area. Quite apart from the setting of the listed buildings, and with references to Newlands in the historic record going back to the Middle Ages, this link with the valued landscape is important.

Notable mansion houses include the palatial Bearwood House – now a school, Grade II listed Barkham Manor and the Grade II listed Barkham Square, an eighteenth-century house. Bearwood House, (built between 1865-74 by Robert Kerr in the Jacobean style) is Grade II* listed and sits amongst other listed buildings including the Grade II listed chapel and the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden of Bearwood Park.

Bearwood Park itself includes notable features of the designed landscape including the Pulhamite 'rock' garden, the lake and dam, the terraces and the fine avenue of *Wellingtonia* trees running from the house to the model village of Sindlesham. The working landscape of the estate included sawmills powered by the dam and kitchen gardens. The latter now replaced (early 21st Century) by a training facility for Reading Football Club. Associated with this designed landscape is the tree-lined Bearwood Road, laid out by John Walter III and now famously lined with *Rhododendrons* which, whilst they have visual appeal, are invasive in woodland areas and harmful to biodiversity.

The valued landscape also encompasses the Barkham Street Area of Special Character identified in the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan. Mainly centred on Barkham Street and stretching from the original medieval centre of Barkham, this area includes the church, the village pond and notable manor and listed buildings, such as The Bull Public House and Sparkes Farm¹⁶. It also extends further towards Barkham Manor.

Other notable designed landscapes within the valued landscape include Barkham Manor, a locally listed historic garden with listing of the manor house stating that it was built on an earlier moated site from the late 1700s. Also of interest is a long-distance trackway passing west-east through the middle of the valued landscape. The trackway with deep ditches either side, runs from Swallowfield Park (a royal residence from before the conquest until Tudor times) to Wokingham (an Anglo-Saxon settlement with the earliest market charter dating from 1219 AD).

An avenue of lime trees is included in the far eastern part of the valued landscape. The lime grove at Nashgrove Ride in Barkham is recognised in the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan as a Locally Valued Natural and Historic Asset due to its historic context in the former Bearwood estate and value as a landscape feature. According to the plan, the avenue of four-lined lime trees was planted at the command of John Walter III, the landowner at the time, who wanted to create a route for his sons to travel along to Wellington College. The plan recognises that it is unusual to find this type of feature with the only other places being at Clumber Park, Nottinghamshire¹⁷.

From the perspective of archaeological heritage, the landscape is largely of interest for the way medieval boundaries, buildings, trackways, woodlands and other structures are incorporated into the modern landscape. Buildings, routes and enclosures from the early 19th Century are also of importance as is some 20th century development, for example the Second World War pillbox guarding the bridge over the Barkham Brook.

Culturally this landscape is important, being on the edge of the historic Royal Forest of Windsor between Bigshotte Walke and Bishop's Bear Wood Chase. The line of the boundary is picked out in today's landscape by roads and footpaths from Arborfield through the medieval centre of Barkham, to Wokingham lying to the south of the current Barkham Road. Two important conflicts between local residents and John Maltravers, on the one part, and King James I on the other, highlight the importance of Forest landscapes (that is land falling under Forest law) and the assertion of the pre-conquest rights of common people against the usurpation of those rights by powerful interests such as the nobility or the Crown. The latter case is discussed in some detail by Dan Beaver and the quote at the header of this narrative is from his work¹⁸.

Recreational Value – The Barkham Village Design Statement states:

¹⁶ Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036 (2020), paragraph 4.32 c), available at: https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Neighbourhood_Plan_Made_Version_April_2020.pdf

¹⁷ Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036 (2020), paragraph 4.35, available at: https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Neighbourhood_Plan_Made_Version_April_2020.pdf

¹⁸ BEAVER. D, *Hunting and the age of violence before the English Civil War*, 2008 Cambridge

Many of Barkham's country lanes are well used for leisure purposes. In particular Sandy Lane, Coombes Lane and Hayes Lane, along with the many bridleways, are well used by horse traffic originating from the various livery stables in the area, as well as by cyclists and runners. These routes and the extensive network of footpaths are popular with ramblers and dog-walkers. Commonfield Lane and Barkham Ride are both part of the Round Berkshire Cycle Route.

Much of the northern part of the valued landscape is covered by Bearwood Lakes Golf Course and the Reddam House Berkshire School, which, whilst both privately run, have a quasi-public face and their landscapes can be enjoyed by workers, members, scholars and in those views in from public roads and other rights of way. The eastern part of the valued landscape includes The Junipers and Elizabeth Park, which provide recreational value for the residents of Barkham. The valued landscape also encompasses an area of land at Fox Hill. Situated on the edge of Wokingham, the area of woodland comprises several rights of way used by residents of Wokingham and Barkham. Part of the land also benefits from planning permission for the change of use of existing private woodland to land for informal recreation that is publicly accessible¹⁹, thereby emphasising its recreational value.

Perceptual Aspects – This is a wooded and pastoral landscape, just a short distance from the busy transport corridors of the M4, A329M and M3, the mainline to Waterloo and the towns of Wokingham and Reading. Notwithstanding this, the landscape is a haven of tranquillity²⁰ and incorporates a sizeable area of relatively dark skies²¹. These perceptual qualities are important and increasingly rare in the borough and the eastern part of the county.

Associations – As well as early associations with the Bishops of Salisbury and with Monarchs from Elizabeth I to the enclosures of the Royal Forest in the early 19th Century (reigns of George III, George IV, William IV and Victoria), the landscape has associations to a number of individuals with national and local importance. Whilst they are not household names now, John de Maltravers, a regicide of the despised Edward II, held land in Barkham much to the annoyance of local residents who petitioned the King:

"To our Lord the King and to his Council complain the inhabitants of Yeingdon [Evendons Farm – near Wokingham], Finchamstede [Finchampstead], Earle [Earley], Erbourgfild [Arborfield] and Nywelend [Newlands] that where they had their village, and villagers paid rights to a common pasture called Langenhurst in the town of Berkham which is within the bounds of the forest of Wyndesore [Windsor]. And themselves and their ancestors have had and used the common rights in the said pasture as appended to their free tenantry of time and of mind. Then moreover Mr. Johan de Mautravers as justice of the forest residing at Wyndesore ... seized this pasture and had it enclosed by a ditch and a hedge claiming the said common pasture as appended to the Manor of Berkam so that they cannot enjoy their

¹⁹ Planning application reference: 203539, Land off Bearwood Road, Wokingham, decision dated 19 November 2021

²⁰ Based on Tranquillity mapping for CPRE by Northumbria University. Cf Tranquillity Mapping: Developing a Robust Methodology for Planning Support Technical Report on Research in England, January 2008 (revised)

²¹ Based on Campaign to Protect Rural England dark skies analysis. cf Night Blight – mapping England's night pollution and dark skies, CPRE, June 2016

*common use as they were wont to use it, and pay without reason, and to their dispossession and to their great damage to which they beg remedy*²².

The petition must have been made around 1330, as John Maltravers acquired Barkham in that year, and was condemned to death in the same year for his role in the execution of Edmund, Earl of Kent, a son of Edward I. He escaped abroad and was subsequently pardoned. According to the cleric and chronicler Adam Murimuth (c.1274 – 1347) he also issued the order for the murder of Edward II.

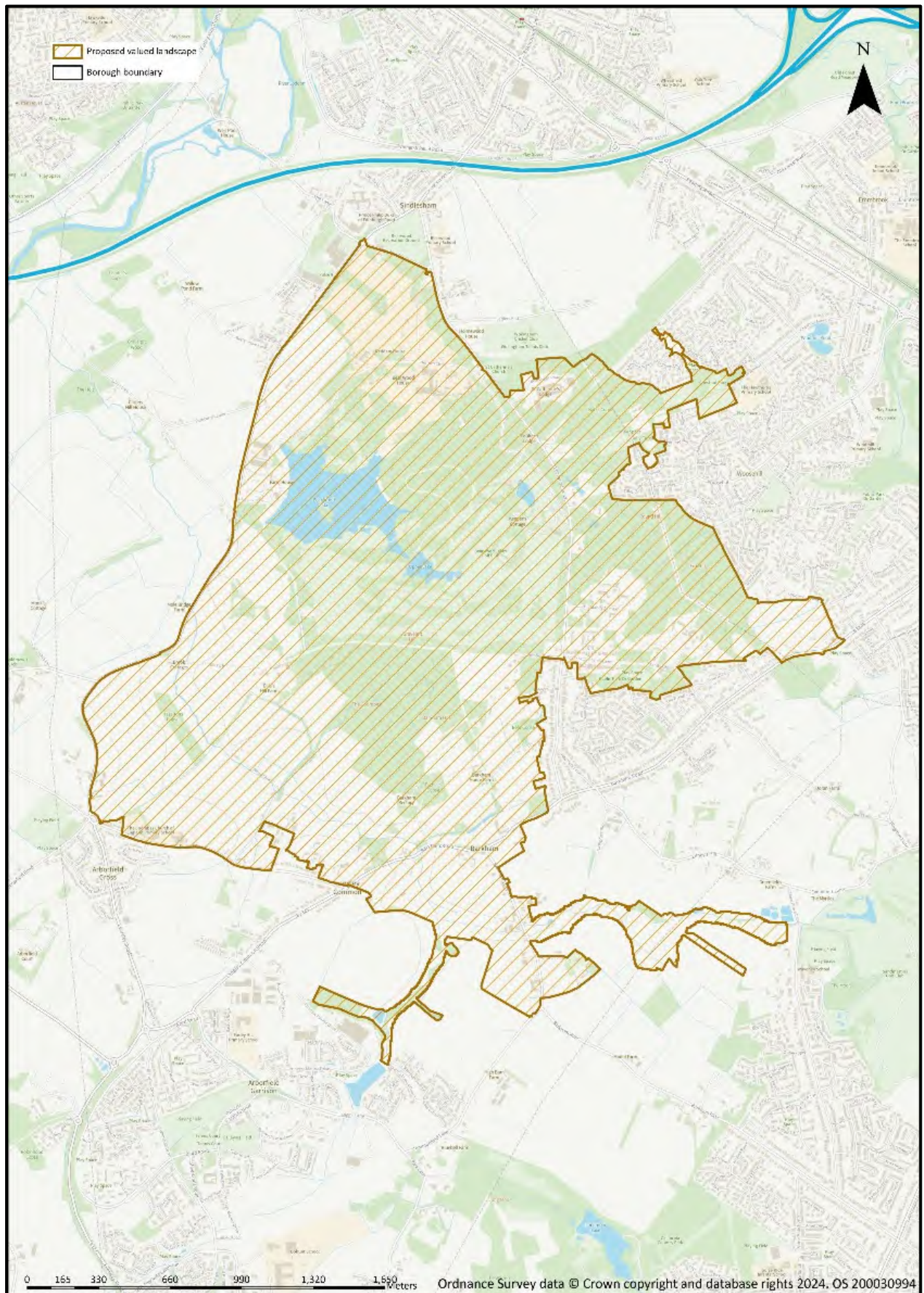
Whilst the site of Maltravers's enclosure is not visible today, the common, known as Langenhurst, is shown on the Norden map of Windsor Forest (1607) and is still visible today. Many features of the common including woodlands, important junctions such as the six-pointed one at Arborfield Cross, tracks (now visible as roads and footpaths) and the villages of Arborfield (now known as Arborfield Cross) and Barkham. The same 1607 map shows details of secular buildings, including public houses in the centre of Windsor that can still be seen today. Whilst no such built landmarks are mapped by Norden within the valued landscape, the links between this early map and the modern landscape are striking.

The historic concerns of local people over the enclosure of common land have already been mentioned. Within Langley Common – anciently 'Langenhurst', or Bearwood Common (both within the valued landscape) - the Allwrights, the Webbs and other villagers of Barkham and surrounding parishes rose up to confront the powerful Sir Francis Knollys, Keeper of Bearwood Walk and his man Richard Arrowsmith. Relying on their ancient pre-conquest rights to pasture on the common their ultimate challenge was to the rights of King James I. These struggles between the people, the aristocracy and the Crown were played out on the stage of forest landscapes across the country, often in the name of the Commonweal or Commonwealth. A precursor of challenges to the power of Kings leading to the Civil War with James' son Charles I and the foundation of the English Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. The landscape is valued not only for its associations with such people, but also as the stage upon which their lives were lived and their formative deeds played out.

Ironically, the landscape achieves importance because of its association with another rich and powerful man – John Walter II – who built a huge estate across the lands of the borough, centred on this valued landscape area. However, far from being the scion of a mighty Norman or Plantagenet house, John Walter II purchased a patent in the new technology of block type. He soon established The Daily Universal Register which in a few years became the well-established daily newspaper the Times of London. The works of John Walter II in establishing and innovating this business cannot be underestimated and, having purchased an estate at Bearwood, employed his considerable vigour in simultaneously working and adorning the landscape, making his estate as self-sufficient as possible. A work continued by John Walter III. This has resonances of the modern struggle to achieve economic growth whilst addressing the need for beauty, biodiversity and more recently the issues of sustainability and climate change.

²² Ancient Petitions, 8315, Record Office, London – translated from the old French.

Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape Map



Billingbear Valued Landscape Narrative

Billingbear Valued Landscape Narrative

*Thy forests, Windsor! and thy green retreats,
At once the Monarch's and the Muse's seats,
Invite my lays. Be present, sylvan maids!
Unlock your springs, and open all your shades.*

*There, interspers'd in lawns and opening glades,
Thin trees arise that shun each other's shades.
Here in full light the russet plains extend;
There wrapt in clouds the blueish hills ascend.*

*Alexander Pope (1688 – 1744)
'Windsor Forest'¹*

Introduction

The Billingbear Valued Landscape sits wholly within the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' Landscape Character Area (as identified in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment 2019) on a ridge of land between the M4 in the north and A329(m) in the south. It takes its name from the medieval park John Norden's 1607 map of the Royal Forest of Windsor. Forest Road (B3034) runs along the southern boundary and is a key and distinctive feature of the valued landscape. This road is marked on Thomas Pride's 1790 Map of the Environs of Reading and is reminiscent of the historic straight rides in the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape in the south-east of the borough. Other features, including Billingbear Park, are shown on this map, although the park has been truncated by the M4 motorway and the northern section is therefore not included in the valued landscape. At only two hundred hectares in extent, Billingbear is one of the smaller valued landscapes in the borough. The landform is essentially a relatively high west-east ridge. It lies in close proximity to Popeswood, in Binfield, where the poet Alexander Pope (1688 – 1744) lived as a child. Pope, one of England's foremost poets drew inspiration from his natural surroundings and his famous work 'Windsor Forest' is quoted at the head of this narrative, and this area is recognised by its own designation as the Alexander Pope Valued Landscape. There are also views across the landscape, for example to where the 'blueish hills ascend' in the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape.

In the hot-spot analysis to uncover the borough's valued landscapes² smaller hot-spots of landscape value were found to the south of, but not currently included in, this valued landscape. One of these is immediately adjacent to the Land south of Foxley Lane appeal site in Binfield³. In that appeal the Inspector, concluded that:

'...the attractive and available views over the land, the presence of woodland, trees and hedgerows, rolling topography and fieldscape, the walks adjacent to the land along country

¹ Pope A, Windsor Forest, 7 March 1713, Publisher B. B. Lintot

² See Appendix 2 of the Valued Landscape Assessment

³ APP/R0335/W/17/3177088

lanes which are designated as part of a Ramblers Route, the absence of built development, and the perception of the land as quintessential English countryside, provide significant reasons to enable me to make the judgement that this location is rightly assessed as a valued landscape by the local population. The landscape has sufficient features and characteristics of quality which set it above the ordinary. I accept that it should be regarded as valued in the terms set out in the NPPF⁴.

Attributes of the valued landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The valued landscape sits wholly within the I1 ‘Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland’ Landscape Character Area, as defined by the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019). The LCA (2019) states:

‘The rural character of the landscape with its variety of characteristics such as the wooded ridgelines with small tributary valleys, woodlands and sparse settlement are in good condition. However, former coppice woodlands have been neglected, and many hedgerows have been lost. There is also an erosion of tranquillity due to the disturbance from the motorways.’⁵

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

For the scenic quality it states:

‘A simple farmed landscape dominated by open arable fields and some pasture, with mature hedgerow trees marking former hedge lines. Wooded horizons created by large deciduous blocks line a subtle ridgeline, cut by a network of small tributary streams. Settlement is focused on ribbon development along the local roads, scattered farmsteads and manor houses. The strong rural character is only affected by the M4 and A329 (M) which cut through the area.’⁶

Assessing the scenic quality, the LCA (2019) identifies valuable landscape attributes of relevance to that:

Strong rural character of the rolling agricultural landscape with its subtle wooded ridges, large woodlands and sparse settlement which create a strong sense of place; large deciduous woodland blocks, including BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland, provide scenic variety and a sense of enclosure in the open landscape as well as important ecological habitats; characteristic mature in-field and roadside oaks in the open arable fields which provide a sense of place; the locally listed historic parkland at Billingbear and Bill Hill Park; wooded skyline which provides a backdrop to the surrounding areas.’⁷

⁴ APP/R0335/W/17/3177088 paragraph 28

⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 189

⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 185

⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 189

Rarity – A number of sources can assist in assessing the rarity of landscape types and individual features. The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004) provided an indication of this in the assessment of sensitivity where it assessed the re-creation of landscape elements and subsequently comments on their importance.

Regarding the I1 ‘Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland’ Landscape Character Area, the LCA (2004) mentions the presence of ancient woodland and the remaining rural, peaceful character that would be difficult to replace / restore if changed. It notes that most of the ‘characteristics are of local importance’⁸ although it says they ‘may be highly valued because of their increasing scarcity in the region’⁹. The characteristics are provided in that document, and many are reflected in the updated LCA (2019). The LCA (2004) mentions the ‘strong wooded horizons’¹⁰ which it says are sensitive to change. Importantly the LCA (2004) identifies the undeveloped ridge itself as important to the setting of nearby Wokingham.

Representativeness – Whilst Murrel Hill Road is some hundreds of metres to the south-east of the valued landscape, Foxley Hill is less than two hundred metres away. Importantly, the Billingbear and the Foxley Hill (in Bracknell Forest) Valued Landscapes both fall within a similar landscape character area. It is called the ‘I1 Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland’ Landscape Character Area in Wokingham Borough and the C1 ‘Binfield and Warfield Clay Farmland’ Landscape Character Area, in adjacent Bracknell Forest. However, the Landscape Character Areas are very similar, particularly on the boundaries between them. The Inspector, in the appeal at nearby Foxley Lane, describes the local environment:

‘Even so, the attractive and available views over the land, the presence of woodland, trees and hedgerows, rolling topography and fieldscape, the walks adjacent to the land along country lanes which are designated as part of a Ramblers Route, the absence of built development, and the perception of the land as quintessential English countryside, provide significant reasons to enable me to make the judgement that this location is rightly assessed as a valued landscape by the local population. The landscape has sufficient features and characteristics of quality which set it above the ordinary. I accept that it should be regarded as valued in the terms set out in the NPPF.’¹¹

The Inspectors’ description of what, earlier in his decision letter, he calls the ‘quintessential English countryside’ fits the nearby Billingbear Valued Landscape. Both landscapes are highly representative of the English lowlands.

In addition, Forest Road, with its wide verges and deep ditches, its appearance on a late 18th Century map¹², and its resemblance to the historic straight rides of the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape, makes this feature both important and representative of that period of the landscape of the Royal Forest of Windsor. The northern boundary of the valued landscape also covers the Straight Mile

⁸ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 13.31, page 254

⁹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 13.31, page 254

¹⁰ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 13.31, page 254

¹¹ APP/R0335/W/17/3177088

¹² PRIDE Thomas, A topographical map of the town of Reading and the country adjacent to an extent of ten miles, 1790, Thomas Pride (publisher)

which runs over the M4 and connects to the southern boundary of the Haines Hill Valued Landscape. Straight and narrow roads such as the Straight Mile and Forest Road are wooded and tree-lined, often with wide verges, banks or water-filled ditches, and are generally smaller in scale and rural in character, a key characteristic of the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA. Notable large manor houses and the parks and gardens, including Ashridge Manor and Bill Hill are also representative of the landscape.

Conservation Interests – In terms of wildlife and biodiversity, the Billingbear Valued Landscape is largely important for its woodlands.

Habitats of Principal Importance include: Lowland mixed deciduous woodland, and ponds.

The Ancient Tree Inventory¹³ records few Ancient or Veteran Trees. However, there is a good assemblage of ancient woodland with four sites recognised as Local Wildlife Sites. Ashridge Wood once occupied a much greater area but it is now only represented by woodland left after the centre was felled many years ago.

There are four Local Wildlife Sites within this valued landscape: They are: North Ockett Wood, Pond Wood, Tippen's Wood and Beech Wood. The woods form an assemblage of ancient woodland, some modified by the planting of sweet chestnuts but many with ancient woodland plants in the field layer including bluebells, wood sorrel and primroses.

A characteristic feature of this landscape is its lack of development with settlement characterised by sparse, ribbon development along the ridgeline and scattered manor houses and farmsteads, notably Ashridge Manor and Bill Hill. As well as being characteristic, this is also a historic feature of the landscape. There are therefore only two listed buildings within the valued landscape. Grade II Targetts Farmhouse, a late 15th Century timber- framed house of L-shaped plan form with a timber frame partly encased in painted brick and an old gable-ended tiled roof. The Grade II listed building at Marchfield House is an 18th Century building within landscaped surroundings containing a small lake.

The valued landscape contains one locally listed historic park and garden, Billingbear Park. Originating as a medieval deer park, Billingbear was bisected by the construction of the M4 Motorway.

The LCA (2019) states:

*'There was a medieval deer park at Billingbear first mentioned in 1280. The Parkland around Billingbear is now cultivated land although two fishponds remain.'*¹⁴

¹³ 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/>

¹⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para I1.7

The LCA (2019) identifies the locally listed parkland and lists it as a 'valuable landscape attribute' with a 'landscape guideline' to:

*'Conserve, enhance and manage the parkland landscape associated with Billingbear and Bill Hill Parks.'*¹⁵

Recreational Value - The LCA (2019) generally assesses public accessibility of the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA. It states:

*'This landscape is open and large scale permitting intermittent framed and distant views, although screening planting along the motorways disturbs this open character. Away from the motorways the area has a peaceful and rural character, with localised experience of dark skies to the north of the area.'*¹⁶

The LCA (2019) states that this is a landscape with 'few footpaths and little access across the large arable fields'. However, the open landscape, the framed and distant views and the network of straight, small-scale rural lanes combine to give the area a level of access above what might be expected from this description.

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the LCA (2019) which, for the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA states:

*This landscape is open and large scale permitting intermittent framed and distant views, although screening planting along the motorways disturbs this open character. Away from the motorways the area has a peaceful and rural character, with localised experience of dark skies to the north of the area.'*¹⁷

Regarding the character of the area, the LCA (2019) states that the landscape has 'Rural and peaceful character, although this is eroded locally by noise and movement along the A329 (M) and M4 motorways'. However, the LCA continues to state:

*'The distinctive large scale rolling landform rises to a subtle ridgeline from which there are views over the surrounding area, including views towards the town of Wokingham and the prominent church spire, and to the woodland of Bracknell Forest. Despite its proximity to Wokingham town, the urban area does not strongly influence the intrinsic rural character of this area...'*¹⁸

Associations – Alexander Pope is regarded as one of the greatest English Poets. According to Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, he is the English poet most quoted, after Shakespeare. Everyday speech is peppered with his phrases, for example: 'a little learning is a dangerous thing', 'to err is human, to forgive, divine,' and 'for fools rush in where angels fear to tread'.

¹⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 191

¹⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para I1.15, page 188

¹⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para I1.15, page 188

¹⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para I1.14, page 188

Pope was born in London in 1688, his father was a successful linen merchant in London but in 1700, his family moved to a small estate at Popeswood in Binfield just over a kilometre to the south-east of the valued landscape, and to the other side of the Foxley Hill Valued Landscape identified by the Planning Inspector in the appeal at Foxley Road, Binfield in adjacent Bracknell Forest.

The move was due to perceived strong anti-Catholic sentiment and a law preventing Papists from living within 10 miles of London or Westminster¹⁹.

The ridge, which runs through the valued landscape, is close to Pope's childhood home. There is no known record of Pope referring to specific places within the valued landscape. However, with its views across to the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape, the ridge would have been a good place to take views to where '*wrapt in clouds the blueish hills ascend*' as Pope later described regarding views from Windsor Forests in his 1713 poem of that name. Indeed, though the poem was first published in that year the first part was written in 1704 when Pope was just sixteen years old and still lived at Popeswood.

¹⁹ An Act to prevent and avoid dangers which may grow by Popish Recusants" (3. Jac. 1, v).

Billingbear Valued Landscape Map



Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape Narrative

Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape Narrative

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
from whence cometh my help.
My help *cometh* from the LORD,
which made heaven and earth.

Psalms of David 121: 1-2
Authorised King James version
(From the Hebrew Ketuvim)

Introduction

The Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape lies on the high chalk to the south of the Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape and a short distance to the north of the main line railway from London Paddington to Reading, which follows the route of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Great Western Railway. The riverside village of Wargrave lies immediately to the west and the boundary with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, forms the eastern boundary to that part of the valued landscape lying within Wokingham Borough.

According to the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019) the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape sits mainly within, the F1 'Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls' and G1 'Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes' Landscape Character Areas.

For the F1 'Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls' LCA, it states that it is:

*'An elevated landscape of rounded hills or 'knolls' cloaked in woodland that form a striking feature in views from the surrounding areas. A strong wooded character with high levels of ancient woodland coverage.'*¹

Describing the G1 'Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes' LCA, it states that the landscape is:

*'A gently sloping landform supporting a farmed landscape with an intimate mosaic of arable fields and pasture interspersed with small woodland blocks. There is a dispersed settlement pattern of rural hamlets, scattered farmsteads and large manor houses.'*²

The valued landscape has exceptional tranquillity and scenic beauty and its southern parts lie across the London to Bath road, for many centuries a highly significant highway. The popularity of the 'season' in Bath being highlighted in the novels of Jane Austen (a onetime resident of nearby Reading). The transport links between the capital and the important tourist destination of Bath combined with the scenic rural location made this an ideal location for country seats. This small area

¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 152

² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 162

has a number of fine examples including the home of a descendent of the Grand Inquisitor of Spain, whose Jewish father converted to Anglicanism, and who was a General at the battle of Waterloo.

Attributes of the valued landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The LCA (2019) assesses the condition of this landscape.

In discussing the condition of the F1 'Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls' LCA, it states:

'The naturalistic landscape is in good overall condition, with its extensive deciduous woodland, high ecological value and a good survival of extensive areas of ancient woodland which provides a wooded backdrop for the adjacent areas. The majority of landscape elements are in good condition. Ongoing operations at the Star Works waste treatment site detract from intact landscape condition at present although there is a long term restoration plan for the landfill element of the site'.³

Describing the G1 'Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes' LCA, it states that the landscape is:

'The elements in the best condition are the rural landscape with its sense of intimacy and enclosure, as well as the distinctive historic built character and settlement form. However, much of the parkland has been lost and the mixture of field boundaries reduces the integrity of the landscape and results in a moderate condition. The busy A4 and linear development alongside it are a detracting element'.⁴

Scenic Quality – The LCA (2019) identifies the following valuable landscape attributes relating to scenic quality:

Discussing the scenic quality of the F1 'Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls' LCA, it lists:

Variety and complexity of dense broadleaved woodland, much of which is ancient in origin; Hummocky wooded skyline providing a distinctive backdrop; clear views from the edge of the woodland over the surrounding landscapes giving a sense of place and orientation.⁵

Describing the scenic quality of the G1 'Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes' LCA, it lists:

Distinctly rural farmed and estate character with irregular fields of varied size, woodland blocks and sparse settlement pattern of hamlets, villages and manors connected by leafy rural lanes; numerous mixed and deciduous woodlands providing valuable habitat; distinctiveness of the historic built form in the villages, farmsteads and manors; parkland landscapes and veteran trees of large Georgian and Victorian manor houses which

³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 155

⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 166

⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 155

*contribute to the sense of place.*⁶

Rarity - The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004) gives an assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape, the re-creation and importance of features. This helps in assessing rarity.

Unusually, the description of the F1 'Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls' LCA does not assist in this case, but it does point to the landform and the sinuous wooded skyline and the visual function of the area as a wooded backdrop. The absence of settlement and the palette of strong perceptual characteristics are mentioned. These features are rare within the borough and the eastern part of the county. Particularly and increasingly rare at the regional level are the palette of strong perceptual qualities (remoteness, enclosure, isolation and elevation). Ancient woodlands which are rare in the borough are not, however, rare in the region (Sussex and Hampshire being particularly rich in these for example), although they are nationally rare and their preservation and enhancement is strongly supported in planning policy.

For the G1 'Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes', the LCA (2019) identifies the '*scattered ancient woodlands with other key sensitivities including the buildings and parklands*' due to their regional scale of importance. It identifies the intimate rural land-use pattern and perceptual characteristics as being important but of a lower level.

Representativeness – The area is predominantly rural with low density development and with high density woodland. Whilst adjacent, lower slopes appear to have been cleared for settlements as far back as Roman times. The area of the valued landscape is a good example of uneven and hilly land which, because of its soils and topography, has been traditionally managed as woodland over hundreds of years. The landscape was on the edge of the Royal Forest of Windsor and the coppiced woodlands of the hills would have contrasted strongly with the more open, less wooded hunting forest.

The high density of broadleaved woodlands in this valued landscape are important for: visual amenity; long distance views into, and framed views out of, the landscape; enclosed space for recreation; and as woodland habitats. The density of ancient woodland coppice sites in the core around Bowsey Hill makes this landscape particularly representative of traditionally managed lowland ancient woodland wooded landscapes.

Place names in the less wooded part of the valued landscape indicate early usage by the Anglo-Saxons of the valleys and hills for pasture, many deriving from Old English: '*denu*' meaning a 'valley'; '*denn*' meaning a summer pasture (especially for swine); '*bearu*' meaning a 'grove'; and '*bæŕ*' meaning 'swine pasture'⁷.

⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 166

⁷ GELLING Margaret, Place Names in the Landscape, 1984, J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd. 97 and 189

This wooded swine pasture sits north of Hare Hatch – one of the gates or ‘hatches’ into the Royal Forest and therefore supported the common swine herders of the Anglo-Saxon and later periods. The woodland, the land use and the place names are all representative of edge-of forest landscapes.

Later, the landscape took on another significance – the backdrop for numerous small estates and large country houses of the Georgian period. Improvements in the long-established Bath Road, with faster routes by carriage to London and Bath, made this an important landscape for the wealthy. Whilst the area was once ‘convenient’ for Bath Road, parts of it now suffer from the impacts of the A4, including noise and light pollution. The rest of the valued landscape shows high levels of tranquillity and dark skies as the next section describes.

The high density of great Georgian houses both contributes to the landscape and take inspiration from it. The Arts and Crafts movement appears also to have taken inspiration from this landscape and the buildings of these movements are ‘representative’ in that they are good examples of their types.

Perceptual aspects - The LCA (2019) provides an assessment of the perceptual aspects of the landscape.

Describing the perceptual aspects of the F1 ‘Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls’ LCA, under the ‘Key Characteristics’ section, it states that the landscape is:

‘Largely unsettled with an occasional isolated property set in a wooded context and connected by narrow and winding lanes.

A secluded naturalistic landscape due to the woodland and topography with high levels of tranquillity and dark night skies.’⁸

And that:

‘The landform and woodland creates an enclosed landscape although in places there are clear views over the surrounding landscapes from the edge of the woodland and lanes on the boundary of the area.’⁹

The list of ‘Key Characteristics’ continues stating that there is:

‘A dramatic sinuous skyline formed by the woodland that clothes the rounded hills’.¹⁰

And under ‘valuable landscape attributes’, the F1 ‘Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls’ LCA states that the landscape is a:

⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 153

⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 153

¹⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 153

'Tranquil intimate character with naturalistic perceptual qualities and experience of dark skies due to the lack of settlement and relative inaccessibility by road.'

*Hummocky wooded skyline which provides a distinctive backdrop to surrounding areas.'*¹¹

And:

*'Clear views from the edge of the woodland over the surrounding landscapes giving the landscape a sense of place and orientation.'*¹²

Describing the 'perceptual aspects' of the G1 'Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes' LCA, under the 'Key Characteristics' section, it states:

*'An intimate landscape with a strong sense of enclosure created by the undulating landform and the scattered woodland blocks, which is exaggerated by the wooded horizon of neighbouring knolls at Bowsey Hill (F1).'*¹³

And:

*'Tranquil farmed and estate character interrupted to the south by the busy A4 and the linear development of industrial and commercial properties alongside it.'*¹⁴

And under 'valuable landscape attributes' it states:

*'Strong sense of intimacy and enclosure due to undulating topography and scattered woodlands which subdivide the landscape.'*¹⁵

And:

*'Occasional views to the prominent wooded horizon provided by F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls.'*¹⁶

Conservation Interests – In terms of wildlife and biodiversity there are no sites that are currently considered nationally important. However, the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape provides an important mix of wildlife sites and habitats particularly at the local level with a high density of local wildlife sites.

¹¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 155

¹² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 155

¹³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 163

¹⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 163

¹⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 166

¹⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 166

Habitats of principal importance include: Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland; Wet Woodland; Lowland Beech and Yew woodland; and Ponds. There may be some Traditional Orchards but this requires ground truthing.

Ancient Woodland is scattered in considerable density throughout the landscape. The main concentration being on Bowsey Hill itself which is thickly wooded. Almost all of the woodland is ancient semi-natural woodland as the high frequency of ‘copse’ and ‘coppice’ names indicate. The extent and density of this woodland landscape makes it important for wildlife and amenity.

The Ancient Tree Inventory¹⁷ (ATI) shows a wide variety of Veteran Trees including an oak with a girth over six metres at Yeldall Manor. There is a notable absence of veteran trees within the wooded areas and whilst this is probably a result of intensive coppice management some boundary trees might have been expected. There are some veteran trees marking boundaries in the valued landscape however, including a fine oak with a girth of nearly six metres, on the footpath some four hundred metres north of Yeldall.

There are no ancient trees recorded for this valued landscape although this may be due to gaps in the recorded data.

The ATI assesses the important avenue of Wellingtonia trees at Yeldall Manor as ‘notable’ trees. They are young and, for this huge species, they are small trees – with girths of just under 4.5 metres, which would be considered small in their native Wellingtonia groves in the western Sierra Nevada, California. However, for the English countryside, and standing together as an avenue, they make an outstanding contribution as an important attribute of the valued landscape.

Local Wildlife Sites: There are eight Local Wildlife Sites within the boundaries of this relatively small valued landscape: Cayton Park Woods; Bear Grove, Lindenhill Wood; Cuttler’s Coppice; Knowl Hill Brick Pits; Scarletts Wood; Keepers Cottage Wood; Square Wood; Bottom Boles Wood. As the names of the sites suggest, Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland is the main habitat type but within the woods other scarce habitats are found. Even Knowl Hill Brick Pits is woodland. However, because of the clay substrate it does contain pond habitat, which is itself scarce and, particularly as the ponds are in such close association with the woodland, an important one.

Cultural heritage and built form - there are seventeen listed buildings within the valued landscape. They include the Grade II* listed building at Bear Place, which is a large country house in a landscaped park. The house dates from the late 18th Century, a brick building of three storeys with slate roof and several chimneys. The house stands on a terrace with a flight of seven stone steps to the door. The Georgian building replaced an earlier Elizabethan house in a moated site and was built for David Ximines, father to the General of that name who served at the Battle of Waterloo.

The Grade II listed building at Hare Hatch House in Tag Lane is a large, late 18th Century house which was moved to its current location in 1912 from a position thirty metres north of the Bath Road, as

¹⁷ 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/>

shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1883¹⁸. The Grade II listed building at Hare Hatch Grange is a late 18th Century country house approached by four stone steps.

The Grade II listed building at Yeldall Manor is a large country house – now a charitable institution in a landscaped park with a notable avenue of Wellingtonia trees (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*). It is an interesting departure from the Georgian architecture of other country houses in the valued landscape, having been built in a romantic Tudor style in 1894.

The Grade II listed building, Rebecca's Well on Crazies Hill, is a well house designed by Gertrude Jekyll. Inside the building is an inscription relating to the story told in Genesis 24 where Abraham's servant finds a wife for his son Isaac (the father of Jacob, the father of the Jewish nation). The inscription reads 'Rebeka and the Servants of Abraham at the well of Nahor'. Jekyll, the famous early 20th Century gardener, was influential in the Arts and Crafts movement and spent part of her early life at nearby Wargrave Manor. She took inspiration from the chalk and clay landscape here, particularly from the woodland, but she preferred to garden on the sandy soil at Munstead Wood in Surrey.

Continuing the theme of the Arts and Crafts movement is the Grade II listed building at Fox Steep, a house built in 1924 with waney-edge, elm boarding, v-boxed eaves of elm, and elm boxed rainwater downpipes. The roof is hipped at differing levels and there are old-brick flanking chimneys.

The valued landscape forms the setting for these buildings, but in terms of scenery it most certainly has formed the inspiration for them. Their locations would have been strongly informed by the site and setting of the valued landscape. As we have seen, one building was moved in its' entirety away from the increasing traffic of the Bath Road and further into the depths of the tranquil landscape.

Recreational Value - The LCA (2019) assesses public accessibility of the various Landscape Character Areas and notes, in a list, the 'Key Characteristics' for each LCA.

In the 'Key Characteristics' section of the F1 'Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls' LCA, it states:

'Well used for informal recreation with a network of footpaths and bridleways including the Chiltern Way which cross through the woods'.¹⁹

And in the section on 'valuable landscape attributes' it states:

'Recreational value, providing quiet enjoyment of the wooded countryside through a network of footpaths and the Chiltern Way.'²⁰

¹⁸ Berkshire Sheet XXXVIII Area of Hurst, six inches to one statute mile, surveyed 1872 – 1875, published 1883, Ordnance Survey

¹⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 153

²⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 155

For the G1 'Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes' LCA, there is little reported of the recreational value of the landscape. However, it does recognise a threat to the valued landscape from recreation. In the section on 'Key Issues', it states:

'Pressure for golf courses that may have an impact on the character of the landscape'.²¹

In the same section in the F1 'Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls' LCA, the potential impacts of informal recreation are also recognised. It states:

'Recreational pressure could lead to damage of ecological features in this well-populated borough'.²²

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the LCA (2019).

When assessing the F1 'Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls' LCA, it states that the LCA has a:

'Tranquil intimate character with naturalistic perceptual qualities and experience of dark skies due to the lack of settlement and relative inaccessibility by road.'²³

And:

'Clear views from the edge of the woodland over the surrounding landscapes giving the landscape a sense of place and orientation.'²⁴

The 'Key Characteristics' section states that this is:

'A secluded naturalistic landscape due to the woodland and topography with high levels of tranquility and dark night skies.'²⁵

Looking at the G1 'Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes' LCA, it states the landscape has:

'An intimate landscape with a strong sense of enclosure created by the undulating landform and the scattered woodland blocks, which is exaggerated by the wooded horizon of neighbouring knolls at Bowsey Hill (F1).'²⁶

And is a:

'Tranquil farmed and estate character interrupted to the south by the busy A4 and the linear

²¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 166

²² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 155

²³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 155

²⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 155

²⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 153

²⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 163

*development of industrial and commercial properties alongside it.*²⁷

Associations – Lieutenant-General Sir David Ximenes KCH (1777 - 1848) was a British Army officer, magistrate, and Berkshire landowner. His father, also David, paid for the Elizabethan House at Bear Place, Hare Hatch to be demolished and the current building to be erected in its place in 1784 at a cost of £843²⁸. He and his brother, Sir Morris Ximenes, who served with Wellington in the Peninsular War, spent their childhoods at Bear Place.

Of Sephardic Jewish origins he, his father and brother, converted to Anglicanism in the late 18th Century and were amongst the first Jewish families to do so. General Sir David Ximenes served under Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo.

The LCA (2019) discusses ‘associations’ relating to the G1 ‘Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes’ LCA and states:

*‘There are landscape connections to Gertrude Jekyll who lived at Wargrave Manor and explored further afield to exercise her artistic talents at Crazies Hill where she designed the well house above Rebecca’s Well and painted the gable front (previously known as Phillimore’s Spring – named after Rev Greville Phillimore a former Curate of Wargrave).*²⁹

And in addition, there is a reference to Miss Jekyll’s artistic endeavours relating to the A1 ‘Thames River Valley’ LCA sitting within the nearby River Thames Valued Landscape. It states:

*‘The Book of Wargrave – ‘History and Reminiscences by the People of Wargrave’ (1986) tells how Gertrude Jekyll “is recorded as having painted several inn signs in the area; alas we have no record of their names”’.*³⁰

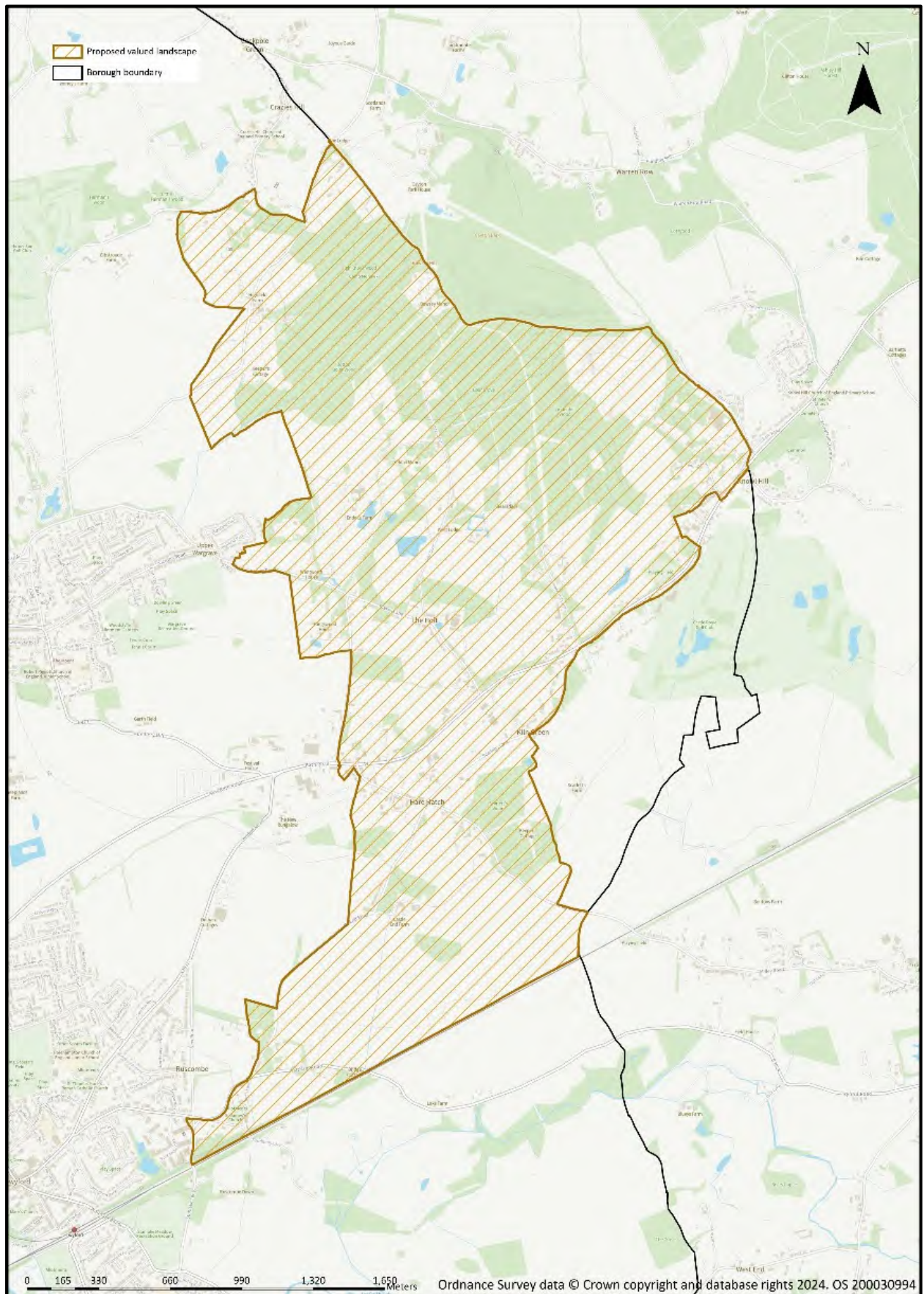
²⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 152

²⁸ V.C.H. Vol.III. p.192. B.O.E. (Berkshire) p.258.

²⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para G1.22, page 165

³⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para A1.26, page 43

Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape Map



Farley Hill Valued Landscape Narrative

Farley Hill Valued Landscape Narrative

Farley Court was about 1820 the residence of Charles Dickinson, whose wife was a friend of Miss Mitford, and whose daughter was the late Mrs. Elliot, author of Old Court Life in France and other works; it was lately the seat of Mrs. Brooks. Of the scattered smaller houses at Farley Hill some are half-timbered and thatched and others of brick.

A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3.
Published by Victoria County History, London, 1923.

Introduction

The Farley Hill Valued Landscape is a landscape of wooded hills, recreation and agriculture; with a number of notable large houses, an abundance of timber-framed and brick-built cottages and farmhouses, all linked by a network of rural lanes. The prominent geology is the Bagshot Formation of sand and sedimentary bedrock formed between 56 and 47.8 million years ago during the Palaeogene. The valued landscape occupies the slopes and high wooded ground of the L2 'Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills' Landscape Character Area (LCA), centred on the Registered Park and Garden and Grade II listed building at Farley Hall. Small areas of the valued landscape fall within the C1 'Arborfield River Terrace' LCA to the west and the J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA to the north and north-east.

The valued landscape is an irregular trapezium with the long side forming the eastern boundary. The north-west boundary runs down Swallowfield Road from Arborfield Cross, incorporating the Chamberlains Farm Area of Special Character, later it borders the River Loddon Valued Landscape at Swallowfield Park. To the south-west and south it shares a boundary with the River Blackwater Valued Landscape, running along Nutbean Lane and south down Ford Lane to the 'Devil's Highway' Roman Road. The southern boundary of the valued landscape then runs roughly east until it meets the Eversley Road/Reading Road (A327). The eastern boundary runs broadly north along the gently meandering Eversley Road/Reading Road (A327), a recognised green route. This boundary deviates east to include ancient woodland, other green infrastructure assets as well as a group of listed buildings around Westwood Farmhouse. The valued landscape boundary rejoins the Eversley Road/Reading Road around Chaucer Grove and runs up to Arborfield Cross where the edge of the settlement marks the northern point of the valued landscape.

The valued landscape is a strongly rural landscape with a heightened sense of tranquillity. It is an intimate landscape of small hills and fields, woodlands, ponds, winding and sometimes steep rural lanes, and historic vernacular architecture. The valued landscape rises above the valleys to a height of 80m AOD at Farley Hill itself, and there are long views across the landscape, especially to Reading which lies to the northwest. The scenery and the landscape's proximity to the River Loddon and River Thames corridors help make this a valuable landscape for recreation; including activities such as rambling, shooting and riding being popular pursuits.

Attributes of the valued landscape:

Landscape quality (condition) – The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004) categorises this area as the L2 ‘Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills’ LCA and confirms that it is of overall high quality. Discussing the condition of the landscape it states:

‘The landscape has such a strong character that despite its moderate condition it is overall perceived to have a high quality.’¹

And:

‘The moderate condition relates to the considerable opportunities for minor but significant changes to bring the landscape closer to its optimum condition, with the condition of the remnant parkland, suburbanising trends, presence of incongruous features and replacement of overgrown hedgerows with fences all of particular concern.’²

The landscape quality of the C1 ‘Arborfield River Terrace’ LCA is described by the LCA (2004) as:

‘...a landscape of moderate quality ...which generally lack[s] a strong sense of place. The components are in a moderate-poor condition.’³

However, the LCA (2004) continues:

‘The components of the highest quality are the physical landscape, particularly the terrace landform and the tranquil rural environment.’⁴

The landscape quality of the J2 ‘Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay’ LCA is described in the LCA (2004) as moderate, but where:

‘...elements in the landscape, such as the pattern of small nucleated settlements and natural tributary streams create localised areas in good condition.’⁵

Scenic Quality - The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019) summarises the scenic quality of the landscape and identifies valuable landscape attributes that relate to the scenic quality of the valued landscape, including:

- Distinctive hilly landform and wooded skyline visible and forming a backdrop in the wider landscape

¹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.48, page 285

² Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.48, page 285

³ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 7.21, page 136

⁴ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 7.21, page 136

⁵ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 14.43, page 318

- Variety and complexity of mixed broadleaved woodland, some of which is ancient in origin, with high biodiversity value reflected in BAP priority habitats and Local Wildlife Site (LWS) designations
- Intimate pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farmland provides scenic quality and visual diversity
- Recreational value of the network of the tree-lined and enclosed byways and footpaths allowing access and enjoyment of the countryside in close proximity to urban areas
- Rural pattern of farms and hamlets, which are well integrated into the wooded landscape and display a strong vernacular of timber-framed farmhouses and cottages, with polychromatic Reading brick, clay-tiled or thatched roofs
- Sunken winding rural lanes and tracks with mature hedgerows are visually appealing and add rural character to the landscape
- Historic parkland landscape associated with the Farley Hill estate, designated as a Registered Park and Garden, provides a cultural record of the past and layers of history within the landscape
- Contrast between the enclosure created by the woods and framed views across the Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater river valleys; and
- Areas with a strong sense of seclusion and rural tranquillity, with naturalistic perceptual qualities and experience of dark skies due to the lack of settlement.⁶

Within the 'Key Characteristics' section for the L2 'Farley Hill Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' LCA, the LCA (2019) highlights the following relating to scenic quality and expands upon them in the main text:

- Small undulating hills rising to 80m AOD at Farley Hill. The islands of higher land express the underlying geology, of London Clay overlain by Bagshot Formation sands and Sixth River Terrace deposits, which produce poorer soils making it unsuitable for agriculture. The lower clay slopes support mixed agriculture.
- Small ponds and open water bodies, possibly from former gravel or clay pits are scattered throughout the area, including Farley Hill West pond, a proposed LWS.
- Extensive woodland network of mixed, coniferous and deciduous woodland and copses, including areas of BAP priority habitat and ancient woodland, many of which are designated as LWS. Farley Hill Woods also contains small areas of remnant heathland habitat.
- Intricate small-scale landscape with small sinuous pastures enclosed by the woodland, and arable fields on lower slopes bounded by thick, overgrown hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Early enclosure field systems cover an extensive area.
- Marginal land uses including pony paddocks with associated stables bound by post and rail fencing and semi-industrial uses of farmland which influence the rural character.
- Some large agricultural buildings which are highly visible within the small-scale landscape.
- Historic parkland associated with Farley Hall (Grade I listed). The parkland was laid out in early-mid 18th century, with possible contribution from Charles Bridgeman, and is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden.

⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 296

- Rural settlement pattern of closely spaced farmsteads, the hamlet at Farley Hill and 18th and 19th century country houses with a strong vernacular of brick, timber-framing, thatch and clay tile. A new estate development on the former Poperinghe Barracks disturbs this pattern.
- Network of footpaths and bridleways and quiet rural lanes and tracks, some sunken, which wind through the woodlands, bordered by bulky hedgerows and often without kerbs or intrusive signage.
- Views to the river valleys of the Blackwater, Broadwater and Loddon, with this area forming a wooded backdrop to views from the surrounding landscape.
- Secluded, remote character of the landscape enclosed within woodland, with an experience of dark skies.⁷

Rarity – Assessing rarity of landscape types and individual features is not simple. However, a number of sources can assist, including the LCA (2004) an archived document. Many of the features and components of the landscape are considered of at least regional importance by the LCA (2004) which states:

‘Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills (L2) is considered to be a landscape of overall moderate sensitivity as a result of the largely regional scale of importance of individual components and their low or moderate recreatability value.’⁸

But the LCA (2004) goes further, it provides an indication of rarity in its’ assessment of sensitivity where it addressed the re-creatability of landscape elements. It continues:

‘However, within this context there are elements of high sensitivity, in particular the woodland which includes significant areas classified as being of ancient origin and sensitive on account of their ecological value’.⁹

The NPPF is clear that ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees are ‘irreplaceable habitats’ and even notable trees and oak standards would take hundreds of years to replace. Even secondary woodland can be of national significance and rarity particularly as ‘lowland mixed deciduous woodland’ is recognised as a habitat of principal importance under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Coniferous plantations, whilst of more limited general importance in terms of the wildlife habitat they offer, still provide a relatively high value amenity landscape for informal recreation, they are relatively rare in the lowlands of the UK and are therefore of at least local significance.

From the perspective of wildlife conservation, the valued landscape encompasses a number of Local Wildlife Sites. Local Wildlife Sites occupy only 5% of the land area of England and so they are nationally rare. Of course, woodland Local Wildlife Sites, such as those found in this valued landscape, are a subset of the whole and are therefore even rarer.

⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 294

⁸ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.50, page 386

⁹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.50, page 386

Perceptual aspects such as dark skies and tranquillity are addressed later in this chapter. Discussing perceptual aspects, the LCA (2004) states:

‘Other sensitive attributes are the important perceptual characteristics, the role of this area in relation to the setting of the Blackwater and Loddon valleys, historic parkland and small-scale character – including the close knit settlement and historic land use pattern, vernacular built character and presence of quiet winding rural lanes and steep sunken tracks.’¹⁰

As with other forms of pollution, light and noise pollution are largely a function of population levels. The more inhabitants in a landscape, the greater the levels of light, noise, domestic waste, sewage and other forms of pollution are generated. The valued landscape is relatively sparsely populated and sits on the southern edge of the borough towards the western boundary of the South-East region - a greatly polluted and highly populated region.

The ‘England’s Light Pollution and Dark Skies’ map published by CPRE shows this valued landscape sitting on the very edge of a swathe of the worst light pollution in the country, centred on central London and stretching from Southend in the east, to Reading in the west and from Stevenage in the north to Crawley in the south.

CPRE’s tranquillity mapping closely reflects this distribution with the least tranquil areas closely matching those areas with the most light pollution. This valued landscape is one of the areas of locally very rare tranquillity and an even better example of locally very rare dark skies.

Whilst mitigation is always possible, the sheer weight of population in the region makes any reversal of current levels of light or noise pollution practically irreversible. Dark skies and tranquillity are regionally rare in the South-East.

The geology forms a more accentuated and distinctive hilly landscape than it does in other areas of the borough. It is the same geology found in the south-eastern corner of the Alexander Pope Valued Landscape and across the Barkham and Bearwood and Riseley Woods Valued Landscapes. The geology consists of the Bagshot Formation of sand and sedimentary bedrock overlaid on London Clay. Time and erosion have crafted these uncommon, hilly landscapes that exist as outliers around the periphery of the Bagshot Formation which stretches from near Farley Hill in the west to Esher in the east and from Aldershot in the south to Wokingham in the north. These pockets of discrete hilly landscapes surrounding the main formation are of at least regional importance and are impossible to re-create.

Relying heavily on the geology for fine views across the River Loddon, the designed landscape at Farley Hall, where the parkland was laid out in early-mid 18th century, is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden. This is of national significance and rarity.

The cultural heritage would be impossible to re-create. The Registered Park and Garden at Farley Hall and the Hall itself are of national significance and rarity, as are all the other listed buildings in

¹⁰ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.50, page 386

the valued landscape. The Buildings of Traditional Local Character (also referred to as locally listed or non-designated heritage asset) are of at least borough and to an extent county significance and rarity.

The one Archaeological Site in the valued landscape is of likely county-wide significance.

There are two Areas of Special Character (ASC) (locally listed Conservation Areas). ASCs occupy only 0.9 percent of the land area of the borough. They should therefore be considered very rare in the borough and probably of county-wide importance.

The intimate pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farmland is considered to be of borough-wide importance and would be impossible to re-create.

Similarly, the rural pattern of farms and hamlets, well integrated into the wooded landscape, would be impossible to re-create as would the hedgerow lined, sunken and winding rural lanes and tracks. These features of the landscape would be impossible to re-create, are rare on a county-wide scale and are considered of at least borough-wide significance.

Another feature of this valued landscape is the Farley Hall Estate. It is recognised that sporting estates can have negative implications for landscape, for example on ecology. However, there are undeniable opportunities that this estate provides for recreational in the landscape. On the other hand, the estate depends mostly on the landscape and indeed the valued landscape, carefully conserved through the local planning process, as one of the unique selling points of the sporting experiences offered. The landscape provides the setting for sport. Sporting estates are not impossible to re-create but it would be a very complex task to do it on this scale and to this standard.

The infrastructure for informal recreation, the footpaths and byways of the valued landscape form a relatively dense network that would be difficult to re-create. The network has enhanced significance because of the quality of the landscape and the topography. It is of borough-wide significance.

Representativeness – ‘Rarity’ is discussed in the previous section. However, opposite to rarity is representativeness. 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 Farley Hill Valued Landscape is representative of the narrow band of broken and eroded landscapes that surround the upper levels of the Bagshot beds.

The geology underlying the landform itself is relatively rare, and therefore the Farley Hill Valued Landscape and the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape are the two best examples in the borough. In these valued landscapes the erosion of the upper strata has created steep isolated hills with aesthetically pleasing long views of the valleys of the rivers that made them. There are other examples of this landform in the borough; at Wokingham and Riseley. The landscape at Wokingham is almost entirely covered by urban development, whilst at Riseley, it still retains many features that make it a valued landscape, despite being bisected by the A33 road. This eroded geology is relatively

rare in the UK, being confined to an area, on the edge of the formation which is broadly elliptical with its long axis running from Farley Hill in the west to Esher in the east and its short axis from Aldershot in the south to Wokingham in the north. This landscape is far less built up than areas of similar geology and landform on the eastern or Surrey side of the main Bagshot formation. The lack of urban development in this valued landscape accentuates its importance and rarity.

Other 'representative' features, for example the vernacular architecture and the land-use fall out of the geology and steep topography.

Conservation Interests – In terms of wildlife and biodiversity, the Farley Hill Valued Landscape provides a mix of locally important wildlife habitats. Local Wildlife Sites within the Valued Landscape include: Claypits Copse; Cuckoo Pen; Farley Hill Woods, Great Copse and New Plantation; Long Copse (South) and Robin Hood Copse; Spring Copse and Long Copse (North); Westwood Copse; Wheeler's Copse and Featherstone Copse; Wyvol's Copse. These largely cover areas of ancient woodland with plantation present on some Ancient Woodland sites and some linking lowland mixed deciduous woodland.

Habitats of principal importance within the valued landscape include lowland mixed deciduous woodland and Wood Pasture and Parkland, with some small areas of traditional orchard.

There are a number of clay and gravel workings some of which have formed ponds. Due to its very high toad (Bufo bufo) population, Farley Hill West Pond is identified as a proposed Local Wildlife Site (LWS).

Cultural heritage - is represented by a dense collection of listed buildings of various kinds. Of the eighteen in the valued landscape, the Grade I listed building at Farley Hall is the most important, the most imposing and also sits centrally and at the highest point of the valued landscape with views across the valley of the River Loddon. The Grade II* listed buildings at Hall's Farm Kennels and Bartlett's Farmhouse are next in terms of quality. There are several different types of Grade II listed buildings including country houses (Arborfield Court and Farleyhill Court), former farmhouses (Farley Hill Farmhouse, Duck's Nest Farmhouse, Nutbean Farmhouse), former rural workers cottages (Vine Cottage, Drumhead Cottage), the Grade II listed stables north of Farley Hall and a Grade II listed cattle shelter adjacent to Old Parson's Cottage. The only listed public house in the valued landscape is the George and Dragon which currently provides added recreational and health benefits by encouraging organised walking routes for its customers. The route even takes in a walk down the riverbank in the adjacent River Blackwater Valued Landscape. In addition, there are four Buildings of Traditional Local Character, a form of local listing. They are Oak Cottage, Parsons Farm, Woodcot and Yew Tree Cottage.

The only Registered Park and Garden is the Grade II listed garden forming the setting to Farley Hall and its stable block. There is one archaeological site (No.104) that sits within the park and garden. There is a further archaeological site (No. 79) within the valued landscape and, of course, the historic route of the 'Devil's Highway', the Roman Road, and archaeological site 47 form its' southern boundary.

The valued landscape is relatively rich in Areas of Special Character: Farley Hill and Farley Hill Farm ASCs.

In addition, the LCA (2004) describes the heritage of early enclosure field boundaries. It states:

*'The piecemeal clearance of woodland to form cultivable land by assarting, and later by agreement, can be seen in the pattern of small irregular fields intermixed with woodland around Farley Hill, where the woodland remains a dominant feature. This early enclosure landscape covers an extensive area, once contiguous with adjacent lands around the Loddon (A2 and C1) and Spencers Wood (J3). A considerable amount of this early field system remains well preserved.'*¹¹

Recreational opportunities within the valued landscape include a relatively dense network of footpaths: ARBO 17, 18, FINCH 1, SWAL 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 24. Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) include: SWAL 8, 28, 29, 30 32 and 33, 34 ARBO 15 and 17. Greenway routes J and F which run along ARBO 15; and also route K, which runs from Arborfield Cross in a south-west direction along Swallowfield Lane for a few hundred metres to Greensward lane where it turns north-west and exits the valued landscape. The Farley Hall Estate offers excellent facilities for riding and shooting, with their value enhanced by the excellence of this landscape.

The L2 'Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills' LCA is described as a landscape in fairly dry and formal prose, nonetheless paints an attractive view of the landscape. The LCA (2019) states:

*'An intricate network of winding rural roads and lanes, bridleways and footpaths links the farms and hamlets, and are used for recreation. The lanes are highly rural in character, a small proportion are sunken, bordered by bulky hedgerows and by woodland. They are without kerbs, sometimes with rough grassed triangular islands at junctions and with little intrusive signage'.*¹²

The L2 LCA identifies the recreational value of the landscape as a Valuable Landscape Attribute:

*'Recreational value of the network of the tree-lined and enclosed byways and footpaths allowing access and enjoyment of the countryside in close proximity to urban areas.'*¹³

The C1 'Arborfield River Terrace' LCA lies in the western part of the valued landscape, the Landscape Character Assessment (2019) identifies the following Valuable Landscape Attribute:

*'Valued area for recreation with a network of bridleways and public footpaths which allow enjoyment of the landscape.'*¹⁴

¹¹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.38, page 381

¹² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para L2.11, page 296

¹³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 296

¹⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 100

The J2 LCA lies in the northern and north-eastern part of the valued landscape. The description of the LCA states:

‘There is a regular network of roads throughout the area which tend to have a rural character with ditches, hedgerows and hedgerow trees, although increased traffic is having a negative impact. Rural tracks, bridleways and, less frequently, footpaths give access for recreational use....’¹⁵

The J2 LCA describes the ‘Recreational value of the network of rights of way between settlements’, as a valuable landscape attribute.¹⁶

Perceptual Aspects – are also addressed in the LCA (2019). The L2 ‘Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills’ LCA is described for its perceptual aspects in paragraphs L2.12 and L2.13. Addressing landscape views in the first paragraph mentioned it states:

‘The woods form a wooded horizon, framing views across the Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater river valleys and strengthening the wooded character of the borough. The enclosure given by the woods on the hills themselves adds drama to the open views out across the valleys.’¹⁷

The second paragraph, (L2.13), addressing tranquillity, dark skies and rural ambience states:

‘There is a quiet and rural ambience, and although the landscape is accessible, it still feels secluded and tranquil, with dark skies.’¹⁸

The LCA identifies three valuable landscape attributes that reflect these earlier paragraphs on perceptual aspects:

Distinctive hilly landform and wooded skyline visible and forming a backdrop in the wider landscape.

Contrast between the enclosure created by the woods and framed views across the Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater river valleys.¹⁹

And:

Areas with a strong sense of seclusion and rural tranquillity, with naturalistic perceptual qualities and experience of dark skies due to the lack of settlement.²⁰

¹⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para J2.12, page 240

¹⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 240

¹⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), paragraph L2.12

¹⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), paragraph L2.13

¹⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 296

²⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 296

The C1 'Arborfield River Terrace' LCA (forming a small part of the western valued landscape), describes perceptual aspects. It states:

*'A tranquil rural environment, with a network of lanes and tracks connecting dispersed farmsteads with fields emphasising the rural character of the landscape...'*²¹

The C1 LCA identifies 'A tranquil area with a sense of remoteness, removed from roads and visual intrusion of settlement' as a Valuable Landscape Attribute.

The J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA lies in the northern and north-eastern part of the valued landscape. The description of the LCA identifies (at paragraph J2.14) 'a wooded context from hedgerow trees and wooded horizons states...'. The LCA description identifies the following Valuable Landscape Attributes:

*Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provides a rural character...*²²

And:

*Views across the landscape to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and to the wooded hills to the north and south...*²³

Associations – This compact but rich landscape has a shorter discrete history being intimately associated with Swallowfield and the families that owned land in the vicinity. Farley Hall was built for Charles Lannoy in the 1720s and the English landscape gardener, Charles Bridgeman (1690–1738) a pioneer of the naturalistic landscape style, possibly designed part of the historic garden there. Farley Hall is now the seat of the Viscounts Bearstead. Marcus Samuel, the first Viscount Bearstead, was the joint-founder of the Shell Transport and Trading Company in 1897 that, following merger with the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company, became one of the world's largest oil companies. During the First World War, the First Viscount Bearstead was active in providing oil and especially a petroleum distillate, which formed the basis of the high explosive TNT (trinitrotoluene).

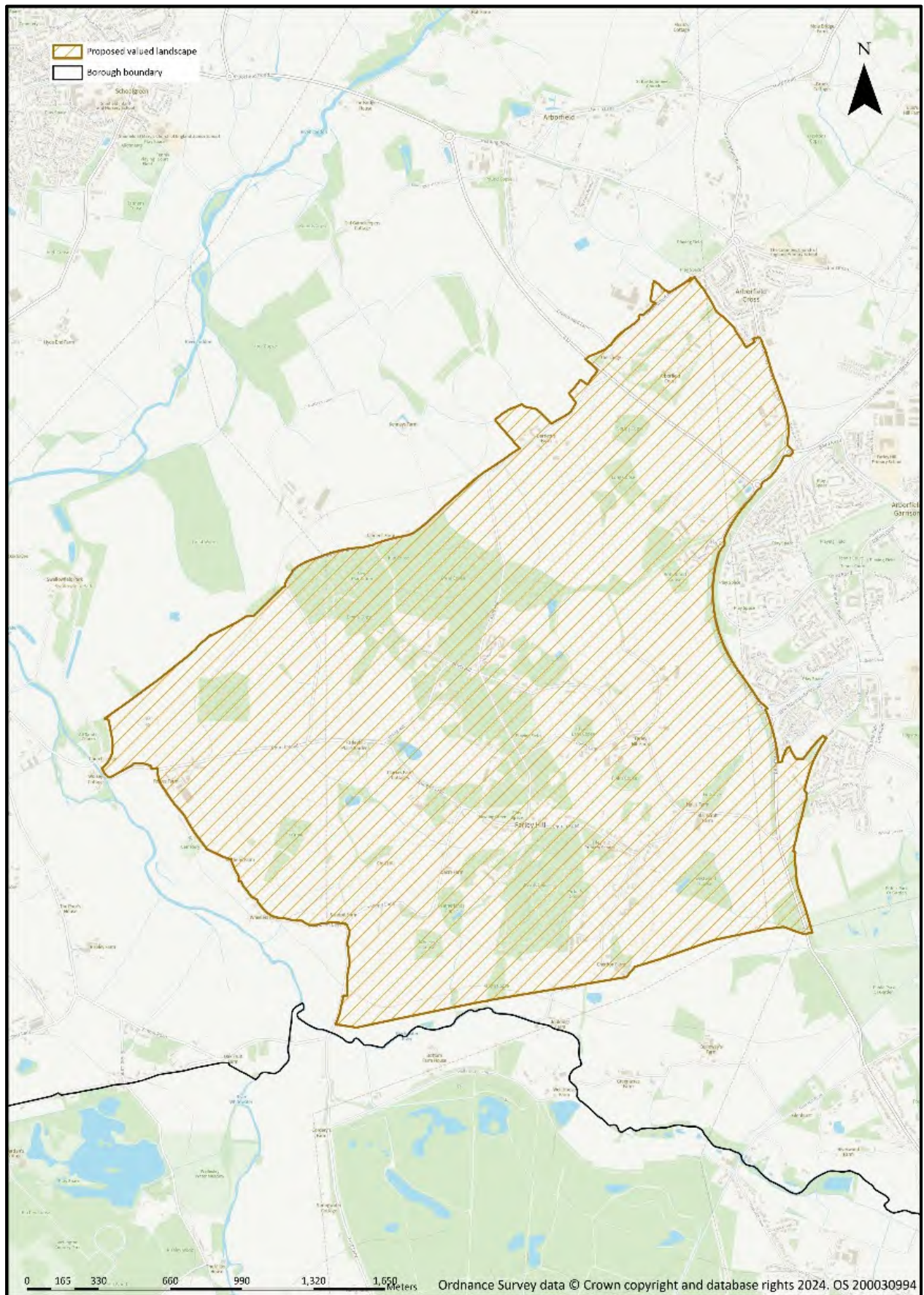
Around 1820, Farley Court was the residence of Charles Dickinson, a descendent of the famous Captain Francis Dickinson (1632-1704). Capt. Francis - born in Appleton, Berkshire (now Oxfordshire) - was granted 6000 acres in Jamaica by Charles II as a reward for capturing Jamaica from Spain in 1655. Like many families the Dickinsons were slave owners compensated for their losses after the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Charles Dickinson's wife was a friend of the celebrated author Mary Russell Mitford (1787 – 1855) – Author of *Our Village* and resident of Three Mile Cross and later Swallowfield to the north of the valued landscape. Mary Russell Mitford, who must surely have visited her friend at Farley Hill and the surrounding landscape, was herself a friend of Jane Austen (1775 – 1817). Charles Dickinson's daughter was Mrs. Elliot, author of *Old Court Life in France* and other works.

²¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para C1.13, page 100

²² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 240

²³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 240

Farley Hill Valued Landscape Map



Forest and Rides Valued Landscape Narrative

Forest and Rides Valued Landscape Narrative

'The boundary of the 19th century park which may approximate to that of the medieval one is shown on Walter's map of Windsor Forest (1823). The line of the boundary is marked by streams and field boundary banks.'

'Bigshotte Rayles' is shown in a survey by John Norden in 1607. The date of the enclosure of the park is uncertain, but Ravenswood, formerly known as Hannican's Lodge embodies part of the old house, and has been suggested to date from the early sixteenth century. The railings were pulled up during the Commonwealth but were repaired by a Keeper in 1649. In 1730 the railes and the house were ruinous, but were again repaired'

From the Wokingham Sites and Monuments record¹

Introduction

The Forest and Rides Valued Landscape gains much of its identity and cohesiveness from its role in later development, in particular of the hunting landscape from the reign of Queen Anne to that of her distant cousin King George III. The wide straight rides with deep ditches, to aid drainage on either side, were created to facilitate the carriages carrying monarchs and their courts following the royal stag hounds as they sought diversion in the forest. The link between hunting, the historic straight rides and the Bigshotte Railes, (a particular kind of deer park associated with the protection and feeding of deer for the hunt and the exclusion of domestic grazers and browsers), is clear. When the historical record is examined, the constant need for money to maintain the park and its boundaries appears to be a reflection of the monarchy's lack of sufficient funds. In the end, the cost of maintaining the Royal Forest, coupled with the gradual wearing-away of much of it through assarts² (legal and illegal), was a factor in the final sale of the forest through the Inclosures of the early 19th Century. The medieval hunting landscape can be characterised by deer, diversion and debt. This valued landscape centres on the locally listed medieval park of Ravenswood, formally Bigshotte Railes, but now the site of a charitable education facility – which lies to the south of the B3040 Nine Mile Ride; and on the Gorrick Plantation land, which lies to the north of that road.

Historic settlements were dispersed in small hamlets between the town of Wokingham and the villages of Finchampstead and Crowthorne. The woodland landscape made the heathland a popular setting for country house surrounded by mostly small ornamental and landscaped parks³. The landscape was amongst the very last parts of the Royal Forest of Windsor to be inclosed in 1817. In ancient times, the Roman road from the important Civitas of Calleva Atrebatum (the former settlement of the Atrebates tribe at modern-day Silchester) ran through the middle of the valued landscape to Londinium (now London). Nowadays the A327 runs north-south in the west and the

¹ Record entry number 00399.00.00. Bigshotte Rayles or Railes, and Hannican's or Hanekin's Lodge are synonymous of the parkland now known as Ravenswood Park. The park is classified as a medieval to post-medieval deer park.

² An assart was an enclosure of the hunting forest which was then converted to agriculture

³ Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2038 (September 2023), Appendix C History & Heritage, available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-development-plan/neighbourhood-development-plans>

A321 in the east of the valued landscape but generally the road network is characterised by smaller historic lanes together with the 18th Century historic straight rides which are characteristic. It is these historic straight rides, most often lined with either dense woodland or linear development, which help define the character and extent of the valued landscape. The contribution that the straight rides, such as Nine Mile Ride, make to the character and appearance of the area has been widely recognised by Inspectors conducting planning appeals, notably the decisions for Land at and to the rear of 240 Nine Mile Ride, Finchampstead⁴ and Land at Pineridge Park, Nine Mile Ride, Wokingham⁵, where, the Inspector, for the latter, stated:

*‘Nine Mile Ride is a designated Green Route and has historical landscape significance by reason of once being part of Windsor Forest. The trees and woodlands along the Ride make a strong contribution to its amenity value by creating a backdrop to built development and a prominent skyline of tree canopies. The depth of woodland blocks strengthens the remote woodland character of the area and the sense of enclosure’.*⁶

This part of the M1 ‘Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands’ Landscape Character Area is ‘valued landscape’ and was confirmed by Inspector Wendy McKay in her Decision Letter. The Inspector said:

*‘The Council accepts that there is a hierarchy of landscape and that the appeal sites do not fall within one of the nationally designated landscapes which are specifically referred to in paragraph 115 of the Framework. Nonetheless, given the identification of this landscape as being of high quality, the reference to the LCA in MDD Policy TB21 and the location of the sites within the historic parkland, I consider that this landscape is appropriately categorised as a ‘valued’ landscape for the purposes of paragraph 109 of the Framework’.*⁷

From this, in the Inspector’s opinion, the valued landscape centres on the locally listed medieval deer park of Bigshotte Railes (now Ravenswood Park) but includes other land. Elsewhere in this judgement, and similarly to the decisions at 240 Nine Mile Ride and Land at Pineridge Park, the Inspector gives weight to the historic straight Nine Mile Ride. This assessment therefore builds on the weight afforded by the Inspectors in their decisions in determining the character and extent of the valued landscape. The historic and landscape links between the straight rides, the park and the wider landscape of the Royal Forest are what gives this valued landscape its’ cohesiveness, character and distinctive shape.

By Identifying these attributes in the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape it ensures that development will be carefully planned and sensitively designed to maintain and enhance connection of the historic straight rides with the verdant character of the wider valued landscape.

⁴ Land at and to the rear of 240 Nine Mile Ride, Finchampstead, APP/X0360/W/22/3295631, decision dated 13th December 2022, paragraph 16

⁵ Pineridge Park Homes, Nine Mile Ride, Wokingham, APP/X0360/A/14/2214855, decision dated 11th February 2015, paragraph 85

⁶ Pineridge Park Homes, Nine Mile Ride, Wokingham, APP/X0360/A/14/2214855, decision dated 11th February 2015, paragraph 85

⁷ Appeals APP/X0360/C/15/3141000 and 3141001 (paragraph 174)

Attributes of the valued landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The bulk of the valued landscape sits within the M1 ‘Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands’ Landscape Character Area (LCA) as defined in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019). However, the valued landscape does cut across a number of other LCAs including J2 ‘Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay’, L2 ‘Farley Hill Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills’, M2 ‘Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands’ and N2 ‘Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland’. Whilst the valued landscape does not occupy the whole, or even any great part of some of these LCAs, an analysis of the condition of these landscapes does help in the assessment of the valued landscape.

The LCA (2019) discusses landscape condition. In the ‘Key Characteristics’ of the LCA it states:

For the J2 ‘Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clays’ LCA it states:

‘The landscape is in overall moderate condition, due to the pattern of arable and pastoral fields, and remnant wetland influences associated with Barkham Brook. However, the hedgerow network is fragmented and the introduction of further development through the Arborfield Garrison SDL and associated infrastructure will further fragment the rural settlement pattern altering the character of the area.’⁸

For the L2 ‘Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills’ LCA it states:

‘This is a distinctive hilly landscape with an intact pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farming interspersed with vernacular settlements. These provide a strong sense of place and strong perceptual qualities of seclusion and remoteness resulting in a good condition. However increasing traffic levels are affecting the tranquillity of the area. The presence of large agricultural buildings and semi-industrial uses for farms is incongruous, as is the replacement of hedgerows with fencing.’⁹

For the M1 ‘Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands’ LCA, which together with the M2 ‘Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sand’ LCA, forms the bulk of this valued landscape, it states:

‘The landscape is in overall good condition, with a distinctive pattern of built and natural elements, including woodland, wetland, open pasture, and heathland habitats, with large lakes, continuous interconnected forestry and a cohesive settlement character. Although much of this landscape has a ‘suburban’ character it does have a very strong sense of place; however there has been fragmentation of heathland and wetland habitats’.¹⁰

⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 240

⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 296

¹⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 318

For the M2 'Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sand' which together with the M1 'Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sand' LCA, forms the bulk of the valued landscape, it states:

*'The landscape within the Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands is in good condition as a result of the well-managed and maintained nature of the woodland, heathland and avenues of trees in this area.'*¹¹

For the N2 'Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland' LCA it states:

*'The landscape components, including scattered woodlands, coherent pattern of settlement and predominately pastoral land use are in good condition. However much of the original parkland character of the landscape has been lost and the mixture of field boundaries reduces the integrity of the landscape.'*¹²

Scenic Quality – The LCA (2019) identifies the following valuable landscape attributes that relate to scenic quality. The scenic quality of the valued landscape encompasses a mixture of short, enclosed views along and from the straight rides, views through the landscape from smaller meandering rural lanes, and long distance views from high points across surrounding countryside.

For the J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clays' LCA it states:

*'Views across the landscape to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and to the wooded hills to the north and south provides a loose sense of enclosure.'*¹³

And also:

*'A rural character away from development and roads, with views across to adjacent character areas including across the Loddon Valley.'*¹⁴

For the L2 'Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills' LCA it states:

*'Views to the river valleys of the Blackwater, Broadwater and Loddon, with this area forming a wooded backdrop to views from the surrounding landscape.'*¹⁵

And also:

*'Intimate pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farmland provides scenic quality and visual diversity.'*¹⁶

¹¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 329

¹² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 351

¹³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 240

¹⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 238

¹⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 294

¹⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 296

For the M1 'Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands' LCA it states:

'Important vistas to the Wellingtonia Avenue (within LCA M2) which provides a sense of place.

*The continuous network of woodland and forestry which helps to provide physical and visual separation between settlements and to filter and screen views to the settlements within the area, as well as provide an attractive setting to housing.'*¹⁷

And:

*Long straight roads such as Nine Mile Ride (which originated as historic 'rides' created through the historically open landscape of the Royal Forest of Windsor) gives a strong linear character to the landscape. Characterised by roadside rhododendron 'hedges' and occasional colourful patches of gorse and heather.'*¹⁸

For the M2 'Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sand' LCA it states:

*'Heavily enclosed character contrasts with distinctive long but framed views along historic straight rides through the trees and extensive views across the Blackwater Valley and into Surrey and Hampshire from the ridgeline at Finchampstead Ridges.'*¹⁹

*'The dramatic Wellingtonia Avenue, with its impressive 150 year old giant redwood trees which is it is an iconic feature of the borough.'*²⁰

And:

*'Long distance southerly views from the elevated ridge over the Blackwater Valley (B2) and beyond into Surrey and Hampshire, as well as framed views associated with designed landscapes, such as the view along the tree-lined Wellingtonia Avenue.'*²¹

For the N2 'Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland' LCA it states:

*'Expansive views from vantage points across the surrounding lowlands of the Blackwater River valley to the south which contrast with the wooded and enclosed character in other parts of the area and to the adjoining forested landscapes of the Finchampstead Ridges.'*²²

And:

'Rural character of the pattern of pastoral fields interspersed with scattered woods and

¹⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 318

¹⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 315

¹⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 328

²⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 326

²¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 326

²² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 348

*hedgerow oaks which provide visual diversity as well as continuity with the adjoining forested landscape of the Finchampstead Ridges.*²³

Rarity – Assessing rarity is difficult but a number of sources can assist. The LCA (2019) provides a list of ‘valuable landscape attributes’ for the M1 ‘Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands’ LCA including:

The elevated plateau and wooded skyline, the distinctive pattern of woodland and forestry and expanses of mixed woodland; sandy heaths, lakes and bogs which provide nationally important BAP habitats, nationally recognised SSSIs and opportunities for recreation; distinctive long straight historic rides – a cultural record of the past allowing views into a landscape; vistas of the Wellingtonia Avenue; areas with a sense of tranquillity and even remoteness; the locally listed historic park at Ravenswood, one of only four medieval deer parks in the ; district; and a low-density, post-war settlement pattern along the straight rides and notably the occasional wooded gaps between areas of settlement.

The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004) M1 ‘Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands’ LCA supports this and describes the following features as being ‘*unique within Wokingham District*’:

*‘The elevated plateau, the long straight rides, the important ecological habitats, the [royal] forest [of Windsor], and the perceptual qualities (which can be interpreted as meaning tranquillity and dark skies). Whilst there are straight rides in adjacent boroughs they are particularly dense in the landscape – a feature of the late enclosure of this part of the Royal Forest. They are therefore of at least regional importance’.*²⁴

The Wellingtonia Avenue is one of, if not the, finest avenues in the Country and is considered to be of both national and regional importance. Its value is recognised in Policy IRS3 of the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan, where it identifies it as a non-designated heritage asset.²⁵ This feature is discussed elsewhere in this narrative. There are cultural and wildlife heritage sites of national importance in the landscape and they are also discussed elsewhere.

Representativeness – The historic straight rides, being rare examples of a large-scale designed hunting landscape in one of Europe’s premier hunting forests, are both rare (as previously discussed) and representative of this valued landscape. The remnants of the hunting forest (the rides, the open undeveloped nature and the deer park with its features), coupled with remnants of the natural landscape (including persisting in the landscapes from the open forest) are important examples of features relating to a hunting forest and a ‘late inclosure’ formerly ‘natural’ landscape. Some of these features have been modified by later land uses or development, for example: Wellingtonia Avenue is now a formal avenue; some rides are now roads lined with forestry trees; and other rides are now lined with housing. The valued Landscape therefore takes the form of a ‘spider’s web’ on

²³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 350

²⁴ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 17.26

²⁵ Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2038 (September 2023), available at:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-development-plan/neighbourhood-development-plans>

the map. However, in places the close association of rides and other hunting features with the natural landscape is preserved. This is evident on the map and in wider views from the ground, where the rides sit in a more naturalistic landscape providing a glimpse of the ancient hunting forest. Whilst both the foresters lodge (Bigshott Lodge) and the mansion that replaced it have been demolished, the parkland setting and its boundaries are largely retained and a large part of the parkland remains open and undeveloped. This provides another glimpse of the ancient hunting landscape.

The historic straight rides and the locally listed medieval park are particularly important examples of such features, and are of at least local importance and, in the case of the straight rides, probably of national importance. The SSSIs are, by definition, of national importance. The areas of tranquillity and dark skies are of at least borough importance and due to their paradoxical relationship with nearby urban areas this importance is elevated, potentially to county level.

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

Habitats of principal importance include:

- Blocks of scattered Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland predominate throughout the valued landscape. Although there are also areas of conifer plantation, some of these are either naturally regenerating or being actively restored to mixed deciduous woodland. As might be expected from a late inclosures hunting landscape there is a notable absence of ancient woodland.
- Pockets of Wet Woodland occur in lower lying and waterlogged areas and Traditional Orchards occur often in close association with established historic settlements
- Wood Pasture and Parkland, a generally more open habitat is reported at West Court in the far western part of the valued landscape.
- Open habitats are present to a lesser extent across the valued landscape including Rivers, Lowland Heathland, Mesotrophic Lakes, Eutrophic standing waters, Lowland Fens, Lowland Dry Acidic Grassland, and Lowland Meadows.

The Ancient Tree Inventory²⁶ shows a wide variety of Ancient and Veteran Trees with notable aggregations, as is to be, at the core of Ravenswood Park (a selection of ancient and veteran oaks and sweet chestnuts) retained amongst modern buildings in the location of the former Hannican's Lodge. The clearest aggregation of ancient and veteran trees in the valued landscape is the avenue of Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) growing either side of the historic ride, now known as Wellingtonia Avenue. These trees were planted by John Walter II, who also planted a similar but smaller avenue at his mansion at Bearwood Park. Avenues of this species are not uncommon in the borough, due to their close association with the first Duke of Wellington whose country seat, Stratfield Saye, is just across the Hampshire border and in whose honour these trees are named.

²⁶ 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/>

However, due to the size of the trees, the intactness and prominent position of the avenue, it has been described as one of the finest in the country.

There are two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the valued landscape: Heath Lake and Longmoor Bog. Heath Lake is a rare lowland example of a shallow acid lake surrounded by birch and pine woodland with relict heath. It is a long, established open water habitat and is particularly important for specialist communities of plants and animals, including some rare aquatic plant species. The site is the only acid lake left in Berkshire which still retains this characteristic flora. Longmoor Bog is one of a small number of base-poor valley mires in the County. It has a well-developed carr of alder, willow, downy birch and alder buckthorn as well as an area of wet heathland. Situated in a valley bottom, the layers of peat have accumulated to a depth of over one metre. The peat provides an almost unbroken pollen record for the last 7,500 years and cores taken from it have been used to demonstrate past changes in vegetation and land use for the surrounding area.

Nature reserves: Local Nature Reserves include Heath Lake and Longmoor Bog both of which are SSSIs. See above.

Local Wildlife Sites: There are 15 Local Wildlife Sites including a large aggregation to the west and east of the railway and north of Nine Mile Ride. This aggregation includes Gorrick Plantation which is one of a number of excellent places for informal recreation in a wildlife-rich and tranquil setting.

A Local Geological Site lies on the boundary of the valued landscape in the location of Rooks Nest Wood Country Park. The surrounding area is flat-lying and there are many drainage ditches. Some of these watercourses are orange in colour due to the amount of iron that has leached into them from the adjacent bedrock of Eocene Sands. The site is regionally important for iron-rich groundwater monitoring.

Cultural heritage and built form - the valued landscape encompasses and forms an important part of the setting of the Finchampstead Church Conservation Area, an area of high land overlooking the valleys to the south. The valued landscape also encompasses the Finchampstead Village Area of Special Character, the historic core of the village comprising small open spaces with linear development along roads. The area includes a grouping of older buildings centred around the church of St James', characterised by two-storey residential properties with tile roofs and brick / render elevations. Generally, the buildings are set back from the road and bordered by hedges and mature trees. Residential development varies in design and age, ranging from modern properties near the junction of The Village, Longwater Road and Jubilee Road, to older cottages to the west fronting The Village.

Listed buildings outside the conservation area are notably absent from the eastern part of the valued landscape and this is evident from the LCA (2019) *Figure 2.8: Cultural Heritage Designations*. This is not unexpected as this area was amongst the last parts of the Royal Forest to be inclosed.

There are just over a dozen listed buildings, ranging from the grand and ceremonial – like the Grade II listed building at West Court (a former manor house with a 17th Century core and substantial

additions and rebuilding in 1800, 1835, 1901 and 1964, and later used as an officers' mess) in the west of the valued landscape - to the more pastoral – like the Grade II listed building The Queens Oak, an early 17th Century cottage, now used as The Queens Oak public house in the south. The valued landscape forms the setting for the conservation area, as well as for the individual buildings and structures in the landscape. The form and location of many of the principal buildings is, in part, a response to the historic, geological, topological and geographical features of the landscape, in which they sit.

The Forest and Rides Valued Landscape also encompasses Ravenswood, a locally listed historic park and garden, which was acknowledged in the Inspector's decision for the planning appeal at New Acres²⁷ as one of four historic medieval parks of local importance in the whole of the district, and thereby concluded that for the purposes of the NPPF it should be categorised as a valued landscape. The Inspector recognised (in paragraph 188) of their decision that Ravenswood Park depicted the principal historic features identified on historic maps, such as the Enclosures Map of 1817 and the Walter's Map of 1823. Notable features referenced included the intact of the park's external boundaries, the driveway still being in use as a footpath and the open grassland still being predominant in the interior of the medieval park. The Inspector recognised that those key historic elements contributed to its recognition of Ravenswood Park as an asset of local importance.

The Roman Road from Calleva to London runs east-west through the valued landscape with remains of the earthed embankment (agger) still visible in some places in Crowthorne and Finchampstead²⁸.

An example of how modern development and land uses overlay ancient ones can be seen in the archaeological record. The Grade I listed 12th Century Church of St James building at Finchampstead, for example, sits in an elevated position at the centre of the medieval village, surrounded by a Roman or earlier earthwork around 200 metres to the south of the Roman Road.

Also situated on the Roman Road, is a large Roman villa complex at Wheatlands Manor in the west of the valued landscape.

The historic straight rides appear to have been built on the model of the Roman road and originally traversed an open hunting landscape affording extensive views from the rides. The rides were created primarily for Queen Anne in the early decades of the 18th Century. The inclosure of this part of the extensive Royal Forest of Windsor was carried out in the early part of the 19th Century with the last remnants of Forest around Windsor itself being lost in the inclosure of 1857. Forest - a place of forest laws (employed to protect the 'venison and the vert' or the deer and their forage) gave way to modern forestry (the science and practice of cultivating trees in plantations for timber production).

²⁷ Land at Pineridge Caravan Park Nine Mile Ride, Wokingham (APP/X0360/C/15/3141001) and Land at New Acres, Nine Mile Ride, Wokingham (APP/X0360/C/15/3141000), decisions dated 19th July 2017, paragraph 185 and 188

²⁸ Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2038 (September 2023), Appendix C History & Heritage, available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-development-plan/neighbourhood-development-plans>

Recreational Value - The LCA (2019) assesses public accessibility of the M1 'Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands' LCA. The LCA (2019) notes, in a list of the 'Key Characteristics', that this area has 'good public accessibility' as follows:

Good public accessibility including formal parks such as California Country Park, LNR (including Longmoor Bog and Heath Lake) and areas of open access Forestry Commission land (such as Gorrick Plantation) connected by a network of bridleways and footpaths.²⁹

Addressing the M2 'Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands' LCA, the LCA (2019) notes that there is:

'Open access to the woodland and heathland, much owned by the National Trust (Finchampstead Ridges and Simon's Wood) provide an important recreational resource for the adjacent settlement of Crowthorne.'³⁰

The N2 'Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland' LCA notes, in a list of the 'Key Characteristics', that the:

'Dense network of public footpaths and bridleways connect to trails in the Blackwater Valley and Finchampstead Ridges.'³¹

The J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA notes, in a list of the 'Key Characteristics', that the:

'Provision for Formal recreation is available at the Royal East Berkshire Golf Course which the M1 LCA says is 'well integrated into the surrounding landscape' (paragraph 17.21).

The Forest and Rides Valued Landscape also encompass areas of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs). These are West Court SANG situated in the western part of the valued landscape and associated with the Arborfield Green Strategic Development Location (SDL).

The valued landscape also encompasses Sand Martins Golf Course, which provides a recreational facility for residents, notably in Finchampstead, Wokingham and Barkham. The golf course and field are set in a largely open area of parkland with trees and lakes. Sand Martins also comprises a network of public footpaths running along the northern, western and eastern boundary connecting the settlements of Barkham and Wokingham with Finchampstead Road and is recognised as a significant recreational resource. The area of green space is identified as a green wedge in the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan (2023) by virtue of the land maintaining the distinction between built-up areas and countryside and by maintaining separation between Finchampstead North and Wokingham Town.

²⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 315

³⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 326

³¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 48

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the LCA (2019) which identifies areas of seclusion and remoteness, a sense of enclosure in some parts, rural tranquillity and even experience of dark skies. This is an exceptional landscape within the commuter belt of London. The LCA (2019) states:

For the L2 'Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills' LCA:

*'...through the woodlands, bordered by bulky hedgerows and often without kerbs or intrusive signage. Secluded, remote character of the landscape enclosed within woodland, with an experience of dark skies.'*³²

And

*'Areas with a strong sense of seclusion and rural tranquillity, with naturalistic perceptual qualities and experience of dark skies due to the lack of settlement. (Additional reference from valued landscape attributes)'*³³

For the M1 'Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands' LCA, which with the M2 'Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands' LCA, forms the bulk of the valued landscape:

*'Localised area of remoteness within woodlands and smaller areas of pasture, mire and heath, which provide a sense of tranquillity.'*³⁴

And:

*'A highly enclosed landscape created by the often continuous swathes of dense woodland, except for framed views along the rides.'*³⁵

For the M2 'Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sand' LCA, which together with the M1 'Finchampsptead Forested and Settled Sands' LCA, forms the bulk of the valued landscape:

*'The undeveloped character and sense of remoteness removed from the roads due to the lack of built development. The area provides an escape and chance to experience dark skies in close proximity to the urban population.'*³⁶

For the N2 'Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland' LCA, it states:

*'Peaceful and rural ambience with an experience of dark skies which provides an escape in close proximity to the urban population.'*³⁷

³² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 294

³³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 296

³⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 315

³⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 315

³⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 328

³⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 351

The landscape sits just a short distance from the busy transport corridors of the A329M and M3, railway links at Crowborough, areas of dense settlement and the town of Wokingham. Notwithstanding this, the landscape is a haven of tranquillity and incorporates a sizeable area of relatively dark skies. These perceptual qualities are important and increasingly rare in the borough and the eastern part of the county.

Associations – The principal associations of this valued landscape are with Queen Anne and King George III, for whom the straight rides were created. King George III, ‘Mad King George’, is recognised as a highly important historical figure and his association with the landscape is important. However, the association of Queen Anne with this landscape is also particularly close and poignant. Queen Anne took great pleasure in following the hunt. As a monarch the need for an heir was key to her, her dynasty and the nation (something she famously struggled for many years to achieve). This effort greatly affected her health. In later years, she was unable to follow the hunt on horse-back. The rides were created for a monarch but also for a woman who, because she was queen, had suffered dreadfully. After seventeen pregnancies; resulting in miscarriages, still births and infant mortality; her heir - Prince William - the only one of her children to survive infancy, died at the age of 11 in 1700 AD.

Another close association is with the first Duke of Wellington (1769-1852) whose seat lay at Stratfield Saye, adjacent to the southern boundary of the borough near Riseley. Wellingtonia trees (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) were first brought into cultivation the year after the Duke’s death and local landowners planted individual trees, groves and avenues which stand out amongst the other trees of the borough. In the LCA (2019) it states the following in its assessment of the M2 ‘Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands’ LCA:

‘Nearby Crowthorne developed with the establishment of Wellington College and Broadmoor Hospital for the insane. Around this time, in the 1870s, the grand avenue of Wellingtonia sequoia known as the Wellingtonia Avenue was planted by John Walter II, owner of the Times newspaper, as a memorial to the Duke of Wellington. It remains an important landmark, providing a gateway to the borough from the south west.’³⁸

At over 40m high and out-topping native trees, such avenues are now the largest features in the landscape, apart from topography and rivers. One, at Wellington Court in Spencers Wood, is visible from a wide swathe of mid-Berkshire including parts of Reading. But the greatest of all the Wellingtonia avenues in the borough is Wellingtonia Avenue itself. Running between The Ridges in Finchampstead to Wellington College (founded 1856) in Crowthorne, it is one of, if not the finest avenue of these gigantic trees in the country, and is considered to be ‘impressive’³⁹ and of ‘national importance’⁴⁰ by National Trust. The avenue is the exception, in that, unlike others in the borough, it was not planted in private parkland but on estate land owned by John Walter III of Bearwood House, proprietor of the Times newspaper and a governor of Wellington College.

³⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para M2.12, page 327

³⁹ National Trust, Things to see and do at Simon’s Wood and Finchampstead Ridges, available at: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/oxfordshire-buckinghamshire-berkshire/simons-wood-and-finchampstead-ridges/things-to-see-and-do-at-simons-wood-and-finchampstead-ridges>

⁴⁰ National Trust, Finchampstead Ridges, Simon’s Wood & Ambarrow Hill

Wellingtonia Avenue is an outstanding and distinct feature of the borough's landscape that was recognised by the Inspector in their decision for Land adjacent to The Ridgeways, Wellingtonia Avenue, Crowthorne. Here, the Inspector stated in paragraph 13 of their decision letter that:

'Wellingtonia Avenue is distinctive in its character and appearance as a result of the impressive avenue of mature trees which line both sides of the road. Within the tree screening are large dwellings set back from the road, bounded to the front by mature hedging and trees. This provided a woodland feel to the immediate area and significantly screens the dwellings. The set back of the dwellings and their large plots minimise the built form and retain a heavy rural ambience to the surroundings. Although not subject to any statutory or local landscape protection, the Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment identifies the dramatic, long and straight Wellingtonia Avenue as a key characteristic of the area, along with low-density detached houses which are enclosed and screened with large gardens containing retained woodland'.⁴¹

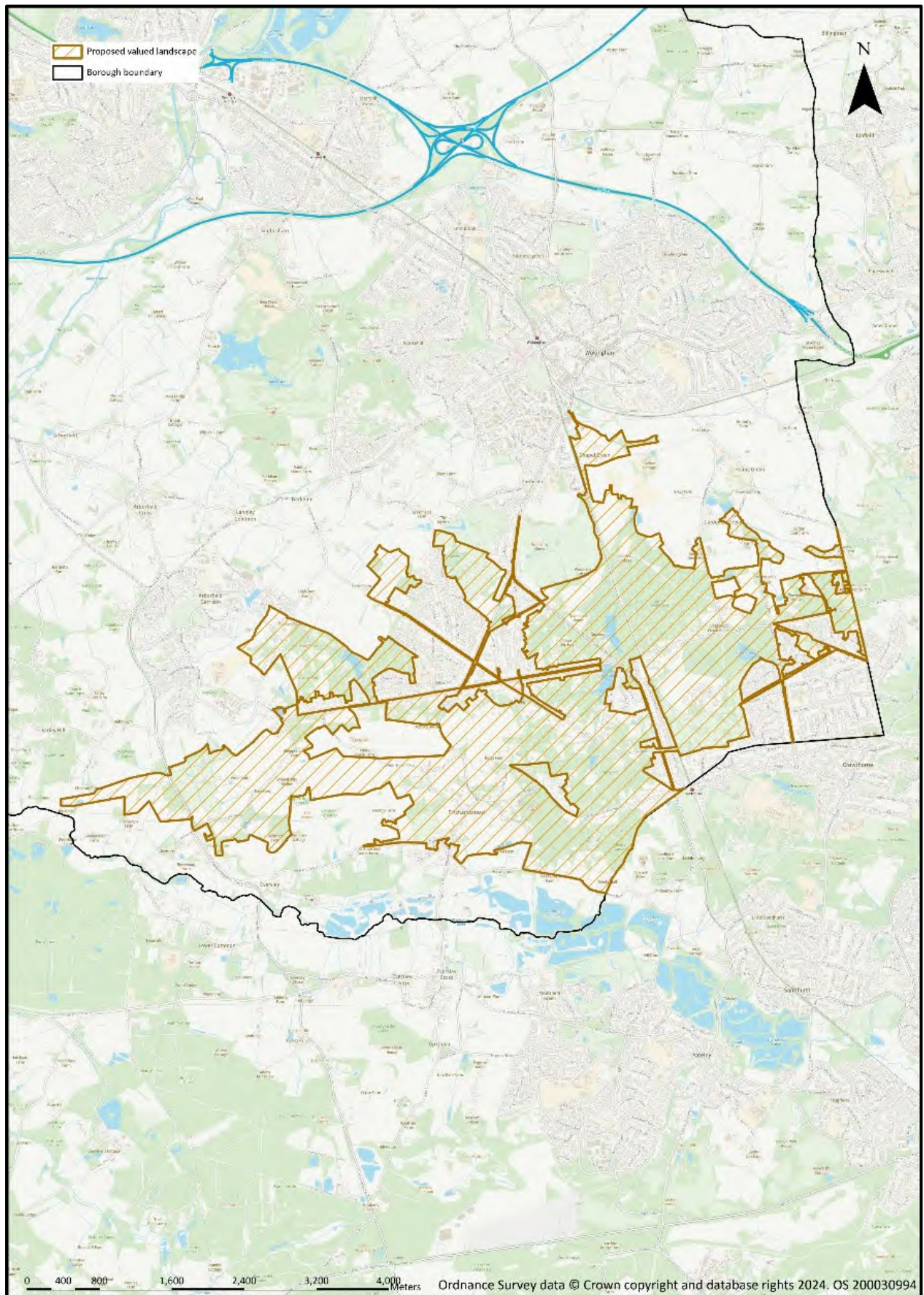
Another known association is the area of woodland surrounding Pinewood Centre, which is included in the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape. Formerly, the Pinewood Sanatorium, this facility was surrounded by tall pine trees in a woodland setting at Bagshot Sands, a key feature that was recognised by the London Medical Board for siting a tuberculosis sanatorium at the turn of the 20th Century. Whilst effective treatments had not been far advanced, the most common remedy in that era was rest, relaxation and plenty of fresh air, and ideally under a canopy of pine trees. The pine forest at Pine Wood was believed to be beneficial for sufferers of tuberculosis as the aroma from the pine trees ameliorated the effects of the lung condition⁴².

The patients were housed in prefabricated dormitories in the grounds of Pinewood, however over 70 years, the sanatorium was also home to victims of gas warfare in the First World War and servicemen and the Canadian Red Cross during the Second World War. The pine forest, known today as Pinewood, is evident on historic OS maps and remains present today.

⁴¹ Land adjacent to The Ridgeways, Wellingtonia Avenue, Crowthorne, APP/X0360/W/18/3216306, decision dated 12th November 2019

⁴² London Metropolitan Archives, Pinewood Sanatorium, 1910-1966, available at: https://search.lma.gov.uk/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/LMA_OPAC/web_detail/REFD+H69?SESSIONSEARCH

Forest and Rides Valued Landscape Map



Haines Hill Valued Landscape Narrative

Haines Hill Valued Landscape Narrative

Nikolaus Pevsner was turned down flat when he sought to view Haines Hill for his volume on Berkshire, published in 1966. His footnote simply records: "I have not seen this house myself, as the owner refused my request to see it.

Obituary of the then owner of Haines Hill¹

Introduction

The Haines Hill Valued Landscape lies between the M3 motorway to the south-east and the London to Reading main line railway, which follows the line of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Great Western Railway and lies a short distance to the north-west.

The Haines Hill Valued Landscape sits mainly within, and occupies most of, the K1 'Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay Lowland' Landscape Character Area as described in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019). The valued landscape also includes parts of the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' and the I4 'Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland' Landscape Character Areas.

For the I4 'Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA it states that it is:

*'A flat predominately pastoral landscape dominated by pony paddocks. The small scale field pattern and overgrown hedges result in an intimate character. There are a number of small watercourses and a network of water-filled drainage ditches frequently filled with rushes and wetland vegetation. Settlement is sparse, with post-war farmsteads and houses often hidden behind vegetation, linked by a dense network of rural roads.'*²

Describing the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA, it states that the landscape is:

*'A simple farmed landscape dominated by open arable fields and some pasture, with mature hedgerow trees marking former hedge lines. Wooded horizons created by large deciduous blocks line a subtle ridgeline, cut by a network of small tributary streams. Settlement is focused on ribbon development along the local roads, scattered farmsteads and manor houses. The strong rural character is only affected by the M4 and A329(M) which cut through the area.'*³

When assessing the K1 'Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay Lowland' LCA, it states that it is:

'A lowland landscape with many unique and distinctive features not found elsewhere in the borough which provide a contrast to the wooded hills to the north and south. The area supports numerous small tributary streams and ponds set amongst the largely arable

¹ The Times of London, 7th August 2011

² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 217

³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 185

*farmland. The area is characterised by its wooded character and a general absence of settlement resulting in a sense of relative remoteness.*⁴

Despite its proximity to Twyford, this is a remote and hidden landscape with small roads running through the landscape. The area is also a resource of dark skies.

Attributes of the valued landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The LCA (2019) assesses the condition of this landscape.

For the K1 ‘Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay’ LCA, it states:

*‘The combination of natural elements, including woodland and wetland and the cohesive settlement character with a strong local vernacular details and absence of unsympathetic development, results in a rural landscape in overall good condition. There is also a good mix of habitats but these are somewhat fragmented and there is evidence of hedgerow loss.’*⁵

For the I1 ‘Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland’ LCA, it states:

*‘The rural character of the landscape with its variety of characteristics such as the wooded ridgelines with small tributary valleys, woodlands and sparse settlement are in good condition. However, former coppice woodlands have been neglected, and many hedgerows have been lost. There is also an erosion of tranquillity due to the disturbance from the motorways.’*⁶

For the I4 ‘Hurst Farmed Clay’ LCA, it states:

*‘The rural character of the landscape, the small watercourses, and general absence of development and the intimate small-scale of the landscape are in a good condition. The overall moderate condition of the landscape as a whole results from the subdivision of landholdings and creation of paddocks with associated temporary structures, combined with loss of hedgerow boundaries or their lack of management.’*⁷

Scenic Quality – The LCA (2019) identifies the following valuable landscape attributes relating to scenic quality:

For the K1 ‘Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay’ LCA, it lists:

Varied wooded character with a mosaic of plantation, mixed and broadleaved woodland which with the natural riparian woodland provides scenic quality and a sense of seclusion;

⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 270

⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 274

⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 189

⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 220

*the pattern of open arable fields interspersed with woodland blocks and riparian corridors which provide visual diversity and a naturalistic sense of place; lightly settled character and absence of unsympathetic development; a high number of historic buildings with strong local vernacular contribute to the scenic quality of the area.*⁸

For the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA, it lists:

*Strong rural character of the rolling agricultural landscape with its subtle wooded ridges, large woodlands and sparse settlement which create a strong sense of place; large deciduous woodland blocks, including BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland, provide scenic variety and a sense of enclosure in the open landscape as well as important ecological habitats; characteristic mature in-field and roadside oaks in the open arable fields which provide a sense of place; wooded skyline which provides a backdrop to the surrounding areas.*⁹

For the 'I4 Hurst Farmed Clay' LCA, it lists:

*Watercourses and vegetated drainage ditches create visual interest; rough hedgerows and hedgerow trees create an enclosed landscape; the intimate character of small-scale pastures provides a distinctive sense of place.*¹⁰

Rarity – Assessing rarity is difficult but a number of sources can assist. The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004) gives an assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape, the re-creation and importance of features.

For the K1 'Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay' LCA, the LCA (2004) states that '*most characteristics within this area are of importance at the local or regional level*'¹¹. The LCA (2004) also mentions specifically: the diversity of habitats including neutral grassland, the building and settlement pattern particularly the absence of residential development over much of the area, and the perceptual qualities of remoteness and tranquillity.

For the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA, the LCA (2004) mentions the presence of ancient woodland and the remaining rural peaceful character that would be difficult to replace / restore if changed. It notes that most of the '*characteristics are of local importance*' although it does state that they '*may be highly valued because of their increasing scarcity in the region*'. The characteristics are provided in that document and many are also reflected in the latest LCA (2019). The LCA (2004) mentions the '*strong wooded horizons*' which it says are sensitive to change. Importantly, the LCA (2004) identifies the undeveloped ridge itself as important to the setting of nearby Wokingham.

⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 273

⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 189

¹⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 219

¹¹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 15.22, page 360

For the I4 'Hurst Farmed Clay' LCA, the LCA (2004) identifies elements of local importance that would be difficult to re-create. They include: the peaceful, rural quality; the low-density settlement; and the distinctive small-scale pattern of pastoral fields, units, drainage ditches and hedges.

It should be noted that elements of only local importance might not appear highly significant when considering a valued landscape. But in fact, they are significant because even features that are of only local importance still lift the local landscape above the ordinary countryside. These features therefore contribute to an enhanced level of interest and enhanced value.

This assessment is supported by the LCA (2019) which lists these features under the heading 'valued landscape attributes'.

Representativeness – Of particular importance in this valued landscape is the small-scale landscape with overgrown hedges and freshwater habitats, including roadside ditches and ponds. The southern boundary of the Haines Hill Valued Landscape also covers the Straight Mile which runs over the M4 and connects to the northern boundary of the Billingbear Valued Landscape. Straight and narrow roads such as the Straight Mile are wooded and tree-lined, often with wide verges, banks or water-filled ditches, and are generally smaller in scale and rural in character, a key characteristic of the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA. Due in part to the inaccessibility of the landscape, the sense of intimacy and tranquillity with a local experience of dark skies is a good example of such a landscape in close proximity to Twyford.

The large manor houses and the parks and gardens are also representative, as are the ancient woodlands close to Stanlake Manor.

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

Habitats of principal importance include: Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland; Wet Woodland; Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland; Lowland Meadows; Rivers and Ponds. There may be some Traditional Orchards but this requires ground truthing. The Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland predictably surrounds Haines Hill, Stanlake Manor and Hurst Lodge.

Ancient Woodland is scattered sparsely throughout the landscape, but with an aggregation to the east of Stanlake Manor with one wood, Botany Bay Copse, incorporating a moated site of archaeological interest.

The Ancient Tree Inventory¹² shows a wide variety of Veteran Trees with notable aggregations, as might be expected, at Stanlake Park and a handful at St Nicholas Church, Hurst. There is a notable absence of veteran trees at Haines Hill Park, but this may be an artefact of where recorders have been able to access the land.

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/>

There are four Local Wildlife Sites: Grassland Opposite Blackthorn Farm; Windsor Ait; Wingwood Copse and Wood near Hintonhatch Corner. As their names suggest, they represent a range of habitats.

There are two locally listed historic parks and gardens: Hurst Lodge and Haines Hill both located near the village of Hurst.

Cultural heritage and built form - there are eighteen listed buildings within the valued landscape. They include a Grade II listed building from the late 16th Century, a timber framed thatched barn with weatherboarding and a brick rubble and flint base and the Grade II listed building at Gardeners Cottage on Broadcommon Road. The cottages are 18th Century brick with tiled roofs, with 19th Century gabled porches. Haines Hill is a Grade II* country house of late 16th Century origins, formerly H-shaped with a long gallery and several courtyards. The windows and walls of each end of the gallery were rebuilt in the 'Queen Anne' style by the Biggs family. The front part of the house was built in 1760 in the Georgian style by James Edward Colleton.

The valued landscape forms the setting for these buildings, other listed structures and for the locally listed parks and gardens at Hurst Lodge and Haines Hill.

The Haines Hill Valued Landscape also encompasses the Poplar Lane, Hurst Area of Special Character and part of the Wokingham Road, Hurst Area of Special Character. Both Poplar Lane and Wokingham Road Area of Special Characters have a linear layout, with buildings concentrated along the road. The areas are characterised by predominantly two-storey detached and semi-detached building, with their streetscape dominated by hedges and trees. There are several Buildings of Traditional Local Character (non-designated heritage assets) located within the valued landscape, including Thatch Cottage, Little Farm, Queens Arbour, Lake Cottage, Southbury Farm, Lake Farm and Keeper's Cottage.

Recreational Value - The LCA (2019) assesses public accessibility of the various Landscape Character Areas. The LCA (2019) notes a list of the 'Key Characteristics' for each LCA.

For the K1 'Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay' LCA, the WBLCA (2019) notes that the area has a:

*'Remote and hidden character of the rural landscape despite the proximity of Twyford due to the sparse settlement pattern and access confined to footpaths and small roads running through the landscape'*¹³

For the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA, it notes the *'relative inaccessibility by footpath which results in a sense of tranquillity despite proximity to urban centres and motorways'*.¹⁴

¹³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 271

¹⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 189

For the I4 'Hurst Farmed Clay' LCA it recognises '*Informal recreation provided by the footpaths west of the A321*'.¹⁵

The western boundary of the Haines Hill Valued Landscape follows the A321 (Wokingham Road), a recognised green route, lined with trees and other vegetation that provides connectivity from Hurst to Twyford, a key feature that contributes to the character and environment of the area.

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the LCA (2019).

Assessing the 'K1 Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay', it states that this LCA has a:

*'Remote and hidden character of the rural landscape despite the proximity of Twyford due to the sparse settlement pattern and access confined to footpaths and small roads running through the landscape. The area is also a resource of 'dark skies'.*¹⁶

When looking at the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA, it states the landscape has a:

*'Remote quality due to the scarcity of settlement and relative inaccessibility by footpath which results in a sense of tranquility despite proximity to urban centres and motorways.'*¹⁷

For the I4 'Hurst Farmed Clay' LCA, it states that this is:

*'A rural and tranquil landscape due to the settlement pattern of closely spaced farmsteads linked by a network of country lanes character with localised experience of dark skies.'*¹⁸

Associations – Haines Hill House was built originally by the Windebank family. Sir Francis Windebank (1582 - 1646) who was, at one time, Secretary of State to Charles I and lived at Haines Hill. He received advancement because of his Catholic faith and plotted with the King in secret to undermine the protestant cause. He was allowed by the King to flee the country when, in 1640, Parliament discovered that he had been offering pardons to recusant priests. He wrote to the Lord Chancellor from France affirming his belief in the Church of England, but died in 1646 having received into the Roman Catholic Church.

During the Civil War, Haines Hill House came into the possession of the Bigg family. From the Bigg family it descended first to James Edward Colleton (MP for Loswithiel and great-grandson of the royalist general Sir John Colleton, 1st Baronet (1608 – 1666). James Edward added the large block on the east side in 1760.

Haines Hill House descended from James Edward Colleton to the Garth family, one of whom, Captain Thomas Colleton Garth, founded the Garth Hunt which first met there in 1852.

¹⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 219

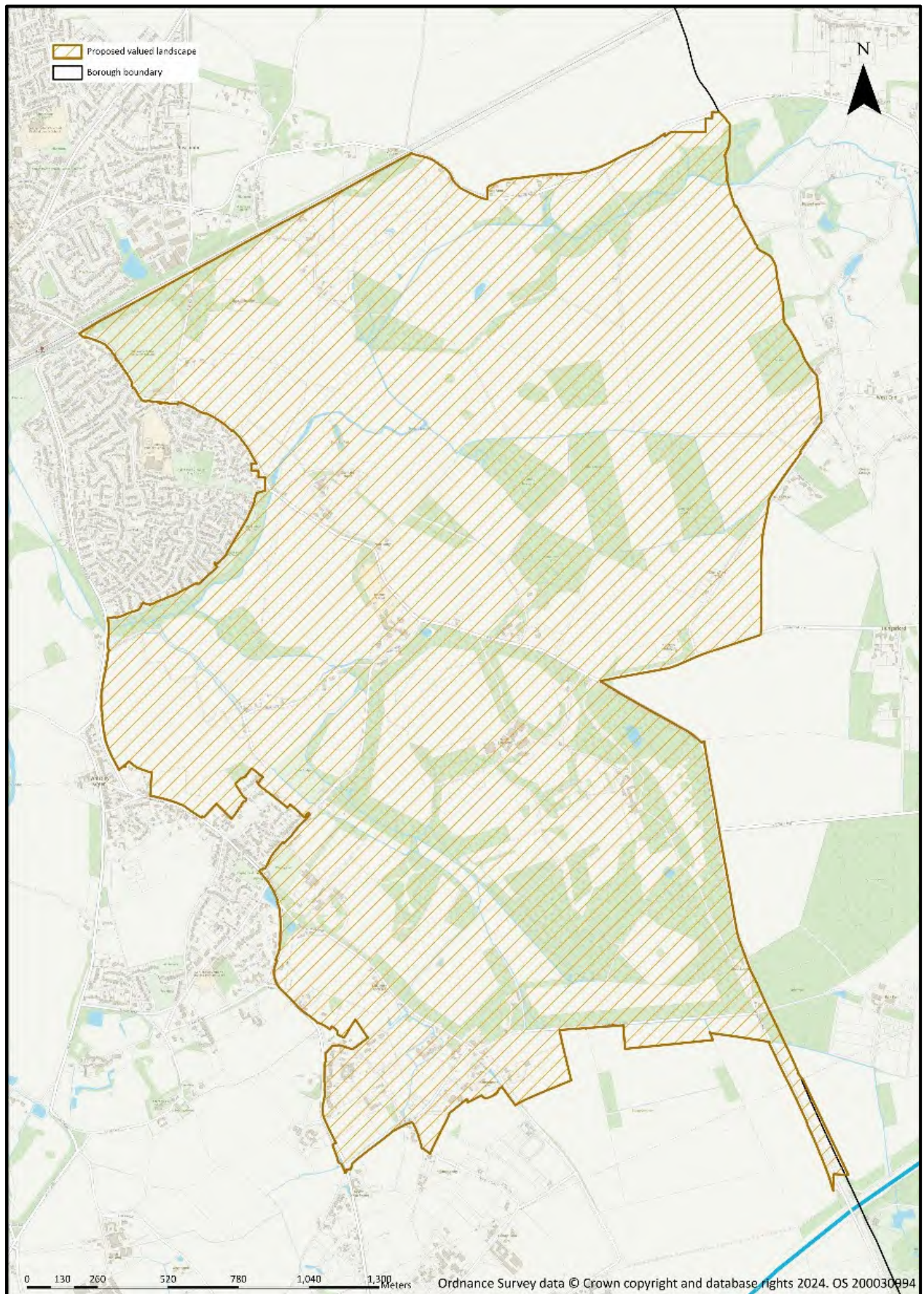
¹⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 271

¹⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 189

¹⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 219

Hurst Lodge has associations with two notable local families: the Barkers, whose ancestor, John Barker was, for thirty-four years, gentleman usher to Queen Elizabeth I. His great-great granddaughter married David, fourth Lord Cardross in 1697 and sold the property in 1742 to Robert Palmer of Hurst, ancestor of the Palmer family of Sonning.

Haines Hill Valued Landscape Map



Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape Narrative

Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape Narrative

Writing of one of the foremost properties of the valued landscape, Park Place, set in the centre of the lime rich chalk - so important for many plants including lavender - the Victoria County History states:

In 1752 it was purchased by General (afterwards Field-Marshal) the Hon. Henry Seymour Conway, who started the cultivation of lavender in Remenham and established a distillery there. The house, which he had much improved, became the rendezvous of many distinguished people, among whom were Horace Walpole, David Hume, the poet Gray, and Mrs. Damer the sculptress, who carved the keystones of Henley Bridge. The grounds were laid out by Conway according to the taste of the period. At the upper end of the Happy Valley in the park was placed a Grecian ruin built of stones brought from Reading Abbey, and stones from the same place were used to build the bridge over the valley which carried the road from Henley to Wargrave. On a hill beyond the pleasure grounds was a Druidic temple presented to Conway by the inhabitants of Jersey (where it was found near St. Helier in 1785), when he was governor of that island.

Victoria County History: Remenham Parish¹

Introduction

The Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape sits on a chalk plateau to the east of Henley-on-Thames. It is bounded by the River Thames Valued Landscape along roads traversing the foot of the chalk scarp roughly along the 40m contour to the west and north. To the south it meets the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape to the south-east. The valued landscape stops at the boundary with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. However, the valued landscape itself may continue across the boundary into the neighbouring borough. In addition, this valued landscape shares many characteristics with the Chilterns National Landscape (formerly known as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) which lies to the north, just a short distance across the River Thames Valued Landscape.

The valued landscape incorporates two Landscape Character Areas (LCA): D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' and E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' as identified in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019).

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

Attributes of the valued landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The valued landscape sits within the areas D1 ‘Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes’ and E1 ‘Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture’ of the LCA (2019).

The LCA (2019) discussed landscape condition. In the ‘Key Characteristics’ of the respective LCAs it states:

For the D1 ‘Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes’ LCA, it states:

‘The landscape is in good condition. The dramatic landform with large tracts of woodland, open pasture of a distinctly ‘downland’ character and views to the Thames Valley and Chilterns AONB are intact and create a distinctive character and sense of place’.

And:

‘Hedgerow removal has led to some loss of field patterns, and replacement by post and wire or post and rail fencing reduces the intimate character. Remnant hedgerows are in variable condition. Remaining chalk grassland has been eroded, while former parkland is now under arable cultivation. Increased traffic on the steep lanes has changed their character in places.’²

For the E1 ‘Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture’ LCA, it states:

‘The estate management restoration, including recent replanting of hedgerows along the rural roads is improving the condition of the landscape, to moderate-good. There is a lack of semi-natural habitats, particularly woodland which is relatively sparse in comparison with other rural areas of the borough. The distinctive views across to the wooded hills of F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls are intact. The busy A4130 disturbs the otherwise tranquil landscape.’³

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

For the D1 ‘Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes’ LCA, it states:

‘Steep and densely wooded slopes interspersed with more open areas giving views across the Thames valley to the Chilterns AONB and forming part of views out of the AONB. A sparsely settled area with large country houses and historic estates connected by steep and sunken rural lanes with dense hedgerows. Rights of way including the Chiltern Way allow access to this relatively quiet and remote landscape’.⁴

In the ‘Key Characteristics’ section of the D1 ‘Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes’ LCA, it identifies the following that relate to scenic quality and expands upon them:

² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 123

³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 144

⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 118

Dramatic chalk slopes and cliffs rising sharply from valley floodplain of the River Thames; heavily wooded character created by woodlands blanketing the steepest slopes; small pastoral fields in the west contrast with larger arable fields in the north; areas of open grass pastures suggestive of 'downland'; formal parkland estates associated with large country houses on the chalk slopes overlooking the river; small hamlets clustered on the floodplain edge with a consistent vernacular character; and rural lanes and tracks, frequently sunken, and enclosed by steep banks and hedges, which wind up the dry valleys.⁵

For the E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' LCA, it states:

'A flat, elevated and open landscape dominated by arable farmland. Settlement is restricted to the linear cluster of buildings at Remenham Hill. The designed estate landscape at Park Place results in there being little public access. There are impressive views of the wooded hills of High Knowl and Bottom Boles Wood to the south.'⁶

In the 'Key Characteristics' section, it highlights the following relating to scenic quality and expands upon them in the text:

Predominantly flat landform with upland 'plateau' character, underlain predominately by Chalk; large scale agricultural landscape intensively farmed for arable production; large open fields with relatively few hedgerow trees; restored hedgerows and shelterbelt planting along the rural lanes; generally unwooded, although shelterbelt planting and strips of both mixed and priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland can be found along rural lanes and tracks with larger copses within Park Place estate; valuable semi-natural habitats including local wildlife sites; designed landscape at Park Place (Grade II Registered Park and Garden) on the plateau edge and exploits views over the Thames to the Chilterns; new estates recently created to the east of Park Place with new country mansions set in mature parkland; largely unsettled landscape characterised by scattered farmsteads and individual houses linked by narrow lanes; Remenham Hill is the only settlement and consists of a ribbon of large detached 19th and 20th century houses.⁷*

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. Helpfully, it identifies a comprehensive list of nationally important elements: the ancient woodland, remnant chalk grassland, historic parkland and gardens of Park Place and Temple Combe, the dramatic landform, the perceptual characteristics (remoteness), the inter-visibility of the landscape with the River Thames [Valued Landscape], and most importantly the Chilterns National Landscape. On the plateau, the LCA (2004), whilst acknowledging the only local (borough) importance of the land-use pattern, places particular importance on the flat landform, the sense of openness and views.

⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 119

⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 141

⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 142

All of these attributes are highlighted in the most recent Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019). However, a new element should be included, which is the inter-visibility of the landscape with the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape. A further element which is often overlooked is the underlying chalk geology and calcareous soils. These features are critical to the formation, management and restoration of this valued landscape. They are also key in restoring and stitching back together the wider chalk landscape, including those parts which, because of neglect, no longer create sufficient landscape ‘heat’ or interest to be considered ‘hot-spots’ under the council’s current Valued Landscape Assessment. Restoration of neglected chalk landscapes is straightforward if the will to do so is there. It can and should be achieved because these landscapes are rare, both for their scenic and perceptual characteristics, and their cultural and wildlife heritage value. The need to conserve and enhance the landscape is supported by legislation and the Glover Review for both the landscape generally and, in particular, the Chilterns landscape. In relation to the Chilterns National Landscape, the Glover Review (2019)⁸ states:

‘Some national landscapes – the Chilterns for instance – risk changing very fast as a result and mostly not for the better. We shouldn’t just accept this as sadly unavoidable. It should shame our generation to leave uglier, less liveable human settlements than those left for us by the generations which came before.’

And:

‘The aim should be to enhance natural beauty and nature in an area of high landscape value, while giving due recognition to the importance of the Chilterns for access and enjoyment.’

Due to the character, quality and rarity of this landscape, the Chilterns AONB Board submitted a request to Natural England in 2013⁹ for a boundary review. This request included areas within the Chilterns National Character Area. Within the borough, this included the Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape, the River Thames Valued Landscape and Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape and adjacent countryside. The Glover Review’s recommendation for a speeding up of boundary changes, as well as National Park status for the National Landscape (in the light of hugely increased pressure on the landscape), supports arguments that this is a rare and valuable landscape. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019 – 2024¹⁰ highlights the increase to the area of the Chilterns National Landscape as a policy objective under General Policy 2:

‘Review the boundary of the protected area to cover the wider area of the Chilterns landscape that merits it.’

The rare chalk landscape is recognised in the Glover Review, the Chilterns AONB Management Plan, and the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019). Whilst there is room to conserve and enhance the local environment, this valued landscape is a good example of this landscape character type.

⁸ Glover J, Landscapes Review, 2019, H M Government

⁹ The Case for Reviewing the Boundary of the AONB, 2013, Chilterns Conservation Board

¹⁰ The Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019 – 2024, Chilterns Conservation Board

Representativeness – ‘Rarity’ is discussed in the previous section. However, the characteristics and features which make a landscape rare in the national context make it distinctive and representative of its type. The valued landscape is, in most ways, representative of chalk landscapes across the south-eastern part of England where the chalk geology occurs. However, two elements are particularly unusual and interesting.

The high chalk plateau is, as the LCA (2019) notes, unusually flat and open having been denuded of vegetation by agriculture, including historic lavender production as well as modern agricultural enterprises. The high cliffs and scarp slopes carved through the chalk by the River Thames are another element of particular and rare quality, less ‘representative’ of the landscape. However, both elements of the chalk landscape have their parallels. The Goring Gap between the Chilterns National Landscape and the North Wessex Downs National Landscape is a good example, representing steep slopes carved out of the chalk by the erosive power of a river (in this case the same river). Likewise, the cliffs above the village of Cliffe across the River Ouse at Lewis in the South Downs National Park also have a similar characteristic. The high chalk plateau in the Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape is reminiscent of the High Chalk Plain in Wiltshire, albeit on a smaller scale and without the tanks.

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

Habitats of principal importance:

- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland and Lowland beech and yew woodland mostly on the western and northern scarp slopes adjacent to the River Thames Valued Landscape. Some of which is Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). There may be remnants of Wood Pasture and Parkland remaining in historic parks.
- Natural England survey data indicates that Wet woodland may be present but it is likely to be in the less well drained valley bottoms on the very edge of the valued landscape.
- Notwithstanding the ideal geology for this habitat, Lowland calcareous grassland occurs, but is rare. One example is the grassland in Happy Valley – part of the Park Place pleasure grounds. Happy Valley and Conways Bridge is a Local Wildlife Site.
- Traditional orchards are reported but exist at a very local scale.
- Ponds are present but due to the porous geology they tend to be located in the heavier soils accumulated in valley bottoms. Where ponds are present in proximity to woodland they often act as habitat to woodland animals such as the protected Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*).

The Ancient Tree Inventory¹¹ shows a wide variety of Ancient and Veteran Trees with notable aggregations, as might be expected, in the parkland at Park Place. There is a large block of ancient woodland at Remenham Wood and four other smaller blocks to the south and to the east. These can

¹¹ 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/>

be clearly seen in the Forestry map for the D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' in the LCA (2019)¹².

Much of the D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' LCA, which forms a crescent around the north and west of the valued landscape, forms the Chilterns Escarpment Biodiversity Opportunity Area.

Local Wildlife Sites: There are 12 Local Wildlife Sites within the valued landscape – with the greatest aggregation, in terms of numbers and area, being on the hard to farm steep slopes and valleys of the western edge and northern sides of the valued landscape. Some Local Wildlife Sites are also located within traditional parkland landscapes.

Although not publicly accessible, an old chalk quarry known as Remenham Church Lane Quarry can be viewed from the lane and is a Local Geological Site. The Berkshire Geoconservation Group state that this site is:

*'A disused quarry in the Lewes Nodular chalk / Seaford chalk formation of the White Chalk subgroup (formerly Upper Chalk). It contains good fossils of this horizon and flints are Of main interest is the infilled fissures (caused by freeze thaw action). These are well displayed at the upper surface (see photograph).... The site is considered of structural and stratigraphical interest'*¹³.

Cultural heritage and built form - the valued landscape encompasses part of the Remenham Bridge Conservation Area and touches on the Remenham Conservation Area to the north-west. Both of these are discussed in more detail in the River Thames Valued Landscape. The Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape is contiguous with the River Thames Valued Landscape along the whole of its western and northern boundaries.

The valued landscape forms the setting and, when viewed from the river or bank, forms the backdrop for the two Conservation Areas, as well as for the individual buildings and structures in the landscape. The locations and forms chosen for such buildings are dictated by the landscape – the smithy on an important route north, Remenham Court close to Henley-on-Thames and on the turnpike to London, the Folly buried within the topography of the landscape.

Park Place and Temple Coombe is a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden forming the setting for Park Place House which is discussed in further detail elsewhere within this narrative. The house and park sit high up on the chalk with grand views of the River Thames. The parks and gardens are described by Historic England in the Register¹⁴:

'Park Place, a C19 country house on the site of an earlier house, surrounded by C18 and C19 gardens and pleasure grounds and landscape park, with work in the mid to late C19 by Robert

¹² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 128

¹³ Berkshire Geoconservation Group website <https://berksggeoconservation.org.uk/lgs.php>

¹⁴ The Historic England *National Heritage List for England* has been a live publication since 2011. It can be found at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list>

Marnock. A second, smaller estate, Temple Combe, developed during the late C18, lies enclosed within the Park Place estate.'

There are a score of listed buildings ranging from the grand, Grade II 19th Century, Remenham Court (formerly listed as Remenham Lodge - C.1830-1840), to the earlier and more humble Grade II listed building at The Old Smithy, which originates from the 17th Century or earlier. The list for the valued landscape includes a Grade II folly in the landscaped park at Park Place. Originating from the mid to late 18th Century, the folly is a small, hemispherical structure built of knapped flint, shells, tiles and flint nodules. It was built into a chalk slope, probably for Sir Henry Conway who lived at Park Place from 1751 to 1795.

An appeal decision at Brick Barns, Remenham Hill in February 2024¹⁵ found that a development proposal situated within the E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau' Landscape Character Area would not conserve and enhance the existing rural character and parkland landscapes associated with the Park Place Estate. The Planning Inspector considered that the landscape character of the Landscape Character Area was inextricably linked to the special interest / significance of the Registered Park and Garden at Park Place, and recognised that due to its special historic interest, the Registered Park and Garden could reasonably be treated as a valued landscape for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework.

The long-distance routes north to south and the later 18th Century turnpike that quarter the valued landscape are also important to the culture of the area and are discussed elsewhere in this narrative.

Recreational Value - The LCA (2019) assesses public accessibility of the D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' and E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' LCAs. The LCA (2019) notes, in a list of the 'Key Characteristics', that this area has 'good public accessibility' as follows:

For the D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' LCA, it states in a list of 'Key Characteristics':

Limited access by footpath except for the promoted route of the Chilterns Way which runs along the lower slopes connecting to the Thames Path before climbing to Remenham Hill.

Sense of peacefulness due to the intimate scale, limited settlement and remoteness of the landscape with a strong experience of 'dark skies'.

And:

Glimpsed picturesque views across the Thames Valley to the Chilterns AONB which can open out dramatically in places.¹⁶

The list of valuable landscape attributes in the LCA (2019) acknowledges the recreational value stating that the landscape has:

¹⁵ APP/X0360/C/23/3325869, Brick Barns, White Hill, Remenham Hill (February 2024), paragraph 76

¹⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 119

*'Steep winding rural lanes enclosed by steep banks and hedges provide a visual interest while travelling through the area.'*¹⁷

The list also highlights the importance of:

*'Picturesque and attractive long views to the river Thames and Chilterns AONB, and across the undulating topography within the area'*¹⁸

For the E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' LCA, it states in the list of valuable landscape attributes that the landscape has:

*'Impressive views of the wooded horizons of High Knowl, Bottom Boles Wood and Bowsey Hill.'*¹⁹

Partly because of the lack of Public Rights of Way, and also the general absence of large roads or railways, this high quality landscape is a quiet, tranquil haven of peace and dark skies.

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) which identifies much of the area (with the exception of the A4130 corridor), as being tranquil, peaceful, remote and relatively inaccessible, with an experience of dark skies.

For the D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' LCA, it states:

*'Sense of remoteness created by limited modern development and infrastructure and the often enclosed character of the landscape with an experience of 'dark skies'. The promoted footpath of the Chiltern Way provides access through this intimate landscape.'*²⁰

*'Limited access by footpath except for the promoted route of the Chilterns Way which runs along the lower slopes connecting to the Thames Path before climbing to Remenham Hill.'*²¹

And

*'Sense of peacefulness due to the intimate scale, limited settlement and remoteness of the landscape with a strong experience of 'dark skies'.'*²²

For the E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' LCA, it states:

'Tranquil and remote rural area, with a strong experience of dark skies, due to its relative inaccessibility, particularly on the Park Place estate and the new estates at Hamilton and

¹⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 122

¹⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 123

¹⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 144

²⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 123

²¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 119

²² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 119

*Stowdes. The area is crossed by small estate roads and limited public rights of way including the Chiltern Way. The busy A4130 introduces a corridor of movement, light, and noise across the north of the area’.*²³

And

*‘Quiet and remote rural character with dark skies, evoked by the strong sense of openness on the plateau landscape and a lack of public access, particularly in the west of the area.’*²⁴

Associations – The large landscape has relatively easy access to London with routes to the capital across the chalk and along the River Thames. A new Turnpike Act 1718 created a turnpike trust for the road from Maidenhead to Henley-on-Thames, part of a longer main post and coach road between London and St David’s in West Wales. The road between Remenham Hill and Aston was formerly part of a north to south route carrying traffic between Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, crossing a ferry between Aston and Mill End. Throughout modern history, this has been an attractive location for high society.

At the time of Domesday (1088) the manor of Remenham was owned by Queen Edith, daughter of Earl Godwin (the father of Harold Godwinson – last Anglo-Saxon King of England) and wife of Edward the Confessor.

During the Middle Ages, Remenham passed through the hands of notable families including the Earls of Warwick, the de Montforts, and the Sandys family.

Of Park Place and Temple Coombe, and estate occupying the southern part of the valued landscape, the Historic England listing states:

*‘In 1719 Mrs Elizabeth Baker sold land called Park’s Place, also known as Stowdes, to Lord Archibald Hamilton, who at some time after this erected a Palladian mansion called Park Place on a new site (Victoria County History, 1923). In 1738 Park Place was sold to Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707-51) (ibid). Following Frederick’s death in 1751 the estate was bought by General the Hon Henry Seymour Conway (1720-95),...’*²⁵

Lord Hamilton who lived much of his life at Park Place was an active politician and a former Governor of Jamaica. He played a role in setting up some of the founders of the Bahamian pirate gang, including Henry Jennings, Francis Fernando, and Leigh Ashworth, for which he was arrested and brought back to England in 1716 by the Royal Navy²⁶. He was acquitted by a board of Trade inquiry and released. His son, Sir William Hamilton, the diplomat and husband of the unfaithful but famous Emma Hamilton, was present as aide-de-camp to General Conway, at the abortive attack on Rochefort in September 1757.

²³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 142

²⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 144

²⁵ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000588>

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Archibald_Hamilton#cite_note-5

As described at the start of this narrative, General Conway, was a later owner of Park Place, after Hamilton. In his ownership it was a rendezvous for many in Georgian high society, including his cousin Horace Walpole and their friend, the poet Thomas Gray with whom they were at Eton. As well as these influential men, their company included Conway's daughter Anne Seymour Damer; the traveller, author, theatrical producer, actress, and acclaimed sculptress. Conway's erection of a gothic bridge and druid's temple have been attributed to Reverend. Gainsborough, brother of the landscape painter Thomas Gainsborough.

Vincent, in his 'The Story of the Thames' (1909) refers to Mrs Lybbe Powys comments on Park Place who wrote in 1762 of its excellent landscape but indifferent architecture:

*"We went to see Park Place, the seat of General Conway and one of the most capital situations in England. The house stands agreeably, but is too indifferent for the surrounding grounds."*²⁷

In the later part of the 19th Century, the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll – famous now for her work with Edwin Lutyens including a house and garden at the Deanery in nearby Sonning – had an early and close association with the landscape. As the LCA (2019) states:

'She moved to Wargrave Hill (now Wargrave Manor) as a child in 1868, and resided there for eight years. Jekyll did not have a favourable opinion of the landscape although could appreciate it's beauty and why others enjoyed its qualities and in a letter written to the artist George Dunlop Leslie she stated:

"It is quite true that I never cared for that part of the country, but I was quite sensible of its beauties. I admired it but had no sympathy with it".
Her appreciation for the underlying landscape is also apparent in her comment that she:

*"...only hated Berkshire because it was not Surrey, and the chalk because it was not sand".*²⁸

The Historic England listing of Park Place and Temple Combe brings the history of illustrious associations closer to modern times:

*'The house was rebuilt c 1871, following a fire, for John Noble of Noble's Paints and Varnishes (who had bought the estate in 1867), together with a new stable block. The grounds were subject to extensive 'landscape gardening' carried out under Robert Marnock (1800-89) c 1869, who planted thousands of specimen trees and shrubs, 'as far as possible every known variety!' (Noble 1905)'*²⁹

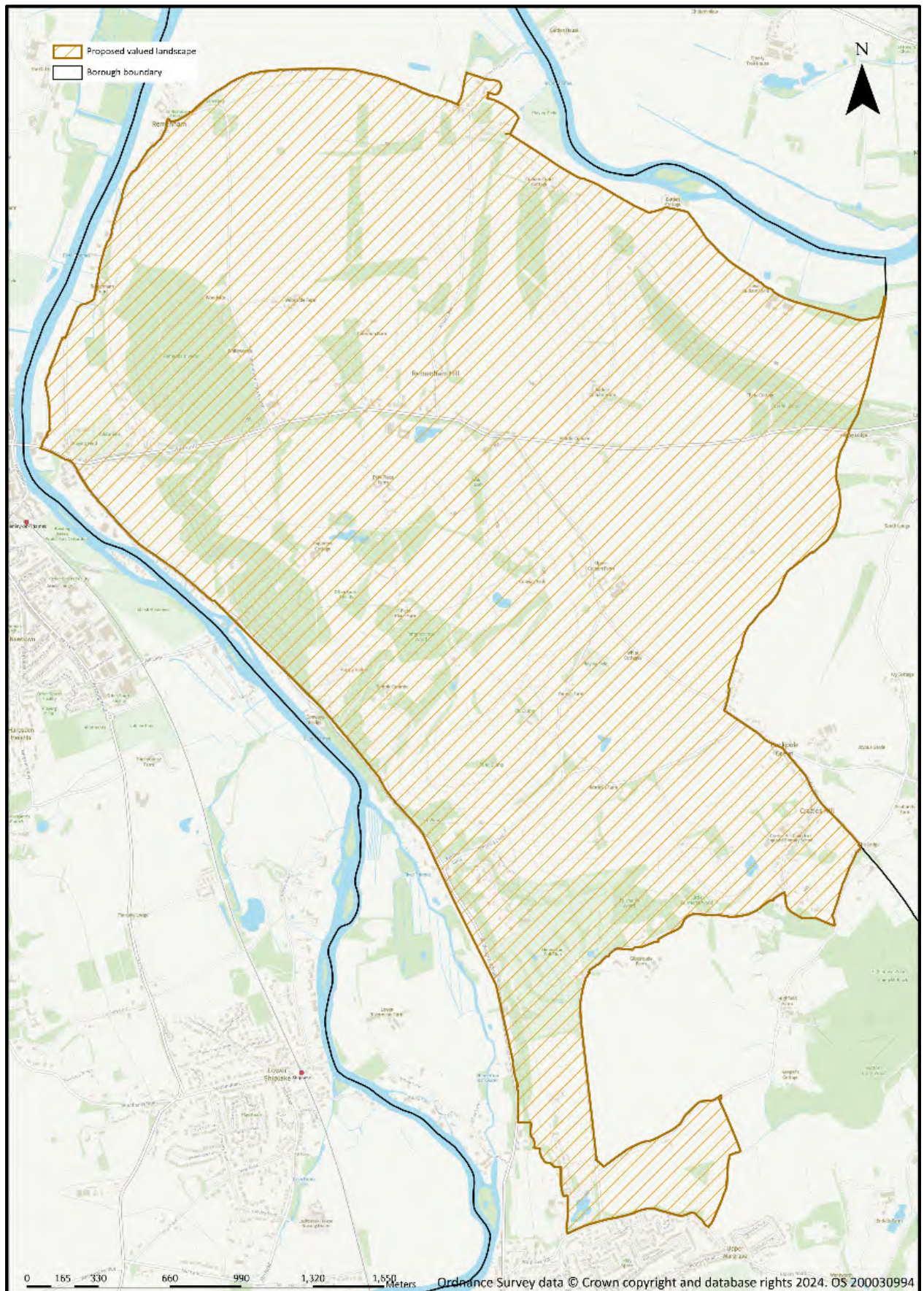
Thomas Cundy was an architect of the new Park Place and he had also held the position of surveyor to Lord Grosvenor's London estates, covering the entire period of builder Thomas Cubitt's developments for Lord Grosvenor in Belgravia and Pimlico in London.

²⁷ VINCENT, The Story of the Thames, 1909, Smith Elder

²⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), paragraph D1.18; D1.19, page 122

²⁹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000588>

Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape Map



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 Hopkiln 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.

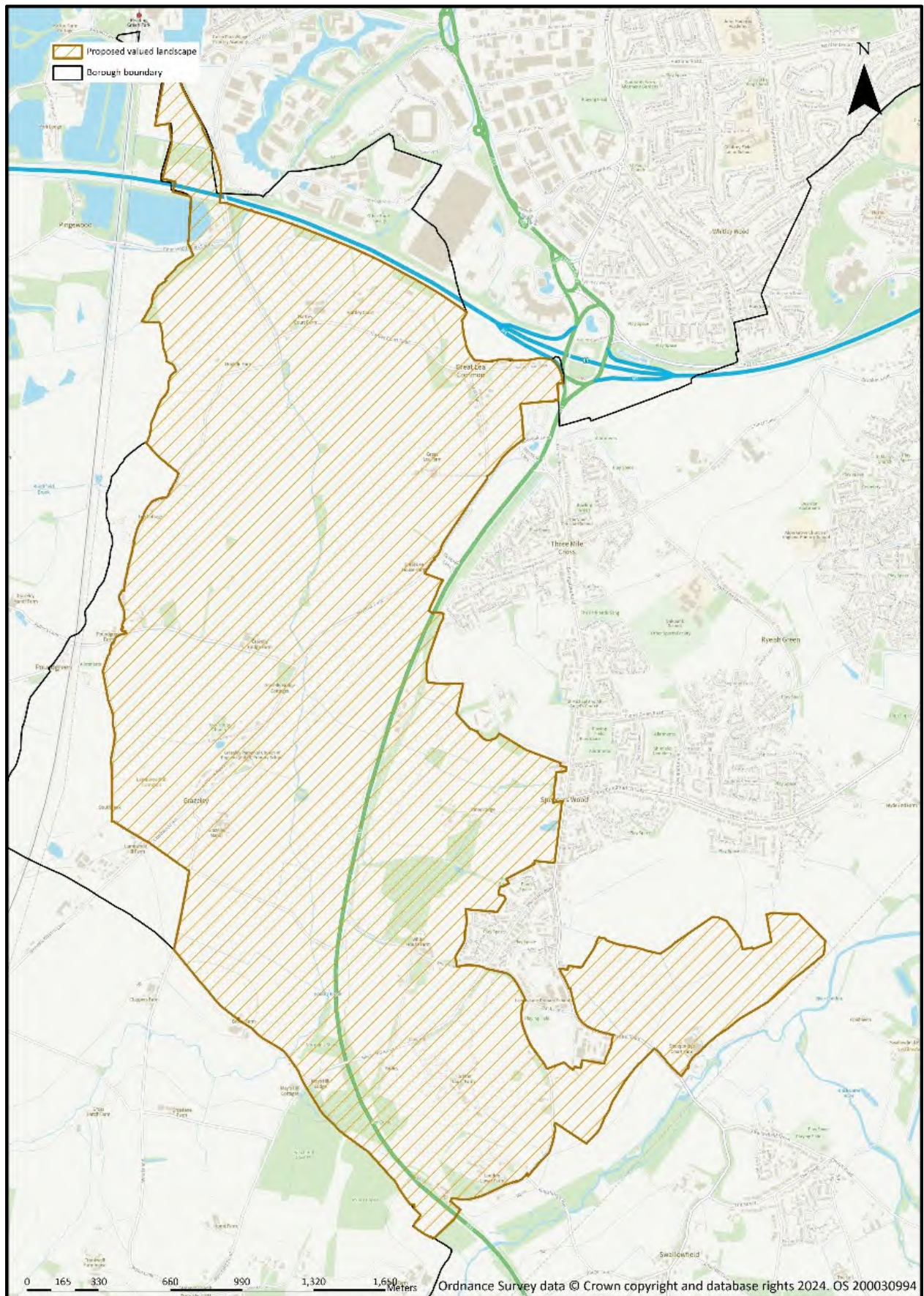
The (GHQ) Stop Line is a key linear feature that spans across the Ridge and Rivers, the River Loddon and, indeed the River Blackwater Valued Landscapes. It was a form of defence-in-depth built across the country as a deterrent against the expected German invasion in the Second World War. The defence 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



Riseley Woods Valued Landscape Narrative

Riseley Woods Valued Landscape Narrative

Introduction

The Riseley Woods Valued Landscape is the smallest of the valued landscapes in the borough. The Riseley Woods Valued Landscape sits close to and above the River Loddon which wraps around it from the west to the north-east.

The Riseley Woods Valued Landscape falls almost entirely within the L3 'Stanford End Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' Landscape Character Area (LCA) and centres on a block of ancient woodland within that LCA. The valued landscape lies above the 55m contour on the northern end of a ridge of London clay and is bisected by the A33 road which runs north-south through the landscape. The valued landscape is located in the extreme south-west and sits on the southern boundary with Hart District in Hampshire. Close by to the west and north lie the River Loddon and Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscapes.

The valued landscape sits between Second World War forward defences at Stanford Bridge and the line of General Headquarters (GHQ) Stop Line, built in 1940, as a defence against German invasion. Within a hundred metres of the southern boundary of the valued landscape, lies the Registered Park and Garden of Stratfield Say in Hampshire – the seat of the Duke of Wellington.

The Riseley Woods Valued Landscape is adjacent to the River Loddon Valued Landscape to the west through north-east, mirroring the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape which lies one kilometre to the north across the River Loddon.

The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019) describes the landscape as:

*'A small but topographically distinct area of higher ground characterised by sparse settlement linked by sunken rural lanes. The area is predominately used for arable farming with a strong network of low hedgerows, interspersed by heathy woodland blocks. An isolated and rural character bisected and disturbed by the busy A33.'*¹

¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 304

Attributes of the valued landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The LCA (2019) assessment of the L3 ‘Stanford End Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills’ Landscape Character Area (LCA) assesses the condition of this landscape, and states:

‘The pattern of arable and pastoral fields with mixed woodland, linked by rural lanes and little settlement is intact and in overall good condition. The busy A33 is a detracting element, and disturbs the rural character and tranquillity of the area. There are opportunities for woodland and hedgerow habitat recreation and strengthening.’²

Scenic Quality – The LCA (2019), when discussing the scenic quality of the L3 ‘Stanford End Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills’ Landscape Character Area (LCA), identifies the following valuable landscape attributes relating to scenic quality: rural farmed character due to the mosaic of irregular fields of varied size, woodland and sparse settlement; variety of the mixed and coniferous woodlands of ancient origin and network of thick hedgerows with hedgerow trees; the wooded skyline which provides a distinctive backdrop to surrounding areas, including in adjacent boroughs; deeply sunken and winding lanes on higher slopes which contribute to scenic rural quality; network of mature hedgerows with mature oak standards which are silhouetted against the sky, giving an enclosed character and sense of place; views to Loddon Valley over the surrounding landscape gives a sense of place and orientation.

Rarity – The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004) provides an assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape, the re-creatability and importance of features. This helps in assessing rarity. It says:

‘...key characteristics being mostly of local importance. However within this context, there are a number of elements with higher sensitivity including the small areas of ancient woodland, skyline woodland, the sunken lanes, sense of remoteness and rural character and sparse built development.’³

The elements that are rare, which are important at a higher level than just the local, are: skyline woodland; the sunken lanes; a sense of remoteness; the rural character and sparse built form.

The uniqueness of ancient woodland is recognised in Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework which defines ‘irreplaceable habitat’ as:

Irreplaceable habitat: Habitats which would be technically very difficult (or take a very significant time) to restore, recreate or replace once destroyed, taking into account their age, uniqueness, species diversity or rarity. They include ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees,⁴

² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 307

³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), paragraph 16.70, page 398

⁴ Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), *the National Planning Policy Framework – Annex 2: Glossary*, 2019.

Whilst ancient woodland is well represented in parts of the south-east of England it is, therefore, clearly a feature of national rarity.

In addition, although four hundred miles of the GHQ stop line defence, in depth, were built, it is still a relatively narrow linear feature covering little land area that, when seen on the scale of regional or national landscapes, should consequently be considered a landscape feature that is nationally rare.

Representativeness –The area is predominantly rural with low density development, but with high density woodland. It has a close association with the River Loddon Valued Landscape which it overlooks. There are good examples of ancient woodland clusters in the valued landscape. The value of this ridge of high land in scenic terms is high. The value of perceptual aspects, for example views across the landscape and dark skies, is high and the landscape is a good example at the borough level.

Notwithstanding the presence of the A33, there are areas of tranquillity and even a feeling of remoteness.

The archaeology is likely to be of interest given the presence of a small Roman settlement and the nearby Roman road. The use of this high land in the Second World War defences is still to be assessed. The valued landscape falls between the forward pillboxes at Stanford End Bridge and the General Headquarters Stop Line, which ran along the eastern, right bank of the Whitewater and Broadwater rivers to the east. The Basingstoke Road running through the village, immediately to the east, was the main route between Reading and the military camps at Aldershot. This high land, with good views across the River Loddon and land to the west (the direction of expected invasion), is likely to have been strategically important.

Perceptual aspects –The LCA (2019) provides an assessment of the perceptual aspects of the L3 ‘Stanford End Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills’ Landscape Character Area (LCA). In the section on ‘valuable landscape attributes’ it states that there are:

‘Views to Loddon Valley over the surrounding landscape gives a sense of place and orientation.’⁵

And the landscape is:

‘Strongly tranquil and remote character, with experience of dark skies due to sparse settlement.’⁶

In the list of ‘Key Characteristics’ for this LCA, it continues to state that this area has a:

⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 306

⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 306

‘Tranquil and remote character, which has dark skies, locally interrupted by the busy A33, which bisects the area, isolating the western half from the rest of the borough.’⁷

And that there are:

‘Extensive views over the Loddon Valley from the ridge.’⁸

Conservation Interests – In terms of wildlife and biodiversity, there are no sites that are currently considered nationally important. However, the Riseley Woods Valued Landscape encompasses an important group of ancient woodlands which form part of a collection of Local Wildlife Sites and are themselves protected in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Habitats of principal importance include: Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland; Wet Woodland; There may also be some Traditional Orchards which appears to be newly planted.

The Ancient Tree Inventory⁹ (ATI) shows no ancient or veteran trees within the valued landscape. However, this may be a result of lack of surveying, or trees missed in survey rather than an absolute absence of such trees.

Local Wildlife Sites: There are three Local Wildlife Sites within the boundaries of this relatively small valued landscape: Highgrove Copse, St Leger’s Copse and Collin’s Copse. These are all ancient woodland, some plantation on ancient woodland sites and some ancient semi-natural woodland, with an interesting flora of ancient woodland indicator species.

Cultural heritage and built form - whilst there are eleven listed buildings in the village of Riseley, there are only three listed buildings that fall within this small valued landscape. They are Bull Lane Cottage, a Grade II listed 17th Century cottage, timber framed with brick and painted brick infill and a thatched roof and flanking chimney on the south gable; Pound House, a Grade II listed former cottage, now a house, originating in the 16th Century. It is part timber-framed with painted render infill and part painted brick. It has an old tile gabled roof with one flanking chimney and one chimney on the ridge and Coldharbour Cottage, a Grade II listed cottage in Swallowfield Lane. Of late 16th Century origin, it was restored in the late 20th Century. It is timber-framed on a brick plinth with painted render infill with a thatched gabled roof and flanking chimneys.

The valued landscape forms an important part of the backdrop for the village and for these buildings. It also serves to screen the village and its listed buildings from the visual, and light and noise pollution impacts of the A33.

The course of the major Roman road from Londinium (London) in the east, to Calleva Atrebatum, (Silchester) in the west, passes around hundred metres to the south of the valued landscape.

⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 305

⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 305

⁹ 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/>

Recreational Value - The LCA (2019) assesses public accessibility of the various Landscape Character Areas for each LCA. There are few public footpaths, but there are well-used informal routes through woodland and narrow winding lanes, which are relatively quiet and are used for walking and the quiet enjoyment of the landscape.

In the 'Key Characteristics' section of the L3 'Stanford East Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' LCA it describes the landscape from this perspective. The LCA (2019) states there are:

*'Single-track lanes, deeply sunken and bounded with banks, ditches and hedges on the higher Ground.'*¹⁰

And the LCA has:

*'Extensive views over the Loddon Valley from the ridge.'*¹¹

In the section on 'valuable landscape attributes' it describes the most important attributes of the LCA and states that there are:

*'Deeply sunken and winding lanes on higher slopes which contribute to scenic rural quality.'*¹²

And:

*'Views to Loddon Valley over the surrounding landscape gives a sense of place and orientation.'*¹³

In the section on 'Key Issues' for the L3 'Stanford East Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' LCA, it states that:

*'The A33 brings noise and movement to the area, disturbing the tranquillity. Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes and, by encouraging greater traffic volumes, also threatens the tranquillity of the area.'*¹⁴

Informal recreation in this valued landscape is dependent on the intimate rural character of the lanes and low traffic volumes.

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the LCA (2019).

When assessing the L3 'Stanford East Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' LCA it states, in the 'Key Characteristics' section, that the LCA has:

¹⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 305

¹¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 305

¹² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 306

¹³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 306

¹⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 307

‘Extensive views over the Loddon Valley from the ridge.’¹⁵

And a:

‘Tranquil and remote character, which has dark skies, locally interrupted by the busy A33, which bisects the area, isolating the western half from the rest of the borough.’¹⁶

In the section on ‘valued landscape attributes’ it states that there are:

‘Views to Loddon Valley over the surrounding landscape gives a sense of place and orientation.’¹⁷

And the landscape has a:

‘Strongly tranquil and remote character, with experience of dark skies due to sparse settlement.’¹⁸

Associations – There are currently no known associations for this valued landscape.

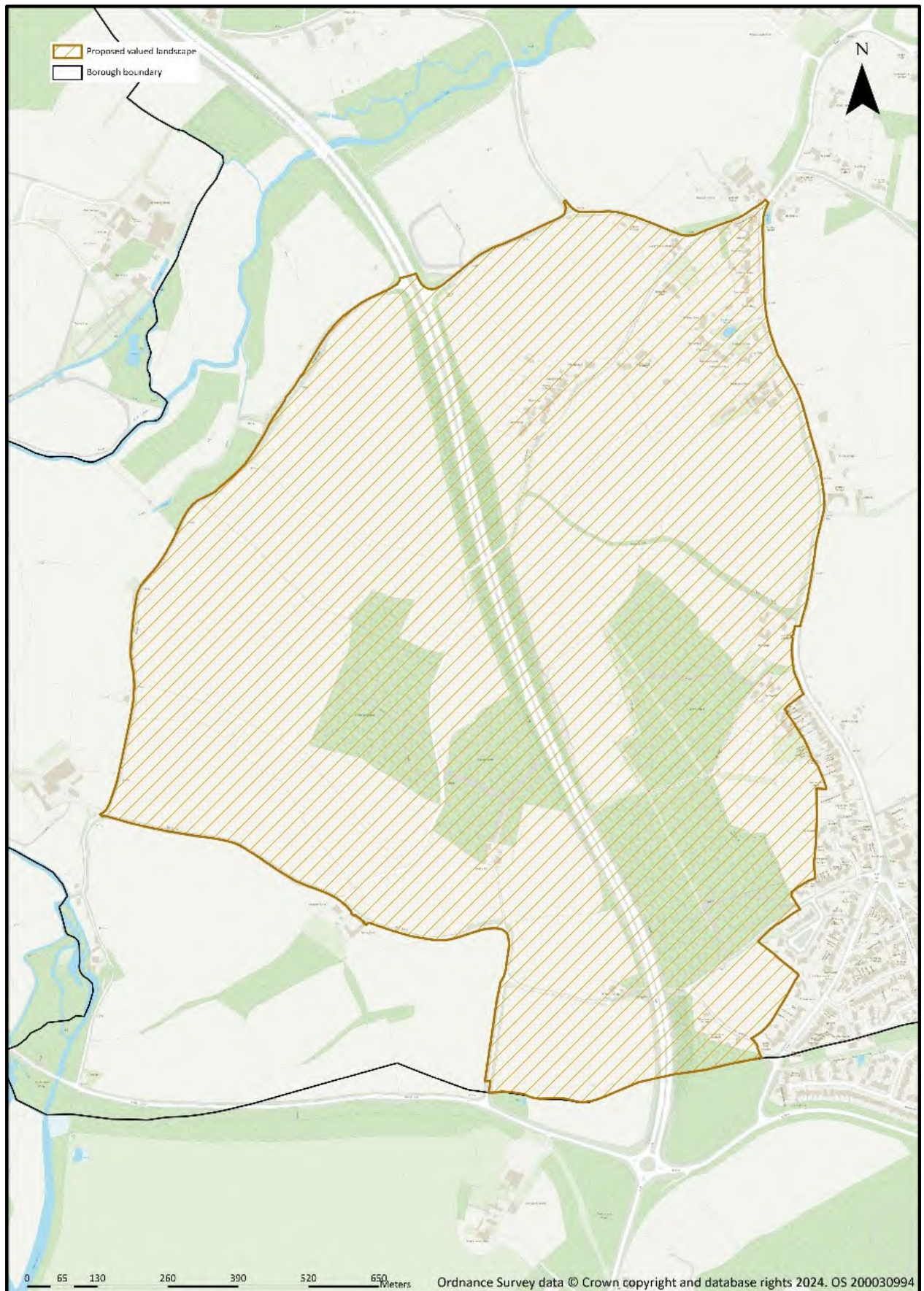
¹⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 305

¹⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 305

¹⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 306

¹⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 306

Riseley Woods Valued Landscape Map



River Blackwater Valued Landscape Narrative

River Blackwater Valued Landscape Narrative

The tiny river Blackwater on the Surrey Berkshire border. You may never have heard of it, but I assure you it is well worth looking at, especially if you are a small river enthusiast. ... So it was that I started tackling up with ever-so-slightly trembling fingers, as the swims were absolute classics straight out of Mr.Crabtree's book. Bends, runs, shallows, overhangs: "there's a Chub Mr Crabtree!" and mysterious pools where the current slowed. Some swims you just knew the stick float would hold up, then dip away to a bite.

from Totally Awesome Fishing's website
quoting the popular angling classic *Mr Crabtree goes fishing*¹

Introduction

The eponymous River Blackwater Valued Landscape, centres on the river of that name. The River Blackwater flows east to west along the southern boundary of the borough. It has been the shire or county boundary since Anglo-Saxon times. The valued landscape sits within the A2 'Loddon River Valley', the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' and the B2 'Blackwater Valley with Open Water' Landscape Character Areas identified in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019). The extensive gravel workings have modified the landscape in the east, where gravel pits have been restored and managed for recreation and nature conservation. In the west of the gravel workings at Fleet Hill Farm, the river meanders through a natural landscape, briefly merging with the Whitewater River to become the Broadwater, before mixing its waters with the Loddon at Swallowfield Park. The Whitewater and the Broadwater were fortified in 1940 with pillboxes and other features as part of the Second World War defences against the predicted German invasion. However, today this is not a grand landscape or a complex one. Its value lies to a great extent in and along the peaceful and tranquil river, and the many opportunities for the quiet enjoyment of the countryside by the many residents who live here.

Attributes of the valued landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The valued landscape sits within the A2 'Loddon River Valley', the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' and the B2 'Blackwater Valley with Open Water' Landscape Character Areas as defined by the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019). The LCA (2019) discusses landscape condition. For the A2 'Loddon River Valley' the LCA 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

¹ Totally awesome fishing website - <http://www.totallyawesomefishing.com/coarse/articles/river-blackwater/>

*corridors, particularly in the north of the area fragment the rural landscape. There are opportunities for improvement and particular enhancement to habitat interconnectivity.*²

It is clear from this that the impacts of development on the northern part of the LCA reduce the quality of the landscape to an 'overall perception of only moderate'. However, the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' Landscape Character Area stresses that *'for the most part this is a remote and rural landscape'*.³

For the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' LCA it states:

*'The strong character and individual landscape components of the Blackwater River with its distinctive intact floodplain are generally in good condition. However, there are opportunities to restore and improve condition through the reinstatement and management of declining hedgerows and the enhancement of areas around settlement. Rural lanes have also become busier.'*⁴

Considering the B2 'Blackwater River Valley with Open Water' LCA it states:

*'The perceptual characteristics of a calm, quiet character and new 'natural' landscape of open water created by mineral extraction are valued, and it is now in good condition. Restoration works of former gravel extraction sites at Manor Farm and Fleethill Farm... will provide opportunities to improve the condition of this area.'*⁵

Scenic Quality – The LCA (2019) summarises the scenic quality of the landscape and identifies valuable landscape attributes that relate to scenic quality. Discussing 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.'*⁶

Developing the theme of scenic quality further, the LCA (2019) lists the following valuable landscape attributes for the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA: the naturalness of the meandering course of the River Loddon and wide floodplain landscape; the wooded backdrop of mature broadleaved woodland copses and natural riparian corridors; important wetland features and 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

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

³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 56

⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 67

⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 89

⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 52

following the course of the rivers; sparse settlement pattern of farmsteads and the village of Swallowfield, with a strong local vernacular which contribute to the scenic quality of the area.⁷

For the B2 'Blackwater River Valley with Open Water' LCA, the LCA (2019) states:

'A section of the Blackwater River Valley which has been exploited for gravel extraction and is being restored as the Moor Green Lake Nature Reserve. Scattered and small scale settlement is located at the edge of Finchampstead and north of Lower Sandhurst Road.'

Looking at this in more depth in the 'valued landscape attributes' table it lists: rural riverine character of the Blackwater River and restored floodplain; ecologically valuable wetland habitats as well as remnant wet meadow and ancient woodland; restored gravel pit lakes; undeveloped character of the valley providing naturalness and remoteness; quiet rural lanes bordered by hedgerows; recreational value of the Moor Green Lake Nature Reserve and the public rights of way; views to the wooded backdrop of Fleet Copse and Finchampstead Ridges create an enclosed and secluded character.

The valuable landscape attributes noted for the B2 'Blackwater River Valley' LCA include: rural riverine character of the Blackwater River and restored floodplain; ecologically valuable wetland habitats; restored gravel pit lakes providing ecological habitats and opportunities for recreation; undeveloped character of the valley which provides a sense of naturalness; quiet rural lanes bordered by hedgerows; recreational value of the Moor Green Lake Nature Reserve and the public rights of way; views to the wooded backdrop of Fleet Copse and Finchampstead Ridges.

The contribution that this LCA makes to the borough's landscape was recognised by the Planning Inspector conducting an appeal at Land to the South of Twin Oaks, Longwater Lane, Finchampstead. The Inspector in his decision letter (paragraph 38) concluded that, when looked at in the round, the ecological importance and localised areas of tranquillity and peacefulness of the landscape centred along the River Blackwater, combined with features such as the wooded character, irregular fields, rural linear patterns along leafy lanes on the edge of the floodplain, took it above mere countryside⁸. The Inspector considered the landscape should be regarded as a valued landscape for the purposes of the NPPF.

Rarity – A number of sources can assist in assessing rarity of landscape types and individual features. The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004) gave an indication of this in the assessment of sensitivity where it assessed the re-creatability of landscape elements and subsequently comments on their importance.

When discussing the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA, the LCA (2004) mentions the naturalness of the river and its associated habitats; the presence of mature trees; and the remote tranquil character and absence of development on the valley floor. The LCA notes the presence of characteristics of national and regional importance for example numerous Wildlife Heritage Sites.

⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 56

⁸ Land to the South of Twin Oaks, Longwater Lane, Finchampstead, APP/X0360/W/21/3283104, decision dated 26th July 2023, paragraph 38

The LCA (2004) states that the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' LCA is: *'...important at the regional (or even national) level, including the wetlands habitats, low density settlement pattern and distinctive vernacular architecture.'*⁹

It highlights the *'most valued and sensitive aspects of this landscape'* which it says are *'the perceptual characteristics including the tranquillity and sense of ruralness that are of local value but increasingly rare throughout the region'*¹⁰. Given that the LCA was produced in 2004, the locality has undergone high levels of house and infrastructure building since it was published, and therefore the aspect of the 'rarity' has increased in value and is now considered to be of regional value.

With regards to the B2 'Thames River Valley with Open Water' LCA, the LCA (2004) comments that the *'immediate river corridor and channel'*¹¹ are very sensitive to change. Natural watercourses of this character and quality are rare in the borough and this river is considered to be of regional importance.

The rare and important Second World War GHQ Stop Line is discussed in more detail in the River Loddon Valued Landscape narrative. In this valued landscape its course passes briefly along the Broadwater River and then turns south along the Whitewater River into Hampshire. It is, however, worth quoting the late Professor Holmes, who suggested that: *'Our landscape is indeed given added meaning by these defences'*¹². The presence of archaeological, historical and cultural features (buried tank ditches, pillboxes, and cultural references) and the geographical and topographical features modified to create the GHQ Stop Line) gives 'added meaning' to the landscape taking this site beyond 'mere countryside'.

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 river landscapes in the southeast. The areas of past minerals workings contrast with the reaches of more natural river; the current or recently ceased workings are yet another contrast. Yet in this variety, the river shows many similarities with lowland rivers across lowland England.

This river is relatively accessible and also close to a number of centres of population: the Arborfield Green Strategic Development Location; Finchampstead; Crowthorne, Sandhurst and Yateley – an urban crescent enclosing the eastern end of the landscape. This is representative of river landscapes that were common in the south-east a generation ago. Such landscapes are increasingly rare, but this landscape is both rare and tranquil, and accessible to a densely populated catchment of residents to whom this landscape is a popular resource.

⁹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 5.93, page 91

¹⁰ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 5.93, page 91

¹¹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 6.43, page 115

¹² 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

Conservation Interests – In terms of wildlife and biodiversity, the River Blackwater Valued Landscape provides an important assemblage of wildlife sites and habitats valued at the borough level.

Habitats of Principal Importance include: Eutrophic standing waters; Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh; Lowland mixed deciduous woodland; Wet woodland and potentially areas of Traditional Orchards.

The valued landscape falls within the Blackwater Valley and Loddon Valley South Biodiversity Opportunity Areas. The Ancient Tree Inventory¹³ shows a wide variety of Ancient and Veteran Trees with notable aggregations along the valley between The Street in the west and Longwater Road in the East. Because much of the land is low-lying and susceptible to flooding there is limited assemblage of ancient woodland. However ancient woodland does occur on the higher land, and some are named on tithe maps that give glimpses into the history of the area including: King's Copse or King's Coppice and Poors Copse. In addition, hedgerow surveys indicate that there is a density of important hedgerows within the valued landscape at Finchampstead, of which many date back to the medieval period.

Local Wildlife Sites: There are six Local Wildlife Sites within the valued landscape: Fleet Copse, Longwater Lane Meadow, The Marshes, Riseley; Wyvol's Copse; Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve and Eversley Meadow. The habitats represented are varied, including (respectively): ancient semi-natural woodland; grassland; woodland, wet woodland and grassland; restored ancient woodland; gravel pits with importance for birds; wet woodland and neutral grassland. Some of these sites are supported by active volunteer groups who carry out not only maintenance and habitat management, but ecological monitoring as well.

The Longwater Road Gravel Pit is a Local Geological Site. However, quarrying ceased in 2012 and the site was restored for amenity and wildlife conservation. The geological features that were exposed by quarrying are therefore no longer visible.

A significant part of the valued landscape is susceptible to flooding, and because of this, the landscape was never densely populated. A characteristic feature of this landscape is therefore its lack of development. Other than buildings that needed to be located close to the river (e.g. water mills) houses, cottages and inns were traditionally located outside areas likely to be flooded. Due to the historic general lack of development, there are only five listed buildings in the Valued Landscape area: Riseley Farmhouse, Angel Sprints, Nutbean Farmhouse, The Poors House and New Mill. The Grade II listed New Mill was previously a mill and millhouse of 15th Century origin and is now occupied by a restaurant. The structure is part timber framed, with painted brick infill and part weather-boarding and painted brick, and an old tile gabled roof. The interior has many exposed timbers, a large inglenook fireplace and the mill wheel, gears and machinery fully restored and in working order enclosed behind a glass screen.

¹³ 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 curiously named Grade II listed Angel Sprints was once known as Angel Inn but is now a Grade II listed cottage. Originating in the late 16th Century it is of timber frame construction with painted brick infill and thatched hip roof, with thatch swept down at the rear to low eaves level. The Grade II listed Poors House is a timber framed, thatched cottage of early 16th Century origin. Nutbean Farmhouse (Grade II) is of late 16th Century origin; a timber framed, part painted stucco infill, part painted brick structure with weatherboarding. There is an old insurance plaque at first floor level. Riseley Farmhouse in Part Lane is Grade II listed. Its origins are as an early 16th Century hall house and byre and it is now a farmhouse.

Recreational Value - The LCA (2019) generally assesses public accessibility of the A2 'Loddon River Valley', A3 'Blackwater River Valley' and B2 'Blackwater Valley with Open Water' Landscape Character Areas in each Landscape Character Area chapter.

The recreational value of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA is addressed in the 'Key Characteristics' table, which states:

*'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.'*¹⁴

With regards to the recreational value within the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' LCA, the cultural landscapes section states:

*'Rural roads run along the northern boundary of the area on the slopes of the valley side, and also cross the valley. To the west of the borough the roads typically become rural tracks bounded by thick hedges with trees and deep ditches as they near the river which they cross by fords rather than bridges. These tracks and the network of footpaths including the promoted Blackwater Valley Path, give particularly good access to the river and floodplain for leisure use.'*¹⁵

In the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' LCA, the 'valuable landscape attributes' table states:

*'Recreational value of the public rights of way including the promoted Blackwater Valley Path which give access to the area. Their presence provides opportunities for the river and surrounding area to be used for leisure, especially in the east, near Fleethill Farm.'*¹⁶

In the 'Key Characteristics' table for the B2 'Blackwater Valley with Open Water' LCA, it states:

*'Informal recreational landscape with trails and footpath connections to Trilakes Country Park, including the promoted Blackwater Valley Path.'*¹⁷

¹⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 53

¹⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), paragraph A3.12, page 67

¹⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 67

¹⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 87

The B2 'Blackwater Valley with Open Water' LCA 'valuable landscape attributes' table states:

*'Recreational value of the Moor Green Lake Nature Reserve and the public rights of way including the promoted Blackwater Valley and Three Castles Paths which give access to the area and enjoyment of the river valley.'*¹⁸

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

For the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA it identified 'valuable landscape attributes', stating 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...' 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.'*¹⁹

Considering the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' LCA, the valuable landscape attributes list states that the landscape has:

*'strong perceptual characteristics, including intimacy, tranquillity and remoteness and experience of dark skies which are rare within the borough.'*²⁰

In a list of valuable landscape attributes, the B2 'Blackwater Valley with Open Water' LCA states the area has:

*'localised areas of tranquillity and peacefulness, with an experience of dark skies, particularly around the restored lakes, and away from the B0136...' and 'views to the wooded backdrop of Fleet Copse and Finchampstead Ridges create an enclosed and secluded character, particularly around the Moor Green Lakes.'*²¹

The wooded backdrop of the ancient woodland at Fleet Copse, in particular, was recognised by the Twin Oaks, Longwater Lane Inspector as a key characteristic that provided an important setting to this landscape.²²

Associations – This landscape has no known associations with national or local figures. This landscape is, however, a popular and populist landscape. Because of its tranquillity, undeveloped nature and the many opportunities for the quiet enjoyment of the countryside, the associations with this valued landscape are with the people of the local community.

¹⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 89

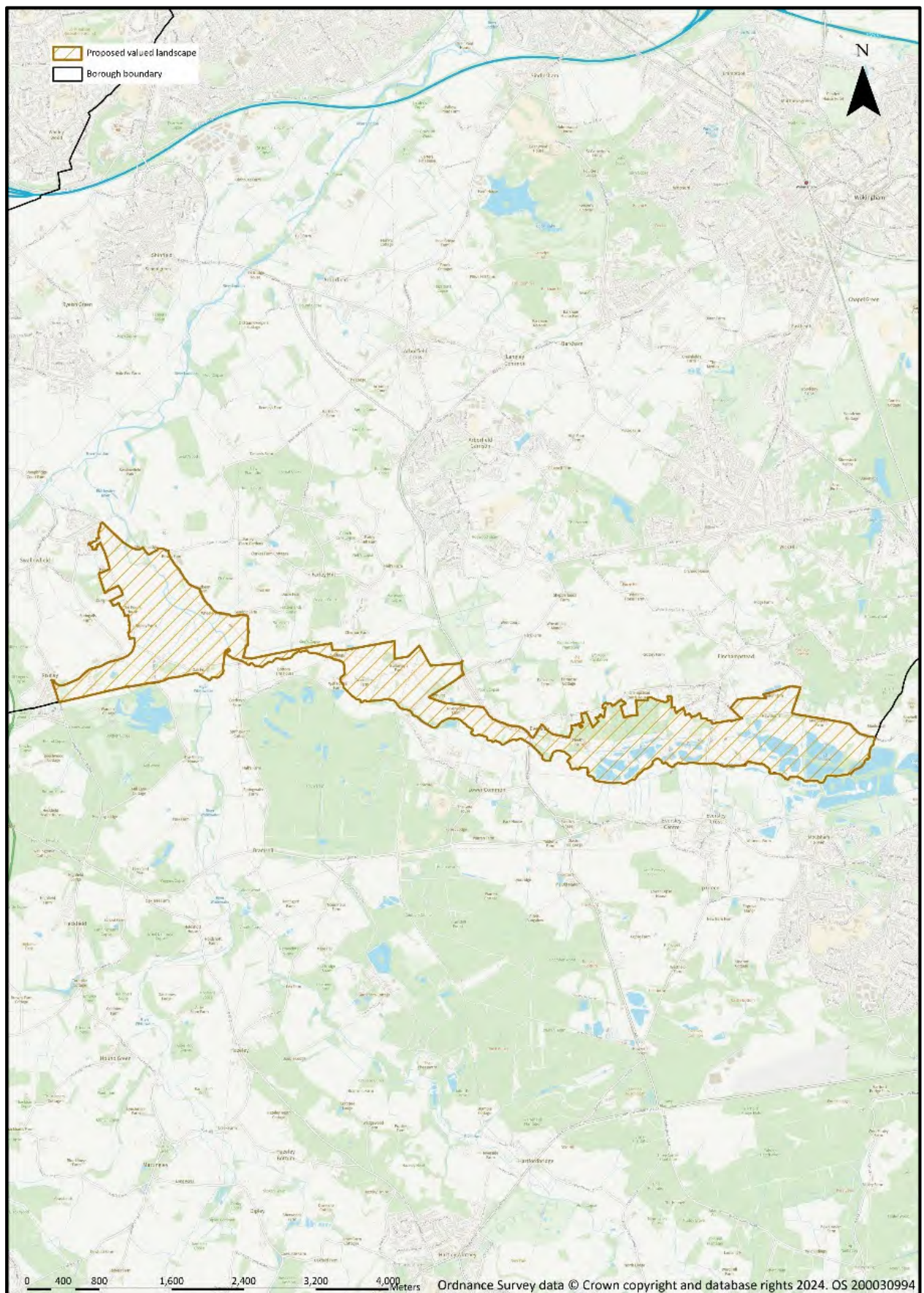
¹⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 56

²⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 6

²¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 89

²² Land to the South of Twin Oaks, Longwater Lane, Finchampstead, APP/X0360/W/21/3283104, decision dated 26th July 2023, paragraph 40

River Blackwater 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://historicismengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1013336>

²⁰ Beaumys Castle moat <https://historicismengland.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.

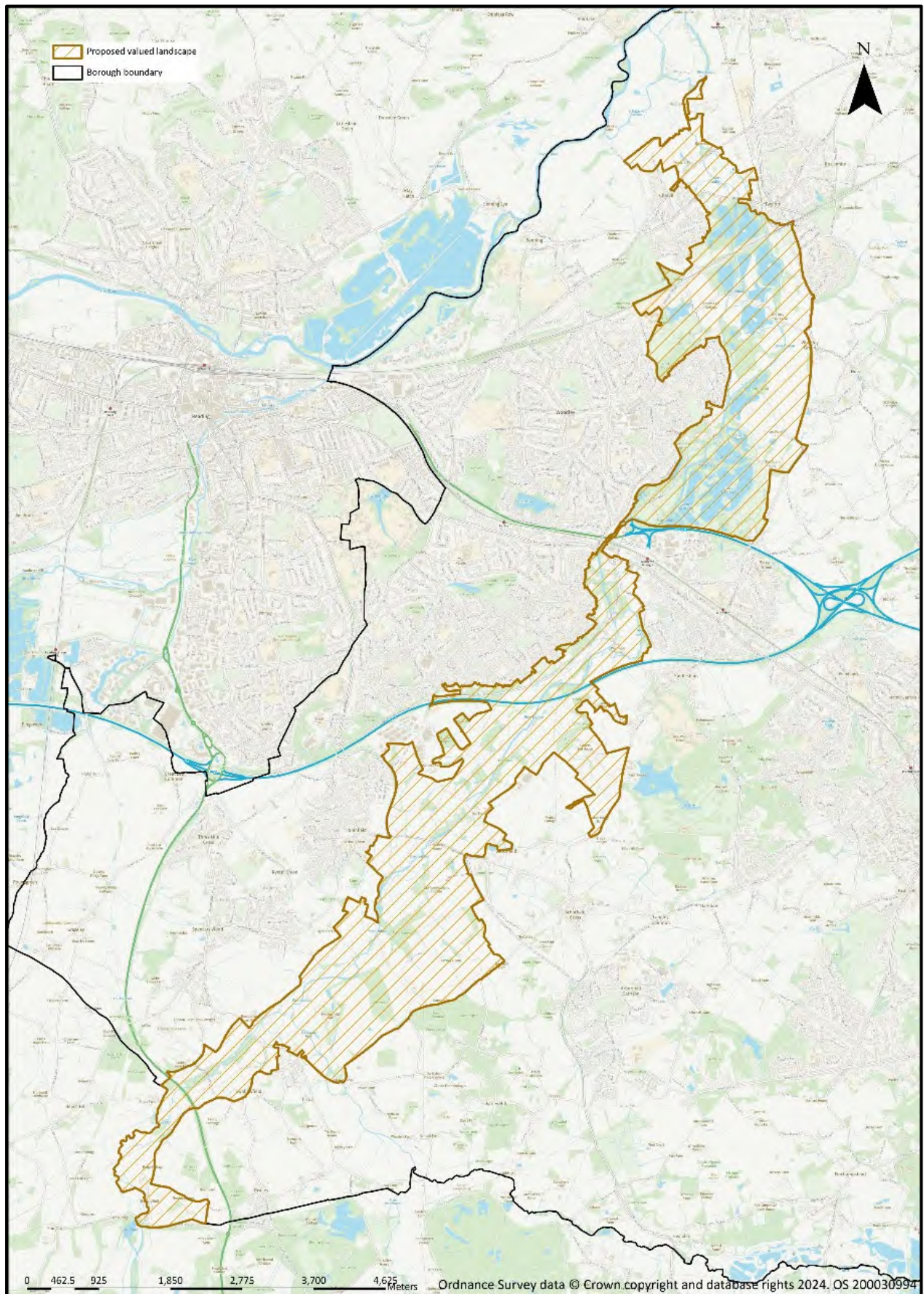
The architect of the home defences during the early months of the Second World War was General Edmund Ironside. William Edmund ‘Tiny’ Ironside, 1st Baron Ironside, GCB, CMG, DSO (6 May 1880 – 22 September 1959) was a career soldier. He served throughout the Second Boer War spying on German colonial forces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



River Thames Valued Landscape Narrative

River Thames Valued Landscape Narrative

It is a part of the river in which to dream of bygone days, and banish forms and faces, and things that might have been, but are not, confound them.

Jerome K Jerome, 1889, Three Men in a Boat

Introduction

The River Thames Valued Landscape centres on the River Thames which forms the northern boundary of the borough and the ancient boundary between the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. The River Thames arises in Lechlade, Wiltshire, has the largest water catchment of Britain's rivers and is the longest river entirely in England (215 miles, or 346 km). It passes through Oxford, Reading, Henley-on-Thames, Maidenhead and Windsor. The navigation starts at Lechlade near its source and continues to Teddington Lock in Richmond, where the river becomes tidal. Navigation in the tidal Thames continues to the Pool of London and onwards to the North Sea.

The valued landscape roughly follows the line of the flood plain but takes in higher ground where settlements, land use or features are intrinsically linked with the landscape of the river. The valued landscape's northern boundary is determined by the borough boundary. The River Thames Valued Landscape abuts the Remenham Chalk and River Loddon Valued Landscapes to the east and south respectively.

Attributes of the valued landscape

Please note that the standard approach of referring to the left and right banks of the river is used in this text. Left refers to the left bank, and right to the right bank when facing downstream.

Landscape quality (condition) – The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004) identified this as a high-quality landscape and this is clear and evident from any visit to the area. There are some elements of the landscape that are industrialised to a limited extent, for example the western end of the landscape at the confluence with the River Kennet, but even here the built form has quality and historic importance and adds to, rather than detracts from, the landscape quality. In other places, housing or other built form constructed in more recent years generally detracts from the natural landscape, however the strength of character and quality given to the landscape by the River Thames and its associated landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage over-ride and over-rule the negative impacts of less well-judged development.

Scenic Quality – The LCA (2004) states that the Thames River Valley (A1) LCA is a 'landscape of overall high quality' and 'this is because the area has a strong landscape character which is in

*generally good condition.*¹ The LCA states that *‘the strong character is derived from the distinctive river channel with associated waterside habitats and the presence of picturesque and traditional settlements on the floodplain edge’*². In addition, road and rail crossings provide focal points and interest when viewed from the navigation and the national trail.

Rarity – The Thames is Britain’s largest river in terms of catchment area (though not in terms of length or discharge). The landscape of the Thames main river is extremely rare and the landscapes of crossing points, particularly those like Sonning and Henley-on-Thames where the settlement is perched above the river on rocky outcrops (chalk in this case) are rarer still. The bridges at such road crossings are also a rare element, as are the Conservation Areas and listed buildings often found at such points. The bridges over the Thames of the Great Western Railway (GWR) are of great historical significance and rarity. Built in 1840 (widened in 1892), the GWR bridge at the confluence with the River Kennet at the western end of the part of the River Thames Valued Landscape that lies within the borough, is one of I K Brunel’s original railway bridges, with another being Maidenhead Bridge, in the neighbouring Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The other railway bridge in this valued landscape is at Wargrave, on the GWRs Henley branch line built in 1857. The bridge is an iron structure in contrast to I K Brunel’s bridge which is built on skew having central elliptical arch with two round flood arches to either side. In Wargrave and Remenham, footpaths called ‘Ferry Lane’ approach the river affording views but no longer any crossing points. By definition, all river crossings are both intimately associated with, and owe their being, to the riverine landscape but because of the size of the river and the history of the transport corridor these bridges, road and rail, are particularly important.

Representativeness – There are other such landscapes that are similar to the River Thames in this area (such as Thames at Wallingford) but they are rare. The landscape here incorporates fine villages including the settlements of Sonning, Wargrave and Henley-on-Thames which grew up to service the trade along the river, a major trade route before the development of toll-roads in the 18th century. These villages centre on conservation areas which run from the settlements, usually on higher ground to avoid flooding, down to the river itself. The river delineates the counties of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire and was also the boundary between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. The river is representative of many lowland rivers but, because it is one of the largest in the country, it is a particularly fine example.

Conservation Interests – In terms of wildlife and biodiversity, the River Thames Valued Landscape offers an almost unique habitat for wildlife because of its position as the country’s largest lowland river with its in-stream habitats, emergent vegetation, flood plain habitats with examples of wetland and lowland meadow habitats.

Riverine habitats represent some of the longest uninterrupted stretches of habitat in the country. They are important as habitats in their own right and for terrestrial ecosystems and habitats, feeding nutrients and water into these and acting as dispersal and migration routes for aquatic plants and

¹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 5.40, page 66

² Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 5.40, page 66

animals. They are also important for terrestrial species such as bats, many species of which forage along rivers. The Thames is, therefore, particularly important for wildlife.

Species which have a particular link with the features of this valued landscape include freshwater fish and invertebrate species such as river lampreys (*Lampetra fluviatilis*) and wild salmon (*Salmo salar*) which spawn in gravel bottomed tributaries migrating up rivers from the sea where the fish spend most of their adult lives.

Terrestrial species particularly at home in and around the river are the rare Daubentons Bat (*Myotis daubentonii*) and amphibians such as the grass snake (*Natrix natrix*).

Habitats of principal importance:

- Wood Pasture and Parkland habitat are present in the general area including some in adjacent valued landscapes - such as Park Place, Aston - and others within. neighbouring administrative areas – for example the parkland at Fawley Court on the left bank of the Thames, just north of Henley-on-Thames. However, the pre 1800 Parkland at Culham Court is present as scattered remnants only and that at Holme Park at Sonning can now be best described as ‘defunct’.
- Blocks of scattered Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland grow on islands or ‘eyots’ in the navigation channel and bankside with particular concentrations north of Wargrave Marsh and south-west of Sonning. Other small blocks of deciduous woodland can be found, many of which are planted around the mixed deciduous woodland habitat. Ancient woodlands tend to be located on the scarp slope of the adjacent Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape.
- An area of Lowland Fen sits on the northern end of the island largely occupied by Lower Rivermead Farm, north-west of Wargrave.
- A sizeable area of Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh sits on the right bank of the river one to two kilometres upstream of its confluence with the River Loddon.

No in-stream habitats have been identified as being of special importance on Natural England, or other mapping, but it is likely that this merely represents a survey bias against such generally inaccessible habitats. It is likely that in-stream habitats will emerge as being of importance as survey methods and efforts increase. This is likely to be the case for side channels and less well-used navigations such as Hennerton Backwater.

The Ancient Tree Inventory³ shows a wide variety of Ancient and Veteran Trees with notable aggregations around the villages and conservation areas of Sonning and Wargrave and the right bank of the river at Henley Bridge and the hamlet of Remenham.

Nature reserves and Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), valuable for wildlife conservation and recreation include the Suttons Business Park and Thames Valley Park East LWS which comprises a small area of

³ 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/>

ponds with Biodiversity Action Plan Lowland priority Fen habitat. The site is particularly valuable for birds and amphibians and sits adjacent and to the east of a large area of restored meadows on the east bank of the river. The nature reserve and meadows are managed by the Oracle Corporation and are accessible to the public.

Charvil Meadow is a good example of a flood meadow used in the past for summer hay with the aftermath grazed off before flooding in the winter. This enhanced the diversity of the wildflowers and fauna. The site is managed by Wokingham Borough Council and is accessible to the public.

Wargrave Marsh, as its name suggests, is more accessible to boaters than from the land. It sits between the river and Hennerton Backwater which is also a navigation. The marsh was an extensive area of Lowland Fen, wet grazing and Grazing Marsh but is now subject to much scrub colonisation. This was formerly towpath but there is still pedestrian access along this, on the right bank of the river.

Ratty's Refuge at the River and Rowing Museum is a very small reserve designed as a wildlife garden for the Chelsea Flower Show in 2008. It can be viewed from the terrace by the museum café.

Cultural heritage and built form - the valued landscape encompasses four conservation areas, three of them based around the riverside villages of Sonning and Wargrave and the hamlet of Remenham. The last of the conservation areas is based on the area on the right bank of the River Thames and surrounding Henley Bridge and the Leander club, the traditional home and start line of the Henley Royal Regatta.

In addition, there are over a hundred listed buildings and structures in this valued landscape area, with concentrations in the four conservation areas: Remenham; Henley Bridge with five listed buildings, Remenham Church with two listed buildings, Sonning with 47 listed buildings and Wargrave with 35 listed buildings.

Notable structures outside the conservation areas include: the Grade II listed structure and Scheduled Monument, 19th century Railway Bridge designed and built by IK Brunel. The Horseshoe Bridge is on the western edge of the River Thames Valued Landscape, dating back to 1892 and is attached to the railway bridge designed and built by IK Brunel. Sitting adjacent to East Reading in the south-west of the valued landscape it crosses the River Kennet and marks the south-western most boundary of the valued landscape. In the north-eastern part of the valued landscape sits Aston Farmhouse a Grade II listed 16th century hall house in the open countryside. Listed separately but designed as part of the listed Grade II* Fawley Court pleasure grounds across the river in Buckinghamshire, the 18th century folly on Temple Island, is another notable structure and marks the finish line for the Henley Royal Regatta.

There are also a number of listed buildings, situated across the borough boundaries but contributing to this valued landscape, including at Shiplake in South Oxfordshire, where there is a notable aggregation of listed buildings associated with the ancient village and the college. As well as listed buildings there are Buildings of Traditional Local Character including Pool Court, set back from Thames Street at Sonning and overlooking the valued landscape. The building is listed in Pevsner and

is by architect Francis Pollen. Some of these character buildings are listed in Conservation Area Appraisals.

The valued landscape forms the setting for these conservation areas as well as for the individual buildings and structures. Indeed, the form and location of many of these buildings is in major part a response to the features of the landscape in which they sit. So, for example the Henley Royal Regatta Headquarters and Rowing Museum, a Grade II post-modern structure, designed in 1984-1986 by the Terry Farrell Partnership, is purposefully located on the right bank of the river immediately adjacent to Henley Bridge the starting point for the regatta races.

From the perspective of archaeological heritage, there is an aggregation of scheduled monuments to the south of the valued landscape. They sit on high ground, perched on the northern slopes of the chalk at Charvil, and overlook the valued landscape, which forms their setting and was clearly a foraging and hunting ground for such settlements. However, although it is important to conserve the visual link between any pre-historic settlements on high ground and the river itself, these features have not been included in the valued landscape, it being limited to the landscape of the river and its floodplain at this time.

Culturally, the River Thames is itself important as a county boundary and previously the boundary between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. After the Norman invasion, the River Thames marked the boundary of the Royal Forest of Windsor, the Crown's premier hunting forest. Although the western part of the valued landscape falls within Bishops Bear Wood 'Chase'; the private hunting forest of the Bishops of Salisbury, who had a palace at Sonning, the river proving to be an enduring demarcation and barrier to incursion.

Wharfs and crossings also form part of the archaeological heritage of the valued landscape, including evidence for a wharf at Broken Brow (where oak from the Royal Forest of Windsor was shipped for use in the hundred years war) and the remains of the 12th Century bridge, which forms part of the sub-structure of the present-day bridge over the Thames at Henley-on-Thames. Most of the towns and villages within and adjacent to the valued landscape grew up on higher ground near wharves and crossings for reasons of trade and security. Sonning is a good example, sitting high on a chalk outcrop above the river crossing and being a seat of the Bishops of Salisbury from Saxon to Elizabethan times. These towns and villages have benefitted from the transition of the river from navigation for commerce to an important tourist route and attraction.

Recreational Value – The National Trail runs along the right bank of the river from Reading, crosses over the Thames at Sonning Bridge and then runs down the left bank until Shiplake Lock, where it deviates inland until Ferry Eyot, when it re-joins the River Thames on the left bank. At Henley-on-Thames it crosses the bridge and once again joins the right bank of the River, which it follows until it deviates slightly inland through the hamlet of Aston, before it leaves Wokingham Borough east of Lower Culham Farm.

The National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 4 is a long-distance route between London and Fishguard (Wales). It runs a short distance along the right bank of the River from Reading to Sutton's Business Park where it turns inland. From the Business Park a 'link route' runs along the Thames to Sonning,

where it again moves to higher ground through the northern part of Charvil to Wargrave and Crazies Hill where it joins NCN Route 52, which arcs north-east and turning south-east, passing out of the Borough.

The Thames navigation runs from the tidal Thames, managed by the port of London Authority, to the length of the river upstream of Teddington Lock managed by the Environment Agency. This part of the river takes the navigation upstream to the furthest navigable point at Lechlade. The River Thames Valued Landscape sits roughly central to the eastern half of the non-tidal Thames and the river in the valued landscape is therefore navigable along its entire length. Because of this traditional navigation, the river is a huge, regionally important, recreational asset, but the landscape of the river is what draws people to it. It is not a natural landscape; it has been modified and managed to benefit the people who live by it, use it or gain enjoyment from it. An example of this is the course of the prestigious and world-famous Henley Royal Regatta, held annually at this site since 1839 (apart from breaks for two world wars). Here, the river landscape and townscape is modified to increase enjoyment of the races: pavilions have been built, field hedges removed, trees are not allowed to impede the view and a new museum constructed. The focus in this reach is the river, the races and the enjoyment thereof.

Angling is popular along the length of the Thames. In the non-tidal Thames, the predominant species are roach (*Rutilus rutilus*), dace (*Leuciscus leuciscus*), bream (*Abramis brama*), chubb (*Squalius cephalus*), pike (*Esox lucius*) and perch (*Perca fluviatilis*).

Other recreational features of the landscape include facilities for the quiet enjoyment of the countryside, including local walks and areas for wildlife and bird watching. Other places offering recreational opportunities include unique venues that owe their form, function or location to the River Thames landscape. Features of value in this context include traditional and longstanding places of recreation, such as The Bull and Big House pubs at Sonning (traditionally the White Hart Hotel) the former of which is mentioned in *Three Men in a Boat*, by Jerome K Jerome (1889).

Perceptual Aspects – This is a pastoral landscape, just a short distance from transport corridors and the towns, and notwithstanding disturbance from visitors, this landscape is part of a haven of tranquillity running through the south-east region from London to Oxford and beyond. There are reservoirs of dark skies particularly in the landscape of the lower reaches below Henley-on-Thames.

Although the wider landscape of the floodplain, and views into it are tranquil, this is a busy landscape. However, in many ways its busyness is characteristic. The road and rail crossings, the boat traffic, and the walkers and cyclists are key to the River Thames landscape. Indeed, there is much evidence that the river has been a transport route since at least Anglo-Saxon times. Features relating to its recreational uses are part of the character of the landscape.

Associations – There are strong cultural associations between the landscape of the River Thames at or near this point and artists and writers including Jerome K Jerome (1859-1927), Jane Austen (1775-1817), Sir John Everett Millais PRA (1829-1896), Sir Stanley Spencer CBE RA (1891-1959) – at nearby Cookham situated downstream of this reach of the river - and William Holman Hunt OM (1827-1910) – a resident of Sonning. Modern artists associated with this landscape include the Hollywood actor

George Clooney. These associations add to the value of this riverine landscape generally but particularly the setting of sites and buildings such as the White Hart Hotel – now the Great House – which was recommended by the painter and writer George Leslie Dunlop in his seminal work – ‘Our River’. In this book he also mentions Mr Sadler, the lock keeper at Sonning Lock who was a celebrated 19th Century poet, bee-keeper and rose-grower.

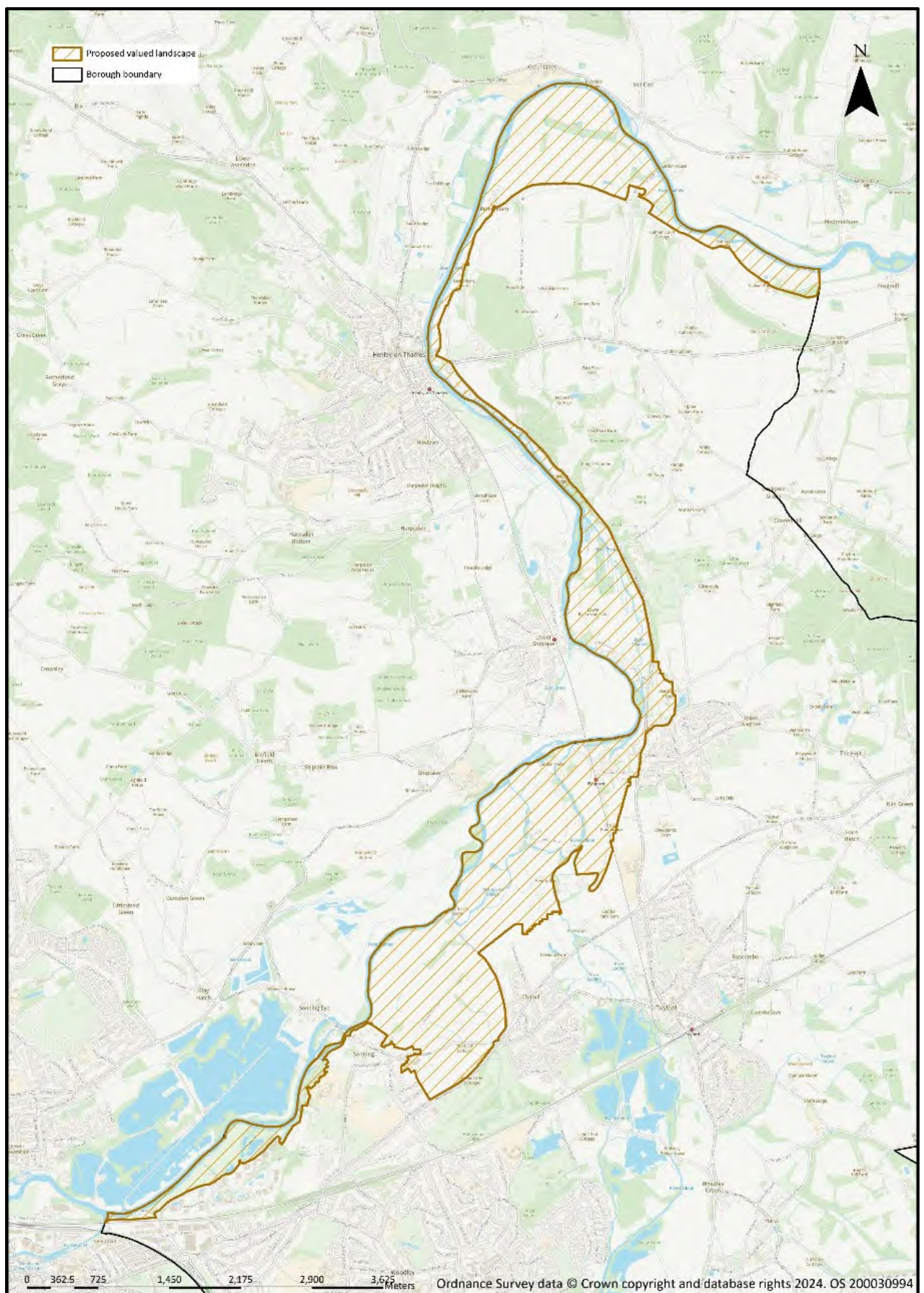
In Late Victorian times numerous now-respected artists and writers took up residence in local towns and villages. Charles Kerr - a London painter who painted ‘Wargrave Church’, one of 27 of his works exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1884 and 1904 was one of many residents at the St George and Dragon Inn in that town. Vicat Cole and William Gosling are also closely associated with the river and its landscape around Wargrave and painted ‘Wargrave’ and ‘Near Wargrave on the Thames’ respectively.

Alfred Glendening (1840 - 1910) also painted the river landscape notably ‘*Gathering Rushes on the Thames near Wargrave*’. Other artists and writers who lived and worked in Wargrave are Frederick Walker, Benjamin Leader, Henry Marks, Edward Duncan and Samuel Jackson. Jackson, particularly, made many paintings of the river and village.

Henley-on-Thames too has its associated artists and whilst there is no evidence that the River Thames Valued Landscape inspired any of his earlier work, the celebrated pop musician, George Harrison MBE from ‘The Beatles’ lived in Friar Park, a few hundred yards from the river, from 1970 until his death in 2001.

Upstream and Downstream of the River Thames Valued Landscape, the river has inspired painters, writers and other artists. The associations of this landscape with the arts run wide and deep.

River Thames Valued Landscape Map



Appendix 4: Summary of responses to valued landscapes proposed in the Draft Plan Consultation (2020)

Valued Landscape	Individual / Organisation	Summary of comments	Officer response
Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape	Barkham Parish Council	The boundary of the valued landscape should incorporate the whole 'Area of Special Character' as identified in the made Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan, as well as extending further to include the separation between Barkham and Wokingham.	Noted. The boundary of the Barkham and Bearwood valued landscape has been reviewed and refined to incorporate the Area of Special Character identified in the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan.
Billingbear Valued Landscape	Site promoter for land at Ashridge, Hurst	The north-western part of the valued landscape includes the promotion's northeastern fields, which adjoin the M4 motorway along an open, unvegetated boundary. Presence of motorway detracts from the scenic and rural qualities and is not considered to be tranquil or rare. Promotion at Land at Ashridge is detached from the valued landscape, including the locally listed Billingbear Park by dense woodland at Beech Wood.	Noted. The methodology for identifying the valued landscapes is consistent with the Aylesbury Road, Wendover decision by recognising that whilst a site in itself may not exhibit any of the demonstrable physical features, where it forms an integral part of a wider 'valued landscape', it should deserve protection under the NPPF. Requiring the site/land in itself to demonstrate the physical features in order to qualify as a valued landscape would be a formulaic, literal approach, and could lead to anomalies. The approach to identifying the borough's valued landscape was based on the aggregation of demonstrable physical attributes or features of the landscape set out in Appendix 1 of the assessment, and recognising the concept that landscape is itself not an average of its parts, but a sum of its parts.

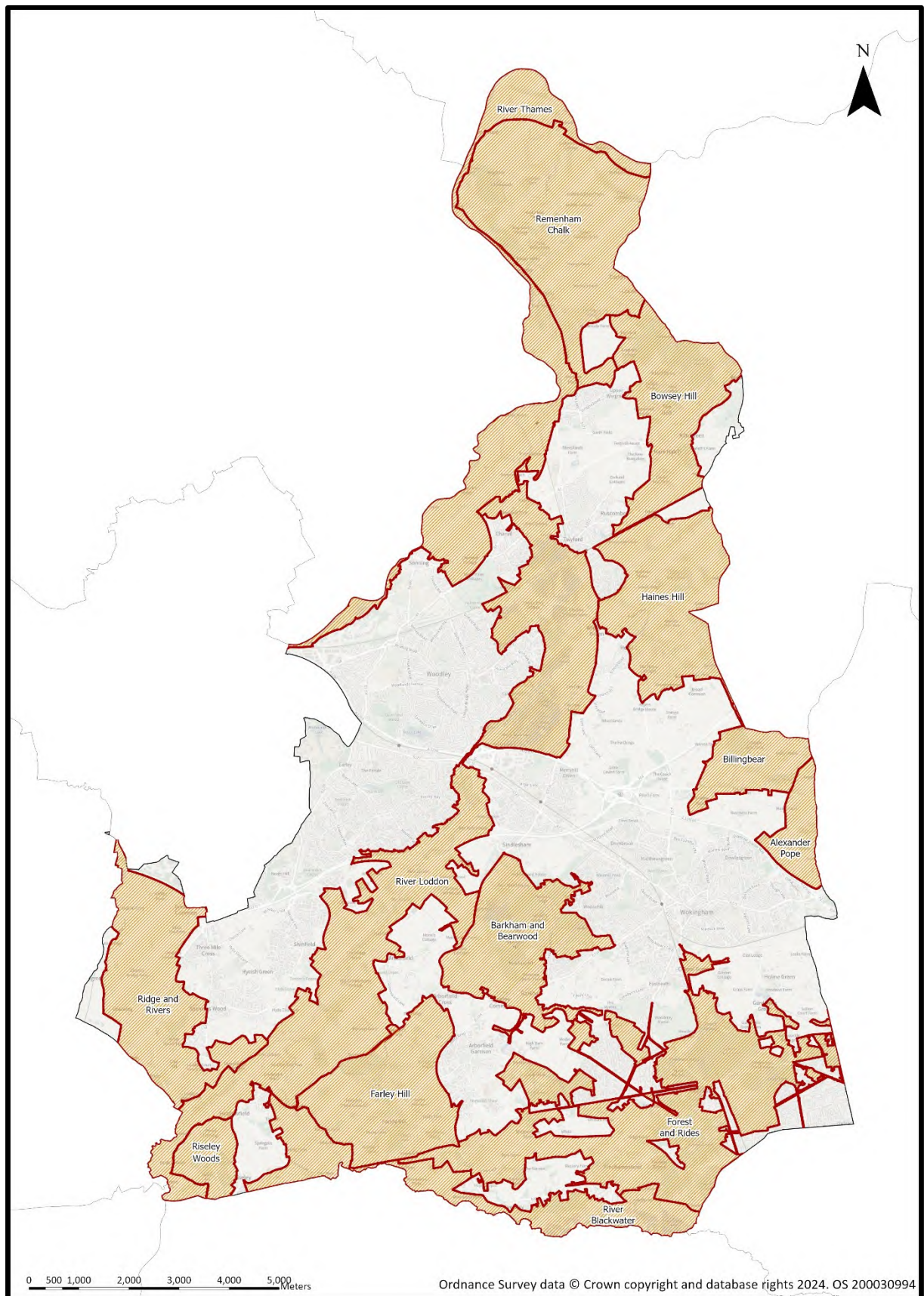
Valued Landscape	Individual / Organisation	Summary of comments	Officer response
Forest and Rides Valued Landscape	Barkham Parish Council	The boundary of the valued landscape should incorporate the four-line lime tree avenue associated with the Bearwood Estate. Its value is recognised as an attractive landscape feature and 'locally valued natural and historic asset' in the made Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan.	Noted. The boundary of the Forest and Rides valued landscape has been amended to incorporate the four-line lime tree avenue at Nashgrove Ride recognised in the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan.
Forest and Rides Valued Landscape		The identification of historic straight rides as a valued landscape is an unusual approach as the historic routes are retained in the road pattern, and many of these have the characteristics of tree lined roads. The area should be reduced to outside the urban areas where the historic character (rides backed by woodland blocks) is retained.	Noted. The boundaries of the Forest and Ride valued landscape have been reviewed and refined to reflect the pattern of the historic straight rides and areas of 'woodland in depth' as recognised by Planning Inspectors in several appeal decisions.
River Loddon Valued Landscape	Landowner at Thames Valley Science Park	The southern edge of the valued landscape should take account consented development at Thames Valley Science Park and the British Museum, and to follow the alignment of the Shinfield Eastern Relief Road, existing field boundaries and landscape features.	Noted. The northern boundary of the River Loddon valued landscape has been reviewed to follow, where possible, physical and permanent features on the ground. The western boundary of the valued landscape follows the alignment of the Shinfield Relief Road and existing field boundaries and features.
River Loddon Valued Landscape	Landowner for Loddon Valley Garden Village	To the south of the M4, the boundary does not follow any physical features on the ground. A more robust, permeable and defensible boundary would be to follow existing landscape features, such as distinctive blocks of woodland on the edge of the River Loddon floodplain.	Noted. The boundary of the valued landscape south of the M4 has been reviewed and refined to follow more physical features on the ground, notably the blocks of woodland on the edge of the River Loddon floodplain.
River Loddon Valued Landscape	Landowner of land to the south Arborfield Road	To the south of Arborfield Road, the boundary should follow the settlement edge and boundaries of the junior school and recreation ground, rather than including part	Noted. The western boundary of the valued landscape, to the south of Arborfield Road has been reviewed and refined to follow more physical and

Valued Landscape	Individual / Organisation	Summary of comments	Officer response
		of Chestnut Crescent and Shinfield St Mary's Junior School grounds and adjoining recreation ground.	permanent features on the ground, such as the defined settlement edge of Shinfield.
River Loddon Valued Landscape	Landowner of land to the south of Shinfield	Around the southern extent of Shinfield, the boundary is incoherent and arbitrary. A more rational boundary would be to follow the Langley Mead SANG and watercourse that run parallel to the River Loddon.	Noted. The boundary of the valued landscape to the south of Shinfield has been reviewed and refined to follow the settlement edge of Shinfield, a more physical and permanent feature.
River Loddon Valued Landscape	Site promoter / developer for land west of Park Lane, Charvil	Part of the housing site allocation on land to the west of Park Lane, Charvil is identified as a valued landscape, but the assessment does not provide justification. Disagree that the valued landscape occupies the flat alluvial floodplain of the river within A2 and B1 landscape character areas, as the site is mainly rising ground, outside the floodplain. Sandpit Copse is not contiguous with the flat alluvial floodplain of the river, which lies to the east of Park Lane. Incorrect reference to World Heritage Sites in the narrative.	Noted. The boundary of the valued landscape has been refined to exclude the area of land proposed for allocation in the Local Plan Update. The valued landscape incorporates the area of ancient woodland and Local Wildlife Site on the site's southern boundary at Sandpit Copse, as well as the area of woodland on the site's western boundary.
Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape	Site promoters for land at Highlands, Basingstoke Road; and land at Beech Hill Road and Lambs Lane	Unclear why the boundary of the Loddon River Valley Landscape Character Area has not been adhered to. Valued landscape extends out within area defined as Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay LCA into neighbouring Loddon River Valley LCA. Assessment identifies the valued landscape as lying within two LCAs, but analysis of the mapping suggests	The assessment recognises that valued landscapes will to a greater extent reflect Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), but in some instances the overlaying of LCA and valued landscape boundaries will not always coincide as particular attributes, such as rivers, geology, old roads or other historic features may cross through LCA boundaries.

Valued Landscape	Individual / Organisation	Summary of comments	Officer response
		that majority is within the Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay LCA, with small areas beyond the A33 road corridor located in the Grazeley Farm Clay Lowlands LCA. Assessment refers to the route of the GHQ Stop Line and links to the medieval Beaumys, however this is a non-designated heritage asset and has little influence on landscape quality. Views from parts of the ridge to the Loddon Valley are of some significance given former historic associations with the Second World War defences, but are likely to be appreciated at a local level. Light pollution and dark skies mapping shows the area lies within an area of moderate night light and affected by light spill from surrounding urban areas and the highway network. Planning Inspectors at several appeals found that each site was not a valued landscape. Two of the appeal decisions referred to in the narrative predate the Wendover decision, which requires an holistic approach to identifying the extent of a valued landscape.	Planning Inspectors have recognised a person's association with a particular historic event or figure contributes towards their perception and experience of a landscape. In the decision for Stable Cottage, Poundfield Lane, Cookham the Inspector highlighted the strong associations between the Conservation Area and the English painter, Sir Stanley Spencer, who set many of his work in the village and its surroundings. The Inspector concluded that a development proposal would denude the special qualities of the CA and its cultural significance, as it contained an open area associated with his paintings. In the decision for land south of Westleaze, Charminster, the Inspector concluded that a development proposal would cause harm to a listed manor house and surrounding landscape associated with the novelist Thomas Hardy. The Inspector highlighted how a person might appreciate how an environment might have felt for Thomas Hardy's character, Mayor of Casterbridge at that point in time, and therefore it brought a social and literary aspect to the significance of the asset and its setting. The methodology for identifying the valued landscapes is consistent with the Aylesbury Road, Wendover decision by recognising that whilst a site in itself may not exhibit any of the demonstrable physical features, where it forms an integral part of a wider 'valued

Valued Landscape	Individual / Organisation	Summary of comments	Officer response
			landscape', it should deserve protection under the NPPF. Requiring the site/land in itself to demonstrate the physical features in order to qualify as a valued landscape would be a formulaic, literal approach, and could lead to anomalies. The approach to identifying the borough's valued landscape was based on the aggregation of demonstrable physical attributes or features of the landscape set out in Appendix 1 of the assessment, and recognising the concept that landscape is itself not an average of its parts, but a sum of its parts.

Appendix 5: Map of valued landscapes across Wokingham Borough



Appendix 6: Criteria and evidence used to identify Wokingham Borough valued landscapes

Criterion	Definition (GLVIA Box 5.1)	Potential indicators	Examples of evidence used
Landscape quality (condition)	A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.	• A coherent landscape character conferring to recognisable sense of place • An area representative of a particular phase in landscape history/development • State of repair of individual features and elements which make up the character of the landscape	Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004) Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2020) East Berkshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) Project (2019) Site visits
Scenic quality	The term used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the senses (primarily but not wholly the visual senses).	• Strong visual character e.g. patterns/composition of vegetation/landform • Qualities of expansiveness, openness, enclosure, seclusion • Memorable, important, or distinctive views • Uninterrupted tracts of land with few built features • Relative lack of human influence/absence of incongruous features	Town/Parish Village Design Statements (adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents) Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004) Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2020) Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003) Designations in neighbourhood plans

Criterion	Definition (GLVIA Box 5.1)	Potential indicators	Examples of evidence used
Rarity	The presence of rare elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a rare Landscape Character Type.	• A coherent landscape character conferring to recognisable sense of place • An area representative of a particular phase in landscape history/development • A distinctive rare or representative land cover • A distinct landform or topography forming a discrete or recognisable area	Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004) Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2020)
Representativeness	Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements which are considered particularly important examples.	• A coherent landscape character conferring to recognisable sense of place • An area representative of a particular phase in landscape history/development • A distinctive rare or representative land cover • A distinct landform or topography forming a discrete or recognisable area	Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004) Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2020) East Berkshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) Project (2019) Planning appeal decisions Presence of other designations or features indicative of representativeness Local research
Conservation interests	The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest can add to the value of the landscape as	• Presence of wildlife and/or habitats/species that make a particular contribution to sense	Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004)

Criterion	Definition (GLVIA Box 5.1)	Potential indicators	Examples of evidence used
	well as having value in their own right.	of place or scenic quality • Presence of settlements, buildings or other structures that make a particular contribution to sense of place or scenic quality • Visible expression of geology creating distinctive sense of place • Visible presence of historic landscape types or specific landscape elements or features that provide evidence of time depth or historic influence on the landscape	Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2020) Designations Conservation Area Appraisals Secondary sources (e.g. Ancient Tree Inventory)
Recreational value	Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important.	• Evidence of recreational activity based on experience of the landscape (e.g. walking /cycling routes, access opportunities, activities such as birdwatching, angling etc)	Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004) Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2020) Town/Parish Village Design Statements (including those prepared/produced by neighbourhood planning groups) OS map data Designations (e.g. National Trails and National Cycle Networks)

Criterion	Definition (GLVIA Box 5.1)	Potential indicators	Examples of evidence used
Perceptual aspects	A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notably wilderness and/or tranquillity.	• Tranquillity or perceptions of tranquillity – peace, quietness, dark skies, presence of water – ditches, streams, rivers, lakes etc • Qualities of expansiveness, openness, enclosure, seclusion • Relative lack of human influence/absence of incongruous features	Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2020) Planning appeal decisions CPRE Tranquillity Mapping CPRE Night Blight/Dark Skies Mapping
Associations	Some landscapes are associated with particular people, such as artists or writers, or events in history that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of the area.	• Associations with written descriptions, artistic representations, and associations of the landscape with people places or events	Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2020) East Berkshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) Project (2019) Historic England's National Heritage List for England (NHLE) Planning appeal decisions Local research Presence of other designations or features indicative of the natural beauty of the area