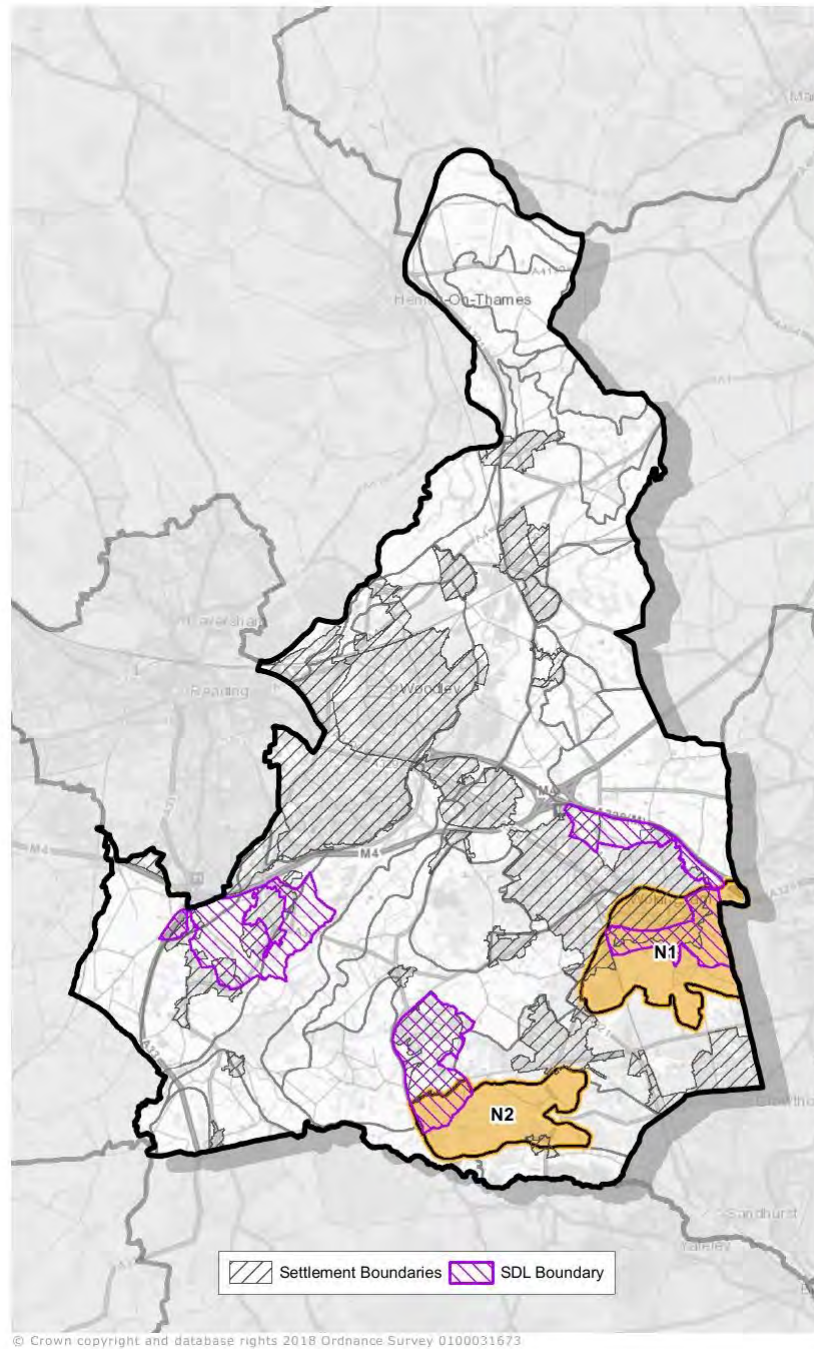


N: Pastoral Sandy Lowland



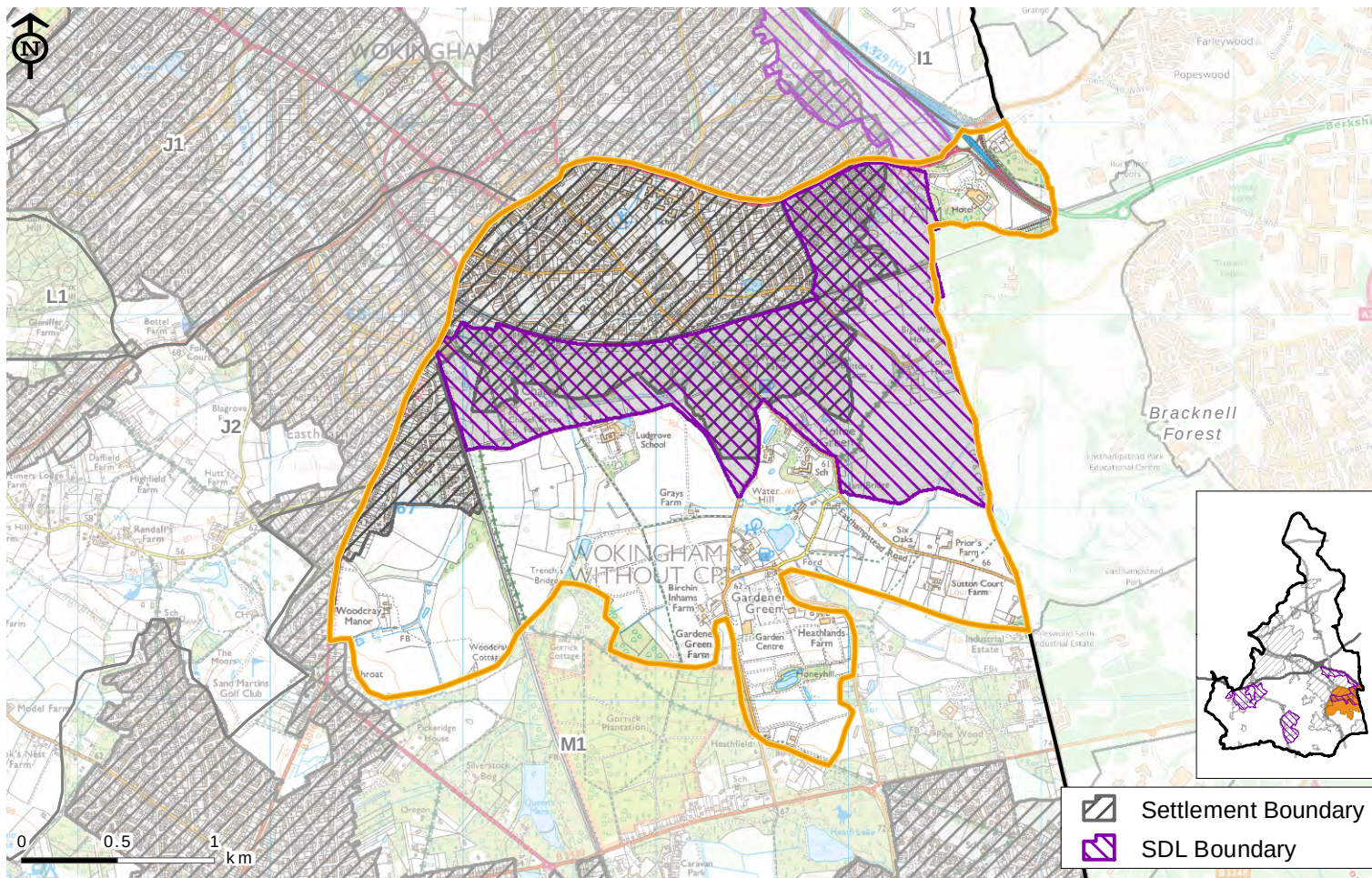
Description

The LCT is characterised by the undulating landform underlain by sandy geology, giving rise to poor soils used for pasture and rough paddocks. Small clustered hamlets, farmsteads and large manors are connected by roadsides with bracken and gorse, creating a heathy appearance.

Landscape Character Areas

The Pastoral Sandy Lowland LCT is subdivided into two Landscape Character Areas:

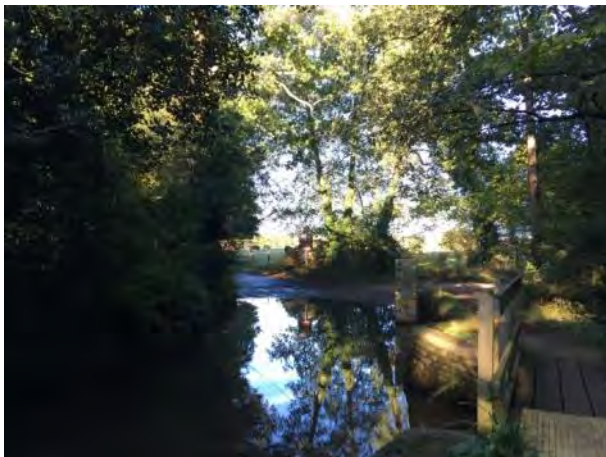
- N1: Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland
- N2: Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland



SUMMARY

Sandy pastoral landscape set within the context of the urban areas of Wokingham to the north and forested areas to the south. Its proximity to the built-up area has led to a variety of land uses including rough horse paddocks, pick-your-own farms and small rural business parks.

Located directly south of the town of Wokingham, and the northern boundary (for the purposes of this assessment) is defined by the settlement edge. The southern boundaries follow the perceived edge of the forested area of M1: Forested and Settled Sand, following the extent of the Gorrick Plantation and interconnected woodland areas. To the west it follows the A321 and the edge of the settled area of Finchampstead North. The borough boundary defines the eastern limits, although the small area of arable clays east of Easthampstead Road and Holme Green is more closely allied to the character of Easthampstead Park to the east (within Bracknell Forest).



Key Characteristics

- Shelving to gently undulating landform which opens out to flatter areas east of Holme Green. Windlesham and Camberley Sand Formations underlain by London Clay and capped by the sandy deposits of the Bagshot Beds with localised drifts of river terraces which results in poorly draining acidic soils.
- The Emm Brook tributaries are a branched network of very small brooks which extend from Wokingham town, hidden within woodland and trees with a number of ford crossings. There are also small lakes and ponds.
- Scrubby vegetation including narrow tracts of BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland follow the course of small streams, broadleaved shelterbelts with gorse, bramble and bracken provide naturalistic land cover and nature conservation interest, including the woodland near Ludgrove School which forms a small area of local wildlife importance.
- Agricultural land is predominantly pasture set within large to medium-sized geometrically shaped fields largely divided by post and wire and rough timber fencing, including unmanaged marginal agricultural land particularly on the settlement edge.
- A high proportion of horse paddocks have introduced compartmentalised field units bound by horse tape and temporary-looking facilities such as caravans and sheds.
- Extensive areas of horticultural polytunnels around Gardeners Green.
- Proximity to Wokingham has resulted in farm diversification including specialty farms such as pick-your-own and bird hatcheries as well as a number of farm industrial estates, workshops and retail villages with associated car parks.
- Dispersed pattern of small settlements and large manors in extensive grounds now used as educational establishments. Historic buildings are limited to the Grade I listed almshouse at Lucas Hospital, the Grade II listed Crooked Billet Public House at Gardener's Green and a number of scattered timber framed, weather boarded or brick houses and farm buildings.
- Linear transport corridors, including the east-west Waterloo-Reading Railway and north-south Guildford Railway which run through the landscape and create a sense of disturbance. The proposed South Wokingham distributor road will add to this disturbance although at time of writing has not been built.
- Recreational value in the form of a small golf course and a network of footpaths and bridleways.
- Open views across the flat landscape to the southern fringes of Wokingham, due to the lack of enclosing elements.
- A rough and **'unmanaged' character** created by the absence of hedgerows and presence of shacks and caravans in the paddocks, rough fencing and scrubby vegetation and a variety of farm industrial and commercial units.
- The tranquility and rural qualities are eroded by busy roads and commuter routes in and out of Wokingham.

Natural Landscape

- N1.1 Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland has a highly varied geology. As part of the Thames Basin it is underlain by London Clay strata, with subsequent drift deposits. The main influences in this area are the fine and medium grained sandy deposits of the Bagshot Beds and localised drifts of the sandy and gravely deposits of the Fifth and Sixth River Terraces. Locally, the lower tributaries of Emm Brook, a tributary of the Loddon are marked by bands of alluvium. The mixed geology has given rise to two different soil types – in the south and west Gley Podzols which are sandy and poorly draining and to the north and east Stagnogley soils which are less influenced by sands but, nonetheless, are affected by high groundwater at moderate depths. These have led to the creation of drainage ditches, although these are not as prevalent as, for example, in the Arable Clay Lowlands.
- N1.2 The Emm Brook tributaries are a branched network of very small brooks set within very narrow and shallow valleys. These create variation in the landform of the area. Consequently the landscape appears to slope gently upwards from the tributaries to the edge of Wokingham to the north and to the forested 'plateau' to the south. The tributary streams are not visible in the landscape being hidden within woodland and trees. There are also some small manmade lakes and ponds.
- N1.3 The proximity to the built-up area has led to the establishment of pick-your-own fruit farms and Christmas tree plantations. There are extensive areas to the south of the area under horticultural polytunnels around Gardeners Green, as well a commercial garden centre.
- N1.4 This landscape is predominantly medium-sized open pastureland supporting a wide variety of animals, including smaller fields with high mesh fences used for bird hatcheries. Some areas are under arable cultivation in large undivided fields particularly where the London Clay remains the dominant influence in the east of the area. However, agricultural land use is dominated by rough horse and pony paddocks with their associated infrastructure. Equestrian liveries exploit the woodland rides through the Forested and Settled Sands. The equestrian areas have a rough and marginal appearance with the presence of wooden sheds and caravans and informal infrastructure used as jumps such as old painted barrels.
- N1.5 The fields are divided by geometrically-arranged post-and-wire or rough timber fencing. In places hedgerows have been retained but these are generally gappy and unconnected and marked by rough overgrown hedge banks including gorse, bracken and bramble. Occasional mature oaks have been retained in the fields and in some areas exotic hedging conifers have been introduced, contrasting starkly with the colour and form of the native vegetation.
- N1.6 The area has retained one Local Wildlife Site (LWS) on the edge of Wokingham town, a small woodland with BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland with alder, birch, rowan and hawthorn near Ludgrove School.

Cultural Landscape

- N1.7 There is no evidence of prehistoric, Romano-British or recorded Domesday settlements in this area. The place names of Luckley and Tangley contain "-leah" (a woodland clearing), which indicates settlement in the forest landscape which later formed part of the Royal Forest of Windsor.
- N1.8 The area formed the agricultural hinterland to Wokingham (see J1: Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay), an Anglo-Saxon name pre-dating the Norman conquest – the homestead of Wocca's folk. The first edition OS map shows a pattern of small irregular fields over much of the area, indicating early enclosure, although the larger, straight-sided field around Tangley and Chapel Green are characteristic of early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure. There was considerable boundary loss as fields were amalgamated in the 20th century.
- N1.9 A number of small hamlets have names such as Holme Green and Gardeners Green which suggest that they became established around village greens, probably developed in the late medieval/post-medieval periods. There are also a number of surviving 16th and 17th century

rural buildings. The Lucas Hospital Grade I listed almshouses, in the former grounds of Luckley Park, were built in 1666 and since run for the shelter of the "poor men" of the area.

- N1.10 In 1759 the Windsor Forest Turnpike Trust created a new road through Wokingham. The line between Staines and Reading, was opened in 1849 by the South Western Railway. This company together with the South Eastern Railway passed through the area, subsequently stimulating urban development, Wokingham becoming Berkshire's fifth largest town by 1930. The railway lines, particularly the north-south Guildford line, fragment this area, and prevent travel across the area.
- N1.11 Recreational uses include a small golf course located between Wokingham and Crowthorne and the network of recreational footpaths, which promote access throughout this area and connect to adjacent areas.
- N1.12 The main settlement in this character area is Wokingham, the principal town of the borough. Wokingham, which is described more fully in Settled Open Clay Lowlands, is expanding southward, beyond the Waterloo-Reading Railway as part of the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location (SDL) and into the rural area of the Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowlands. The future urban edge will be characterised by suburban, low-rise residential settlement integrated with a number of nature parks / SANGS.
- N1.13 Outside Wokingham, the area is sparsely settled, although the urban edges of Wokingham are often visible. There are clusters of settlement at Holme Green, Chapel Green and Gardeners Green, with no obvious distinctive common vernacular, although brick, timber framed, and dark weatherboard are evident.
- N1.14 The area is also characterised by scattered farmsteads, with farm buildings increasingly converted for use as light industrial estate, workshops, or retail villages. Large manor houses set in extensive grounds have been converted into education establishments such as Ludgrove School and Holme Grange School. The settled areas are connected by a network of rural roads and private lanes. The planned South Wokingham distributor road with associated junctions and railway bridges will run east-west south of the Waterloo-Reading Railway providing access to residential developments on the southern edge of Wokingham.

Perceptual Landscape

- N1.15 Away from Wokingham town and the on-going development on its southern boundary, the landscape appears generally peaceful.
- N1.16 It has a rough and 'unmanaged' character created by the absence of hedgerows and presence of shacks and caravans in the paddocks, use of farm buildings for commercial or industrial uses, and rough fencing and scrubby vegetation including gorse and bracken.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- The open agricultural land which provides a gap between the settlement edge of Finchampstead and Wokingham.
- Pastoral farmland, paddocks and sparse settlement pattern to the south of the LCA, creating a rustic feel.
- Small areas of valued woodland habitats including narrow wooded tributaries, shelterbelts and a small area of BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland near Ludgrove School, designated as an LWS.
- Scattered historic farm buildings and houses, pubs and mansions provide time-depth.
- Rural views over fields and towards Wokingham, given a sense of openness and orientation.

Landscape Condition

The open pastoral farmland dominated by horse paddocks is intact. However, historic field patterns have virtually disappeared, and the urban fringe influences will increase due to the expansion of Wokingham through the South Wokingham SDL. This will contribute to further erosion of peaceful rural qualities, and results in a moderate condition. Temporary structures including caravans within fields leads to a sense of neglect.

Key Issues

- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and wet woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- Loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees and introduction of post and wire fencing associated with changing agricultural land use, including conversion to pony paddocks.
- Pressure for more horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- Expansion of horticultural polytunnels across the landscape affecting the openness of the landscape.
- Presence of unmanaged marginal agricultural land, which is of poor visual character due to being unmanaged, being kept in hope of rising land value, particularly around settlement edges.
- Commercial development pressure leading to the continued conversion of farm buildings from traditional uses to commercial and industrial enterprises eroding the rural character.
- Pressure for large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure impacting landscape character. Rapid rate of change due to future and on-going expansion of South Wokingham including on-going development of 2,500 homes both north and south of the Waterloo rail line as part of the South Wokingham strategic development.
- Continuing pressure for new roads including the proposed South Wokingham Distributor Road and associated road and rail crossing which will increase the fragmentation of the landscape and visual intrusion of transport corridors.
- Increased traffic on rural roads leading to erosion of road verges and erosion of tranquillity.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing landscape character. The key opportunities are to improve the condition, intactness and presentation of the farmed landscape – with potential for replanting and management of field boundaries, and enhancement of ecological character.

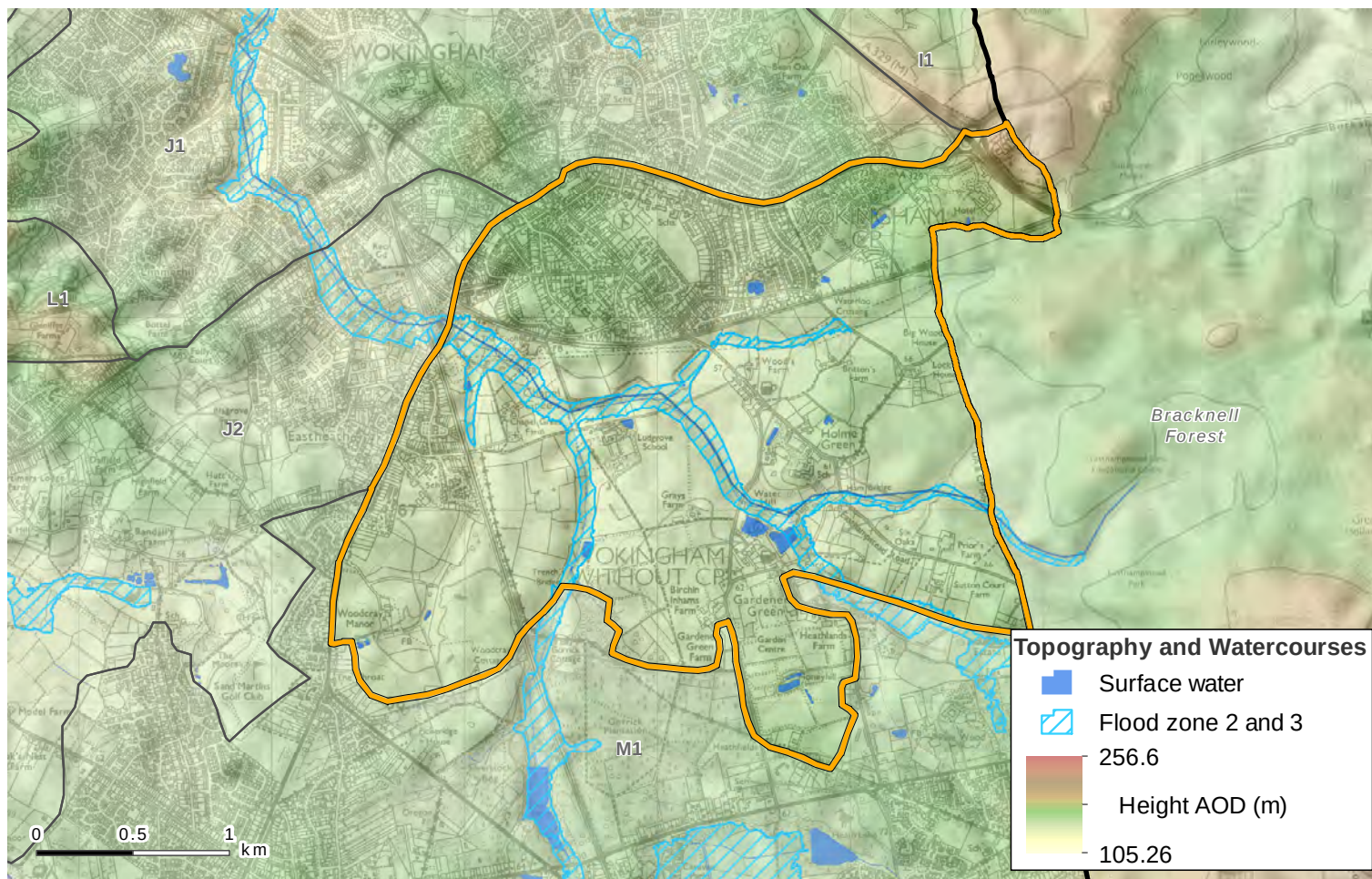
In terms of development, the rural setting of Wokingham should be conserved and management of urban fringe activities on marginal land is also required. The appearance of the new settlement edge as part of the South Wokingham SDL should also be enhanced by extensive planting and integrated within the existing rural landscape context.

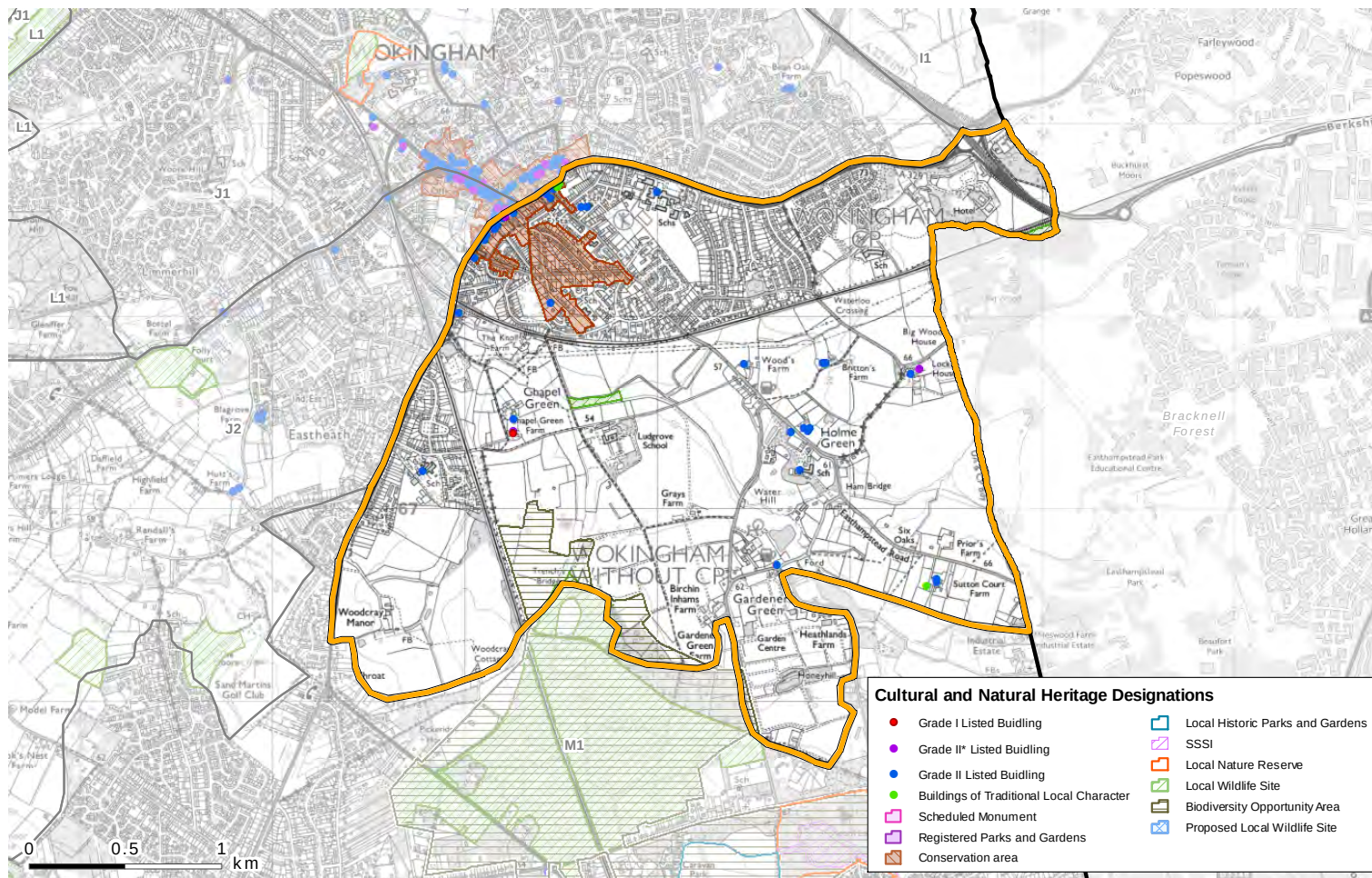
Landscape Guidelines

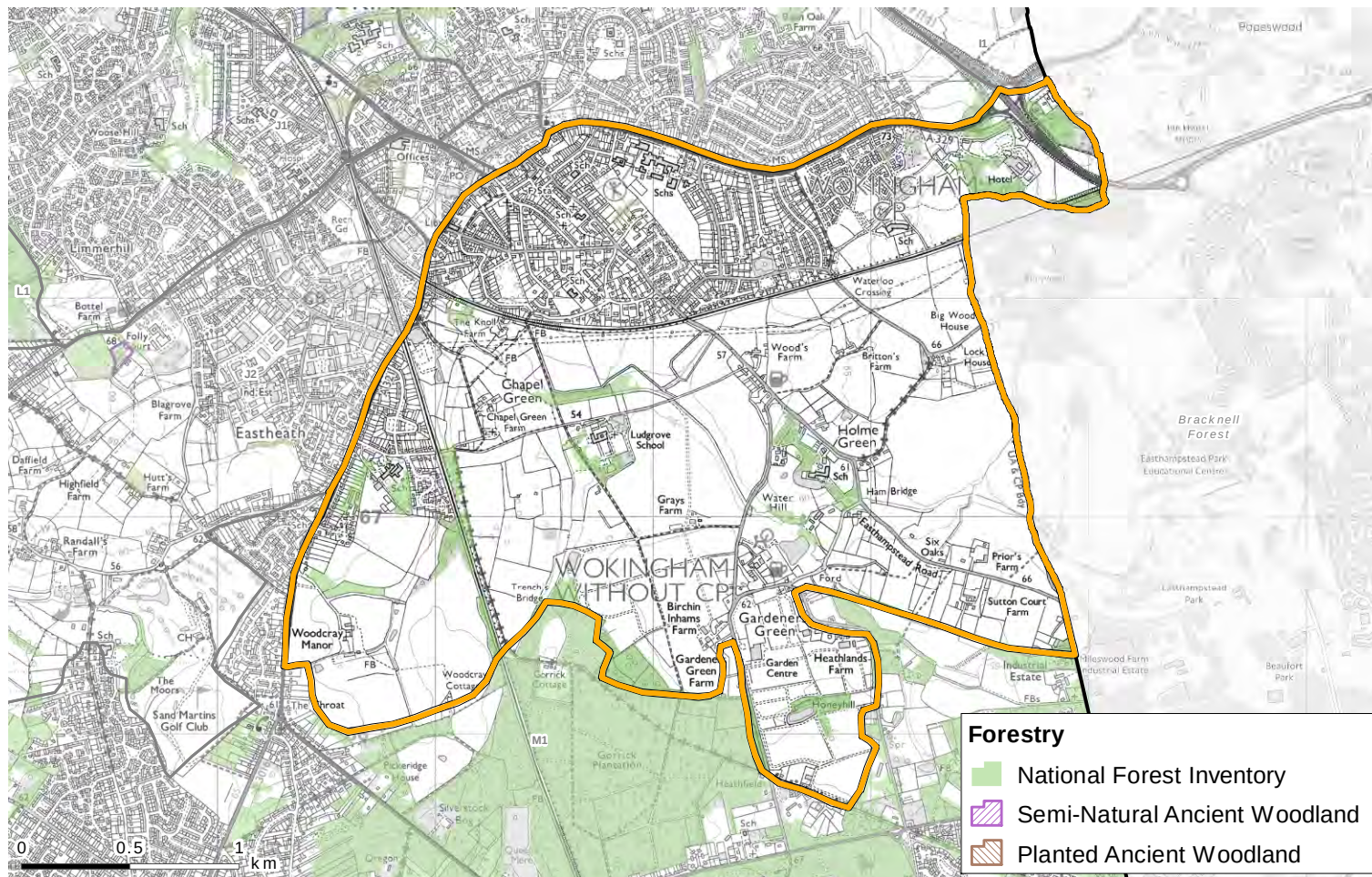
- Conserve and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features as

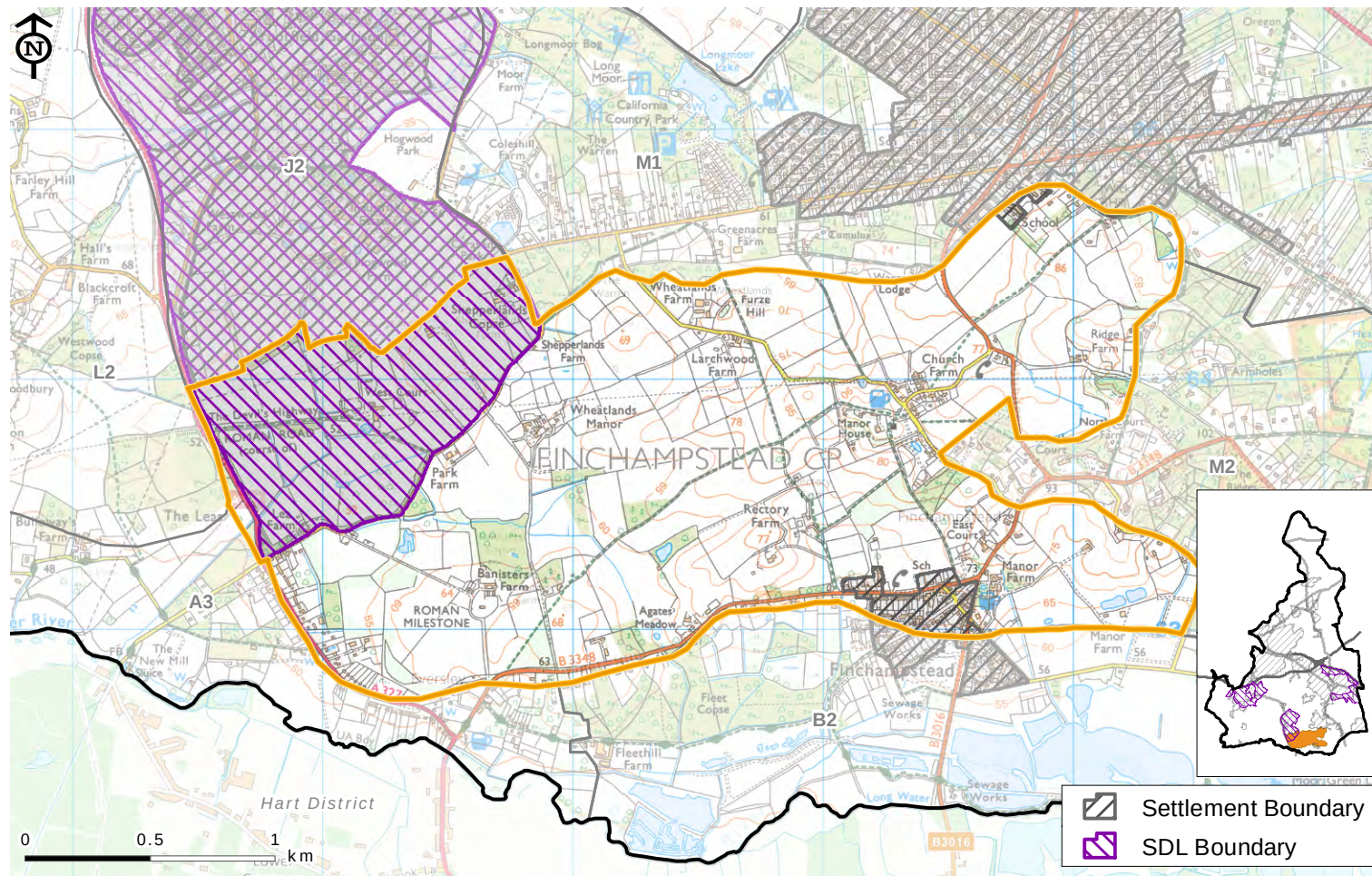
well as the links they provide across the landscape. Reinstate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides. Plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting.

- Conserve and protect pasture and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing. Consider re-creation of lost grassland habitats.
- Manage the integration of equine related activities, hobby farms and set aside into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows to enhance the visual and ecological quality of the landscape. Control any associated built elements.
- Minimise visual impact of agricultural polytunnels and commercial farm enterprises through careful siting and design. Minimise visual clutter including signage.
- Enhance the integration of existing and proposed urban edges through wooded boundaries, new hedgerows and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for Wokingham town.
- Conserve and enhance the wooded character along the small brooks and increase the extent of BAP priority habitat woodland using native species to create a more mixed woodland character and provide links to existing woodland habitats.
- Promote woodland creation, particularly in urban fringe areas of South Wokingham SDL to enhance landscape character and provide recreational potential.
- Conserve the rural character of the landscape between adjacent settlement clusters, to protect their individual identity, avoiding ribbon development. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land along the new settlement edge of South Wokingham SDL and undeveloped rural landscapes separating and defining Wokingham and Finchampstead.
- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting) to minimise the impacts of any new development on valuable attributes.
- Use appropriate tree and hedgerow planting to help integrate new and existing roads, particularly in relation to the South Wokingham Distributor Road and associated road and rail crossings.
- Enhance informal recreational enjoyment of the landscape, particularly in relation to Public Rights of Way connections to new residential areas.
- Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution through the sensitive siting of any new development, especially any proposed night-time lighting.









SUMMARY

A peaceful rural landscape characterised by gently to steeply undulating pastures rising to a gently undulating ridge. The area encompasses the picturesque village of Finchampstead, but otherwise settlement is sparse. Grand manor houses and scattered farmsteads often located along the ridgeline and enjoying views out over the river valley to the south are connected by narrow lanes bordered by grassy banks with roadside trees.

The Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland is located in the south of the borough, north of A3: Blackwater River Valley and B2: Blackwater River Valley with Open Water and set against the backdrop of M1: Finchampstead Settled and Forested Sands. The boundary to the south follows the edge of the Blackwater valley, defined approximately along the route of the B3348 and A327. To the east and north it is defined by the forested edge of the Forested and Settled Sands, except in the far northwest where it follows the edge of the Arborfield Garrison SDL.



Key Characteristics

- Gently to steeply undulating landform culminating in a locally prominent ridgeline to the east rising between 60m and 100m AOD, which bisects the area in an east-west direction.
- The varied underlying sandy geology including Bagshot Beds, Windlesham and Camberley Sand Formations with areas of flatter London Clay in the west has given rise to acidic sandy soils and a predominantly pastoral landscape.
- Many small drainage channels and roadside ditches as well as a scattering of small ponds due to the poorly draining soils in the west of the LCA.
- Pastoral landscape of open small or medium-sized fields with grazing horses and cattle divided by post and wire or post and rail fencing following a variety of enclosure patterns. Fields are sometimes subdivided into paddocks by horse tape.
- Wooded context created by scattered woodlands in combination with scrubby and overgrown shelterbelts and scattered remnant hedgerow trees (predominantly oak) enhanced by the adjoining wooded landscape of the Forested and Settled Sands (M1/ M2).
- Semi-natural habitats include scattered deciduous and mixed woodland and small areas of marshy grassland and wet meadow on lower slopes. Many are designated as LWS (Shepperlands Copse, Woodland near Banister Farm and East Court Woods). Banister Copse LWS is also an ancient woodland.
- The landscape provides a setting to archaeological remains of a Roman villa complex (Scheduled Monument) and the Grade I listed Norman church of St James, located on top of a prominent hill which stands on old Roman earthworks (designated as part of the Finchampstead Church Conservation Area).
- Coherent settlement pattern of grand manor houses and clustered farmsteads located in elevated positions, reached by narrow private roads and often following the former route of the Devil's Highway Roman Road which runs along the ridge. The historic buildings share a characteristic local vernacular of brick and dark timber-framed houses.
- Remnant parkland landscapes associated with grand manor houses (including Grade II listed West Court and East Court) and pattern of veteran trees and avenues.
- Dense network of public footpaths and bridleways connect to trails in the Blackwater Valley and Finchampstead Ridges.
- Winding rural roads and leafy sunken lanes enclosed by grassy banks with bracken, furze occasionally running through 'tunnels' created by the mature trees, typically ash, create a sense of enclosure and seclusion.
- A tranquil rural landscape with an experience of dark skies.
- 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.

Natural Landscape

- N2.1 The underlying geology is dominated by the varied sandy strata of the Bracklesham Group, comprising the clayey sands of the Bagshot Beds and in the east and centre of the area, the Windlesham and Camberley Sand Formations. These are locally overlain by gravely river terrace deposits including Eighth River Terrace at high elevations and First River Terrace at low elevations. Towards the west, London Clay strata are also present. The soils created by these strata are predominantly typical gley-podzol soils, which are sandy and nutrient-poor, being affected by poor drainage and waterlogging, and therefore of limited use to arable agriculture. These require drainage, locally giving rise to small drainage channels. A small divided tributary stream of the River Blackwater is present towards the west, but generally water in this landscape is low-key and dominated by the roadside drainage ditches and a scattering of small ponds associated with dwellings.
- N2.2 The topography of this landscape is distinctive comprising a gently undulating but prominent ridgeline at between 60m and 100m AOD, which bisects this area in a west-east direction connecting to the wooded ridge of M2: Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands. This slopes southwards to the adjoining Blackwater Valley and northwards to the forestry of M1: Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands.
- N2.3 The combination of the undulating landform and nutrient-poor soils have favoured pastoral over arable land uses. This has resulted in a peaceful landscape of fields subdivided into small and medium enclosures by timber and post and wire fencing with occasional overgrown shelterbelts and lines of remnant hedgerow trees, creating a rough and scrubby character. The fields are generally grazed by sheep or by horses, although there are also some used for cattle grazing.
- N2.4 The Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland is characterised by scattered woodlands within a landscape largely dominated by pastoral land uses. Within the fields there are also a number of small farm woods, which contain BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland. These combine with the shelterbelts (often poplar) and the adjoining wooded landscapes of the Settled and Forested Sands (M1/M2) to create a subtly wooded context throughout much of the area.
- N2.5 The woodlands are typically acid oak woodland with a ground layer composed of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), often with climbing corydalis (*Ceratocarpus claviculata*), which is a characteristic species of these acid woodland sites.
- N2.6 The character area contains three wooded sites designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). The Banister's Copse complex of woodland is partly of ancient origin and represents a slightly fragmented cluster of woodland blocks, recorded as BAP priority habitat wet woodland. In recent years woodland has been planted in this area, aiming to link existing patches together and creating a larger core area.

Cultural Landscape

- N2.7 The two round barrows located nearby at Warren Lodge (M1) suggests there may have been an expansion of settlement from the valleys onto these poorer sandy soils during the Bronze Age, leading to the early formation of heathland. An earthwork around the Norman church of St James, Finchampstead, is recorded on the first edition OS map as the site of a supposed camp.
- N2.8 Cropmarks at Wheatlands Manor indicate the presence of a large Roman villa complex, comprising at least three aisled buildings and other features. These are adjacent to the Roman road between London and Calleva (Silchester), known locally as the Devil's Highway. The line of the road is followed by the driveway of West Court, but is not visible in the rest of the area. In the late 13th century the original manor of Finchampstead was divided into two parts, East Court and West Court. West Court today is a late 17th century country house within landscape parkland.
- N2.9 Although Finchampstead was a Domesday settlement, and was granted a market in 1458, this area remained sparsely populated, being peripheral to the main routes of communication. Settlement consists of closely-spaced farms linked by country lanes. The large straight-sided fields flanking Common Field Lane, northwest of the village, probably date from the mid-19th

century enclosure of the Royal Forest of Windsor, although a number of less regular fields, and the boundaries of the surviving areas of woodland, suggest earlier assart and other voluntary enclosures. Within this area there are fragmented pockets of well-preserved enclosure/field systems.

- N2.10 The pleasant and topographically varied landscape has views of the Blackwater River Valley and adjoining forested landscapes. There is a dense network of footpaths and bridleways passing through the area and connecting to trails in the Blackwater Valley, Finchampstead Ridges and beyond.
- N2.11 The largest settlement in this area is Finchampstead, which falls partially within character area B2: Blackwater River Valley with Open Water. Finchampstead is an attractive nucleated settlement with a rural character and noticeable vernacular influences including dark timber-framed houses with white render and thatched roofs. Finchampstead has expanded out from its historic core with newer estate development with mock-vernacular character continuing into the Blackwater Valley. The Grade I listed Church of St James dating from the 12th century sits on a hilltop to the north of the village (designated as part of the Church of St James Conservation Area) and stands high on a mound with fine views to the south.
- N2.12 Elsewhere the settlement pattern is dominated by clustered farmsteads incorporating 'manorial' style buildings located on local high points and hills often also following the former route of the Devil's Highway Roman Road along the ridge. These include West Court, a 17th century brick house, which is reached by a tree-lined driveway that follows the Roman alignment; Church Farm; Manor House and the (appropriately named) Ridge Farm. Away from the route of the Devil's Highway are, to the south, Banister's Farm (also 17th century brick and incorporating a Roman Milestone), Agates Meadow and, to the north, Warren Lodge - a sprawling white painted building. Many of these buildings are reached by narrow private roads, which are in themselves important features of the character of the landscape. Elsewhere the road network is very rural comprising green lanes, sometimes sunken, and quiet B roads. The only sizable road is the A327 defining the western boundary of the area.
- N2.13 On-going development of a new village of up to 3,500 new homes on the site of the former military barracks at Arborfield Garrison (Arborfield Garrison SDL), mostly located in the J2: Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay, extends into the north of the character area. However, the area around West Court is currently allocated in the Local Plan as a proposed Nature Park or SANGS.

Perceptual Landscape

- N2.14 Overall the landscape appears generally peaceful with dark night skies, despite the proximity to Finchampstead and the ongoing development of Arborfield Garrison SDL.
- N2.15 There are expansive views across the surrounding lowlands of the Blackwater River valley (A3 and B2) and adjoining forested landscapes of the Finchampstead Ridges. These expansive views contrast with the wooded and enclosed character in other parts of the area.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Elevated ridgeline which provides a backdrop to the wider lowland landscape in the Blackwater Valley as well as expansive views out over the surrounding landscapes.
- Rural character of the pattern of pastoral fields interspersed with scattered woods and hedgerow oaks which provide visual diversity as well as continuity with the adjoining forested landscape of the Finchampstead Ridges.
- Scattered mixed and broadleaved woodland, including ancient woodland, and small wetland areas which provide valued ecological habitats including BAP priority habitats.
- Coherent settlement pattern of historic manors, farmsteads and the landmark church of St James located in elevated positions on the ridgeline, which provide a link with the

past.

- The historic edge-of-floodplain village of Finchampstead is well integrated into the landscape and provides a sense of time-depth.
- Remnant parkland landscapes with veteran trees associated with grand manor houses which have a localised impact on landscape character and contribute to sense of place.
- The network of winding sunken lanes and local footpaths which provide access to and enjoyment of the countryside.
- Peaceful and rural ambience with an experience of dark skies which provides an escape in close proximity to the urban population.
- The route of the Roman Road and associated archaeological features from that period which follow the topography of the ridgeline.

Landscape Condition

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.

Key Issues

- Hedgerow loss associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- The declining viability of livestock grazing is resulting in conversion to other land uses and loss of grassland habitats.
- Conversion to equestrian activities, particularly at settlement edges, leading to loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees and a decrease in rural intactness.
- Loss or changes in native deciduous woodland structure through decline in species diversity in the traditionally coppiced woodlands have occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Effect on tree health or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- 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.
- Drainage operations associated with development or agriculture altering ground water levels and affecting small wetland habitats.
- Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated borough.
- Pressure for large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure both inside and outside the area impacting on landscape character. Development of a new settlement at Arborfield Garrison SDL in adjoining LCA J2 and associated SANG extending into the north of the character area around West Court will impact the area.

- Increase in traffic on local roads, particularly in relation to the Arborfield Garrison development, leading to pressure for new roads or upgrading of existing roads with new signage, line painting and widening, impacting tranquillity and changing the existing character of the rural road network.
- Pressure for built development on the skyline leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the local landscape.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in this elevated landscape.
- This character area contains a reservoir of dark skies and light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the quiet rural character and dark skies.

The key aspects to be enhanced and actively managed are the hedgerow network and the woodland habitats.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the coherent pattern of settlement, and avoid the spread of urban built form including roads into the area.

Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve distinctive wooded ridgelines. Consider the impact of any development on skylines, where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive skylines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.
- Conserve and protect pasture and encourage appropriate restoration and management of grassland to restore lost grassland habitats.
- Manage the integration of equine related activities into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and other landscape planting and control of associated built elements.
- Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of woodlands as coppice, with standards left to form future timber trees. Consider opportunities for reinstatement of hedges, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides.
- Conserve and increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, including BAP priority habitats, using natural regeneration or by planting native species in order to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
- Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Restore, conserve and manage small wetland areas which provide valued habitats and seek to create new areas of wetland.
- Restore, conserve, enhance and manage parkland landscapes associated with history manor houses, planning for the next generation of parkland trees with a programme of tree planting.

- Enhance informal recreational enjoyment of the landscape. But ensure appropriate management of informal recreation to limit negative impacts on landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage, particularly in relation to the Rights of Way network.
- Conserve the rural character of dispersed ridgeline settlement to protect the individual identity of farmsteads and manors and conserve the scenic quality of the nucleated character of Finchampstead through the control of development.
- Integrate new development of the Arborfield Garrison SDL into the landscape through wooded boundaries and tree planting to provide a positive interface between the settlement edge and the rural area. In particular protect the sensitive areas of woodland adjacent to West Court in the west of the area.
- 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.
- Maintain and enhance the character and tranquillity of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage through the use of traffic calming and access restrictions. This would also make the use of rural roads more attractive for cyclists and recreational users.
- Protect the expansive views to the Blackwater Valley and Finchampstead Ridges, including resisting proposals that would introduce extensive or obtrusive elements e.g. pylons on the visually sensitive landscape.
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity in the landscape, including the **experience of 'dark skies'**, through the management of development.

