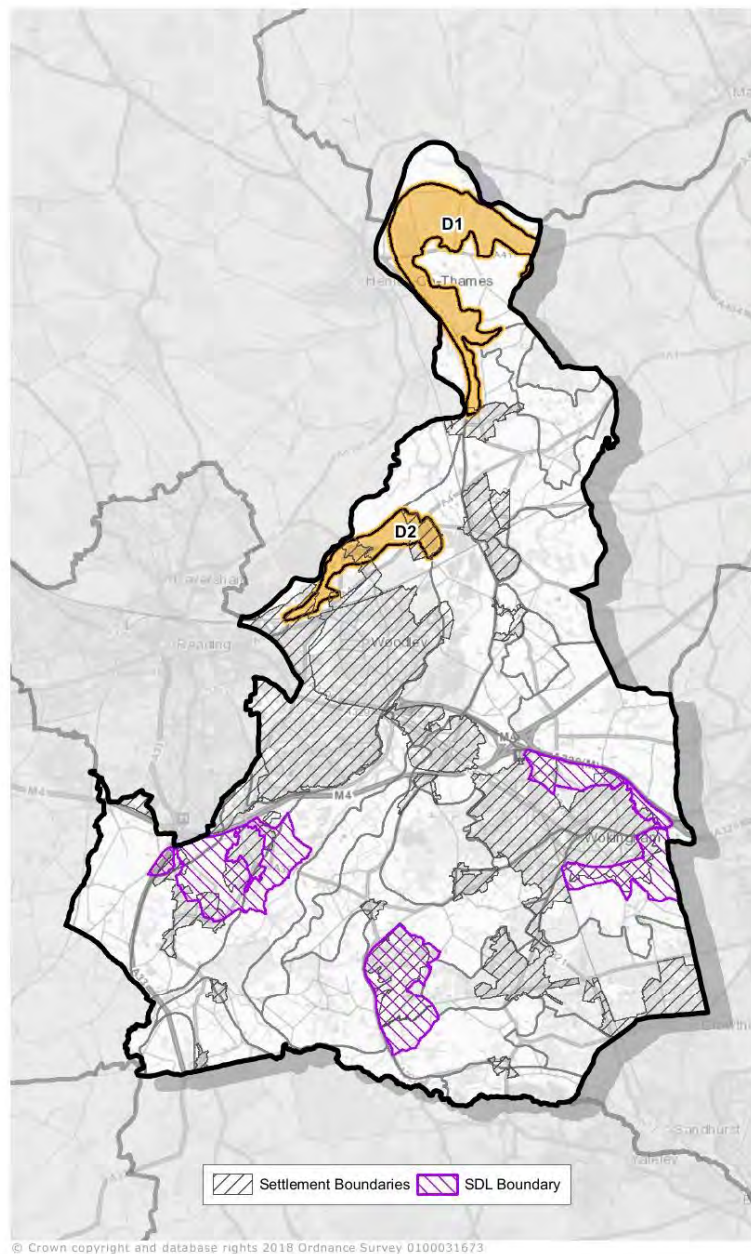


D: Wooded Chalk Slopes



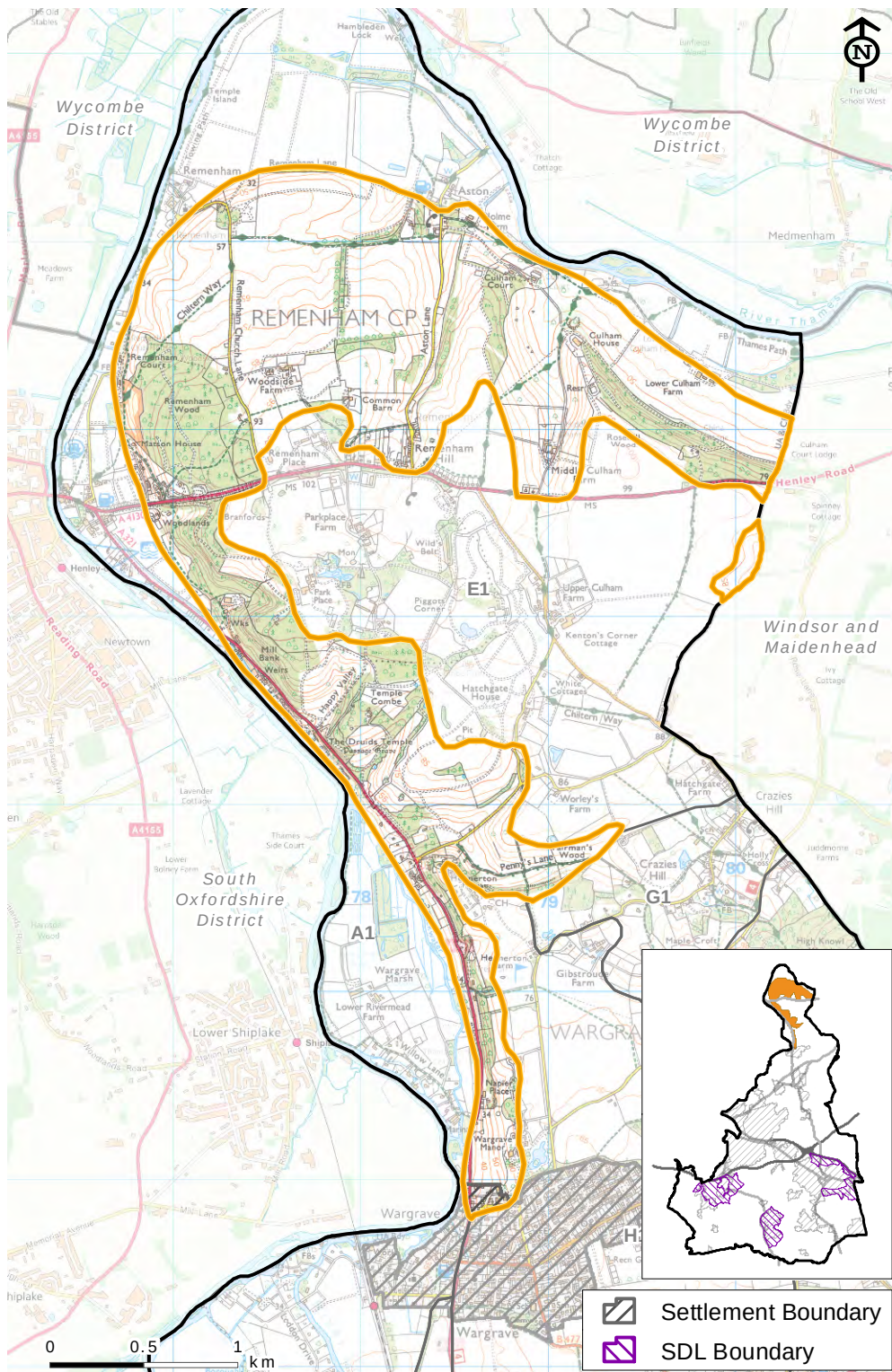
Description

The LCT is characterised by its chalk geology, leading to an acutely sinuous network of steep chalk slopes and combe valleys with swathes of chalk grassland and scattered blocks of mixed woodland. Winding sunken lanes connect valley edge country houses and parks, situated to take advantage of glimpsed views to the River Thames.

Landscape Character Areas

The Wooded Chalk Slopes LCT is subdivided into two Landscape Character Areas:

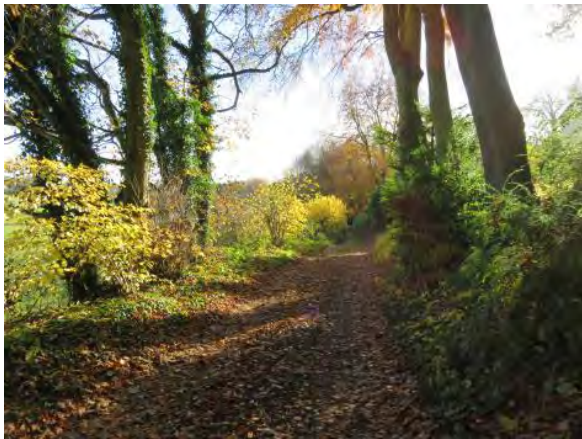
- D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes
- D2: Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes



SUMMARY

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.

The Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes is located in the north of the borough and defined by the belt of chalk, which is cut by the River Thames (A1: Thames River Valley) which forms its northern and western boundaries. The area extends from near Wargrave in the south and sweeps northwards and eastwards to skirt the settlements of Remenham and Aston. The eastern boundary is defined by the borough boundary, although the character area continues into Windsor and Maidenhead. The southern boundaries are largely based on contour lines, at the break of slopes, leading into E1: Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau, G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes, and H1: Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands.



Key Characteristics

- Dramatic chalk slopes and cliffs rising sharply from valley floodplain of the River Thames from 40m to 100m AOD. The steep valley sides dominate the landscape, with incised coombe valleys creating areas with a more intimate character. Localised areas of gravels overlie the dominant underlying Chalk Formations.
- Heavily wooded character created by woodlands blanketing the steepest slopes. The woodland is mostly BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland, and coniferous woodland blocks of varying shape. There are characteristic hanging valleys with BAP priority habitat beech and yew woodland. Many of the woods are designated as LWS and contain ancient woodland including Cannon Wood and Remenham Wood.
- Small pastoral fields in the west contrast with larger arable fields in the north. The arable fields tend to have no obvious boundaries or field divisions, while the pasture fields in the west are bounded by woodland.
- Areas of open **grass pastures suggestive of 'downland'** are predominantly grazed by sheep. Small areas of BAP priority habitat lowland calcareous grassland, designated as LWS (Happy Valley and Conways Bridge, Chalk Grassland Remenham, Grassland Slope Wargrave), found on the steepest valley slopes, support a number of restricted and rare grassland species.
- Formal parkland estates associated with large country houses on the chalk slopes overlooking the Thames e.g. Remenham Court (Grade II listed). Grazed pasture, lawns and parkland trees, including the Cedar of Lebanon avenues at Hennerton House, are distinctive features. The Grade II* Park Place and Temple Combe Registered Park and Garden covers much of this area south of the A4130. Culham Court, Grade II* and associated parkland occupies rolling slopes south of the Thames with views to the estate from the other side of the Thames Valley.
- Small hamlets clustered on the floodplain edge with a consistent vernacular character typified by warm polychromatic Reading brick, flint and black weatherboarding including Aston and Remenham and evident in the listed building in the Wargrave Conservation Area.
- Rural lanes and tracks, frequently sunken, are enclosed by steep banks and hedges, and wind up the dry valleys e.g. Remenham Church Lane. The A321 runs along much of the western boundary, and introduces noise and movement into an otherwise rural area.
- 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'.
- Glimpsed picturesque views across the Thames Valley to the Chilterns AONB which can open out dramatically in places.

Natural Landscape

- D1.1 The Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes is entirely underlain by Lewes Nodular, Seaford and Newhaven Chalk Formations, and this geology is the dominant influence on the character of this

area. Overlying the chalk there are localised areas of Shepperton, Lynch Hill, Boyn Hill and Gerrards Cross Gravels, and a small area of Clay-with-Flints in the south. These have previously been exploited, and there is a reclaimed gravel pit at Remenham. The underlying chalk strata have influenced the overlying soils, which are well-drained, fine or coarse loamy soils that are locally stony and shallow.

- D1.2 The chalk has created a strongly articulated landform, which has been cut into by the River Thames to produce sloping valley sides that rise sharply above the valley floodplain. These are some of the most distinctive elevated landforms in Wokingham Borough. The slopes are particularly steep including escarpments or 'cliffs' in the west of the area, while the northern slopes are less dramatic and create a more rolling landform. The action of the erosion of meltwater over permafrost during the ice age and more modern drainage discharging down these slopes from the upper slopes has led to the formation of incised combe valleys at regular intervals, which produce undulations and variety in the landscape and create areas with a more intimate character.
- D1.3 There is significant woodland cover, particularly on the steeper slopes to the west. Woodlands are largely BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland with areas of conifer planting and the area includes significant tracts of BAP priority habitat beech and yew woodland. The size and shape of woodland are highly variable ranging from large swathes on the slopes to the east of Henley to the much smaller, narrow shelterbelt strips in the north. The characteristic tree species of the Remenham Chalk Uplands include yew (*Taxus baccata*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), oak (*Quercus robur*) and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). Other defining species such as hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and old man's beard (*Clematis vitalba*) occur along hedgerows and copses.
- D1.4 Small agricultural fields occur between the woodlands along the west of this character area with the largest continuous expanse occurring on the gentler slopes to the north. These are a mixture of arable and permanent pasture. Sheep grazing on these rolling hillsides is evocative of the 'downland' character of West Berkshire and the Chilterns. The smoothness of the grazed fields provides an attractive contrast to the silhouettes of woodland and beech hangars against the skyline. The large fields are divided by inconspicuous and infrequent boundaries giving no sense of an overall field pattern or system. Where hedgerow removal has occurred, post and wire fencing and more rustic wooden fencing has been erected – leading to an inconsistent edge character and reducing the intimate quality of the landscape. Remnant hedgerows are varied in terms of quality, condition and character with some sporadic and others thick and tall but unmanaged.
- D1.5 Parkland and estates are also characteristic of this area, forming a transition between the pasture and woodland landscape. Parkland is associated with large halls and manor houses such as Hennerton House and Wargrave Manor. Particularly important areas of parkland are associated with the very steep wooded slopes just north of Wargrave, and Park Place and Temple Combe, which is a Registered Park and Garden listed at Grade II* and parkland associated with the Grade II* listed Culham Court. The parkland landscapes include areas of grazed pasture and lawn distinguished by parkland trees. The Cedar of Lebanon avenues at Hennerton House are a particularly distinctive and striking element of the landscape.
- D1.6 Much of the woodland is designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), and there are also significant areas of woodland of ancient origin. These woodland sites consist of a variety of small plantations, copses and shelterbelts. Remenham Wood LWS contains ancient woodland and is designated for its distinctive beech and yew woodland.
- D1.7 Chalk grasslands that developed on thin soils of the steep scarp slope have been largely improved through cultivation, reseeding and subsequent overgrazing, and are therefore of low conservation value. However, this character area supports the last remaining fragments of BAP priority habitat lowland calcareous grassland in Wokingham Borough, designated as LWS (Chalk Grassland, Remenham, Happy Valley and Conways Bridge, Grassland Slope near Wargrave). The grassland supports a number of species that are restricted in the borough such as fairy flax (*Linum catharticum*), wild basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*), salad burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*), dragon's teeth (*Tetragonolobus maritimus*), and the nationally rare rough marsh-mallow (*Althaea hirsuta*).

- D1.8 Much of the area is covered by the Chilterns Escarpment BOA, which extends into the neighbouring Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and identifies the area has having opportunities for habitat creation and restoration, and where the greatest positive impact of conservation will occur.

Cultural Landscape

- D1.9 There may have been gradual clearance of the chalk soils on the shallower slopes, possibly from the Neolithic onwards, associated with prehistoric/Roman occupation of valley floor, as indicated by cropmarks at Remenham and Henley.
- D1.10 Woodland, on the steeper slopes and on the area of gravel drift at Remenham Wood, remained a valued economic resource during all periods. There is a Domesday entry for Royal woodland at Remenham in 1086. After widespread disafforestation in 1217, a deer park was created at Remenham Wood in 1284, its extent indicated on the 1840 tithe map as "Remenham Park Wood" and nearby fields of "Parkwood" and "Park Piece". Areas of ancient woodland associated with this park survive in the landscape.
- D1.11 The irregular boundaries of much of the woodland suggest assart incursions of medieval/post-medieval date. The more regular straight-sided fields on the north facing slopes indicate early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure, although the large prairie-type fields at Remenham may result from the later amalgamation of earlier enclosures.
- D1.12 A 1718 Turnpike Act created a turnpike trust for the road from Maidenhead to Henley, part of the main post and coach road between London and St David's. The road between Remenham Hill and Aston was formerly part of north-south route carrying traffic between Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, crossing a ferry between Aston and Mill End.
- D1.13 In contrast with the more developed landscapes in the south of the borough, this character area is sparsely settled with a peaceful and rural character. Farmsteads, manors and halls occur independently of one another located on the elevated land at the periphery of the area, exploiting views over the Chilterns AONB and the Thames Valley. The hamlets of Remenham, Aston and Remenham Hill are located on the edge of the area, linked by narrow lanes running along the boundary with the floodplain and plateau edges. Flint, black weatherboarding, polychromatic Reading brick, clay tiles, and white-framed windows including curved dormers are common elements of the domestic architecture and farmsteads, appearing consistently and providing continuity and sense of place across the character area. In part, these relate to materials once readily available locally, such as the presence of flint nodules in the chalk soils of this and the adjoining areas and the easy availability of timber. Half-hipped and deep-pitched roofs are also typical. The area contains a small section of the Wargrave Conservation Area, centred around Wargrave Manor.
- D1.14 The wooded slopes over the Thames became favoured locations for large country houses, positioned to exploit magnificent views over the River Thames. These include Temple Combe, Hennerton House, Wargrave Hill (now Wargrave Manor) and Culham Court, products of the influx of new wealth to the area in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many of the estates were landscaped in the late 18th and 19th centuries, some incorporating features of mock or displaced antiquity. Improvements in the Park Place estate, for instance, included the construction of Conway's Bridge (named after the estate's owner General Conway, the Governor of Jersey) built from the ruins of Reading Abbey, and carrying the Wargrave to Henley road over Happy Valley. In 1785 a megalithic chamber (the 'Druid Temple') was imported from Jersey and rebuilt at Temple Combe. Both works are also attributed to the Rev. Gainsborough, brother of Thomas Gainsborough. Significant areas of former parkland are now under arable cultivation, as the large estates were split up and sold off during the 20th century. Their former character is still evident in the survival of mature planted trees in the fields.
- D1.15 The roads in this area are very distinctive steep and subtly winding narrow rural roads that connect the floodplain to the plateau along the most direct route, often following the dry valleys. The roads are often cut into the landscape creating sunken lanes with steep banks and wide grassy verges. These are free from signage, kerbs and other road infrastructure and are integral

to their rural setting. The presence of high and overgrown hedges and 'tree tunnels' punctuated by occasional large beech trees, enhances the rural character of the lanes. The area is quiet and appears remote, although the northern section is accessible by foot along footpaths and the Berkshire Loop of the Chilterns Way, which opens this area up for recreation.

Perceptual Landscape

- D1.16 The landscape is intimate, with framed views and a strong sense of enclosure due to the steep and densely wooded slopes and with small dry combe valleys. Where land cover permits there are good views over the Thames Valley and the Chilterns AONB, with which this area shares many characteristics.
- D1.17 The limited access and limited settlement give this landscape a remote character, which is further enhanced by the experience of dark skies in this area.
- D1.18 Gertrude Jekyll, the famous garden designer and artist, has strong connections to the landscape of Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes. 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".*
- D1.19 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".*
- D1.20 In Vincent's journey in 'The Story of the Thames' (1909) he describes how:
- "There is nothing to delay us of necessity until Marsh Lock, built in 1771 is reached, and here, at the top of the hill, is Park Place, full of memories".* He also refers to Mrs Lybbe Powys comments on Park Place who wrote in 1762 of its unsympathetic relationship with the landscape:
- "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."*

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- The dramatic landform and large tracts of woodland which are visible as a backdrop in the wider landscape.
- Expanses of mature mixed and deciduous woodland including BAP priority habitats and semi-natural ancient woodland, which form a network of important ecological habitats and provide a sense of place and enclosure.
- Open grassland pastures provide a rural character reminiscent of the downland typical in the adjacent landscapes in the Chilterns.
- Remnant pockets of BAP priority habitat lowland calcareous grassland which are unique in the borough, designated as LWS and within the Chilterns Escarpment BOA.
- Intact parkland landscape associated with large country houses such as Park Place, Temple Combe and Culham Court, with parkland trees and ancient woodland which provide time-depth and a strong sense of place.
- Sparse settlement pattern of hamlets and country houses with a strong local vernacular of polychromatic Reading brick, flint and black weatherboarding provides a sense of place.
- Steep winding rural lanes enclosed by steep banks and hedges provide a visual interest while

travelling through the area.

- Picturesque and attractive long views to the river Thames and Chilterns AONB, and across the undulating topography within the area.
- 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.
- The visual contrast between woodland **and grazed 'downland'** which provide aesthetic appeal, and allows views of beech and oak trees to be silhouetted against the smooth turf.

Landscape Condition

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.

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.

Key Issues

- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and wet woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- Changes in deciduous woodland structure through loss of species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- Influence of woodland management on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines and slopes.
- Hedgerow loss associated with past expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Past loss and fragmentation of species rich chalk grassland due to intensive grassland management and conversion to arable land.
- Lack of the recruitment of young trees (through natural regeneration or planting) required to rebalance the age structure of parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the character of the landscape.
- Intensification of estate land for other uses such as polo.
- Demand for future residential development, infill and densification of existing settlements both inside and outside the area, eroding the rural character and tranquillity of the area which remains relatively undeveloped.
- Pressure for built development on the skyline leading to loss of wooded ridges.
- Increase in traffic on small lanes resulting in unofficial passing places and unsightly verges

leading to demands for upgrading the network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening which threatens their intimate rural character.

- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the elevated landscape.
- A tranquil landscape which contains a reservoir of 'dark skies'. Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape, especially in the west of the area near Henley.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the distinctive landscape and sense of place created by the combination of dramatic landform, parklands and tracts of woodland and pockets of open pasture.

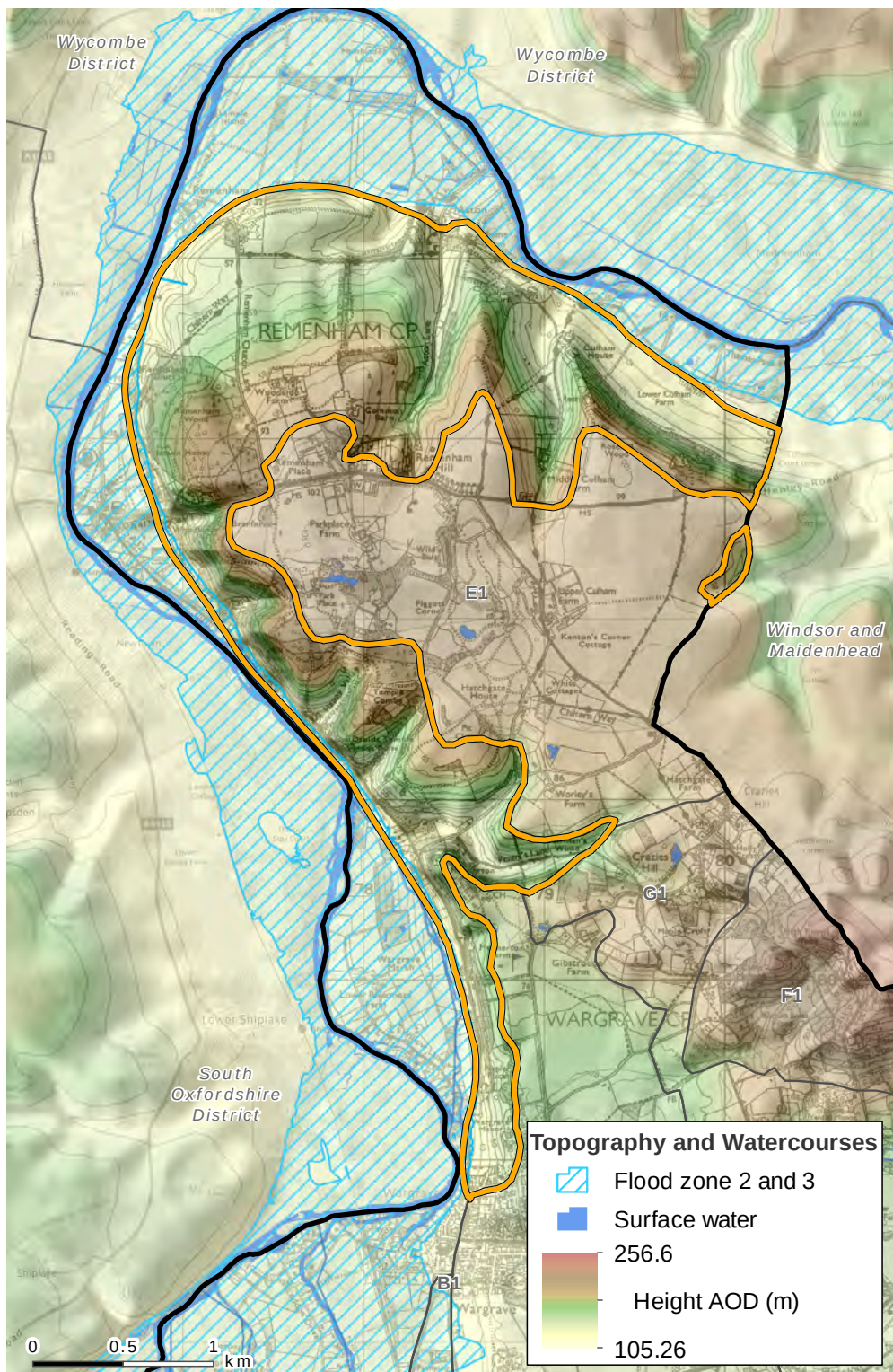
The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the extensive woodland, including ancient woodland. There is an opportunity to restore and strengthen the hedgerow network and to manage, and increase the extent of, the ecologically valuable chalk grassland.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern and historic built form of the hamlets, farms and manors.

Landscape Guidelines

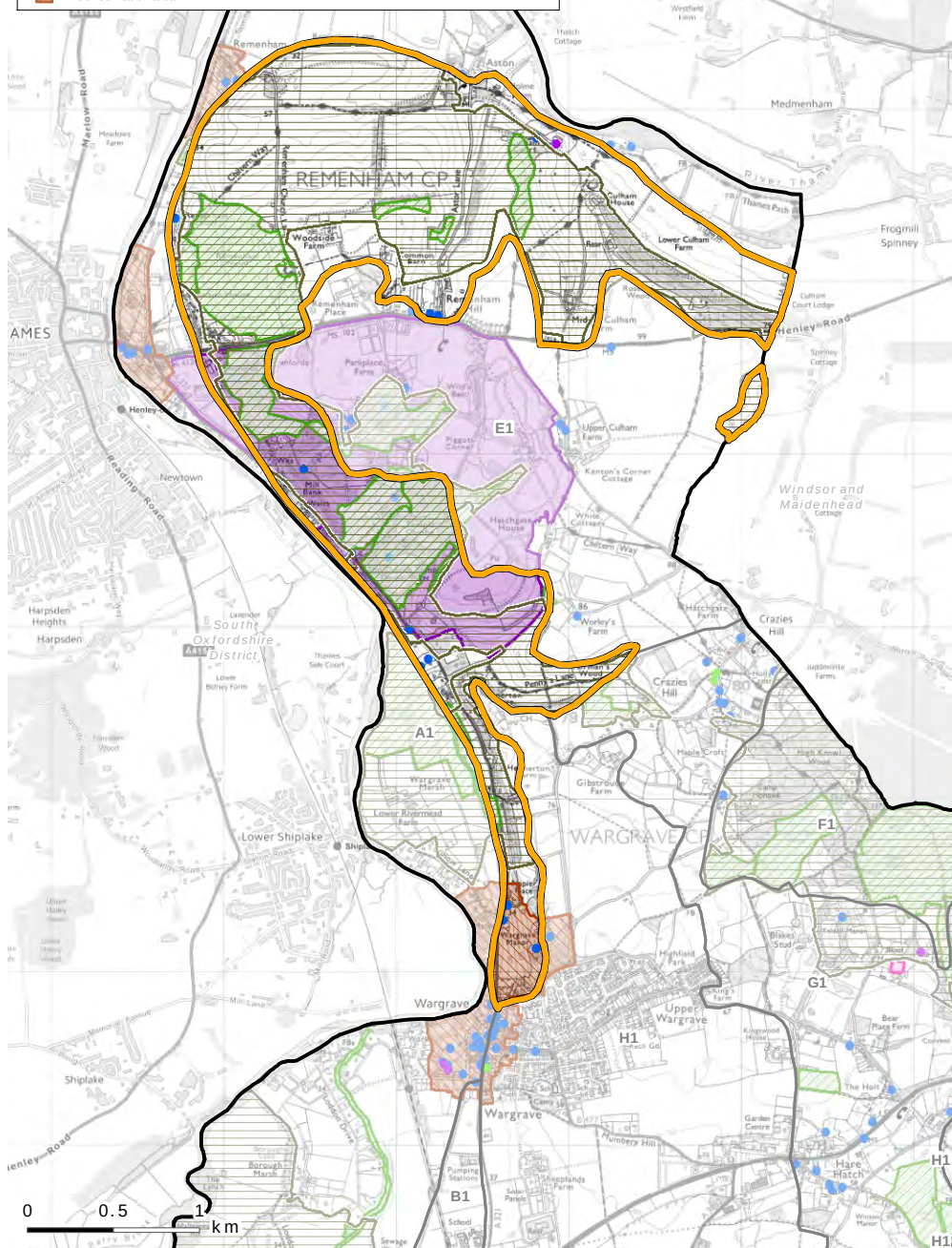
- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape. Conserve BAP priority habitats, ancient woodlands and woodland copses, which provide ecological interest, and a wooded backdrop. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species following the existing pattern of wooded ridges. Plan for the next generation of parkland and hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the landscape. Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods, particularly around the more intensively farmed fields in the north.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinststate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so.
- Conserve and protect the landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields, and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- Conserve and protect the parkland landscapes by limiting possible harmful changes of use. Retain mature and veteran trees while planning for the next generation of parkland trees to ensure a sustainable population.
- Conserve, enhance and manage woodland and chalk grassland habitats particularly the BAP priority habitats from development and changes in land use. Much of this area is part of the Chiltern Escarpment BOA. This network of natural habitats, which extends into Windsor and Maidenhead, has been identified as a target for habitat creation and restoration and positive management of chalk grassland and woodland. An appropriate woodland and grassland management regime is critical.

- Conserve the numerous listed historic buildings and structures, including those in Wargrave Conservation Area and Park Place and Temple Combe Registered Park and Garden.
- Maintain the sparse settlement pattern of small villages and country houses set within large estates through control of new development. Avoid the spread of development from the riverside settlements of Remenham, Aston etc.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural and tree-lined lanes, resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage, particularly along Remenham Church Lane, Aston Lane and Kenton's Lane.
- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes.
- Conserve distinctive wooded character of undeveloped skylines. Consider the impact of any development, particularly vertical development, on skylines, particularly where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive skylines to ensure that the wooded backdrop to the Thames is maintained. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements, which have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated landscape.
- Protect the views across and along the Thames Valley, into and from the Chilterns.
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity, remoteness and dark skies in the landscape, through the management of development.

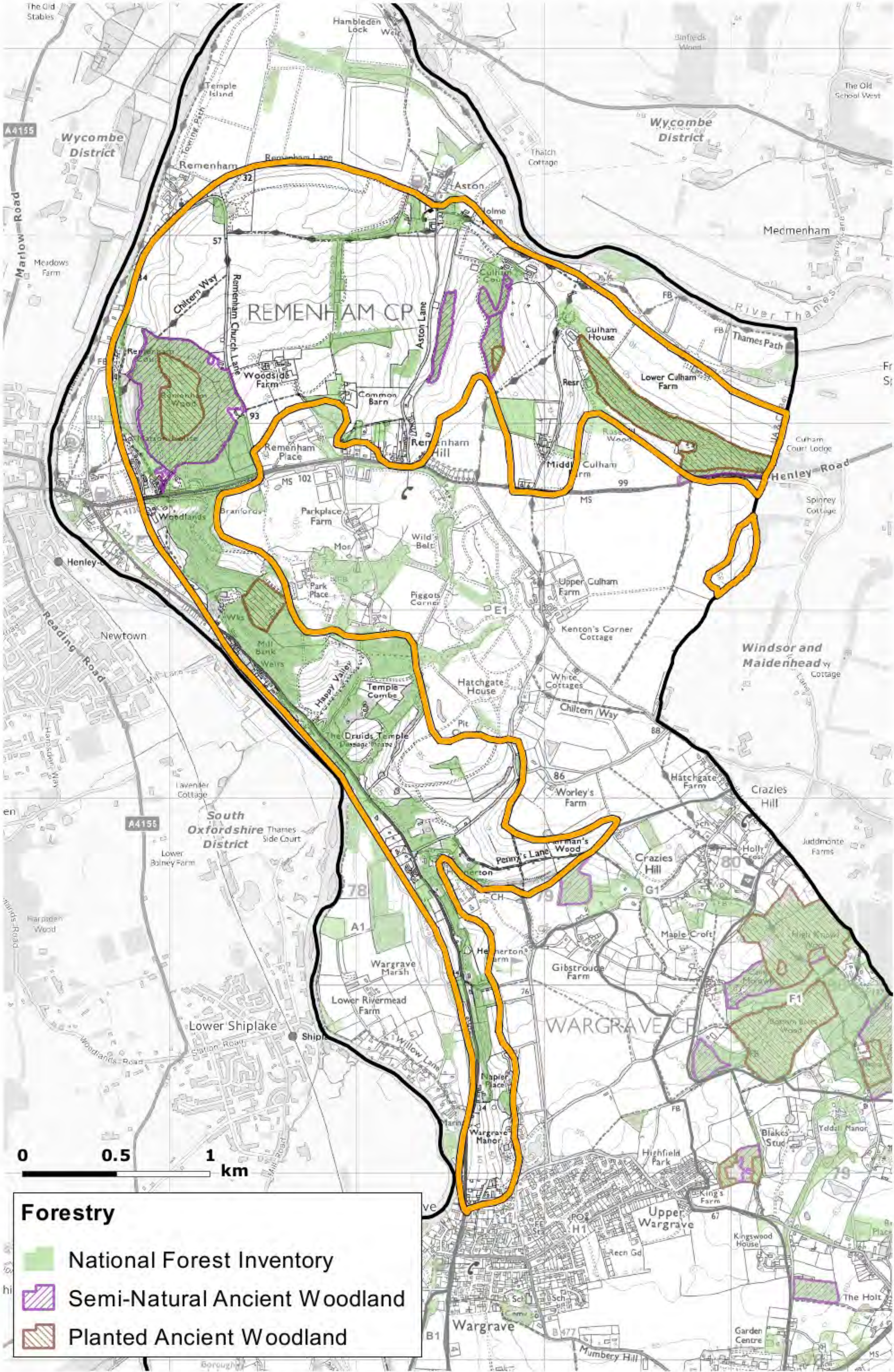


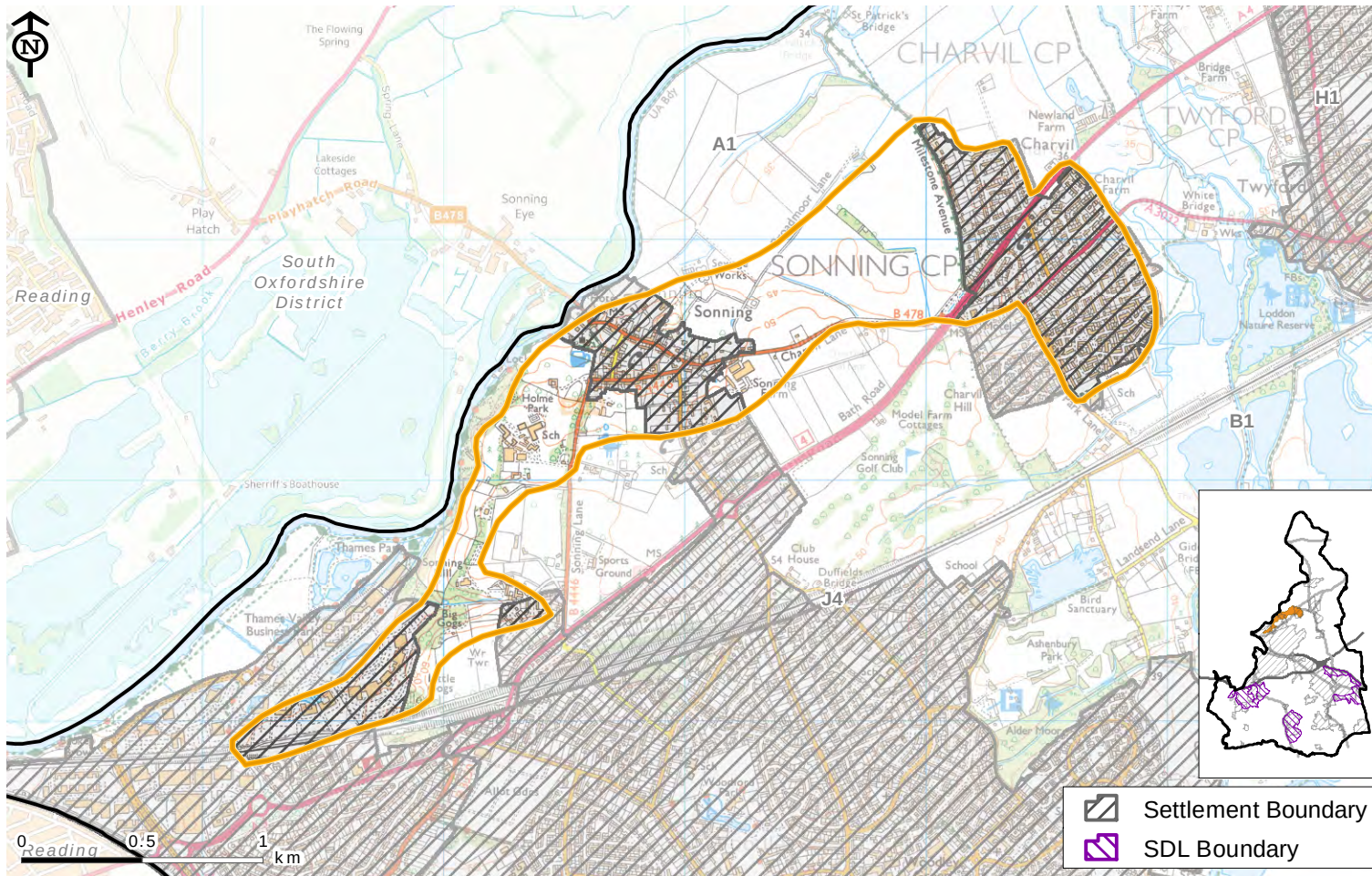
Cultural and Natural Heritage Designations

- Grade I Listed Building
- Grade II* Listed Building
- Grade II Listed Building
- Buildings of Traditional Local Character
- Scheduled Monument
- Registered Parks and Gardens
- Conservation area
- Local Historic Parks and Gardens
- SSSI
- Local Nature Reserve
- Local Wildlife Site
- Biodiversity Opportunity Area
- Proposed Local Wildlife Site



D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes





SUMMARY

Steep chalk slopes overlooking the Thames Valley incised with a narrow wooded combe valley. Settlements, which exploit the valley edge location, include Charvil, a modern settlement located on flatter ground to the east and Sonning, a picturesque Thames-side village. There is little public access throughout the area.

The area is located in the northwest of Wokingham Borough to the east of Reading and between the urban area of J4: Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay and the Thames river valley. The northern boundary is defined by the edge of the Thames Valley floodplain, which incises the chalk, and the southern boundary by the edge of the sloping area, which approximately follows the geological boundary between the Bagshot Beds and London Clay.



Key Characteristics

- Topographically and geologically varied landscape influenced by a steeply sloping outcrop of chalk which is incised by the river valley. In the west the distinctive steep rolling chalk slopes capped by sands and clays, provide a backdrop to the adjoining Thames floodplain landscape. To the north around Sonning, the slopes are gentler, while in the east Charvil is situated on a flatter elevated river terrace between the Thames and the Loddon.
- Wooded slopes, with BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland, including the slope woodland of Big Gogs and Little Gogs, rise from a small combe valley.
- Large scale open arable and unmanaged land, divided by overgrown grassy verges, maintains the distinction between Sonning and Charvil, and the urban edge of Woodley. There are small areas of pasture related to the University of Reading's Sonning Farm.
- Extensive cropmarks, registered as Scheduled Monuments, indicate prehistoric land use.
- Nucleated riverside village of Sonning has a distinctive vernacular of combined knapped flint and polychromatic Reading brick being common amongst the many listed buildings within its extensive Conservation Area. The Deanery house (listed Grade I) and registered garden (listed Grade II*) is an example of the partnership between the architect Edwin Lutyens and garden designer Gertrude Jekyll. Larger more modern village of Charvil has a more suburban character and is located on a river terrace.
- Remnant estate parkland and playing fields associated with Reading Blue Coat School which is partly housed in Holme Park, a grand Victorian Gothic house.
- Rural context generally inaccessible to the public with few rights of way, especially in the south of the area. Narrow roads around Sonning are busy, while the A4 Bath Road is visible from Charvil, and is lit at night.
- Glimpsed views to the Thames Valley across into Oxfordshire. The river itself is only visible at Sonning. Pylons are also a prominent visual feature in this area.
- The wooded slopes provide a wooded framework to the wider Thames Valley, including the Thames Valley Business Park.

Natural Landscape

- D2.1 The Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes are geologically and topographically varied in comparison to the simplicity of D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes. The area is distinguished by the presence of a steeply sloping outcrop of Seaford and Newhaven Chalk Formation incised by the river which occupies the valley to the west. A combe valley has incised the chalk slope and at its upper levels the Lambeth Group – a sandy and clayey formation, has capped the chalk creating local variation. The sloping and freely draining chalk has no water-courses and the only water features present are small ornamental ponds.
- D2.2 To the north the landscape becomes less dramatic with gentler slopes, which have been exploited in the siting of Sonning. To the east, deposits of Kempton Park and Taplow Gravels create a flatter landscape on which Charvil has been built. There are also areas of Boyn Hill Gravels in the south west at Sonning, and Fourth River Terrace deposits north west of Charvil Lane. The soils

within this area are well drained loamy and gravelly soils affected by high groundwater. For the most part these have been developed as parkland estates, are settled or are wooded although areas of arable farmland remain, particularly associated with the flatter and more fertile river terraces.

- D2.3 The steep slopes are wooded and include the combe and slope woodlands of Big Gogs and Little Gogs, consisting of BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland. Around Holme Park the grounds of the Reading Blue Coat School comprise parkland and playing fields. However, much of this area is inaccessible and it is impossible to ascertain if many of the intervening areas are under ornamental or agricultural use. East of Sonning farmland becomes more evident. This area includes Sonning Farm, a teaching farm for the University of Reading, home to the Crop Research Unit and dairy and beef stock. The terrace area is distinct and comprises very large and open fields in arable use or unmanaged, divided by overgrown grassy verges.
- D2.4 Ali's Pond LNR is partially within this area. The 1ha site is laid out with paths and large ponds, home to Great Crested Newt, stag beetle and pipistrelle bat. In the rest of the area, the most important ecological assemblages are the densely wooded slopes in the west at Big Gogs and Little Gogs, which are likely to support a range of bird species.

Cultural Landscape

- D2.5 The archaeological and historic environment of the character area is significant, although little is now visible. Early clearance and the use of the river valley for social and ceremonial purposes is indicated by the presence of an important complex of ceremonial monuments based around a Neolithic cursus and burial monuments, in the fields between Sonning and Charvil. Other cropmarks in the vicinity, showing enclosures, field boundaries and other features, indicate continued prehistoric and/or Romano-British exploitation of the landscape.
- D2.6 There was a Saxon minster at Sonning, and the land south of the village was occupied from the medieval period by the palace of the Bishops of Salisbury, with an extensive ecclesiastical complex. The main buildings were bounded on three sides by a moat, and the western portion is still traceable. The palace was sold to Queen Elizabeth I but it fell into disrepair, and a new mansion was built on the site in the 17th century. A new Georgian house, Holme Park, replaced the mansion in 1800, and was altered to the Victorian Gothic style in the late 19th century. The house is surrounded by landscaped parkland and is now in use as the Reading Blue Coat School. There are numerous playing fields and sports grounds associated with the school, which limit public access in the south of the area.
- D2.7 Another significant designed landscape is the house and grounds of the Deanery in Sonning, completed in 1902 for the owner of Country Life. This is a fine, small example of the successful partnership between the famous architect Edwin Lutyens and garden designer Gertrude Jekyll.
- D2.8 The area between Sonning and the newer settlement of Charvil to the east is characterised by large straight-sided fields, representing the recent amalgamation of the smaller and less regular fields shown on the first edition OS maps. The section of the Bath Road between Twyford and Reading passes through the area, running to the south of Sonning. The Great Western Railway cutting runs through Sonning Hill at approximately 20m deep and was completed in 1840.
- D2.9 Exploiting the edge-of-valley locations, two settlements have been established in this area. Sonning is a picturesque Thames-side village noted for its strong rural vernacular architecture, and much of the village is designated as a Conservation Area. The vernacular consists of distinctive redbrick building façades, as well as timber-framed and white rendered buildings and flint-work. Many of the dwellings have tall chimneys and ornate porches. The buildings are mostly detached or terraced dwellings that abut straight onto the pavement, resulting in charming and picturesque narrow streets.
- D2.10 In contrast, Charvil is a more modern and lower density settlement with wide grassy verges along the suburban streets. It includes numerous modern brick houses of the 1940s and 50s and bungalow developments, and exploits links to both the Loddon and Thames. Further development has greatly expanded the settlement in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

- D2.11 There are few roads within this area and the only access routes in the most steeply sloping area are private gated roads. Elsewhere the roads are narrow and of rural character, but become larger and more urban in character towards Charvil, which is accessed by both the A3032 and the A4 (T).

Perceptual Landscape

- D2.12 The wooded slopes provide a backdrop to the business park on the valley floor below and a setting to the Thames Valley when viewed from afar. There are also views across to the wooded hills of Oxfordshire.
- D2.13 The dramatic views from the slopes to the Chilterns have been exploited by the building of large detached houses, now in institutional use, and much of the area is inaccessible to the public.
- D2.14 Some arable fields on the edge of Sonning and Charvil have an unmanaged quality, and lend a neglected character to this part of the area. Pylons are also a visible feature of this area.
- D2.15 Sonning has been the subject of many artistic and literary references however these are almost always linked to the riverside character of the village as opposed to Sonning itself which has developed further away from the floodplain. These are referred to in character area A1: Thames River Valley.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Wooded slopes of the coombe valley of Big Gogs and Little Gogs provide strong sense of intimacy and enclosure due to the undulating topography and a wooded context to the Thames Valley Business Park as well as ecologically important BAP priority habitats.
- Open fields between Sonning and Charvil provide important visual and physical distinction between the two settlements.
- Remnant parkland at Reading Blue Coat School although largely inaccessible by the public, provides time-depth and contributes to the sense of place.
- Strong vernacular of the historic built form at Sonning provides a coherent and picturesque character to the settlement.
- Scheduled Monuments west of Charvil are of historic importance and give the area time-depth.
- Glimpsed views from the chalk slopes across the Thames Valley into South Oxfordshire giving the landscape a sense of place
- Wooded skyline which provides a distinctive backdrop to the Thames Valley.

Landscape Condition

The landscape is generally in moderate condition. Landscape elements in the best condition are the distinctive settlement pattern and built character at Sonning and the wooded slopes rising from the river valley. However, there is an absence of natural habitats for example chalk grassland, and the hedgerow boundaries and trees have all diminished. There has been amalgamation of fields around settlements and the fields between Sonning and Charvil have an unmanaged character. The busy A4 Bath Road is a detracting element.

Key Issues

- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and wet woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- Influence of woodland management on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded slopes.
- Hedgerow and hedgerow tree loss associated with past expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture. Loss of other valued habitats such as chalk grassland.
- Lack of the recruitment of young trees (through natural regeneration or planting) required to rebalance the age structure of parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the character of the landscape.
- Cropmarks registered as Scheduled Monuments between Sonning and Charvil are on the Heritage at Risk register and are under threat from arable ploughing.
- Marginal agricultural land on settlement edges is of poor visual character. Potential pressure for horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges.
- Demand for new residential expansion, leading to the loss of individual settlement identity and the potential amalgamation of adjacent areas.
- There is continuing pressure for infill within existing settlements leading to dilution of vernacular character and distinctive architectural style.
- Increasing transport pressures on rural roads leads to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air and light pollution in rural areas.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing distinctive vernacular settlement and the wooded slopes.

There are key opportunities to enhance the character, through the reinstatement of hedgerow boundaries and trees, and management of the woodland. The aim should be to maintain the wooded backdrop to the Thames Valley and enhance views across and from the Thames Valley. In particular there is an opportunity to consider restoration of chalk grassland on the slopes and to address the poor visual character of the farmland overlooking the Thames.

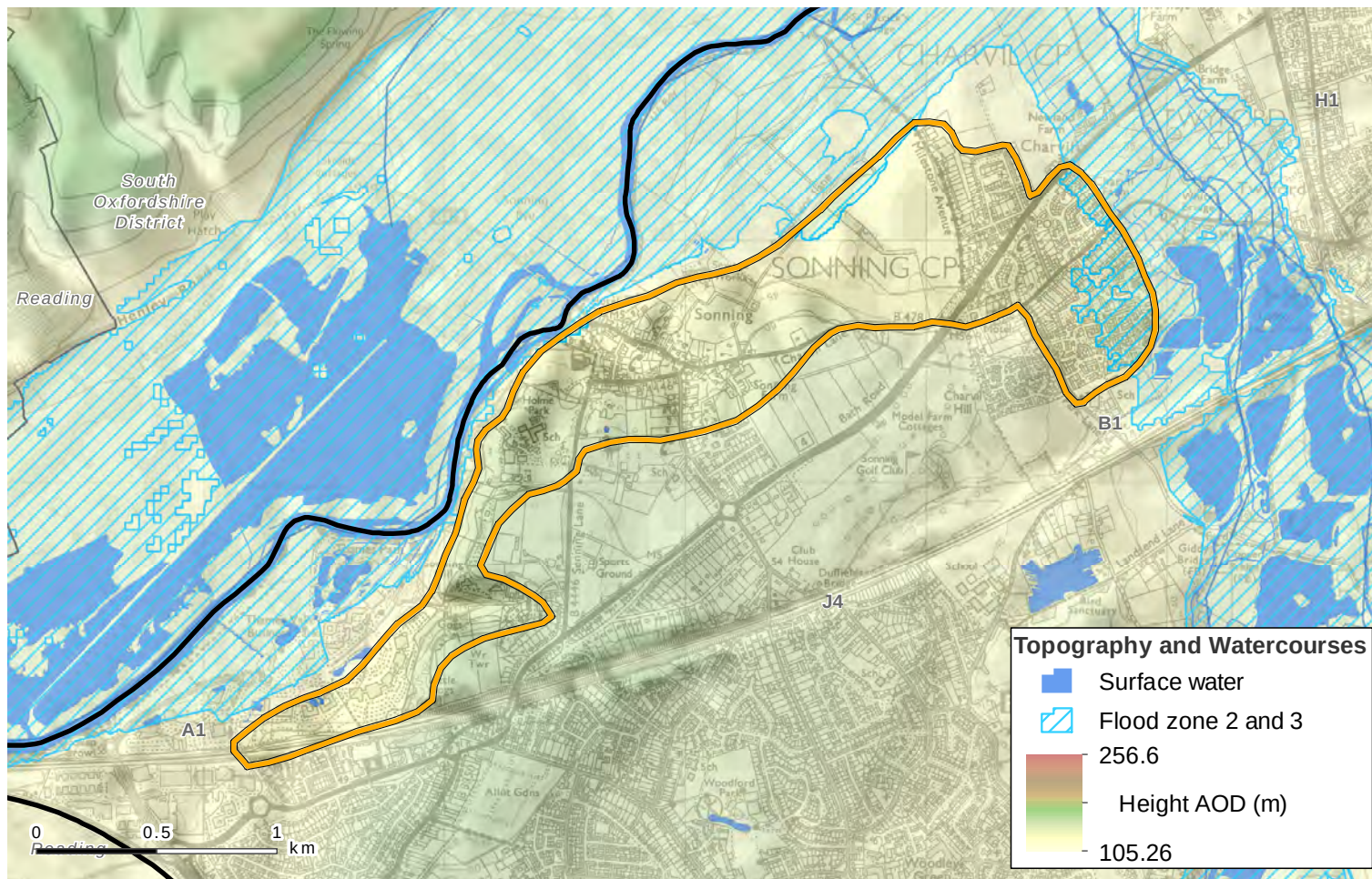
In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the pattern of individual settlement identity focused on Charvil and Sonning, minimising any linear development.

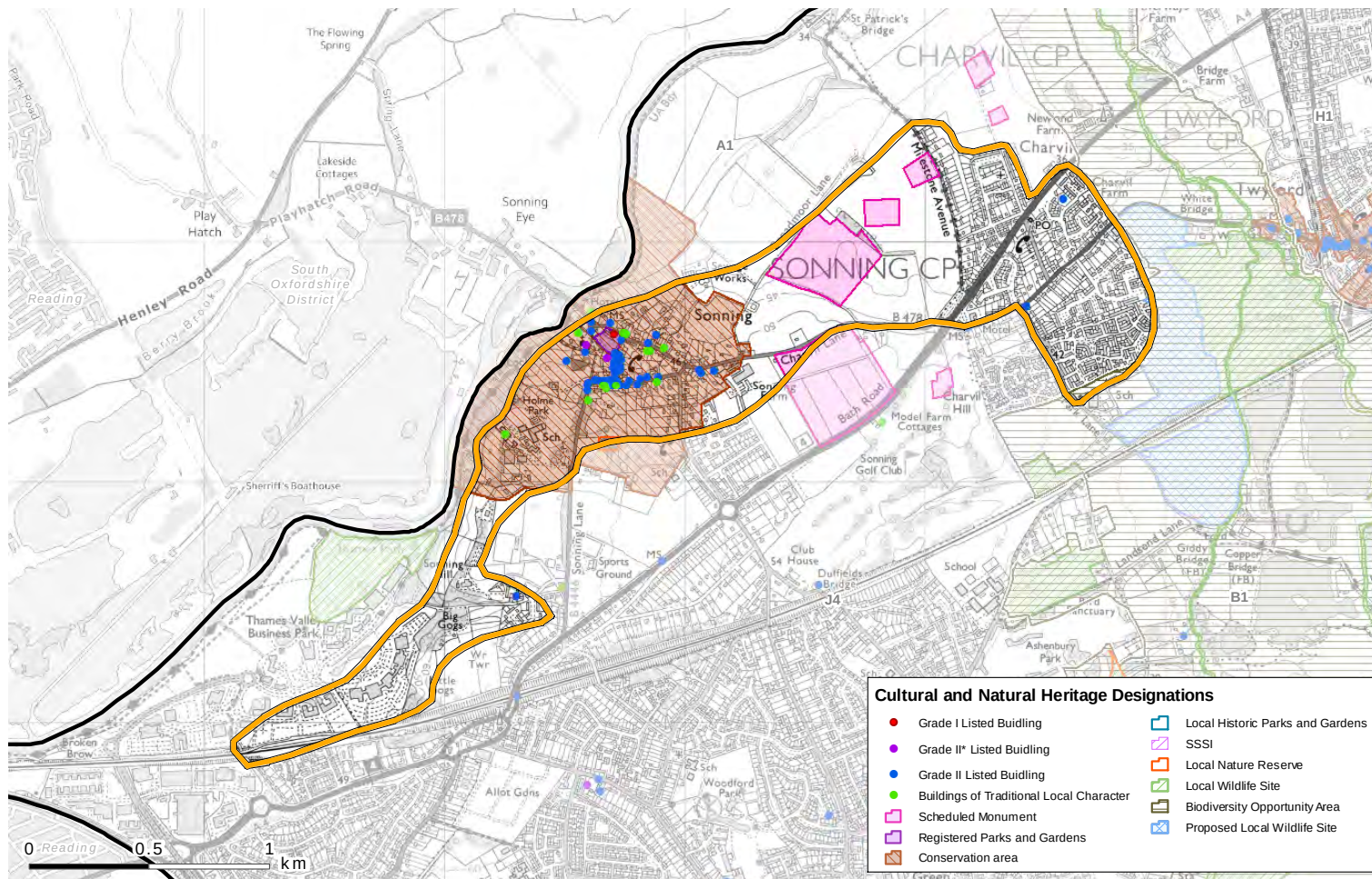
Landscape Guidelines

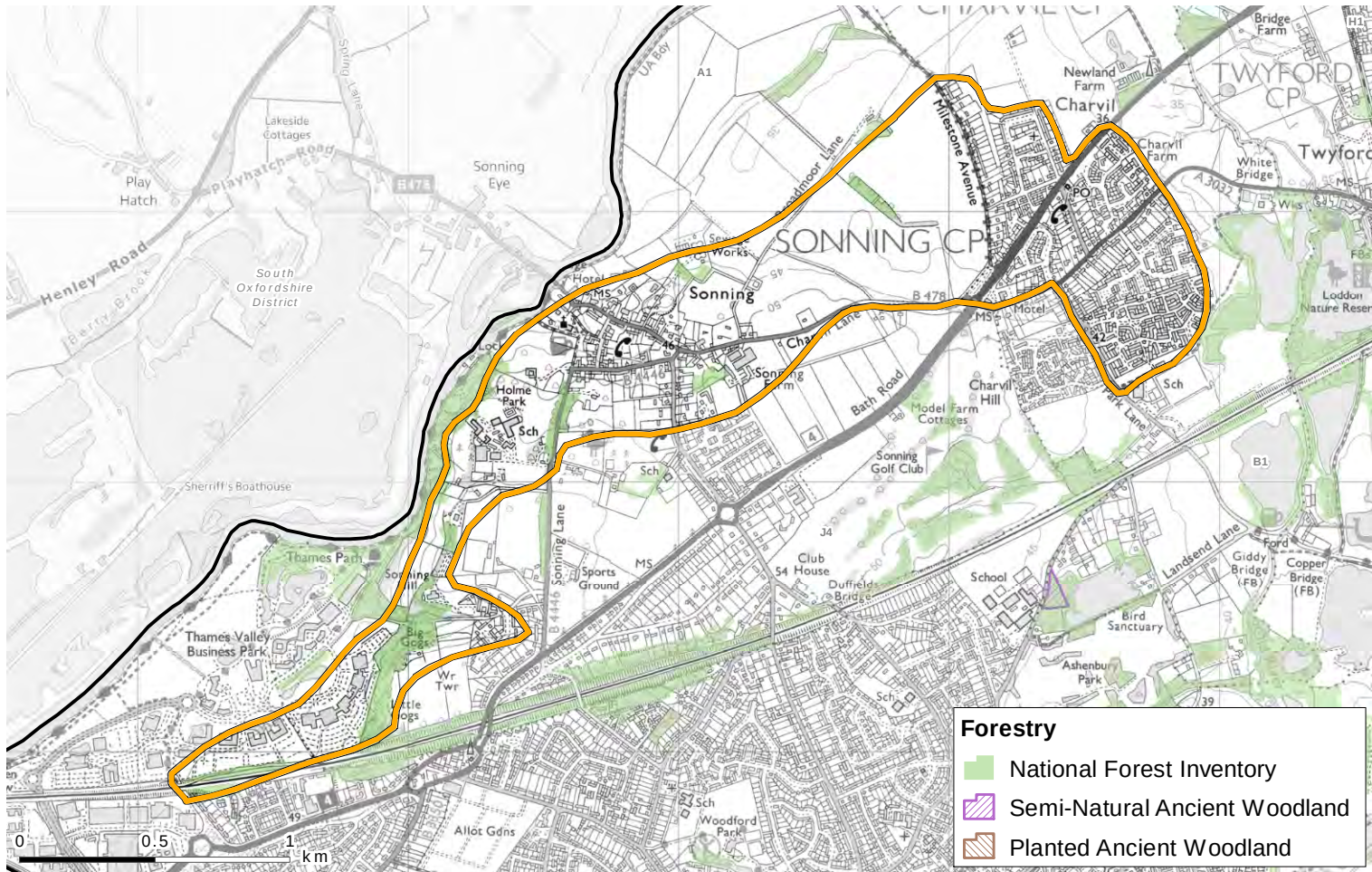
- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of area, particularly the BAP priority habitats at Big Gogs and Little Gogs, where it provides a wooded backdrop to views across the Thames Valley. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the landscape, particularly between Sonning and Charvil. Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around

intensively farmed fields.

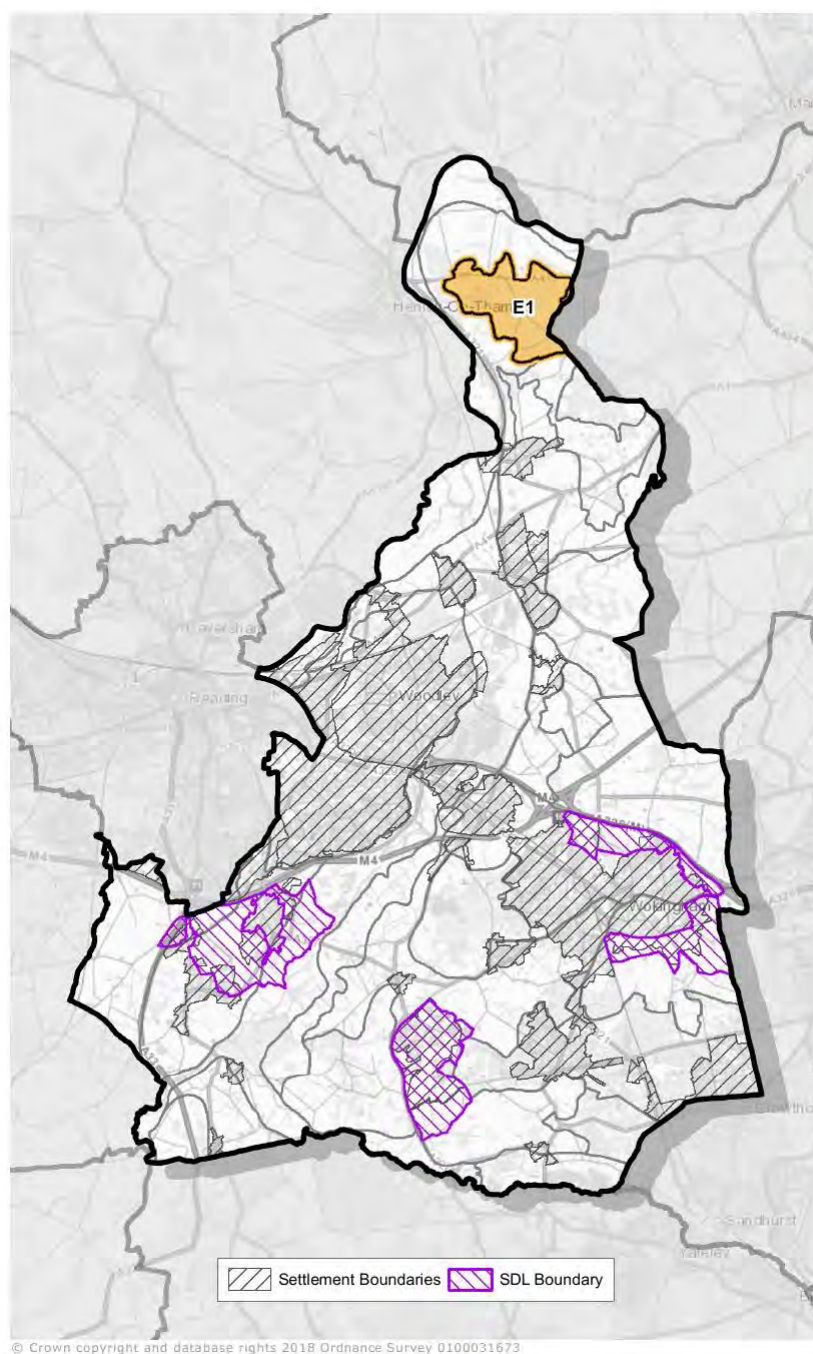
- Reinststate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so, as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland.
- Conserve, enhance and manage woodland habitats, particularly from development and damaging changes in land use. Consider the potential for chalk grassland creation in suitable areas.
- Conserve the strong vernacular of the historic buildings, particularly in Sonning Conservation Area and the estate character of Holme Park. Manage the Scheduled Monuments between Sonning and Charvil.
- Conserve the sensitive rural character of the open farmed landscape between Charvil and Sonning, and the between Sonning and Woodley, to protect the individual identity of settlements, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges, through hedges, wooded boundaries, occasional scrub planting and large-species trees to provide visual screening, particularly minimising impacts in relation to any expansion of Charvil or Sonning.
- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes.
- Protect the long views across the Thames Valley to the wooded hills in Oxfordshire and views back across and along the Thames to Sonning.
- Conserve distinctive wooded character of undeveloped skylines. Consider the impact of any development on skylines, particularly vertical development e.g. pylons which would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive skylines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements, which have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated landscape.
- Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution through the sensitive siting of any new development, especially any proposed night-time lighting.







E: Arable Chalk Plateau



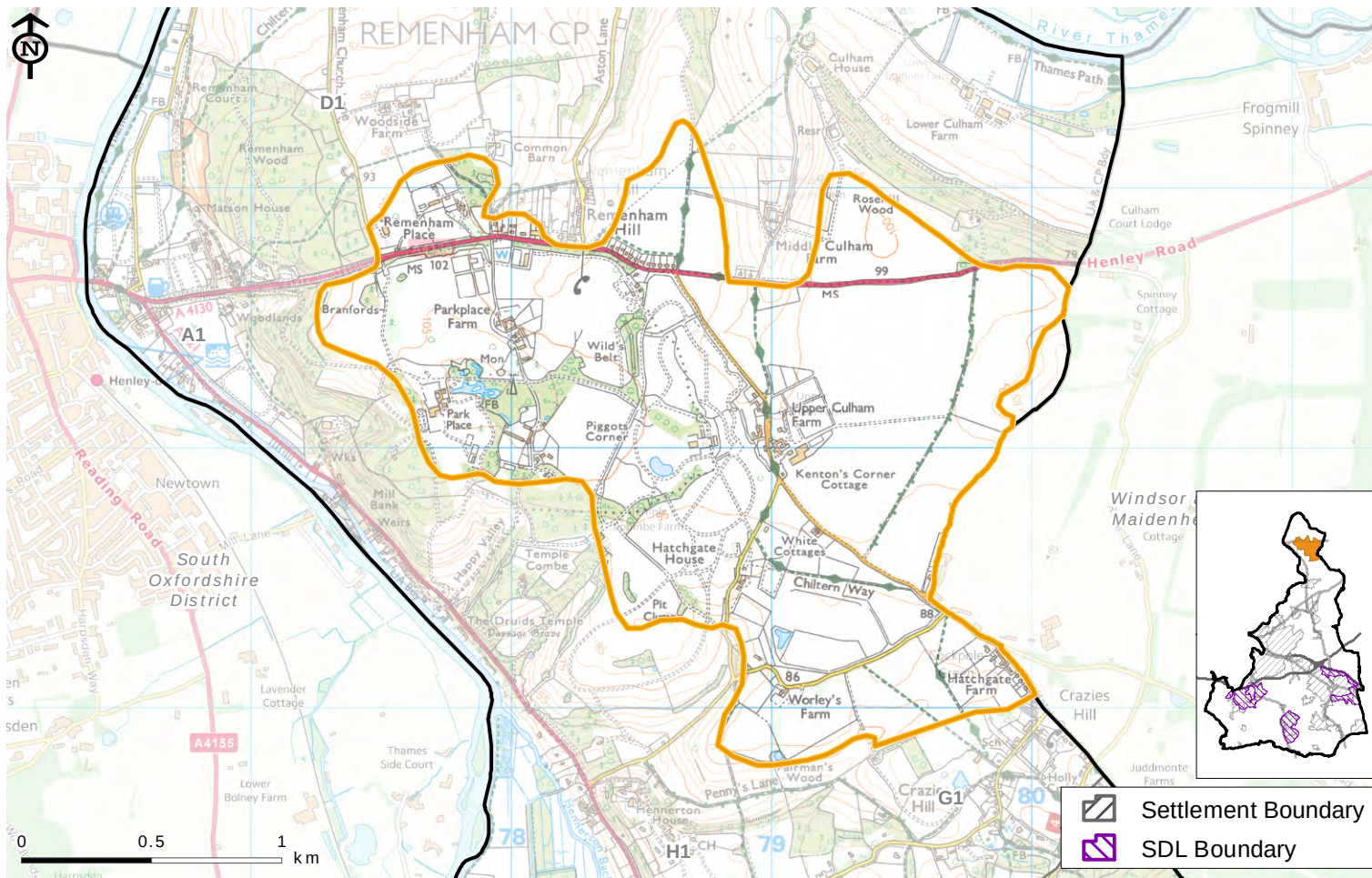
Description

The LCT is distinguished by chalk bedrock geology, with an area of Lambeth Group clay silts and sands around Park Place. Clay-with-Flint Formation is the most common superficial, leading to a flat upland area, suited for arable farmland, in large fields with few divisions. A parkland estate character dominates the area, which is sparsely settled, with far reaching and open views.

Landscape Character Areas

The Wooded Chalk Slopes LCT has one Landscape Character Area:

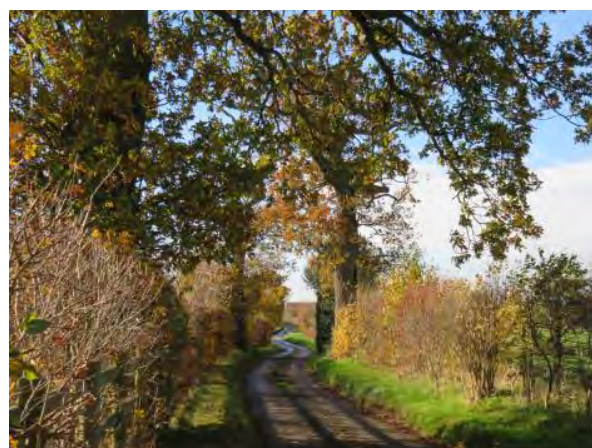
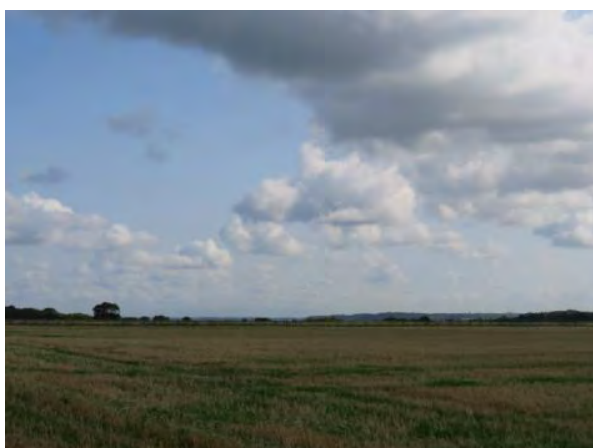
- E1: Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau



SUMMARY

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.

Located towards the north of Wokingham Borough, this landscape is largely enclosed by D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes to the north and west where the boundary follows the plateau edge before it falls away towards the Thames. The eastern edge is dictated by the borough administrative boundary, although the character area continues into the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The short, southernmost edge is defined by changes in topography, land cover and land use at Crazies Hill into G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes.



Key Characteristics

- Predominantly flat landform **with upland 'plateau' character**, underlain predominately by chalk with an area of Lambeth Group east of Park Place, clay and flint drifts cap much of the area.
- Large scale agricultural landscape intensively farmed for arable production, predominantly cereals and oilseed rape, due to well drained soils generally to the east of the LCA. Some horse grazing in subdivided fields closer to settlements.
- Large open fields with relatively few hedgerow trees and sporadic short, flailed, gappy hawthorn hedgerows. Restored hedgerows and shelterbelt planting along the rural lanes and within the Park Place estate reinforced by estate rail fencing.
- Generally unwooded, although shelterbelt planting and strips of both mixed and BAP 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 Park Place School LWS designated for its open water, woodland and grassland and a spur of broadleaved woodland of the Temple Combe Wood LWS.
- Designed landscape at Park Place (Grade II* Registered Park and Garden) located along the plateau edge evokes a formal estate character and exploits views over the Thames to the Chilterns. New estates have recently been created to the east of Park Place at Hamilton and Stowdes with new country mansions set in a mature parkland setting.
- Largely unsettled 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.
- 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 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.
- Strong sense of exposure due to lack of vertical element such as trees hedgerows or buildings, exaggerated by the wooded character of the adjoining DI: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes.
- Clear views of the wooded hills of High Knoll and Bottom Boles (F1) provide distant enclosure.

Natural Landscape

- E1.1 Geologically, the landscape is characterised by the superficial Pleistocene deposits of Clay-with-Flints that cap much of the underlying solid, around 95m AOD, which sits above the steep slopes falling to the Thames valley. Lewes Nodular, Seaford and Newhaven Chalk Formations form the bedrock. This landscape is relatively flat with a total range of between 110m AOD at Park Place, where the bedrock is formed by the Lambeth Group clay silts and sands, and 75m AOD in the

south of the area. In contrast to the adjoining steeply sloping land, the depth and moisture retentiveness of the Argyllic Brown earths, which are well drained, flinty, fine or coarse loamy, and the ease of mechanisation have led to the suitability of the area for intensive arable farmland. Flints are visible where the land is being worked for agriculture.

- E1.2 Cereals and oilseed rape dominate the arable farmland. Fields are generally large with smaller field divisions occurring in close proximity to farmhouses and other agricultural buildings. In the east of the area there is little tree cover, with just a few trees occurring within the large open fields. Field boundaries are not always apparent masking the former field system. New hedgerows have been planted aligning the rural roads, supported by post-and-rail fencing of a standard style. There are flailed single-species hawthorn hedgerows, although these appear to be being replaced with newly planted mixed-species hedgerows.
- E1.3 Around and within Park Place and its wider estate the land use is more wooded, and contains varied parkland with some pasture providing variation in landscape character. Strips of both mixed and BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland can be found along rural lanes and tracks, and new hedgerows have been planted within the estate land. This woodland greatly influences the sense of scale and changes the degree of perceived enclosure. Beech woodland is prominent close to the A4130 between Remenham Hill and Remenham Place, and connects to the core of Remenham Wood. This provides both physical and visual connectivity to the neighbouring character area D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes.
- E1.4 The former golf course south of Remenham Hill closed in 2005, and is being restored to a parkland character including planting of new woodland and parkland trees as part of the Hamilton and Strowdes estates. This restoration extends the parkland character further east than was previously the case, but contained within the wider Park Place Grade II* listed Registered Park and Garden extent.
- E1.5 Park Place School Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and Templecombe Wood and Worleys Hill LWS are both part of the Chilterns Escarpment BOA. Part of Templecombe Wood and Worleys Hill LWS lies within this character area, and represent a significant area of parkland habitat, characterised by scattered mature standard trees, including oak (*Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and lime (*Tilia sp.*). Small remnant areas of calcareous grassland can be found on the edge of the area, near to and on the slopes of D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes.

Cultural Landscape

- E1.6 The heavy Clay-with-Flint soils of the plateau were generally unsuited to prehistoric and Roman cultivation, and may have remained predominantly wooded until Saxon times when settlement expanded onto previously marginal areas. This area would have provided productive arable land from the medieval period onwards.
- E1.7 Woodland remained a valued economic resource. There is a Domesday entry for Royal woodland at Remenham in 1086, and the whole area was part of the wider, more varied habitats of the Royal 'Forest' of Windsor. Tracts of older woodland survive on the western side of the plateau, preserved by their incorporation within the landscaped parks of the 18th century estates e.g. Park Place. The irregular boundaries of this woodland suggest assart incursions of medieval/post-medieval date, whereas the more regular, straight-sided fields to the east indicate early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure.
- E1.8 Elevated positions on the plateau overlooking the Thames favoured locations for the construction of country houses and villas, such as Remenham Place and Park Place, products of the influx of new wealth to the area in the 18th century. The current Park Place was built in 1870 by Thomas Cundy in a French Renaissance style on the site of an earlier 18th century building built by Lord Archibald Hamilton (father in law of Nelsons mistress Emma, Lady Hamilton). The Grade II listed building was used as a school until 1989, when it was bought by private owners. It has since been remodelled, and the formal ground restored. The grounds were the landscape gardening project of Robert Marnock (c. 1869), and contain significant trees and shrubs adding a wooded character to an otherwise open landscape. The Grade II* listed Registered Park and Gardens, which cross into D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes, incorporated many features of mock or

displaced antiquity. These include 18th century obelisks from Stanstead Hall, and the 17th century top of the steeple of St Bride's church, Fleet Street (all Grade II listed buildings); a rustic cottage and Grecian 'ruins' (both now gone); and a grotto (now in ruins). As the large estates were sold off and split up during the 20th century, areas of former parkland were put under arable cultivation. However, over the past decade much of the landscape at Park Place and on the Hamilton and Strowdes estates has been brought back under estate management.

- E1.9 There is a simplistic settlement pattern of sparsely scattered farmsteads, lacking a strong vernacular character but including white-rendered and polychromatic Reading brick buildings and rustic agricultural buildings. Some of these are listed, for example the 16th century Worley's timber framed farmhouse. Remenham Hill is the only settlement, and is little more than a ribbon of 19th and 20th century buildings, albeit large detached properties. There is evidence of demand for new buildings on the plateau with a number of modern detached dwellings constructed in an estate at the edge of Cockpole Green (in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead).
- E1.10 New country mansions and other properties have been built as part of the estate regeneration, on the footprint of previous estate buildings, set within parkland and hidden from the roads and public rights of way.

Perceptual Landscape

- E1.11 Clear views of the wooded hills of High Knowl and Bowsey Hill which frame and contrast with the elevated and flat landform of the plateau landscape. Unmanaged, gappy hawthorn hedgerows create a sense of neglect, which contrasts with the ordered formal landscape created by the Park Place estate.
- E1.12 This is a largely tranquil and remote area, with dark skies at night, with limited public access and little settlement beyond scattered farms and estate cottages.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Parkland landscape associated with the historic estate at Park Place designated as a Registered Park and Garden which provides a cultural record of the past and layers of designated landscape history within the landscape. The estate character lends homogeneity to much of the area which is strengthened by the new parkland estates of Hamilton and Strowdes.
- Small woodland copses and linear deciduous woodlands are ecologically important BAP priority habitats and provide continuation with adjoining character area D1.
- Restored deciduous hedgerows along rural lanes which add a sense of rural character to the landscape.
- Pattern of individual properties that appear well integrated into the landscape, including historic buildings within the landscaped estate, farm buildings and cottages which provide a sense of place and time-depth.
- 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.
- Impressive views of the wooded horizons of High Knowl, Bottom Boles Wood and Bowsey Hill.

Landscape Condition

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.

Key Issues

- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- Decline in the management of field boundaries, including hedgerow loss associated with past expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture or decline in management. This is improving with estate hedgerow planting.
- Demand for residential development is continuing to push linear development along the A4130, including the considerable enlargement of existing houses or conversion of agricultural buildings, potentially eroding the rural character.
- Intensification of estate land for other uses such as polo.
- Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies'. Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape.
- Demands for highways modifications to the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and road widening threatens the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open areas of the landscape.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing rural character and the parkland landscapes associated with Park Place estate.

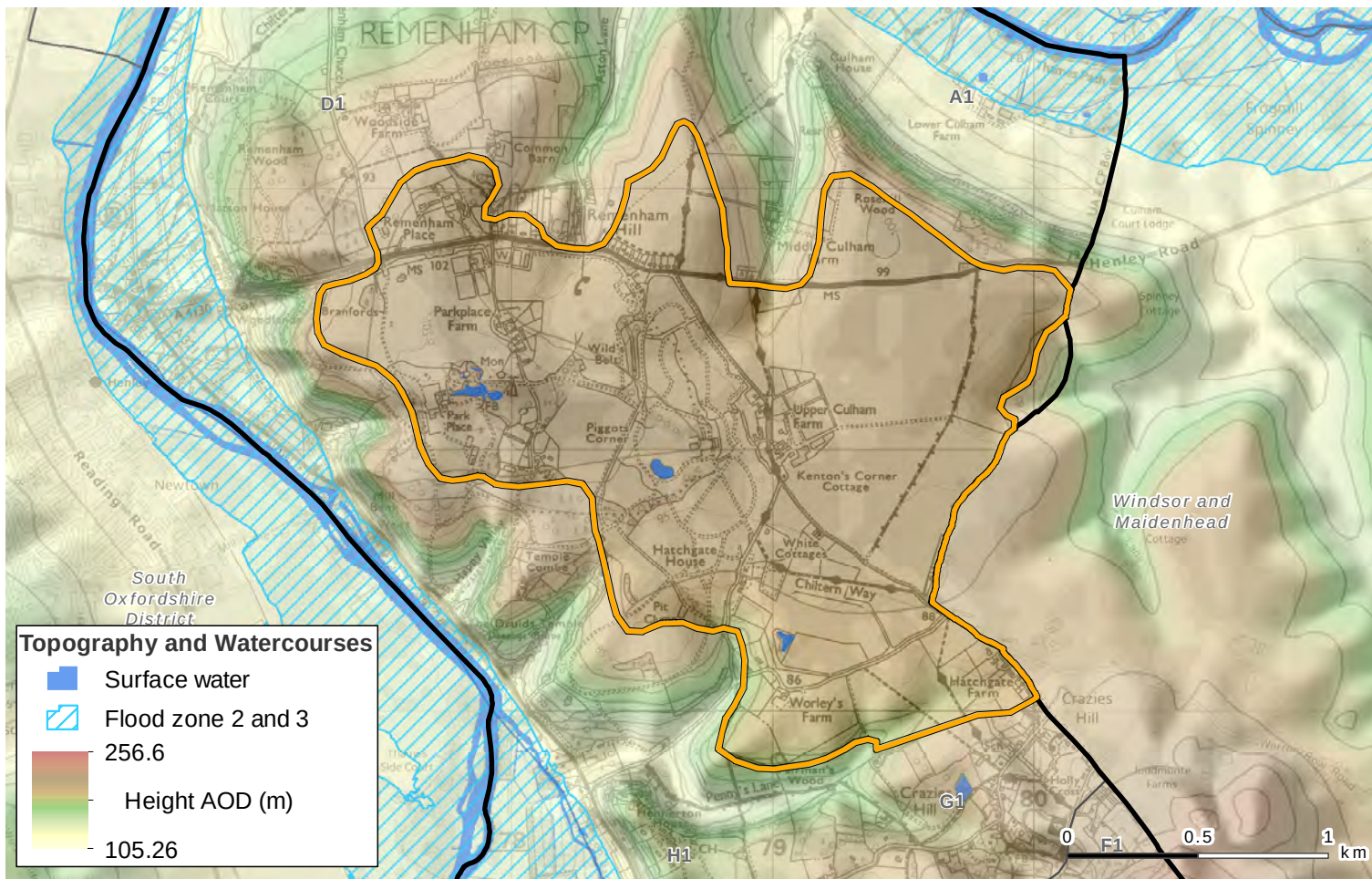
The key aspects to be enhanced and strengthened are field boundaries and hedgerows and the parkland woodland and trees while maintaining the views to Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls. In particular there are opportunities for the re-creation of chalk grassland habitats that have been lost.

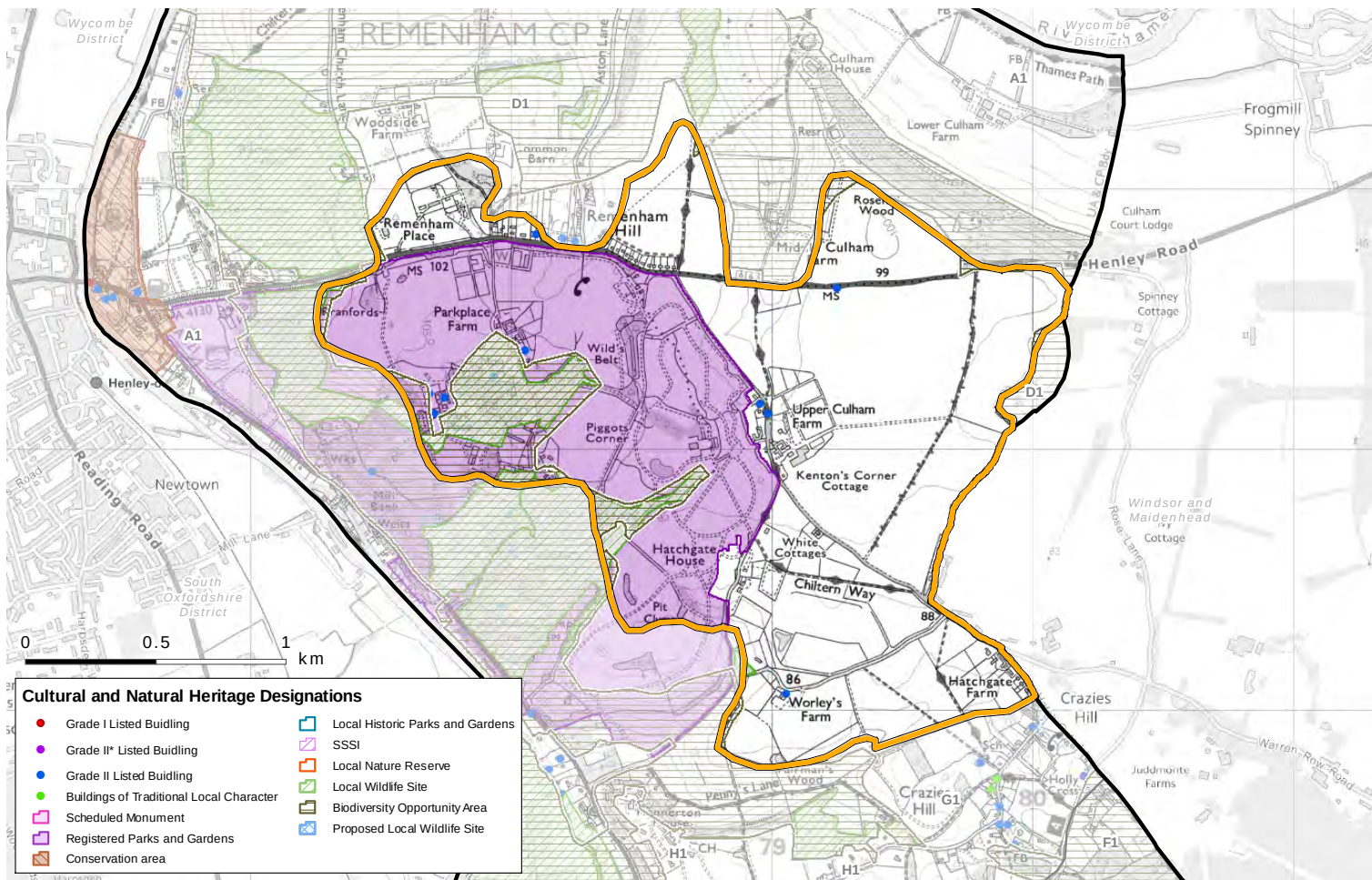
In terms of development, the aim is to conserve and enhance the sparse rural settlement pattern, dark skies and tranquillity.

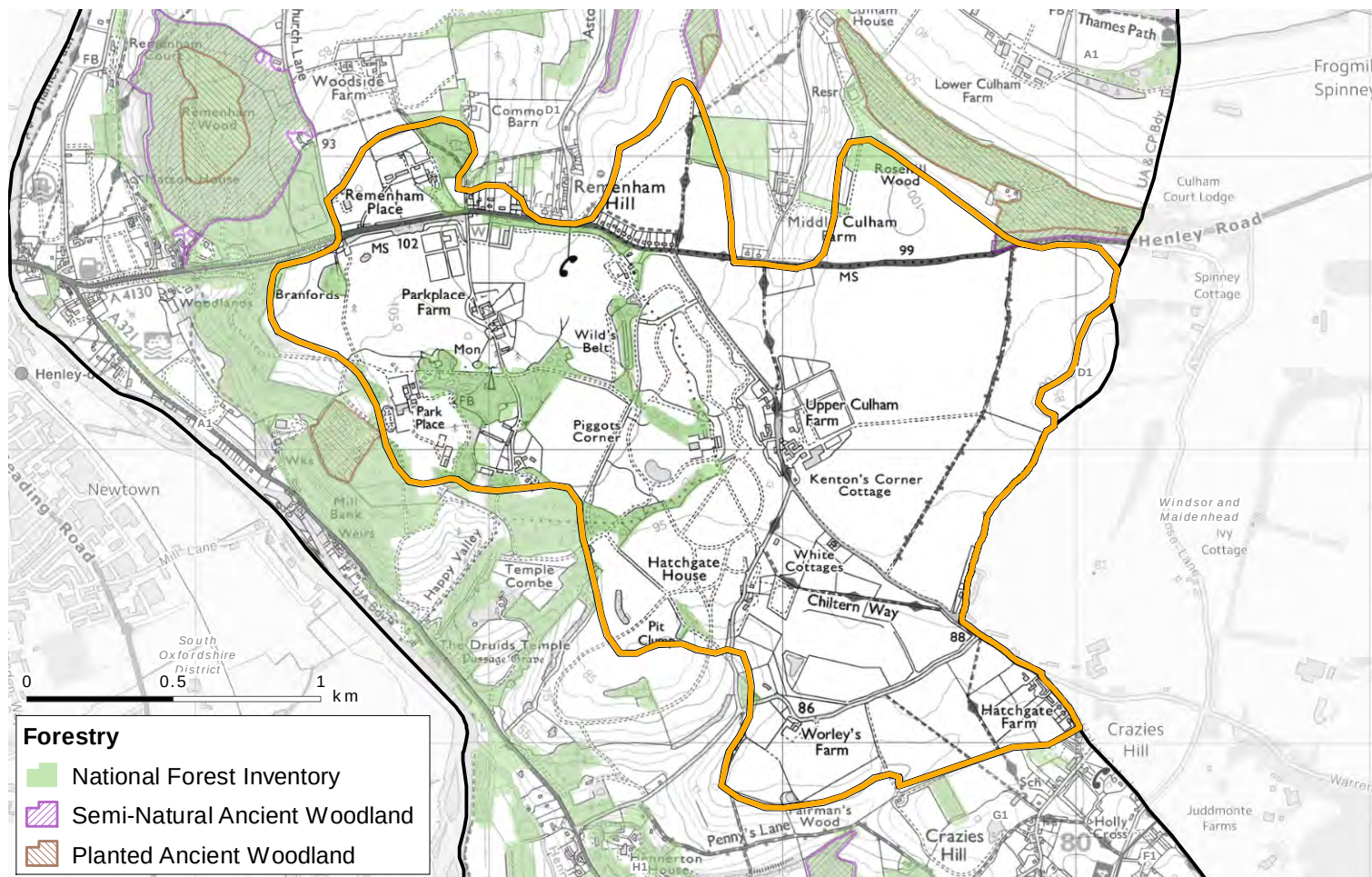
Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve and enhance small woodland copses, especially those with BAP priority habitats. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland and hedgerows with hedgerow standard trees, using locally occurring native species in order to link existing woodland, within and outside the area, without the loss of significant views. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the landscape.

- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.
- Conserve, enhance and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinstall or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so. Plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting.
- Conserve and enhance the historic parkland landscapes, and plan for the next generation of parkland trees.
- Conserve, enhance and manage grassland and woodland habitats, particularly within LWS. Maximise chalk grassland creation where these have been lost, notably in association with the existing remnant sites. Park Place and the spur of Templecombe Wood are part of the Chiltern Escarpment BOA. This network of natural habitats has been identified as a target for woodland management and chalk grassland management, restoration and re-creation.
- Maintain the rural character of the landscape and its sparse settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads and individual houses.
- Conserve and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highway improvements, infrastructure, white lines, and signage.
- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night.).
- Protect views across the open landscape, particularly towards the wooded skylines at Bowsey Hill and Knowl Hill. Consider the impact of any development outside the area where it would have the potential to be highly visible from this character area. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements, which have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated landscape.
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity and seclusion in the landscape, including the experience of dark skies, through the management of development.
- Conserve and protect the historic parkland landscape and resist further the additions of buildings/ barns and/or intensification of use.



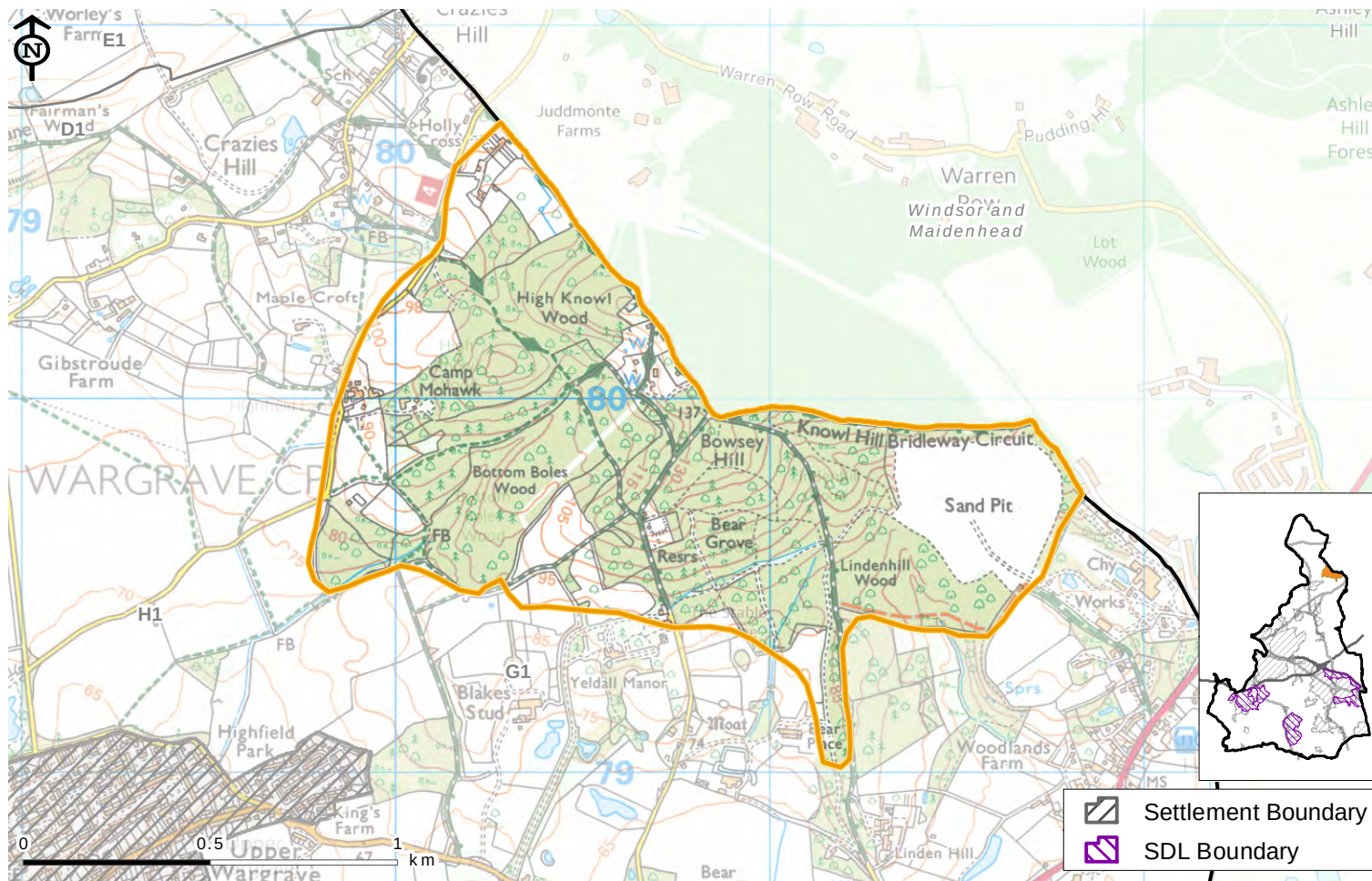




The LCT is defined by a strongly articulated landform of rounded hills or knolls dominated by extensive mixed and deciduous woodland. There is a lack of built form, but a good network of public footpaths.

The Wooded Chalk Knolls LCT has one Landscape Character Area:

- Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment



SUMMARY

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.

Located to the north east of Wokingham Borough lying south-east of the settlement of Crazies Hill and north of Kiln Green. Both settlements fall within the adjacent character area G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes. The boundary separating the character areas predominantly follows contour lines that determine the marked steep slope while also reflecting the change to woodland dominated land use pattern. The northern edge is dictated by the administrative boundary of Wokingham Borough.



Key Characteristics

- A visually distinct landform of pronounced wooded hills ranging from 85m AOD to 130m AOD which form a backdrop to flatter more open areas in the surrounding landscapes (particularly E1 and H1). The strongly articulated landform of the 'knolls' are defined by a prominent outcrop of chalk formation overlain by clay and gravel drift deposits.
- Extensive areas of mature woodland, much of it ancient woodland, form a continuous tract over the landscape and represents fragments of the primordial wildwood which existed from prehistory. Primarily broadleaved, with areas of oak and beech-dominated woodland on hill tops, with alder along spring lines, ash and hazel on lower slopes and occasional areas of mixed woodland.
- High concentration of BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland much designated as LWS (Keepers Cottage Wood, Bottom Boles Wood, Bear Grove/ Lindenhill Wood). The area is included in the Ashley and Bowsey Hills BOA.
- An absence of farmland due to the dense woodland cover and steep landform except on the periphery of the character area.
- Largely unsettled with an occasional isolated property set in a wooded context and connected by narrow and winding lanes.
- Well used for informal recreation with a network of footpaths and bridleways including the Chiltern Way which cross through the woods.
- A secluded naturalistic landscape due to the woodland and topography with high levels of tranquility and dark night skies.
- 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.
- A dramatic sinuous skyline formed by the woodland that clothes the rounded hills.

Natural Landscape

- F1.1 The most visually striking feature is the hummocky, distinctly rounded landform at high elevation ranging from 85m AOD (roughly marking the edge of surrounding character area G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes) to 130m AOD at Bowsey Hill. The shape and height of the land ensures that Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls stands proud – influencing not only the setting but also the overall character of the surrounding landscape.
- F1.2 In geological terms the landscape is defined by a prominent outcrop of chalk, overlain by London Clay Formation and towards the southern boundary of the character area, Lambeth Group clay, silt and sand. The London Clay Formation consists of brown to grey silts, fine grained sands and pebble beds in places. This is capped in places by Head deposits comprising variably sandy and silty clay with pebbles occurring sporadically. Drift deposits of Head Gravel also occur and are defined by variably clayey gravels and stony clays. A pit and disused workings to the east of the character area suggest past mineral (gravel) extraction activity. The sandy and clayey strata of the Lambeth Group provide the geological transition towards character area G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes. The soils are Stagnogley soils of the Windsor series. These are clayey or loamy/clayey soils and have drainage impeded at moderate depths by an impermeable layer.

- F1.3 The rural land use is almost solely defined by woodland comprising a series of connected woods at High Knowl Wood, Bottom Boles Wood, Bowsey Hill, Bear Grove and Lindenhill Wood. The woodland clothes the rounded hills and forms a dramatic skyline and visually distinct backdrop to the surrounding landscapes. Towards the east, south and west boundaries, there are small areas of open (non-wooded) land forming the edge of the arable farmland in the adjacent character area G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes.
- F1.4 A reservoir occupying a central location is well hidden by surrounding tree cover and as such is unobtrusive. Similarly, a number of workshops close to the reservoir are only apparent at close range which, although small scale, impinge upon an otherwise rural landscape character.
- F1.5 The Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls is characterised by a high concentration of relatively large ancient woodlands. In total 48 ancient woodland indicator species having been recorded from this area, with 38 of these occurring in Bottom Boles Wood alone. Three sites have Local Wildlife Site (LWS) status and represent an important area for the conservation of local woodland biodiversity, supporting a wide range of plant species many of which are particularly characteristic of ancient sites.
- F1.6 This plant diversity is partly related to the wide range of woodland, including BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland. These woods vary from beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and oak (*Quercus robur*) dominated on top of the hill, to localised patches of BAP priority habitat wet woodland comprising alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) associated with local spring lines on the slope, while further down the hill moister soils typically support ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) woods.

Cultural Landscape

- F1.7 The London Clay, which forms the knolls of Bowsey Hill (and Knowl Hill to the east), would have hindered early cultivation and settlement of its soils, and much of the landscape has remained continuously wooded. The whole area was part of the Royal Forest of Windsor giving the crown rights over hunting, timber and other resources. Woodland was also a valued economic resource exploited by those settlements sited on the more easily cultivated soils of the adjacent landscape.
- F1.8 It is possible that some of the frequent 'Bear' names in the area, such as Bear Grove, may derive from the Saxon bare meaning swine pasture, the pigs being fattened on woodland fodder before autumn slaughter (although, alternatively, they may derive from the locally prominent A'Bear or Bear family).
- F1.9 There has been a brickworks at Knowl Hill on the south-east boundary of the LCA since at least the 19th century but whilst the HF Warner Star Works chimney remains, the site is now a waste treatment site. Lime, from the chalk bedrock, was also produced at the works in the 19th century, and a former sand pit from the latter half of the 20th century occupies the south-east corner of the landscape character area.
- F1.10 A number of footpaths and bridleways cross through the woodland including the Chiltern Way and it is a popular recreation area especially with dog walkers. The paths provide important access connections to adjacent character area G1: Hare Hatch Sand-over Chalk Slopes.
- F1.11 One of the overriding characteristics of the landscape is the absence of settlement and built form, the only exception being the small collection of workshops close to the reservoir and a small cluster of large detached properties at Bowsey Hill.

Perceptual Landscape

- F1.12 The absence of buildings and settlement emphasises the sense of rurality and the lack of any significant roads and vehicles within the landscape creates a quiet and peaceful character.
- F1.13 Isolated remote and enclosed character exaggerated by the elevated landform and predominant absence of development.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Variety and complexity of dense broadleaved woodland, much of which is ancient in origin, with high biodiversity value reflected in BAP priority habitats and LWS designations.
- Recreational value, providing quiet enjoyment of the wooded countryside through a network of footpaths and the Chiltern Way.
- 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.
- Clear views from the edge of the woodland over the surrounding landscapes giving the landscape a sense of place and orientation.

Landscape Condition

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.

Key Issues

- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and wet woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- In the past expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands has resulted in a change in character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora.
- Influence of woodland fell cycles and management on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines.
- Recreational pressure could lead to damage of ecological features in this well-populated borough.
- Pressure for built development on the skyline has potential to lead to the loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham Borough landscape.
- Disturbance and visual impact from on-going operations at the Start Works landfill site at Knowl Hill.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing character created by the extensive wooded hills and ridgelines and the largely unsettled rural character. The area should continue to provide a dramatic wooded backdrop and setting to the surrounding lowland landscapes. There are key opportunities to promote active management of the ancient woodland resource.

Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape and the existing pattern of wooded deciduous and mixed woodland ridges and interconnecting valleys.
- Conserve all native woodland including ancient woodland and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
- Conserve, enhance and manage woodland habitats, particularly BAP priority habitats and those protected as LWS. Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive ridgelines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.
- Enhance informal recreational enjoyment of the wooded landscape while managing recreation pressure on the area. Maximise the contribution made by the woodland resource elsewhere for recreational purposes, to draw more intrusive pressure away from this sensitive landscape and protect the most valuable areas of woodland habitat.
- Conserve the distinctive wooded character of the undeveloped skylines. Generally, built development would not be compatible with the natural qualities of this landscape. Impact of any development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas – would be a particular cause for concern. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated landscape and therefore highly damaging to the landscape and to views into the landscape.
- Protect the views from the edge of the woodland over the surrounding landscape and across the river valley.
- Recreate appropriate vegetation cover as part of a long-term strategy to restore area of landfill at Knowl Hill and maximise opportunities to filter views of current activity.
- Regenerate former landfill sites to maximise biodiversity.
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity and seclusion in the landscape, including the experience of dark skies, through the management of development.

