



March 2004

# Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment

## Final Report



Prepared on behalf of  
Wokingham District Council  
by Land Use Consultants



WOKINGHAM DISTRICT LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Final Report

Prepared for Wokingham District Council

by

Land Use Consultants

March 2004

43 Charlton Street

London NW1 1JD

Tel: 020 7383 5784

Fax: 020 7383 4798

[luc@london.landuse.co.uk](mailto:luc@london.landuse.co.uk)

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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## THE WOKINGHAM LANDSCAPE

- 1.1. The district of Wokingham is located in the heart of the Royal County of Berkshire some 30 miles west of London, falling between the urban areas of Reading and Bracknell. The area administered by the District Authority covers 17,892 hectares and has a population of 143,085 people, concentrated in the main urban centres of Woodley and Earley, the historic market town of Wokingham and in numerous smaller rural villages such as Sonning and Wargrave. The location and context of the study area are shown on **Figure 1**.
- 1.2. The Wokingham district landscape is considerably varied, an observation illustrated by the fact that three of the Countryside Agency/English Nature's joint Character Areas cover the district: *Areas 110: Chilterns; 115: Thames Valley and 129: Thames Basin Heaths* (shown in **Figure 2**). These provide a broad indication of the diversity of the district's landscapes, which range from elevated chalk plateaux to open and settled clay farmlands and wooded hills to coniferous plantations and heaths. The District is unified by the interlinked system of attractive lowland river valleys – the Thames, Loddon and Blackwater.

## WOKINGHAM DISTRICT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- 1.3. Landscape character assessment is a technique that has been developed to facilitate systematic analysis, description and classification of the landscape. It involves identification of those features or combinations of elements that contribute to the character of the landscape, thereby enabling the special character and qualities of a particular area to be understood. This information allows reasoned consideration of those issues affecting the landscape, which can be used as a basis for the development of appropriate recommendations for future landscape conservation and management.

- 1.4. There are many reasons for undertaking this character assessment. The main purpose is to document the current status of the District's landscape. It is anticipated that this will:
- (a) Help further the understanding of the landscape resource available in the District.
  - (b) Assist in the development and refinement of policies within the Local Plan and provide the basis for strategic planning.
  - (c) Assist in the development control response by providing a more informed response to development proposals affecting the landscape.
  - (d) Provide an objective basis for and contribute to a future Quality of Life analysis required to secure the Thames Valley as a World Class Economic Region.
  - (e) To provide an objective basis for the preparation of Village Design Statements and other future studies.
  - (f) Enable better-informed decisions to be made on the future management of the landscape.

## ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

- 1.5. The method for undertaking the landscape character assessment follows the current accepted method promoted by the Countryside Agency as set out in the document *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland* (2002).
- 1.6. The District-wide assessment has been prepared within the framework of the Countryside Agency and English Nature's Countryside Character Initiative as shown on the *Character of England Map* and it also considers the context provided by the Agency's emerging *National Landscape Typology* and the county-scale *Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment* (final report 2003), undertaken on behalf of the Berkshire Joint Strategic Planning Unit. The assessment also builds upon the Local Authority scale assessments of the adjacent districts (where these have been undertaken and have been published).



- 1.7. The process for undertaking the study involved five main stages, described below, namely:
- Data Collation
  - Characterisation
  - Field survey
  - Evaluation
  - Consultation
- 1.8. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was used throughout the study as the tool for collating, manipulating and presenting data.

### Data Collation

- 1.9. **Baseline Data:** This stage involved the collation and mapping of a wide range of existing information on the characteristics of Wokingham District from a variety of sources including baseline maps of geology, topography, soils and hydrology; schedules of designated and protected areas and features; and a review of technical literature including Environment Agency information, English Nature's Natural Area Profiles etc. It also included collation of information relating to the 'perceptual' characteristics of the landscape, such as literary references or as a source of artistic inspiration.
- 1.10. **Scoping Inquiry:** A scoping inquiry to key communities of interest was made requesting information relevant to the study.
- 1.11. **National Context:** The context provided by the framework of the three joint Character Areas and the emerging national Landscape Typology was reviewed and boundaries mapped to place the county in the context of the national hierarchy. **Figure 2** indicates the National Character Area Context.
- 1.12. **County Context:** The context provided by the *Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment*, undertaken by the Berkshire Joint Strategic Planning Unit (2003) was also considered as the context for the district assessment. **Figure 2** also illustrates the County context.

- 1.13. **Local Context:** Existing local character assessments including the *Wokingham Historic Landscape Survey* and studies undertaken in adjacent districts and counties were reviewed and their boundaries mapped: *Draft Bracknell Forest Borough Landscape Character Assessment*, *Newbury District-Wide Landscape Assessment*, *The Landscape Strategy for Buckinghamshire*, and *Hart District Landscape Character Assessment*.

### Characterisation

- 1.14. The process of characterisation drew together all the information outlined above, to develop a draft classification. The approach follows best practice as promoted by the Countryside Agency in the *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland* (2002) in maintaining a distinction between landscape types and character areas, and developing a hierarchical approach as follows:
- **Landscape Types** – which are generic and share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences, e.g. ‘River Valley’ or ‘Wooded Chalk Slopes’;
  - **Character Areas** – which are single and unique, discrete geographical areas of the landscape type, e.g. ‘Thames River Valley’ or ‘Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes’.
- 1.15. For the purposes of this District-wide assessment emphasis has been placed upon the definition and subdivision of the landscape at a scale of 1:25 000 and at the Landscape Character Area scale i.e. the identification of particular geographical areas of distinctive landscape. The Landscape Types are a refinement and subdivision of the Landscape Types identified within Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, which were defined at a coarser (1:50 000).
- 1.16. The classification was informed by specialist studies, including an outline appraisal of the historic character of the landscape undertaken by Wessex Archaeology and tailored ecological studies. The emphasis has been on the integration of this information within the landscape character assessment.

- 1.17. The study specifically **excluded** an analysis of the area within development limits. Therefore, although the smaller villages *were* considered as a part of a wider landscape context and character, no specific townscape or urban character assessments were undertaken of the more built-up areas such as Wokingham. Twyford, Woodley and Earley.

### Survey

- 1.18. A field survey was undertaken to appraise the draft characterisation. This specifically focussed on:
- verification and fine-tuning of the classification of the landscape character areas (and types) identified;
  - making refinements to landscape character area (and type) boundaries and names;
  - recording landscape character,
  - assessing condition, key trends and forces for change.
- 1.19. A systematic and rigorous approach was adopted for the survey, with information recorded on 1:25,000 scale maps and a Field Record Sheet: see Appendix 1. A comprehensive photo record was also made. The final classification encompasses fifteen landscape types, including a total of thirty character area subdivisions. This level of classification is considered to be sufficiently detailed to meet the objectives of the study outlined in 1.4 above.
- 1.20. **A note on boundary lines:** The precision of boundaries drawn around landscape character areas and types varies with the scale and level of detail of the assessment. This assessment has been mapped at a scale of 1:25,000 which means that it is suitable for use at this scale.
- 1.21. In reality landscape character rarely changes abruptly and the boundaries indicated in the Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment therefore frequently represent zones of transition in character relating to changes in topography, geology soils, cultural patterns, land use etc. rather than marked changes on the ground. For example the boundary between *Arborfield River Terrace* (C1) and

*Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay (J1)* is a more gradual change on the ground than the boundary on the character map may suggest. In practice such boundaries of this nature have frequently been drawn to follow physical or mappable features such as roads, lanes or field boundaries which provide ‘best fit’, for example between *Grazeley Open Clay Lowland (I3)* and *Spencers Wood Farmed and Settled Clay (J3)* which follow the line of the A33.

- 1.22. However, there are exceptions where the transition between character areas is relatively abrupt, for example where an obvious change in landform and landcover marks the division between the alluvial floodplain of the *Thames River Valley (Area A1)* and the sloping chalk of the adjacent *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes (Area D1)*.
- 1.23. **A note on character areas:** Character Types and Areas have been mapped at a scale of 1:25,000 and are suitable for use at this scale.
- 1.25. The Character Areas share generic characteristics with other areas of the same Landscape Type but have a particular ‘sense of place’. Therefore Character Areas defined and described in this report have distinct patterns of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field pattern etc. which contribute to their particular character. However, it is important to be aware that Character Areas are not homogeneous and that there is variation within them, for example an area of parkland found within a character area would have different characteristics to, say, an adjoining pastoral field but the Character Area overall may be unified by the presence of a number of parklands set within pastoral fields or a distinctive landform.
- 1.26. **A note on built areas:** This is an assessment of the rural landscape. The land within the development limits of villages and settlements was not studied in detail as part of the LCA. The smaller villages have been considered and form part of the description on landscape character. However, no specific townscape or urban character assessments were undertaken of the more built-up areas such as Wokingham, Twyford, Woodley and Earley and where these occur within the boundaries of Character Areas it is the undeveloped area surrounding the settlement to which the description is referring. This



applies particularly to character areas of Landscape Type J: Farmed and Settled Clay where the urban area and areas of open land (parks and gardens) are discussed only in relation to wider landscape character.

- 1.27. For similar reasons Character Area boundary lines which cross the settlement areas (such as within Character Area J1) are indicative and intended only to distinguish the character areas outside the settlement and are not intended to suggest any change in character within the developed area. It is suggested that this landscape character assessment could provide the framework for a more detailed townscape assessment within the 'urban' areas.

## Method for the Evaluation

### *Introduction*

- 1.28. There is no current accepted methodology for evaluating Landscape Character. As the Countryside Agency's Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland states '*The use of Landscape Character Assessment in making judgements is a fast-moving scene amongst practitioners*'. The approach for the evaluation undertaken as part of the Wokingham District LCA aims to follow current best practice and is set out below.
- 1.29. The purposes of the Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment Evaluation are to assist in the development control response by providing a more informed response to development proposals affecting the landscape and to provide the basis for strategic landscape planning and management. In order to achieve these aims the evaluation needs to develop judgements on:
  1. the **quality** of the landscape
  2. an overall guiding **landscape strategy**
  3. the **sensitivity** of the landscape
  4. the ongoing processes that are/will affect the future landscape and **recommendations for managing change**.

1.30. Evaluation involves making professional judgements and considering the views of stakeholders about what is important about a landscape. The evaluation methodology adopted for Wokingham District comprises a series of working tables which indicate the factors that are important to each of the landscape character areas identified. The conclusions have been summarised for presentation in the report. The logic, terminology (as set out by the Countryside Agency guidance, where possible) and rationale behind the evaluation in this assessment are set out below.

1.31. The judgements draw on the following:

- ***Strength of Character:*** A description of how the combination of individual landscape components and create a distinctive sense of place. Strength of character is determined by judging how a distinct and recognisable is the pattern of elements that define the character of the landscape. This includes the combination of physical and cultural attributes and the sense of place that they evoke. It is defined on a three-point scale of weak, moderate or strong.
- ***Condition:*** A description of how the condition and intactness of the different components create a perception of the overall condition of the landscape. It is defined on a three-point scale of poor, moderate or good.

### **Landscape Quality**

1.32. This statement is a judgement about the overall physical state of the landscape and its intactness from a visual, functional and ecological perspective reflecting the state of repair of individual characteristics. This is based upon the combination of the overall strength of character and overall condition. Landscape Quality is defined on a three-point scale.

**High Quality** – The landscape has a strong character with most individual elements in good condition and overall it is considered to be in a good condition.

**Moderate Quality** – The landscape has a strong character with some elements considered to require improvement/enhancement in terms of condition, or is defined as moderate strength of character although generally in good condition.

**Poor Quality** – The landscape is of weak or moderate character with many of the elements in poor condition with considerable opportunities to strengthen character and enhance condition.

### Landscape Strategy

- 1.33. The following table is used to determine an overall landscape strategy for the character area. It is based on a consideration of strength of character and condition.

<i>Condition</i>	Good	Enhance	Conserve and Enhance	Conserve
	Moderate	Enhance/Renew with some opportunities to Create	Enhance	Conserve and Enhance
	Poor	Renew/Create	Enhance	Enhance
		Weak	Moderate	Strong
<i>Strength of Character</i>				

- 1.34. The strategy is presented for the character area as a whole and identifies any particular management needs for specific elements. These are developed further in the guidelines. The aim is not just to give a blunt prescription for the whole area, but to identify the specific features to which the strategy applies. The aim is to set out broad principles to manage and direct landscape change for example in order to protect the highest quality and most sensitive landscapes from adverse change and to encourage positive change in weak or degraded landscapes. The strategy objectives are combinations of different aims ranging from managing the current landscape (conservation) to encouraging positive change (creation). The objectives are illustrated in the box below.

### **Landscape Strategies**

**Conserve:** Landscapes of strong character in good condition and therefore judged to be of high quality where emphasis should be on conservation of existing character and of particular features that contribute to this character. The aim should be to continue the current management regime/adopt best practice approaches. Great care will need to be taken in the introduction of new characteristics.

**Enhance:** Landscape character is strong/positive but becoming weakened and individual features may have suffered decline or damage. Within these landscapes the emphasis should be on restoring elements that have been lost or declined and on enhancing character. This may include improvements to landscape management practices and the introduction of positive new elements or features.

**Renew/Create:** Landscape character is weak and is not highly valued and its condition is declining/poor. Here the objective is to form a new and different landscape or accelerate change towards a new character with positive benefits for people and the environment. This should be proactive rather than reactive and it may be appropriate to develop plans or strategies in consultation with stakeholders to determine appropriate new character.

### **Landscape Sensitivity**

- 1.35. An overall judgement on the inherent sensitivity of the landscape is made for each character area. Sensitivity is determined on a three point scale of High, Moderate or Low. This reflects the sensitivity of the individual elements that contribute to character and their condition, plus any particular visual sensitivities of the character area or key features, for example relating to scale, degree of enclosure (landform and tree cover) and the potential visibility of change.
- 1.36. It includes judgements on:
- Recreatability:*** how 're-creatable' a landscape component would be if it was to be lost (due to changes in management or development



pressure). This is intended to be a pragmatic measure based upon a realistic time scale (short to medium-term).

***Scale of Importance:*** A judgment as to the significance of a component based upon concepts of rarity/'enoughness' and, where appropriate, policy guidance and designations.

***Sensitivity of landscape component:*** A judgement of how sensitive or vulnerable a landscape component is to any change in management or development based upon an understanding of its recreatability and scale/nature of importance.

- 1.37. It should be noted that the overall judgement of inherent landscape sensitivity is not the same as **capacity** to accommodate any specific type of change.

### **The Changing Landscape: Key Issues**

- 1.38. The purpose of this section is to identify the factors affecting landscape change (or likely to do so in the future) and to determine appropriate landscape guidelines for managing change to help ensure that local character is conserved and enhanced. It is not intended to provide an implementation strategy.

***Change:*** These are both positive and negative forces for change that are known to or have potential to act on the landscape, including agricultural management issues, policy and development pressures. The list has been determined in discussion with the client and stakeholders.

***Landscape Guidelines:*** For each character area a set of guidelines has been developed based upon the changes identified. The guidelines indicate the actions required, with reference to the overall landscape objective in order to ensure that distinctive character is maintained.

## **CONSULTATION**

- 1.39. The study involved extensive consultation to test and verify the results. As recommended by the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance (Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage 2002), the consultation procedure addressed both **Communities of Interest** and **Communities of Place**.

### ***Stage 1 Consultation: Communities of Interest***

- 1.40. Communities of interest are defined as those groups that have an interest in the landscape including government departments, statutory agencies, adjoining local authorities, and local interest groups notably environmental groups and landowner or farming organisations. A wide ranging list of organisations with an interest in the Wokingham landscape (Appendix 2a) was drawn up at the outset of the study and these were contacted to inform them of the landscape assessment and request relevant baseline data to feed into the characterisation process. On completion of the draft report (June 2003) an electronic copy was forwarded to these stakeholders. Modifications and additions suggested by the consultation exercise were incorporated into the report.

### ***Stage 2 Consultation: Communities of Place***

- 1.41. Communities of place are defined as groups or individuals who live or work in a particular area or visit it. They are predominantly local residents and are able to contribute considerable local detail and nuance. The Second Stage Consultation was directly overseen and administrated by Wokingham District Council and involved two linked processes – a workshop and wide ranging internet and hardcopy consultation.
- 1.42. **Workshop:** A workshop was held on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2003. It was facilitated by Wokingham District Council, Land Use Consultants and the Community Council for Berkshire. Participants at the workshop were invited from lists of consultees held by the council with the aim of obtaining wide stakeholder consultation representing different interests and covering the geographic area of the district. The purpose of the consultation workshop was to:
- provide an outline of the study and the work undertaken to date;
  - allow discussion on the draft landscape classification;
  - enable local people to say what they consider to be important about their area and why;
  - understand current issues and suggest suitable management objectives and guidelines.

- 1.43. The workshop was attended by a total of 20 participants (Appendix 2b) representing local residents and local organisations with an interest in the landscape. All participants were sent information on the draft landscape character assessment in advance of the workshop. The event took the form of presentations followed by a series of participatory exercises to validate the results of the study and provide local insight and detail. The information was recorded and presented to Wokingham District Council as a 'Report on the Stakeholder Workshop' June 2003. The information was reviewed and incorporated into the final document. In some cases a wealth of local information emerged, which would be particularly relevant to a detailed study such as a Village Design Statement. It is strongly recommended that such local level studies are undertaken within the framework of the District landscape character assessment.
- 1.44. **Internet/Hard Copy Consultation:** The workshop formed part of a wider consultation by internet in which the full document was available for viewing and comment over the Wokingham District Council website for a six week period ending on 4<sup>th</sup> August. Over the same period hard copies of the document were placed –'on deposit' at local libraries and the council offices. CD copies were available from the District Council on request. The opportunity for making comments was widely publicised. Forms for providing individual responses to the report were provided. The process was administered by WDC.
- 1.45. The results of the internet and hard copy consultation were reviewed by the District Council and passed to LUC in Mid October 2003. In total, comments were received from 13 individuals and organisations (Appendix 2c). A report providing a summary of responses was prepared by LUC 'Report of Internet and Hard Copy Consultation Comments and Suggested Report Modifications' November 2003. It sets out clearly how comments have been taken on board and the recommended changes to the report.
- 1.46. The final Wokingham District landscape character assessment report therefore includes changes, additions and amendments suggested through the first and second stage consultations. It is considered

that these changes strengthen the report and contribute considerable local knowledge and detail.

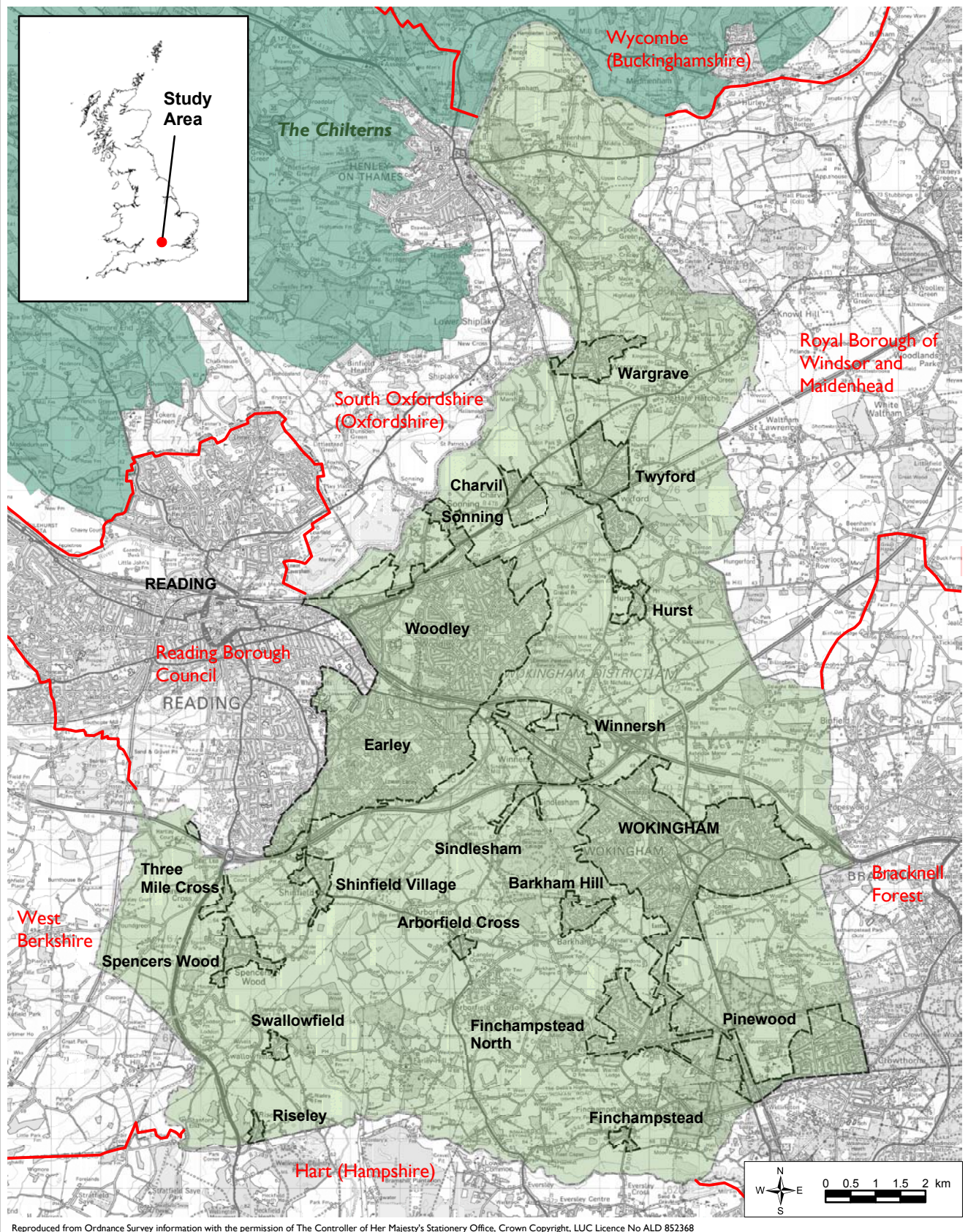
## STRUCTURE OF THIS DOCUMENT

1.47. This report presents the findings of the landscape character assessment. The report is structured as follows:

**Part 1: Overview:** Establishes the factors that have influenced the character of the district as a whole, including physical, cultural and ecological characteristics.

**Part 2: The Character of the Wokingham Landscape:** This is the main body of the report and contains the detailed landscape type and character area **descriptions**. Each description is followed by an **evaluation** which presents the judgements on landscape quality and landscape sensitivity. It concludes with an overall landscape strategy and **management guidelines**.





## Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment

**Figure 1.0:  
Location and Context**

### Key

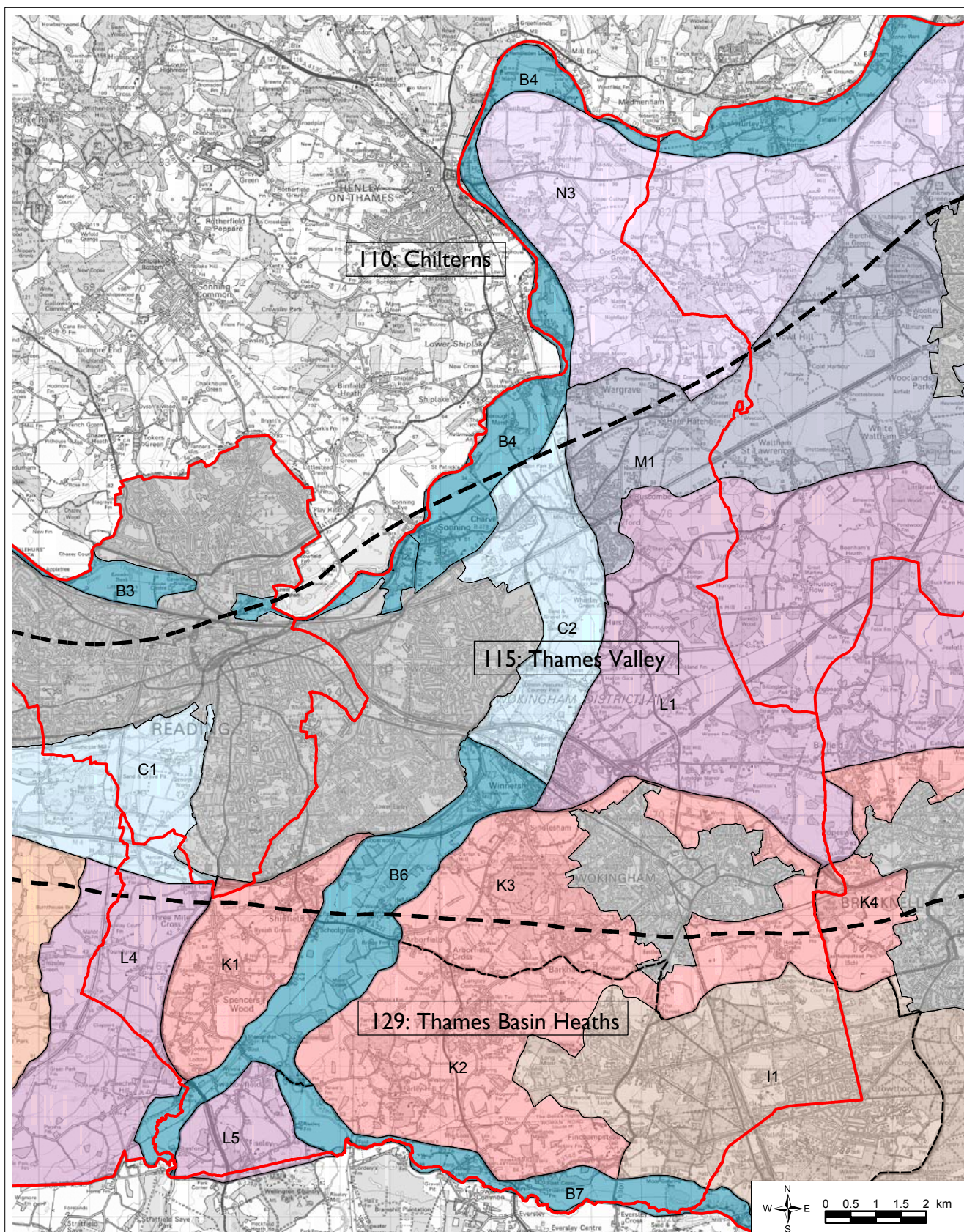
- County/District boundaries
- Wokingham District Council
- Chilterns AONB
- Settled areas (not included in the assessment)

Source: Wokingham District Council

LAND USE CONSULTANTS  
43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
Ph: 020 7383 5784  
Fax: 020 7383 4798  
Luc@london.landuse.co.uk







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## Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment

**Figure 2.0:**  
Character Area Context

LAND USE CONSULTANTS  
43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
Ph: 020 7383 5784  
Fax: 020 7383 4798  
Luc@london.landuse.co.uk



### Key

**I10:** National Character Areas

*Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2004)*

**B:** Lower River Floodplain

B3 - Reading Thames  
B4 - Hurley Thames  
B6 - Lower Loddon  
B7 - Blackwater

**C:** Lower River with Open Water

C1 - Kennet  
C2 - Loddon

**I:** Forested Sands

I1 - Crowthorne

**K:** Settled Farmlands

K1 - Spencers Wood  
K2 - Arborfield  
K3 - Wokingham  
K4 - Bracknell

**L:** Open Clay Lowlands

L1 - Shurlock Row  
L4 - Grazeley  
L5 - Riseley

**M:** Open Chalk Lowland

M1 - Waltham

**N:** Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes

N3 - Cookham Dean

**Urban Areas (not assessed)**

**District boundary**

## PART 1

### OVERVIEW

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## 2 EVOLUTION OF THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE

---

### INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The landscape of Wokingham is a product of the multitude of physical and human influences that have, over vastly different time-scales, acted upon it. In order to understand how and why the varied character of the modern landscape has arisen it is necessary to explore those conditions which have affected its form, patterns of land use and ecological character, ranging from the basic underlying geological characteristics of the land and the natural processes which have acted upon it to historical and more recent activities of humans.

### PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

- 2.2 The physical components of and influences upon the landscape are the most tangible elements of its character, being the most permanent and fundamental aspect of its outwards appearance. The underlying geology is the skeleton upon which later influences are overlain. The qualities of the geological substrate affect the nature and consequences of weathering, erosion and deposition, in turn influencing the landform, hydrological patterns and the range of soil conditions created. These patterns provide the template for human activities, for example determining the most appropriate locations for agriculture, settlement or mineral extraction.

#### Geology and Landform

For simplicity the description of the geology of the district has been broken up into the three principal geological phases with their associated formations. However, it must be recognised that this is for clarity and, in fact, the nature of the geology is considerably more complex than this overview may imply.

See **Figure 3: Simplified Geology** and **Figure 4: Simplified Topography**

*The Chalk Landscapes: Upper Cretaceous (65–97 million years Before Present)*

Principal deposits:

*Chalk Group* – marine coccolith rich limestone (chalk)

- 2.3 The geology of Wokingham district is relatively young (in geological terms) being dominated by drift deposits of the Palaeogene and Quaternary Systems with fewer outcrops of the underlying older Cretaceous Systems. Beneath these systems are the older concealed strata of the Palaeozoic comprising principally Middle and Upper Devonian ‘basement’ rocks. The oldest surface geology of Wokingham district is that of the Upper Cretaceous.
- 2.4 The greatest influences of the Cretaceous system are found in the north of the district where a large outcrop and separate smaller band of **Upper Chalk** some 100m thick occur. These have their origin in the deposition of pure calcareous seabed (pelagic) deposits within a sea created by the rising water levels across Europe during the Late Cretaceous period over an area known as the London Platform. Within the chalk seams of flints have also formed– translucent grey or black silica nodules created by the pressure of the overlying seas. The chalk outcrops within Wokingham are now isolated from the larger contemporary strata to the north and east, which form the basis of the Chiltern Hills and the Berkshire Downs, by the Thames Valley.
- 2.5 Despite much of the chalk being subsequently overlain by Palaeogene and drift deposits the landscapes created by the Upper Chalk are very distinctive occurring at higher elevations than most other strata of the district and also providing the basis for some of the most topographically distinct landforms including steep scarp slopes, combe valleys and knolls. The elevated landform is attributable to stresses placed upon the chalk during the Alpine tectonic phase of the Palaeogene during which time uplifting of the chalk strata led to the creation of dry land, leading to the recession of the sea and the end of marine geological formations. The area also underwent considerable folding at this time to form the **London Basin** syncline,

resulting in the differential raising of certain chalk strata above the surrounding landscape: it is these areas that today remain visible as chalk hills and downland.

- 2.6 Local variation within the chalk topography has occurred due to differential erosion and deposition in later geological phases. These included the formation of localised incised combe valleys in the chalk slopes by the action of permafrost impeding free drainage during the glacial episodes of the later Quaternary period.

***The Clay and Sand Landscapes: Palaeogene (23–65 million years BP)***

Principal deposits:

*Lambeth Group* – Shallow marine sand; fluvial and estuarine mud and sand.

*Thames Group* – London Clay – marine mudstone

*Bagshot Formation* – Barton Beds and Bracklesham Beds – mainly alluvial sands.

- 2.7 Much of Wokingham District lies within the central part of the London Basin and its geology is therefore strongly influenced by the deposition of river-borne (fluvial) material in freshwater and brackish conditions, including the sand and mudstone deposits formed during the Palaeogene.
- 2.8 The oldest formation is the **Lambeth Group**. This is dominated by the mottled sandy clays known as the Reading Beds, which are around 10m thick, and comprise mottled clays with some fine to medium-grained sands laid down in marshy mudflats crossed by rivers. There are also some thinner beds dominated by fine to medium sand and pebbly/flinty beds.
- 2.9 The thickest and most widespread of the mudstone formations in Wokingham is the Thames Group of which the predominant member is the **London Clay**. This occupies a broad band across the centre of the district, commonly of around 100m deep. These undivided brown to dark blue/grey silty mudstones, including localised areas of fine-grained sands and pebble beds, were deposited in an inland sea



created by the considerable raising of sea levels during the Mid-Palaeogene leading to the flooding the London Basin (to up to 200m in depth). Due to its method of deposition the clay landscape is relatively flat. It has historically been an important source of London brick for construction, although most important Brickworks were located outside of Wokingham District.

- 2.10 The London Clay is overlain in the south east of the county by the relatively much thinner Bagshot (or Bracklesham Formation), which was deposited in shallow marine or possibly estuarine conditions. This comprises the **Bagshot Beds, Camberley and Windlesham Formations**. These are dominated by a thin and fine-grained orange or pale yellow sand inter-bedded with thin layers of pale grey clays.

***Neogene (1.64–23 million years BP)***

Principal deposits:

Red Crag and Norwich Crag – Not present in Wokingham District.

- 2.11 Following the deposition of the Bagshot, Windlesham and Camberley Sand Formations there was a fall in sea level. At this time the sea level receded to the east of the Wokingham area and therefore no deposition occurred in this period and no new formations were formed, although fluvial erosion and deposition would have continued to sculpt the landscape.

***Quaternary: Pleistocene (0.01–1.64 million years BP)***

Principal deposits:

River terrace sand and gravel; glacial till, sand and gravel; slope deposits, Clay-with flints, loess.

- 2.12 The Quaternary Period including the Pleistocene or ‘ice age’ was a period of considerable change. Glaciers located at distance to the north of the district led to deposition of materials by glacial and fluvial processes. As a result the river courses established by earlier uplifts were changed resulting in the establishment of the modern river system. Most significant in this respect within Wokingham was the creation of the Thames valley with its tributaries including the

rivers Loddon and Blackwater. The movement of the Thames from its original course is thought to have been due to the damming of the original valley by a glacier. As the river courses cut down and changed locations a series of river terraces were formed representing the original ancient floodplain levels and relating to the cycle of glacial episodes. In total eight different **River Terrace Deposits** are represented within Wokingham with the oldest eighth river terrace occurring in the most elevated location to the south east of the district.

- 2.13 The river terraces commonly comprise gravel and sands generally no more than a few metres thick and influenced by the underlying strata. Their composition reflects the geology of their watershed with ‘flint with chert’ gravels common in the Loddon and Blackwater Valleys and ‘flint with limestone’ prevalent in the Thames Valley – the latter relating to the chalkier outcrops of the contemporary Chilterns and Berkshire Downs. They are coarse deposits – the finer materials removed during transportation. These are often extracted for use as aggregates in the construction industry.
- 2.14 Also at this time the periglacial Head of the ‘**Clay-with-Flints**’ groups, found capping the high chalk in the north of the district, were formed. These are the insoluble weathered remains of the chalk into which Palaeogene sediments have been mixed resulting in variably sandy and silty reddish brown clay with abundant flint pebbles.

***Quaternary: Holocene (present–0.01 million years BP)***

Principal deposits:

Alluvium, hillwash, tufa, peat, coastal and estuarine sand and mud.

- 2.15 The youngest of the Quaternary deposits were formed during the Holocene epoch of the last 10,000 years. These are the **alluvium** and other fluvial materials formed on the river floodplains principally comprising silt and clay and with seams of sand and gravel. Human activity in the form of clearance of woodland and cultivation of the uplands during the Neolithic Iron Age and Roman period resulted in hillwash, which led to increased sedimentation in the river valleys.



## HYDROLOGY

See Figure 5: Simplified Hydrology

- 2.16 The current river systems were, as described above, established during glacial episodes some 300,000 years ago. The main drainage pattern is from south to north, connecting with the main river valley – the Thames Valley – draining from west to east. The **River Thames** is the largest river of Wokingham District with a wide flat floodplain, defined to the north by the steep slopes of The Chilterns and to the South by the chalk slopes around Remenham and Sonning respectively creating a distinctive valley landscape defining the northern boundary of the district.
- 2.17 The Thames is joined by a number of tributaries including the **River Loddon**, which is a significant river its own right and has its own tributary river – the **Blackwater River/Broadwater** – that defines the southern district boundary. The watershed of the Loddon includes a network of numerous small tributary streams set within very shallow ‘valleys’. These include (from north to south of the district) Twyford Brook; Billingbear Brook; Emm Brook, with its tributaries Ashridge Brook, Waterloo Road Stream and Queens Brook; and Barkham Brook.
- 2.18 The Foudry Brook in the west of the district drains into the Kennet Valley – the former headwater of the Thames, which today is a tributary of the Thames. The Kennet does not fall within Wokingham District.
- 2.19 Where the River Loddon joins the River Thames, the floodplain widens exhibiting an expansive character accommodating the branching of the River Thames forming St Patrick’s Stream, west of Wargrave. To the north of Wargrave, the floodplain dramatically pinches and at this point the Thames splits forming the Hennerton Backwater – sandwiching the low-lying island of Wargrave Marsh.

## SOILS AND AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITY

See Figure 6: Simplified Soils

- 2.20 The soil type and conditions strongly relate to the nature of the underlying geology and drift deposits and the influences of

hydrology, such as the susceptibility to seasonal waterlogging in river valleys. This in turn affects the land use potential and intensity and type of land use and its subsequent ability to support different assemblages of natural vegetation.

- 2.21 There are six basic soil groups within Wokingham, which can be loosely related to the geology. These are as follows:

***Argillic Brown Earths:*** These are found associated with the outcrops of chalk in the north of the district around Remenham and associated areas including the Thames Valley. Within this group there are divisions recognising the nature of the underlying substrate between: well-drained fine or coarse loamy soils, locally stony and shallow, in Head over river gravel, associated with slowly permeable clayey alluvial soils affected by high groundwater and occasional short term floods; and, similar, well-drained, flinty, fine or coarse loamy soils over chalky head or chalk associated with calcareous moderately deep fine or coarse loamy soils in chalky Head and shallow fine silty soils over chalk. These tend to be given a grade 2 and 3 agricultural land classification with localised areas of grade 4 associated with the river corridor. Consequently they are used for pastoral grassland or broadleaf forestry (particularly the steepest lowest grade or frequently flooded land) and arable farmland.

***Podzols/Brown Sands:*** These are found in a very small area associated with the terraces and sands located around Farley Hill in the south of the district. These soils are well-drained, stony sandy soils, commonly with a subsurface pan, in river terrace gravel associated with slowly permeable loamy over clayey soils in Head over Palaeogene clay and occasionally with moderately well drained loamy soils affected by high groundwater. These are of low agricultural land classification – grade 4 – and therefore support pasture and woodland/forestry including coniferous plantation.

***Gley-Podzols:*** These are found associated with the sandy geological formations in the south and east of the district around Finchampstead. They are generally sandy soils, sandy over clayey soils and sandy over coarse or fine loamy soils, commonly with subsurface pan and impeded drainage in Head over Palaeogene strata

associated with well drained sandy soils having subsurface pan in Palaeogene sands and permeable sandy and fine or coarse loamy soils affected by high groundwater. Being of generally low agricultural grade – typically grade 4 with areas of grade 3 – these acidic soils support pasture and woodland, particularly plantation conifer and also semi-natural vegetation including heathland and mire.

***Argillic Gley Soils:*** These are found along or associated with the river valleys of the Loddon and Blackwater and some of the associated smaller tributaries such as the Foudry Brook and the Twyford Brook. They are stony fine or coarse loamy soils in Head over river terrace gravels with high groundwater, associated with clayey alluvial soils affected by high groundwater and occasional short term flooding. Being of mixed agricultural grade with grade 4 along the immediate river corridor and grade 3 along the adjoining land these support a variety of land uses including both pastoral and arable farmland and small-scale woodlands. Drainage channels are frequent in areas of this soil type.

***Stagnogley Soils:*** These cover a large band across the centre of the District from Spencers Wood to north of Wokingham largely corresponding to the clay landscapes. They are clayey, or loamy over clayey soils in Palaeogene clays and Head with drainage impeded at moderate depths by an impermeable layer. They are generally of grade 3 and because their flatness makes them suitable for mechanised agriculture they support arable farmland with localised areas of pasture, except where the sandier substrates emerge when they tend to be given over to woodland uses. They are frequently drained with a network of deep ditches.

## ECOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF THE WOKINGHAM DISTRICT

### Context

- 2.22 The Natural Areas and Designated sites within the Wokingham District are shown on **Figure 7a: Nature Conservation Designations**, together with their generalised habitats types on **Figure 7b: Natural**

## **Areas and Distribution of Dominant Habitat Types for Designated Sites.**

- 2.23 Natural Areas (NAs) are sub-divisions of England identified by English Nature as being unique on the basis of their physical, wildlife, land use and cultural attributes. This approach provides a wider context for conservation action, and offers a framework for setting objectives relevant to nature conservation. There are two NAs within Wokingham highlighting the variety of habitat types represented within the District.
- 2.24 To the north a relatively small part of the Wokingham District falls within the Chilterns NA, the Chilterns as a whole forms a major ridge of Cretaceous chalk and delimits the northern edge of the London Basin. It is the southern tip of the Chilterns NA that extends into the Wokingham District, where it is in close proximity to the River Thames and is dominated by rural land uses within the parishes of Remenham and Wargrave. The area is characterised by significant woodland cover particularly on the slopes, the majority of which is of ancient origin, although some areas have been replanted with other broadleaved species. These chalk slopes also support pockets of grassland between the woodland blocks, most of which is improved with only a small area of unimproved chalk grassland remaining.
- 2.25 The remainder and majority of the District falls within the London Basin NA, which is characterised by extensive urban centres, namely Woodley, Earley, Wokingham, Winnersh and Twyford, together with wide-spread agricultural land uses. Although urban and agricultural land uses dominate the landscape, the District has retained a variety of undeveloped areas which support significant biodiversity, with woodlands, grasslands and wetlands all well represented, many of which have nature conservation designations. These sites are scattered throughout the District, with ancient woodlands typically occurring as surviving fragments particularly in the more rural areas, but also to a lesser extent in the urban centres themselves.
- 2.26 Although there are sites of nature conservation value scattered throughout, there are pockets associated with particular high nature conservation interest. This includes the River Valleys, particularly the

Loddon Valley, which supports a number of wetland sites of national importance and is particularly notable for providing the national stronghold for the rare Loddon Pondweed (*Potamogeton nodosus*) and Loddon Lily (*Leucojum aestivum*). Neutral grassland also occurs on the alluvial soils of the Loddon and Blackwater floodplains. The middle section of the Loddon valley has, for the last 30 years, been the focus of extensive gravel extraction, much of this has now been restored and has developed nature conservation and recreational value.

- 2.27 Sandy deposits known as the Bagshot and Bracklesham Beds, occur in the southeast of Wokingham District and support extensive woodland cover. The majority of this woodland is coniferous or plantation, and include for example, the substantial (65ha) forestry plantation at Gorrick. These sandy deposits also support small areas of relict heath and bog; which are of high biological interest, with nationally important sites including Longmoor Bog (SSSI), and Heath Lake (SSSI).

### **Wildlife Attributes**

- 2.28 Assessment of local and national Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) and statutory and non-statutory wildlife site data for Wokingham indicate that a wide range of habitats occur within the county. Wokingham's most valuable habitats are summarised below as:

- Woodland
- Grassland
- Rivers and wetlands
- Heathland

### ***Woodland***

- 2.29 Wokingham District is well wooded and supports a range of woodland types, ranging from ancient semi-natural woodland through to coniferous plantations interspersed with heathland. Particularly well-wooded areas are found to the north around Remenham and Bowsey Hill along the steep scarp slopes, and to the southeast where mixed plantations are common on the sandy soils around Finchampstead.

- 2.30 **Ancient semi-natural woodland** is widely distributed throughout the District, typically occurring as small fragments within the agricultural and urban matrix. More extensive areas occur on the steep chalky slopes to the north, for example Remenham Wood, which covers 32ha. Much of this ancient woodland has been replanted, largely with beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) on the chalk and with oak (*Quercus robur*) on the heavier soils, and is managed as coppice or high forest. Although replanting reduces the nature conservation value of these sites they remain important for biodiversity, and often support a unique assemblage of plants and animals.
- 2.31 The remaining ancient woodlands are mostly small coppice woodlands, which often support a species-rich ground flora, with bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) often occurring in abundance. The majority of these small coppice woodlands have not received continuity of management and few have been coppiced in the past 20 years.
- 2.32 **Wet woodlands** are found in association with river valleys and bog communities. The riverine woodlands are particularly concentrated around the River Loddon valley and are generally composed of alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), crack willow (*Salix fragilis*) and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), they provide a stronghold for the rare Loddon Lily, and are considered to be of national importance. The bog woodlands are areas of wet woodland, generally found in shallow sandy valleys where there is some peat accumulation. A good example is Longmoor Bog (SSSI), which lies within California Country Park, and is composed of carr with alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), grey willow (*Salix cinerea*), downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) and alder buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*). These bog woodlands often support an interesting ground flora, dominated by sedges (*Carex* spp.) and *Sphagnum* species.
- 2.33 **Coniferous plantation** is a common feature in the southeast of the District where former heathland sites have been planted with mixed woodland. These woodlands are generally of low conservation value, but where appropriately managed, for example by encouraging structural heterogeneity and retaining deadwood and where forming intimate mosaics with other habitats such as heathland and bog, they

can enhance habitat diversity at a landscape scale. This benefits specialist heathland birds such as nightjar and woodlark as well as other specialist invertebrate and fungi species.

### *Grassland*

- 2.34 The most valuable grasslands within the District are those that have escaped agricultural improvement. Such grassland habitats are a scarce resource, and most have been lost to arable agriculture or substantially improved by fertiliser application.
- 2.35 Areas of unimproved **Neutral grassland** are generally restricted to small fragments along roadside verges and in churchyards. However, Stanford End Mill (SSSI) provides a rare example of neutral grassland that has received continuity of traditional management. The site is important for supporting a diverse suite of grassland species, most notably for its large and thriving colony of snake's head fritillary (*Fritillary meleagris*).
- 2.36 **Wet grassland** occurs along the river valleys, particularly the floodplain where drainage is impeded. These sites often provide important areas for breeding birds such as lapwing.
- 2.37 **Acid grassland** is found as scattered patches in association with the free draining sandy soils and heathland vegetation, particularly around Finchampstead. Bulmershe heath at Highwood Local Nature Reserve is a good example of an acid grassland and heathland mosaic.
- 2.38 **Chalk grassland** is restricted to two designated sites in the north of the Wokingham District. These sites are important for supporting a number of chalk grassland species that are restricted in the District, and one of these is particularly notable for supporting the nationally rare rough marsh-mallow (*Althaea hirsuta*).

### *Rivers and wetlands*

- 2.39 There are three rivers in the District, which with their floodplains account for around 23% of Wokingham's land area. Two of these rivers form boundaries to the district; these are the **River Thames** to the north and northeast and the **River Blackwater** to the south. The

third, the **River Loddon**, is a tributary of the Thames and crosses through Wokingham flowing in a roughly south to north direction.

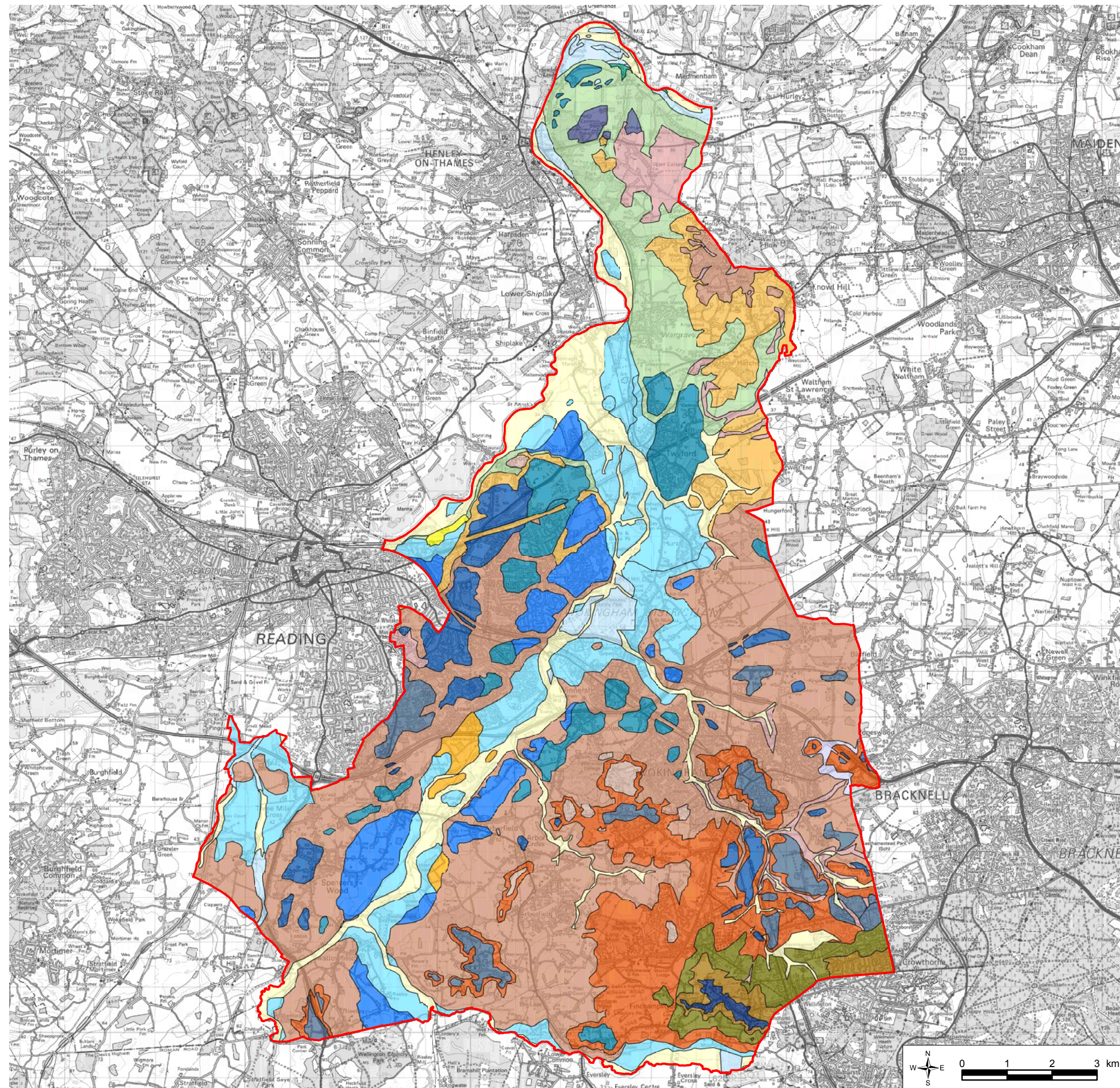
- 2.40 Considering these three rivers influence such a high proportion of Wokingham, there are very few associated natural wetland habitats remaining. Wetland vegetation such as reedbed and stands of tall-herbs are now mostly restricted to narrow fringes along the riverbanks.
- 2.41 The River Thames has suffered from recreational pressure and flood defence management, and populations of the nationally important Loddon pondweed (*Potamogeton nodosus*) have dwindled and may now be locally extinct in this river. However the Thames floodplain has maintained some ecological interest and recent years has shown improvements in water quality. A number of wet woodlands, still occur in the Thames valley and these provide important sites for the rare Loddon Lily (*Leucojum aestivum*).
- 2.42 A four-kilometre section of the River Loddon together with Stanford End Mill has been recognised as a Site of Special Scientific Importance (SSSI). Here Loddon pondweed forms dense mats together with fennel-leaved pondweed (*Potamogeton pectinatus*), yellow water-lily (*Nuphar lutea*) and arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*).
- 2.43 The middle of the Loddon valley has a number of **flooded gravel pits** that have been created within the last 30 years. These sites have enhanced local biodiversity and provide important areas for public recreation. Dinton County Park for example, is a 135ha reserve, which supports a variety of lakes, scrub and grasslands.
- 2.44 In the south of the district there are a group of much **older lakes**, of these only Heath lake (SSSI) has retained a flora associated with acid and nutrient poor conditions. Acid lakes are rare in lowland Britain, and Heath Lake is the only remaining example in Berkshire. The lake is mostly less than 1m deep, and supports a number of nationally scarce plant species, including six-stamened waterwort (*Elatine hexandra*) and pillwort (*Pilularia globulifera*).



### *Heathland*

- 2.45 The extent of heathland habitat has declined drastically due to afforestation, development and agricultural conversion and is now is restricted to small fragments concentrated in southeast Wokingham on the sandy soils around Finchampstead and Crowthorne. There are, in addition, small heathland fragments within the built up area of Earley and Woodley. The heathland sites often have mosaics of dry and wet heath, and are often important sites for specialist invertebrates, birds and reptiles.





# Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment

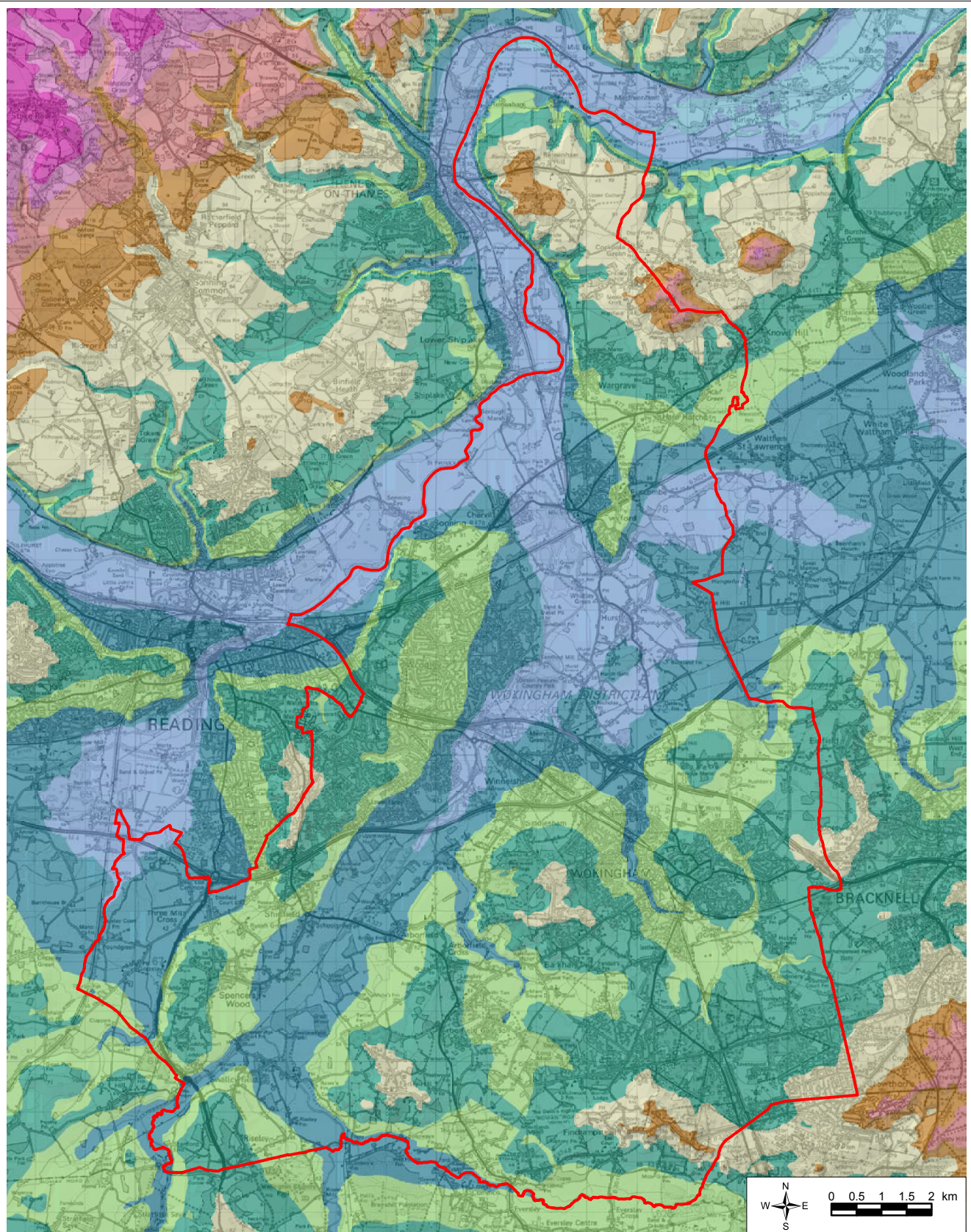
Figure 3.0:  
Simplified Geology

- |            |  |                          |
|------------|--|--------------------------|
| Quaternary |  | Head                     |
|            |  | Head Gravel              |
|            |  | Brickearth               |
|            |  | Langley Silt             |
|            |  | Alluvium                 |
|            |  | River Terrace 1          |
|            |  | River Terrace 2          |
|            |  | River Terrace 3          |
| Tertiary   |  | River Terrace 4          |
|            |  | River Terrace 5          |
|            |  | River Terrace 6          |
|            |  | River Terrace 7          |
|            |  | River Terrace 8          |
|            |  | Camberley Sand Formation |
|            |  | Windlesham Formation     |
|            |  | Bagshot Beds             |
|            |  | Claygate Member          |
|            |  | London Clay              |
| Cretaceous |  | Lambeth Group            |
|            |  | Upper Chalk              |
|            |  | Middle Chalk             |
|            |  | District boundary        |

Source: British Geological Survey  
 LAND USE CONSULTANTS  
 43 Chalton Street  
 London NW1 1JD  
 Tel: 020 7383 5784  
 Fax: 020 7383 4798  
 Luc@london.landuse.co.uk



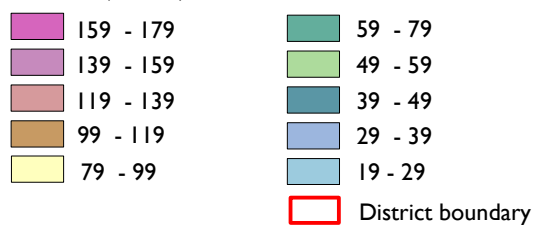




## Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment

**Figure 4.0:**  
**Simplified Topography**

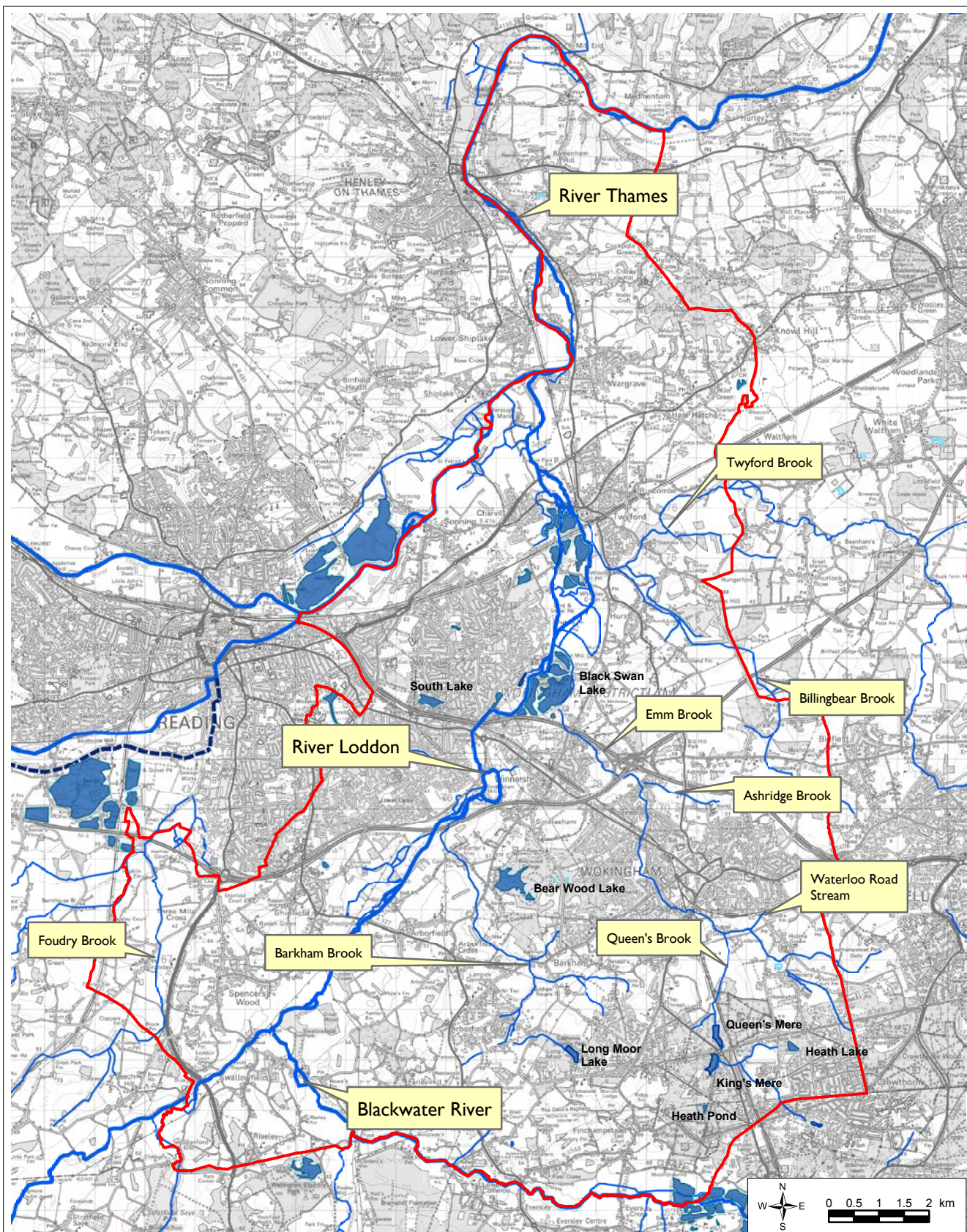
**Key**  
Elevation (m AOD)



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43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
Ph: 020 7383 5784  
Fax: 020 7383 4798  
Luc@london.landuse.co.uk







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## Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment

**Figure 5.0:**  
**Simplified Hydrology**

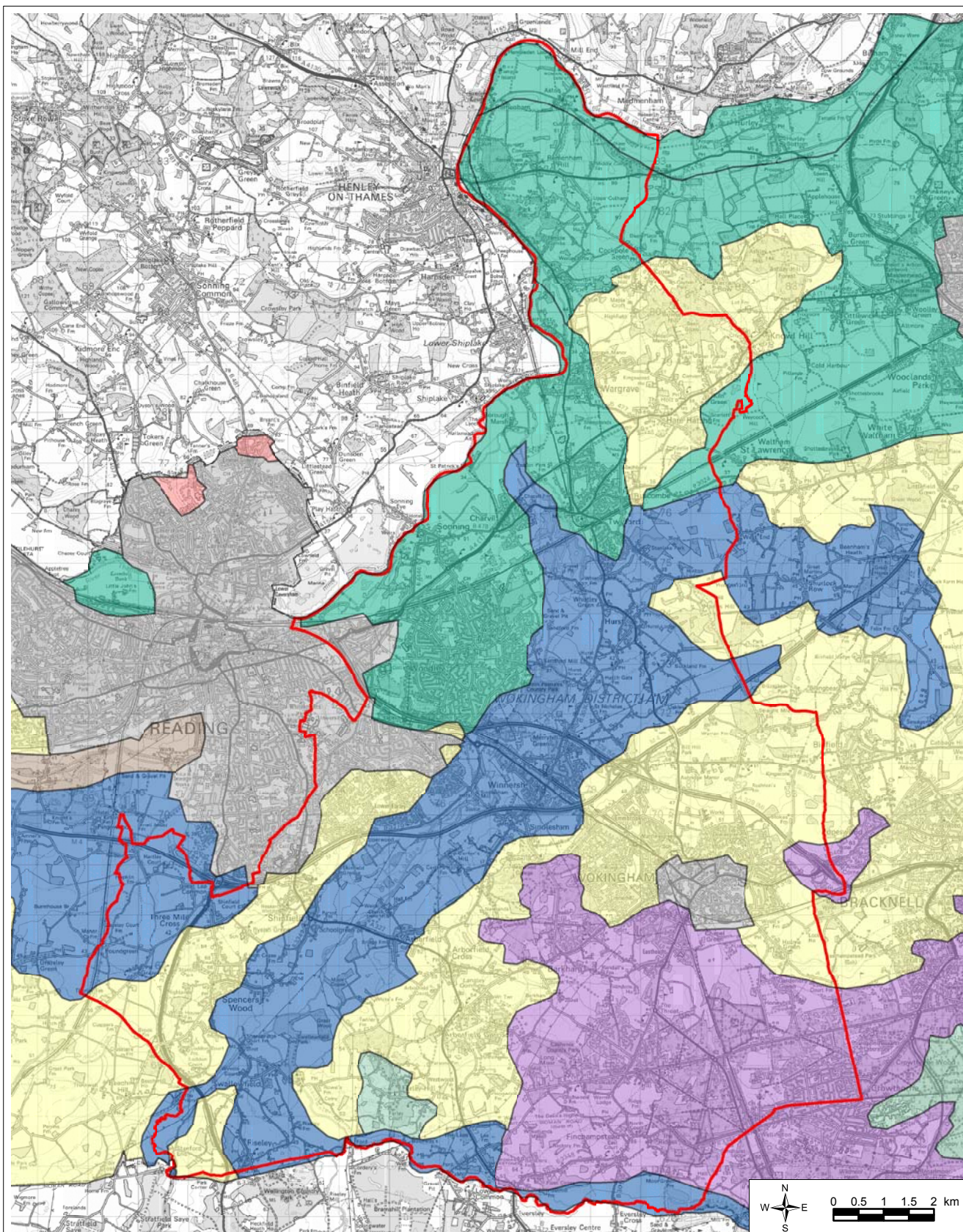
### Key

- Main river
- Secondary river
- Canal
- Lake
- District boundary

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43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
Ph: 020 7383 5784  
Fax: 020 7383 4798  
Luc@london.landuse.co.uk















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## Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment

**Figure 6.0:**  
**Simplified Soils**

### Key

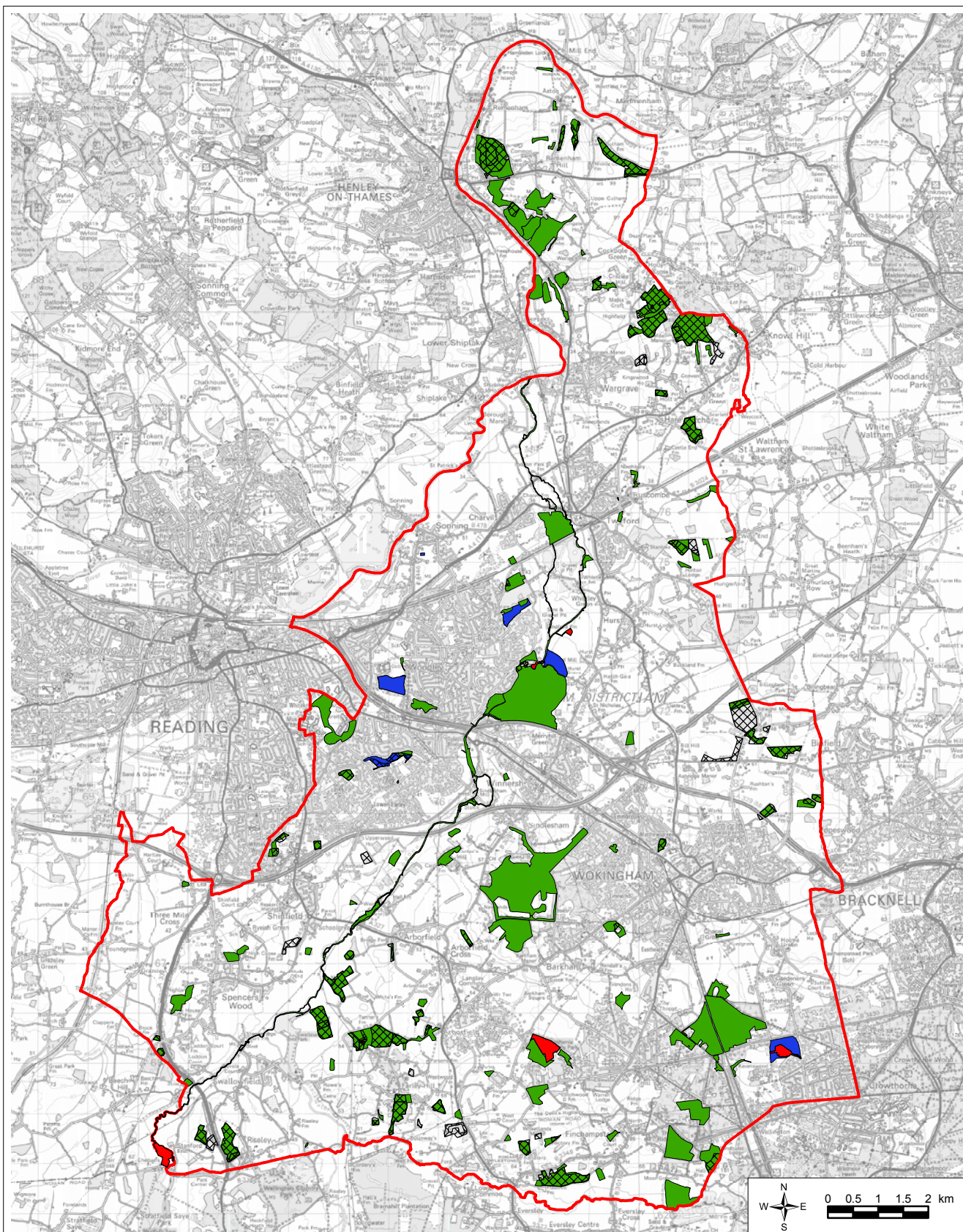
	Alluvial gley soils		Podzols / Brown sands
	Argillic brown earths		Stagnogley soils
	Argillic gley soils		Unsurveyed including urban
	Gley podzols		District boundary

Source: 'Soils of Berkshire'  
Soil Survey of England and Wales  
1975

LAND USE CONSULTANTS  
43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
Ph: 020 7383 5784  
Fax: 020 7383 4798  
Luc@london.landuse.co.uk







## Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment

**Figure 7.0a:**  
**Nature Conservation Designations**

### Key

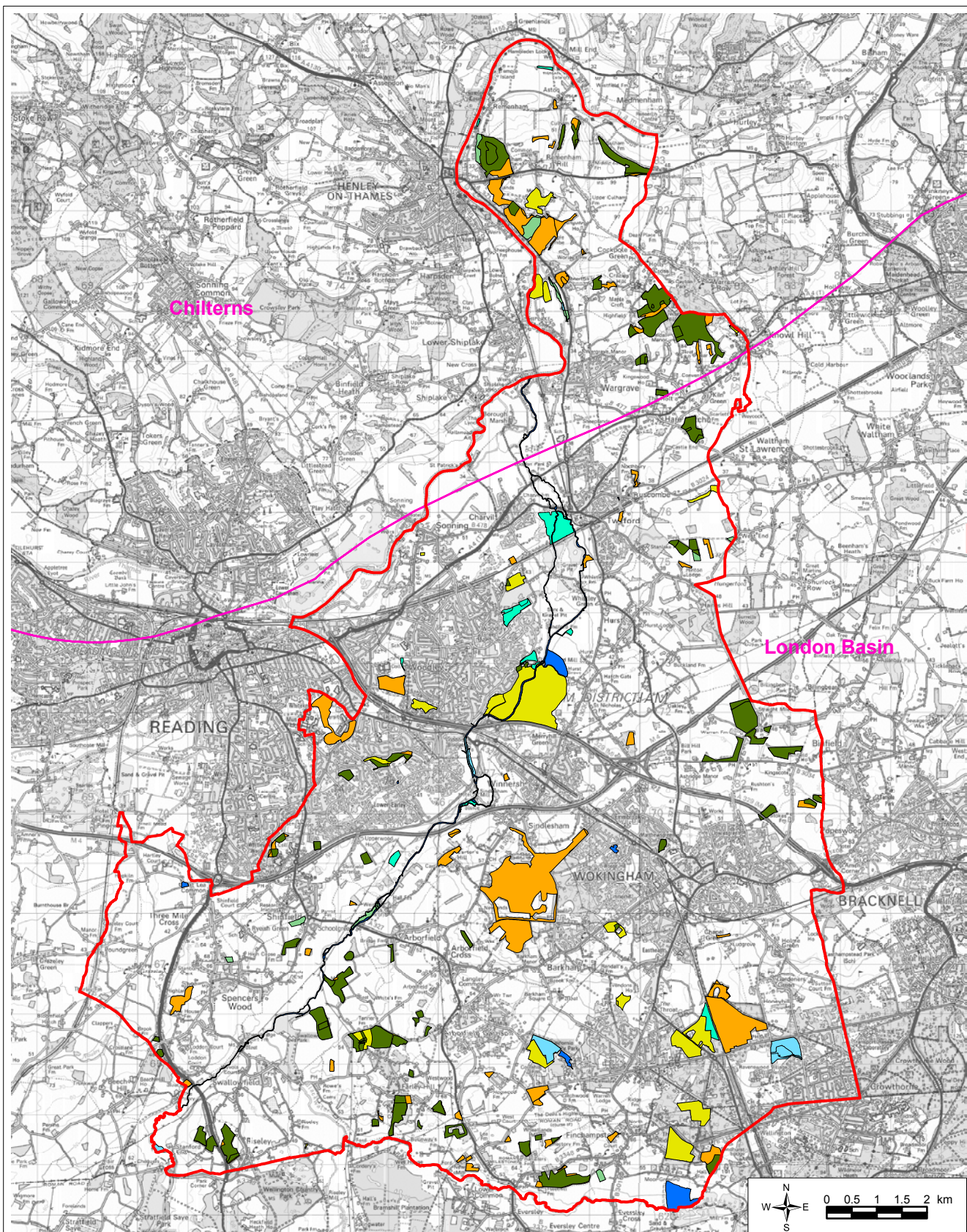
- SSSIs
- LNRs
- Ancient Woodlands
- Wildlife Heritage Sites
- District boundary

Source: Wokingham District Council

LAND USE CONSULTANTS  
43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
Ph: 020 7383 5784  
Fax: 020 7383 4798  
Luc@london.landuse.co.uk

















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## Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment

**Figure 7.0b:**  
**Natural Areas and Distribution**  
**of Dominant Habitat Types**  
**for Designated Sites**

### Key

- |   |                    |   |                   |
|---|--------------------|---|-------------------|
|  | Ancient woodland   |  | Open water        |
|  | Secondary woodland |  | River             |
|  | Wet woodland       |  | Natural areas     |
|  | Grassland          |  | District boundary |
|  | Wetland            |   |                   |
|  | Mosaic             |   |                   |

Source: Wokingham District Council  
and English Nature

LAND USE CONSULTANTS  
43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
Ph: 020 7383 5784  
Fax: 020 7383 4798  
Luc@london.landuse.co.uk



### 3 THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

---

The designated landscapes of historic significance are shown on **Figure 8**.

- 3.1 The diverse landscape of Wokingham is a reflection of not only of its varied geology and topography, but also the product of its use through history. Since prehistoric communities first cleared the native woodland to grow their crops, each generation has inherited from its forebears an historic landscape and has, in turn, transformed it, in some cases subtly, in others more drastically. The accelerated transformation of the landscape in modern times has meant that that its cultural attributes of prehistoric, Romano-British, Medieval and Post-medieval date have been progressively overwritten by recent events, creating a layer of cultural influences, in some places still indelible in the countryside, but elsewhere now hardly legible, if at all.
- 3.2 Possibly as early as the Mesolithic (8,500 – 4,000 BC), but certainly from the start of the Neolithic (c. 4,000 BC), prehistoric communities modified and managed the landscape for economic and social purposes. The extent of these changes has been visible in modern times mainly in the distribution of cropmarks recorded in air photographs, particularly along the Thames valley, but also in other areas where conditions are suitable. However, apart from two surviving round barrows near Finchampstead, the burial and ceremonial monuments, settlement enclosures and field systems are now no longer visible in the landscape. The permanent impacts of prehistoric settlement and agriculture were the gradual clearance of woodland starting on the valley floors, the progressive alluviation of the valley floors resulting from the cultivation of cleared soils on the valley sides, and the early depletion of sandy soils in the south of the district leading to the early creation of heathland.
- 3.3 The settlement pattern and economy of the Romano-British period (43 – 410 AD) displays considerable continuity with those of the preceding Iron Age, and it is possible that some prehistoric land



boundaries may have been maintained. Again, most of the evidence is invisible within the modern landscape. Other features, however, were imposed upon the contemporary landscape, as determined by the priorities of the centralised Roman administration, the most visible being the Roman road between London and Calleva (Silchester). The road's agger (earthen embankment) is still visible at locations in Crowthorne and Finchampstead parishes, and its line is reflected in the alignments of a number of lengths of modern road and track. During its use, the road attracted high status settlements and villa estates, but although it remained a landscape feature in succeeding periods (it still forms the southern boundary of the district at Riseley and Crowthorne) its influence as a communication route waned after the end of Roman rule.

- 3.4 During the Saxon period (410 – 1066) there was an expansion of settlement onto the previously unsuitable clay soils, and documentary and place-name evidence indicates that, apart from the heathland areas with their poor sandy soils in the southeast, the district had a largely settled landscape by the time of Domesday survey in 1086. While it is possible that some Romano-British estate boundaries were in turn preserved in those of Saxon estates, it is clear that by the 10th century the broad pattern of later Medieval estates and parishes was well established.
- 3.5 The whole of east Berkshire formed part of Windsor Forest, and remained so following widespread disafforestation elsewhere in the county after 1227. Although much of the landscape had been cleared of woodland it remained subject to Forest Law, giving the crown the right to keep and hunt deer, and exploit other woodland resources of value also to local communities. The large quantity of Forest legislation indicates the increasing pressure on woodland resources from assarting, the informal encroachment into woodland and its inclosure for private farmland. A number of Medieval deerparks were also created, some of which appear to have been incorporated within the landscaped parks of 18th and 19th century country houses.
- 3.6 The Medieval settlement pattern of small villages, hamlets and farmsteads dispersed within the rural landscape remained largely unchanged until the 20th century. Urban development was largely

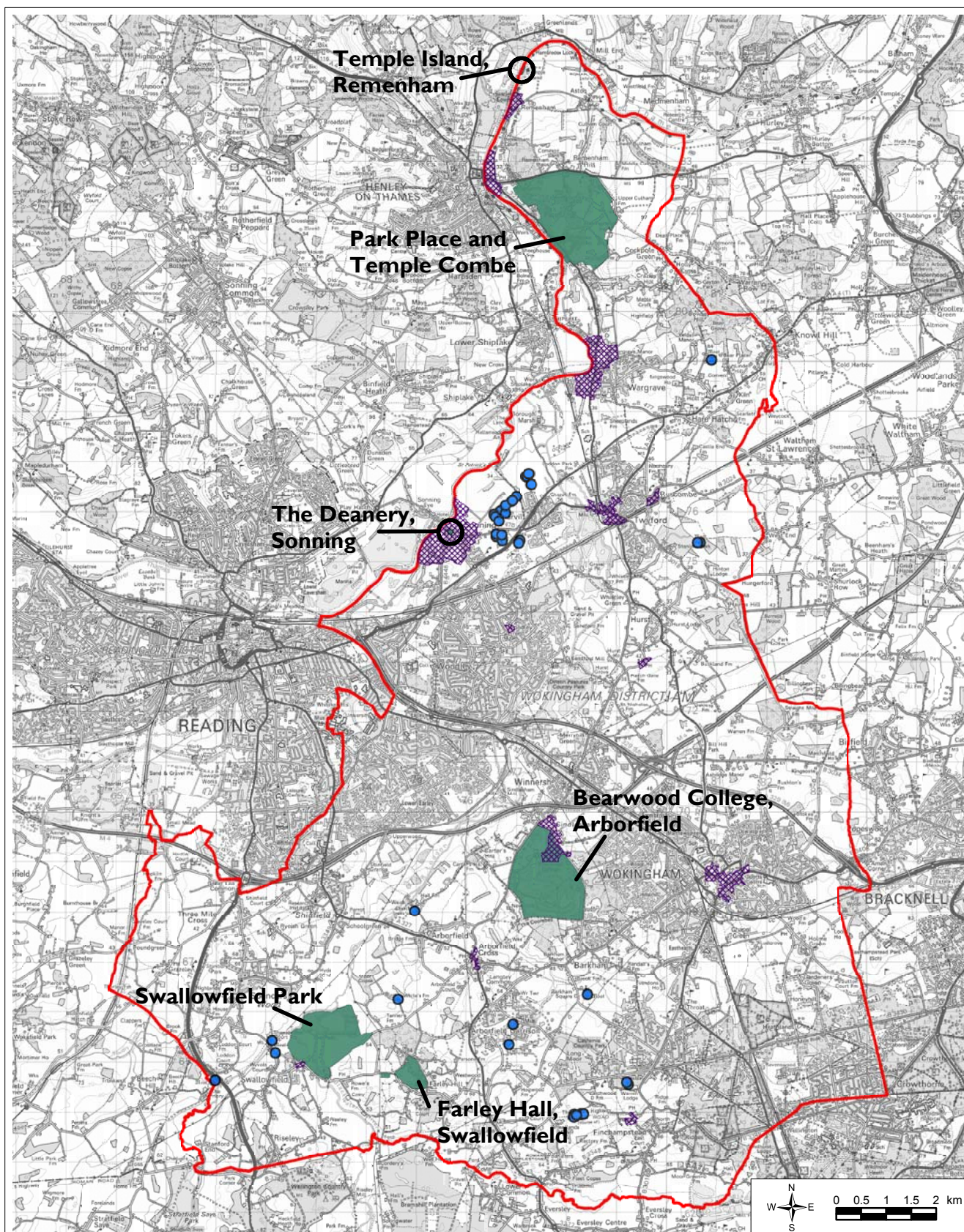
constrained by the growth of Maidenhead to the east and Reading to the west. Wokingham, the only Medieval town in east Berkshire not sited along the Thames, relied for its livelihood on the agricultural regions to its north and east and the heathland areas to the south. A number of moated sites of late Medieval or Post-medieval date survive, particularly in the southern part of the district. These were primarily architectural features enhancing the status of a manor or other large house, rather than defensive structures.

- 3.7 The rural landscape is characterised by a diversity of field patterns. The intricate patchwork of both small and medium-scale field systems, indicative of assarting, probably of Medieval and Post-Medieval date, suggests that woodland, particularly on the clay soils, may have been cultivated during periods of pressure on land. These fields are characterised by their irregular boundaries, species-rich hedgerows and small areas of interspersed woodland. The main concentrations are in Shinfield, Swallowfield, Arborfield, Hurst, Ruscombe and Wargrave parishes. The straight-sided field boundaries, intermixed within this irregular pattern, reflect 19th century Parliamentary inclosures, both rationalising earlier field systems and also enclosing areas of previously common land as improvements in agriculture, including the use of fertilisers, made cultivation more viable. There has been further rationalisation and amalgamation of fields in the 20th century, resulting in the creation of some very large fields in some areas of arable farming, and in the loss of numerous hedgerow field boundaries. The last remnants of heathland in Windsor Forest were replaced by plantations in the mid-nineteenth century.
- 3.8 From the end of the Medieval period, the district's position on the main communication routes between London and the west had far-reaching effects, with new forms of communication making their mark on the landscape. In the 18th century, new locks were constructed to improve the Thames navigation, and the establishment of Turnpike trusts resulted in improvements to the existing main roads, and the creation of a new road through Wokingham. The 19th century saw the opening of the railway network, encouraging urban development and stimulating industry

(such as brick making on the London Clay). This process has continued in recent times with the M4 motorway.

- 3.9 The district's proximity to London led to a new class of wealthy gentry building large country estates. Riverside locations along the Thames were favoured, as was the scenic heathland landscape in the southeast. Many of the estates were surrounded by formally landscaped parkland, often incorporating extensive plantations, radically changing the appearance of the landscape. Some of these survive today, but many were sold off and broken up in the twentieth century, the houses being taken over by a variety of institutions, and the land reverting to farmland. Even here, however, traces of the former parkland are visible in the mature trees growing in the present fields.
- 3.10 20th century developments have frequently removed earlier features from the landscape, although a series of World War II defensive pillboxes, such as those along the Foudry Brook, have added to its historic character. Rapid urban growth has enveloped large areas of the rural landscape around Reading and Wokingham, as well as heathland. Gravel extraction along the Loddon and Blackwater has created extensive lakes in areas of former farmland.





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## Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment

**Figure 8.0:**  
**Historic Landscape Designations**

### Key

- Scheduled Ancient Monuments (63)
- Historic Parks and Gardens (English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens)
- Local Plan Conservation Areas (15)
- District boundary

Source: Wokingham District Council and English Heritage

LAND USE CONSULTANTS  
43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
Ph: 020 7383 5784  
Fax: 020 7383 4798  
Luc@london.landuse.co.uk



## 4 THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS OF WOKINGHAM

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- 4.1 This section of the report presents the results of the landscape character assessment, drawing together information gathered from the desk study review, initial scoping and the field survey.
- 4.2 Fourteen landscape types have been identified, which have been subdivided into thirty character areas. These are illustrated on **Figure 9: Landscape Character Areas**.

### The 'River' Landscapes

#### **Type A: River Valleys**

- A1 Thames River Valley
- A2: Loddon River Valley
- A3: Blackwater River Valley

#### **Type B: River Valleys with Open Water**

- B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water
- B2: Thames River Valley with Open Water
- B3: Blackwater River Valley with Open Water

#### **Type C: River Terraces**

- C1: Arborfield River Terrace
- C2: Hurst River Terrace

### The 'Chalk' Landscapes

#### **Type D: Wooded Chalk Slopes**

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

### **Type E: Arable Chalk Plateau**

E1: Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau

### **Type F: Wooded Chalk Knolls**

F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls

### **Type G: Farmed Chalk Slopes**

G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes

### **Type H: Arable Chalk Lowlands**

H1: Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands

### **The ‘Clay’ Landscapes**

#### **Type I: Farmed Clay Lowland**

I1: Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland

I2: Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland

I3: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland

I4: Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland

#### **Type J: Settled and Farmed Clay**

J1: Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay

J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay

J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay

J4: Woodley–Earley Settled and Farmed Clay

#### **Type K: Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland**

K1: Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland

## **The ‘Sand’ Landscapes**

### **Type L: Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills**

L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills

L2: Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills

L3: Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills

### **Type M: Forested and Settled Sands**

M1: Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands

M2: Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands

### **Type N: Pastoral Sandy Lowland**

N1: Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland

N2: Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland

4.3 Each of the descriptions is structured as follows:

#### **(1) Landscape Type description**

- a) Key map:* illustrates the area/areas of the district where this particular landscape type occurs.
- b) Characteristics of Landscape Type:* Describes where this landscape type occurs and the fundamental landscape characteristics of this Type.
- c) Key Characteristics:* Set of bullets summarising the fundamental characteristics of this landscape type.
- d) Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment:* Brief statement of how the landscape type nests within the regional hierarchy.

#### **(2) Landscape Character Area description(s)**

For *each* character area affiliated to the Landscape Type:

- a) Introduction:* Paragraph introducing and summarising the key elements – location, characteristics etc. – of the character area.



- b) *Location and Boundaries*: Brief summary of where the boundaries of the area are indicating how they have been defined and indicating whether they are 'fixed' following a specific meaningful landscape feature (such as a floodplain limit or contour) or follow a man made feature that is indicative of a broader transition in the landscape.
- c) *Key Characteristics*: Bullets summarising the essential characteristics of the character area.
- d) *Physical Landscape*: Description of the geology, landform, hydrology and soils of the area, indicating how these elements separately or in combination influence land use and aesthetic character.
- e) *Historic Environment*: Description of the evolution of the landscape with emphasis on how historic land use has affected current landscape use and character and indicating any *visible* features or areas that are of particular archaeological or historic significance (i.e. does not include all elements of the buried archaeological resource that do not affect the landscape character).
- f) *Ecological Character*: Description of the nature of the ecology within an area, emphasising the connection between physical landscape and land use and listing areas of national and local ecological significance and any species of particular scarcity or local distinctiveness.
- g) *Rural Land Use*: Description of current rural land use (farming, forestry, military, recreation, extraction etc) explaining what and why particular patterns have arisen and their influence on the visual character of the landscape.
- h) *Settlement and Built Character*: Description of current buildings and settlement patterns (including reference to towns, villages or industrial areas) and vernacular/architectural character.
- i) *Perceptions of the Landscape*: This draws upon a range of published or artistic responses to the qualities of the landscape,



local plan designations and views of stakeholders [to be added after the stakeholder consultation process].

## FIT WITH EXISTING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS

4.4 The *Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment* was carried out on a scale of 1:50000 with emphasis at the Landscape Type level. In the same way that the Countryside Agency/English Nature national character areas provide a broad outline of the range of landscape character across England, so the Berkshire-wide assessment takes this down to a more detailed level whilst offering scope for refinement of boundaries and descriptions at a more detailed level of assessment, such as this district-level assessment. Accordingly, the current assessment follows the broad ‘fit’ and hierarchy established by Berkshire. However there are notable distinctions:

- **Creation of ‘new’ landscape types:** New types emerge at the district level. This is explained for example by examining the ‘Chalk’ landscapes. At the county level the chalk landscapes can be distinguished by two principal landscape types – the *Dipslope Mosaic* and the *Open Chalk Lowland*. At the district level the *Open Chalk Lowlands* is still apparent as a distinctive entity. However, at this scale, the ‘mosaic’ of the *Dipslope Mosaic* needs to be divided into its distinctive component parts. In this case, separating the steep chalk slopes from the clay-with-flint capped plateau and from the adjacent clay-capped slopes and chalk knolls. i.e. at the district scale five separate types emerge from two types evident at the county scale. Similar subdivisions occur within the clay landscapes, for example separating off the sand-capped wooded hills from the lowland clay, which at the county scale are features of the broad landscape type.
- **Boundary refinements:** Inevitably at this more detailed scale of assessment some boundaries need to be amended to reflect the finer-grained level of data collection and more precise nature of its intended use. This has resulted in, for example, more precise definition of floodplain boundaries.

- **Reference to adjoining areas:** At this scale of assessment the impact of landscapes in adjoining districts upon the character of the Wokingham landscape becomes more evident and it is desirable to ensure greater interconnectivity to ensure fluidity across (arbitrary) political boundaries. For example it is apparent that the small area of restored gravel workings in the Thames Valley north of Wokingham is interconnected with a larger area within Buckinghamshire, which would certainly be identified as a separate landscape character type if a district level assessment were to be carried out. This study seeks to pre-empt such studies in order to ensure a more robust long-term 'joined-up' framework for future landscape strategies and management.



Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment

Figure 1:  
Landscape Character Areas

THE RIVER LANDSCAPES

**Type A: River Valley**

- A1 - Thames River Valley
- A2 - Loddon River Valley
- A3 - Blackwater River Valley

**Type B: River Valley with Open Water**

- B1 - Loddon River Valley with Open Water
- B2 - Thames River Valley with Open Water
- B3 - Blackwater River Valley with Open Water

**Type C: River Terrace**

- C1 - Arborfield River Terrace
- C2 - Hurst River Terrace

THE CHALK LANDSCAPES

**Type D: Wooded Chalk Slopes**

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

**Type E: Arable Chalk Plateau**

- E1 - Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau

**Type F: Wooded Chalk Knolls**

- F1 - Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls

**Type G: Farmed Chalk Slopes**

- G1 - Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes

**Type H: Arable Chalk Lowlands**

- H1 - Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands

THE CLAY LANDSCAPES

**Type I: Farmed Clay Lowlands**

- I1 - Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland
- I2 - Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland
- I3 - Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland
- I4 - Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland

**Type J: Settled and Farmed Clay**

- J1 - Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay
- J2 - Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay
- J3 - Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay
- J4 - Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay

**Type K: Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland**

- K1 - Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland

THE SAND LANDSCAPES

**Type L: Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills**

- L1 - Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills
- L2 - Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills
- L3 - Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills

**Type M: Forested and Settled Sands**

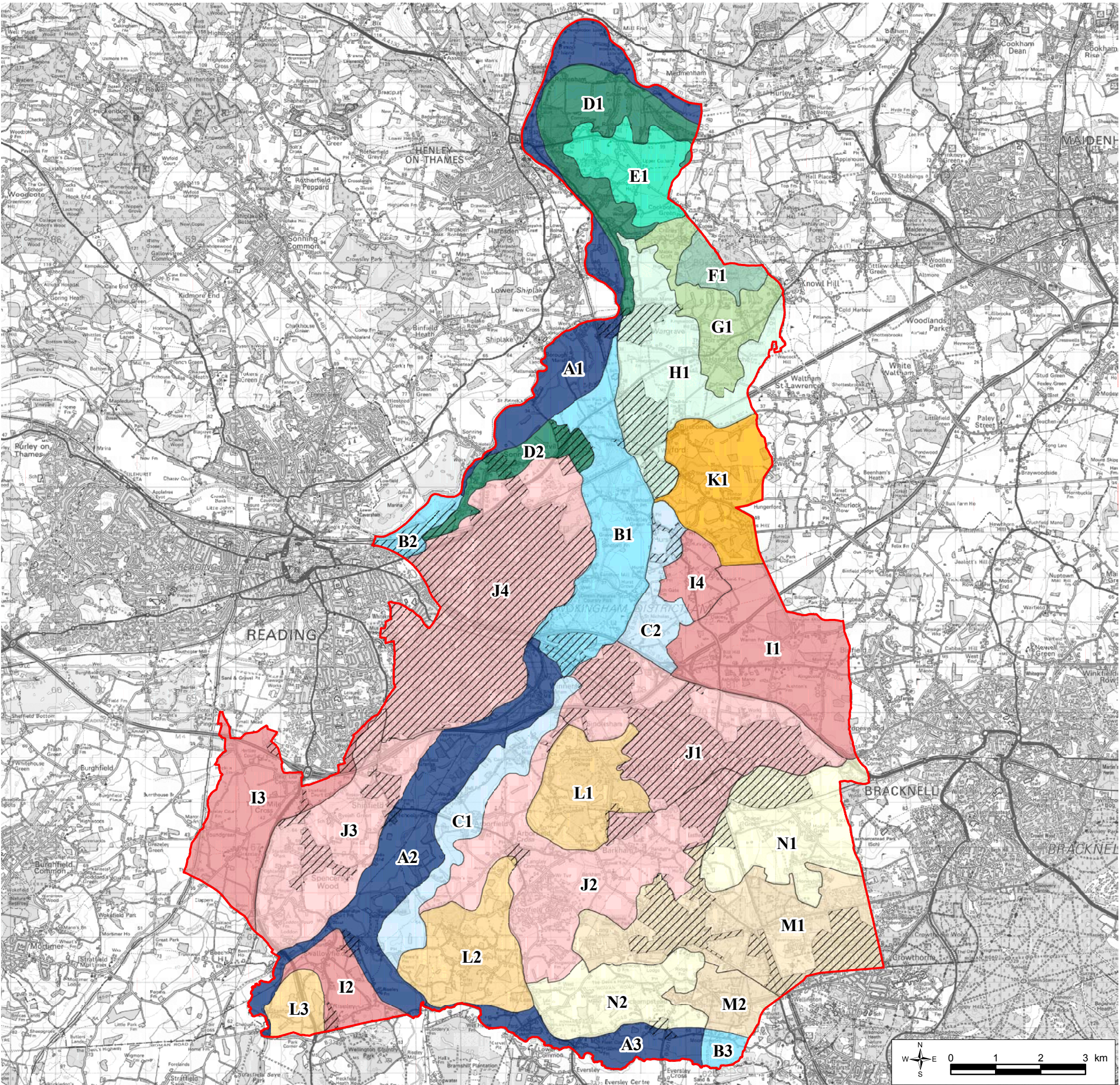
- M1 - Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands
- M2 - Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands

**Type N: Pastoral Sandy Lowland**

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

Urban areas

District boundary



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Drawing number: 2235.01\_014 fig 1\_luc wokingham character areas\_A3\_Feb04.mxd

LAND USE CONSULTANTS  
43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
Tel: 020 7383 5784  
Fax: 020 7383 4798  
Luc@london.landuse.co.uk

