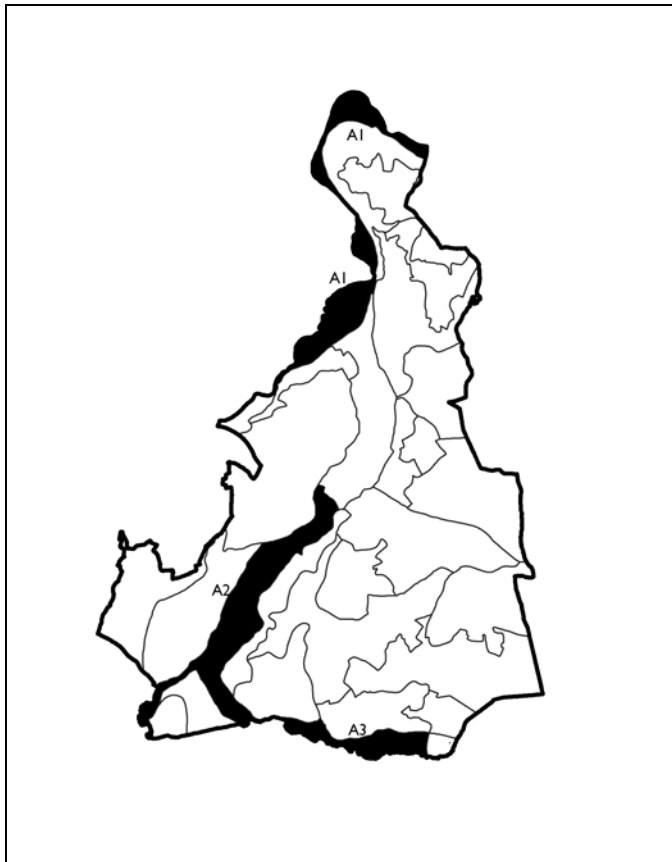


PART 2

THE CHARACTER OF THE WOKINGHAM LANDSCAPE

5 LANDSCAPE TYPE A: RIVER VALLEYS



Landscape Areas	Character
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A1: Thames River Valley

A2: Loddon River Valley

A3: Blackwater River Valley

Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 5.1 There are three character areas classified as being of the *River Valley* landscape type. These correspond to the valleys of the Rivers Thames and Blackwater which respectively, define the north and south boundary of the district and the Loddon which bisects the district, in a south–north direction. This landscape type is distinguished by a flat lowland alluvial/river terrace floodplain supporting a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland generally set within a partially wooded context creating a semi–enclosed landscape.

Key Characteristics

- Flat to gently shelving.
- Predominantly alluvial floodplain with some areas of river terrace.
- Important wetland and marginal habitats.

- Pastoral fields and meadows with large arable fields further away from river.
- Semi-enclosed landscape with open fields framed within a wooded backdrop.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

- 5.2 The *River Valley* landscape type corresponds to *Type B: Lower River Floodplain* of the *Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment*. The particular character areas are *B4: Hurley Thames*, *B6: Lower Loddon* and *B7: Blackwater*. Generally, there is good parity between the boundaries of the landscape types. The main distinction is that two small areas within the valleys of the Thames and Blackwater have been separated into the *River Valley with Open Water* landscape type. Additionally, there have been some minor boundary changes due to the more detailed scale of this assessment including some areas where *River Terraces* have been distinguished from the main valley landscape.

A1: THAMES RIVER VALLEY

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 5.3 *A1: Thames River Valley* defines much of Wokingham's northern boundary sweeping in a sinuous corridor some 13 km long between the village of Sonning, through Wargrave and Henley-on-Thames to Remenham and Aston at the district's northernmost point. Characterised by a flat floodplain landscape dominated by the river, this character area is defined by the steep chalk slopes of the *Remenham* and *Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes* (D1 and D2) within Wokingham district and the dramatic chalk hills of the Chilterns to the north; the resulting 'borrowed character' creating a distinctive sense of enclosure opening out where the Loddon joins the Thames near Wargrave.
- 5.4 The floodplain landscape is characterised by large pastoral and arable fields, divided by paths, ditches and post and wire fences, creating a sense of openness on the floodplain. Through the heart of the landscape flows the River Thames, a large impressive river, popular with recreational users. The Thames exhibits large-scale meanders but is often hidden behind belts of bankside woodland. The Thames is joined by a network of smaller rivers, streams and channels. The channels are frequently lined with pollards forming important landscape features. The floodplain appears relatively unsettled. However, at the periphery of the character area, above the flood level, there are a number of small hamlets and the nuclei of some of the larger settlements, which have subsequently expanded away from the floodplain. In some parts such as around Charvil, access to the floodplain is limited, creating a locally strong sense of remoteness. Views of parklands and manor houses associated with the adjoining valley sides also create an impression of settlement and are important features of the landscape.
- 5.5 This stretch of the Thames has been a popular source of artistic inspiration – drawn by the water-dominant landscape clothed by

stretches of pasture, its architectural grandeur, vernacular detail and the special character of rural river-side villages and hamlets. The status of the Thames as a nationally-important river and its connotations and connection with the development of major English cities including Oxford and the capital London also add to its important perceptual qualities.

Location and Boundaries

- 5.6 The *Thames River Valley* character area occupies a corridor in the north and north west of Wokingham. The corridor relates to the floodplain of the River Thames, which marks the county boundary between Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. Hence the northern/westernmost boundary of this area is represented by the district boundary, although in reality this character area extends beyond. To the south/east the boundary is clearly defined by landform – namely the limit of the floodplain. For much of the area this corresponds with the obvious break of the steep chalk slopes of *D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* and *D2: Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes*. This approximately follows the 35m AOD contour line, which, north of Wargrave, largely (although not exactly) follows the line of the A321 and Remenham Lane. The boundary is less distinct where the Loddon and Thames Floodplains meet near Twyford/Charvil. Here the boundary follows features that approximate division between these two contiguous landscape types.

Key Characteristics

- Dominated by the **River Thames**, a large navigable river with pronounced meanders, sometimes braided into faster flowing **smaller streams** and interconnected with drainage channels. Joined by a series of rivers, streams and channels.
- **Broad flat alluvial floodplain** with pockets of River Terrace.
- Accentuated and **semi-enclosed** by adjoining steeply-sloping, open and wooded chalk landscapes of the Chilterns.
- Distinctive **flat to gently shelving landform** with adjoining strongly articulated chalk landscapes.

- **Large open geometric fields** of pasture and some arable farmland, often undivided or divided by drainage channels, paths or post and wire fences.
- **Wetland character** including wet meadow, wet woodlands and waterside features such as pollarded willow, supporting rare and important species.
- Popular **recreational setting** for rowing, canoeing, boating, fishing, walking and cycling with supporting facilities including boatyards, boatsheds, locks and towpaths.
- **Peaceful natural landscape** with characteristic small-scale wetland features such as pollarded willows.
- **Small, nucleated and linear settlements clustered along the floodplain edge** including hamlets (e.g. Aston) and the nuclei of larger towns and villages (e.g. Wargrave).
- Distinctive **vernacular character** typified by the use of warm red brick and flint.
- Views to **prestigious large detached properties** from the river.
- Influenced by **adjoining formal parkland landscapes** characterised by exotic evergreens including the romantic Temple Island.
- **Peaceful, picturesque and largely rural** qualities that have inspired literary and artistic interest.

Physical Landscape

- 5.7 The area is characterised by the presence of the River Thames, a large and mature river, which is often invisible except at close range, being hidden by vegetation. The River Thames has large pronounced meanders, of which this character area is one, but at the local scale appears to follow a straight and smooth course. The Thames becomes braided and branching in parts: notably north of Charvil, where St Patrick's Stream diverts and rejoins; and north of Wargrave where the Henerton Backwater is present. Along the main channel there are a

number of small islands or aits. There are also some locks, which are designed to assist navigation along the River.

- 5.8 The landscape surrounding the Thames is essentially a flat floodplain ranging from between 30 and 35m AOD, which in places is perceived to shelve very gently down to the water. The flatness (and openness) of this landscape is dramatically contrasted with some of the most elevated and steepest land in the area, particularly in the north where the floodplain abuts the precipitously rising *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* and the strongly rolling hills of the Chilterns. Where the River Loddon joins the River Thames, west of Wargrave, the floodplain opens up becoming very wide and expansive.
- 5.9 The floodplain landscape is defined geologically by a wide alluvial corridor, which, in some areas, is abutted by pockets and bands of exposed first and second river terraces. These conditions gives rise to the argillic brown earth soils of the Thames series which vary from heavy loam soils over chalk to flint loam soils over gravel and lime-rich clayey floodplain soils which are influenced by the underlying middle chalk strata. Although the soils are generally well-drained and fertile they are subject to high groundwater and periodic flooding. Consequently, the area is a mosaic of arable and pastoral land uses including pasture and wet meadow in the most flood-prone areas, particularly close to the river, and arable farmland wherever conditions allow.

Historic Environment

- 5.10 Clearance of woodland from the valley floor, in order to cultivate the fertile river gravels, may have started as early as the Neolithic and was largely complete by the Late Bronze Age. There is little visible evidence of this landscape although cropmarks reveal evidence of prehistoric/Romano-British settlement and farming. Cultivation on the valley sides would have led to deposition of alluvium on the floodplain.
- 5.11 The bridging place at Sonning may date to Roman times. Sonning was an important ecclesiastical centre from the late Saxon period, and there was a Medieval bridge there (the present brick bridge, with

eleven arches spanning the three river channels was built in 1790). A bridge was also built at Henley in the 13th century.

- 5.12 Saxon settlement along the Thames valley is also evident in the Domesday settlement at Remenham, but most Medieval settlement is at the edges of the valley and there are few farms on the valley floor – a pattern which has largely survived to the present day.
- 5.13 In the Medieval period there were likely to be open fields along the river terraces and common meadows on the floodplain, although drainage may have allowed some mixed farming on the floodplain. The Domesday Book records numerous mills associated with settlements along the Thames, and some of the surviving Post-medieval mills are likely to be at the same locations.
- 5.14 The straight-sided rectangular fields that dominate the modern valley floor landscape indicate Parliamentary inclosure of probably early 19th century date. However, in places, such as around Remenham and between Sonning and Wargrave, 20th century boundary removal has created extensive prairie-style fields.
- 5.15 The main roads are determined largely by the course of the river, and its crossing points at Sonning, Henley and the Mill End ferry. The embankment at the base of White Hill on the post road from Maidenhead to Henley was part of a major regrading following the 1718 Turnpike Act, allowing coaches to ascend the hill rather than go the long route via Remenham. A lock was also built at Sonning. Since 1839 the Henley Regatta has been held on the Thames and for the last century the river has been used primarily for its amenity value. The valley is crossed by the branch line of the Great Western Railway from Twyford to Henley opened in 1857.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
BCC No 182	Cropmark N.E. of St Patrick's Avenue
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	There are a number of scattered and isolated sites located throughout the Thames Valley.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Conservation Areas</i>	
	Sonning Wargrave Remenham Henley Bridge Remenham Church
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	There are several listed buildings associated with the cores of the edge of floodplain villages including Remenham and the conservation areas of Sonning, Wargrave and Henley.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
Temple Island (and Fawley Court) Grade II* Park Place and Temple Combe	Fishing Temple (probably by Wyatt 1771) on an island in the Thames .5Km northeast of Fawley Court (Buckinghamshire) conceived as a focal part within late C17 and mid-C18 park and landscape.

Ecological Character

- 5.16 The *Thames River Valley* character area forms a relatively narrow part of the floodplain, which abuts the steep chalk slopes to the south. The valley is characterised by seasonally wet alluvial soils, which support a range of wet grassland and woodland vegetation types. The banks of the river are fringed by alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), willow (*Salix* spp.) and poplar (*Populus* spp.).
- 5.17 However, the area has been subjected to widespread improvement and the majority of the floodplain is composed of improved grassland swards, used for livestock grazing. There are also smaller areas of arable land used for cereal cultivation.
- 5.18 The channel itself is managed for both boat traffic and flood defence purposes and although it maintains some ecological interest, important species such as Loddon pondweed (*Potamogeton nodosus*)

have declined and this plant may now be extinct in this stretch of the Thames. However the water retains a high quality diverse and comparatively productive fishery of which the Temple to Marlow reach is the highlight with excellent rheophilic (riverine) and limnophilic (stillwater) populations.

- 5.19 Where drainage has been less severe scattered fragments of semi-natural habitat have persisted in the Thames River Valley. There are six sites with Wildlife Heritage Site status, including two wet woodlands and three grassland sites with scrub and woodland elements. The woodland sites are typically composed of alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and willow (*Salix* spp.) carr and support a range of wet woodland species including marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*), meadow sweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and occasionally the rare and nationally important Loddon lily (*Leucojum aestivum*).
- 5.20 Wargrave marsh represents the largest remaining area of semi-natural wet grassland in this character area, and is an important site for breeding birds. This site once carried SSSI designation but its nature conservation value declined due to improvement for agriculture in the 1980's.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserve</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
River Loddon 76.18ha	River
Grassland slope 4.4ha – <i>Part of this sites also falls within D1</i>	Marsh, calcareous grassland
Wetland north of Wargrave 0.5ha	Grassland, woodland
Wargrave Marsh 4.7ha	Wetland, scrub, meadow
Meadow adjacent to River Thames 8.0ha	Grassland, woodland

Designations	Summary of Importance
Wood adjacent to Henley Rowing Club 0.4ha	Wet woodland
Wet woods 1.2ha	Stream, wet woodland

Rural Land Use

- 5.21 The main land uses within the *Thames River Valley* are farming, recreation and natural landscape including woodland and wetland. There are also some settled areas, but these are peripheral and so do not dominate the character of the landscape.
- 5.22 The farmland in this area is large scale; comprising vast arable fields (cereals) divided by post and wire fences and medium-sized horse pastures bounded by fences and drainage ditches. There is no real network of hedgerows in this character area and the few surviving hedgerows are fragmented low flailed hawthorn monocultures. Consequently the floodplain has an open feel. The exception to this is the large 'island' of land between the Thames and the Henerton Backwater around Wargrave Marsh, which has a smaller field system and more intimate quality. The allotments, near Henley, also create a more intricate pattern on the floodplain.
- 5.23 The area is partially wooded. The woodland is of a natural quality and concentrated in deciduous linear belts following the watercourses or belts of trees (including conifers) marking property boundaries. The smaller drainage channels set within the pastures are sporadically punctuated with pollarded willows.
- 5.24 Use of the river for or as a setting for leisure and recreation is a very important feature of the Thames valley exploiting the views and opportunities for watersports. A number of small informal car parks have been established to support these uses. The banks of the Thames are a very popular destination for rambling and cycling. This is facilitated by the presence of numerous footpaths and towpaths following the river, including The Thames Path – a long distance footpath classified as a national trail, which is largely on the Buckingham side of the boundary until it reaches Henley, at which point it crosses into Berkshire. The river itself is used for angling, canoeing and boating. The pleasure craft ferrying tourists down the

Thames, colourful barge traffic and associated boathouses are a feature of the landscape introducing activity and noise into the peaceful setting. This reach of the Thames is also, famously, the venue of the Henley Regatta – a highlight of the British Establishment's Social Calendar.

Settlement and Built Character

- 5.25 This character area is an important focus of settlement, with settlement spaced at regular intervals on both sides of the river valley. There are four Conservation Areas at Sonning, Wargrave, Remenham Henley Bridge and Remenham Church. The settlements are located at the edge of the floodplain along the periphery of the character area boundary. However, the most important settlements have expanded away from the floodplain and into the adjoining character areas. The principal settlements following this pattern within Wokingham District are Wargrave (discussed further in *H1: Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands*) and Sonning (*D2: Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes*), although Henley-on-Thames and Lower Shiplake across the valley in Buckinghamshire follow a similar pattern.
- 5.26 The hamlets of Aston, Remenham and the nuclei of Wargrave and Sonning Villages are typical of the floodplain edge settlements with a small-scale vernacular character. These settlements are particularly noted for their combination of vernacular materials including flint, warm traditional red brick and tile, and dark weatherboarding. Brick banding and timber – framing with pitched and half-hipped roofs are a feature. Some of these settlements include focal edge-of floodplain flint churches with square towers and attractive churchyards.
- 5.27 In addition to edge-of-Thames settlements there are also some linear settlements, apparent on the valley floor. These include Loddon Drive, located along the stretch of the River Loddon before it meets with the River Thames, and Willow Lane along the Henerton Backwater at Wargrave Marsh. These tend to be more modern fairly executive style houses, some of which have the appearance of weekend retreats or holiday homes. They are fairly well integrated into the landscape within a wooded framework.

- 5.28 Buildings visible from but not actually within the Thames Valley also have an important influence on the character of this area. Most notable in this respect are the manor houses and parkland located along the chalk slopes of Remenham, Sonning and the Chilterns. These include the large detached redbrick and pantile college buildings of Shiplake House, Matson House near Henley, Fawley Court College, Bear Place and Wargrave Manor. These country houses in landscaped grounds were built as the Bath and Swindon Roads developed from London. They create a parkland impression in parts, which is emphasised by the presence of more overtly scenic building of the Fishing Temple, a small white-painted temple, located romantically on Temple Island visible across the Thames.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 5.29 There are a number of literary and artistic perceptions of the village of Wargrave. In *'The Book of Wargrave - History and Reminiscences by the People of Wargrave'* (1986) it is noted that "in late Victorian times, Wargrave attracted a number of now-famous artists and writers" and how many of those either bought houses within the village or resided at the local pubs – the St George and Dragon Inn being a particular favourite. Among them, Charles Henry Malcolm Kerr – a London Painter of portraits, landscapes and country subject, painted *'Wargrave Church'* which formed one of 27 of his works exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1884 and 1904. George Vicat Cole (1833–1893), an important landscape painter of the mid-19th century also painted at Wargrave. Vicat Cole painted naturalistic landscape scenes and did not aspire to produce the image of the rustic idyll. His oil on canvas simply entitled *'Wargrave'* provides a foreground scene of the River Thames flanked by the wooded riverbank, which in turn is punctuated by the spires of Wargrave church in the distance.
- 5.30 William Gosling (1824–1883) painted naturalistic landscapes or pure landscape scenes in and around Wargrave and Henley-on-Thames. *'Near Wargrave-on-Thames'* depicts a number of villages working and boating on the Thames not far from Wargrave. He also painted from *'Henley from the Gate Hill'* – an image of peasants harvesting with Henley in the distance.

5.31 Alfred Augustus Glendening (1840–1910) also painted the river landscape and of note is the painting entitled *‘Gathering Rushes on the Thames near Wargrave’*. Other writers and artists to have both resided and worked in Wargrave are F. Walker, B.W Leader, H.S. Marks, E. Duncan and S. P Jackson. S. P Jackson painted many images of both the river and village.

5.32 In J E Vincent’s *‘The Story of the Thames’* (1909) he details the journey taken from Shiplake Lock to Wargrave which he describes as:

“...a short half-mile of the Thames, reinforced by the Loddon, flowing almost due east, and here the stream is turned northward into low ground, calculated to encourage wide curves of course and many islets by the commanding ridge of chalk...”

Vincent refers to Wargrave as *“an exquisite village, boasting an ivy-grown church and...an inn-sign, that of the George and the Dragon”*. It is interesting to note that Gertrude Jekyll, whilst resident at Wargrave Manor, lent George Dunlop Leslie R.A her large pot of white lead to help him repaint the sign to the George and Dragon. He painted one side whilst the artist J.E. Hodgson painted the other, this at a time when both were unable to paint the landscape due to excessive flooding. The Book of Wargrave – *‘History and Reminiscences by the People of Wargrave’* (1986) tells how Gertrude Jekyll herself *“is recorded as having painted several inn signs in the area; alas we have no record of their names”*.

5.33 In his book *‘Our River’* George Dunlop Leslie R.A records Wargrave as:

“a sweet quiet little village, and the houses with their lawns on the river bank, all add to the charm of the spot, the elm-trees in Mr. F. Maitland’s garden being, with those about the church, quite a feature of the bend of the river”.

5.34 In his famous *‘Three Men in a Boat’* (first published 1889), Jerome K Jerome wrote of the journey to Wargrave along the Hennerton Backwater:

“We went up the backwater to Wargrave. It is a short cut, leading out f the right-hand bank about half a mile above Marsh Lock,

and is well worth taking, being a pretty, shady little piece of stream, besides having nearly half a mile of distance”.

- 5.35 Sonning has also been the subject of many artistic and literary references. In J E Vincent’s ‘*The Story of the Thames*’ (1909) he describes the journey from the wooded hills of Holme Park to Sonning. On passing through Sonning Lock he states that:

“there is a strong disposition to disobey the self-denying ordinance against comparisons and to pronounce that here, assuredly, is the prettiest spot on the Thames. Here, so far as the delight of the eye goes, we have nearly everything that can be desired – much branching of the river, many eyots, rising ground and variety of contour on the Berkshire side, gay gardens and lawns of hotels modernised but some with taste...”.

- 5.36 There are a number of paintings of Sonning such as ‘*Sonning Church and Bridge*’ by Samuel Ireland (1791) and ‘*September Sunshine*’ by J Ayton Symington (1911) both depicting scenes of a riverside village idyll.

- 5.37 Jerome K Jerome wrote of Sonning:

“...the most fairy-like little nook on the whole river. It is more like a stage village than one built of bricks and mortar. Every house is smothered in roses, and now, in early June, they were bursting forth in clouds of dainty splendour”.

- 5.38 Of the River he wrote:

“The river up to Sonning winds in and out through many islands and is very placid, hushed and lonely. Few folk, except, at twilight, a pair or two of rustic lovers, walk along its banks...It is a part of the river in which to dream of bygone days, and vanished forms and faces, and things that might have been, but are not, confound them.”

- 5.39 Jane Austen also has connections with Sonning. Whilst at school in Reading, it is thought she visited her mother’s sister, Jane, and her husband (Reverend Edward Cooper). Her mother’s brother (James

Leigh Perrot) and his wife also lived in the Wokingham District (refer to *GI: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes*).

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 5.40 The *Thames River Valley* (A1) is a landscape of overall **high quality**. This is because the area has a strong landscape character which is in generally good condition. The **strong character** is derived from the distinctive river channel with its associated waterside habitats and the presence of picturesque and traditional settlements on the floodplain edge. Views into the adjoining Chilterns also give this area a very strong sense of place. The status of the Thames as a nationally important river and its connections with the development of Oxford and London, the presence of the Thames Path National Trail, the status of the river as the venue for the Henley Regatta and the strong literary and artistic representation of this stretch of the river all contribute to the strong character. Generally, the landscape is considered to be in **good condition**, although there are some opportunities for improvement, for example enhancements to the interconnectivity of wetland and waterside habitats.

Landscape Strategy

- 5.41 The overall strategy for *Thames River Valley* (A1) is to **conserve** the peaceful, natural character, with the meandering river channel, network of streams and channels, belts of bankside woodland and distinctive willow pollard and picturesque floodplain edge settlements. The key elements of character which would benefit from improved management are the woodland and wetland habitats, the hedgerow framework and traditional features including pollarded willow. There are also opportunities to restore pasture along the floodplain, in areas where arable land uses now dominate.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 5.42 The *Thames River Valley* (A1) is a landscape of **high sensitivity** to change. Although many characteristics are capable of being successfully recreated, many are also of regional or even national

importance. The most sensitive aspects are the watercourses (including the Thames), the peaceful, natural character, the relationship with, and views of the Thames Valley to/from the Chilterns AONB, the wet woodlands, the remnant historic parkland and the small floodplain-edge settlements. The potential for views along the valley from the adjacent high ground, along with the strong sense of openness make the area particularly visually sensitive.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

5.43 The following table sets out the key issues that have had, are having or have potential to affect the character of the *Thames River Valley* (A1). The guidelines set out how these issues should be managed in order to ensure that positive landscape character, as defined in the description, is conserved, in line with the landscape strategy.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Hedgerow loss is evident – this is associated with the past expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture. The post and wire fencing present is less aesthetically pleasing than a robust hedgerow network would be.	• Conserve remaining hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features. Consider opportunities for reinstatement of hedges, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides.
❖ There is evidence of incremental loss of species rich grassland (including wet meadow) due to increasingly intensive grassland management/conversion to arable land.	• Consider opportunities for the creation of wet meadows or permanent pasture to restore grassland habitats lost through agricultural intensification.
❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides have resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been improvement in water quality.	• Encourage environmentally beneficial management of farmland.
❖ Loss of features e.g. pollarded willows on waterside pasture.	• Encourage traditional management practices to maintain key landscape features.

Key Issues

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Climate change is likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows and possible greater damage to woodland as a result of wind throw.

Minerals

- ❖ Past pressures for gravel and sand extraction in river valleys, particularly along the Thames and Loddon, has resulted in changes in landscape character. The pressure for gravel extraction is likely to continue.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture. This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.

Recreation

- ❖ High demands for recreation, including watersports, continue to threaten the tranquillity of the landscape.
- ❖ Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated district.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas

Associated Guidelines

- Consider the use of trees and creation of wetland habitats within river catchments to dampen extreme river flows and place greater emphasis on mixed age woodlands that are more resistant to wind throw as well as disease and other stresses.

- Further mineral extraction in this part of the Thames Valley is not appropriate. Ensure that restoration plans for any permitted gravel extraction sites are in keeping with the character of the landscape. Encourage opportunities for habitat creation.

- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland).

- Seek sympathetic integration of new recreational features and seek to locate such activities in less sensitive areas.

- Consider opportunities for zoning of activities on the river and floodplain to ensure sensitive landscapes are protected from damaging activities. Also seek to enhance the integration of car parks into the landscape.

- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between

Key Issues

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new industrial developments, sewage treatment works and commercial premises leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.
- ❖ This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies'. Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape. This, for example, may particularly affect views from this character area to the adjoining Chiltern Hills.

Associated Guidelines

- adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. Consider the role of the Thames floodplain in relation to separation between Henley, Wargrave, Charvil and Sonning.
- Undertake sensitive woodland planting to reduce the intrusion of existing development. Care should be taken in the siting and design of industrial buildings and estates to ensure that key landscape characteristics are maintained.
- Conserve the resource of dark skies in Wokingham District. Monitor development proposals and ensure measures are taken to minimise light pollution (e.g. full cut off lights). Promote guidance to encourage appropriate lighting of domestic/commercial properties.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.

A1: THAMES RIVER VALLEY



A2: LODDON RIVER VALLEY

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 5.44 The *Loddon River Valley (A2)* character area occupies the flat valley floor of the River Loddon, a tributary of the Thames. It is underlain by riverine alluvium and the youngest of the river terrace gravel deposits relating to the Loddon. Its boundaries are clearly defined both geologically, and by the notable change in topography to adjacent character areas that form the valley sides. The landscape is dominated by mixed agriculture of irregular fields, with large-scale arable fields occupying better drained areas and small scale wet meadows occurring on frequently flooded land adjacent to the river. Woodland is another notable component of the valley floor, forming a backdrop to views.
- 5.45 Although the landscape is peaceful, almost remote in places, the proximity to large centres of development is evident through views to residential estates on the edges of Reading and the continuous presence of background traffic noise from the M4 and other major roads that cross the floodplain. Water mills, small hump backed bridges and pollarded willows are traditional features of this riverine landscape.

Location and Boundaries

- 5.46 The *Loddon River Valley* character area occupies a corridor between Swallowfield and Winnersh and relates to the valley floor of the River Loddon and its tributary, the Broadwater, in the south-west of the District. The boundaries of the area are defined by the extent of the river alluvium and recent second terrace river deposits that occupy the valley floor.
- 5.47 Transition to the *Arborfield River Terrace* (area C1 to the south-east) is marked by a small, but obvious change in elevation. *Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay* (area J3) is a prominent ridge that encloses the valley to the north-west and *Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland* (area I2) forms the higher ground between the Loddon and Broadwater.

Transitions to these latter character areas are marked by more dramatic changes in topography.

5.48 To the north-east the character area ends abruptly at the edge of Winnersh and the Loddon Bridge where industry and infrastructure form an artificial boundary and mark the end of the tranquil rural landscape of the Loddon Valley. The character area is terminated in the south-west by the administrative boundary of Wokingham District and it is recognised that, in reality, the *Loddon River Valley* character area will extend outside the District boundary.

Key Characteristics

- Presence of the **River Loddon**, following a meandering course with branches, **tributary rivers** and **streams**.
- **Broad, flat alluvial floodplain** bounded by adjacent low ridges of river terrace gravels.
- **Medium and large irregular geometric fields** of both **pasture** and **arable** farmland, divided by post and wire fencing, timber fencing, gappy hedgerows and drainage ditches.
- **Natural wetland character** associated with the watercourses providing important wildlife habitats, including riparian woodlands and wet meadows and supporting many **rare and important species**.
- **Low-density scattered settlement** dominated by traditional warm red brick buildings and farmsteads.
- Important historic **riverside features** including **bridges** at crossing points, **water mills** and **moated sites**.
- Scattered blocks of **deciduous woodland** and **copses**, interlinked woodland belts, scattered trees and scrub provide a rough **wooded backdrop**.
- Influence of **large scale designed parkland** landscape at Swallowfield Park with smooth, shelving grassland and mature oaks.
- **Strong rural character and sense of remoteness** in some areas, although the **M4 creates physical and visual severance** along the

floodplain.

Physical Landscape

- 5.49 The character of the *River Loddon Valley* is influenced by the presence of the River Loddon, a tributary of the River Thames. The river itself occupies only a small part of the floodplain its presence is only revealed close to its banks or in the tranquil water meadows that lie alongside the river. The river is branched and braided, for example north of Arborfield Bridge where a system of sluices and weirs mark the site of the old Arborfield Mill, now a water pumping station. The river also branches significantly at Salter's Bridge, Swallowfield and at Sindlesham Mill, north of the M4. There are also numerous ponds, ox-bow lakes and pools of standing water on the valley floor.
- 5.50 The landform comprises a flat floodplain that lies between 40 and 45m AOD. It is underlain by riverine alluvium and younger river terrace deposits of the Loddon that give rise to pelo-alluvial argillic gley soils that are affected by high groundwater levels. The loamy soils that overlie the younger river terrace gravels are better drained and are in use as arable fields. The areas closer to the river are affected by short term flooding and are characterised by pasture and wet meadow.

Historic Environment

- 5.51 As with the Thames Valley, the Loddon was an early focus of human activity and cultivation of the fertile valley floor may have commenced during the Neolithic with cultivation on the valley sides leading to alluvial deposition on the floodplain below. Cropmarks, including ring ditches, and Bronze Age finds, provide evidence of continuous prehistoric/Romano-British settlement and farming along the Loddon. The Roman road between London and *Calleva* (Silchester), known locally as the Devil's Highway, runs for a short length at Riseley Common.
- 5.52 Although the area was part of Windsor Forest, the “-feld” element of place names such as Arborfield and Swallowfield, suggests a largely open and cultivated landscape during the Saxon period. The focus of Medieval and later settlement was on the valley sides, with settlement on lower ground consisting mainly of dispersed farmsteads sited at the

edges of the floodplain, probably set within open fields along the river gravels and common meadows on the floodplain.

- 5.53 There is a loose network of lanes serving this primarily agricultural landscape, with a limited number of river crossing points. The presence of Post-medieval mills at a number of these and other points, i.e. Sheepbridge Mill, Sindlesham Mill, Stanford End Mill, etc, probably reflects the locations of earlier mills.
- 5.54 The large straight-sided fields along most of the valley indicate Parliamentary inclosure of probably early 19th century date. Small areas with less regular fields interspersed with small parcels of woodland, shown on the 1st edition OS map, indicate earlier assart inclosures, although few traces of these survive due to recent amalgamation of fields.
- 5.55 There are a number of moated sites – the greatest concentration in the district – the construction of moats in the Post-medieval period being a popular way of enhancing the status and appearance of a manor, or other large house, such as at Beaumys Castle and Sheepbridge Court. A number of 17th and 18th century country houses were surrounded by areas of landscaped parkland, traces of which area still visible around the site of the now demolished Arborfield Hall, and at Swallowfield Park, the 1690 country house much remodelled in the 18th century, which was based upon and incorporates the woodland of an earlier medieval deer park.
- 5.56 A more recent feature of the Loddon Valley is the scattering of World War II gun emplacements (Pill boxes) associated with the ‘stop line’ that ran throughout this part of Berkshire.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
BCC No. 146; monument 12018	Moated manorial site at Beaumys Castle, 200m NE of Priory Farm
BCC No 152, monument 12020	Medieval moated site at Sheepbridge Court
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	There are a number of Regional

Designations	Summary of Importance
	Archaeological Sites in the Loddon Valley, particularly to the east of Arborfield and to the south of Swallowfield.
Conservation Areas	
	Swallowfield
Listed Buildings	
	Swallowfield Village Conservation Area is centred on the cluster of listed buildings in the village. A number of the scattered farmsteads on the valley floor are also listed.
English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.	
Swallowfield Park (Grade II)	Swallowfield Park was enclosed in the 14th century. Today it consists of a 17th century country house with gardens and pleasure grounds and a landscape park laid out in the 18th century.

Ecological Character

5.57 The Loddon River Valley character area has retained significant biological interest and is characterised by scattered wet woodlands and grasslands, which are now mostly restricted to the banks of the river channel. The valley is particularly notable for the nationally important Stanford End Mill and River Loddon (SSSI), which comprises a 4km stretch of the River Loddon together with a series of traditionally managed, seasonally waterlogged hay meadows. This site supports rich plant communities and is of special interest for its thriving populations of two rare plants, the fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*) which is now mainly confined to scattered localities in southern Britain, and Loddon pondweed (*Potamogeton nodosus*), a rare aquatic plant for which this length of River is a national stronghold. The site is also associated with a number of notable aquatic and wetland mollusc species, including two rare pea mussels (*Pisidium moitessierianum* and *P. tenuilineatum*), and two rare snails *Vertigo antivertigo* and *V. moulinsiana*.

5.58 In addition the valley supports eleven areas designated as Wildlife Heritage Sites, including eight woodlands, three of which are of ancient origin. These wet woods are dominated by alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and crack willow (*Salix fragilis*) and are particularly notable for supporting important populations of Loddon lily (*Leucojum aestivum*).

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Site of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
Stanford End Mill and River Loddon 10.0ha (SU709642)	Grassland, river
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Great Wood 15.7 / 15.7ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within C1</i>	Ancient woodland
Moor Copse 13.9 / 14.0ha	Ancient woodland
St. Johns Copse	Ancient woodland
Rounds Copse 2.4 / 2.4ha	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
River Loddon 76.2 ha	River
Loddon Bridge 4.9ha	Riverside
Tanner's Copse 1.4ha	Woodland
Arborfield Bridge Meadow 4.6ha	Grassland, open water
Hall Farm – Woodland Triangle 0.7ha	Woodland
Rushy Mead and Newcovert 3.9ha	Wet woodland
Loader's Copse 2.1ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within C1</i>	Woodland
Alder Carr 1.3ha	Wet woodland
Wood and Ditch/Moat 1.57ha	Woodland

Rural Land Use

- 5.59 The landscape is dominated by a large scale irregular field pattern divided by drainage ditches and post and wire fencing. Where hedgerows occur they are low flailed, species poor and discontinuous, forming the remnants of a former network. Alongside, the river corridor itself wet meadows are an important resource and wet woodland provides a sense of enclosure and hidden character that contrasts with the open floodplain beyond. The presence of pollarded willows is characteristic of the river corridor.
- 5.60 Mixed deciduous and coniferous copses and coverts form isolated geometric blocks within the wider mixed farmland. These woodlands provide shelter for wildlife as well as a green backdrop to views across the floodplain. The historic parkland of Swallowfield Park has a localised influence on the character of the floodplain with scattered parkland trees (mature oaks) and woodland belts forming features within the open floodplain.
- 5.61 Apart from public footpaths at Salter's Bridge, Arborfield/Shinfield and Loddon Bridge, the floodplain is largely inaccessible by foot and remains a remote, agricultural landscape. There is little use of the river for pleasure craft and limited opportunity for recreation including fishing.

Settlement and Built Character

- 5.62 The *Loddon River Valley* is a rural, remote character area with a dominant settlement pattern being one of very low density scattered built features. Built features typical of this valley landscape are the traditional brick and timber framed farmsteads, mills and hump backed bridges at crossing points of the river. Often the settlements associated with the water mills, for example old Arborfield village, are located on the adjacent higher ground of the older river terraces or clay farmland and linked to the valley floor by rural tracks and lanes. In Arborfield the site of the mill is now a water pumping station.
- 5.63 Swallowfield House is a 17th century house set within carefully tended grounds, with a wooded walk leading to the quiet flowing River Loddon. Swallowfield Park has an old walled garden, now planted in

the Arts and Crafts Style, and is surrounded by a woodland garden. The village of Swallowfield (Conservation Area) lies on the edge of the park and is unusual in that it occupies a site on the valley floor.

- 5.64 The traditional built features within the valley are typically constructed from traditional warm red brick and timber framing of the 17th and 18th century, with clay tile the dominant roofing material. This is seen in the scattered farmsteads, mill buildings, bridges and village of Swallowfield. Agricultural buildings often combine the use of weatherboarding with red brick and typically have half-hipped roofs. Flint is also seen in decorative use on gate posts or on churches and in all cases attention to detail is a characteristic of the built environment.
- 5.65 There is a range of materials present where new built development has spread onto the valley floor (for example on the edges of Shinfield), and where major infrastructure crosses the valley (for example the A33, A327 and M4). Electricity pylons are typical features of the valley floor, prominent in views across such an open landscape.
- 5.66 Although built development is limited on the valley floor, there are views to substantial areas of built development in adjacent areas, for example the residential outskirts of Reading. Despite proximity to large scale residential built development, the valley floor has retained a tranquil, rural character.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 5.67 In his book, '*Our River*' George Dunlop Leslie R.A recalls collecting foliage and dried reeds at Wargrave, which he took away with him and used to create the pictures painted of the River Loddon.
- 5.68 The critic J. C. Loudon remarked of Swallowfield Park, in 1831, that '*The situation is nearly flat, with a stream passing through it. The house is a large plain building, lately put in thorough repair; and the gardens and grounds are undergoing essential ameliorations*'.
- 5.69 The village of Swallowfield has associations with Miss Mary Russell Mitford who wrote a diary known as '*Our Village*' which became a minor classic. In '*Our Village*' she asks of the "*brimming Loddon*":

“Is it not a beautiful river? Rising level with its banks, so clear and smooth and peaceful, giving back the verdant landscape and the clear blue sky, and bearing on its pellucid stream the snowy water-lily, the purest of flowers, like the lady in ‘Comus’”.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 5.70 The *Loddon River Valley (A2)* is a landscape of overall **high quality**. This is due to the strong contribution that many landscape components make to the overall perception of the landscape coupled with their generally moderate condition. The **strong character** relates particularly to the meandering course of the river, the flat floodplain landscape, with its characteristic features such as willow pollards, old stone watermills and bridges, historic parkland plus important habitats including wet woodland and wet meadow remnants. For the most part it is a remote, rural landscape. The **moderate condition** of some key features provide opportunities for landscape improvements, as set out in the landscape strategy/guidelines – particularly enhancements to habitat and hedgerow interconnectivity.

Landscape Strategy

- 5.71 The overall strategy for the *Loddon River Valley (A2)* is to **conserve** its current rural character with its typical river valley components and sense of remoteness. There are also opportunities to **restore** elements that have been lost, notably restoration of hedgerow boundaries and restoration/enhancement of natural habitats including areas of wet woodland and wet meadow. Restoration of permanent pasture on areas of arable land alongside the river is also a key opportunity.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 5.72 The *Loddon River Valley* is considered to be a landscape with **high sensitivity** to change. This is because it is very difficult to recreate many of the key characteristics of the landscape if these were to be affected, for example the naturalness of the river course and its associated habitats, the presence of mature trees, and the area’s tranquil remote character including an absence of development on the

valley floor. Moreover, many of the characteristics are also noted to be of regional and national importance such as the Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI, numerous WHSs and the EH registered parkland at Swallowfield. The valley form and the potential for views from the adjacent river terrace (C1) and farmland (J3) give this area a high visual sensitivity to change.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

5.73 The following table sets out the key issues that have had, are having or have potential to affect the character of the *Loddon River Valley* (A2). The guidelines set out how these issues should be managed in order to ensure that positive landscape character, as defined in the description, is conserved.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Hedgerow loss is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.	• Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
❖ There is evidence of incremental loss of species rich grassland due to increasingly intensive grassland management.	• Consider opportunities for the creation of wet meadows or permanent pasture to restore grassland habitats lost through agricultural intensification. Ensure the protection of the Stamford End Meadows.
❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years water quality has improved.	• Encourage environmentally beneficial management of both pasture and arable land.
❖ Decline in demand for traditional countryside products leading to loss of	• Encourage traditional management practices to maintain key landscape features.

Key Issues

rural features pollarded willows on waterside pasture.

Associated Guidelines

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Climate change is likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows and possible greater damage to woodland as a result of wind throw.
- Consider the use of trees and wetland habitats within river catchments to dampen extreme river flows and place greater emphasis on mixed age woodlands that are more resistant to wind throw as well as disease and other stresses.

Minerals

- ❖ Past pressures for gravel and sand extraction in river valleys, particularly along the Thames and Loddon, has resulted in changes in landscape character. The pressure for gravel extraction is likely to continue.
- Ensure restoration plans for gravel extraction sites are in keeping with the character of the landscape in which they lie. Encourage opportunities for habitat creation. Resist any proposals that would impact on the intactness or integrity of the landscape or habitats.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture. This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.
- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland).

Recreation

- ❖ Potential for recreational pressure leading to erosion of special ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated district.
- Consider zoning of activities to ensure sensitive landscapes are protected from damaging activities.

Key Issues

Associated Guidelines

Built Development

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. In particular resist the expansion of Swallowfield, Earley, Winnersh and Shinfield onto the floodplain. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ There is continuing pressure for expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider undertaking character appraisals of settlements within Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ There is continuing pressure for new industrial developments, sewage treatment works and commercial premises, particularly in the river valleys and associated with the major transport corridors. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resist any pressure for floodplain development associated with the M4. Care should be taken in the siting and design of industrial buildings and estates to ensure that key landscape characteristics are maintained. Undertake sensitive woodland planting to reduce the intrusion of the motorway, other major roads and large buildings. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies'. Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve the resource of dark skies in Wokingham District. Monitor development proposals and ensure measures are taken to minimise light pollution (e.g. full cut off lights). Promote guidance to encourage appropriate lighting of domestic/commercial properties. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies'. Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve the resource of dark skies in Wokingham District. Monitor development proposals and ensure measures are taken to minimise light pollution (e.g. full cut off lights). Promote guidance to encourage appropriate lighting of domestic/commercial |

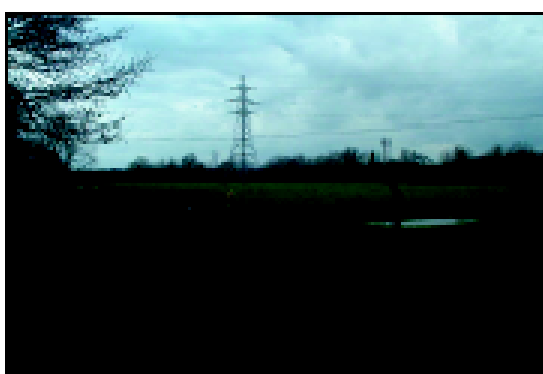
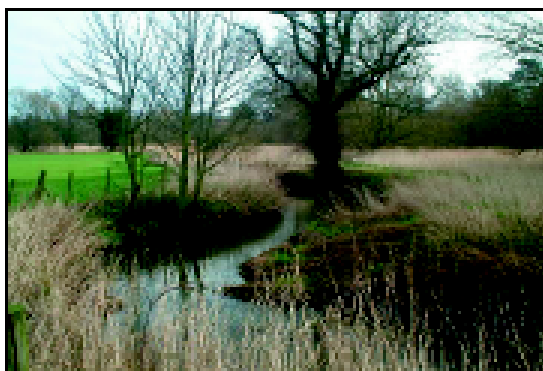
Key Issues

Associated Guidelines
properties.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.
 - ❖ Also vulnerable to large scale infrastructure projects including widening of the M4 and construction of the Winnersh bypass.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.
 - The valley is particularly sensitive to large scale infrastructure development. It is important to ensure that such development does not become a catalyst for further change.

A2: LODDON RIVER VALLEY



A3: BLACKWATER RIVER VALLEY

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 5.74 The *Blackwater River Valley (A3)*, situated at the south of the district, occupies the floodplain of the River Blackwater, defined by the district boundary and the adjoining sandy pastureland.
- 5.75 The area is characterised by the presence of the River Blackwater along its southern boundary. The river winds through a pastoral landscape of small fields and paddocks bounded by thick hedgerows with abundant trees and some small areas of woodland. Rural lanes crossing the river by fords link scattered farmsteads although elsewhere there are larger more engineered bridges. Timber framed and thatched vernacular buildings add to the rural ambiance. Away from the river, at the edge of the valley floor, there are larger, more open, arable fields and larger blocks of deciduous woodland. Modern development at the edges of the villages and along the roads skirting the valley is associated in some places with geometric paddocks bounded by post and rail fences.

Location and Boundaries

- 5.76 The Blackwater River forms the southern boundary of Wokingham district. To the east the valley continues as the *Blackwater River Valley with Open Water* with the boundary defined by a line across the valley floor representing the current extent of the mineral workings. The boundary to the north marks the foot of the slope up to the higher ground of Farley Hill and follows the 50m AOD contour. It continues along the foot of the more gentle undulations of the *Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland*. Here the topography is less well defined and the boundary is defined by A227 and B3348 deviating in Finchampstead where it skirts the higher central part of the village.

Key Characteristics

- **Riverine landscape** dominated by the presence of the moderately

large **Blackwater River** with a gently winding course, which is frequently enclosed within **riverbank vegetation**.

- **Narrow valley gently enclosed** by the London Clay slopes of Farley Hill (L2) to the west and **widening** to the east where it is bounded by the gently shelving sides of the pastoral sands of Finchampstead (N2).
- **Flat alluvial valley floor** prone to flooding, with pockets of river terrace gravels.
- **Rural agricultural landscape** dominated by **small enclosed verdant pastures** and **rough paddocks** concentrated along the river corridor.
- Presence of **geometric medium-sized arable fields** on the lower valley sides.
- **Wooded, enclosed and intimate** quality due to the influence of **thick and frequently overgrown hedgerows** and **hedgerow trees** defining field boundaries and **often extensive deciduous woodland blocks** and **copses** away from the immediate river corridor.
- **Sparse settlement pattern** of **traditional scattered farmsteads** at the edge of the floodplain.
- Presence of Victorian and more **modern development** expanding from the villages (e.g. Eversley) with stretches of **ribbon development** along main roads.
- Traditional and **vernacular built character** with timber framing, brick and thatch characteristic and including a weatherboarded mill house at a river fording point.
- Strong sense of **tranquillity** and even **remoteness**.

Physical Landscape

5.77 The *Blackwater River Valley* is characterised by the presence of the Blackwater River. This is a small river with a gently winding course. Near to and adjoining the river are open water bodies, and a network of drainage ditches takes water from the surrounding land to the river.

5.78 The alluvial valley floor is narrow to the west where it is closely bounded by the rising slopes of London Clay. To the east the low undulating sand of the Bagshot Formation forms the north slopes and here the valley floor is wider. Pockets of 2nd River Terrace at the edge of the valley floor become a more substantial element of the wider flat valley to the east. This pattern is reflected in the soils. The fertile soil of the valley floor supports a mixture of arable and pastoral use, with the land closest to the river that is subject to flooding predominantly given over to pasture. The less fertile sandy soils of the valley edge and the pockets of river gravel support wedges of woodland with settlement on the higher ground.

Historic Environment

5.79 There is little evidence of prehistoric or Romano-British clearance along the Blackwater valley. The Blackwater formed part of the southern boundary of the Saxon shire, part of the kingdom of Wessex, but, unlike the Thames and Loddon valleys, the Blackwater appears not to have been a major focus for Saxon settlement.

5.80 Apart from the Domesday settlement at Eversley, Medieval and Post-medieval settlement on the valley floor was limited to farmsteads distributed along the valley edge. The valley floor would have comprised open fields and common grazing. A Roman settlement was probably associated with the crossing point of the Devil's Highway.

5.81 The pattern of narrow sinuous fields southeast of Finchampstead indicates early inclosure of the open fields. Elsewhere, the 1st edition OS map shows a mix of irregular and straight-sided fields, interspersed with irregular areas of woodland, indicating assart and later inclosure, including 19th century Parliamentary inclosure. The pattern of field inclosure is considerably well-preserved.

5.82 There is a single mill at New Mill, probably on the site of a Medieval mill. The valley floor was not a major communication route, and while a number of roads cross the valley, the lanes along it, and crossing at fords, primarily served the farms. The present straight road from Finchampstead to Eversley Cross, crossing the river at Finchampstead Bridge, replaced the earlier Longwater Lane which crossed at a ford.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	A large area of the river valley floor (almost the entire extent) is classified making it the most extensive continuous area in the district.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	A small number scattered but particularly associated with river fording points including the New Mill (now a restaurant).
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 5.83 In comparison to the slightly calcareous conditions of the Thames and Loddon Valleys, there are higher proportions of sand and more acid substrates influencing the ecological character of the Blackwater Valley. The land rises up gently from the channel and the floodplain forms only a narrow band of seasonally wet ground and has resulted in fewer remaining nature conservation sites.
- 5.84 Three sites with Wildlife Heritage Site status remain in the Blackwater Valley, one of which, Fleet Copse is a significant block of ancient woodland dominated by oak (*Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) together with a rich assemblage of higher plant species. It has been managed as coppice with standards and has retained its original woodland banks.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Site of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Local Nature Reserve</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Fleet Copse 23.3 / 22.9ha	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Longwater Lane Meadow 2.6ha	Meadow
Group of woodland adjacent to New Mill Road 4.4ha	Wet woodland

Rural Land Use

- 5.85 The main land uses in the *Blackwater River Valley* are agriculture and woodland with some residential development. Arable farming predominates on the gently shelving lower valley sides in medium sized fields, geometric in shape and bounded by hedges varying in thickness, with large regularly spaced hedgerow trees making an important contribution to the wooded appearance of the landscape.
- 5.86 Characteristic of the valley floor are permanent pasture and paddocks. Small geometric fields are defined by thick hedgerows with a mixture of mature and young trees. In places the hedgerows have an unkempt appearance and in others they are patchy and have been replaced by post and rail or wire fencing. Trees, including young oaks, add to the small scale, wooded feel of the valley floor. To the east where the valley widens the pastures are larger and more open, typically with parallel drainage ditches running along the boundaries down to the river.
- 5.87 The course of the Blackwater itself is marked by a narrow band of scrubby vegetation with trees sometimes hiding the water from view. The woodland, mainly deciduous, is in blocks varying in size, breaking up the landscape into intimate spaces especially to the north of The New Mill.

Settlement and Built Character

- 5.88 There is a regular pattern of farmsteads along the edge of the floodplain plus old settlement at New Mill including the listed New Mill Restaurant. The buildings are predominantly timber framed, some with thatched roofs.
- 5.89 Overlaid on this older pattern is the expansion of villages at Eversley and Finchampstead plus ribbon development along the A327. This is Victorian and modern brick with the older buildings showing some decorative chequered brick detailing for instance near Eversley. Here the expansion of the village is associated with small straight paddocks neatly fenced giving a tamed feeling to the landscape in contrast to the landscape around The New Mill.
- 5.90 Rural roads run along the northern boundary of the area on the slopes of the valley side, they also cross the valley. To the west of the district the roads typically become rural tracks bounded by thick hedges with trees and deep ditches as they near the river which they cross by fords rather than bridges. These tracks plus a network of footpaths give particularly good access to the river for leisure use.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 5.91 The *Blackwater River Valley (A3)* is a landscape of overall **high quality**. It has a strong character and the individual components are generally in good condition. The most important elements contributing to the **strong character** are the Blackwater River, its distinctive intact floodplain, land use pattern of pasture bound by hedgerows with small areas of woodland, variety of riverine habitats, notable buildings and strong perceptual characteristics (including intimacy, tranquillity and remoteness). These components are generally in **good condition**.

Landscape Strategy

- 5.92 The overall strategy for the *Blackwater River Valley (A2)* is to **conserve** the tranquil rural valley character and pastoral landscape. There are opportunities to restore and improve condition through the

reinstatement and management of declining hedgerows and enhancement of areas around settlement.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 5.93 The *Blackwater River Valley* is a landscape of overall **high sensitivity** due to the presence of a number of characteristics that have low recreatability and are important at the regional (or even national) level, including the wetland habitats, low density settlement pattern and distinctive vernacular architecture. However, the most valued and sensitive aspects of this landscape are the perceptual characteristics including the tranquillity and sense of ‘ruralness’ that are of local value but increasingly rare throughout the region.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 5.94 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Blackwater River Valley* and the associated management guidelines. The overall objective is to conserve the rural character, including the sense of tranquillity and the river landscape with its associated distinctive habitats, good hedgerow network and vernacular buildings.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Hedgerows are a key feature of the landscape and require ongoing management.	• Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak standards left to form future timber trees. Manage the ‘green lanes’ quality of the valley side roads.
❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an increase in the conversion to organic food production.	• Encourage ecologically beneficial management of both pasture and arable land.
❖ Decline in demand for traditional countryside products leading to loss of rural features e.g. loss of	• Encourage traditional management practices to maintain key landscape features.

Key Issues

pollarded willows on waterside pasture.

- ❖ Changes in agricultural practice, with some land becoming marginal for commercial uses including conversion to hobby farms and horse paddocks, is leading to loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

Associated Guidelines

- Seek to manage set-aside land, paddocks and hobby farms to enhance the visual and ecological quality of the landscape, for example through planting boundary hedgerows.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- ❖ Climate change is likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows and possible greater damage to woodland as a result of wind throw.
- Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
- Consider the use of trees and wetland habitats within river catchments to dampen extreme river flows and place greater emphasis on mixed age woodlands that are more resistant to wind throw as well as disease and other stresses.

Minerals

- ❖ Past pressures for gravel and sand extraction in river valleys, including the Blackwater Valley, has resulted in changes in landscape character. The pressure for gravel extraction is likely to continue.
- Resist gravel extraction where the character of the landscape created would be of less value than that lost. Ensure restoration plans for gravel extraction sites are in keeping with the character of the landscape in which they lie. Encourage opportunities for habitat creation.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture.
- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland).

Key Issues

This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.

Associated Guidelines

Recreation

- ❖ Pressure for more pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a fragmentation of the rural landscape.
- Provide guidance to encourage new paddocks to be sensitive to existing landscape character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows.

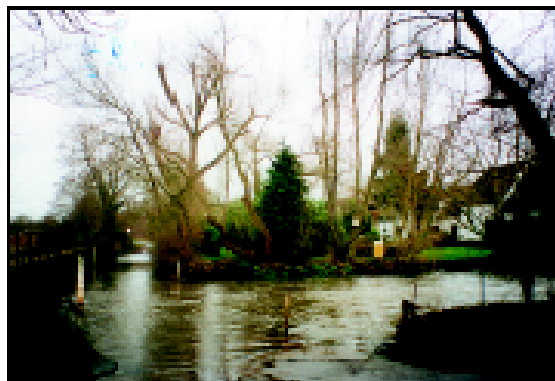
Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.
- Resist additional floodplain settlement and protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements.
- ❖ There is continuing pressure for expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.
- Consider undertaking character appraisals of settlements within Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation.

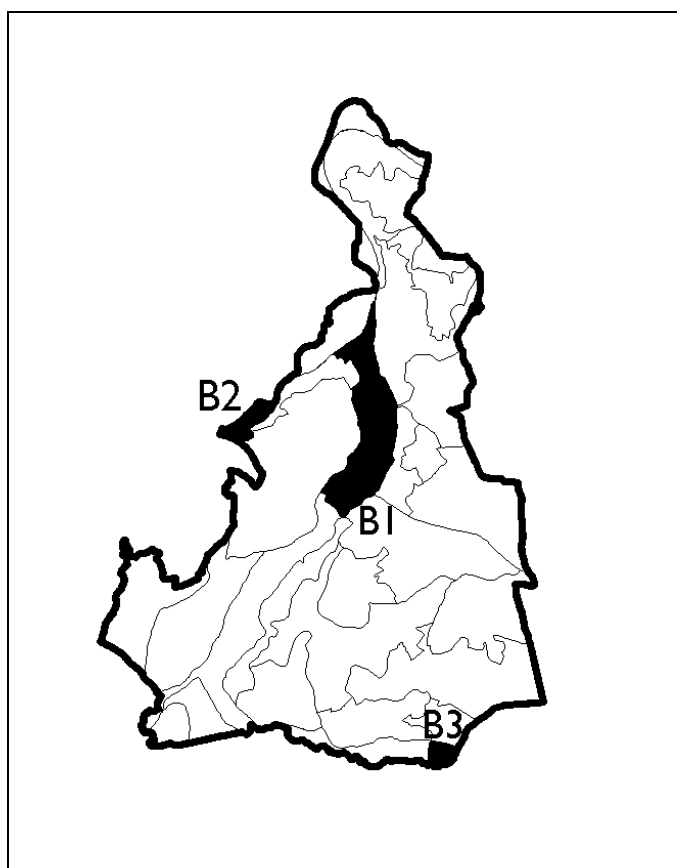
Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- Maintain the historic leafy lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural locations.

A3: BLACKWATER RIVER VALLEY



6 LANDSCAPE TYPE B: RIVER VALLEY WITH OPEN WATER



Landscape Areas	Character
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B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water	
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B2: Thames River Valley with Open Water	
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B3: Blackwater River Valley with Open Water	
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Characteristics of the Landscape Type

- 6.1 The *River Valley with Open Water* landscape type occurs in three places corresponding to particular areas of the River Valley Landscapes – the Thames, Loddon and Blackwater – where mineral extraction has had a significant and lasting impact upon the character and use of the valley landscape. The *River Valley with Open Water* would once have corresponded to the *River Valley* landscape type and therefore shares many essential characteristics with that type including a flat alluvial floodplain and sense of openness. However where gravel and sand extraction has occurred large areas of the landscape are now characterised by the open water and wetlands of the restored workings or the presence of active workings.

Key Characteristics

- Flat to gently shelving landform.

- Predominantly alluvial floodplain landscape with sub-alluvial gravel terrace deposits apparent where workings occur.
- Restored gravel workings with large expanses of open water.
- Wetland vegetation including willow carr.
- River channel – often enclosed within bankside vegetation.
- Recreational land uses.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

6.2 The character of the *River Valley with Open Water* corresponds to landscape type *C: Lower River with Open Water* of the *Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment*. *B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water* almost exactly matches *C2: Lower Loddon Valley with Open Water*. *B2: Thames River Valley with Open Water* falls within *B3: Reading Thames Lower River Floodplain* of the Berkshire assessment. The reason that it has been distinguished within Wokingham is that although only a small area of open water occurs within the district boundary there are large areas of active and restored gravel workings beyond the county boundary in Buckinghamshire, which, at this local level of assessment are perceived to have a strong influence on the character of the district landscape. Similarly, although the area of gravel workings on the Wokingham side of the Blackwater Valley is small, there are a large number within Surrey that affect landscape character hence *B3: Blackwater River Valley with Open Water* has been defined.

B1: LODDON RIVER VALLEY WITH OPEN WATER

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 6.3 The *Loddon River Valley with Open Water* is the largest area of this landscape type. It is located in the valley of the River Loddon falling between the urban areas of Woodley and the large villages of Winnersh and Twyford.
- 6.4 The area relates to a stretch of the floodplain landscape of the Loddon River Valley, which has been subject to considerable modification as a result of gravel extraction practices. This has led to the creation of a new landscape type characterised by a mixture of land uses including active extraction workings, old workings being used for landfill, natural floodplain landscapes and open waterbodies created by the restoration of former gravel workings. The latter areas have now become the focus of a country park, providing important recreational space. Overall the landscape has a diverse character ranging from industrial workings to a calm watery landscape offering long, open views and natural, peaceful qualities.

Location and Boundaries

- 6.5 The *Loddon River Valley with Open Water* follows a linear corridor connecting with the *River Valley* landscape type of the Loddon (A2) to the south and Thames (A1) to the north. The character area is defined in the north by the *Thames River Valley*, which as described in *Type A*, is a pragmatic boundary representing the seamless transition between the two floodplain landscapes. To the south the boundary is marked by the edge of the built up area encompassing the Winnersh Triangle Industrial Estate (parallel to the A329). Similarly the western boundary is delineated by the development edge of Woodley-Charvil. The eastern edge is defined by the edge of the built-up area of Twyford and the distinct landscape of the *Hurst River Terrace* (C2), which approximately follows the route of the A321-Lodge Road - Davis Street.

Key Characteristics

- **Flat lowland alluvial floodplain landscape** with pockets of terrace **gravels** and **sands** and an absence of enclosing valley sides.
- **Modified riverine landscape** characterised by a large expanses of **open water** which have developed important wildlife habitats relating to **restored and flooded former gravel extraction works**.
- **Enclosed wooded context** due to the presence of natural and restored woodland areas and **fringing carr** vegetation around flooded gravel pits, of important habitat value.
- Filtered views of the **River Loddon** and **Old River** – medium sized, gently meandering tributaries of the River Thames with their associated network of **drainage ditches**, occasional **fords** and white-painted bridges.
- Popular recreational landscape including **Dinton Pastures Country Park** and associated facilities with an **extensive footpath system**.
- Areas of exposed soil and mineral heaps arising from the presence of **active mineral workings** and **landfill sites**.
- Remnant pockets of traditional **pastureland** located in small and medium sized fields including **pollarded willows** along bank-sides and drainage ditches.
- Floodplain **relatively open and undeveloped** with built development confined to small clusters around fording points or farmsteads at the floodplain fringe, with some encroaching peripheral development
- Suburbs of **Winnersh** and **Winnersh Triangle** business with modern commercial buildings located in the south near Loddon Bridge.
- Affected at the periphery by roads and the A329(M) **motorway** and crossed by a **railway line** creating local noise disturbance.

Physical Landscape

- 6.6 The dominant influence on the physical landscape is the River Loddon. The Loddon is a medium-sized river that meanders gently through the

heart of this character area. North of Dinton, for a length of about two kilometres, the Loddon splits to form two channels – the River Loddon and Old River the latter eventually rejoining the Loddon close to the A4(T) north of Twyford. Surrounding the river channels is a wide and relatively flat floodplain, generally at below 40m AOD.

- 6.7 The flat valley floor is characterised by alluvium, which is flanked by river terrace gravels, principally the Kempton Park Gravel and first and second terrace deposits. The geology of this area has become the most fundamental influence on its character because it is the mineral resources of the valley that have led to the presence of the extractive industries. The gravel within the Loddon Valley is composed of Flints with Sandstone and Chert, some of which originate from the Lower Greensand of the Weald making it eminently suitable for use as a building aggregate.
- 6.8 The soils of the Loddon Valley are typical argillic gleys of stony fine or coarse loamy nature and associated with clayey alluvial soils affected by high groundwater and short-term flooding. Consequently, these are not highly suited to arable farming – a fact that has resulted in the high incidence of pasture in the remaining farmed landscape. Localised flooding is a seasonal feature as, for example, at Loddon Bridge and Sindlesham Mill.

Historic Environment

- 6.9 The historic landscape in this area has largely been replaced by the modern landscape created by recent sand and gravel extraction.
- 6.10 There are a number of cropmarks southwest of Wargrave which suggest prehistoric occupation on the Loddon close to its confluence with the Thames, probably leading to early clearance of the woodland on parts of the valley floor. A Domesday settlement is recorded at Whistley – “-leah” (a woodland clearing) indicating settlement in the forest environment which formed part of Windsor Forest.
- 6.11 There is no trace of the former Medieval deerpark created at La Lee (Hurst), although the presence of Lea Farm may point to its location extending onto the valley floor, although the focus of Medieval settlement was on higher ground off the valley floor. Settlement

within this area therefore consisted mainly of dispersed farmsteads sited on the edges of the floodplain, linked by narrow lanes set within open fields and common meadow on the floodplain.

- 6.12 The Bath Road crossed the Loddon at Twyford, and there are a number of other bridges at former fords, along the valley. The presence of post-medieval mills, at a number of these and other points, i.e. Twyford Bridge, Sandford Mill, Whistleymill Farm, etc, probably reflect the locations of earlier mills. The embanked Great Western Railway, completed in 1840, crosses the valley at Twyford.
- 6.13 A number of 17th and 18th century country houses were surrounded by areas of landscaped parkland, traces of which area still visible around the site of Whistley Park (demolished in the mid 19th century) and at Hurst Grove.
- 6.14 Early inclosure along the Loddon valley floor is suggested by the irregular field pattern shown on the first edition OS maps, although the surviving farmland is made up of straight-sided fields characteristic of Parliamentary inclosure of probably early 19th century date and there are no intact field systems remaining. By the 1930s, the river valleys were dominated by dairy farming, but little of the agricultural landscape survives due to more recent large-scale gravel extraction.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
BCC No. 181	Ring ditch E of St. Patrick's Avenue
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	One large interconnected area around Whistley Park
<i>Conservation Areas</i>	
	Twyford Wargrave
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	A number of buildings scattered throughout the area including a concentration at the extremity of the Twyford conservation area, the High

Designations	Summary of Importance
	Chimneys and, elsewhere, several scattered farmsteads.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 6.15 The *Loddon Valley with Open Water* is characterised by substantial areas of open water, together with associated marginal habitats and wet woodland. In total there are around 17 flooded gravel pits in this character area, many of which are managed for nature conservation and recreation objectives. This complex of lakes and wetlands supports nationally important numbers of wintering gadwall and smew. Dinton Pastures Country Park represents the largest wetland site in the area totalling over 120ha.
- 6.16 Lavell's is a wetland site and Local Nature Reserve; it is managed primarily for ornithological objectives, with habitats such as wader scrapes, islands and reedbeds having been created to enhance habitat diversity for birds.
- 6.17 The area also supports fine examples of wet woodland, including three sites with Wildlife Heritage Site status. They are most typically dominated by alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and crack willow (*Salix fragilis*) with species such as lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) and marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*) occurring in the ground layer. Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill (SSSI), is particularly important for supporting over 10% of the UK population of the nationally rare Loddon lily (*Leucojum aestivum*), and a number of locally restricted plants such as wild daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*).
- 6.18 Also found within this character area at Berkshire Aviation Museum is an important site for the rare tower mustard (*Arabis glabra*). This location supports over 300 plants, representing one of the five largest populations of this plant remaining in England.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Site of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill 1.3ha	Wet woodland
<i>Local Nature Reserve</i>	
Lavells Lake 9.5ha	Open water, wetland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Sandfordmill Copse	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
River Loddon 76.2 ha	River
Dinton Pastures Country Park/Sandford Copse/Adjacent Field / Mortimers Field 121.7ha	Open water, wetland, meadow
The Moors 3.1ha	Wetland, meadow
Berkshire Aviation Museum 0.16ha	Grass verges supporting tower mustard
Sandford Fen 3.6ha	Wetland, scrub
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site (cont)</i>	
Whistle Mill Farm Copse 2.2ha	Woodland
Loddon Reserve 26.9ha	Open water, grassland
Lavells	Open water
Dinton Pastures Country Park/Sandford Copse/Adjacent Field/Mortimers Meadow 121.7ha (SU77W02)	Open water, wetland, meadows

Rural Land Use

6.19 Land Use in the Loddon Valley is principally gravel extraction and its after uses, including landfill and recreation. The active gravel workings are located to the west of the Old River and near Whistley Bridge. These are frequently noisy with moving machinery and plant and they appear as (albeit temporary) scars on the landscape exposing large areas of exposed spoil and gravel mounds. However, the areas currently being worked are neither easily accessible nor visible. Some

areas of gravel workings have been used as landfill and are currently being capped. These highly disturbed landscapes are an odd feature with large areas of exposed substrate and protruding vent shafts.

6.20 Old gravel workings, no longer in production, have been extensively restored resulting in the creation of Dinton Pastures Country Park managed by Wokingham District Council, which covers a large proportion of this character area. Dinton Pastures comprises a large group of lakes and also includes a municipal golf course and farmed pastures. Black Swan Lake is the largest of the water bodies and is the focus of the country park with boating and picnic areas. The smaller White Swan Lake is equipped for anglers. The remaining lakes including Sandford Lake and Lavell's lake are managed principally for ecological interest. These are all connected by a series of footpaths leading from the visitor car parks located near to High Chimneys and the Berkshire Aviation Museum. These trails interconnect with the rivers and with another concentration of restored gravel workings located in the north of the area. Along the footpaths interest is added by the presence of pillboxes (gun emplacements) remaining from the WW1 stop line. All of these restored gravel pit lakes create open and long distance views within the wooded context of the fringing carr vegetation.

6.21 The areas of remaining pastoral farmland are concentrated in the centre of the area and north of Twyford. Some of these are traditionally managed as part of the country park. The pastures tend to be small or medium scale and often have a strong rural quality accentuated by the rivers and drainage channels flanked with lines of mature pollarded willows. There are also small horse and pony paddocks, particularly found associated with the settled areas.

Settlement and Built Character

6.22 This area is relatively inaccessible, except on foot, with transportation routes confined to the edges of the floodplain and cross-valley linkages. Most roadways are small and of rural character with river crossings accented by white-painted wood or metal railings. However, the A4(T) and A3032 cross between Twyford and Charvill in the north and the A329(M) and A329 cross between Winnersh and Earley in the

south. The valley is also traversed by the Paddington to Reading railway line. These influences introduce movement and considerable noise into parts of this character area.

- 6.23 Unsurprisingly, given its propensity for flooding and low accessibility, the Loddon Valley is sparsely settled. Settlement and building in this area conforms to two patterns – clusters of buildings or farmsteads located at the periphery of the floodplain on the river terraces and settlements nucleated around a river fording or bridging point, which have sometimes grown outwards and onto the valley floodplain landscape.
- 6.24 The main area of development is around Winnersh. This has grown from a focus to the east of the area (discussed further in *J1: Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay*) and expanded along the A329 and railway. More recently the good transport connections, including the A329(M), has resulted in the construction of a large business park – The Winnersh Triangle – in the south of this character area. The Winnersh Triangle exhibits all the typical characteristics of a modern industrial/business park with large office buildings and warehouses within landscaped setting of car parks and roundabouts.
- 6.25 An area of Twyford (*H1: Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands*) located to the north of this character area, part of which is a conservation area, extends to the fording point of the Loddon. This area includes a number of mills, which historically exploited the power of the river. Elsewhere, the smaller clusters of buildings also include other mill houses, characteristically with white weatherboarding. Notably there are also numerous pubs, such as Lands End Pub, located at the river crossing points. The farmsteads and other older buildings are traditionally brick-built. One of these – High Chimneys – was built in the late seventeenth century, and exhibits mullioned windows and gables.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 6.26 It is reasonable to conclude that those references to the Loddon noted in A2 apply, or at least once applied, to this area.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 6.27 The *Loddon Valley with Open Water (B1)* is a landscape of overall **moderate quality**. The moderate quality derives from the **moderate strength of character** and the **moderate condition**. The presence of active mineral extraction and the impact of the motorway are negative elements. Urban influences in relation to Winnersh and Woodley/Earley are also strong. However, within this context there are numerous distinctive and intact characteristics, particularly the undeveloped flat floodplain, rivers, open water bodies formed by former gravel extraction, wetland habitats and recreation areas. The moderate condition of key characteristics means that there are considerable opportunities for landscape improvements as set out in the strategy and guidelines.

Landscape Strategy

- 6.28 Within the *Loddon Valley with Open Water* the overall objective is to **conserve** the positive characteristics of the landscape and to **enhance** the character and condition of key elements. Enhancement works should focus on retaining and extending the natural floodplain and strong wetland influences including the waterside pollards, ensuring that any ongoing or permitted new gravel or landfill works are fully and appropriately restored and that the wooded areas are actively managed. Where possible measures should be sought to promote better integration of the transportation corridors and large scale industrial/business land uses (including the Winnersh Triangle area) and recreational facilities that affect the overall perception of tranquillity and peacefulness.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 6.29 The *Loddon Valley with Open Water* has already been affected by extraction activities and is therefore considered to be a landscape with overall **moderate sensitivity** to change. Within this context the most sensitive aspect of the landscape is considered to be the ecological character, in particular the wetland habitats many of which are of national importance due to the scarcity of the flora and fauna present.

The small areas of open land between some areas of existing development are also particularly sensitive to change. The potential for views across the floodplain from the adjacent terrace landscape (C2) increases visual sensitivity.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

6.30 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Loddon Valley with Open Water* and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to retain the existing landscape character whilst making management improvements to increase its robustness and enhance its presentation.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ There is evidence of incremental loss of species rich grassland across the district due to increasingly intensive grassland management elevating the significance of the remaining grassland within this area.	• Consider further opportunities for the creation of meadows or permanent pasture to restore and extend grassland habitats lost through agricultural intensification. Continue to manage Dinton Pastures as a valuable resource.
❖ Decline in rural features e.g. potential loss of the pollarded willows on waterside pasture so characteristic of this area.	• Encourage traditional management practices to maintain key landscape features.
❖ Changes in agricultural practice, including conversion to hobby farms and horse paddocks is leading to changing management priorities and loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees.	• Provide guidance on appropriate management of set-aside land, paddocks and hobby farms to enhance the visual and ecological quality of the landscape, for example through planting boundary hedgerows.
Forestry and Woodland Management	
❖ Potential demand for areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.	• Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Key Issues

- ❖ Climate change is likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows and a possible increase in damage to woodland as a result of wind throw.

Associated Guidelines

- Resist further development of the floodplain. Consider the use of trees and wetland habitats within river catchments to dampen extreme river flows and place greater emphasis on mixed age woodlands that are more resistant to wind throw as well as disease and other stresses.

Minerals/Landfill

- ❖ Past and ongoing pressures for gravel and sand extraction in river valleys has resulted in changes in landscape character. The pressure for gravel extraction is likely to continue, particularly in this area of the Loddon valley.
- ❖ Landfilling of worked pits and potential for excavating of landfill to create sites for development are a particular concern in this area.

- Ensure restoration plans for gravel extraction sites are in keeping with the character of the landscape. Encourage opportunities for habitat creation and restoration linked with these.
- Conservation of the valley's key assets including its biodiversity interest and the water quality of the River Loddon is a priority.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats in the district. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture. This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.

- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland). Avoid unsympathetic river engineering works in this sensitive area.

Recreation

- ❖ High demands for recreation, including watersports, mountain biking and quad biking continue to threaten the tranquillity of the landscape.
- ❖ Pressure for golf courses that have an impact on the character of the landscape.

- Seek sympathetic integration of new recreational features and seek to locate such activities in areas of low tranquillity such that passive recreational pursuits can still be enjoyed.
- Ensure new and existing golf courses (e.g. the course adjacent to Dinton Pastures Country Park) are

Key Issues

- ❖ Pressure for more horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- ❖ Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated district.

Associated Guidelines

sympathetically sited and integrated into the landscape.

- Provide guidance to help ensure management of paddocks is sensitive to existing character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows.
- Consider zoning of activities to ensure sensitive areas (such as the habitat supporting the Loddon Lily) are protected from damaging activities.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.
- ❖ Increasing demand for industrial and commercial buildings particularly associated with flat landscapes (e.g. floodplains) associated with transport corridors leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape. The Winnersh Triangle and presence of the A329(M) are significant contributors to pressure in this area.

- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. In particular conserve the vulnerable 'gap' at Loddon Bridge between this area and the Loddon River Valley (A2) which is also an important break between Reading and Winnersh.

- Undertake sensitive woodland planting to reduce the visual and aural intrusion of the motorway, other major roads and large buildings. Care should be taken in the siting and design of industrial buildings and estates to ensure that key landscape characteristics are maintained.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting, concrete kerbing and widening is threatening

- Maintain the historic leafy lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would

Key Issues

the intimate rural character of the lanes.

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.

Associated Guidelines

threaten their rural character, particularly in the deeply rural parts of the district.

- Undertake sympathetic screening to minimise the impact of new and existing roads.

B1: LODDON RIVER VALLEY WITH OPEN WATER



B2: THAMES RIVER VALLEY WITH OPEN WATER

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 6.31 The *Thames River Valley with Open Water* is a small area located in the Thames valley between Reading and Sonning. This area is a stretch of the Thames, which has, particularly in Oxfordshire, been heavily modified by gravel extraction works resulting in the creation of large areas of wetland which lend themselves to influence the overall character of the landscape. Within the bounds of the character area itself, industrial and business developments predominate – the modern glass façades of the Thames Valley Park contrasting with the declining heavy industrial character towards Reading. Here, the rusty gasometers are landmark features looming over the banks of the Thames. The setting – at the base of the steeply wooded chalk slopes around Sonning – provides a strong backdrop and sense of enclosure to the landscape.

Location and Boundaries

- 6.32 This small area occupies a narrow linear corridor of the Thames stretching from New Town, east of Reading, to the village of Sonning. It is contiguous with *A1: Thames River Valley* and is also part of a wider area of distinctive landscape character that bridges the administrative boundary of Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Being strongly influenced by views into the adjoining county, this landscape character area in fact extends beyond the county boundary. The base of the steep wooded slope of the *Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes* (D2) is a distinctive topographical feature demarcating the character area's southern limit.

Key Characteristics

- Small area of **river landscape** focussed on the presence of the **River Thames**– a broad navigable river defining the district boundary.
- **Broad and flat alluvial floodplain landscape** with localised pockets of terrace deposits.

- **Transitional landscape with considerable urban influences** due to the neighbouring urban areas and the presence of **gas towers, roads** and a **railway line**.
- Strong influence of **modern and older commercial and industrial buildings**, particularly the **Thames Valley Park**, a new business park integrated within a landscaped setting and nature reserve.
- Borrowed character due to **views to large areas of open water** located in Oxfordshire relating to **active and restored gravel workings** and associated new **marina** with distinctive boat masts.
- **Immediate river channel** with reinforced banks and adjoined by a **country park**, with scattered parkland trees.
- **Wooded and subtly-enclosed context** due to adjoining wooded chalk slopes (D2) to the south and views to the **carr vegetation** in the adjoining county.
- Considerable evidence of **recreational use** including the **Thames Path National Trail** and **water sports** with associated facilities including a new watersports building.

Physical Landscape

- 6.33 The physical landscape of the *Thames River Valley with Open Water* comprises a flat floodplain at below 40m AOD along the River Thames. This is accentuated by the adjoining wooded slopes, which create a backdrop to this area when viewed from the north. In this location the River Thames is visible as a large river with soft and largely un-engineered riverbanks. However, in contrast to the Loddon here are no drainage channels in this area connecting to the river.
- 6.34 The soils of this area are Argillic Brown earths subject to flooding. However, here the presence of Kempton Park Gravels below the alluvium of the floodplain has been exploited for the construction industry. This has resulted in the formation of flooded gravel wetlands, extending from the adjoining county, which has a high concentration of such features, clearly visible across the river.

Historic Environment

- 6.35 As elsewhere along the Thames, woodland clearance may have started as early as the Neolithic, allowing cultivation of the fertile valley floor and continued through the prehistoric and Romano-British periods.
- 6.36 A brick kiln and brickfield is shown on the 1st edition OS map, bounded to the south by the Great Western Railway. The land between the Great Western and the South Eastern Railways contained a number of market garden plots in the late 19th century. Gravel extraction in the 20th century has created a number of small bodies of water and there are no visible features of the historic landscape.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
None	
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
None	
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 6.37 There are no sites with statutory or non-statutory designations within this character area – the natural landscape being largely replaced by built development and ornamental planting. However, the character area does include the Thames Valley Park, which is managed as a Nature Reserve by Oracle, together with the River Thames and adjoining wetlands, which are of ecological significance and have the potential to develop rich ecological assemblages.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Site of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Local Nature Reserve</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
None	

Rural Land Use

- 6.38 This area is strongly influenced by industry and commerce and, consequently, there is no farmland remaining in this area. The area immediately adjacent to the river is free from built development and has developed into a recreational landscape with amenity grassland and footpaths forming part of the Thames Path long-distance trail. These include ‘grasscreted’ areas that allow access to the river by small boats and canoes. There are some parkland trees and areas of wetland aquatics beside the river.
- 6.39 The remainder of the area has typical business park landscaping set around a central lake. Overall one of the strongest influences on the landscape is the ‘borrowed character’ of the active and restored gravel workings of the Lafarge plant within Oxfordshire. From within the Wokingham district the dense carr vegetation and open wetland of that area are highly prominent as are the masts of boats within the marina and the movement of the brightly-coloured diggers engaged in active works.

Settlement and Built Character

- 6.40 There are no domestic buildings within this area. The main influence on character is the Thames Valley Park, a recently built commercial/industrial business park characterised by classic modern four-storey glass and steel buildings located at the base of the chalk slope and highly influenced by the technology industries. There are also older industrial units and rusty gasometers, which act as local landmarks and create an urban character that is quite different to the

adjacent *Thames River Valley* character area. There are structures associated with the recreational use including a new waterside recreation facility overlooking the Thames.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 6.41 The *Thames River Valley with Open Water* (B2) is judged to be of **moderate quality** as a result of its strong character and moderate condition. The **strong character** of the landscape is related to the presence of the River Thames, floodplain form, and adjoining wooded slopes/restored gravel workings. The landscape considered to be in **moderate condition** with, for example opportunities to make improvements to the value of habitats and repair of buildings and infrastructure.

Landscape Strategy

- 6.42 The overall objective for the *Thames River Valley with Open Water* (B2) is to **conserve** the positive characteristics including the river channel form and wooded, enclosed context related to the adjoining chalk slopes. There are particular opportunities to **enhance** character and condition to ensure this area remains as an attractive recreational landscape. Key opportunities include improved presentation of some of the built elements and habitat creation in particular to seek to restore appropriate floodplain elements, that have been lost, to integrate this area with the adjoining *Thames River Valley* (A1).

Landscape Sensitivity

- 6.43 The landscape of the *Thames River Valley with Open Water* is of overall **low sensitivity** as a result of the high recreatability and limited importance of many of the elements. However within this context some aspects of the physical landscape are highly sensitive to change – particularly the immediate river corridor and channel.
- 6.44 Any change should respect the current landscape sensitivities and should not, in particular, impact upon the character of the Thames.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

6.45 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Thames Valley with Open Water* and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to seek opportunities to restore lost elements of the natural and cultural landscape in order to enhance the attractiveness of this area, and its value for recreation – to deflect pressure from more sensitive locations and areas.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Former hedgerow lines are no longer present.	• Consider opportunities for reinstatement of hedges in the wider landscape particularly where they would help integrate the business park within its landscape context.
❖ There is evidence of incremental loss of species rich grassland due to increasingly intensive grassland management, for example through the creation of amenity turf swards in favour of more natural grasslands.	• Consider opportunities for the creation of meadows, including wet meadows, particularly where these would be attractive features for users of the recreation trails. .
❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality. .	• Encourage environmentally beneficial management of ornamental vegetation and amenity turf through minimising use of fertilisers and pesticides.
❖ Decline in landscape features e.g. loss of pollarded willows on waterside pasture (also affected by river management practise).	• Encourage traditional management practices to maintain key landscape features.
Forestry and Woodland Management	
❖ Influence of woodland management in adjoining area (D2) on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded slopes.	• Develop sympathetic woodland management plans (in D2) to maintain positive character, to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.

Key Issues

- ❖ Climate change is likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows and possible greater damage to woodland as a result of wind throw.

Associated Guidelines

- Consider the use of trees and wetland habitats within the river catchment to dampen extreme river flows and place greater emphasis on mixed age woodlands that are more resistant to wind throw as well as disease and other stresses.

Minerals

- ❖ Past pressures for gravel and sand extraction in river valleys, including this area, has resulted in changes in landscape character. The pressure for gravel extraction is likely to continue, particularly in the vicinity of this area.
- Ensure restoration plans for gravel extraction sites within or adjacent to the area are in keeping with the character of the landscape. Encourage opportunities for habitat creation.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture. This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.
- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland).

Recreation

- ❖ High demand for recreation, including watersports and cycling continue to have an impact on the tranquillity of the landscape.
- ❖ Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated district.
- Seek sympathetic integration of new recreational features and seek to locate such activities in less sensitive areas of low tranquillity.
- Maximise the contribution made by the forestry resource for recreational purposes, to draw pressure away from more sensitive landscapes.
- Consider zoning of activities to ensure sensitive landscapes are protected from damaging activities: this area should be used in preference to A1.

Key Issues

Associated Guidelines

Built Development

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new industrial developments, sewage treatment works and commercial premises, particularly due to the proximity of Reading.
- Resist continued floodplain development. Care should be taken in the siting and design of new buildings. Undertake sensitive woodland planting to reduce the intrusion of the motorway, other major roads and large buildings.

Infrastructure

- ❖ There is evidence of light pollution at night that impacts on the perception of the rural night landscape as well as causing 'sky glow'.
- Encourage use of full cut-off lights and sensitively designed lighting schemes to reduce the impact of light pollution on night skies.
- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open floodplain landscape.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.
- ❖ Potential for new Thames River crossing to be sited in this area.
- Sensitive integration of any large scale infrastructure project is essential. It should not become a catalyst for further development.

B2: THAMES RIVER VALLEY WITH OPEN WATER



B3: BLACKWATER RIVER VALLEY WITH OPEN WATER

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 6.46 The *Blackwater River Valley with Open Water* occupies a very small area in the south-eastern corner of the district. This area is a section of the Blackwater River Valley, which has been exploited by the minerals industry resulting in the formation of large areas of flooded gravel workings as well as some areas in which extraction is ongoing. The flooded gravel workings continues to the south east – beyond the bounds of the character area and the administrative district of Wokingham. Development is a small scale – scattered rural settlement located to the north of the character area and surrounded by small field units that create a clear separation between built form and open water body.
- 6.47 The character area has considerable recreational value with a footpath and the Three Castles Path bordering the area of open water.

Location and Boundaries

- 6.48 The *Blackwater River Valley with Open Water* is a tributary of the Loddon and is contiguous with the *Blackwater River Valley* (A3). The boundaries of this area are largely determined by Wokingham District's boundaries with Hart and Bracknell Forest Districts, which do not represent a physical change in landscape. Therefore in reality this character area extends into the adjoining districts. Within the Wokingham area, the boundaries are determined to the north by the transition from the floodplain to the upland landscapes of *MI: Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands* and to the west by the limit of current gravel extraction workings. Evidently if gravel extraction were to expand westwards towards Finchampstead this boundary would change.

Key Characteristics

- Small area of **river landscape** comprising a **lowland alluvial floodplain** focussed around the **River Blackwater** – a relatively large gently meandering natural river defining the district boundary.
- Presence of **flooded recently-restored gravel pits** characterised by **open water** with connectivity to the larger Yately Lakes restored gravel workings in the adjacent districts.
- The appearance of an attractive **natural landscape** created by the presence of fringing **aquatic wetland vegetation** and carr.
- Valley landscape loosely enclosed to the north within the **setting of wooded ridges** of Finchampstead (M2).
- Bare earth, spoil and machinery associated with the small area of **active gravel extraction works**, exploiting the remaining workable **river terrace deposits**, but largely **screened** by field boundary vegetation.
- **Informal recreational landscape** with footpath connections to Trilakes Country Park and trails.
- Small **linear rural settlement** confined to the edge of the floodplain comprising buildings of mixed traditional and modern character.
- **Quiet** ‘backwater’ character moderately disturbed by the gravel works.

Physical Landscape

- 6.49 The main physical influence on this landscape is the presence of the River Blackwater, a small to medium sized river. The valley has a gently sloping, and in some areas almost flat landform which contrasts with the steeper slopes of the Forested and Settled Sands leading up to Finchampstead Ridges to the north.
- 6.50 The floodplain is comprised of alluvial and second terrace deposits fringed by the sandy soils of the Bagshot Beds. This has resulted in the presence of argillic gley soils on the floodplain and gley-podsols on the more elevated sandy soils. Both of these soil types are affected by high groundwater levels and are of marginal agricultural value. The presence of sub alluvial first and second river terrace gravel below the

floodplain alluvium has, and is currently being exploited by the aggregates industry resulting in the creation of two large lakes. This series of flooded gravel pits continues beyond the district boundary to form the Yately Lakes, which are the foci of the Trilakes Country Park.

Historic Environment

- 6.51 There is little evidence of prehistoric or Romano-British clearance along the Blackwater valley. The Blackwater formed part of the southern boundary of the Saxon shire, part of the kingdom of Wessex, but the valley appears not to have been a major focus for Saxon settlement.
- 6.52 Medieval and Post-medieval settlement in this area was limited to farmsteads distributed along the lane running along the valley edge. During the Medieval period the valley floor is likely to have comprised open fields and common grazing. Although much of the valley floor has been subject to recent gravel extraction, creating a number of lakes, traces of the pattern of narrow sinuous fields running across the valley floor southeast of Finchampstead, shown on the 1st edition OS map, indicate early inclosure of the open fields.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	Contiguous with the Blackwater River Valley (A3) this area almost entirely falls within a regional archaeological site.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
None	
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 6.53 This character area is a small parcel of land dominated by Moor Green and Moor Green Lakes Wildlife Heritage Site. This 23ha site comprises

a recently restored gravel pit, managed for nature conservation and recreation. The lake is slightly acid and supports the nationally scarce pillwort (*Pilularia globulifera*), and is an important site for waterfowl.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserve</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Moor Green / Moor Green Lakes 23.36ha	Open water

Rural Land Use

- 6.54 Gravel extraction and the subsequent after use of the gravel spoil pits to create a wetland habitat and recreation area are the dominant land uses of this area.
- 6.55 The area has two large flooded gravel workings located north of the River Blackwater that have been restored to support a varied range of aquatic flora and trees. North of these, near Moor Green Farm is a small car park with an information board from which a footpath leads down to the Blackwater where it connects with the Three Castles Path, an important recreational trail. From this it is possible to connect to Trilakes Country Park.
- 6.56 The active workings are located to the west of the footpath and are partially screened by an overgrown hedge bank and ditch. These are relatively small workings that are evident due to the high visibility of the revealed minerals and the presence of active plant.

Settlement and Built Character

- 6.57 There is a linear settlement located along the small rural lane at the edge of the character area located on the Bagshot Beds. This

settlement includes a number of detached houses set within large grounds. There are also farm buildings, such as Moor Green Farm.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 6.58 The *Blackwater River Valley with Open Water* (B3) is overall of **moderate quality** due to the combination of moderate character and moderate condition. The overall **moderate strength of character** results from the perceptual characteristics – a calm, quiet character and ‘new’ natural landscape of open water created by mineral extraction. The landscape is generally considered to be in **moderate condition**. The highest quality elements are the wetland habitats related to the restored gravel works, which, despite their relatively recent origins, are in good condition. Detracting elements include the areas of on-going mineral extraction.

Landscape Strategy

- 6.59 The overall objective for the *Blackwater River Valley with Open Water* is to **conserve and enhance** character and condition. Key elements to conserve and enhance are the River Blackwater corridor, the wetland habitats associated with the river and gravel works and the perceptual characteristics including the peaceful setting.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 6.60 The landscape of the *Blackwater River Valley with Open Water* (B3) is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The most sensitive elements are the physical landscape, particularly the River Blackwater itself and the ecological character associated with the restored gravel pits. Much of the character of this landscape has been recently created and therefore there is a relatively high level of recreatability. Most attributes are important at the local or regional scale.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 6.61 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Blackwater River Valley with Open Water* and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall

objective is to seek opportunities to enhance the character of the landscape and restore lost characteristics whilst retaining the existing character and ensuring that any further gravel extraction works make a positive contribution to the landscape.

Key Issues

Associated Guidelines

Agriculture

- ❖ Loss of rural features e.g. pollarded willows on waterside pasture (also affected by river management practise).
- Encourage traditional management practices to maintain key landscape features.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Influence of woodland fell cycles on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines of adjacent character area (e.g. M2/M1).
- Develop sympathetic fell and maintenance cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive ridgelines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.
- ❖ Climate change is likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows and possible greater damage to woodland as a result of wind throw.
- Consider the use of trees and wetland habitats within river catchments to dampen extreme river flows and place greater emphasis on mixed age woodlands that are more resistant to wind throw as well as disease and other stresses.

Minerals

- ❖ Hedgerows have been lost as a result of gravel extraction.
- Conserve remaining hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak standards left to form future timber trees.
- ❖ Past pressures for gravel and sand extraction in river valleys has resulted in changes in landscape character. The pressure for gravel extraction is likely to continue.
- Ensure restoration plans for gravel extraction sites are in keeping with the character of the landscape. Encourage opportunities for habitat creation.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat
- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats through appropriate management and seek to extend the

Key Issues

continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture. This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.

Recreation

- ❖ No significant issues.

Built Development

- ❖ Expansion of villages and hamlets has resulted in dilution of settlement form.
 - ❖ Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham landscape.
- Restrict further ribbon development along the edge of the floodplain and consider opportunities to strengthen and enhance the landscape setting to the villages through planting.
 - Consider the impact of any development on the Finchampstead skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from this character area.

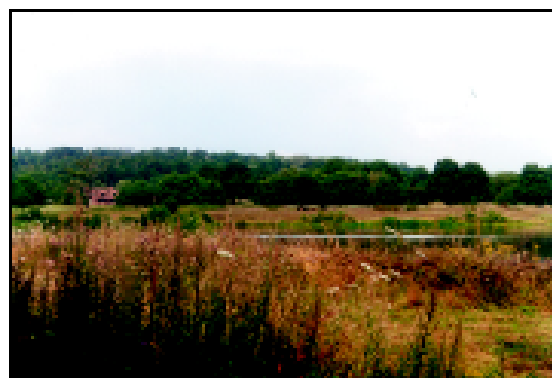
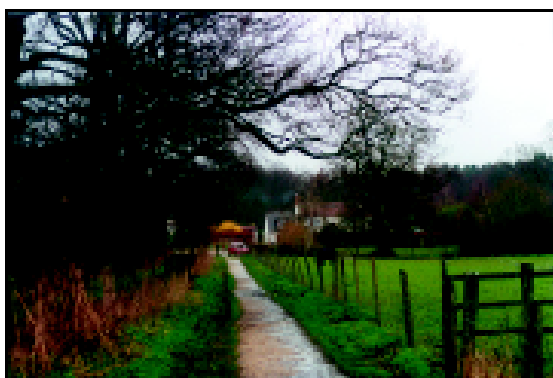
Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural locations, such as this.

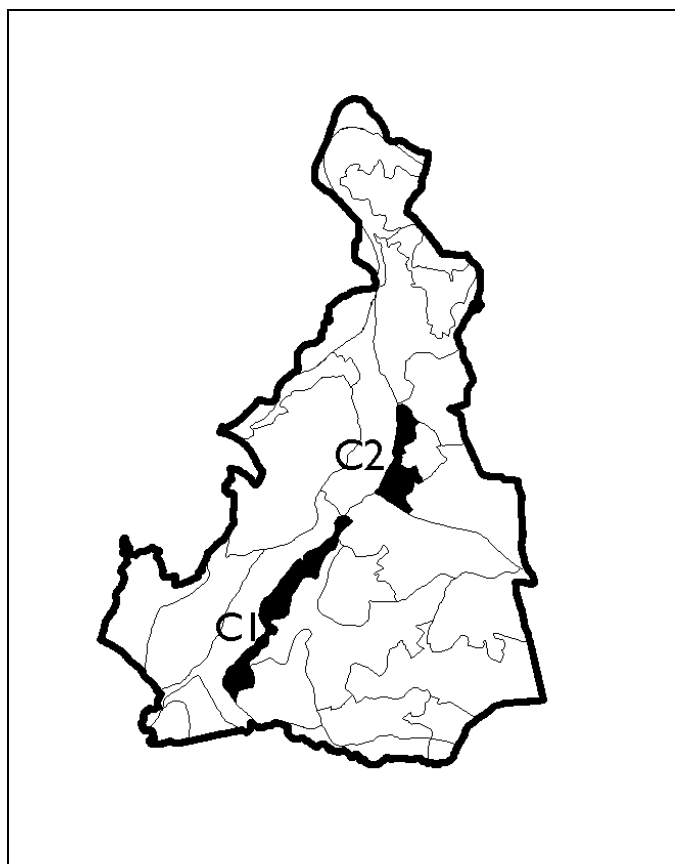
Associated Guidelines

area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland).

B3: BLACKWATER RIVER VALLEY WITH OPEN WATER



7 LANDSCAPE TYPE C: RIVER TERRACES



Landscape Areas	Character
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C1: Arborfield River Terrace	River
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C2: Hurst River Terrace	
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Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 7.1 There are two character areas classified as being of the *River Terraces* landscape type. These correspond to two flat areas of second and third river terrace gravels that have been left a little above the level of the present day floodplain of the River Loddon. *River Terraces* are typically distinguished by their flat to gently undulating landform, strong field patterns, semi-enclosed character and proximity to the river corridor.

Key Characteristics

- Flat to gently undulating landform.
- Younger river terraces close to the modern river.
- Working agricultural landscape.

- Semi-enclosed landscape of large scale fields divided by post and wire fencing or hedgerows.
- Settlement with connections to the adjacent river.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

7.2 The *River Terrace* landscape type does not appear at the County scale which being at a larger scale did not distinguish the character of these narrow areas from the adjoining river and farmed landscapes. Hence C1: *Aborfield River Terrace* is divided between the *Loddon Lower River Floodplain* (B6) and the *Settled Farmlands* (K) of the Berkshire assessment and C2: *Hurst River Terrace* within the *Open Clay Lowlands* (L) adjacent to the *Loddon Lower River with Open Water* (C2).

C1: ARBORFIELD RIVER TERRACE

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 7.3 The *Arborfield River Terrace* is a narrow strip of land that lies alongside the south-eastern edge of the Loddon valley floor in the south-west of the District.
- 7.4 It is underlain by a combination of London Clay and third river terrace gravels that give rise to better-drained soils than those on the valley floor itself. Despite the presence of a number of small scale woodlands and copses, the intensively farmed landscape has a predominately open character. The varied field pattern includes early enclosure as well as fields typical of Parliamentary inclosure in the early 19th century. Today many of the hedgerow boundaries have been lost, further enhancing the exposed character of the landscape. It is a working agricultural landscape, but with historic links to the river valley.
- 7.5 A network of lanes and tracks connecting farmsteads with fields emphasises the rural character of the landscape against which the grandeur of Swallowfield and Arborfield Halls, and their associated parkland, are powerful visual features.

Location and Boundaries

- 7.6 The *Arborfield River Terrace* lies along the south-eastern edge of the Loddon Valley, in the south-west of the District. It is a distinctive platform, a little above the level of the present day floodplain of the Loddon, and there is a small, but identifiable, drop in elevation between the *Arborfield River Terrace* and the flat valley floor of the *Loddon River Valley* (area A2) to the north-west. The south-eastern edge of the terrace is less clearly defined and forms a more gradual transition to the undulating landscape of the *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* (area J2) and the hilly landscape of the *Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* (area L2).

Key Characteristics

- **An agricultural landscape** defined by **medium to large, geometric field units** under intensive farming (both pasture and arable) and bound by indistinct boundaries comprising mainly post and wire fencing and gappy remnant hedgerows.
- **Gently undulating river terrace landform** alongside the River Loddon – underlain by clay and younger river terrace gravels.
- The presence of **woodland and copses**, some of ancient origin, breaking up the agricultural plain.
- Largely unvaried topography and proximity to the River Loddon allows **clear views across to the adjacent floodplain**.
- **Sense of remoteness** due to very **low-density settlement** comprising farmsteads (typically of red brick), manor houses and hamlets.
- **Remnant historic parkland** associated with the former Arborfield Hall and the presence of **mature oaks**, which provide a strong silhouette against the open sky.
- **Large, modern agricultural buildings** are prominent features of the landscape.
- The presence of **moats** in the landscape, indicate the post-medieval fashion of enhancing the status and appearance of manor and other large houses.
- The **rural character** is emphasised by the **narrow lanes and tracks** that allow access to fields on the Loddon floodplain.

Physical Landscape

- 7.7 The *Arborfield River Terrace* is a gently undulating terrace adjacent to the Loddon valley floor at an elevation of between 45 and 50m AOD. The area is underlain by London Clay and the younger third river terrace gravel of the River Loddon. These give rise to loamy argillic gley soils that are better drained than the adjacent floodplain and are therefore intensively farmed. There are no tributaries but there are a

number of small water features including drainage channels, ponds and moats.

Historic Environment

- 7.8 Cropmarks, including ring-ditches, indicate that clearance and settlement on the river terrace began during the prehistoric and Romano-British periods.
- 7.9 The area was part of Windsor Forest, although the “-feld” element of Arborfield suggests a largely open and cultivated landscape in the Saxon period. The original Medieval settlement at Arborfield, probably located close to the 13th century St Bartholomew’s church (a chapel-of-ease to the mother-church at Sonning), later shifted to its present location. The ruins of the church still stand, a new church being built nearer the new village of Arborfield in 1863.
- 7.10 Beyond the village, settlement consisted mainly of dispersed farmsteads occupying the drier ground offered by the terrace, with a series of lanes running towards the river linking the farms to fields on the floodplain. Towards the north of the terrace there are large fields with straight boundaries characteristic of Parliamentary inclosure of probable early 19th century date. Towards the south many of the fields, with small interspersed copses shown on the 1st edition OS map, have wavy boundaries indicating earlier inclosure.
- 7.11 The quadrangular moat at Moor Copse near Kenny's Farm, Arborfield, reflects the Post-medieval fashion of enhancing the status and appearance of manor and other large houses. There are traces of the parkland around Arborfield Hall, the late 17th century country house demolished in 1945. The landscape park at Swallowfield was laid out in the 18th century.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
BCC No. 153, monument 12021	Moated site at Kenney's Farm
BCC No. 154,	Site of St Bartholomew's Church

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	There is a very large area designated as a regional archaeological site located on the edge of Arborfield and several smaller sites elsewhere.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	There are a number of scattered listed buildings on the terrace, principally farmsteads, and the church near Swallowfield.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
Swallowfield Park (Grade II)	Swallowfield was first enclosed in the 14th century. The present landscape park was laid out in the 18th century. The park extends into the adjacent <i>Loddon River Valley</i> (area A2).

Ecological Character

- 7.12 Ecologically the West Loddon River Terrace is characterised by widely scattered woodland blocks, ranging in size from 1 to 15ha. The area supports six woods with Wildlife Heritage Site status, two of which are recognised as being of ancient origin. The soils here are somewhat damp and typically support woods dominated by a combination of oak (*Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), field maple (*Acer campestre*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) with a ground layer often including dogs mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) and blue-bell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*).
- 7.13 Great Wood and Pound Copse are ancient woodland sites with a history of coppice management; the latter site forms a narrow strip and supports a high density of wild service tree (*Sorbus torminalis*).
- 7.14 Although the remaining four woodlands are of secondary origin, they generally have a similar composition of woody species and have often been brought under a traditional coppice regime.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserve</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Great Wood 15.7 / 15.7ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within A2</i>	Ancient woodland
Pound Copse 1.1ha / 1.8ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within J2</i>	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Cuckoo Pen 1.7ha	Woodland
Gravel Pit Wood / The Holt 6.8ha	Woodland
Loader's Copse 2.1ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within A2</i>	Woodland
Winnersh Woodland 0.9ha	Woodland
River Loddon 76.18ha	Open water

Rural Land Use

7.15 The main land use of the *Arborfield River Terrace* landscape is agriculture. There is also some settlement, but this constitutes a small part of the landscape around Arborfield. Farming is intensive and the fields, which are mixed arable and pasture, are mainly divided by post and wire fences, although some fragments of low flailed hedgerows still survive. This results in a large-scale open landscape with long views, such as the distant view to the church spire of the 19th century Arborfield Church on the hill.

7.16 Deciduous copses and woodlands punctuate the agricultural landscape, providing a break in the field pattern and a forming a backdrop to views. Some are remnants of the former Windsor Forest. Mixed plantations are a feature on the edge of Arborfield, forming the

remnants of the designed landscape surrounding the former Arborfield Hall. There are also ponds and standing water bodies associated with the designed landscapes at Swallowfield and Arborfield.

Settlement and Built Character

- 7.17 This area is characterised by a scattered rural settlement pattern. The most typical form of built development is the rural farmstead, typically a cluster of traditional red brick buildings with weatherboarded barns and clay tile roofs. However, today there are also large-scale agricultural buildings that are prominent features of the landscape. The interest lies in the detailing of the buildings and their boundaries. Brick wall boundaries and chimneystacks are often ornate features.
- 7.18 Arborfield, a village of medieval origin, forms a focus for settlement in this character area. The former Arborfield Hall, now demolished, is recognised by the presence of remnant parkland features such as ornamental parkland trees and shelterbelts. The ruins of the original Arborfield church are also a feature. The influence of parkland is also seen in the south of the character area adjacent to Swallowfield Park.
- 7.19 The settlements are connected by rural lanes and there are frequently tracks connecting farmsteads to fields on the Loddon floodplain.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 7.20 Arborfield Hall, which has since been demolished, was immortalised as the 'Old House at Aberleigh' in Miss Mary Russell Mitford's *Our Village*.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 7.21 The *Arborfield River Terrace* (C1) is a landscape of **moderate quality** on account of its moderate strength of character and the moderate condition of most characteristics. The **moderate character** relates to the presence of a number of elements – it is a working rural agricultural landscape with historic links to the river – but which generally lack a strong sense of place. The components are in a **moderate–poor condition**, for example the hedgerow network/historic

field system have declined, the coppices are unmanaged and the vernacular architecture is being eroded by the introduction of unsympathetic components. The components of the highest quality are the physical landscape, particularly the terrace landform, and the tranquil rural environment.

Landscape Strategy

- 7.22 The overall strategy for the *Arborfield River Terrace* (C1) is to **conserve** the quiet rural, agricultural landscape with its scattered rural settlement and rural lanes. There are key opportunities to **enhance** the landscape. The main aspects requiring enhancement and management are the historic landscape including the former hedgerow boundaries, area of historic parkland and the coppiced woodlands.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 7.23 The *Arborfield River Terrace* is considered to have a **moderate sensitivity** to change. This results from the importance (and difficulty of recreating) the historic buildings and small areas of ancient woodland/parkland as contrasted with the relative ease with which the rural land use pattern could be replicated. The components which make up this landscape are important largely at the local scale, although the tranquillity and openness are increasingly rare and important. The most sensitive elements are the remaining historic features such as the parkland, ancient woodland and rural lanes and tracks as well as the distinctive perceptual aspects including the tranquil rural character. The views of wooded horizons imparted by the adjoining Loddon River Valley (A2) are also sensitive. However, the openness of the landscape on the terrace means that any change has the potential to be highly visible.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 7.24 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Arborfield River Terrace* and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to seek opportunities to improve the condition, robustness and intactness of the landscape and, in particular, to retain the important perceptual characteristics of remoteness and openness.

Key Issues

Agriculture

- ❖ Hedgerow loss and soil erosion is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- ❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.

Associated Guidelines

- Conserve remaining hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
- Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
 - ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.
 - ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet
- Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
 - Continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
 - Ensure design of areas of coppice is sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses

Key Issues

renewable energy obligations increased.

Associated Guidelines

such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ Past pressures for gravel and sand extraction has resulted in changes in landscape character. The pressure for gravel extraction is likely to continue and could potentially affect the terrace deposits.
- Ensure any restoration plans for gravel extraction sites are in keeping with the character of the landscape in which they lie. Encourage opportunities for habitat creation.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Over-maturity of veteran parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going concern.
- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland and hedgerow trees.

Recreation

- ❖ Potential pressure for horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- Develop guidance on management of horse/pony paddocks – to be sensitive to existing landscape character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.
- Aim to maintain the largely unsettled character of the area, with one main settlement focus and dispersed farms.
- ❖ Development is resulting in the dereliction and loss of traditional dwellings, dilution of vernacular character and loss of distinct architectural style and 'suburbanising' trends.
- Conserve historic buildings and vernacular character consider undertaking built character appraisals across the district to identify local styles, layouts, densities and materials that may be appropriate in new buildings and the spaces between these buildings.
- ❖ Potential demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding
- Maintain the remaining historic

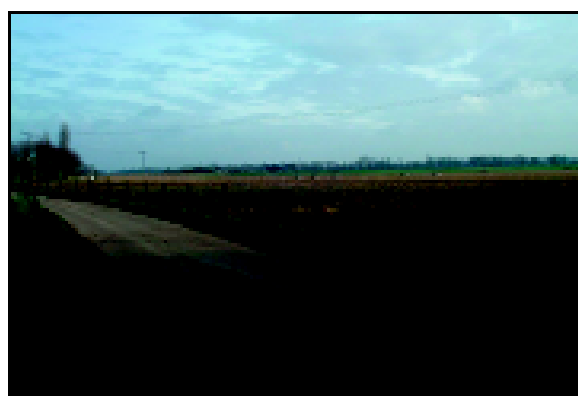
Key Issues

network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.

Associated Guidelines

lanes with their unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character.

C1: ARBORFIELD RIVER TERRACE



C2: HURST RIVER TERRACE

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 7.25 The character of the *Hurst River Terrace* is created by the combination of the flat landform with mixed agricultural use set against a wooded horizon. It is also influenced by the adjacent Loddon river valley. Located in the heart of Wokingham district, the *Hurst River Terrace* is located above the floodplain of the River Loddon, on sand and gravel of the Second Terrace Deposits. The argillic gley soils of this area are affected by high groundwater and periodic flooding resulting in a mixture of arable and pastoral land use. The propensity for flooding is marked by the presence of drainage channels and permanently water-filled ditches which, together with a number of ponds throughout the area, create a character that has a strong connection with the adjoining river valley landscape. This area lacks a woodland, but its verdant and open character is enhanced by the dark wooded horizons created by the adjacent river landscapes. The openness is emphasised by the general absence or fragmented character of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- 7.26 The landscape has a settled residential character due to the presence of the small hamlets of Whistley Green and Hurst but is also strongly influenced by agricultural buildings, including large agricultural warehouses and traditional farmsteads. A relatively dense network of small rural roads with wide verges and occasional grassy roadside banks connects the settlements.

Location and Boundaries

- 7.27 The *Hurst River Terrace* is a thin strip of land located west of the Loddon River Valley between the settlements of Twyford and Winnersh. It incorporates the small settlements of Hurst and Whistley Green. The area is defined to the west by the boundary with the *Loddon River Valley with Open Water (B1)*, which follows Davis–Street Lodge Road–A321, being determined by the extent of the floodplain and gravel extraction works (operational or restored). To the east the boundary

of the area is less clearly defined and follows field boundaries that mark the transition from this landscape type to the distinct character areas of the *Ashridge* and *Hurst Open Clay Lowlands* (I1 and I4) and the *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* (K1). This corresponds to the geological boundary between the river terrace deposits and the adjoining clay and alluvial landscapes. The southern boundary is marked by the M4, which separates the rural landscape from the more settled 'fringe' landscape of the *Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay* to the south.

Key Characteristics

- **Flat to gently shelving** lowland landscape located at the edge of and **overlooking the Loddon floodplain** (B1).
- **Simple and open agricultural landscape** comprising a regular mixture of **arable farmland** and **pasture** dominated by sheep, enclosed in relatively large **straight-sided fields** with some smaller **horse and pony paddocks**.
- **Few hedgerows**, those remaining being predominantly low flailed hawthorn hedges, with fields being mostly divided by poor quality **post and wire fencing**
- **Wooded horizons** created by the **small deciduous woodlands** and scattered **remnant hedgerow trees** and the wooded character of the adjoining Loddon valley.
- Localised wet influences due to presence of minor **drainage channels** radiating into the Loddon Valley, **deep drainage ditches** around the fields and scattered **farm ponds** with willows associated with settled areas.
- **Villages** of Hurst and Whistley Green located **around older cores** with interspersed newer scattered **linear development** along the network of rural lanes
- Regular pattern of river terrace **farmsteads**, including large-scale modern **agricultural buildings**.
- Building character unified by presence of **red brick** and presence

but evidence of **suburban influences** on house details and in gardens.

- Southern edge affected by movement and noise of the **A329(M)**.

Physical Landscape

7.28 The *Hurst River Terrace* is a relatively flat lowland landscape above the Loddon Floodplain lying almost entirely at 40m AOD with gentle shelving slopes falling away to the river valley below. The character area represents a terrace of land that, approximately, concurs with an area demarcated by the deposition of Second Terrace Deposits and small lenses of Third Terrace Deposits, which are located variably above the underlying Lambeth Group and London Clay. In some parts, notably in the south of the area, such gravel and sand deposits have not capped the clay and the London Clay therefore occurs near the surface.

7.29 Despite the wide variation in geology the dominant group of soils of this area are typical argillic gley soils, which are stony loams that are affected by high groundwater and short-term flooding due to the associated underlying gravels and clay alluvial deposits. The propensity for waterlogging has led to the creation of a network of formal ditches that often follow the roads and are designed to drain water away from the terrace into the Loddon river valley below. At the more detailed scale the extent of waterlogging has had a profound effect influencing the subdivision of land between permanent pasture and arable farmland. Locally the impervious nature of the soil has resulted in the creation of numerous small farm ponds.

Historic Environment

7.30 St Nicholas Church in Hurst was built c. 1080, a Domesday settlement is recorded at Whistley, and a village became established around a green at Whistley Green – place names containing “-leah” and Hurst indicating settlement in the woodland environment of Windsor Forest. There is no trace in the landscape of the former Medieval deerpark at La Lee (Hurst), which probably spanned both the terrace and the floodplain. The Tudor mansion at Hurst House was rebuilt in the 19th century, with landscaped parkland.

7.31 The higher ground of the river terrace was the focus for Medieval settlements exploiting the valley floor and there is a pattern of quite closely spaced hamlets and farmsteads sited on the edges of the floodplain, linked by narrow lanes. These include a particularly high concentration of surviving 16th and 17th century rural buildings. Many of the current medium and large fields are irregularly shaped, but often with straight-sides, indicating the recent amalgamation of the smaller fields produced by Parliamentary and earlier inclosure, although there are small areas of relatively intact early Post-medieval field system.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	There is a small area around the Hurst conservation area and a larger one in the north around Whistley Green.
<i>Conservation Areas</i>	
	Hurst
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	This area has one of the highest densities of listed buildings in the rural area away from the centre of large settlements. There is a concentration in the Hurst Conservation Area, and a linear cluster at Wards Cross and isolated examples include Hurst House, Hatch Gate Farm and St Nicholas Farm.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None.	

Ecological Character

7.32 There are no sites with statutory or non-statutory designations within this character area. Its main features of habitat value are the small water bodies including the drainage channels and numerous small farm ponds with permanent aquatic vegetation. Some of these

channels and ponds support great crested newts, which are thought to be common in this area. In addition, the roadside ditches in Hurst support a good population of water voles.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserve</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
None	

Rural Land Use

- 7.33 The landscape of the *Hurst River Terrace* is predominantly agricultural and residential. The farmland is mixed including both arable and pastoral fields. The pastures support horses and sheep and the arable fields are used for cropping including brassicas. Due to their close proximity stock is sometimes released from the pastures onto the arable areas, when the crops have been fully harvested to use the unwanted parts of the crops for fodder.
- 7.34 Both the arable and pasture is set within large geometric fields of variable shape. These fields are mostly divided by post-and-wire fences with occasional stretches of metal estate rail and gates defining the edges of the pony paddocks. There are few boundaries marked by vegetation, although the infrequent lengths of hedgerow that have survived tend to be intact and comprise mechanically managed low flailed hawthorn monoculture hedge. Remnant hedgerow or roadside trees are sometimes present but are noticeably scarce and scattered. Therefore, in conjunction with the absence of woodland, the landscape takes on an open character. Sometimes the property boundaries

contain coniferous shelterbelt hedgerow plantations and there is often vegetation in gardens, which help to break up the landscape. However, generally the landscape appears to lack vegetation structure and is reliant upon woodland in the adjacent landscape types for definition.

Settlement and Built Character

- 7.35 The settled character of the landscape is predominantly rural although it has been affected by suburban elements. The road network has a winding and peaceful character, which, in the rural area, results from the lack of kerbing and the distinctive character of the roadside ditches and banks, and, in the more settled parts from the wide roadside verges. Only in the south, for example around the Little Hill Road and Green Lane areas, where the noise and movement of traffic on the M4 is apparent, is the proximity of this area to the heavily settled areas of Wokingham, Winnersh and Woodley evident.
- 7.36 Settlement in this area is dominated by detached linear settlement located along the rural roads and including clusters of houses associated with the edge of the floodplain following Lodge Road and Davis Street. These include the settlements of Whistley Green, Hurst (Conservation Area) and Wards Cross. Although there is no apparent strong rural vernacular in these areas they do have a sense of unity, albeit somewhat suburbanised, with warm red brick being characteristic throughout all ages of property and the hedges, brick walls and fences of front gardens creating a continuous frontage to the roads. Furthermore within the built area there are numerous older buildings, many of which are listed, which lend a sense of historic continuity and provide local focal points. These include the flint and brick-built parish church of St Nicholas (founded in 1086), and the distinctive brick Barker's Almshouses nearby on higher ground.
- 7.37 Elsewhere the dominant influences are clustered farmsteads and large detached halls. The farmsteads include more modern buildings with dormer windows and are frequently associated with large agricultural sheds and warehouses, some of which are brightly coloured and eye-catching. Many of the halls are of high architectural quality,

originating from earlier buildings, such as the early nineteenth century building of Hurst House with its tall ‘Elizabethan’ style chimneys.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 7.38 The *Hurst River Terrace* (C2) is a landscape of overall **moderate quality** as a result of its moderate landscape character and moderate overall condition. The main characteristics contributing to the **moderate character** are the gently shelving landform, distinctive settlement patterns and openness of the rural landscape. These are predominantly in **moderate condition** with the factors most significant in reducing the perception of overall condition being the loss of hedgerows and replacement with post and wire fencing, suburbanisation of some buildings and disturbance due to motorway noise from the M4.

Landscape Strategy

- 7.39 The overall strategy for the *Hurst River Terrace* (C2) is to **conserve** the quiet rural, agricultural landscape with its scattered rural settlement, small red-brick villages and rural lanes. The open views overlooking the adjoining floodplain of the Loddon are a key feature that should be retained. There are key opportunities to **enhance** the landscape. The main aspects requiring enhancement and management are the condition of the hedgerow and habitats. There are also potentially opportunities for further woodland planting, notably to mitigate the influence of the M4.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 7.40 Overall the Hurst River Terrace is a landscape of **moderate sensitivity**. This is because most of the landscape characteristics are relatively replaceable or recreatable and also, most characteristics are of local importance and/or are common in the locality. The views of wooded of horizons imparted by the adjoining Loddon River Valley (B1) are also sensitive. However, the openness of the landscape on the terrace means that any change has the potential to be highly visible.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

7.41 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Hurst River Terrace* and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to seek opportunities to improve the condition, robustness and intactness of the landscape and, in particular, to retain the important perceptual characteristics of remoteness and openness.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Hedgerow loss and soil erosion is evident – this is associated with the past intensification of agriculture. This area has particularly suffered from the loss of hedgerows and their replacement with post and wire fencing.	• Conserve all hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
❖ Recent years have seen viability of small farms decline leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of landscape features such as hedgerows.	• Promote active management of features of the landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
❖ There is evidence of incremental loss of species rich grassland due to increasingly intensive grassland management. Despite the predominance of pasture there are no areas of species-rich grassland in this area.	• Consider opportunities for the creation of meadows or permanent pasture to restore grassland habitats lost through agricultural intensification, for example the creation of grassland field margins.
❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in recent years water quality has improved.	• Encourage environmentally beneficial management of both pasture and arable land.

Key Issues

- ❖ The declining viability of livestock grazing is resulting in conversion to other land uses such as pony paddocks and small hobby farms.

Associated Guidelines

- Conserve and protect pasture and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing. Consider re-creation of lost grassland habitats, particularly in chalk areas. Resist encroachment of paddocks from area I4.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Currently not a significant component of the landscape

Minerals

- ❖ Potential for demand to extract terrace deposits.
- Ensure restoration plans for any approved gravel extraction sites are in keeping with the character of the landscape in which they lie. Encourage opportunities for habitat creation.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have, in the past, resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture. This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.
- Conserve remaining wetland habitats through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland). Resist infilling of ponds and drainage ditches.

Recreation

- ❖ Currently not a significant factor

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.
- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. Avoid the unplanned expansion of Hurst across this area.

Key Issues

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

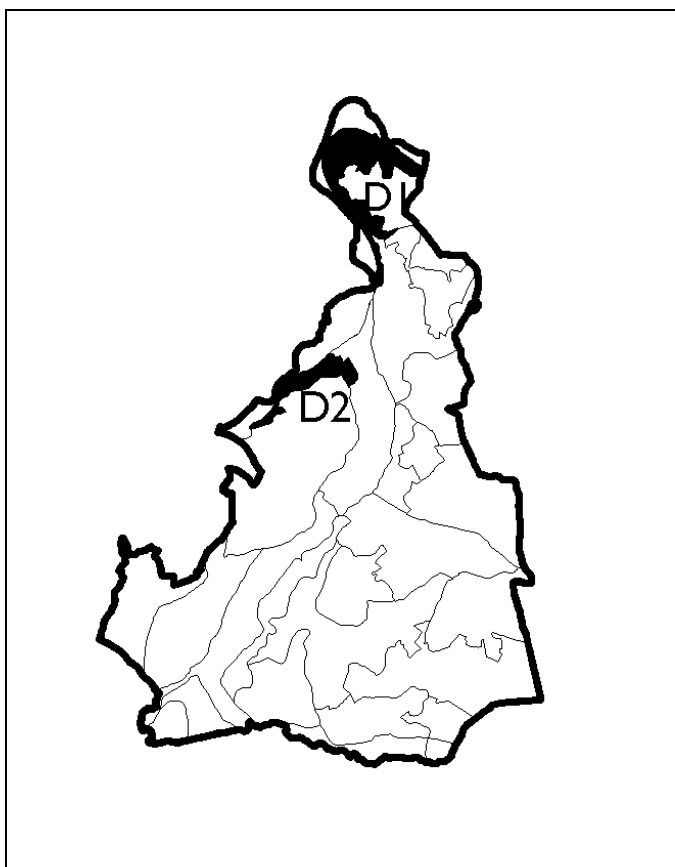
Associated Guidelines

- Maintain the historic leafy lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural locations.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.

C2: HURST RIVER TERRACE



8 LANDSCAPE TYPE D: WOODED CHALK SLOPES



Landscape Areas	Character
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D1: Remenham	Wooded Chalk Slopes
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D2: Sonning	Wooded Chalk Slopes
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Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 8.1 There are two areas affiliated to the landscape type classified as *Wooded Chalk Slopes*. These occupy a disconnected sweeping arc of chalk landscape overlooking the Thames Valley in the north of the District. The landscape is topographically distinct, rising steeply between the flat lowland of the Thames River Valley at 35m AOD, to the north and west of the district to elevated farmed areas at 95m AOD (around Remenham) and 60m AOD (around Sonning). The landscape type is characterised by an acutely sinuous network of steep chalk slopes and narrow, intimate valleys clothed in large swathes and scattered blocks of mixed woodland.

Key Characteristics

- Underlying flinty Upper Chalk geology.
- Steep, strongly articulated slopes with dry combe valleys.

- Mixed woodland, particularly clinging to the steepest slopes including beech hangars.
- Open slopes with chalk grassland.
- Glimpsed views to the River Thames.
- Valley edge country houses and associated parks.
- Intimate winding sunken lanes.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

- 8.2 The *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* fall entirely within *Landscape Type G: Dipslope Mosaic* and is within indicative *Character Area G9: Cookham Dean Dipslope Mosaic*. The boundary with the river valley follows the same line as that within the county-wide assessment. The district landscape type represents a subdivision within the county landscape type – including only the slopes and thus distinguished from the adjoining wooded hills, open arable farmland and enclosed pastures, which are constituents of the *Dipslope Mosaic* landscape type. Around Sonning, given the different scale of assessment the smaller ribbon of this landscape type was included within *B4 Hurley Thames Lower River Floodplain* which notes the enclosing scarp of the valley sides and wooded context.

D1: REMENHAM WOODED CHALK SLOPES

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 8.3 The *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* is a visually distinctive character area defined by a belt of chalk landscape that appears to wrap around the floodplain of the River Thames and is clearly distinguished from the adjoining river and arable plateau landscapes.
- 8.4 Characterised by very steep and densely wooded slopes and with small dry combe valleys, the landscape is intimate, with framed views and a strong sense of enclosure. However, within the wooded context, contrast is provided by open and less wooded areas of grass pastures with distant views of the Thames valley and the Chilterns. These characteristics made it popular with wealthy landowners in the nineteenth century who established their large country houses and historic estates on the slopes overlooking the valley, which are now important features of the landscape. Elsewhere settlement is relatively sparse comprising farmsteads and small houses and cottages concentrated in hamlets and villages at the base or along the upper slopes. These include traditional vernacular buildings with brick, flint and dark weatherboarding characteristic. Further rural charm is evident through small details such as sunken lanes, beech hangers, and dense hedgerows. The area is quiet and appears remote, although accessible by foot along the network of footpaths or the steep rural lanes.

Location and Boundaries

- 8.5 The *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* character area is located in the north of the district. This landscape runs approximately parallel to a meander of the River Thames, extending from near Wargrave in the south and sweeping northwards and eastwards to skirt the settlements of Remenham and Aston. The boundaries of this character area are the breaks of the upper and lower slopes and, as such, are largely based upon contour lines. The 40m AOD contour approximately follows the bottom of the slope, which is the edge of the *Thames River*

Valley (Character Area A1), whilst the upper boundary, less precisely, follows the 90m contour marking the edge of the adjoining elevated *Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau* (E1). These contrasting very open and topographically simple landscape types accentuate the varied landform and intimate character of this character area.

Key Characteristics

- A landscape dominated by the **Steep Upper Chalk slopes and cliffs** of the River Thames valley sides creating an acute and dramatic landform.
- **Heavily wooded character** in parts created by woodlands blanketing the steepest slopes comprising mixed, deciduous (some ancient) and coniferous woodland blocks/copses of varying shape, including characteristic **hanging woodlands** and **oak/beech woodland**.
- Areas of **open grass pastures** suggestive of 'downland' predominantly grazed by sheep (often with no obvious boundaries or field divisions) including unimproved **chalk grassland**–supporting a number of restricted and rare grassland species.
- Sense of peacefulness due to the **intimate scale, limited settlement** and remoteness of the landscape.
- Glimpsed picturesque **views to the River Thames** and **Chiltern Hills**.
- **Settlements (hamlets)**, located on the boundary of the area, **exhibit rustic architectural character** through consistent use of materials – predominantly red brick, flint and black weatherboarding.
- **Rural lanes and tracks**, frequently sunken, enclosed by steep banks and hedges, winding up dry valleys.
- **Large detached properties**: farmsteads, halls and manor houses, which are dotted across the landscape, often within an estate **parkland** setting.
- **Variety of field shapes**, the product of Medieval/Post-Medieval assarts, Parliamentary inclosure, and recent field boundary loss.

Physical Landscape

- 8.6 *The Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* are so called due to the simple and relatively unvaried nature of the underlying geology. The entire area is underlain by an outcrop of Upper Chalk, which was formed in the Upper Cretaceous and is now the dominant influence on the character of this area. In numerous locations along the A4130 to Henley the chalk strata are exposed due to previous quarrying activity and road cutting.
- 8.7 The chalk has given rise to a strongly articulated landform, which has been cut into by the River Thames to produce sloping valley sides that rise sharply above the valley floodplain to produce some of the most distinctive elevated landform of Wokingham District. To the west of the area, the slopes are particularly steep including escarpments or 'cliffs'. The northern slopes are less dramatic creating a more rolling landform. The action of the erosion of meltwater over permafrost during the ice age and more modern drainage discharging down these slopes from the upper slopes has led to the formation of incised combe (dry) valleys at regular intervals, which produce undulations and variety in the landscape and create areas with a more intimate character. Where landcover permits there are good views over the Thames Valley and the Chilterns AONB, with which this area shares many characteristics.
- 8.8 The underlying chalk strata have influenced the overlying soils, which are classified as Argillic Brown Earths. These are well-drained, fine or coarse loamy soils that are locally stony and shallow.
- 8.9 Overlying the chalk there are some localised small areas of drift deposits including river terrace (upper slopes) and river gravel deposits (lower slopes). The young river gravels are Fourth Terrace Deposits of the Quaternary era and reflect the historic fluvial processes of the River Thames. They contain Jurassic limestones, ironstones and flints with some erratic pebbles and have previously been quarried – evident through the presence of a reclaimed gravel pit at Remenham. There are also some localised areas of Seventh Terrace Deposits. These localised deposits influence land cover and therefore create subtle variations within the character of this area.

Historic Environment

- 8.10 There may have been gradual clearance of the chalk soils on the shallower slopes, possibly from the Neolithic onwards, associated with prehistoric/Roman occupation of valley floor, as indicated by cropmarks at Remenham and Henley.
- 8.11 Woodland, on the steeper slopes and on the area of gravel drift at Remenham Wood, remained a valued economic resource during all periods– there is a Domesday entry for Royal woodland at Remenham in 1086. After widespread disafforestation in 1227, a deerpark was created at Remenham Wood in 1284, its extent indicated on the 1840 tithe map as “Remenham Park Wood” and nearby fields of “Parkwood” and “Park Piece”. Significant tracts of this woodland survive.
- 8.12 While the irregular boundaries of much of the woodland suggests assart incursions of Medieval/Post-medieval date, the more regular straight-sided fields on the north facing slopes indicate early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, although the large prairie-type fields at Remenham may result from the later amalgamation of earlier inclosures.
- 8.13 A 1718 Turnpike Act created a turnpike trust for the road from Maidenhead to Henley, part of the main post and coach road between London and St. David’s. The road between Remenham Hill and Aston was formerly part of north-south route carrying traffic between Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, crossing a ferry between Aston and Mill End.
- 8.14 Settlement within this area is sparse, although a pattern of small, dispersed hamlets and farmsteads linked by narrow lanes on the edges of the zone has developed, indicating cultivation of the more level adjacent plateau and valley areas. However, the wooded slopes over the Thames became favoured locations for large country houses. These include Temple Combe, Hennerton House and Wargrave Hill (now Wargrave Manor) and Culham Court (1771) – products of the influx of new wealth to the area in the 18th century. Many of the estates were landscaped in the late 18th and 19th centuries, some incorporating features of mock or displaced antiquity. Improvements in the Park Place estate, for instance, included the construction of

Conway's Bridge (named after the estate's owner General Conway, the Governor of Jersey) built from the ruins of Reading Abbey, and carrying the Wargrave to Henley road over "Happy Valley". In 1785 a megalithic chamber (the "Druid Temple") was imported from Jersey and rebuilt at Temple Combe. Both works are also attributed to the Rev. Gainsborough (brother of Thomas Gainsborough). Significant areas of former parkland are now under arable cultivation, as the large estates were split up and sold off during the 20th century, although their former character is still evident in the survival of mature planted trees in the fields.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	There is one small site located off Aston Lane.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	There are a number of listed buildings. These are large detached buildings including Culham Court and Remenham Court
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens</i>	
Park Place and Temple Combe Grade II* (SU7782) (<i>Also falls in Area A1</i>)	C19 house surrounded by C18 and C19 gardens and pleasure grounds and landscape park with work in the mid to late C19 by Robert Marnock. Temple Combe, developed during the late C18, lies enclosed within the Park Place Estate.

Ecological Character

- 8.15 The main influences upon the ecological character of the *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* are the chalk geology, which supports calcareous grassland assemblages, and the steeply sloping landform, which has consequently escaped agricultural use leading to the survival of important woodland blocks.

- 8.16 The *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* have retained significant woodland cover, particularly on the steeper slopes to the west, supporting in total eleven woodland sites with Wildlife Heritage Site status, with four of these recognised as being of ancient origin. These non-statutory woodland sites account for around 20% of the 587ha of the character area. The characteristic tree species of the Remenham Chalk Uplands include oak (*Quercus robur*) and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), together with beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), which has often been planted for forestry objectives. With other defining species such as hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and old mans beard (*Clematis vitalba*) occurring along hedgerows and copses.
- 8.17 Remenham Wood is classified as ancient woodland and represents the largest woodland block totalling 38.5 ha. It is located on an area of deeper soils over gravel drift. Part of this site has been replanted, but much remains in its semi-natural state and has been managed as high forest. The three other ancient woodlands in this character area are Canon Wood, Rosehill Wood and part of Park Place and Mill Bank. The remaining seven woodlands with Wildlife Heritage Site status comprise a variety of small plantations, copses and shelterbelts.
- 8.18 The grasslands that occur over the calcareous soils on the slopes are largely improved through cultivation, reseeding and subsequent overgrazing, and therefore are of low conservation value. However, this character area is notable for supporting the last remaining fragment of unimproved chalk grassland in the Wokingham District. This site is situated on the western edge of Remenham Wood and has developed on the thin soils of the steep scarp slope. This grassland is important for supporting a number of chalk grassland species that are restricted in the District such as fairy flax (*Linum catharticum*), wild basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*), salad burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*), and dragon's teeth (*Tetragonolobus maritimus*), and particularly for supporting the nationally rare rough marsh-mallow (*Althaea hirsuta*).

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	

Character Area D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Cannon Wood 6.1 / 6.8ha	Ancient woodland
Park Place / Mill Bank 17.5 / 3.9ha	Partly ancient woodland (all replanted)
Remenham Wood 38.5 / 31.9ha	Partly ancient woodland
Rosehill Wood 19.9 / 18.5ha	Ancient woodland (mostly replanted)
Fairmans Wood	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Aston Lodge Wood 1.0ha	Woodland
Branfords Woodlands 13.1 ha	Deciduous woodland
Chalk Grassland Remenham 4.8ha	Chalk grassland
Happy Valley and Conways Bridge 10.2ha	Chalk grassland
Hennerton House 5.6ha	Deciduous woodland
Long Innings Copse 2.8ha	Deciduous woodland
Grassland Slope 4.4ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within A1</i>	Marsh, calcareous grassland
Lower Spinney 1.8ha	Deciduous woodland
Templecombe Wood 28.4ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within E1</i>	Deciduous woodland
The Belt 1.8ha	Deciduous woodland
Wood adjacent to Henley Rowing Club 0.4ha	Wet woodland
Fairmans Wood/Little Fairmans Wood 5.5ha	Deciduous woodland
Worleys Hill 0.5ha	Deciduous woodland
Wetland North of Wargrave 0.5ha	Wetland

Designations	Summary of Importance
Long Inings Copse 2.8ha	Deciduous woodland

Rural Land Use

- 8.19 The two principal land uses of this area are woodland and agriculture. Most of the woodlands are mixed and include significant tracts of beech. The size and shape of woodland are highly variable ranging from large swathes on the slopes to the east of Henley to the much smaller, narrow shelterbelt strips in the north.
- 8.20 Small agricultural fields occur between the woodlands along the west of this character area with the largest continuous expanse occurring on the gentler slopes to the north. These are almost exclusively given over to permanent pasture and the Sheep grazing on these rolling hillsides is evocative of the ‘downland’ character of West Berkshire and the Chilterns. The smoothness of the grazed fields provides an attractive contrast to the silhouettes of woodland and beech hangars against the skyline. The large fields are divided by inconspicuous and infrequent boundaries giving no sense of an overall field pattern or system. Where hedgerow removal has occurred, post and wire fencing and more rustic wooden fencing has been erected – leading to an inconsistent edge character and reducing the intimate quality of the landscape. Remnant hedgerows are varied in terms of quality, condition and character with many sporadic and unkempt and others thick and tall.
- 8.21 Parkland and estates are also characteristic of this area, to some extent forming a transition between the pasture and woodland landscape. This is found associated with the large halls and manor houses such as Hennerton House and Wargrave Manor. Particularly important areas of parkland are associated with the very steep wooded slopes just north of Wargrave. The parkland landscapes include areas of grazed pasture and lawn distinguished by parkland trees. The Cedar of Lebanon avenues at Hennerton House are a particularly distinctive and striking element of the landscape.

Settlement and Built Character

- 8.22 In contrast with the more developed landscapes in the south of Wokingham District, this character area is sparsely settled with a peaceful, rural and genteel quality. Farmsteads, manors and halls occur independently of one another located on the elevated land at the periphery of the area, exploiting views over the Chilterns and/or Thames Valley. Notably, the main settlements in the vicinity – the hamlets of Remenham and Aston and the linear settlement of Remenham Hill – are located outside the area being clustered along the boundary with the floodplain and plateau edges.
- 8.23 The built form is varied but of distinctive character ranging from small cottages of rustic quality to the architectural grandeur of the manor houses. Flint, black weatherboarding, red brick, clay tiles, and white-framed windows including curved dormers are common elements of the domestic architecture and farmsteads, appearing consistently and providing continuity and sense of place across the character area. In part, these relate to materials once readily available locally, such as the presence of flint nodules in the chalk soils of this and the adjoining areas and the easy availability of timber. Half-hipped and deep-pitched roofs are also typical. In contrast, the polite architecture of the halls and manors commands the landscape, such as Wargrave Manor, a white 19th century property (with colonnade and wings) positioned to exploit magnificent views over the River Thames.
- 8.24 The roads in this area are very distinctive comprising steep but subtly winding narrow rural roads that connect the floodplain to the plateau along the most direct route, often following the dry valleys. The roads are often cut into the landscape creating the image of sunken lanes and with steep banks and wide grassy verges. These are free from signage, kerbs and other road infrastructure and integrate well into their rural setting. The presence of high and overgrown hedges and ‘tree tunnels’, punctuated by occasional large beech trees enhances the rural character of the lanes.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 8.25 Gertrude Jekyll, the famous garden designer and artist, has strong connections to the landscape of *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes*,

having moved to Wargrave Hill (Wargrave Manor) as a child, in 1868 and resided there for eight years. Jekyll did not have a favourable opinion of the landscape although could appreciate why others enjoyed its qualities and in a letter written to the artist George Dunlop Leslie R.A. stated:

"It is quite true that I never cared for that part of the country, but I was quite sensible of its beauties. I admired it but had no sympathy with it".

8.26 Her appreciation for the underlying landscape is also apparent in her comment that she *"...only hated Berkshire because it was not Surrey, and the chalk because it was not sand"*.

8.27 In Vincent's journey in *'The Story of the Thames'* (1909) he describes how *"there is nothing to delay us of necessity until Marsh Lock, built in 1771 is reached, and here, at the top of the hill, is Park Place, full of memories"*. He also refers to Mrs Lybbe Powys comments on Park Place who wrote in 1762 of its unsympathetic relationship with the landscape:

"We went to see Park Place, the seat of General Conway and one of the most capital situations in England. The house stands agreeably, but is too indifferent for the surrounding grounds."

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

8.28 The *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* (D1) is a landscape of overall **high quality**. This is due to the combination of strong character and good condition. The **strong character** relates to the area's many distinctive characteristics, including the dramatic landform and large tracts of woodland, open pasture of a distinctly 'downland' character, the general absence of development and the attractive views to the River Thames and Chilterns AONB. The landscape is largely in **good condition** requiring ongoing management, although there are some opportunities to improve some details, for example the hedgerow boundaries and the extent/management of the remaining chalk grassland.

Landscape Strategy

- 8.29 The overall strategy for the *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* is to **conserve** its existing character – the combination of dramatic landform, tracts of woodland and pockets of open pasture, appealing building vernacular, views to the Thames and the sense of remoteness for example. Within the overall context of conservation there are a number of opportunities to enhance the robustness and quality of some characteristics, notably the ancient woodlands, chalk grassland and parklands.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 8.30 The *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* is a landscape of overall **high sensitivity** due to the low recreatability of many elements and their relative importance – including features of national and regional importance. The most highly sensitive and important elements are the areas of ancient woodland, remnant chalk grassland, the historic parkland and gardens of Park Place and Temple Combe, the dramatic landform and the perceptual characteristics such as the sense of remoteness. The intervisibility of the landscape with the River Thames and the Chilterns AONB gives this area a high visual sensitivity to change.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 8.31 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* and the associated management guidelines. The overall objective is to manage the landscape to ensure that the current characteristics are retained and, where possible, to seek opportunities to improve the condition of those characteristics in decline. In particular, this will entail ongoing management of the woodland and parkland, consideration of key views into and out of the area and active management and expansion of the chalk grassland.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Some hedgerow loss is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and replacement with post and wire	• Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak standards left to form future timber trees. Consider

Key Issues

fencing.

- ❖ There is evidence of incremental loss of species rich grassland due to increasingly intensive grassland management.
- ❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.
- ❖ The declining viability of livestock grazing is resulting in conversion to other land uses and loss of grassland habitats (particularly detrimental in chalk grassland areas) such as this.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase

Associated Guidelines

- opportunities for reinstatement of hedges, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides, being careful not to adversely impact on the sense of openness and views from the slopes overlooking the Thames and Chilterns.
- Consider opportunities for the creation and recreation of meadows or permanent pasture to restore grassland habitats lost through agricultural intensification e.g. creation of grassland field margins.
- Encourage environmentally beneficial management of both pasture and arable land.
- Conserve and protect pasture and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing. Consider re-creation of lost grassland habitats, particularly in this chalk area.

- Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
- Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of

Key Issues

in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.

- ❖ Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- ❖ In the past expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands has resulted in a change in character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora.
- ❖ Influence of woodland management on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines and slopes.

Associated Guidelines

significant views.

- Seek to actively manage woodlands by controlling exotic invasive species that are threatening the locally distinctive species.
- Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnecting valleys. The aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in areas which have been converted to coniferous monoculture plantation.
- Develop sympathetic woodland management to maintain positive character, particularly phased along sensitive slopes to ensure that the wooded backdrop to the Thames is maintained.

Minerals

- ❖ No significant issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence of loss and fragmentation of chalk grassland as a result of intensive agricultural practices.
 - ❖ Over-maturity of veteran parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.
- Conserve and restore remnant chalk grassland and promote grazing management in these areas. In addition, seek to re-create chalk grassland communities where these have been lost.
 - Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland and hedgerow trees.

Recreation

- ❖ No significant issues.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential
- Protect the individual identity of

Key Issues

development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas and also threatens to erode areas such as this which remain relatively undeveloped.

- ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- ❖ Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham District landscape.

Associated Guidelines

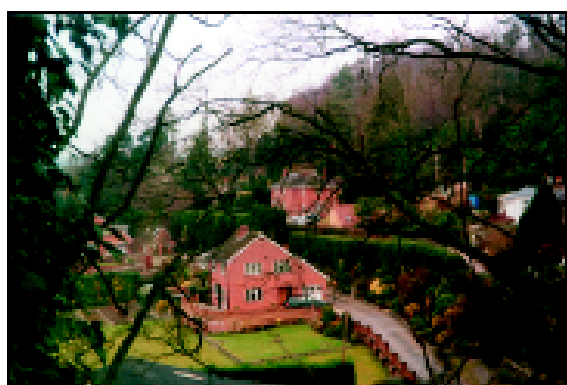
settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. Conserve the pattern of isolated detached dwellings in this area.

- Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained. Avoid these in the open chalk 'downland' area.
- Consider the impact of any development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas and from the Chilterns AONB. Retain the wooded skylines of this area.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
 - ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.
- Maintain the historic leafy lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural locations. Restore hedgerows adjacent to the lanes.
 - Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in the open areas of landscape – particularly the grassy slopes.

D1: REMENHAM WOODED CHALK SLOPES



D2: SONNING WOODED CHALK SLOPES

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 8.32 The *Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes* overlooks the *Thames River Valley with Open Water* (B2) around the small villages of Sonning and Charvil. Less dramatic than the *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* (D1) with which it shares many characteristics, the *Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes* comprises relatively steep but less elevated chalk slopes capped with river terraces, sands and clays with incised wooded combe valleys, with a flatter area to the east around Charvil. The wooded slopes provide a backdrop to the business park on the valley floor below and a setting to the Thames Valley when viewed from afar. The dramatic views from the slopes to the Chilterns have been exploited by the building of large detached houses, now in institutional use, and much of the area is inaccessible to the public.
- 8.33 Exploiting the edge-of-valley locations, two settlements have been established in this area. The smaller settlement – Sonning – is a picturesque Thames-side village noted for its rural vernacular architecture including the distinctive redbrick building façades. The larger and more modern settlement is Charvil exploiting links to both the Loddon and Thames and associated with the river terraces rather than the chalk landscapes.

Location and Boundaries

- 8.34 The *Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes* character area is located in the northwest of Wokingham district to the east of Reading and between the urban area of Woodley–Earley and the Thames Valley. The boundaries of this area are defined to the north by the edge of the Thames Valley Floodplain, which largely follows the edge of the chalk, and to the south by the edge of the sloping area, which approximately follows the boundary between the Bagshot Beds and London Clay.

Key Characteristics

- A topographically and geologically **varied settled landscape** of **mixed built character** influenced by its proximity to both the urban areas of Woodley and the river landscapes of the Thames and Loddon Valleys.
- **Picturesque nucleated** riverside village of **Sonning** – located on a gentle shelf of land above the River Thames with a **very distinctive vernacular character** particularly noted for the combined use of knapped flint and warm red brick.
- Larger modern village of **Charvil** located on a river terrace with a more **suburban** character.
- Context of intensive and **large scale open pasture** and **arable land** of low visual quality but maintaining the **distinction between settlements** and separating them from the densely-settled landscape of Woodley (J4).
- More distinctive landform to the west with **relatively steep rolling chalk slopes** capped by sands and clays providing a backdrop to the flat adjoining floodplain landscape.
- Glimpsed **views to the Thames Valley** throughout the area.
- **Wooded combe valleys** on the chalk slopes creating a wooded framework to the Thames valley (and adjoining Thames Valley Business Park) when viewed from Oxfordshire.
- Slopes interspersed with open **grasslands, estate parkland and playing fields** associated with the presence of **large detached properties** in institutional use such as the Reading Blue Coat School.
- Rural context generally **inaccessible to the general public** with few rights of way.

Physical Landscape

- 8.35 The *Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes* are geologically and topographically varied in comparison to the simplicity of the *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* (D1). The area is distinguished by the presence of a steeply sloping outcrop of Upper Chalk, which wraps around the valley floor landscape below. A combe valley has incised the chalk slope and at its upper levels the Lambeth Group – a sandy and clayey formation, has capped the chalk creating local variation. The sloping and freely draining chalk has no water-courses and the only water present are a few small ornamental ponds.
- 8.36 To the north the landscape becomes less dramatic with gentler slopes, which have been exploited in the siting of Sonning. To the east, the landscape becomes a much flatter elevated river terrace (first river terrace) on which Charvil has been built. The soils within this area are argillic brown earths, which are well drained loamy and gravelly soils affected by high groundwater. For the most part these have been developed as parkland estates, are settled or are wooded but there are also some areas of arable and pastoral farmland, particularly associated with the flatter and more fertile river terraces.

Historic Environment

- 8.37 Although not visually obvious the archaeological/historic environment of the character area is a significant. Early clearance, and the use of the river valley for social and ceremonial purposes is indicated by the presence of an important complex of ceremonial monuments based around a Neolithic cursus and burial monuments. This prehistoric landuse is indicated by cropmarks at Sonning. Other cropmarks in the vicinity, showing enclosures, field boundaries and other features, indicate continued prehistoric and/or Romano-British exploitation of the landscape.
- 8.38 There was a Saxon Minster at Sonning, and the land south of the village was occupied from the Medieval period by the palace of the Bishops of Salisbury, surrounded by an extensive ecclesiastical complex, the main buildings of which were bounded on three sides by a moat, the western portion of which is still traceable. The palace was sold to Queen Elizabeth I but it fell into disrepair, and a new mansion

was built on the site in the 17th century. This was in turn pulled down in 1800 and a new Georgian house, Holme Park, built overlooking the Thames. It was changed to Victorian Gothic style in the late 19th century, and is surrounded by landscaped parkland. Another significant designed landscape is the house and grounds of Deanery Gardens in Sonning – a fine, albeit small example of the successful partnership between the famous architect Edwin Lutyens and garden designer Gertrude Jekyll.

- 8.39 The area between Sonning and the new settlement of Charvil to the east is characterised by large straight-sided fields, representing the recent amalgamation of the smaller and less regular fields shown on the 1st edition OS maps. The section of the Bath Road between Twyford and Reading passes through the area, running to the south of Sonning. The Great Western Railway cutting, up to c. 20m deep through Sonning Hill, took over three years to excavate, being completed in 1840.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
BCC No. 178	Cropmark E. of Broadmoor Lane
BCC No. 179	Cropmark in Straighthanger Field
BCC No. 180	Cropmark S.W. of Milestone Avenue
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	A large area around the SAMs is designated as a RAS.
<i>Conservation Areas</i>	Sonning
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	There is a very dense cluster of listed buildings located within the Sonning Conservation Area including Deanery Garden (I) and wall (II).
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
Deanery Garden (Grade II*)	An early 20 th house by Edwin Lutyens surrounded by a contemporary formal

Designations	Summary of Importance
	and informal garden by Lutyens with planting plans by Gertrude Jekyll.

Ecological Character

- 8.40 There is only one site with a statutory designation and none with non-statutory designations within this character area. The most important ecological assemblages are the densely wooded slopes in the west of the character area, which are likely to support a range of bird species.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Site of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
Ali's Pond	A small lined pond with a meadow surrounding it and two lengths of species rich hedgerow.
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
None	

Rural Land Use

- 8.41 The steep slopes are wooded and include the combe and slope woodlands of Big Gogs and Little Gogs. Around Holme Park the grounds of the Reading Blue Coat School comprises parkland and playing fields. However, much of this area is inaccessible and it is impossible to ascertain if many of the intervening areas are under ornamental or agricultural use. East of Sonning farmland becomes more evident. This area includes Sonning Farm, which is a teaching farm for the University of Reading. The terrace area is distinct and comprises very large and open fields in both arable and pastoral land use divided by overgrown grassy verges.

Settlement and Built Character

- 8.42 There are few roads within this area and the only access routes in the most steeply sloping area are private gated roads to which public access is not permitted. Elsewhere the roads are narrow and of rural quality, but becoming larger and more urban in character towards Charvil, which is accessed by both the A3032 and the A4(T).
- 8.43 The residences on the steep chalk slopes overlooking the Thames are prestigious. The grandest is Holme Park accessed via an unusual brick and flint knapped gatehouse. The house itself is also built in brick with knapped flint and includes impressive dressed stone windows and a clock tower. This is currently in use by the Reading Blue Coat School.
- 8.44 Sonning is a traditional Berkshire riverside village located on a gently sloping chalk outcrop. It has a very strong vernacular character with the dominant material being red brick but with timber-framed and white rendered buildings and flint-work also being common (Conservation Area). Many of the dwellings are noted for their tall chimneys and ornate porches. The buildings are mostly detached or terraced dwellings that abut straight onto the pavement, resulting in charming and picturesque narrow streets. In contrast, Charvil is a more modern and lower density settlement with wide grassy verges along the suburban streets. It includes numerous modern brick houses of the 1940s and 50s and bungalow developments.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 8.45 Sonning has been the subject of many artistic and literary references however these are almost always linked to the riverside character of the village as opposed to Sonning itself which has developed further away from the floodplain. These are referred to in character area *A1: Thames River Valley*.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 8.46 The *Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes* (D2) are evaluated as being of **moderate quality**. This is due to their moderate strength of character

and moderate condition. The characteristics which create a **moderate character** and sense of place are the distinctive settlement and built character with the physical landscape and rural land use, particularly the wooded slopes and their function as a backdrop, also being of importance. The **moderate condition** relates to the many opportunities there are to improve the presentation and robustness of certain components, particularly to redress the absence of potential habitats including chalk grassland, reinstatement of hedgerow boundaries and trees and addressing the poor visual quality of the farmland overlooking the Thames.

Landscape Strategy

- 8.47 The overall landscape strategy is to **conserve** the features that contribute to the sense of place namely the woodland, distinctive vernacular settlement and to ensure that the area continues to provide a wooded backdrop to the Thames Valley. There are key opportunities to **enhance** character and condition, notably the reinstatement of hedgerow boundaries and trees and addressing the poor visual quality of the farmland overlooking the Thames and ensuring appropriate management of the woodland.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 8.48 The *Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes* (D2) has a **moderate sensitivity** to change. This is because of the general moderate level of recreatability of key elements and a scale of importance at the regional level. The elements of highest sensitivity are the historic landscape (on account of the large amount of buried archaeological features in this area), the areas of historic parkland, the distinctive settlement character of Sonning, the wooded slopes, and other perceptual characteristics including views to the River Thames. The elevated landform and function as a backdrop to the Thames Valley (parts of the area), means that any change has the potential to be highly visible. It should also be noted that the proximity of this area to Reading and Woodley makes this area particularly vulnerable to development pressure (although does not increase the intrinsic sensitivity *per se*).

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

8.49 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes* and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to manage the landscape to ensure that the current characteristics are retained and particularly to enhance the condition of those characteristics noted as being of poor condition. In particular, ongoing management of the remaining areas of wooded slopes, consideration of key views into and out of the area (especially in relation to the River Thames), enhancements to the presentation of the agricultural land and opportunities for habitat creation (including potential for chalk grassland) should be encouraged.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Hedgerow loss and soil erosion is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.	• Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.	• Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and local produce initiatives, to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
❖ There is evidence of incremental loss of species rich grassland due to increasingly intensive grassland management.	• Consider opportunities for the creation of meadows or permanent pasture to restore grassland habitats lost through agricultural intensification, for example the creation of grassland field margins. Consider the potential for chalk

Key Issues

- ❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.
- ❖ Presence of marginal agricultural land being kept in 'hope' value, particularly around settlement edges, which is of poor visual character.

Associated Guidelines

grassland creation in suitable areas.

- Encourage environmentally beneficial management of both pasture and arable lands.
- Seek to maintain a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for the village or town. This is particularly important in the area between Charvil/Sonning and Sonning/Woodley.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.
- ❖ Influence of woodland management on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines and slopes
- Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
- Develop sympathetic management cycles to maintain positive character, to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.

Minerals

- ❖ Unlikely to be an issue in this landscape.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence of loss and fragmentation of chalk grassland as a result of intensive agricultural practices. There are no significant chalk grasslands in this area.
- ❖ Over-maturity of hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the
- Seek to re-create chalk grassland communities where these have been lost.
- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
landscape.	hedgerow trees.
Recreation	
❖ Potential pressure for golf courses that have an impact on the character of the landscape.	• New golf courses are unlikely to be successfully accommodated in this landscape. New and existing golf courses to be sympathetically sited and integrated into the landscape to decrease adverse views and enhance the contribution of the golf course to character.
❖ Pressure for more horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.	• Paddocks to be sensitive to existing character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows. Paddock fencing and temporary fencing should be discouraged.
Built Development	
❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas particularly Charvil/Sonning and Sonning/Woodley.	• Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. In particular seek to preserve the very sensitive gap between Sonning and Charvil and/or Sonning/Woodley.
❖ The pressure for large areas of housing is resulting in the dereliction and loss of traditional dwellings, dilution of vernacular character and loss of distinct architectural style.	• Conserve historic buildings and vernacular – particularly in the picturesque village of Sonning. Consider undertaking built character appraisals across the District to identify local styles, layouts, densities and materials that may be appropriate in new buildings and the spaces between these buildings.
❖ There is continuing pressure for expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.	• Consider undertaking character appraisals of settlements within Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation.
❖ Pressure for expansion of built	• Consider possibilities for woodland

Key Issues

development on the edges of towns is leading to suburbanisation of the landscape, loss of individual settlement identity and blocking of views.

- ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- ❖ Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham District landscape.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Increasing transport pressures on rural roads is occurring as a result of traffic taking diversions to avoid delays in the urban areas leading to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air pollution in rural areas.
- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Associated Guidelines

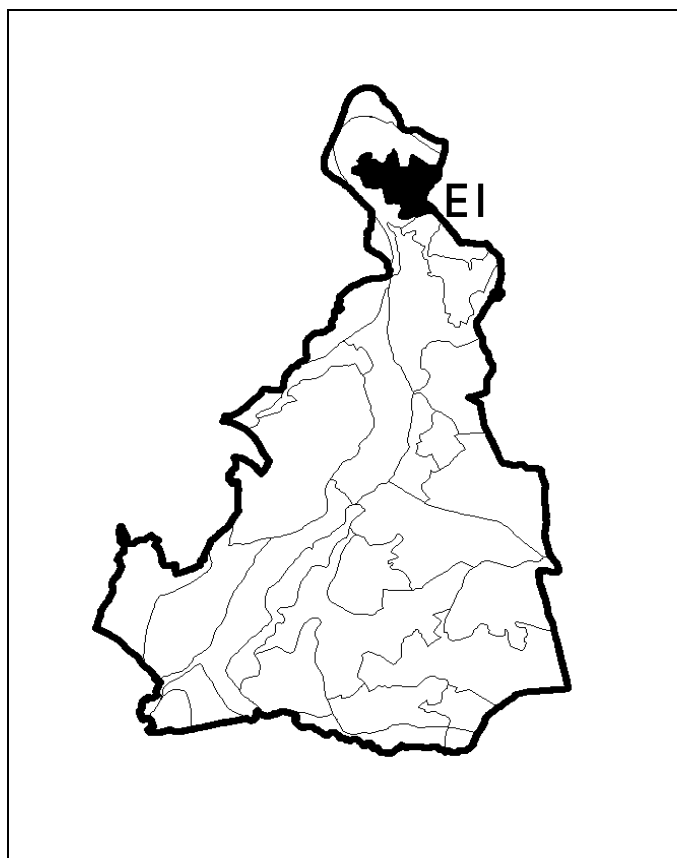
creation in urban fringe areas where these could enhance landscape character and quality, provide recreational potential, and assist in the positive integration of the urban into the rural landscape while conserving significant views to landmark features.

- Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained.
- Consider the impact of any development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Retain the wooded skylines of this area.
- Consider the use of traffic calming and access restrictions to maintain the tranquillity of the most rural areas. This would also make the use of rural roads more attractive for cyclists and recreational users.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.

D2: SONNING WOODED CHALK SLOPES



9 LANDSCAPE TYPE E: ARABLE CHALK PLATEAU



Landscape Areas	Character
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E1: Remenham Chalk Plateau	Arable
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Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 9.1 There is only one area of the *Arable Chalk Plateau* Landscape Type. This area is distinct due to its elevation, landform and largely unvaried arable land use. The majority of the landscape occurs at 95m AOD and is predominantly flat with very little landform variation. The creation of deeper richer soils due to the presence of Clay-with-Flints drift over the underlying Upper Chalk strata, in combination with the flat topography, makes this area highly suited to mechanised farming and has resulted in the dominance of intensive arable farmland resulting in a strong sense of exposure and the presence of far reaching views. There are few trees or internal subdivisions, although a sense of distant enclosure is created by wooded horizons relating to woodlands located in adjacent areas.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Elevated upland area.

- Flat plateau with open views.
- Clay-with-Flints drift capping and partially masking the underlying chalk influences.
- Arable Farmland comprising large fields with few divisions.
- Sparsely settled.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

- 9.2 The *Arable Chalk Plateau* is entirely within Berkshire Landscape Type *G: Dipslope Mosaic* and within indicative *Character Area G9: Cookham Dean Dipslope Mosaic*. The district type represents a subdivision within the county landscape type, including only the elevated plateau and distinguishing it from the adjoining steeply wooded slopes and wooded hills that are constituents of the *Dipslope Mosaic* Landscape Type.

E1: REMENHAM ARABLE CHALK PLATEAU

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 9.3 The *Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau* Character Area is a flat, elevated and open landscape dominated by arable farmland located in the north of the district. There are few vertical elements such as trees, hedgerows or buildings, resulting in a strong sense of exposure, exaggerated by the adjoining *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes*, which fall sharply away to the Thames Valley below. The flatness and openness of the landscape are emphasised by impressive views of the wooded hills of High Knowle and Bottom Boles Wood to the southeast – *Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls* (F1) providing definition and a sense of distant enclosure
- 9.4 There is a simplistic land use pattern of sparsely scattered farmsteads, lacking a strong vernacular character but including some white-rendered and red brick buildings, rustic agricultural buildings and with newer executive dwellings nearby. There is only one settlement – Remenham Hill – which is little more than a cluster of buildings. These are set within a large-scale intensively-worked arable landscape. This pattern is visually fairly monotonous and the character is further eroded by the apparent loss and poor condition of the field boundaries, which where still surviving comprise short-flailed, gappy and infrequent hedgerows. The presence of the busy A4130 also disturbs the potential for rural tranquillity. Within this overall context, some variety is evident in the landscape around Park Place, which includes a golf course and parkland, sheltered by broken woodland belts (mixed and deciduous) offering localised enclosure.

Location and Boundaries

- 9.5 Located towards the north of Wokingham District this landscape is largely enclosed by the *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* Character Area. The boundary to the north and west follows the plateau edge determined by the point where the steep slopes fall away. To the east, the border is dictated by the district/authority boundary. This is an

arbitrary limit and does not represent the full extent of the character area, which is recognised to continue beyond the limits shown on the map. The short, southernmost edge is defined by changes in topography, land cover and land use at Crazies Hill.

Key Characteristics

- **An agricultural landscape** intensively farmed for **arable** production.
- **Large field units** –undivided due to the relative absence of boundaries.
- **A predominantly flat landform** (defined by the Upper Chalk outcrop) evoking an **open ‘plateau’ character** – further exaggerated by the lack of vertical elements and minimal field divisions.
- **Clear views of High Knoll Wood (F1)**, framing and contrasting with the **flat plateau landscape**.
- **Largely unsettled character** with development characterised by **dispersed individual farmsteads** and **individual houses** linked by narrow lanes, with Remenham Hill – located at the main road junction.
- **Sense of neglect** through presence of sporadic short, flailed, **gappy hawthorn hedgerows**.
- **Park Place and its designed landscape**, along with other **manorial buildings** located along the plateau edge evokes a formal character and exploits views to the Thames and Chilterns.
- Evidence of incremental **urbanisation of rural character** due to occasional executive style development.
- Crossed by the **A4130** introducing a corridor of movement, noise and litter.

Physical Landscape

- 9.6 Geologically, the landscape is characterised by the superficial Pleistocene deposits of Clay-with-Flints that cap much of the underlying solid Upper Chalk outcrop in this area. The Clay-with-

Flints deposits generally comprise mottled, yellowish red to reddish brown clays, or loamy clays that are interrupted by isolated patches of sand and a plethora of shattered flints or flint nodules in the upper section. The lower surface of the deposit is generally irregular with the Clay-with-Flints acting to infill deep solution cracks or fissures in the underlying Upper Chalk.

- 9.7 The overlying soils are Argillic brown earths, which are well drained, flinty, fine or coarse loamy. These flints are visible where the land is being worked for agriculture. This landscape is relatively flat with a total range of between 110m AOD (at Park Place) and 75m AOD (in the south of the area). In contrast to the adjoining steeply sloping land, the depth and moisture retentiveness of the soils and the ease of mechanisation have led to the suitability of the area for intensive arable farmland (cereals).

Historic Environment

- 9.8 The heavy Clay-with-Flint soils of the plateau were generally unsuited to prehistoric and Roman cultivation, and may have remained predominantly wooded until Saxon times when settlement expanded onto previously marginal areas. However, they would have provided productive arable land from the medieval period onwards.
- 9.9 Woodland remained a valued economic resource, and there was a Domesday entry for Royal woodland at Remenham in 1086, and the whole area was part of Windsor Forest. Some tracts of woodland survive on the western side of the plateau, preserved by their incorporation within the landscaped parks of the 18th century estates. While the irregular boundaries of this woodland suggest assart incursions of medieval/Post-medieval date, the more regular, straight-sided fields to the east indicate early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure.
- 9.10 Elevated positions on the plateau overlooking the Thames were, like the valley slopes (e.g. of D1: *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes*), favoured locations for the construction of country houses, such as Remenham Place and Park Place, products of the influx of new wealth to the area in the 18th century. Park Place, built in 1719 (although extensively remodelled in 1871) represented a new type of house –the

villa – that was to flourish in 18th–19th century Berkshire. The grounds of Park Place which cross into the *Wooded Chalk Slopes*, were landscaped during the 18th and 19th centuries and incorporated many features of mock or displaced antiquity, such as four 18th century obelisks from Stanstead Hall, and a fifth re-using the 17th century top of the steeple of St. Bride’s Church, Fleet Street, as well as a rustic cottage and Grecian “ruins” (both now gone), and a grotto (now in ruins). Significant areas of the former parkland are now under arable cultivation, as the large estates were split up and were sold off during the 20th century, although the former parkland is still evident in mature planted trees surviving in the fields.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	A small area in east of area nr Rose Lane.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	There are very few – including Park Place, Stables and Walled Garden
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
Park Place and Temple Combe Grade II* (SU7782) (<i>Also falls in Area A1</i>)	C19 house surrounded by C18 and C19 gardens and pleasure grounds and landscape park with work in the mid to late C19 by Robert Marnock. Temple Combe, developed during the late C18, lies enclosed within the Park Place Estate.

Ecological Character

- 9.11 This plateau is dominated by arable agriculture, and subsequently has retained very little woodland cover. Large arable fields, typically divided by defunct hawthorn hedges, dominate the landscape.
- 9.12 Part of Templecombe Wood and Worleys Hill lie within this character area, and represent a significant area of parkland habitat,

characterised by scattered mature standard trees, including oak (*Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and lime (*Tilia* sp.).

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Sites / Registered ancient Woodland</i>	
Rosehill Wood 18.5ha	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Sites</i>	
Park Place School 14.2ha	Grassland, woodland, open water
Templecombe Wood 28.4ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within D1</i>	Deciduous woodland
Worleys Hill 0.5ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within D1</i>	Deciduous woodland
Happy Valley and Conways Bridge 10.17ha	Calcareous grassland
Park Place/Mill Bank 17.53ha	Deciduous woodland
Branfords Woodlands 13.05ha	Deciduous woodland
Remenham Wood 38.48ha	Deciduous woodland

Rural Land Use

- 9.13 This character area is notable for its largely unvaried land use with the majority of the landscape given over to arable farming, including the cultivation of cereals and oilseed rape. Field size is generally large with some smaller field divisions occurring in close proximity to farmhouses and other agricultural buildings. There is a distinct lack of tree cover over most of the landscape with few trees occurring within the large open fields. Field boundaries are not always apparent masking the former field system. Where field boundaries are present they are generally of poor quality. Some flailed single-species hawthorn hedgerows occur aligning the rural roads but these are

sporadic and appear degraded. Where tracts of hedgerow have been lost, they have largely been replaced by post-and-rail fencing of a standard style. However, there are extensive lengths of roadside, such as along the A4, where field boundaries are now totally absent. Here, scrubby vegetation occurring on wide rank grass verges separates the field system from the road and there is an accumulation of litter and fly-tipping (particularly around the lay-by) giving a sense of neglect.

- 9.14 Around Park Place land use is more varied with woodland, parkland and a golf course, providing some variation in landscape character. Strips of both mixed and deciduous woodland can be found along rural lanes and tracks. This woodland extends from the wooded parkland of Park Place interspersing and thus breaking the continuum of arable fields. This greatly influences the sense of scale and changes the degree of perceived enclosure. Beech woodland is prominent close to the A4 between Remenham Hill and Remenham Place. This narrow, mature belt connects to the core of Remenham Wood (A1), providing both physical and visual connectivity to the neighbouring character area of the *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* (A1).
- 9.15 The golf course south of Remenham Hill largely respects the open character of the landscape although the growth of immature trees may increase the level of enclosure, making for a more intimate character, extending the adjacent parkland character of Park Place.

Settlement and Built Character

- 9.16 There is a dispersed rural settlement pattern consisting mainly of individual farmsteads linked by narrow rural lanes and the A4. The general (apparent) absence of development is one of the area's key characteristic features, with only a few farmhouses, scattered cottages and the small hamlet of Upper Culham. Furthermore, there is no strong vernacular influence although building materials include brick, white render and clay roof tiles. The hamlet of Remenham Hill is located at the junction of the Maidenhead to Henley road and the north-south route to Buckinghamshire, which crossed the Thames at the Aston to Mill End ferry. This comprises a ribbon of twentieth century dwellings located to the east of the Victorian detached manor house of Remenham Place of listed building status.

9.17 The main building of architectural note is Park Place, which lies to the northeast of the character area on a slightly elevated area, with estate land crossing over into the *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes*. The elevated location has been exploited in the recent erection of a telecommunications mast. The building is a 19th Century Grade II county house constructed of rendered brick in French Renaissance style and with a tower. Until 1989 Park Place was used as a school. The stables, built circa 1871, are also listed Grade II and also fall within this character area – located away from the main property to the northeast. Park Place is surrounded by 18th and 19th Century gardens, pleasure grounds and landscaped parkland. The grounds were the landscape gardening project of Robert Marnock (circa 1869) with significant planting of trees and shrubs emphasising the wooded character, which varies with the rest of the character area and includes some coniferous trees.

9.18 There is some evidence of demand for new buildings on the plateau with a number of new detached dwellings constructed in an estate at the edge of Cockpole Green (in the adjacent District).

Perceptions of the Landscape

9.19 Unsurprisingly, there are few literary or artistic references to this area, although the comments of Mrs Lybbe Powys on Park Place (1762) described in *D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes* can be considered.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

9.20 The *Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau* (E1) is a landscape of overall **moderate quality**. It has a moderate strength of character and is in **moderate–poor condition**. The **moderate strength of character** arises from features such as the distinctive flat landform, evoking a sense of openness and exposure and providing impressive views of the wooded hills of High Knowle and Bottom Boles Wood (*Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls F1*). However, the loss of hedgerows dilutes the landcover pattern and the busy A4130 disturbs the otherwise tranquil landscape character. The characteristics in the poorest condition are

the field boundaries, habitats and parkland. There is considerable scope to enhance the general management of the landscape.

Landscape Strategy

- 9.21 The overall strategy for the *Remenham Arable Chalk Plateaux* is to **enhance** existing character through restoration of elements that have been lost or are in decline. The key elements which would benefit from enhancement are field boundaries / hedgerows, habitats, the remnant parkland and the general presentation of the landscape, particularly along the road corridor which suffers from fly tipping. Certain features of the landscape, such as the views to adjacent *Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls*, should be conserved.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 9.22 The *Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau* has a **moderate sensitivity** as a result of a mixture of characteristics varying in terms of recreatability and importance. In particular the land use pattern is neither particularly difficult to create and is not judged to be of more than local importance. Within this overall context, however, there are some very sensitive visual and perceptual characteristics, including the flat landform, the sense of openness and views, which will need to be carefully considered in any future changes to the landscape.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 9.23 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau* and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to manage the landscape to ensure that the important characteristics of openness and views to Bowsey Hill, are retained and to enhance those elements that are not projecting a high quality image at the local level, particularly the quality of the farmland and the presentation of the roads.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Hedgerow loss and soil erosion is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.	• Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak

Key Issues

- ❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.

Associated Guidelines

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.

- Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and local produce initiatives, to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.
- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.

- Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ No significant issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence of loss and fragmentation of chalk grassland as a result of intensive agricultural practices.
- ❖ Over-maturity of veteran parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.

- Seek to re-create chalk grassland communities where these have been lost, notably in association with the existing remnant sites.
- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland, and hedgerow trees.

Key Issues

Associated Guidelines

Recreation

- ❖ Pressure for golf courses that have an impact on the character of the landscape.
- New and existing golf courses to be sympathetically sited and integrated into the landscape to decrease adverse views and enhance the contribution of the golf course to character.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development with potential impact on the rural, predominantly unsettled character of the area.
- Conserve the largely unsettled character with few dispersed farms, cottages and one small hamlet.
- ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained.
- ❖ This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies'. Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape.
- Conserve the resource of dark skies in Wokingham District. Monitor development proposals and ensure measures are taken to minimise light pollution (e.g. full cut off lights). Promote guidance to encourage appropriate lighting of domestic/commercial properties.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- Maintain the historic leafy lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural locations.
- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.
- Undertake sympathetic screening to minimise the impact of new and existing roads.
- Consider the use of bridges rather than embankments to allow permeability beneath the bridge thereby reducing fragmentation of the landscape as a result of road building.

Key Issues

- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

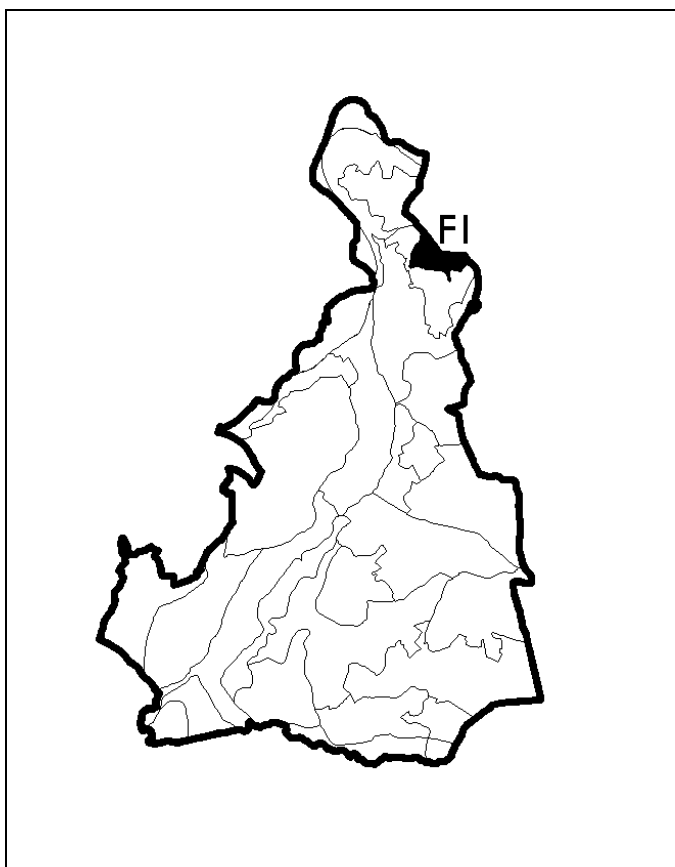
Associated Guidelines

- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.

E1: REMENHAM ARABLE CHALK PLATEAU



10 LANDSCAPE TYPE F: WOODED CHALK KNOLLS



Landscape Areas	Character
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F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls	
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Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 10.1 There is one landscape character area of the *Wooded Chalk Knolls* landscape type. This area occupies a location to the north east of Wokingham District and exhibits a land cover dominated by deciduous and mixed woodland over a landscape of high elevation, defined by a strongly articulated landform of rounded hills or knolls.

Key Characteristics

- Rounded hills or knolled landform.
- High elevation.
- Large tracts of mixed and deciduous woodland.
- Absence of built form.
- Network of public footpaths.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

- 10.2 The *Wooded Chalk Knolls* landscape type falls within the bounds of character area *G9: Cookham Dean Dipslope Mosaic*, at the county level. At the county scale a series of wooded knolls are a feature of the wider landscape type however, due to its uniqueness at the district level, the *Wooded Chalk Knolls* appears as a landscape type in its own right.

F1: BOWSEY HILL WOODED CHALK KNOLLS

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 10.3 Located to the northeast of the district, the character area defined as *Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls (F1)*, is bordered by character area *G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes*. Characterised by a striking elevated, hilly landform, the landscape is dominated by woodland cover – both mixed and deciduous. A number of public rights of way make for important recreation space. Industrial activity is apparent due to the presence of small workshops and active mineral workings at the Star Brick and Tile works in the adjacent character area of *Hare Hatch Farm Chalk Slopes (G1)*. It is the combination of prominent landform and dense woodland that are the most striking elements of the landscape and, combined, make for a character area both visually strong and physically distinct from its surroundings. The absence of buildings and settlement emphasises the sense of ruralness and the lack of any significant roads and vehicles within the landscape creates a quiet and peaceful character.
- 10.4 The landscape creates a wooded backdrop linking with Ashley Hill to the east and contributing to the sense of wooded enclosure of the Thames and Chilterns.

Location and Boundaries

- 10.5 *Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls (F1)* occurs to the northeast of Wokingham District lying east of the settlement of Crazies Hill and north of the settlement at Kiln Green. Both settlements fall within the adjacent character area *G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes* which encompasses the wooded knolls to the east, south and west. The boundary separating the character areas predominantly follows contour lines that determine the change in severity of slope whilst also reflecting the change in land use pattern. The northern edge is dictated by the administrative boundary of Wokingham District.

Key Characteristics

- **Rounded steep wooded hills** or ‘knolls’ at **high elevation** forming a strongly articulated and visually distinct landform and prominent **setting to surrounding, flatter landscapes** on lower ground (particularly E1 and H1).
- **Dominated by a series of woodlands, both mixed and deciduous** forming a continuous tract over the landscape, providing a **dramatic sinuous skyline** and a **wooded backdrop** to adjacent character areas.
- **Ancient woodlands** supporting a number of important plant communities.
- **Absence of farmland.**
- **Isolated, remote and enclosed character** exaggerated by the elevated landform and predominant absence of development.
- **Clear views, from the edge of the woodland, over the surrounding landscapes.**

Physical Landscape

- 10.6 The most visually striking feature is the hummocky, distinctly rounded landform at high elevation ranging from 85m AOD (roughly marking the edge of surrounding character area *G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes*) to 130m AOD at Bowsey Hill. The shape and height of the land ensures that *Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls (F1)* stands proud – influencing not only the setting but also the overall character of the surrounding landscape.
- 10.7 In geological terms the landscape is defined by a prominent outcrop of Upper Chalk, overlain by a surface geology of London Clay. The London Clay consists of brown to grey silts, fine grained sands and pebble beds in places. The London Clay, in turn, is capped in places by Head deposits comprising variably sandy and silty clay with pebbles occurring sporadically. Drift deposits of Head Gravel also occur and are defined by variably clayey gravels and stony clays. A pit and disused workings to the east of the character area suggest past mineral (gravel) extraction activity. Towards the southern boundary of the character area Lambeth Group – a sandy and clayey formation –

caps the Upper Chalk and provides the geological transition towards character area *G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes*.

- 10.8 The soils are Stagnogley soils of the Windsor series. These are clayey or loamy/clayey soils and have drainage impeded at moderate depths by an impermeable layer.

Historic Environment

- 10.9 The London Clay, which forms the knolls of Bowsey Hill (and Knowl Hill to the east), would have hindered early cultivation and settlement of its soils, and much of the landscape has remained continuously wooded (Bottom Boles Wood, High Knowl Wood). The whole area was part of Windsor Forest giving the crown rights over hunting, timber and other resources. Woodland was also a valued economic resource exploited by those settlements sited on the more easily cultivated soils of the adjacent landscape.
- 10.10 It is possible that some of the frequent 'Bear' names in the area, such as Bear Grove, may derive from the Saxon *bare* meaning swine pasture, the pigs being fattened on woodland fodder before autumn slaughter (although, alternatively, they may derive from the locally prominent A'Bear family).

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
None	
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	There is only one listed building in this area.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 10.11 The *Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls* is characterised by a high concentration of relatively large ancient woodlands. Three sites have Wildlife Heritage Site status, which comprise a woodland complex

notable for supporting important plant communities. In total 48 ancient woodland indicator species having been recorded from this area, with 38 of these occurring in Bottom Boles Wood alone.

10.12 This plant diversity is partly related to the wide range of woodland types that are present. These woods vary from beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and oak (*Quercus robur*) dominated on top of the hill, to localised patches of alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) associated with local spring lines on the slope, while further down the hill moister soils typically support ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) woods.

10.13 As a whole these sites represent an important area for the conservation of local woodland biodiversity, they support a wide range of species many of which are particularly characteristic of ancient sites.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Keepers Cottage Wood 3.9 / 2.3ha	Partly ancient woodland
Bottom Boles Wood 15.1ha	Ancient woodland (all replanted)
Bear Grove / Lindenhall Wood 40.6ha	Ancient woodland
Cayton Park	Ancient woodland
High Knowl Wood	Ancient woodland (partly replanted)
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Knowl Hill Brick Pits	Sandpits, pools, scrub, wetland

Rural Land Use

10.14 The rural land use is almost solely defined by woodland comprising a series of connected woods at High Knowl Wood, Bottom Boles Wood,

Bowsey Hill Wood, Bear Grove and Lindenhall Wood. The woodland clothes the rounded hills and forms a dramatic skyline and visually distinct backdrop to the surrounding landscapes. Towards the east, south and west boundaries, there are some small areas of open (non-wooded) land forming the edge of the arable farmland in the adjacent character area *(G1) Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes*.

10.15 A reservoir occupying a central location is well hidden by surrounding tree cover and as such is unobtrusive. Similarly, a number of workshops close to the reservoir are only apparent at close range but do influence the character of the landscape with industrial activity, although small scale, impinging upon an otherwise rural landscape character. A number of footpaths and bridleways cross through the woodland and it is a popular recreation area especially with dog walkers. The paths provide important access connections to adjacent character area *G1: Hare Hatch Sand-over Chalk Slopes*.

Settlement and Built Character

10.16 One of the overriding characteristics of the landscape is the absence of settlement and built form, the only exception being the small collection of workshops close to the reservoir. There is no residential development.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

10.17 The *Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls* (F1) is a landscape of **high quality** – this is related to the strong character and good overall condition. The **strong character** results from the dramatic landform, extensive deciduous woodland and high ecological value and, in particular, the value of the area as a wooded backdrop and landmark from the adjacent areas. The majority of landscape elements are in **good condition** – with good survival of extensive areas of ancient woodland.

Landscape Strategy

10.18 The overall objective for the *Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls* (F1) is to **conserve** the existing character created by the extensive wooded hills and ridgelines and the largely unsettled rural character. The area should continue to provide a dramatic wooded backdrop and setting to the surrounding lowland landscapes. There are key opportunities to promote active management of the ancient woodland resource and the reinstatement of field boundaries where they have been lost.

Landscape Sensitivity

10.19 *Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls* (F1) is considered to be a landscape of overall **moderate sensitivity**. This relates to the low level of recreatability of most of the key characteristics notably the elevated landform and extensive ancient woodland cover. The most sensitive elements in this respect are the landform, the sinuous wooded skyline, ancient woodland, and the function of the area as a wooded backdrop, absence of settlement, and strong perceptual characteristics (remoteness, isolation, enclosure and elevation). The elevation and landform mean that any change could have potential wide visibility, with the skyline being particularly important (sensitive) in creating the strong wooded backdrop. However, the extensive woodland cover reduces visual sensitivity to a degree.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

10.20 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls* (F1) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to manage the landscape to ensure that the important natural qualities of the woodland are retained and that the knolls continue to create a wooded skyline when viewed from adjacent areas.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Not a key issue in this wooded landscape.	
Forestry and Woodland Management	
❖ Loss of structure and species	• Conserve all ancient woodland sites,

Key Issues

diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.

- ❖ Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- ❖ In the past expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands has resulted in a change in character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora.
- ❖ Influence of woodland fell cycles and management on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines.

Associated Guidelines

and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.

- Seek to actively manage woodlands by controlling exotic invasive species that are threatening the locally distinctive species.
- Maintain the existing pattern of wooded deciduous and mixed woodland ridges and interconnecting valleys.
- Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive ridgelines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.

Minerals

- ❖ No significant issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Woodland is the significant habitat: issues addressed under woodland management.

Recreation

- ❖ Recreational pressure could lead to damage of ecological features in this well-populated district.
- Maximise the contribution made by the forestry resource elsewhere for recreational purposes, to draw more intrusive pressure away from more sensitive landscapes such as this and protect the most valuable areas of woodland habitat.

Built Development

- ❖ Pressure for built development on
- Consider the impact of any

Key Issues

the skyline has potential to lead to the loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham District landscape.

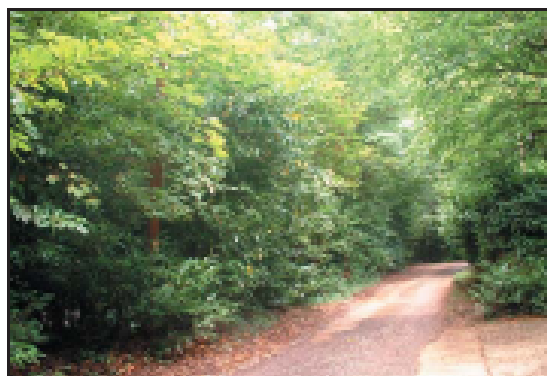
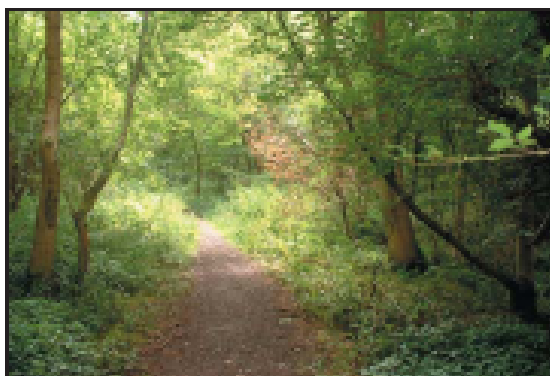
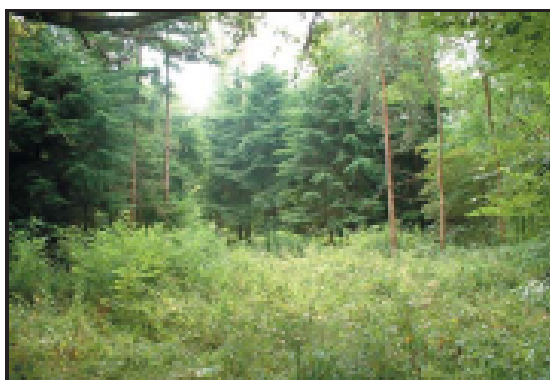
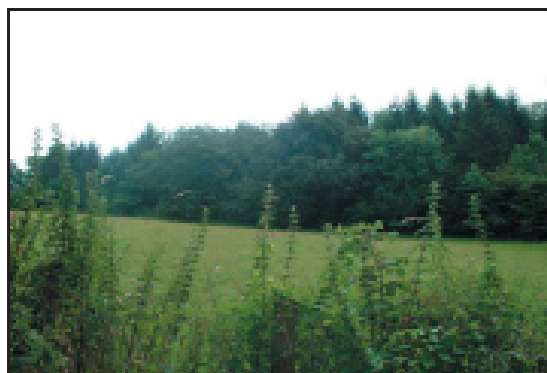
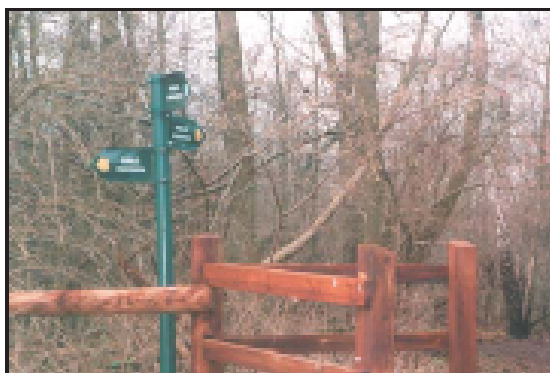
Associated Guidelines

development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Retain the wooded skylines of Wokingham District. Generally, it is thought that built development would not be compatible with the natural qualities of this landscape.

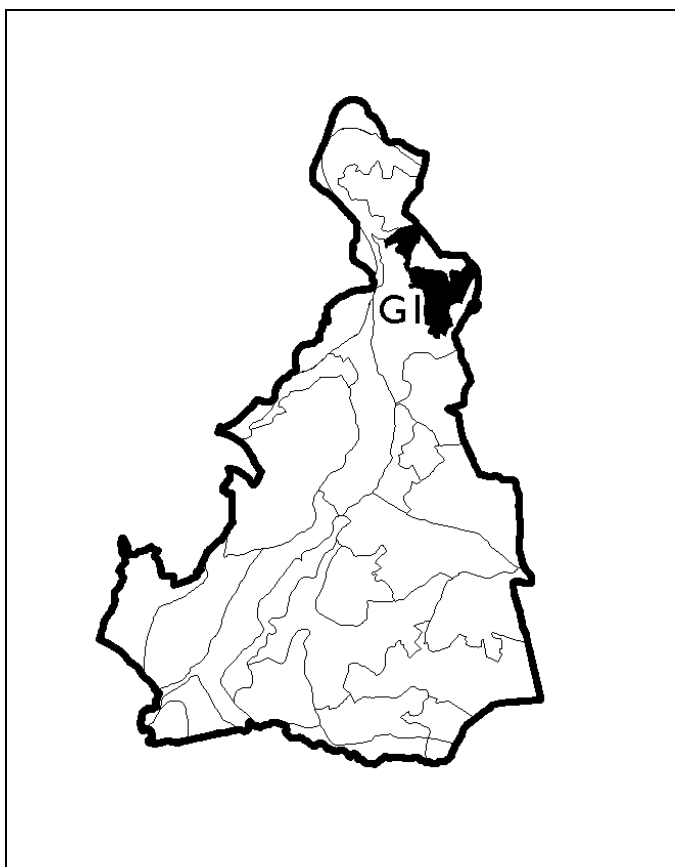
Infrastructure

- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated landscape.

FI: BOWSEY HILL WOODED CHALK KNOLLS



11 LANDSCAPE TYPE G: FARMED CHALK SLOPES



Landscape Areas	Character
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G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes	
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Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 11.1 There is only one character area that corresponds to the landscape type classified as *Farmed Chalk Slopes*. This area is located in the northeast of the district around the settlements of Hare Hatch and Kiln Green and is characterised by a gently sloping landform supporting an intimate mosaic of arable fields and pasture, small woodland blocks, scattered farmsteads and rural hamlets.

Key Characteristics

- Flat to shelving landform.
- Surface geology of clayey sands overlying chalk.
- Mixed agricultural use of arable fields and pasture (predominantly horse and pony grazing).
- Small clustered settlement (villages and hamlets).

- Small deciduous and mixed woodland blocks.
- Farmsteads and manors across the landscape.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

11.2 With regard to the county level assessment, the landscape type classified as *Farmed Chalk Slopes* corresponds with landscape type *G: Dipslope Mosaic* and falls specifically within character area *G9: Cookham Dean Dipslope Mosaic*. The geological and landform characteristics provide the link in terms of intrinsic features but the more detailed level of assessment at the district scale means that the *Dipslope Mosaic* is further subdivided such that character area *G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Sand-over-Chalk Farmed Slopes* forming just one part of the mosaic.

G1: HARE HATCH FARMED CHALK SLOPES

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 11.3 The character area *Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes*, is located to the north east of Wokingham District. It is defined by a sloping landform that supports a predominantly agricultural land use. Farming is a mix of arable land and pasture contained within an irregular field pattern of varied unit size, largely bounded by standard wooden post and rail fencing. There are a significant number of woodland blocks and belts (generally small in size) that create subdivisions within the landscape – restricting the extent of views and contributing to a strong sense of enclosure. This is exaggerated further by the prominent wooded horizon provided by adjacent character area *F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls*. The mixed farming landscape is interspersed by small linear villages and hamlets aligning rural lanes, individual farmsteads, stud farms and manors. The manors occur within a parkland setting imparting a designed character to parts of the landscape. The combination of small field patterns, woodland blocks and dispersed settlement of distinctly rural character creates a small scale, almost intimate landscape character. Active mineral workings are present at the Star Brick and Tile works.

Location and Boundaries

- 11.4 The *Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes* is located within the northeast of Wokingham District and is bounded by four different character areas: *D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes*, *E1: Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau*, *F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls* and *H1: Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands*. The boundary drawn to demarcate the limits of the character area has been influenced by human landscape elements – predominantly following the line of fields and secondary roads. These mapped features indicate a change in land use activity coinciding with changing underlying physical landscape elements of topography and geology.

Key Characteristics

- **Sloping and gently undulating landform** creating a transition between the adjacent Arable Chalk Lowland (H1) and sinuous wooded knolls (G1).
- A landscape of mixed land uses but with **agriculture predominating** (both **pastoral** and **arable**) and defined by an irregular pattern of **small to medium sized field units** largely bound by wooden post and rail fencing.
- **Scattered woodland blocks, roadside belts and neighbouring wooded knolls** of Bowsey Hill (F1) provide an **intimate** character and a strong sense of **enclosure** with a number of ecologically-valued woodland habitats.
- **Large manor houses and farmsteads** of architectural merit (many listed) make for interesting visual ‘cues’ in the landscape with Georgian buildings being particularly apparent. The **formal parkland settings** impart a **designed character** to the landscape.
- **Largely scattered settlement** evokes a distinctly **rural character** and a landscape of generally slow pace – only interrupted by the **busy A4** to the south.
- **Rural villages and hamlets** located alongside roads/crossroads form the main settlements connected by a network of rural roads and tracks crossing the landscape.
- **Compartmentalised land for pony grazing and exercising** evokes a temporary character.

Physical Landscape

- 11.4 The character area is almost entirely underlain by a solid surface geology of the Lambeth Group consisting various strata of clayey sands (including the Reading Beds), which have been lain down over the Upper Chalk strata. The underlying Upper Chalk is white, well bedded and contains scattered nodules and bands of flint.

- 11.6 The overlying soils are Stagnogley soils of the Windsor series. These are clayey or loamy/clayey soils and suffer drainage problems due to an impermeable layer occurring at moderate depths. The poor drainage is indicated by the presence of roadside ditches. Drainage problems and undulating ground make this landscape less suited to large-scale mechanised arable farming and it supports mixed agricultural land use. There are a number of small farm ponds and moats associated with the farmsteads and manors.
- 11.7 The sloping and gently undulating landform between about 45 and 85m AOD – creates localised sense of enclosure, further exaggerated by the woodland cover. The landform appears transitional – separating the much flatter, lower lying ground of character area *H1: Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands* and the distinctly elevated, hilly landscape of *F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls*.

Historic Environment

- 11.8 The Reading Bed soils of the area would have been generally unsuited to prehistoric cultivation, although there is a possible Roman villa site at Canhurst Farm, Knowl Hill. The area may have remained predominantly wooded until Saxon times when settlement expanded onto previously marginal areas resulting in clearance.
- 11.9 Hare Hatch was one of the old gates into Windsor Forest. Place names such as Deane Farm, Dean Pit Farm and Deane Fields suggest the area was used for summer pasture by settlements on the edge of the forest, while some of the frequent ‘Bear’ names, such as Bear Hill and Bear Ash, could possibly derive from the Saxon bare meaning swine pasture, the swine being fattened on woodland fodder before autumn slaughter.
- 11.10 The small irregular fields, with uneven boundaries flanking the woodland, indicate piecemeal assart clearance of Medieval/Early Post-medieval date and are one of the earliest enclosure landscapes in Wokingham District. Only small areas of woodland survived. Although many of these small fields were amalgamated in the 20th century, with the loss of ancient hedgerows the area retains some pockets of well-preserved enclosure/field systems.

- 11.11 The area remained largely unsettled, although a series of lanes developed converging on Bowsey Hill. Later Medieval settlement concentrated along the route of the Bath Road, with Knowl Hill, Kiln Green and Hare Hatch becoming stopping points for travellers, but Crazies Hill remained a small and isolated hamlet. Elsewhere, there is a series of farmsteads distributed around the edges of the woodland linked by the narrow country lanes.
- 11.12 There was a Medieval moated “manor” at Bear Place, first mentioned in 1261. The present Bear Place was built in 1784, to the east of the moat, which became a feature of its landscape grounds. There are traces of other areas of parkland at Scarletts, built in 1765, and Linden Hill, although these estates have reverted to farmland. One surviving historic feature at Crazies Hill is Rebecca’s Well – elaborately enclosed in 1870.
- 11.13 Place names, such as Kiln Green, indicate the importance of Post-Medieval and modern brick making in the area, exploiting the adjacent London Clay. There were brick and lime works at in Lindenhill Wood at Knowl Hill (the Star Brick Works which closed in 1992) and at Crazies Hill.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
BCC No. 168.	Moat S. W of Bear Place and SE of Yeldall Manor.
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	One relatively small area located to the northeast at the workings.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	This area has a particularly high number of listed buildings scattered across the landscape including groups at Crazies Hill (Conservation Area) and Holly Cross. There are also small clusters of listed buildings at Hare Hatch, Kiln Green, Linden Hill, The Holt and Yeldall Manor.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 11.14 The *Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes* are dominated by farmland, but have retained six sites with nature conservation designation. Of these six sites, five are woodlands, three of which are of ancient origin, ranging in size from the 12.3ha of Scarlett's wood to the 2.5ha of Cutlers coppice.
- 11.15 The characteristic woodland type is a combination of ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*), generally with a history of management under a coppice with standards regime. This traditional management has commonly ceased and these traditional coppice woodlands are now often in a state of neglect.
- 11.16 There are also small scattered ponds in this area, some of which are known to support great crested newts.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Site of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserve</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Cutlers Coppice 2.5 / 2.5ha	Ancient woodland
Fairmans Wood / Little Fairmans Wood 5.5 / 3.4ha	Partly ancient woodland
Scarlett's Wood 12.3 / 12.3ha	Ancient woodland
Bear Grove/Lindenhill Wood 40.63ha	Partly ancient woodland
Keepers Cottage Wood 3.95ha	Ancient woodland

Designations	Summary of Importance
Bottom Boles Wood 15.08ha	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Knowl Hill Brick Pits 0.7ha	Sandpits, open water, wetland, scrub
Square Wood 1.3ha	Deciduous woodland
<i>Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Kings Farm Copse 3.8ha	Ancient woodland (mostly replanted)

Rural Land Use

- 11.17 The landscape is an intimate mosaic of land uses. Agriculture predominates and comprises a mix of both arable and pasture. Field sizes are highly variable as is field shape, the latter being angular but irregular, probably as a result of their assart origins. There is a trend however for the larger fields to be concentrated towards the west and south of the character area where they abut the arable landscape *H1: Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands*. This indicates the transition towards the arable land use of the chalk lowlands where conditions for mechanised farming techniques improve. Smaller, more irregular field units are prevalent to the north and east where they are associated with small settlements and where they neighbour the woodland edge of adjacent character area *F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls*. This is particularly apparent at Holly Cross and Maple Croft. Field boundaries are predominantly wooden post and rail with native hedgerows occurring sporadically. Where land has been divided for horse and pony grazing, field boundaries are often inconsistent and temporary in appearance.
- 11.18 Manors are also a key feature of the rural landscape. Their surrounding grounds are significant in size and due to their parkland setting bring localised variation to landscape character with designed landscapes of sweeping lawns and coniferous standards. A long straight avenue leading to Yeldall Manor is lined by mature conifers and is a striking feature. Pasture is also associated with the manors as is mixed plantation woodlands. Woodland also occurs as both mixed and deciduous blocks/belts throughout the character area.

The scattered wooded areas provide an overt sense of enclosure due to the restriction of views. This is further exaggerated by the presence of the wooded knolls at Bowsey Hill. Scarlett's Wood, adjacent to Winton Manor, is a sizeable geometric block and appears an anomaly with others being much smaller in size and organic in form.

- 11.19 There are a number of scattered farmsteads across the character area namely Woodland's Farm, Castle End Farm, Bear Place Farm and Endall's Farm. The presence of Stud farms (Castlemans and Gibstroude) to the north and east of the area are characterised by pasture and horse exercising grounds. Aside from the farms and their associated outbuildings, development is typified by small settlements aligning rural roads or forming small clusters at junctions e.g. Crazies Hill and Hare Hatch.
- 11.20 Vehicular routes across the landscape are secondary with the exception of the A4 running across the southern half – bypassing Kiln Green and Hare Hatch. The general absence of major roads makes for a landscape of relatively slow pace. Footpaths to the south are minimal with most concentrated in and around Crazies Hill and connecting with the footpaths that filter through the wooded knolls.

Settlement and Built Character

- 11.21 There is a dispersed rural settlement pattern across the character area consisting of large individual properties including farmsteads, manors and small residential settlements – villages and hamlets. The main areas of settlements are found at Crazies Hill village and the hamlets of Hare Hatch and Kiln Green. These are characterised by low density, single and two-storey dwellings of predominantly residential character aligning secondary roads.
- 11.22 Crazies Hill village, located to the far north of the character area at the junction of two secondary roads exhibits a range of interesting historic buildings. These include a building of particular note – Summerfield House (or Crazies) – a two-storey house of Georgian style built in the late 19th Century. The house was built using the Tuscan columns, from Henley's former town hall, built in 1790 but subsequently dismantled. Nearby at Holly Cross, Fox Steep a house

built in 1923 is of interest due to the use of waney (uneven) edged elm and roofs finished at different levels.

- 11.23 Hare Hatch and Kiln Green are small hamlets and are located on the Bath Road (A4). Both retain coaching inns and properties of traditional vernacular. At Hare Hatch, the red brick Georgian buildings of Old House, The Hill, Hare Hatch House and The Grange are of particular architectural note. At Kiln Green, Castleman's is also of Georgian origin but bleak in appearance. Other buildings of architectural note are the red brick Georgian property of Bear Place; the Convent of the Good Shepherd or Yeldall Manor (1894), a brick, half timbered and gabled property with bay windows of various shape; and Linden Hill, a property with two symmetrical bows and a tower.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 11.24 There are landscape connections to Gertrude Gekyll who, although resided at Wargrave Manor, explored further afield to exercise her artistic talents at Crazies Hill where one of her paintings exists at Rebecca's Well (previously known as Phillimore's Spring – named after Revd Greville Phillimore a former Curate of Wargrave).

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 11.25 The *Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes* (G1) is a landscape of overall **moderate quality** as a result of its moderate character and moderate condition. The rural character, sense of intimacy/enclosure and the distinctiveness of the historic built form combine with elements such as compartmentalised field units and the busy A4 to create a landscape of overall **moderate character**. The landscape components of *Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes* (G1) are largely in a **moderate condition**, with scope for improvement. The elements in the best condition are the physical landscape and settlement and built character. However, much parkland has been lost and the mixture of field boundaries reduce the integrity of the landscape.

Landscape Strategy

- 11.26 The overall strategy for *Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes (G1)* is to **enhance** the existing character notably the ancient woodlands, chalk grassland, field boundaries, parkland landscapes – the robustness of which has declined. Within this context certain elements of the landscape should be conserved such as the historic built development and the views to the prominent wooded horizon provided by the adjacent character area *F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls*.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 11.27 Due to the low–moderate level of recreatability and the local–regional scale of importance for all components, the *Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes (G1)* is considered to be a landscape of overall **moderate sensitivity**. The most sensitive characteristics are the scattered ancient woodlands, with other key sensitivities including the buildings and parklands (due to their regional scale of importance) and the intimate rural land use pattern and perceptual characteristics which would be difficult to recreate if lost.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 11.28 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes (G1)* and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to ensure that the landscape is actively managed to enhance the condition and presentation of the key characteristics, particularly the field boundaries, ancient woodland blocks and intimate that create the enclosed and rural qualities.

Key Issues

Agriculture

- ❖ Some hedgerow loss is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.

Associated Guidelines

- Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak standards left to form future timber trees. Consider opportunities for reinstatement of hedges, particularly

Key Issues

- ❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.
- ❖ The declining viability of livestock grazing is resulting in conversion to other land uses such as pony paddocks and loss of grassland habitats.
- ❖ Changes in agricultural practice, including conversion to hobby farms and 'horsiculture', is leading to changing management regimes (due to lack of knowledge and resources) and loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

Associated Guidelines

where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides.

- Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and local produce initiatives, to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
- Conserve and protect pasture and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- Seek to manage set-aside land, paddocks and hobby farms to enhance the visual and ecological quality of the landscape, for example through planting boundary hedgerows.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
 - ❖ In the past expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands has resulted in a change in character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora.
- Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
 - Ensure that any new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnecting valleys. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.

Key Issues

- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.

Associated Guidelines

- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ Minerals permissions, as at Linden Hill are a potential threat to areas of ancient woodland.

- Conserve all ancient woodland sites and promote appropriate management.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Over-maturity of veteran parkland, and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.

- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland and hedgerow trees.

Recreation

- ❖ Pressure for more horse/pony paddocks, leading to a decrease in rural intactness.

- Paddocks to be sensitive to existing character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows. Temporary fencing and structures to be discouraged.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development with potential impact on the rural character of areas such as this.

- Protect the individual identity of settlements and areas by conserving the rural character of the landscape and avoiding amalgamation of settlements. Protect the dispersed pattern of large scale farmsteads and manor houses.

- ❖ The pressure for large areas of housing is resulting in the dereliction and loss of traditional dwellings, dilution of vernacular character and loss of distinct architectural style.

- Conserve historic buildings and consider undertaking built character appraisals across the District to identify local styles, layouts, densities and materials that may be appropriate in new buildings and the spaces between these buildings.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural

- Maintain the historic leafy lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural

Character Area G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes

Key Issues

character of the lanes.

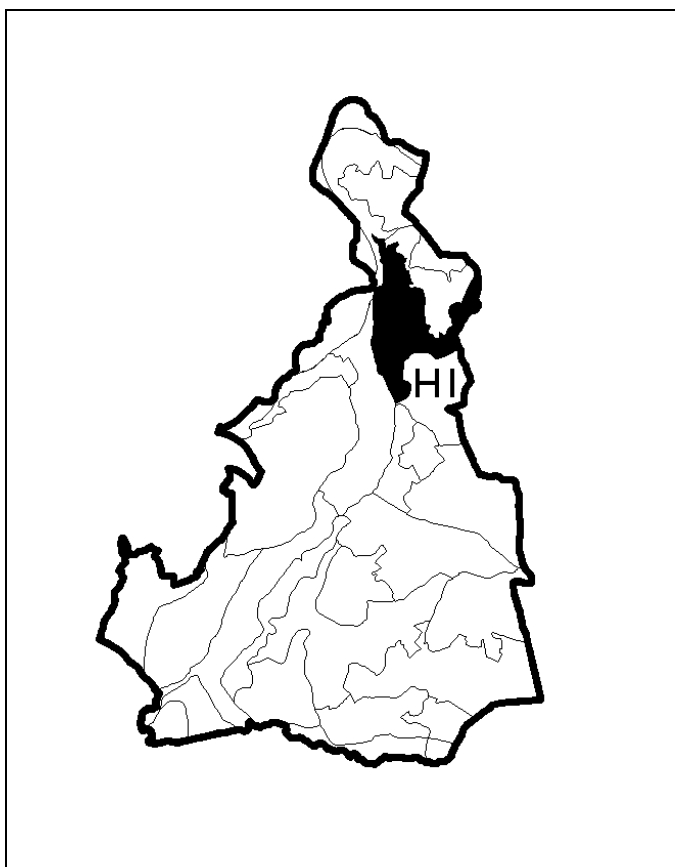
Associated Guidelines

character, particularly in the most rural locations.

G1: HARE HATCH FARMED CHALK SLOPES



12 LANDSCAPE TYPE H: ARABLE CHALK LOWLANDS



Landscape Character Areas

H1: Wargrave–Twyford
Arable Chalk Lowlands

Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 12.1 There is just one area of the *Arable Chalk Lowland* Landscape Type. This landscape is located in the northern half of Wokingham District associated with the chalk landscapes of the district and is distinguished by its flat to gently shelving landform. It supports two key land uses – arable farming and urban settlement. With a lack of tree cover and other enclosing elements, the landscape is seemingly open and expansive.

Key Characteristics

- Flat to gently shelving landform.
- Predominantly underlain by a geology of Upper Chalk.
- Working arable farmland within a pattern of large fields.
- Large riverside villages.

- Expansive, open landscape due to undifferentiated landform and lack of tree cover.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

12.2 The *Arable Chalk Lowlands* landscape type largely falls within *Type M: Open Chalk Lowland*. The boundaries differ slightly north of Wargrave but these are a reflection of further subdivisions of the landscape at the more refined district level assessment. The *Arable Chalk Lowlands* exhibits many of the characteristics typifying the *Open Chalk Lowland* and this is reflected in its location within the wider framework.

H1: WARGRAVE–TWYFORD ARABLE CHALK LOWLANDS

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 12.3 The character area that is defined as *H1: Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands* is located towards the north of the district and bordered by five different character areas. Characterised by a flat to gently shelving landform, this landscape exhibits a transitional topography – separating the sinuous slopes of adjacent character area *G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes* from the simplistic lowland valley floors of the adjacent character areas *A1: Thames River Valley* and *B1: Loddon River Valley*.
- 12.4 The subtly sloping landform is characterised by a system of large working arable fields with sporadic, infrequent boundaries of degraded condition. Combined with an overall lack of trees and other vertical vegetation, the landscape evokes an open character due to extensive views over predominantly homogenous land cover. Settlement is a key component of the landscape and is almost entirely concentrated within the urban fabric of the riverside villages of Twyford, located beside the Loddon Valley towards the south and Wargrave besides the Thames/Loddon Valley towards the north. These, historic villages have extended over time away from the floodplain and onto the arable slopes disguising to a degree the distinction between the river valley, river terrace and chalk landscapes.
- 12.5 Although the landscape exhibits an overriding open character, the wooded hills to the northeast provide some degree of distant visual enclosure. Similarly, the four other character areas bordering the landscape exhibit characteristics that influence the overall character of the area. The landscape, therefore, to some degree has a ‘borrowed’, as opposed to intrinsic, sense of place.

Location and Boundaries

- 12.6 *H1: Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands* occupies a northeast location within the Wokingham District. The Loddon and Thames River Valleys define the majority of the western edge between the villages of Twyford and Wargrave. Due to the subtlety of landform change, the transition separating this character area from the River Valleys is discrete. However, by following the western boundaries of the riverside settlements, the river valleys can be defined where historic development follows the edge of the floodplain. The boundary demarcating the change to *Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes (D1)* is topographically defined by the point at which the land drops sharply away to form the acute wooded slopes. The eastern edge of the character area is represented by the administrative boundary of Wokingham District although in reality this character area extends beyond into the Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The more intricate land use pattern marks an obvious change in landscape character at the border to *Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes (G1)*. The south to southeast edge is abutted by *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland (K1)*. Here the B3018 marks a change in land use patterning and underlying geology.

Key Characteristics

- A distinctly **flat to gently shelving landform** exaggerated by the connection the river valley floodplains and adjacent wooded knolls at Bowsey Hill.
- Large village/small towns of **Twyford** and **Wargrave** which have extended from the Loddon/Thames valleys with ‘market town’ architecture and peripheral post-war and modern dwellings.
- Dominated by **intensive working arable farmland**, including market gardening, defined by **extensive field units** of no apparent pattern and with no obvious boundary divisions.
- Farmland with **strong sense of openness and homogeneity** due to the lack of field divisions or vertical elements across the landscape and maintains separation between and setting of settlements.

- **Views to the wooded knolls** at Bowsey Hill create **some sense of distant enclosure** in an otherwise exposed landscape.
- **Transport corridors** both road and rail including the A4T and A3032 running through the landscape create a sense of disturbance in an otherwise peaceful landscape.
- **Scrubby margins** where fields align roads give an indication of **poor management**.
- Enclave of **plant nurseries** with their associated car parks along the A4(T).
- **Sense of remoteness** due to the largely undeveloped character with the exception of Twyford and Wargrave providing a connection to the River Thames and River Loddon landscapes.

Physical Landscape

- 12.7 The landscape is predominantly underlain by a thin succession of Upper Chalk of the Upper Cretaceous Era. The overlying soils comprise Argillic Brown Earths of the Thames Series and Stagnogley Soils of the Windsor Series. The Argillic Brown Earths occur to the west of the area and indicate historic fluvial action where the floodplain once extended this far east. These soils are well-drained, fine or coarse and loamy, locally stony and shallow and associated with slowly permeable clayey alluvial soils that are affected by high ground water and occasional short term floods. The Stagnogley Soils occur to the east of the area and are clayey or loamy over clayey soils with drainage is impaired at moderate depths by an impermeable layer.
- 12.8 This landscape is relatively undifferentiated with a total range of between 40m AOD (where the landscape meets the floodplain) and 80m AOD (at the most elevated area at Hennerton House). The land shelves very gently in places creating a subtly undulating landform, however it generally appears flat contrasting with the dramatic backdrop of the wooded knolls at Bowsey Hill. The flatness of the land, combined with free draining soils provide the ideal conditions for mechanised, intensive arable farming.

Historic Environment

- 12.9 A low density of late Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement evidence suggests that there may have been early clearance of the woodland and cultivation of the chalk soils, with an expansion of prehistoric settlement from the river valley. By the Roman period there were villa settlements, and it is possible that some of the boundaries of the villa estates survived into the Saxon period.
- 12.10 At the time of Domesday, Wargrave was one of the richest and most populous places in East Berkshire. It was a royal manor until 1194, and a borough from 1225. It became a market town in the 13th Century – established as a speculative venture by the Bishop of Winchester but it failed to maintain its urban status, being eclipsed by the growth of Reading and bypassed by the Bath Road – it was later referred to as a rural village. In contrast, Twyford developed due to its location on the Bath road (it has now been bypassed to the north). There are few other settlements in the area, and the dispersed farmsteads are linked by a loose network of country lanes. The Great Western Railway, opened in Berkshire in 1840, runs through the south of the area.
- 12.11 The area's predominantly rural landscape is characterised by medium and large straight-sided field typical of Parliamentary inclosure, although there are smaller and less regular fields around the farms adjacent to Hare Hatch, Kiln Green and Knowl Hill. From the 19th century the land has supported largely arable farming and the growing of vegetables, the good loam soils of the chalk being ideal for nurseries and market gardening common today. This has resulted in considerable amalgamation of fields.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	There are three small archaeological sites including two sites northeast of Ruscombe and one near Castleman's Stud Farm. There is also an

Designations	Summary of Importance
	archaeological site coinciding with Wargrave Conservation Area.
<i>Conservation Areas</i>	
	Twyford Station Ruscombe Wargrave
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	Notable clusters are found at Twyford and Wargrave corresponding with their Conservation Area status and location. Small grouping of listed buildings north of Ruscombe (Northbury Farm). Group of listed buildings around, and including Ruscombe Chalk.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None.	

Ecological Character

- 12.12 The *Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands* is a large character area and is almost exclusively composed of arable and urban land uses. The area has however, retained some ecological interest in the form of three isolated Wildlife Heritage Sites. Two of these sites namely Hennerton House and Vale and Northbury Wood are small secondary woodlands and the third site Ruscombe Village Pond is notable for supporting a population of great crested newt. A heavily wooded railway embankment is connected to Ruscombe Village Pond and this may provide an important hibernation site for over-wintering newts.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Site of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserve</i>	

Designations	Summary of Importance
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Hennerton House 5.6ha – <i>Part of this site also fall within D1</i>	Deciduous woodland
Ruscombe Village Pond 0.1ha	Open water
Vale and Northbury Wood 2.3ha	Woodland

Rural Land Use

- 12.13 The rural landscape is almost entirely under arable farming characterised by a seamless expanse of large fields. The open nature of the field system permits panoramic views across the landscape and beyond into other character areas. Views are unobstructed by vertical elements most notable through the lack of trees and the loss of native hedgerow boundaries. Single species, short flailed hedges do however occur sporadically. Posts carrying overhead wires are a feature, but are unobtrusive.
- 12.14 Hedgerow loss can be largely attributed to agricultural mechanisation and intensive farming methods. Today, scrubby margins define the interface between fields and roads – reducing the sense of intactness and perceived condition of the landscape. There is evidence of recent coniferous planting within the roadside margins, which will change landscape character as they become mature. Similarly, coniferous shelterbelt-planting on the perimeter of individual properties is an eye-catching feature in this open landscape.
- 12.15 Aside from arable farming, the relatively flat landscape and proximity to Reading has led to the development of a number of transport corridors with the A321, A3032 and A4 cutting through or aligning the character area, and the mainline railway. Recreational elements include two golf courses, however there is limited recreational access into the area with only two footpaths and three bridle paths.

Settlement and Built Character

- 12.16 Settlement is a significant contribution to landscape character – focussed in the western half of the landscape in the form of the two riverside settlements of Wargrave and Twyford. The western extents of both villages align the very edge of the River Thames and River Loddon floodplains marking the eastern boundary of the character area.
- 12.17 Located at the confluence of the Thames and Loddon Rivers (*A1: Thames River Valley and B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water*), Wargrave developed circa 900 and its long history is reflected in its architectural character, with much of the village afforded Conservation Area status. The High Street is the main north–south arterial route through the village and contains a variety of building styles. It is the array of design and detailing that provide a varied and interesting streetscape. Brick and flint details, deep–pitched roof lines, timber framed cottages and rendered brickwork are typical, along with warm orange–red roofing tiles and chimney pots. The narrowness of the High Street, the clustered density of the terrace buildings and the staggered frontages all evoke an intimate, organic character – one of distinctly human–scale.
- 12.18 The Village Hall or Woodclyffe Hall is a landmark building. Built in 1905, it contains an ornate–bow or oriel window under its gable, an overhanging clock and an ornate, patterned façade. The library at Church Street has a similar decorative frontage.
- 12.19 Although Wargrave developed because of its location on the Thames, growth of the village over time has extended it in an easterly direction away from the river and onto the surrounding chalk slopes. The reason for this lateral expansion as opposed to linear growth along the line of the floodplain, can perhaps be attributed to the adoption of a Georgian cruciform in the 18th Century comprising a main crossroads with streets radiating in four directions.
- 12.20 Although there are a number of small houses and cottages there are also larger properties such as Wargrave Manor located on higher ground (*discussed in D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes*) that command the landscape.

- 12.21 Twyford was developed where the London–Bath Road crossed the River Loddon and is larger in size and less compact in form than Wargrave. The town has good transport connections with the mainline railway connecting Twyford directly with London and Reading and three ‘A’ roads cutting through and skirting the settlement. Expansion of the settlement in the 1960’s has diluted the nucleated shape of the village with housing estate development occurring to the north, east and south. This expansion has almost doubled the size of the settlement.
- 12.22 Twyford retains a central village core – the crossroads of which acts as the main shopping area. This central area has an urban fabric of mixed age and style. There are a number of red brick buildings with burnt header courses, yellow brick and flint banding, Victorian properties exhibiting diaper brickwork and newer 1960s buildings of dark brick and slate roofs. As with Wargrave, a significant area of the village is afforded with Conservation Area status.
- 12.23 Aside from the settlements of Wargrave and Twyford, the landscape is largely undeveloped comprising only a few scattered farms and individual houses. The character is affected to the east by the presence of a concentration of nurseries around Hare Hatch, extending beyond the district boundary. These are characterised by their large car parking forecourts, glasshouses and commercial appearance, although some appear to be in decline with neglected surrounds.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 12.24 George Orwell resided at Scarletts Farm with the Warburg family – returning to country living after many years spent in the city. Elizabeth Cader–Cuff (1999) in her book *‘Walks with Writers’* notes how Orwell’s *‘The Lion and the Unicorn’* was written here while Second World War bombers flew overhead, perhaps inspired by the openness of the landscape.
- 12.25 William Gosling (1824–1883) painted *‘Harvest Time at Hennerton’* – assumed to be in this area – a painting which appears to have reflected artistic excellence as the Art Journal commented in 1873:

“By Gosling is a landscape of remarkable power... It is entitled Harvest Time at Hennerton ... and shows a field of corn already yielding to sickle. The expanse of golden grain is bounded by dense wood; and altogether the work is so much superior to others that have proceeded it, that this artist must be estimated among those who have greatly advanced”.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 12.26 The *Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands* (H1) is judged to have a **moderate quality** overall. This is due to the combination of a moderate character and condition of the landscape. The **moderate character** results from the range of characteristics – the distinct flat-shelving landform and the presence of settlements with vernacular interest for example. The landscape does however ‘borrow’ much of its character from the adjacent landscape character areas as opposed to having a strong, ‘intrinsic’ sense of place. Views to surrounding character areas are also important. The condition of the *Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands* (H1) is judged to be **moderate**, with scope for improvement, particularly in relation to the field boundaries (scrubby margins) and intensively farmed arable land.

Landscape Strategy

- 12.27 The overall strategy for the *Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands* (H1) is to **enhance** landscape character. There are management opportunities to improve the condition, intactness and presentation of the farmed landscape without affecting the sense of openness (central to the character of the landscape) particularly where this permits views to the Thames and Loddon Valleys.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 12.28 This is a landscape of overall **moderate** sensitivity as a result of varied scope for recreatability combined with characteristics of largely local and regional importance. Within this context there are some highly sensitive elements such as the perceptual open quality of the landscape and its physical contrast to the surrounding hills, the

distinctive architecture in Wargrave and Twyford’s historic cores, and the visual relationship between this character area and the River Thames.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

12.29 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands* (H1) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to ensure that the landscape is actively managed to conserve and enhance key characteristics (such as the hedgerows) or removing those features (such as coniferous shelterbelts) that reduce the perceived condition of the landscape.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Hedgerow loss and soil erosion is very evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.	• Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.	• Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and local produce initiatives, to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.	• Encourage environmentally beneficial management of both pasture and arable land.

Key Issues

- ❖ Presence of marginal agricultural land being kept in ‘hope’ value, particularly around settlement edges, which is of poor visual character.

Associated Guidelines

- Seek to maintain a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for the village or town, in particular land surrounding the settlements of Wargrave and Twyford.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade
- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.
- Seek to expand the woodland resource of this area. In particular aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ No known issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence of loss and fragmentation of chalk grassland – none remain in this area.
- Seek to re-create chalk grassland communities where these have been lost.

Recreation

- ❖ Potential pressure for pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- Paddocks to be sensitive to existing landscape character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows. Temporary fencing/structures should be discouraged.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of
- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres

Key Issues

adjacent areas.

- ❖ The pressure for large areas of housing is resulting in the dereliction and loss of traditional dwellings, dilution of vernacular character and loss of distinct architectural style.
- ❖ Pressure for expansion of built development on the edges of towns is leading to suburbanisation of the landscape, loss of individual settlement identity and blocking of views. In particular peripheral development on the edges of Twyford and Wargrave could reduce their visual appeal.
- ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements. This is a particular concern in this open landscape.

Infrastructure

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual and aural intrusion of transport corridors.
- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open

Associated Guidelines

and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. In particular protect the important area of open land lying between the settlements of Twyford and Wargrave and prevent their encroachment into the Thames/Loddon Valleys.

- Conserve historic buildings and consider undertaking built character appraisals across the District to identify local styles, layouts, densities and materials that may be appropriate in new buildings and the spaces between these buildings.
- Consider possibilities for woodland creation in urban fringe areas where these could enhance landscape character and quality, provide recreational potential, and assist in the positive integration of the urban into the rural landscape while conserving significant views to landmark features.
- Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained.

- Undertake sympathetic screening to minimise the impact of new and existing roads without decreasing important views to adjoining character areas.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly

H1: Wargrave–Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands

Key Issues

landscape.

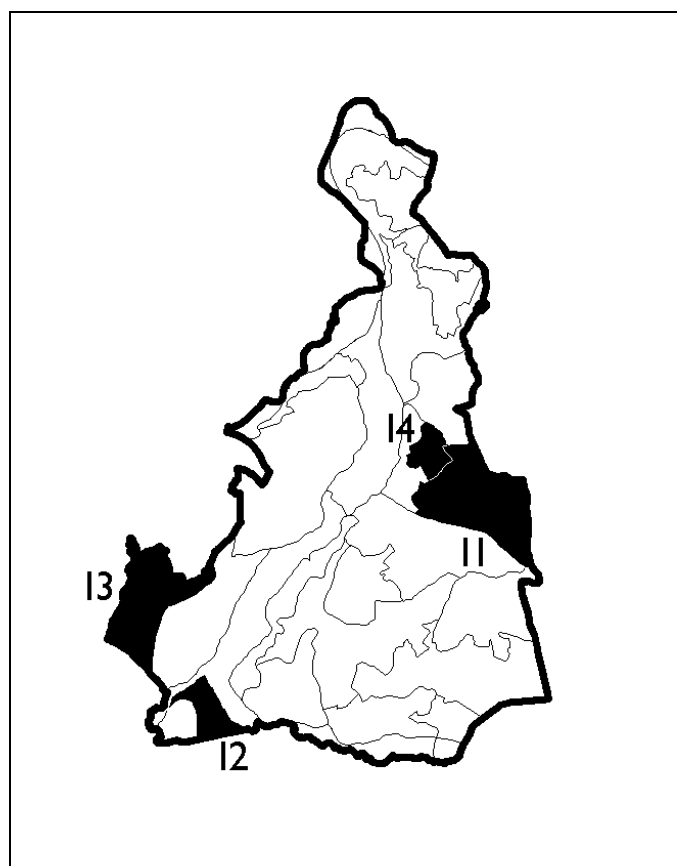
Associated Guidelines

visible in this open landscape.

H1: WARGRAVE-TWYFORD ARABLE CHALK LOWLANDS



13 LANDSCAPE TYPE I: FARMED CLAY LOWLAND



Landscape Character Areas

I1: Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland

I2: Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland

I3: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland

I4: Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland

Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 13.1 There are four areas of the *Farmed Clay Lowland* landscape type. These occur in a broad band across the centre of the district around the Loddon Valley and are associated with the *Settled and Farmed Clay Lowlands*. The *Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland* (I1) and *Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland* (I4) are a contiguous unit located north of the A329, the *Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland* (I2) is a small area between the River Broadwater and Loddon and the *Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland* (I3) is located in the far west of the district to the south of Reading. The key characteristics of this landscape are the lowland vale landscape dominated by London Clay and with bands of alluvial and river terrace deposits. This has given rise to a sparsely settled landscape dominated by large-scale arable and pastoral fields with denuded hedgerows, often set within wooded horizons.

Key Characteristics

- Lowland vale landscape underlain by London Clay with alluvium/river terraces.
- Variable landform ranging from flat to rolling and undulating.
- Mixed farmland dominated by arable farmland but also with sheep pasture and paddocks.
- Large-scale irregular geometric fields undivided by hedgerows but often with remnant mature oak standards and semi-enclosed within wooded horizons.
- Small, tributary streams, which are often invisible and drainage ditches.
- Sparsely settled with a strong rural character, including brick-built farmsteads.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

- 13.2 The *Farmed Clay Lowland* landscape type relates to *Landscape Type L: Open Clay Lowlands* of the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, sharing the same characteristics of a flat to rolling clay lowland, mixed arable and pastoral farmland within large fields denuded of hedgerows, sparse settlement and farm woods creating wooded horizons. Broadly the areas covered by this landscape type within the two assessments are comparable. The key differences are small boundary changes and subdivisions where new landscape types have been identified at the more detailed district scale.
- 13.3 Minor adjustments have been made to the boundaries of *13: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland*, reflecting the more detailed grain of survey for this assessment. Identification of an area of district-level landscape type *L: Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* in the Swallowfield area has resulted in the subdivision of that area of the county assessment into two separate landscape types. Similarly, around Hurst and Stanlake two new district level landscape types have been identified – the *River Terraces* (C) and *Mixed Farmed Gravel Sand and Clay Lowland* (K) – which have led to a subdivision of county level type L in these areas.

11: ASHRIDGE FARMED CLAY LOWLAND

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 13.4 The *Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland* is a simple farmed landscape dominated by open arable fields and pastureland cut by a network of small tributary streams. Located to the east of Wokingham this area has a strong rural quality, affected only by the influence of the M4 and A329(M) motorways that, respectively, cut through and define the southern edge of this area.
- 13.5 The distinctive large scale rolling landform rises to a subtle ridgeline from which there are views over the surrounding area, including views towards the town of Wokingham. This lowland clay vale landscape is suited to arable farming and there are numerous large arable fields that have been continuously amalgamated resulting in the loss of hedgerows. Remnant oak standards mark many of these former hedge-lines and are a feature of the landscape. Elsewhere, particularly associated with localised sandier soils, sheep pastures are present. Stud farms with associated gallops also occur – a feature that is uncommon within Wokingham District.
- 13.6 Wooded horizons are characteristic of this area being created by large deciduous blocks associated with the network of small tributary streams in this area and also along the ridge. Many of these woodlands are classified as ancient and are of interest for their nature conservation value as well as their aesthetic appeal. Mixed woodlands and parkland with exotic conifers are also evident; these being associated with the scattered farmsteads, manor houses and ribbon settlement along the ridgeline that characterises the settlement pattern of this area.
- 13.7 This landscape is open and large scale permitting intermittent framed and distant views. It is also very peaceful except where intruded by the influence of the motorways. The character is also affected by

pylons and poles, which disturb the wide horizons and, combined with the influence of the motorways, lead to a sense of fragmentation.

Location and Boundaries

- 13.8 The *Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland* is located in the centre east of Wokingham District. It is defined by a wide belt of clay that has given rise to a distinctive pattern of land use. To the south the character area is defined by the A329(M) motorway which represents a pragmatic division between the closely-related landscape of the *Settled and Farmed Clay* around the town of Wokingham. To the east the boundary follows the district boundary – beyond the district boundary are the settlements of Binfield and Bracknell that represent a more settled landscape allied to the *Settled and Farmed Clay* landscape type. To the north the boundary is more complex being related to the distinctive flat landscape of the *Hurst River Terrace* (C2), the wetland character of the *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* (K1) and the related but distinct landscape of the *Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland* (I4) with its smaller field system and greater proportion of paddocks.

Key Characteristics

- Landscape of **rolling to undulating landform** punctuated by **subtle ridgelines**, creating **gentle enclosure** and providing distant **views** including views to the northern edge of **Wokingham town**.
- **Agricultural landscape defined by large open, geometric arable fields of irregular shape**
- Large geometric **blocks of deciduous woodland** many of which are **ancient woodland** and **shelterbelts** creating a sense of **woodland enclosure**.
- Rural character with **sparse settlement** comprising **manor houses** and **farmsteads**, the latter typically built with traditional brick, weatherboard and clay tile.
- **Pastoral farming** associated with the manors along the ridge.

- Hedgerows are largely denuded but **mature oak standards** are a common feature of fields and roadsides.
- Although a largely peaceful landscape, the junction of the **M4 and A329(M)** influence the overall character through **noise intrusion**.
- Other vehicular routes comprise **narrow lanes** with **banks** and **ditches** of rural character.
- **Conifers** planted by property owners as screening belts to buffer the roads are incongruous features.
- Presence of small, **tributary streams** within shallow valleys, but these are often invisible within the wider landscape.
- Small number of **stud farms** and **gallops**.

Physical Landscape

- 13.9 A broad belt of stiff blue London Clay underlies the *Ashridge Arable Clay Lowland*. In small areas, generally in the more elevated locations, there are also localised deposits of old river terrace gravels including the Fifth and Sixth Terrace Deposits. The landform is transitional occurring at between 40m and 75m AOD. It has a broadly undulating to rolling character rising from the flatter areas located in the north around Broad Common to a gentle ridgeline crossing west-east from the subtle hill at Bill Hill towards Binfield. There are long distance views from this ridge into the surrounding landscape.
- 13.10 The clay has given rise to stagnogley soils, which have an impeded drainage layer at moderate depth creating occasionally waterlogged conditions. There is also a narrow band of Argillic gley soils, affected by seasonal waterlogging. These are located around Broad Common and are transitional with the wet landscape of the *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* (K1). The variability of the soils, landform and subsurface drainage has resulted in a mix of pastoral and arable land use.
- 13.11 Numerous small watercourses and drainage channels cross the landscape, although they are generally hidden from view. To the

south of the 'Ashridge' there are some small southerly draining reaches of Emm Brook, a tributary of the River Loddon. North of the ridge the branching network of tiny streams relates to the upper reaches of Billingbear Brook, a tributary of the Emm Brook. Along the course of these streams a number of small ponds have been created. Ponds have also been formed associated with the farmsteads and manors.

Historic Environment

- 13.12 Although Mesolithic and Neolithic finds indicate exploitation of the woodland, there is no evidence of settlement until the Romano-British period.
- 13.13 The area fell within Windsor Forest. There was a Medieval deer park at Billingbear (the 'Bear' name possibly indicative of the presence of 'bare' or swine pasture – it has also been suggested, locally, that it could relate to the ancient practice of bear baiting within the district). The deerpark was first mentioned in 1208, and there are still two fishponds. However, the former parkland around Billingbear Park is now cultivated land.
- 13.14 There was also a park at Ashridge in 1319 – it originated as an assart in Windsor Forest and reverted to the Crown in the 15th century. Some large areas of woodland survive, such as Tippen's Wood, but Ashridge Wood survives only around the margins of its former extent.
- 13.15 The large rectangular fields on Broad Common represent the amalgamation of a regular grid of earlier fields, themselves the product of the Parliamentary inclosure of the former common. There is a similar pattern extending south to Forest Road, one of a grid of predominantly straight roads that cross the area, representing the Post-medieval opening up of the woodland.
- 13.16 The former forest landscape is reflected in the generally low level of settlement, there being no villages and only widely dispersed farmsteads. The pattern of narrow land-parcels associated with individual dwellings strung out along Forest Road, for instance at Kingscote, represents late 19th and 20th century development.

There was an early Georgian country house and landscaped park at Bill Hill, part of the park surviving today.

- 13.17 To the south of Forest Road, and east of Ashridgewood Farm, there is a pattern of medium to large field with wavy boundaries. The 1st edition OS map shows a pattern of smaller irregular fields interspersed with areas of surviving woodland, indicating early assart incursions of the forest. However, there has been a considerable degree of boundary loss since then, resulting in medium to large, but still irregular fields.
- 13.18 A brick kiln and brickfield, shown on the 1st edition OS map south of Billingbear Park, indicates the exploitation of the London Clay for brick making. The area is crossed by the M4 motorway completed in 1971, and bounded on its south side by the A329(M) motorway completed in 1972.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	A relatively high number of sites including Ashridge Wood, an area north of Ruston's Farm, two areas around Stokes Farm and sites on Broad Common.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	A scattering including a concentration at Ewas Stud, Rushton's Farm, Targett's Farm and Marchfield House.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 13.19 The Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland is characterised by several small and widely scattered ancient woodlands. In total there are six ancient

woodlands, which range in size from the 2.5ha Swains copse to the 9.1ha Tippens Wood. These six woodlands are all of the same general type, and are dominated by oak (*Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and have been traditionally managed as coppice with standards, but are typically in a neglected state.

- 13.20 Within the agricultural context, vegetation of a more heathy character including birch (*Betula*) and bracken with some gorse (*Ulex*) are found associated with 6th river terrace deposit.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserve</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Pebblestone Copse 3.7 / 4.8ha	Ancient woodland
Long Copse 4.9 / 2.1ha	Partly ancient woodland
Swains Copse 2.5 / 2.1ha	Partly ancient woodland
Tippens Wood 9.1 / 9.9ha	Ancient woodland
Pond Wood 4.2 / 6.7ha	Ancient woodland
Beech Wood / North Ockkett Wood 4.8 / 25.5ha	Ancient woodland mostly replanted)
Pocket's Copse	Ancient woodland
Ashridge Wood	Ancient woodland
Pond Wood	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Furze Covert 3.2ha	Woodland

Rural Land Use

- 13.21 In this character area the principal land uses are farmland and woodland. The farmland is mixed with both arable and pastoral use. Generally arable farmland covers the largest area, particularly on the gentler and flatter slopes. The arable, farmed landscape has an open character as a result of the presence of large and geometric irregular-shaped fields from which hedgerows have been lost. Frequently the former hedge-lines are marked by mature oak standards set within the fields, accentuating the sense of openness.
- 13.22 Permanent and improved pasture, which is dominated by sheep grazing, tends to be associated with manors such as along the ridgeline, including the locally poorer quality soils associated with the River Terrace deposits. There are also a concentration of stud farms and paddocks with associated gallops located in the west of the area. In contrast to the gallops of the Berkshire Downs these are less formal being defined by temporary white fabric ribbon fencing.
- 13.23 Wooded horizons are present throughout the area. These are created by woodland within this landscape and in the adjoining areas, such as the wooded boundaries of the edge of Wokingham. The area includes a large proportion of woodland arranged in straight-edged blocks or more irregular large copses. The woodland is often associated with the ridgeline, such as the linear shelterbelts of Ashridge Wood, or located adjacent to the tributary streams, as at Pond Wood. These woodlands are often ancient and are predominantly deciduous. Also found are mixed woodlands including ornamental conifers and small areas of parkland, particularly adjacent to the manor houses. Coniferous trees and hedges define the boundaries of many of the smaller properties.

Settlement and Built Character

- 13.24 Despite the proximity of the area to the major urban centres of Wokingham and Bracknell the settlement of this area retains a rural character being largely unaffected by suburbanising influences. From the ridge there are views towards Wokingham, including views of the prominent church spire. However, due to the distance and the

integration of the settlement within the wooded setting this does not strongly influence the intrinsic character of this area.

- 13.25 There are no villages and hamlets. The most concentrated settlement is located along the ridgeline where there is a ribbon of small, detached houses. Generally the settlement pattern is very low density being dominated by farmsteads and manor houses that occur across the area at regular intervals, the drives of which lead down from the ridge. There is no overriding local vernacular although traditional brick and clay tile are present and dark weatherboarding is also used on residences and agricultural buildings.
- 13.26 Throughout this area most of the connecting roads are small scale and very rural in character without kerbing or intrusive signage and include wide verges, banks and/or ditches. However, this area is the focus of the junction between the M4 and A329(M) and these motorways do have an influence on character – introducing noise and movement and also, along some sections, resulting in the establishment of dense screening coniferous belts. The A321 passes north-south through this landscape crossing both motorways and thus severing a triangle of land around Pikes Farm at the extreme west of the ridgeline.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 13.27 Much of Alexander Pope's poetry was inspired by Windsor Forest, which extended into this character area. Between 1701 and 1716, Pope resided at Binfield (Whitehill House now Pope's Manor) and although falling east of the character area and outside of the Wokingham boundary in Bracknell Forest District, his work was inspired by the countryside around him, for example *Pastoral Poem II, Summer*.

*O deign to visit our forsaken seats,
The mossy fountains and the cool retreats!
Where'er you walk, cool gales shall fan the glade:
Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a shade;
Where'er you tread, the blushing flow'rs shall rise'
And all things flourish where you turn your eyes.*

- 13.28 In 1704, Pope started working on his poem Windsor Forest and although of ill-health at the time, produced a piece of work regarded as one of his finest. The opening lines read:

*Thy forests, Windsor! And thy green retreats,
At once the Monarch's and the Muse's seats,
Invite my lays. Be present, sylvan maids!
Unlock your springs, and open all your shades.
Granville commands; your aid O Muses bring!
What muse for Granville can refuse to sing?*

*The groves of Eden, vanish'd now so long,
Live in description, and look green in song:
These, were my breast inspir'd with equal flame,
Like them in beauty, should be like in fame.
Here hills and vales, the woodland and the plain,
Here earth and water, seem to strive again;
Not Chaos like together crush'd and bruis'd;
But as the world, harmoniously confus'd.*

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 13.29 The *Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowlands* (I1) is a landscape of **moderate quality**. This is due to it being a landscape of strong character in moderate condition overall. The **strong character** results from the variety of characteristics such as the natural physical landscape with its subtle ridges and small tributary valleys, woodlands and wooded horizons and generally rural character with sparse settlement. These characteristics together combine to create a strong sense of place. The **moderate condition** relates to the neglect of the former coppice woodlands and many hedgerows and erosion of tranquillity by noise from the motorways.

Landscape Strategy

- 13.30 The overall landscape strategy for the *Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowlands* (I1) is to **conserve** the important characteristics of the landscape such as the subtle wooded ridges, working agricultural land and strong rural character and to **enhance** and improve the condition of key elements for example by minimising motorway noise intrusion, restoration of coppice management, and the reinstatement of key hedgerow lines.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 13.31 The *Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowlands* (I1) is considered to be a landscape of overall **moderate sensitivity**. This judgement is based on the fact that some of the key characteristics would be difficult to replace/restore if changed, particularly the ancient woodland and remaining rural, peaceful character. However, most of the characteristics are of local importance, although may be highly valued due to their increasing scarcity in the region. The strong wooded horizons are an important feature and are particularly sensitive to change – such as clear felling or construction of tall structures which would create a more cluttered skyline. The ridges form the skyline in views, for example, from the northern edge of Wokingham town.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 13.32 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowlands* (I1) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to ensure that the landscape is actively managed to retain the rural character whilst addressing those characteristics that reduce the overall condition of the landscape, such as the lack of appropriate coppice management within the ancient woodlands.

Key Issues

Agriculture

- ❖ Hedgerow loss and soil erosion is very evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.

Associated Guidelines

- Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as

Key Issues

- ❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- ❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.
- ❖ Decline in demand for traditional countryside products leading to loss of rural features e.g. loss of coppice.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The

Associated Guidelines

coppice, with oak 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.

- Seek to diversify the agricultural landscape. Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and local produce initiatives, to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
- Encourage environmentally beneficial management of both pasture and arable land.
- Encourage and develop markets for products to encourage farm diversification supporting such features.

- Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.

- Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring

Key Issues

state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.

- ❖ Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- ❖ In the past expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands has resulted in a change in character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora.
- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.

Minerals

- ❖ No issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Over-maturity of veteran parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.

Recreation

- ❖ Potential pressure for formal recreation facilities such as golf courses that have an impact on the natural character of the landscape.

Associated Guidelines

native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.

- Seek to actively manage woodlands by controlling exotic invasive species that are threatening the locally distinctive species.
- Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnecting valleys. The aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in areas which have been converted to coniferous monoculture plantation.
- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland, hedgerow and street trees.

- Ensure recreation facilities are sympathetically sited and integrated into the landscape to enhance their contribution to local character.

Key Issues

Built Development

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas. ❖ There is continuing pressure for new industrial developments, sewage treatment works and commercial premises, particularly in the river valleys and associated with the major transport corridors, such as the A329(M) ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements. ❖ Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham District landscape. ❖ This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies'. Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The settlement pattern is indistinct and requires strengthening. Conserve the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. • Undertake sensitive woodland planting to reduce the intrusion of the motorway, other major roads and large buildings. Resist the introduction of large buildings in this rural area. • Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained. • Consider the impact of any development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Retain the wooded skylines of Wokingham District. • Conserve the resource of dark skies in Wokingham District. Monitor development proposals and ensure measures are taken to minimise light pollution (e.g. full cut off lights). Promote guidance to encourage appropriate lighting of domestic/commercial properties. |
|---|---|

Infrastructure

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the historic leafy lanes |
|---|---|

Key Issues

network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.

- ❖ Increasing transport pressures on rural roads is occurring as a result of traffic taking diversions to avoid delays in the urban areas leading to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air pollution in rural areas.
- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Associated Guidelines

with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural locations.

- Consider the use of traffic calming and access restrictions to maintain the tranquillity of the most rural areas. This would also make the use of rural roads more attractive for cyclists and recreational users.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.

II: ASHRIDGE FARMED CLAY LOWLAND



I2: RISELEY FARMED CLAY LOWLAND

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 13.33 The *Riseley Open Clay Lowland*, located at the south west of the district, is a small area of London Clay geology bounded by river valleys to the north and east and by an area of high ground to the west. The land shelves gently from west to east and is dominated by arable farming with large open fields bounded by hedgerows and fences. The strong rural character is emphasised by rural roads lined with ditches, banks and mature oak trees. Prominent skyline features are large agricultural buildings and shelterbelts of poplar. Settlement takes the form of scattered farmsteads and sections of the villages of Swallowfield and Riseley, largely modern or Victorian red brick buildings. The character area has an overriding rural quality and a sense of isolation due to its enclosure by the valleys of the Loddon and Broadwater.

Location and Boundaries

- 13.34 The *Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland* is a small area to the south west of the district bounded to the north by the valleys of the Loddon and Broadwater, to the south by the edge of the district and to the west by the ridge of the *Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills (L3)*. The boundaries of this lowland area are defined by the edges of the river valley floors, loosely following the 45m contour and by the foot of the slope up to the ridge to the southwest following the line of the 65 m contour.

Key Characteristics

- Small area of intensive rural lowland farming.
- Simple, open and relatively unvaried agricultural landscape.
- Arable farming dominant set within large irregular fields but with some open pastures.
- Mechanically-flailed hawthorn hedgerow field boundaries with

frequent gaps and presence of ivy-clad stag horn **oak trees** with some post and rail fencing and sporadic **coniferous shelterbelts**.

- Heavy and waterlogging-prone soils due to the underlying **London Clay** geology leading to the presence of deep water-filled **ditches**, which are a historic feature and remain well -maintained.
- Lines of **poplar** visually prominent and occasional **pollarded willow** along ditches.
- **Quiet rural lanes** bounded by **wide grassy verges** and **overgrown mixed hedgerows** and **banks** with wildflowers.
- Overriding **rural quality** and a **sense of isolation** due to its enclosure by the valleys of the Loddon and Broadwater.
- Settlement of **large farmsteads** with modern **agri-industrial buildings** punctuating the skyline forming visually dominant features.
- Small **villages of Riseley and Swallowfield** (outskirts) with **modern/Victorian red brick** character.
- Landform **gently shelving** from west to east with **views to the valleys** of the rivers Loddon and Broadwater.

Physical Landscape

- 13.35 The underlying geology of the area is London Clay bounded by the Alluvium of the river valleys to the north and with gravel of the Third River Terrace to the south east. The ground shelves gently from west to east, from 65m AOD down to 45m AOD.
- 13.36 Soils are Argillic Gleys, loamy soils with high ground water and liable to short-term flooding. The effect of this is seen in the pattern of drainage ditches through the area with very wide and deep ditches by the side of many roads, lined by pollarded willow and poplar. To the south are a cluster of ponds, possibly caused by extraction of the underlying river terrace gravel but there are no tributaries within this area. The fertile soils support arable farming as the principal land use of the area.

Historic Environment

- 13.37 There is evidence of small iron age settlements at Riseley of later Romano-British settlement, located close to the line of the Roman road between London and *Calleva* (Silchester), known locally as the Devil's Highway. Riseley derives from the Saxon "*leah*" (a woodland clearing) and indicates settlement originally in a forest environment. In fact this area (and indeed the whole district) was part of the Crown land at Windsor Forest.
- 13.38 The established pattern of medium to large irregular fields indicates early inclosure, with recent amalgamation of fields resulting in boundary loss and loss of much of the former historic field system. The pattern of small rectangular fields north of the Roman road, indicates more recent inclosure at the edge of the former Riseley Common where is also fringed by a number of 16th and 17th timber-framed farms.
- 13.39 The Reading to Basingstoke turnpike, established in 1718, passes through the village of Riseley, with its adjacent network of lanes serving the farms.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	Various blocks; south east corner, around Glasspool Farm, Between King's Bridge and Handpost Farm.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	Quite a high concentration including some in Riseley and on the outskirts of Swallowfield, various farms and Wyvols Court.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 13.40 This character area supports only one very small Wildlife Heritage Site, which is near to School Road and Riseley Farm. This site is composed of a small stream, which is bordered by a narrow fringe of secondary woodland and scrub.
- 13.41 Elsewhere the most important wildlife habitats are likely to be the deep permanently water-filled ditches, which have stands of aquatic vegetation.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Importance</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Collins/St. Legers Copse	Ancient woodland (partly replanted)
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Nr School Road and Riseley Farm 0.2ha	Scrub, wetland, water

Rural Land Use

- 13.42 This area is dominated by arable farming, with large irregular fields. It is a simple landscape with little variety. Hedgerows bound the fields but these have frequent gaps and the hedgerow trees are sparse and often over-mature. In some places the hedgerows have been replaced with fences. By the roads the hedgerows include a wide variety of trees: holly, poplars, oak and ash.
- 13.43 The landscape appears disjointed, with large agricultural buildings and small shelter belts dominating the views over the open fields. Shelter belts vary from small plantations of conifers or deciduous trees to lines of poplar – these latter are highly visible in the almost flat landform. Newly planted belts include a wider mixture including beech and pine.

- 13.44 There is no woodland within this character area however, although the adjacent *Stanford End Wooded Gravel and Sand Hills* (L3) area provides some wooded horizons and a sense of semi-enclosure.

Settlement and Built Character

- 13.45 Settlement is composed of a regular pattern of farmsteads with the village of Riseley at the south east and the outskirts of Swallowfield to the north. Buildings are predominately brick, some traditional with timber framing but mainly modern and with some suburban (bungalow) linear development along the roads. Large farm buildings are prominent in the landscape because of their scale.
- 13.46 The area includes the southern outskirts of Swallowfield which consist of modern brick houses with some traditional detailing including barge boards.
- 13.47 The area has a network of rural roads, often with wide deep ditches and sometimes banks topped by hedgerows with hedgerow trees (mature oaks) or with lines of poplar. The ditches and banks, with native vegetation such as primroses beneath mature oak trees, contribute to the rural character.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 13.48 The writer Mary Russell Mitford (1787–1855) moved to Swallowfield in 1851 due to the number of repairs required to her cottage at Three Mile Cross (refer I3: Grazeley Open Clay Lowland). She wrote of her move:

'I walked from the one cottage to the other in an Autumn evening. Here I am now in this prettiest village, in the cosiest of all snug cabins; a trim cottage garden, divided by a hawthorn hedge from a little field guarded by grand old trees; a cheerful glimpse of high road in front, just to hint that there is such a thing as a peopled world; on wither side the deep silent woody lanes, that form the distinctive character of English scenery.'

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 13.49 The overall quality of the *Riseley Open Clay Lowland* (I2) is judged to be **moderate**. This is because the landscape has a moderate strength of character and a moderate condition overall. The **moderate character** is largely attributable to the physical landscape and rural land use with arable and some pasture set in large open fields and small-scale local features such as drainage ditches, rural lanes and roadside banks and verges. Overall the landscape is in **moderate condition** and there are considerable opportunities for improvements to each of the key characteristics: in particular due to the loss of and poor management of hedgerows, intensive farming practices, presence of coniferous shelterbelts and large agricultural buildings that disturb the openness and scale of the landscape.

Landscape Strategy

- 13.50 The overall strategy for the *Riseley Open Clay Lowland* (I2) is to **enhance** character and restore lost elements. The aim should be to maintain the quiet, rural character of the landscape. Key elements to enhance and restore include field boundary elements, particularly those along roadsides and ditches to help reintroduce a more intimate scale. Pollard willows are an important feature and should be managed/replanted. Native shelterbelt planting, as opposed to intrusive coniferous belts, should also be an objective.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 13.51 Overall the landscape is considered to be of **low sensitivity** to change. This is because, generally, most characteristics are not irreplaceable if lost and are important at the local scale – although some may be particularly sensitive at this scale. The most sensitive aspects of this landscape are the key perceptual characteristics including the simple open and unvaried nature of the landscape, quietness, and views to the river valley and the wooded horizons. Therefore the landscape is particularly sensitive to the introduction of any large-scale or vertical elements.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

13.52 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Riseley Open Clay Lowland* (I2) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to ensure that the landscape is actively enhanced including restoration of those elements that have been lost in recent years to create a more picturesque and intact quality.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Hedgerow loss and soil erosion is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.	• Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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. Consider removal of coniferous shelterbelts and replacement with native shelterbelts.
❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.	• Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and local produce initiatives, to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.	• Encourage environmentally beneficial management of arable and pasture.
❖ Decline in demand for traditional countryside products leading to loss of rural features	• Encourage and develop markets for products to encourage farm diversification supporting such

Key Issues

e.g. loss of pollarded willows.

Associated Guidelines

features.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.
- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ No issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Over-maturity of remnant veteran hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.
- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees.

Recreation

- ❖ Potential pressure for formal recreation facilities that have an impact on the character of the landscape.
- Any new recreation facilities to be sympathetically sited and integrated into the landscape to enhance their contribution to local character.
- ❖ Potential pressure for horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- Paddocks to be sensitive to existing character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows and minimising the construction of additional features.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.
- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements.
- ❖ The pressure for housing is resulting in dereliction and loss of traditional dwellings, dilution of vernacular character and loss of distinct architectural style.
- Conserve historic buildings and consider undertaking built character appraisals across the District to identify local styles, layouts, densities and materials that may be appropriate in new buildings and the spaces between these buildings.
- ❖ Infilling of village greens with
- Restrict further ribbon development

Key Issues

built development has resulted in loss of settlement structure, communal areas and village focus.

- ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.
- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Associated Guidelines

and consider opportunities to strengthen and enhance the landscape setting to the villages through planting. Consider creating new village greens which could help to maintain the individual character of individual settlements.

- Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained.
- Maintain the rural lanes with their ancient oaks, drainage ditches and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural locations.
- Undertake sympathetic screening to minimise the impact of new and existing roads.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.

I2: RISELEY FARMED CLAY LOWLAND



13: GRAZELEY FARMED CLAY LOWLAND

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 13.53 The *Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland (13)* character area is an area of lowland clay and alluvial farmland isolated on the slowly permeable soils that form part of the Thames Basin. The area is drained by numerous streams and ditches including the tranquil course of Foudry Brook, overhung by mature trees.
- 13.54 This is a mixed agricultural landscape, with both arable and pasture – on areas of pasture sheep grazing is a particular feature. The presence of hedge banks and sunken lanes indicates an ancient landscape close to the River Kennet. Mature oaks are a feature, standing out of the flat landscape as silhouettes against the open sky. It is a highly rural, even remote landscape, characterised by low density, dispersed settlement of scattered farmsteads and hamlets, often focussed around a green.

Location and Boundaries

- 13.55 The *Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland* character area lies in the far west of the District and forms part of the wider landscape of the Thames Basin. Its eastern boundary is defined by a change in topography where the prominent clay ridge of *Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay* separates it from the Loddon Valley. The A33 runs along the foot of this ridge and forms a convenient boundary between the two character areas. The other boundaries are artificially delineated by Wokingham district's administrative boundary and it is recognised that in reality this character area continues beyond the boundary into the neighbouring district of West Berkshire.

Key Characteristics

- **Low lying vale** underlain by **clay and alluvium** forming part of the wider Thames Basin.
- **Simple flat landform**, enclosed to the east by the prominent clay

ridge of Spencers Wood.

- **Open large-scale irregular fields** divided by a mixture of post and wire fences, discontinuous hedgerows and drainage ditches and with remnant lines of **mature oaks** marking former field boundaries.
- **Mixed pastoral and arable farmland** with sheep grazing characteristic in some areas.
- Wetland character in parts due to presence of drainage **ditches, channels and small streams** including **Foudry Brook**. Also presence of polars and cricket bat willows.
- **Low density scattered rural farmsteads and small agricultural settlements** characterised by the use of **red brick** and **thatch** with **weatherboarding** a feature of barns.
- **Sinuuous rural single-lane tracks** shaded by **hedgerows** and hedgerow trees.
- **Remnant parkland** around 18th and 19th century country houses at Grazeley Court Farm and Hartley Court
- **Remnant wayside commons** with mature stag horned and mature oaks as features.
- **Urban fringe land uses** close to Reading and the M4 include **paddocks** and **rough grazing**.
- **Glimpsed views of Reading urban fringe** and Green Park (business park) at the northern periphery. Urban 'glare' makes Reading particularly prominent at night.
- **World War II pillboxes** located along Foudry Brook.

Physical Landscape

13.56 The *Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland* character area is a lowland landscape, gently shelving towards the River Kennet (near to its confluence with the Thames in Reading) from 50m AOD in the south to 40m AOD, in the north. The area is underlain by London clay and alluvial drift deposits that are associated with the River Kennet and its tributaries. It is drained by a number of streams and drainage ditches that flow north towards the Kennet, for example Foudry Brook

– the main watercourse, being a medium sized stream that is only visible at close range. Field ponds are a characteristic feature of these clay lowlands.

- 13.57 The underlying clay and riverine alluvium have given rise to pelo-alluvial argillic gley soils that are affected by high groundwater levels and have a slowly permeable character. The better drained soils are used as arable land whereas the more waterlogged areas typically associated with the watercourses are characterised by pasture and wet meadow.

Historic Environment

- 13.58 This area has considerable evidence of very early agricultural exploitation. A concentration of cropmarks found across this area indicate possible clearance, cultivation and settlement through the prehistoric and Romano-British periods, probably focussed on the Foudry Brook. There are also a number of known small Mesolithic and Neolithic sites and small Roman settlement.
- 13.59 As observed elsewhere, the settlement names of Grazeley, Thurley and Hartley contain “-*leah*” and suggest establishment in a forest environment – this area was also part of Windsor Forest. Although there was a Domesday settlement at Hartley, the pattern of Medieval and Post-medieval settlement is characterised primarily by the dispersed pattern of farmsteads and the lack of any villages, the small agricultural settlement at Grazeley being a late 19th century development.
- 13.60 The presence of former common land is indicated by the names of Lambwoodhill Common, Hartley Common, and Great Lea Common, and a small ovate arrangement of fields at Grazeley may indicate the preservation of a small area of common within the inclosed fields. Traces of former parkland, established around 18th and 19th century country houses, are still evident at Grazeley Court Farm and Hartley Court.
- 13.61 Many of the fields in the northern part of the area, as shown on the 1st edition OS map, were small and irregular in form, frequently with wavy boundaries, suggesting early inclosure of the former open fields

and commons. Many of these boundaries, however, have been lost in the recent amalgamation of fields. To the south there is a pattern of larger rectangular fields characteristic of early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure which has been retained relatively intact.

- 13.62 The pattern of small lanes linking the farmsteads has been overlain by more recent communication routes such as the mid 19th century Great Western Railway line between Reading and Basingstoke, the A33 trunk road west of Spencers Wood, and the M4 motorway completed in 1971. During World War II, a series of pillboxes were built along the Foudry Brook as part of the defensive GHQ line in case of invasion.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	There are a number of sites on the edges of agricultural settlements covering a relatively large proportion of the area.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	There are a number of listed buildings scattered throughout the area, relating to the agricultural settlements (including Grazeley) and country houses characteristic of this area, such as Hartley Court.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 13.63 The *Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowlands* are largely under arable cultivation. However, four sites with Wildlife Heritage Site status have been retained, three of which are small ancient woodland blocks. Both Clay Hill and Normans Shaw are ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) coppice woodlands and

Nore's Hill is an ancient coppice wood, which has been planted with beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). Old buildings within Nore's Hill Wood provide an important roost site for Pipistrelle bats, and to the east of this site along Shinfield Road there are a number of fine pollarded oaks.

- 13.64 The fourth Wildlife Heritage Site is Great Lea Pond, which is located just south of Reading. Due to siltation and progressive vegetation colonisation there is now little remaining open water at this site. This drying is associated with a decline of notable aquatic species such as water violet (*Hottonia palustris*) and bladderwort (*Utricularia* spp.) for which this pond was once an important site and is now in need of sensitive management to restore open water communities.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Site of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Clay Hill 1.5 / 1.5ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within J3</i>	Ancient woodland
Normans Shaw 0.9 / 0.9ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within J3</i>	Ancient woodland
Beech Hill Coverts	Ancient woodland
Whitley Wood	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Great Lea Pond 1.1 ha	Open water
Nore's Hill 5.05ha	Woodland

Rural Land Use

- 13.65 This is a rural agricultural landscape of large scale fields of mixed arable land and pasture. The field pattern is irregular with some extremely large fields in the open vale and small scale fields close to settlements such as Three Mile Cross. The landscape is a mixed agricultural scene of sheep grazing and cereal growing. Fields are divided by low, neatly clipped thorn hedgerows and hedgebanks indicating an ancient enclosed landscape. Where hedgerows are discontinuous post and wire fences act as stock proof barriers. Hedgerow oaks are features of the field boundaries and remain standing even where hedgerows have been lost.
- 13.66 The clay plains were once thickly wooded, but today the landscape is largely devoid of woodland. Small mixed farm woods and shelterbelts are all that remain of the once extensive woodland. There are a few rights of way in this landscape, the area remains a working agricultural landscape with little recreational or tourist activity. Close to the M4 are fragmented plots where land use includes urban fringe land uses such as factory sites and paddocks, and where fly tipping is evident.

Settlement and Built Character

- 13.67 This is a highly rural landscape characterised by low density, dispersed settlement of scattered farmsteads and hamlets such as Grazeley and Poundgreen. These hamlets are typically nucleated and have retained their rural character. The traditional built form is distinctive for its half-hipped roofs and use of traditional red brick with weatherboarding on agricultural buildings. The use of clay tiles, along with the soft red brick, also adds a warmth to the landscape. Thatch is also a feature of this area, reflecting its association with the Kennet and proximity to reed beds.
- 13.68 Farmsteads and hamlets are linked by a network of ancient winding sunken lanes, lined by hedgebanks and shaded by oaks. Drainage ditches are often located either side of these rural lanes and the remnant wayside commons, visible as wide grass verges with mature oaks. The A33 dual carriageway runs along the eastern boundary of the area and the M4 crosses east to west with a major road junction

located just beyond Wokingham's administrative boundary. The area retains a rural character despite the presence of these major transport corridors.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 13.69 Mary Russell Mitford (1787–1855), perhaps the most famous of Wokingham's writers, once resided at Three Mile Cross (before moving to Swallowfield). From a tiny labourer's cottage Mitford provided an account of country life and character in her book *'Our Village'* (1824–1832) revelling in the intimacy which her rural life afforded. Her 'indigenous' accounts provide such vivid pictures of a seemingly idyllic country life which may well apply to the rural landscape around her home:

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

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

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 13.71 The *Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland* (I3) has a strong character and is in moderate overall condition and is therefore described as being of overall **moderate quality**. The **strong character** is attributed to the distinctive flat landform and presence of the numerous streams including the course of the tranquil Foundry Brook. Also important is the mixed working farmland set within neatly clipped hedges, distinct

rural settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads and hamlets and strong overriding rural character. The wayside commons and pattern of winding sunken lanes contribute to this rural character. The **moderate condition** arises from the presence of some characteristics that would benefit from enhanced management, such as the remnant wayside commons, wetland and woodland habitats and the presence of intrusive features such as the motorway. Marginal agricultural land and fragmented plots close to the M4 and the urban fringe would also benefit from improved management.

Landscape Strategy

- 13.72 The overall landscape strategy is to **conserve** the strong rural character and important features as set out above. There are key opportunities to **enhance** character notably by improving management of wetland and woodland habitats, managing and replanting hedgerow boundaries including the distinctive hedgerow oaks. Improving the management of marginal land adjoining the motorway and urban fringe of Reading, for example by woodland planting, is also a key opportunity.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 13.73 The *Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland* (I3) is considered to be a landscape of overall **moderate sensitivity**. This is because there are many elements present that would be difficult to recreate or restore if lost and these are important at the regional or local level. The most sensitive characteristics are the pattern of ancient hedgerows, mature oaks, wayside commons and rural lanes, the ancient woodlands, old barns and buildings, the rural settlement pattern and the perceptual characteristics such as the openness and rural qualities.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 13.74 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Grazeley Open Clay Lowland* (I3) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to ensure that the landscape is actively enhanced to increase the sense of place, presentation, and condition of the characteristics.

Key Issues

Agriculture

- ❖ Hedgerow loss is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- ❖ Presence of marginal agricultural land being kept in ‘hope’ value, particularly around settlement edges, which is of poor visual character. This increases towards the north (Reading) area of this character area.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.
- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.

Associated Guidelines

- Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
- Seek to maintain a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for the village or town. In some areas woodland planting may be an appropriate land use.
- Conserve the small ancient woodland copses and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
- Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland within the character area using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Key Issues

Minerals

- ❖ No issues known.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture. This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.
 - ❖ Over-maturity of veteran parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.
- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland).
 - Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland, hedgerow and street trees.

Recreation

- ❖ Probably no significant issues.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.
 - ❖ The pressure for large areas of housing is resulting in the dereliction and loss of traditional dwellings, dilution of vernacular character and loss of distinct architectural style.
 - ❖ There is continuing pressure for new industrial developments, sewage treatment works and commercial premises, particularly in the river valleys and associated with the major transport corridors.
- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. In particular seek to minimise any encroachment of Reading into this area.
 - Conserve historic buildings and consider undertaking built character appraisals across the District to identify local styles, layouts, densities and materials that may be appropriate in new buildings and the spaces between these buildings.
 - Care should be taken in the siting and design of industrial buildings and estates to ensure that key landscape characteristics are maintained and to avoid visual intrusion of these elements in the

Key Issues

Here pressure is particularly associated with the M4 and Reading fringes.

- ❖ Pressure for expansion of built development on the edges of towns is leading to suburbanisation of the landscape, loss of individual settlement identity and blocking of views.
- ❖ Increasing demand for industrial buildings particularly associated with flat landscapes (e.g. floodplains) associated with transport corridors
- ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.

Associated Guidelines

open landscape. Undertake sensitive woodland planting to reduce the intrusion of the motorway, other major roads and large buildings.

- Consider possibilities for woodland creation in urban fringe areas where these could enhance landscape character and quality, provide recreational potential, and assist in the positive integration of the urban into the rural landscape while conserving significant views to landmark features.
- Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- ❖ Increasing transport pressures on rural roads is occurring as a result of traffic taking diversions to avoid delays in the urban areas leading to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air pollution in
- Maintain the historic leafy lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural locations.
- Consider the use of traffic calming and access restrictions to maintain the tranquillity of the most rural areas. This would also make the use of rural roads more attractive for cyclists and recreational users.

Key Issues

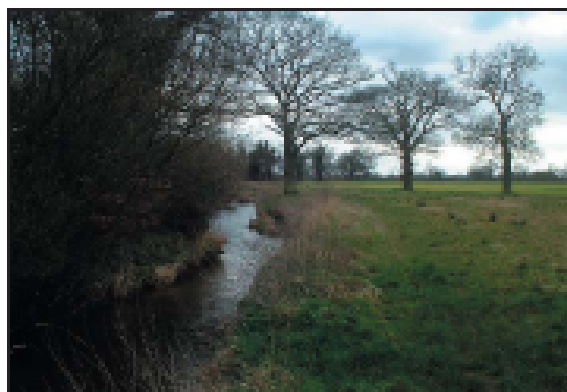
rural areas.

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.
- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Associated Guidelines

- Undertake sympathetic screening to minimise the impact of new and existing roads.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.

I3: GRAZELEY FARMED CLAY LOWLAND



I4: HURST FARMED CLAY LOWLAND

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 13.75 The *Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland*, located south of Twyford and east of Hurst, is a distinctive landscape located at the transition between three different landscape types. Therefore, despite largely displaying the pattern of the *Farmed Clay Lowland* landscape type it has a number of distinctive characteristics unique to this particular area.
- 13.76 The main characteristics of this area are the presence of flat to gently rising pasturelands located over a base of London Clay and river terraces. Similarly the area is sparsely settled with scattered farmsteads, although many of these are hidden behind vegetation or are of a modern post-war bungalow style rather than having rural vernacular character. Despite this there are a number of listed buildings in the area including listed eighteenth century houses and farmsteads.
- 13.77 The area also is influenced by the presence of small watercourses – the upper reaches of Billingbear Brook – which permeate the landscape. The character of these is also mirrored in the extensive and deep network of water-filled drainage ditches, particularly associated with the wide roadside verges. These are frequently filled with rushes and wetland vegetation and sometimes widen into small ponds with associated willow pollards. In contrast to other parts of the landscape type this area has very little arable farmland and the field system is much smaller, being dominated by pony paddocks (particularly east of the A321) often surrounded by dense and overgrown rough hedgerows. This creates a more enclosed character.

Location and Boundaries

- 13.78 The *Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland* is located to the north west of *11: Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland* to the east of the Loddon valley around the settlement of Hurst. It is a small distinctive area defined

by its smaller-scale field pattern and dense network of rural lanes. Therefore, the boundaries are defined by field boundaries that mark the transition from an intimate to more open landscape. The north-eastern boundary is defined by the transition to the *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* (K1). The north-western and south-western boundaries are defined by the transition to the flat and open pastoral landscape of the *Hurst River Terrace* (C2) and the south eastern boundaries are represented by field boundaries defining the edge of *Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland* (I1).

Key Characteristics

- Small area of **flat to gently undulating landform** at low elevation and underlain by London Clay with small pockets of alluvium and river terrace.
- A **pastoral landscape** defined by a **small-scale regular and irregular shaped fields** divided by **post and wire fencing** and **overgrown hedgerows**.
- **Horse and pony keeping** evident through the large number of grazing and exercising paddocks with associated features. This is a particularly prominent land use east of the A321.
- Small **watercourses, ponds, deep drainage ditches** and wetland vegetation including rushes and **pollarded willows**.
- A **‘wooded’ context** due to the large number of dense, overgrown rough hedgerows aligning rural lanes.
- **Quiet landscape** character of **strong rural character** due to **absence of significant settlements** and intricate pattern of winding rural lanes.
- A landscape with **peaceful** qualities and **intimate character**.

Physical Landscape

13.79 The *Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland* is predominantly underlain by the London Clay, which was formed in the Thames Basin. Over this there are also localised deposits of alluvium associated with the small

tributaries in the north of the area – the upper tributaries of Billingsbear Brook. There are also more extensive areas of Second and Third River Terrace, extending from the *Hurst River Terrace* to the west. These conditions have created a landscape of argillic gley soils, which are loamy soils but affected by high groundwater and short-term flooding, limiting their suitability for arable farming. This has resulted in the creation of deep drainage ditches beside many of the roads and the formation of numerous ponds.

- 13.80 The landform appears flat but in fact gently undulates and slopes to form a subtly elevated area at around 45m AOD at Hurst and the Church of St Nicholas Hurst (located on the boundary of this area).

Historic Environment

- 13.81 There is little evidence of settlement until the Medieval period. The parish of St. Nicholas Hurst was originally known as Whistley, where there was a Domesday settlement – both “-leah” and ‘Hurst’ indicating settlement in a forest environment.
- 13.82 The settlement pattern is one of closely spaced farmsteads linked by a tight network of country lanes. The present pattern of fields includes some rectangular straight-sided fields characteristic of early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure, and many of irregular shape with wavy boundaries possibly indicating early assart inclosure of areas of woodland. Although some of these patterns survive intact they have been modified by recent subdivision by fences.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	Two small sites – located north of Grange Farm and around Hurst.
<i>Conservation Areas</i>	
	Hurst
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	Cluster within Hurst Conservation Area, also clusters and numerous

	isolated buildings throughout the area.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 13.83 There are no sites with statutory or non-statutory designations within this character area. Biodiversity interest relates to the areas of pasture, hedgerows and notably the network of drainage ditches and associated small scale wetland habitats.

Rural Land Use

- 13.84 Land use in this area is dominated by pasture, which relates to the propensity of this area to become waterlogged. This is evidenced by the dense network of deep formal drainage ditches throughout and around this area, particularly associated with wide verges and wayside commons along the rural lanes. It is also accentuated by the presence of small ponds, which are filled with rushes and lined by pollarded willows.
- 13.85 The pastures are small to medium-sized and include areas of sheep grazing. However, the dominant land use is rough grazing paddock for horses and ponies. The pastures are set within small and geometric enclosures, which are divided by post and wire fences. The fences are often supplemented by overgrown hedgerows and shelterbelts, which have a variety of species and include standard trees spanning a wide age range. The overgrown hedgerows continue along the rural lanes creating an enclosed character. Within this pastoral context there are a few larger areas of arable farmland.
- 13.86 The presence of paddocks coupled with the presence of a number of footpaths and bridleways makes this area important for low-key recreational use.

Settlement and Built Character

- 13.87 The area is very sparsely settled. There are no large settlements, although the small hamlet of Hurst, including part of the conservation

area around St Nicholas, falls within this area. Elsewhere the detached residences are widely spaced being largely associated with farmsteads. There are a relatively high number of listed buildings including the eighteenth century Hurst Lodge. However, the vernacular character of the area is for the most part hidden and diluted by the presence of later bungalow and chalet-style buildings and the industrial quality of many of the newer farmstead groups.

- 13.88 The built character of the landscape is affected by the presence of prefabricated and temporary structures within the fields (such as caravans and feeding troughs).

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 13.89 The *Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland* (I4) is a landscape of **moderate quality**. This is due to the combination of a moderate character with a good overall condition. The **moderate character** arises from the combination of landscape components, the most distinctive of which are the very rural quality of the landscape, the small watercourses, and general absence of development and the intimate scale of the landscape. Overall the landscape is considered to be in **moderate condition** – this is largely as a result of the subdivision of landholdings and creation of paddocks with a variety of temporary boundaries and associated structures, combined with loss of hedgerow boundaries in other areas.

Landscape Strategy

- 13.90 This landscape strategy is **conserve and enhance** the rural pastoral intimate character. The objective is to conserve and actively manage those elements of the landscape that are creating a positive sense of place i.e. the small watercourse and drainage ditches, small scale pastoral fields, ponds, and winding rural lanes and the low key settlement pattern. Elements which would benefit from enhancement are the hedgerow boundaries and management of horse/pony paddocks including improved management of the sward and enhancement of temporary boundaries and associated structures.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 13.91 The *Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland* (14) is judged to have a **moderate sensitivity** to change. The most significant elements (which would be most difficult to restore/recreate if lost) are the peaceful, rural quality, the low-density pattern of settlement and the distinctive land use pattern of small-scale pastoral field units, drainage ditches and hedges. Whilst these elements are of largely local importance, they are sensitive to change and, some, such as the peaceful, rural qualities are increasingly valued at the regional scale.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 13.92 The following table sets out the main issues affecting or with potential to affect the character of the *Grazeley Open Clay Lowland* (13) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Hedgerow loss (particularly of historic hedgerows) is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.	• Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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 or replaced with post and wire fencing.
❖ Changes in agricultural practice, including conversion to hobby farms and equestrian activities is leading to changing management regimes and loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees.	• Seek to manage set-aside land, paddocks and hobby farms to enhance the visual and ecological quality of the landscape, for example through planting boundary hedgerows.
Forestry and Woodland Management	
❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general	• Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous

Key Issues

shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade

- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.

Associated Guidelines

woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the Wokingham landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.

- Ensure design of areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ No known issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture. This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.
- ❖ Over-maturity of veteran hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.

- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats – including the ponds and drainage ditches – through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including ponds)
- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees.

Recreation

- ❖ Pressure for more horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.

- Paddocks to be sensitive to existing landscape character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows. Temporary structures/fencing should be minimised.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.

- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and

Key Issues

- ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.

Associated Guidelines

village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. Seek to retain the low-density of settlement within this character area.

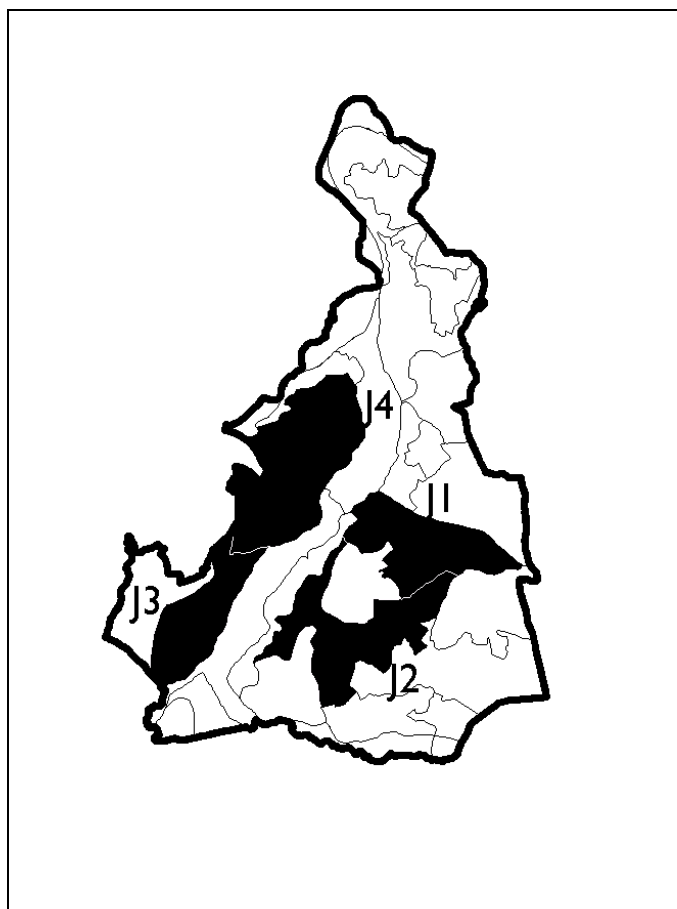
- Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible, ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained.

- Maintain the historic leafy lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character.

I4: HURST FARMED CLAY LOWLAND



14 LANDSCAPE TYPE J: SETTLED AND FARMED CLAY



Landscape Areas Character

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

Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 14.1 There are four character areas of the Landscape Type classified as *J: Settled and Farmed Clay*. These areas correspond to a south-central location within the district and incorporate major areas of settlement within their bounds including Wokingham and the areas of Woodley and Earley east of Reading. The *Settled and Farmed Clay* landscape is distinguished by a shelving/undulating landform, with two predominant land uses – arable farming and urban settlement.

Key Characteristics

- Gently shelving to undulating landform.
- Working arable farming within a system of large field units.
- Tributaries (and associated subtle valleys) draining towards the River Loddon.

- Large tracts of low-density (predominantly post war) settlement.
- Network of major and minor roads cutting through the landscape.
- Predominantly underlain by the Palaeogene deposit of London Clay.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

14.2 The character of *J: Settled and Farmed Clay* corresponds to Landscape Type *K: Settled Farmlands* of the county level assessment. Some minor boundary changes have occurred due to the more detailed nature of the district study but there is a strong match between the district level *Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay* (J3) and *Spencers Wood Settled Farmlands* (K1) at the county level. Character areas J1 and J2 (*Wokingham-Winnersh* and *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay*) fall within character area K3: *Wokingham Settled Farmlands* of the Berkshire Study. Character area J4 falls within the urban core of Reading, which at the county level did not form part of the Landscape Character Assessment. Perhaps most notably, at the county level, there is no character area distinction to separate the north and south of Wokingham and its surrounding urban fringe farmland. This is directly related to the different scales of the studies.

J1: WOKINGHAM–WINNERSH SETTLED AND FARMED CLAY

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 14.3 The character areas identified as *J1: Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay* occupies a central–east location within Wokingham district and encompasses a significant area of urban land, namely the northern half of Wokingham town and the residential areas of Winnersh.
- 14.4 Characterised by a shelving landform the rural landscape is predominantly under arable farming comprising medium field units that are further subdivided into areas of equine grazing pasture at the rural/urban interface. Field boundaries are largely characterised by post and rail fencing with the majority of traditional hedgerows lost. Working farmland is sandwiched between the urban edges of Wokingham, Winnersh and the M4 and A329M transport corridors. There is an overriding sense of urbanity throughout the character area and this is further emphasised by the presence of pylons and posts cutting across the farmland, carrying overhead cables and wires. The Emm Brook flows north to south through the heart of the area, around the northern edge of Winnersh but flowing through Wokingham. The brook provides both a visual and recreational connection between the agricultural and urban landscapes.
- 14.5 The marginal character of agriculture in this area is evident – with major transport corridors cutting across previously intact farmland. The urbanising influence of adjacent settlement also dilutes the rural quality of the landscape.

Location and Boundaries

- 14.6 Occupying an area to the central–eastern location, the *Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay (J1)* stretches from the edge of the Winnersh Triangle east towards the district boundary and is bordered by five other character areas. The indicative boundaries drawn to

distinguish the character area from its surroundings have largely been informed by land use patterns. To the north and east, the boundary follows the A329M, marking the edge of character area *J1: Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland* – a contrastingly unsettled landscape with woodland blocks a key feature. To the south, the boundary follows the line of the A329 and a minor road – both separating the character area from *J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay*. To the west, the edge of the character area follows both the line of roads and settlement edge – indicating the transition into character areas *L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills*, *C1: Arborfield Loddon River Terrace* and *B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water*.

Key Characteristics

- An agricultural landscape greatly influenced by urban development.
- Presence of the historic market town of **Wokingham** and **Winnersh** that have extended from their original cores with peripheral suburban estate development.
- **Fragmented, marginal rural landscape** largely due to the presence of **motorways** – the A329 (M) and M4 – and the mainline **railway** line.
- **Agricultural land** predominantly given over to **arable farming** and defined by **medium sized fields of irregular pattern** and bound by **post and wire fencing**.
- **Abrupt rural–urban interface** due the contrast of open arable fields abutting suburban style estates with important areas of agricultural land preventing amalgamation of Winnersh–Wokingham.
- A **sloping landform** with **subtle valleys** formed by the cuttings of **Emm Brook** and associated tributaries with associated open land extending within the urban areas.
- **Horse and pony paddocks** within **compartmentalised field units**

bound by temporary boundaries aligning transport corridors or abutting settlement edge.

- **Urbanisation of rural land** due to landscape detailing such as street lighting, roadside kerbing, municipal character of street furniture and ornamental garden planting such as **coniferous hedges**.
- **Pylons and posts** carrying overhead wires are **striking vertical elements** across the arable fields.

Physical Landscape

- 14.7 Geologically, London Clay deposited in the Palaeogene underlies the majority of this character area. The London Clay formation consists of dark blue to brown grey clay containing varying degrees of fine-grained sand and silt. There are two significant corridors of Alluvium within the landscape. One strip of Alluvium runs east to west along the line of the tributary to the north of the area and the other follows the north–south line of Emm Brook. To the west, there is a concentration of 4th Terrace River Deposits of the Quaternary era (at Winnersh) with 5th and 6th Terrace River Deposits occurring to the east. Also to the east, Bagshot Beds overlie the clay and comprise fine-grained sand and grey clay in thin beds. The geological strata gives rise to the overlying soils – comprising Stagnogley Soils of the Windsor series. These are clayey or loamy over clayey soils that suffer drainage difficulties at moderate depths due to an impermeable layer.
- 14.8 The landscape is shelving or sloping with subtle valleys formed by the cuttings of Emm Brook and the associated tributary. Elevation ranges from 85m AOD in the far east of the area to 45m AOD on the floodplains of the brook and tributary. Although there is a shallow valley system giving form to the landscape, its subtlety makes it visually indistinct and is masked further by built development.

Historic Environment

- 14.9 There is little evidence for extensive prehistoric or Romano–British settlement of the clay soils, which may have remained predominantly

wooded until Saxon times when settlement expanded onto previously marginal areas.

- 14.10 Wokingham, first recorded in 1146, was the only Medieval town in east Berkshire not sited along the Thames. It relied for its livelihood on the agricultural regions to its north and east, as well as looking to the heathland areas to the south. The streets and burgage plots of the new town were probably laid out in the early 13th century and it was granted a market in 1219.
- 14.11 In the rural areas outside the town, settlement consisted primarily of farmsteads with few villages, the whole district being part of Windsor Forest. There was a 13th century settlement at Sindlesham, but a new model village was built there in the late 19th century as part of the Bearwood estate (L1).
- 14.12 The 1st edition OS map shows that much of the farmland around Wokingham consisted of an irregular field system indicating early inclosure. These areas have been almost completely built over by the 20th century (largely post-1950s) residential development of green-field land at Wokingham and Winnersh. The areas of surviving farmland, such as north of Matthews Green, have straight-sided rectangular fields characteristic of early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure.
- 14.13 The early maps also show numerous brickworks around Wokingham. The brick industry exploited the clay soils, and fuel from heath and woodland, and provided the main building material from the late 17th century.
- 14.14 In 1759 the Windsor Forest Turnpike Trust created a new road through Wokingham. In the mid 19th century the South Eastern Railway provided transport for the growing brick industry, and stimulated urban development. By 1930, Wokingham was the county's fifth largest town, the growth continuing in the post-war period with the construction of the A329(M) motorway which bounds the area to the north.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	Generally few sites – one area of significant size at central Wokingham (related to the conservation area) and one north of Matthewsgreen Farm.
<i>Conservation Areas</i>	
	Wokingham Town Centre (urban area not covered by this assessment). Sindlesham.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	There is a loose cluster of listed buildings at Winnersh, and a greater density within the Wokingham and Sindlesham Conservation Areas. There is also a scattering of individual listed buildings forming no obvious pattern across the remainder of the area.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None (bordering Bearwood, Arborfield see L1)	

Ecological Character

- 14.15 The *Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay* is dominated by urban and arable land uses and contains only two Wildlife Heritage Sites. The first of these is Holt Copse, which is a small wood of ancient origin dominated by oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*). This site has been managed as coppice with standards, but was partly replanted in the 18th century and is currently very dense woodland, which would benefit from thinning.
- 14.16 The second Wildlife Heritage Site is Windmill Pond, which is an urban pond surrounded by housing.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Site of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserve</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Holt Copse 2.7 / 2.6ha	Ancient woodland
Pebblestone Copse	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Windmill Pond 1.5ha	Open water
Small part of the Bearwood Estate 129ha (mainly in L1)	Woodland, open water, remnant heathland

Rural Land Use

- 14.17 The rural landscape is predominantly given over to arable farming characterised by a geometric but somewhat irregular pattern of medium-sized field units. There is an open character to the landscape largely due to the lack of woodland although two small (deciduous and mixed) blocks are present to the east. The fields in turn are largely bound by post and wire fencing and, at the immediate urban edge, by walls where open land abuts roads and/or property at Wokingham and Winnersh. In addition to arable land cover, there are some areas of horse and pony paddocks – for grazing and exercising. These paddocks are almost exclusively associated with the immediate urban edge or aligning transport corridors. Here, marginal agricultural land has been subdivided and is characterised by temporary field boundaries.
- 14.18 Many field boundaries have a hard appearance with post and rail (and other man-made material) fencing a common feature. There are however some remnant native hedgerow boundaries but these are either overgrown and seemingly unmanaged or very short and flailed. The urban edges formed by the residential areas of Wokingham and

Winnersh have an influence upon the overall character of the landscape. Suburban planting, in particular lines of coniferous hedging, contrasts with the scrubby field margins and occasional standard mature native trees found within the agricultural land. This is particularly evident where rear gardens form a linear edge immediately abutting farmland. Other features that have an urbanising influence over the rural landscape are street lighting, kerbs, lay-bys and the municipal character of street furniture and landscape detailing. Pylons crossing open fields, combined with metal clad agricultural buildings, evoke a semi-industrial fringe character.

- 14.19 A distinct landscape feature is Emm Brook – flowing north south, crossing through the arable farmland and into Wokingham. Here, open space aligning its route provides an attractive green corridor connecting the rural environment and the urban core. However, despite its proximity to the urban core the agricultural landscape provides very few opportunities for recreation with only three short footpaths present to the east of the character area.
- 14.20 The motorway transport corridors and secondary roads play a significant role in influencing landscape character. Both the A329M and the M4, through noise generation and movement flow, increase the pace and diminish the tranquillity of the landscape. There are a number of scrubby roadside shelterbelts (some containing mature standard trees) that help mitigate the visual and sound impacts of heavy traffic but the presence of the roads pervades the area.

Settlement and Built Character

- 14.21 Settlement is characterised by the towns of Wokingham and Winnersh beyond which there is little built development with the exception of a few scattered farms and a working depot.
- 14.22 Wokingham with its history as a market town, has developed exponentially over the last twenty years as a centre for business and light industry and as a residential base for commuting to London, Reading and Bracknell. Despite rapid growth it has kept much of its traditional central layout – retaining its market place and the five main roads of Peach Street, Denmark Street, Broad Street, Rose Street

and Shute End. Much of the development has occurred by expansion from the centre chiefly following the line of primary and secondary roads. Falling within the bounds of this character area, Wokingham's urban edge is chiefly characterised by suburban, low-rise residential settlement of modern style. The urban edge is often abrupt – not only due to built form but through ornamental and non-native garden planting. However, from afar often appears well-integrated with woodland and vegetation into the wider landscape.

- 14.23 Like Wokingham, Winnersh although a smaller settlement with no obvious centre, has seen much growth – mainly along the A329 towards Reading and Wokingham and along the secondary road running north to south through the village. Development in the last thirty years has occurred along the A329 with the village having a predominantly modern residential character. There are also many new 'executive' style estates in this area. The Winnersh Triangle – to the northwest is a high-tech business park bound by the A329M, the railway and the edge of Winnersh village (refer to *B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water*). Like Wokingham, Winnersh's urban edge is of low rise, suburban character with housing abutting the open agricultural landscape and lacking historic focus.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 14.24 The *Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay* (J1) is judged to be of **low quality** overall. The landscape has a weak character and is in moderate condition. The **weak character** arises from the highly fragmented landscape which lacks a sense of unity and any particularly distinctive characteristics to afford it with a strong sense of place. The dominant elements of the character area are the influences of the adjacent urban areas – the presence of views to the edges of Wokingham and Winnersh, and the associated urban fringe land uses including significant transport corridors. The two remnant ancient woodland sites are key features of note. The landscape is in **moderate condition** with much scope for improvement: whilst many elements are reasonably maintained some are in a poorer state of repair such as the marginal agricultural land and the visual quality of

equine paddocks bound by temporary fencing. The perceptual experience of the landscape are greatly influenced by the noise and visual intrusion of the transport corridors.

Landscape Strategy

- 14.25 The overall objective for the *Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay* (J1) is to **enhance** the existing character and condition of the landscape – improving the interface for example between the urban edges open fields. There are some opportunities to **renew or create** landscape character but any change should respect the sensitivities and qualities of the existing landscape, including the value of the Emm Brook and the setting of existing settlements, particularly the sense of separation between Winnersh and Wokingham. The objective should ensure that any new character addresses elements of the landscape that are currently in poor condition, through habitat creation and enhancement for example.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 14.26 The *Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay* (J1) is considered to be a landscape of overall **low sensitivity**. This is as a result of the relatively high recreatability of the characteristics and the, generally, local scale of importance. Within this context, the most sensitive factors, which should be considered in any changes to the landscape, are the Emm Brook and its floodplain and the role of the undeveloped agricultural land defining the edge of and providing a context for the built-up areas of Wokingham and Winnersh – and particularly the vulnerable area around the M4 between these settlements.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 14.27 The following table sets out the main issues affecting or with potential to affect the character of the *Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay* (J1) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to renew/create positive new character whilst retaining the best characteristics of the current landscape – respecting its key sensitivities.

Key Issues

Agriculture

- ❖ Hedgerow loss and soil erosion is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- ❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.
- ❖ Changes in agricultural practice, including conversion to hobby farms and 'horsiculture', is leading to changing management regimes (due to lack of knowledge and resources) and loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- ❖ Presence of marginal agricultural land being kept in 'hope' value, particularly around settlement edges, which is of poor visual character. This is particularly relevant in the marginal wedge of land between Wokingham and Winnersh.

Associated Guidelines

- Conserve remaining hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
- Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and local produce initiatives, to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
- Seek to manage set-aside land, paddocks and hobby farms to enhance the visual and ecological quality of the landscape, for example through planting boundary hedgerows.
- Seek to maintain a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for the settlement.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in
- Conserve all ancient woodland sites (there is one remaining in this area), and continue to

Key Issues

the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.

- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.
- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.

Associated Guidelines

promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.

- Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ Not thought to be any significant issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture. This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.
 - ❖ Over-maturity of hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.
- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats – including the Emm Brook – through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland).
 - Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland, hedgerow and street trees.

Key Issues

Recreation

- ❖ Potential demands for recreation, including cycling.
 - ❖ Pressure for golf courses that have an impact on the character of the landscape.
 - ❖ Pressure for more horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- Seek sympathetic integration of new recreational features and seek to locate such activities in areas of low tranquillity such as this: being close to major built up areas and having a low sensitivity this landscape could be an ideal location to develop the recreation potential.
 - Any permitted new and existing golf courses to be sympathetically sited and integrated into the landscape to decrease adverse views and enhance the contribution of the golf course to character.
 - Paddocks to be sensitive to existing character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows. Temporary fencing/structures should be discouraged.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.
 - ❖ The pressure for large areas of housing is resulting in the dereliction and loss of traditional dwellings, dilution of vernacular character and loss of distinct architectural style.
 - ❖ There is continuing pressure for
- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements.
 - Conserve historic buildings and consider undertaking built character appraisals across the District to identify local styles, layouts, densities and materials that may be appropriate in new buildings and the spaces between these buildings.
 - Consider undertaking character

Key Issues

expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new industrial developments, sewage treatment works and commercial premises, particularly in the river valleys and associated with the major transport corridors, such as the M4.
- ❖ Pressure for expansion of built development on the edges of towns is leading to suburbanisation of the landscape, loss of individual settlement identity and blocking of views.
- ❖ Increasing demand for industrial buildings particularly associated with flat landscapes (e.g. floodplains) and associated with transport corridors leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Infrastructure

- ❖ There is evidence of light pollution at night that impacts on the perception of the rural night landscape as well as causing 'sky glow'.
- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and

Associated Guidelines

appraisals of settlements within Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation.

- Undertake sensitive woodland planting to reduce the intrusion of the motorway, other major roads and large buildings.
- Consider possibilities for woodland creation in urban fringe areas where these could enhance landscape character and quality, provide recreational potential, and assist in the positive integration of the urban into the rural landscape while conserving significant views to landmark features.
- Care should be taken in the siting and design of industrial buildings and estates to ensure that key landscape characteristics are maintained.
- Encourage use of full cut-off lights and sensitively designed lighting schemes to reduce the impact of light pollution on night skies.
- Undertake sympathetic screening to minimise the impact of new and existing roads.
- Consider the use of bridges rather than embankments to allow permeability beneath the bridge

Key Issues

fragmentation of the landscape.

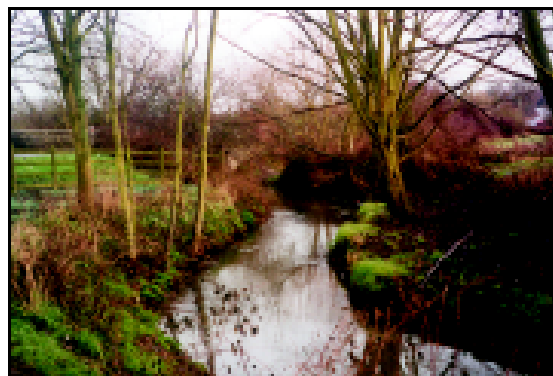
- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the landscape.

Associated Guidelines

thereby reducing fragmentation of the landscape as a result of road building.

- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.

J1: WOKINGHAM-WINNERSH SETTLED AND FARMED CLAY



J2: ARBORFIELD CROSS AND BARKHAM SETTLED AND FARMED CLAY

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 14.28 The *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* is a large, irregularly shaped area just to the south east of the centre of the district. Its London Clay geology is reflected in the flat to gently undulating landform. The principal land uses are settlement and agriculture. Large fields with hedgerows predominate both for arable and for sheep pasture with smaller, fenced paddocks featuring near to settlements. Hedgerow trees are important in retaining the rural, wooded feel of the landscape, in combination with small woodlands and shelterbelts and the presence of views towards woods on surrounding higher ground.
- 14.29 Settlement takes on a wide variety of forms, including the Arborfield Garrison, suburbs of Wokingham and an older pattern of farmsteads and villages. The more modern development has little consistent character while the older buildings are characterised by vernacular materials, timber frame, brick and clay tiles.

Location and Boundaries

- 14.30 The *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* area is sited south east of the centre of the district and defined mainly by its Clay geology, gently undulating landform and to some extent by land use. To the west it abuts the lower lying *Arborfield Loddon River Terrace* (C1) and the boundary is defined by the 50m AOD contour line. Moving east two higher areas of wooded sand and gravel hills squeeze the area into narrow confines and the boundaries here follow the base of the hill slopes. To the north east the boundary is more pragmatically determined following the line of settlement around an outlying suburb of Wokingham and then in a wedge into the centre of the main settlement. To the south-east is *Finchampstead Forested*

and Settled Sands and the boundary here follows the well defined edge of the forested area.

Key Characteristics

- Large area of **rural farmland** interspersed with a fairly dense network of **mixed traditional and modern settlements**.
- **Predominantly flat to gently shelving** landform over a simple **Clay** geology with localised areas of **sandy** and **terrace** deposits.
- **Arable farming predominates** with **pasture** on slightly high ground and **paddocks** near settlement.
- **Large geometric fields** with remnants of **irregular early inclosure** and **Parliamentary fields** on **former commons**.
- **Declining hedgerow structure** showing gaps in many places or replaced by fences.
- **Hedgerow trees** in field boundaries and particularly along roads, **shelterbelts** and **small farm woods** are an important element in maintaining **rural character**.
- Presence of subtle **wooded shallow ‘valleys’** around the **Barkham Brook** known as ‘the Coombes’ extending to character area L1.
- Small **ponds** and **moated sites**.
- Older scattered **settlement of farms, hamlets** and small nucleated **villages** including Barkham and Arborfield Cross with **traditional character** and use of vernacular materials including **timber framing** and **clay tiles**.
- **Modern development** varies widely **with no consistent style or form**, including southern edge of **Wokingham** and industrial estate.
- **Arborfield Garrison and Barracks** with distinctive institutional **military buildings** within **security fencing** and **housing estates**.

Physical Landscape

- 14.31 The predominant geology of the area is London Clay with the sand of the Bagshot Formation in the east and localised Fourth and Fifth River Terrace gravel deposits in the far northern tips. There are also small

areas of Alluvium following the courses of the network of streams associated with the Barkham Brook, which crosses through this area.

- 14.32 The area is flat or gently undulating at between 50m and 65m AOD. In some areas it is more rolling with steeper slopes, for instance where it narrows between the two areas of hills to the west forming a shallow valley between Barkham and Arborfield. Locally these shallow valleys and the wooded area around them are known as 'The Coombes'.
- 14.33 The core of the area has Stagnogley soils, clayey or loamy with impeded drainage. To the west adjacent to the *Arborfield Loddon River Terrace* are Argillic Gleys, loamy with high groundwater, while to the east, over the sand of the Bagshot Formation are sandy soils – Gley Podzols again with impeded drainage. All these soils tend to have impeded drainage or high groundwater and there is a consistent pattern through the area of drainage channels, streams, ditches and open water bodies of varying sizes.

Historic Environment

- 14.34 It is likely that the clay soils, being difficult to work, remained predominantly wooded until Saxon times and were not settled during the prehistoric or Romano-British periods. There was a Domesday settlement at Barkham, although the present village has shifted from its original site, which is marked by the position of the church, and a late Medieval/Post-medieval moat manor at Church Farm. There is a second possible moat at the site of the former Biggs Farm, now within Arborfield Garrison.
- 14.35 Wokingham (described more fully in J1) was first recorded in 1146, being granted a market in 1219. Although the village of Arborfield Cross developed at a major junction of roads, the area as a whole contained few rural villages, and settlement outside Wokingham consisted mainly of dispersed farms.
- 14.36 Parliamentary inclosures produced the regular, straight-edged field boundaries that are particularly prevalent in the areas of former commons, such as at Langley Common and Barkham Common, areas of which remain well-preserved. Across the rest of the area,

however, the predominantly irregular field boundaries indicate the voluntary inclosure of earlier field systems.

- 14.37 Later developments have considerably changed the landscape. In particular the development of the headquarters of the Corps Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Training Establishment in World War II led to the formation of Arborfield Garrison, which now covers a large area of the former farmland.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
BCC. No. 155	Moat at Church Farm
BCC. No. 160	Moated site at Moat House near Arborfield Garrison
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	The Centre of Wokingham plus five other small areas ranged through the area including one at Arborfield.
<i>Conservation Areas</i>	
	Arborfield Cross Wokingham Town Centre (not covered by this assessment)
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	Cluster in the centre of Wokingham associated with Conservation Area, elsewhere very few generally small farmsteads.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
Bordering Swallowfield Park (see A2/C1)	

Ecological Character

- 14.38 This large character area is dominated by urban and arable land uses but has retained four sites with Wildlife Heritage Site status. These sites are restricted to the edges of the character area and include three woodland sites, two of which are of ancient origin and a grassland site with some woodland encroachment. The ancient

woodland sites are Pound Copse and Bottle Copse both of which are neglected coppice woodlands, dominated by oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*).

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Pound Copse 1.1ha / 1.8ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within C1</i>	Ancient woodland
Bottle Copse 7.0 / 0.8ha	Partly ancient woodland
Emms Copse	Ancient woodland
Hazeltons Copse	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Hogwood Shaw 1.2ha	Woodland
The Moors/Evencons Farm 5.1ha	Meadows, woodland
Farley Hill Woods: Great Copse/New Plantation/Kiln Copse 19.28ha	Woodland, wet gullies, heath
Claypit Copse 1.68ha	Woodland

Rural Land Use

- 14.39 The land is predominantly arable cultivation (except for the outskirts of Wokingham and the sprawling Arborfield Garrison). The large, geometric fields are bound by hedges and where gaps have occurred post and wire fencing is a common replacement. Mature trees are a feature of the hedgerows and are also scattered in fields. The trees are an important element in the landscape – combined with woodland belts and the wooded horizons of the hills they create a rural character to an area, which in places could otherwise be characterised

as urban fringe. Shelterbelts and small farm woodlands are typical lowland oak woodland, some with hazel coppice.

- 14.40 On higher ground there is permanent pasture for sheep grazing in large-scale field patterns. Small paddocks with post and rail fencing are associated with settled areas such as the fringes of Wokingham.
- 14.41 There is a regular network of rural roads throughout the area along with rural tracks, bridleways and, less frequently, footpaths. The latter gives access for recreational use, for instance to the ancient settlement of Barkham and to fishing ponds. The roads and tracks tend have a rural character with ditches, hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Fly tipping at the roadside in some areas detracts from this rural appearance.

Settlement and Built Character

- 14.42 This area contains a wide variety of settlement ranging from the suburban outskirts of Wokingham to the regimented and institutional Arborfield Garrison to scattered farms and villages, including part of Arborfield, Arborfield Cross (Conservation Area), and Barkham to industrial estates on the edge of Wokingham and to the south near Hogwood Farm. The rural farmsteads and hamlets are largely traditional buildings, timber framed or brick with clay tiles, with some weatherboarded barns. Newer development takes various forms without a consistent character or form.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 14.43 The *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* (J2) is a landscape of **moderate quality**. This is due to the combination of moderate landscape character and moderate overall condition. The **moderate character** is related to the presence of some notable characteristics including the Barkham Brook, the distinctive geometric field system, arable and pastoral fields, and a wide range of habitats. However, there are few features of particular uniqueness or distinctiveness – the exception being the moats, ‘the coombes’ wooded valleys and the presence of Arborfield Garrison. The **moderate condition** is related to factors such as fragmentation of the

field system (due to the declining hedgerow structure) and the maintenance of the areas in institutional use. Other elements in the landscape such as the pattern of small nucleated settlements and natural tributary streams create localised areas in good condition.

Landscape Strategy

- 14.44 The overall objective for the *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* is for **enhancement**. Certain elements of the landscape including the historic field systems, habitats, moats, rural lanes and wooded valleys should be retained/respected. Landscape enhancement should include better integration of the garrison in its landscape setting, and more general improvements to woodland, farmland and habitat management.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 14.45 The *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* (J2) is a landscape of **moderate sensitivity**. Most elements would be difficult but not impossible to replace or restore, in particular the pattern of older settlements, the areas of intact, historic field system and the rural qualities of the roads. Most characteristics are valued at the local scale of importance, although the peaceful rural qualities are rare at a regional or even national level. This landscape has a wooded context – with trees forming shelterbelts and wooded hills that restrict views and reduce visual sensitivity.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 14.46 The following table sets out the main issues affecting or with potential to affect the character of the *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* (J2) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to enhance the current character by retaining the current positive characteristics and seeking to improve the condition of characteristics which are not in their ideal state, and sensitively integrating appropriate new characteristics.

Key Issues

Agriculture

- ❖ Hedgerow loss and replacement with fencing is evident – this is associated

Associated Guidelines

- Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape

Key Issues

with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture. Poor maintenance of hedgerows leading to thinning and a dominance of ash is also a concern.

- ❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.
- ❖ Decline in demand for traditional countryside products leading to loss of rural features e.g. loss of pollarded willows on waterside pasture (also affected by river management practise).
- ❖ Presence of marginal agricultural land being kept in 'hope' value, particularly around settlement edges, which is of poor visual character. This is particularly the case in the north of this area around the Wokingham fringes.

Associated Guidelines

features and promote sensitive management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.

- Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and local produce initiatives, to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
- Encourage and develop markets for products to encourage farm diversification supporting such features.
- Seek to maintain a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for the village or town.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general
- Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
- Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous

Key Issues

shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.

- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.

Associated Guidelines

woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.

- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ Not thought to be an issue.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture. This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.
- ❖ Uncertain future trends regarding MOD activity and infrastructure in the area is a continuing threat to the natural environment.
- ❖ Over-maturity of veteran hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.

- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats – the small tributaries – through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (the combe valleys).
- Seek to work with government agencies (MOD) to improve the presentation of military landscapes and encourage adoption of ecologically sensitive management regimes.
- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland, hedgerow and street trees.

Recreation

- ❖ High demands for recreation continue to threaten the tranquillity of the landscape.

- Seek sympathetic integration of new recreational features and seek to locate such activities in areas of low tranquillity.

Key Issues

- ❖ Pressure for more horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to an accumulation of shelters, vehicles and equipment.
- ❖ Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated district.

Associated Guidelines

- Paddocks to be sensitive to existing character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows and providing appropriate sward management.
- Maximise the contribution made by the forestry resource for recreational purposes, to draw pressure away from more sensitive landscapes.
- Consider zoning of activities to ensure sensitive landscapes are protected from damaging activities.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.
- ❖ The pressure for large areas of housing is resulting in the dereliction and loss of traditional dwellings, dilution of vernacular character and loss of distinct architectural style.
- ❖ There is continuing pressure for expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.
- ❖ Pressure for expansion of built development on the edges of towns is leading to suburbanisation of the landscape, loss of individual settlement identity and blocking of

- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation or ribbon development of these settlements, particularly around the southern edge of Wokingham.
- Conserve historic buildings and consider undertaking built character appraisals across the District to identify local styles, layouts, densities and materials that may be appropriate in new buildings and the spaces between these buildings.
- Consider undertaking character appraisals of settlements within Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation.
- Consider possibilities for woodland creation in urban fringe areas where these could enhance landscape character and quality, provide recreational potential, and assist in the positive integration of the urban

Key Issues

views.

Associated Guidelines

into the rural landscape while conserving significant views to landmark features.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
 - ❖ Increasing transport pressures on rural roads is occurring as a result of traffic taking diversions to avoid delays in the urban areas leading to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air pollution in rural areas.
 - ❖ There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.
 - ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.
- Maintain the historic leafy lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural locations.
 - Consider the use of traffic calming and access restrictions to maintain the tranquillity of the most rural areas. This would also make the use of rural roads more attractive for cyclists and recreational users.
 - Undertake sympathetic screening to minimise the impact of new and existing roads.
 - Consider the use of bridges rather than embankments to allow permeability beneath the bridge thereby reducing fragmentation of the landscape as a result of road building.
 - Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.

J2: ARBORFIELD CROSS AND BARKHAM SETTLED AND FARMED CLAY



J3: SPENCERS WOOD SETTLED AND FARMED CLAY

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 14.47 The *Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay* is located in the south-west of the District, between the *Loddon River Valley* to the east and the *Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland* to the west. It is an undulating pasture dominated with a patchwork of moderate sized pasture and arable fields divided by hedgerows featuring mature hedgerow oaks. There are a number of woodlands, either mixed woodland belts and tree clumps associated with the remnant deciduous copses that once formed part of the extensive woodlands of Windsor Forest.
- 14.48 The character and diversity of this rural landscape is enhanced by the presence of the ancient river terraces of the Thames with acidic soils supporting woodland and parkland characterised by acid-loving species such as Scots pine, birch, holly and rhododendron.
- 14.49 The traditional built form is the rural farmstead – constructed from soft red brick. Weatherboarding is a distinctive feature of the associated barns. Roofs are often half-hipped and clay tiled and traditional brick walls are typical boundary features. Some of these traditional rural buildings are now encapsulated within the more recent suburban development that dominates the built character of the area today.
- 14.50 This character area retains a rural character although there is a strong (sub)urbanising influence as a result of the proximity to the large town of Reading.

Location and Boundaries

- 14.51 The *Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay* is a clay ridge that separates the *Loddon River Valley* (area A2) from *Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland* (area I3) in the south-west of the District. Its eastern boundary abuts the *Loddon River Valley* (area A2) and this boundary is clearly defined by a change in topography where the clay ridge ends and the flat valley floor begins. The western boundary of the

character area is also defined by topography and this coincides with the A33 along part of its length. In the north the boundary is defined by the urban edge of Reading and in the south the boundary is dictated by Wokingham District's administrative boundary. It is recognised that the character area extends beyond this administrative boundary into the adjacent District.

Key Characteristics

- **Rolling clay ridge** enclosing **Loddon Valley** to the east and lowlands to west, punctuated by the valley of the Foundry Brook.
- **Substantial post-Victorian residential settlement with suburban character** at Spencers Wood, Three Mile Cross, Shinfield and in **linear** form along the roads connecting adjacent settlements, creating the **perception of denser settlement**.
- Predominantly **pasture** plus areas of arable farmland within a **variety of field sizes including some small irregular fields**, indicative of **early inclosure**, located around settlements. Increasing presence of horse-keeping.
- **Intact hedgerow network** with **hedgerow oaks** as features.
- **Scattered traditional farmsteads** with **red brick** and **weatherboarding**.
- **Woodland blocks** and **copses** including some **ancient woodland**.
- Patches of **Scots Pine**, **birch**, **holly** and **rhododendron** marking underlying presence of isolated pockets of older acidic **river terrace outcrops**.
- Former **Common land** at Spencers Wood, to west of Basingstoke Road, is an important defining feature of the settlement and based around Stanbury Park and Highlands.
- **Remnant parkland** at Shinfield Park (The Grove), Loddon Court and Shinfield Lodge.
- **Sense of elevation** and **good views** over surrounding lowlands.

- Network of rural lanes bordered by water-filled ditches.

Physical Landscape

- 14.52 The *Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay* is a prominent, undulating clay ridge rising to a flat, sandy plateau. This sandy plateau is in fact an old (5th level) river terrace, deposited as a terrace of a proto-Thames and left high above the present day valley. The terrace is typically coarse loose sand and gravel with some imbedded flints or pebbles. The soils in this isolated area are acidic and this gives rise to distinctive vegetation and land use around Spencers Wood. The former unenclosed common land of Spencerswood is now a network of fields, woodland and parkland and is characterised by the presence of Scots pine, birch, holly and rhododendron. This contrasts with the Stagnogley soils on the remainder of the ridge. These soils are clayey or loamy over clayey soils that suffer impeded drainage resulting in an agricultural landscape dominated by pasture.
- 14.53 The sandy plateau of Spencers Wood is a flat area that forms the highest point of the ridge, reaching 66m AOD at Stanbury Park. The remainder of the ridge is an undulating 'ridge' landscape, between two lowland areas: *Loddon River Valley* to the east and *Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland* to the west.

Historic Environment

- 14.54 In common with clay soils found elsewhere in the district there is little evidence for extensive prehistoric or Romano-British settlement of this area at the edge of the Loddon river valley. However, by Saxon times it appears likely that settlement and agriculture expanded onto previously marginal areas – the “-*feld*” element in the name of Shinfield, a Domesday settlement, suggesting a largely open and cultivated landscape in the Saxon period.
- 14.55 In the Medieval period in this area, forest law protected the Crown's hunting, timber and other rights over both private and common land in the face of pressure from assart incursions into the woodland for cultivation and pasture. The piecemeal clearance of woodland to form cultivable land by assarting, and later by agreement, continued until the 18th century.

- 14.56 The 1st edition OS map shows the area to contain numerous small irregular fields with wavy boundaries, indicative of early inclosure of former open fields, as well as of heath and common as at Spencers Common. Some of the common still existed at the time the map was drawn. With adjoining landscapes of the Loddon (A2, C1) and Farley Hill (L2) these form the largest area of early enclosure landscape in the district. Many of the boundaries of these small fields have been lost in the modern amalgamation of fields, although a considerable area of this field systems survives particularly around Three Mile Cross and Spencers Wood.
- 14.57 There are a number of moated sites around Shinfield, the construction of moats in the Post-medieval period being a commonly practiced way of enhancing the status and appearance of a manor or other large house. It is evident from the early maps that settlement consisted primarily of quite closely-spaced Medieval/Post-medieval farmsteads, interspersed with country houses and areas of landscaped parkland, traces of which are still evident to varying degrees around Shinfield Park (The Grove), Stanbury Park, Highlands and Loddon Court.
- 14.58 There was a loose network of winding country lanes, but few major roads until the 18th century. The road between Reading and Basingstoke was one of the earliest turnpikes in Berkshire, established in 1718. The settlement character changed markedly from the late 19th century to the early 20th century with new developments at Spencers Wood, Three Mile Cross and Shinfield. Other significant 20th century additions are the World War II pillboxes located in the south of the area, which form part of the defensive GHQ line which extends northwards along the Foudry Brook.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	There is a large amount of sites particularly around Sheepbridge Church Farm with scattered sites

Designations	Summary of Importance
	elsewhere.
Listed Buildings	
	Listed buildings are associated with the settlements of Three Mile Cross, Spencers Wood and Shinfield.
English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.	
None	

Ecological Character

- 14.59 This *Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay* is characterised by small and widely scattered woodland blocks. In total there are six woodlands with Wildlife Heritage Site status, three of which are recognised as being of ancient origin. These ancient woodlands have a history of coppice with standard management. Often this traditional management has ceased, but at Pearman's Copse Wokingham District Council has reintroduced this management system. Old ash stools with field maple (*Acer campestre*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) dominate Pearman's Copse, and it supports a rich woodland flora with around 27 ancient woodland indicator species and a good range of woodland invertebrates.
- 14.60 This character area also contains Clare's Green Field, which represents unimproved neutral grassland with Wildlife Heritage Site status for its botanical interest.

Designations	Summary of Importance
Site of Special Scientific Interest	
None	
Local Nature Reserves	
None	
Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland	
Clay Hill 1.5 / 1.5ha – <i>part of this site also falls within I3</i>	Ancient woodland

Designations	Summary of Importance
Normans Shaw 0.9 / 0.9ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within I3</i>	Ancient woodland
Pearman's Copse 2.1 / 2.0ha	Ancient woodland
Beech Hill Coverts	Ancient woodlands
High Copse	Ancient woodland (partly replanted)
Whitley Wood	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Wood and Ditch Moat 1.6ha	Woodland
Woods between Whitehouse and Highlands 10.8ha	Woodlands
Clare's Green Field 1.3ha	Neutral grassland
Nore's Hill 5.1ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within I3</i>	Woodland
<i>Denotified</i>	
Field at School Green 3.3ha	Grassland, MG5b

Rural Land Use

- 14.61 The dominant land use is agriculture with much retained as pasture. The rolling farmland is characterised by a variety of field sizes divided by largely intact hedgerows and hedgerow oaks. Fields around Three Mile Cross and Spencers Wood are small and irregular with wavy boundaries, indicating early inclosure of former open fields. However, many of these smaller fields have now been lost. The flat plateau area on the sandy soils of the 5th River Terrace was formerly Spencerswood Common but all common land has now been enclosed.
- 14.62 There are a number of woodlands, either mixed woodland belts and tree clumps associated with the designed landscapes or remnant deciduous copses that once formed part of the extensive woodlands of Windsor Forest. The presence of parkland is a feature of the landscape and parkland trees stand out as features against the

skyline especially the avenue of *Metasequoia* at the entrance to Stanbury Park.

- 14.63 Residential development is also a significant use of land. Boundaries include rows of conifers and suburban fences that have eroded the rural character of the ridge and contrast with the native hedgerows and hedgerow trees of the surrounding farmland. Other features that have an urbanising influence on the landscape are street lighting, kerbs and pavements, lay-bys and municipal street furniture.
- 14.64 A network of footpaths provides opportunities for informal recreation with views over the surrounding lowland landscapes. There are also a number of narrow tracks that give the areas beyond the settlement more rural character.

Settlement and Built Character

- 14.65 The area is characterised by the presence of small agricultural and village settlements that have seen significant post-Victorian expansion. For example, the flat plateau area on the sandy soils of the 5th River Terrace was formerly Spencerswood Common at a time when Spencers Wood was a small common edge settlement. At this time Shinfield and Three Mile Cross were small agricultural settlements and the remainder of the area was characterised by scattered farmsteads and country houses associated with parkland. Map evidence suggests this was the case until at least 1883. However, the area saw rapid expansion during the Victorian and post-Victorian periods resulting in a number of good example Victorian semi-detached properties. Today the area is well settled with ribbon development merging adjacent settlements. The presence of ribbon development gives the impression of a higher density of development as one travels along the roads than is actually the case.
- 14.66 The extensive modern built development today illustrates a large range of different house styles and use of materials. However, the traditional built form is still the rural farmstead, constructed from soft red brick with weatherboarding on agricultural outbuildings. Clay roofs add to the warm tones of the built environment and brick walls form the typical boundary. Some of these traditional

agricultural buildings are now encapsulated within the more recent suburban development where they are regarded as historic built features and landmark buildings.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 14.67 The *Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay* (J3) is a landscape of overall **moderate quality**. This is because it has a moderate character and a moderate condition. The overall **moderate character** arises due to the combination of a number of distinctive characteristics – the landform and the pastoral land use within a wooded setting for example. Also notable are the remnants of historic parklands and commons, habitats, views (particularly of the Loddon valley). The presence of the relatively densely-settled area of Spencers Wood with suburban development mean that the rural character is diluted in some areas. The **moderate condition** arises due to the survival of some elements of the former field patterns, ancient woodland copses and presence of relatively well-managed hedgerows, but also the influence of the suburban edge of Reading which breaks down the integrity of the rural landscape due to the presence of elements such as suburban fencing and coniferous shelterbelts.

Landscape Strategy

- 14.68 The overall objective for the *Spencers Wood Farmed and Settled Clay* landscape type is to **enhance** elements of existing character. Opportunities to enhance the landscape exist where the suburban edge of Reading is diluting the rural integrity of the character area – woodland planting is an option. Key characteristics that should be considered in any change are the woodlands (especially those of ancient origin), the vernacular buildings, and the views into the surrounding landscape (especially the Loddon Valley), remnant parkland and pastureland within intact hedgerows.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 14.69 The *Spencers Wood Farmed and Settled Clay* landscape has a **moderate sensitivity** overall. Most of the key characteristics would be difficult but not impossible to recreate, with the most difficult being

the early inclosure field patterns, ancient woodland and mature hedgerows with mature oak standards. With the exception of the ancient woodlands most of the characteristics are valued at the local level. The most sensitive aspects of the landscape are the ancient woodland copses, pasture enclosed within historic field boundaries and the sense of elevation and views provided across the adjacent lowland landscapes.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

14.70 The following table sets out the main issues affecting or with potential to affect the character of the *Spencers Wood Farmed and Settled Clay* (J3) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to enhance the character of the area by retaining and managing the current positive characteristics.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Some hedgerow loss is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.	• Conserve and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.	• Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and local produce initiatives, to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
Forestry and Woodland Management	
❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred	• Conserve all ancient woodland copses, and continue to promote appropriate management through

Key Issues

in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.

- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.
- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.

Minerals

- ❖ No significant issues – river terrace gravels are unlikely to be commercially viable.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Over-maturity of veteran parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.
- ❖ The pressure for large areas of housing is resulting in the dereliction and loss of traditional

Associated Guidelines

natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.

- Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland and hedgerow trees.

- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. In particular seek to preserve the gap between Spencers Wood/Shinfield and Shinfield/Whitley Wood.

- Conserve historic buildings and consider undertaking built character appraisals across the District to

Key Issues

dwelling, dilution of vernacular character and loss of distinct architectural style.

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.
- ❖ Infilling of village greens and former heaths with built development has resulted in loss of settlement structure, communal areas and village focus.
- ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- ❖ Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham landscape.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual

Associated Guidelines

identify local styles, layouts, densities and materials that may be appropriate in new buildings and the spaces between these buildings.

- Consider undertaking character appraisals of settlements within Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation.
- Restrict further ribbon development and consider opportunities to strengthen and enhance the landscape setting to the villages through planting.
- Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained.
- Consider the impact of any development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Retain the wooded skylines of Wokingham District.

Key Issues

intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.

- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Associated Guidelines

- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.

J3: SPENCERS WOOD SETTLED AND FARMED CLAY



J4: WOODLEY–EARLEY SETTLED AND FARMED CLAY

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 14.71 The *Woodley–Earley Settled and Farmed Clay* is located in the east of the district west of Reading. In common with the *Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay* this area is densely settled. Falling almost entirely within established settlement boundaries, this area is not within the study area boundary (which specifically excludes the larger settlements). However, an assessment of the Wokingham landscape would be incomplete without reference to the district's most extensive area of settlement and therefore an outline assessment of the landscape and its contribution to wider landscape character is included here (it is not a detailed townscape or urban character assessment).
- 14.72 The *Woodley–Earley Settled and Farmed Clay* is one of the most densely settled areas of the district with a strong urban and suburban character. Development is predominantly composed of post-war housing estates with associated commercial and institutional uses. Within the settled area there are pockets of open space, some large, which are public parks or associated with the grounds of institutions such as the University of Reading, schools and colleges. Many of these are wooded and located in prominent elevated locations or occupying linear corridors associated with the small tributary streams that cross the settled area.

Location and Boundaries

- 14.73 Located east of which is contiguous with the urban area of the *Woodley–Earley Settled and Farmed Clay*, this area is to a large extent delineated by the administrative boundary. To the north a natural landscape boundary occurs defined by the transition to the floodplain landscape of the *Thames River Valley* (A1) and the distinctive *Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes* (D2). To the east the boundary is defined by

the abrupt transition to the natural floodplain landscape of the Loddon River Valley with Open Water (B1). This boundary is largely defined by roads (including a section of the M4) along the floodplain edge and/or the edge of the current settlement limit.

Key Characteristics

- A **highly urbanised landscape** due the presence of the town of Reading and the extension of settlement (Woodley and Earley) into their former agricultural hinterland.
- **Marginal agricultural land** with a small remaining area of rural land (in the north) exhibiting an **urban fringe character** and defined by remnant fragment of arable agricultural land.
- The **urban landscape** is defined by **dense settlement** with **post war and modern estates** around earlier Victorian buildings and former country houses.
- **Overriding suburban and urban character** exaggerated by the developed network of roads including 'A' roads and the M4.
- Network of **recreation spaces** in and around the built-up area including **parklands, golf courses** and the grounds of extensive institutions – many of which have their origin in **former historic parkland** e.g. Whiteknights Estate/University of Reading.
- **Gently rolling clay ridge** enclosing the Loddon Valley to the west, capped with linear bands of older river terrace outcrops, but largely imperceptible due to the urban influence.
- A number of **Wildlife Heritage Sites** both **woodland** and **open water**. Small **tributary streams**, many of which have been dammed to form **lakes**.
- The setting for the residential areas are enhanced by the **subtly wooded ridgeline and stream corridors**
- **Generally an enclosed landscape** but with **some good views** over surrounding lowlands from the open areas at the edge of the settled area.

Physical Landscape

- 14.74 The *Woodley–Earley Settled and Farmed Clay* character area is based upon a gently rolling area underlain by London Clay, between the valleys of the Thames and Loddon, which rises from around 40m AOD to a ridge of land at between 60 and 80m AOD. Being located close to two important valley landscapes this area has been extensively overlain by a series of gravels relating to ancient river terraces. The soils produced are largely argillic brown earths with stagnogleys in the south, which are capable of supporting mixed farmland with woodland retained on the sandier and gravelly areas.
- 14.75 There are a number of small, tributaries of the Loddon, which drain through this area in an easterly direction to connect to the Old River. Due to the urban situation these have been culverted/canalised in parts but they also form the basis for open spaces where they flow through open parkland. The principal lakes of the area are the large forked water body at Whiteknights campus, South Lake, and the pond near Long Moor. There is also a lake relating to the flooded former gravel extraction near Ashenbury Park with links to the *Loddon River Valley with Open Water* (B1). There was once also an additional large lake in the area – North Lake – close to South Lake, but this has been infilled.

Historic Environment

- 14.76 The modern settlement dominates this landscape. However, Woodley and Earley (a Domesday settlement) contain “–leah” thus indicating early settlement was in a wooded landscape, which is further supported by the irregular boundaries (suggesting assart inclosures) of surviving areas of woodland, such as Alder Moor. A small area of the remaining undeveloped land to the north retains cropmarks indicative of Roman agriculture set within predominantly 20th century enclosure patterns.
- 14.77 The 1st edition OS map shows Woodley and Earley as small rural communities within a landscape comprising a mix of irregular and straight-sided fields, as well as extensive areas of parkland associated with large country houses such as Whiteknights Park (possibly the site of a Medieval deerpark at Earley, and now the

campus of Reading University), Bulmershe Court (now demolished, but built in 1777 with grounds designed by Capability Brown in an Italianate style), Maiden Early and Shinfield Lodge. The ornamental grounds of Whiteknights were once famous for their collection of plants collected by the Marquess of Blandford, later fifth Duke of Marlborough.

- 14.78 The Bath Road passes through the area, as does the Great Western Railway line, completed in 1840, at the point where it enters the Sonning cutting. Planned urban development after World War II encouraged by the success of Reading was stimulated by the A329(M) motorway which connects the area to the M4 motorway. Woodley and Earley were both granted town status in 1974.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
BCC. No. 176	Cropmark S. of Charvil Lane
BCC. No. 177	Cropmark N E of Model Farm Cottages.
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	These sites are associated with the SAMs and also include areas south of Charvill, near Moor Copse and fields E of Shire Hall (N of M4)
<i>Conservation Area</i>	
	Woodley Green Sonning
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	There are two within the Woodley Green conservation area. Elsewhere there are about sixteen individual buildings scattered across the area – relatively few given the size of the settled area. These include a number at Whiteknights and the college north of the M4, but are otherwise domestic in nature.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens</i>	
None.	

Ecological Character

- 14.79 Although the *Woodley–Earley Settled and Farmed Clay* is dominated by urban development, it has retained a significant number of sites of nature conservation value. This includes a variety of habitat types such as acid woodland, wet woodland, heathland and open water. In total there are two Local Nature Reserves and nine Wildlife Heritage Sites within this character area.
- 14.80 One of the Local Nature Reserves known as High Wood represents a substantial woodland block of some 15ha. It is acid oak woodland with hazel (*Corylus avellana*), wych elm (*Ulmus glabra*), sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) and a ground layer dominated by bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*). A small area of remnant heathland has been retained on the north side of the wood. Management of this site has focused on the removal of invasive species such as rhododendron (*Rhodoendron ponticum*) and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*).
- 14.81 Of the woodland sites only Redhatch Copse is recognised as being of ancient origin, it is typical of the coppice woodlands in the District being dominated by oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel. The remaining woodland sites are represented by small secondary woods, with eight having Wildlife Heritage Site status. The majority of these are wet woods are characterised by ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) with notable ground layer species including opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*) and marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*).

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
Highwood 15.1ha	Woodland
Maiden Early Lakes and Woods 10.1ha	Open water, woodland
Aldermoor	Mixed ancient semi-natural and secondary wet woodland
Ali's Pond	A small lined pond with a meadow surrounding it and two lengths of species rich hedgerow.
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Redhatch Copse 3.7 / 3.7ha	Ancient woodland
Pearmans Copse	Ancient woodland
Oak Wood	Ancient woodland
Moor Copse	Ancient woodland
Waingel Copse	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Rushey Way Pond 0.1ha	Open water
Old Pond Copse / Moor Copse 5.7ha	Woodland
Southlake Park 6.8ha	Open water, woodland
Whiteknights Park 26.2ha	Woodland
Bulmershe Carr 0.7ha	Wet woodland, open water
Alder Moors 11.1ha	Woodland, open water
Norris's Copse 8.4ha	Woodland
Sandpit Copse 1.4ha	Woodland
High Wood 15.09ha	Woodland
Sandford Fen 3.66ha	Calcareous woodland
The Moors	Open meadow, wetlands, meadows

Rural Land Use

- 14.82 There is relatively little land in this character area that could be considered ‘rural’. There are a few remnant fragments of relatively flat arable agricultural land located north of the Bath Road to the south of Sonning Farm – the teaching farm of the University of Reading.
- 14.83 Elsewhere within this area the land, which has not been given over to built development (and gardens) is used as public open space and typical urban fringe recreation spaces. This includes a large (but relatively well screened and infrequently visible) golf course at Charvil Hill. There are also a large number of playing fields associated with the schools including those north of the Bath Road. A number of the public parks or grounds of the large institutions have a natural character (including areas of important habitat) such as the bird sanctuary associated with the restored gravel workings at Ashenbury Park, The Moor Copse Recreation Ground and High Wood. Based upon former designed landscapes some of these areas including Whiteknights campus retain a parkland feel. There are also a small number of allotment sites in this character area.
- 14.84 The presence of wooded and open space within the urban framework (and street trees), particularly where they are associated with the more elevated areas is very important and provides a verdant counterpoint to the built fabric both from within and when viewed across the valley. The open spaces also permit occasional views out into the surrounding landscape, such as the views of the Loddon Valley from the reservoir site near Redhatch Copse.

Settlement and Built Character

- 14.85 This area is extensively settled. The settlement has largely expanded due to the outwards growth of Reading and therefore the new settlement can be seen to have not so much expanded out from the older cores of Woodley Green, Earley and Butts Hill, but to have engulfed these earlier centres from the east with a disaggregated grid of planned post WW2 estates, culminating in the modern housing estates at the fringe of the area adjacent to the Loddon Valley. Early and Woodley are both settlements historically associated with the

Loddon Valley. There is no discernable vernacular – the presence of older buildings in the historic cores being subsumed within the suburban architecture of later buildings. The historic core at Woodley Green is a Conservation Area.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 14.86 The landscape of the *Woodley–Earley Settled and Farmed Clay* (I4) (outside the settled area) is evaluated as being of **moderate quality**. Although character is generally weak, it is overall in moderate condition. The **weak character** relates to the fact that there are no obvious or striking landscape characteristics and the remaining land use is fragmented and lacks unity. The characteristics are in overall **moderate condition**. Although many features have been lost, many that remain are generally in good repair but there are numerous opportunities for improvement of other elements. Those aspects making a definite contribution to the landscape quality are settlement and built form, the presence of wildlife habitats and the former historic parkland at Whiteknights.

Landscape Strategy

- 14.87 The overall objective for the *Woodley–Earley Settled and Farmed Clay* is to **enhance** remaining landscape features with opportunities to **renew/create** landscape character where the agricultural land has become marginal and fragmented due to urban pressures. This entails promoting positive change and management, whilst restoring lost elements which would enhance the character of the new landscape. Woodland planting is a key opportunity.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 14.88 The landscape components generally have a low or low–moderate degree of sensitivity. These different sensitivities combine to give the landscape of the *Woodley–Earley Settled and Farmed Clay* a **low sensitivity** overall with most characteristics important at the local scale. The most sensitive characteristics are the remnant historic parkland surviving as recreation areas/campus and the surviving

woodland, particularly the area of ancient woodland. Visual sensitivity is judged to be moderate. Although much of the landscape is enclosed, some good views can be gained over the surrounding lowlands from the open areas at the edge of the settled area.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

14.89 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the character of the *Woodley–Earley Settled and Farmed Clay* (J4) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to ensure that the landscape is appropriately managed to enhance the distinctiveness and strength of character of the remaining fragments of undeveloped land through the renewal/creation of landscape character.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Hedgerow loss and soil erosion is evident – this is associated with the intensification of agriculture. This particularly applies to the area between Sonning and Woodley.	• Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
❖ Presence of marginal agricultural land being kept in ‘hope’ value, particularly around settlement edges, which is of poor visual character.	• Seek to maintain a positive interface between the built up and rural areas to provide an appropriate setting for the settlement.
Forestry and Woodland Management	
❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management and built development.	• Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected

Key Issues

Associated Guidelines

woodlands. Continue to manage the former parkland areas.

- Further woodland planting is a key opportunity in this area.

Minerals

- ❖ Not likely to be an issue.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Over-maturity of veteran parkland and street trees is an on-going concern.
- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland and street trees.

Recreation

- ❖ High demands for recreation including recreational facilities.
- Seek sympathetic integration of new recreational features and seek to locate such activities in areas of lowest tranquillity.
- ❖ Pressure for golf courses that have an impact on the character of the landscape.
- Golf courses to be sympathetically sited and integrated into the landscape.
- ❖ Pressure for more pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- Develop guidance on management of paddocks – to be sensitive to existing landscape character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent built areas and fragmentation of the remnant open rural landscape.
- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the undeveloped character of the landscape around the settlement edge. This particularly applies to the vulnerable area of land located between Woodley and the Thames Valley/Sonning and across the Loddon near Winnersh.
- ❖ Dilution of vernacular character and loss of distinct architectural style.
- Conserve historic buildings and consider undertaking built character appraisals across the District to identify local styles,

Key Issues

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.
- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new industrial developments and commercial premises, particularly associated with the major transport corridors.
- ❖ Pressure for expansion of built development on the edges of towns is leading to suburbanisation of the landscape, loss of individual settlement identity and blocking of views.
- ❖ Demand for industrial buildings associated with transport corridors leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the landscape.
- ❖ Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham landscape.

Infrastructure

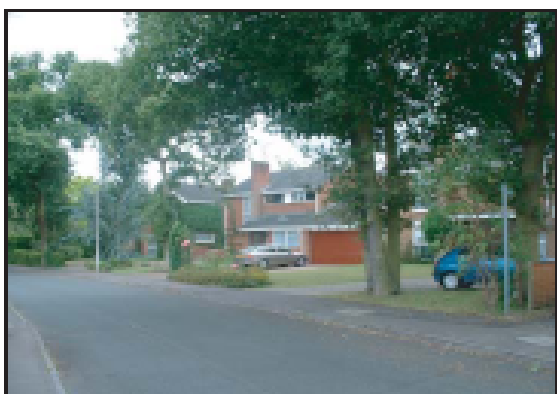
- ❖ No significant additional issues.

Associated Guidelines

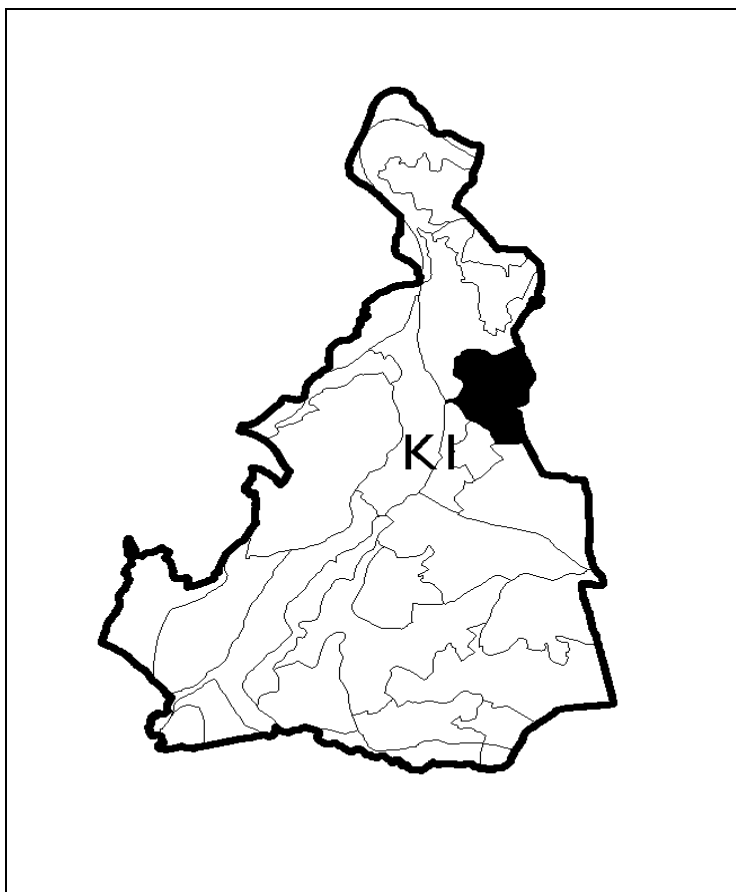
layouts, densities and materials that may be appropriate in new buildings and the spaces between these buildings.

- Consider undertaking character appraisals of settlements within Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation.
- Undertake sensitive woodland planting to reduce the intrusion of the motorway, other major roads and large buildings.
- Consider possibilities for woodland creation in urban fringe areas where these could enhance landscape character and quality, provide recreational potential, and assist in the positive integration of the urban into the rural landscape while conserving significant views to landmark features.
- Care should be taken in the siting and design of industrial buildings and estates to ensure that key landscape characteristics are maintained.
- Consider the impact of any development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Retain the wooded skylines of Wokingham.

J4: WOODLEY-EARLEY SETTLED AND FARMED CLAY



15 LANDSCAPE TYPE K: FARMED SAND AND CLAY LOWLAND



Landscape Character Areas

K1: Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland.

Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 15.1 There is only one area of the Landscape Type classified as *Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland*. This distinctive area is located in the east of the district and to the southeast of Twyford. This area is characterised by a lowland character with a mixed geology dominated by alluvial drift and Lambeth Group with some London Clay. The landscape is between 30m and 35m AOD being predominantly flat with some gentle hills and includes a number of small watercourses. The landscape includes numerous woodland belts following the watercourses and woodland blocks, resulting in a wooded and lush appearance.

Key Characteristics

- Underlying mixed alluvial, Lambeth Group and Clay geology.
- Flat 'basin' with variation provided by gentle hills.

- Lush quality due to presence of numerous small watercourses, ponds, drainage channels and bogs.
- Sense of woodiness created by woodland blocks and watercourse belts.
- Dominated by rough grassland and arable farmland but with specialised crops including vines.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

15.2 The *Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* is a distinctive area, which is unique at the local scale and does not occur elsewhere in the district. As a consequence this landscape type or its equivalent did not appear in the Berkshire Landscape Assessment. In that assessment this area appears as part of *L1: Open Clay Lowlands* at its transition with *M1: Open Chalk Lowlands*, which lies to the north. Comparatively, in this assessment the landscape to the north is classified as *H1: Arable Chalk Lowlands* and the landscape to the south as *Type I: Arable Open Clay Lowlands*. However, being at the district scale assessment this assessment has drawn out the subtleties between this area and the open clay lowlands elsewhere.

K1: STANLAKE FARMED SAND AND CLAY LOWLAND

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 15.3 The *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* is a unique landscape within Wokingham District with many features unusual or uncommon elsewhere. Located in the east of the district this area is dominated by its lowland qualities, which contrast with the elevated wooded hills occurring to the north and south. A damp and boggy landscape, this area supports a network of small tributary streams and ponds set amongst the rough pasture and farmland. In medieval times a larger lake – Ruscombe Lake – was present. In part this may be responsible for the general absence of settlement throughout most of this area with the scattered farmsteads, houses and the hamlet of Ruscombe confined to the edge of the area or located on the gently hilly area to the north, resulting in a sense of remoteness. The area is also characterised by its wooded quality due to the presence of natural riparian woodlands associated with the tributaries and mixed woodlands and parklands.

Location and Boundaries

- 15.4 The *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* is located along the eastern boundary of Wokingham District, close to the village of Twyford, and includes the small hamlet of Ruscombe. The eastern boundary of this character area is defined by the district boundary, and continues for a short distance into Bracknell Forest District and the Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The landscape is distinguished to the north by the obvious change to a large-scale farmed chalk landscape, which appears to occur north of the B3024. To the south and east the transition is more complex being represented by the terrace and small-scale paddock landscapes around Hurst (Areas C2 and I4), and the open farmed clay (of I1) to the south. Field boundaries and roads have been used to define these boundaries.

Key Characteristics

- A very **flat landscape with gentle hills** to the south and east underlain by a varied geology of alluvium, clay and sandy clay influencing a **mixed land cover pattern**.
- **Landscape features** including a multitude of **tributaries** including Stanlake Brook and Billingbear Brook, **ponds, drainage channels and ditches**.
- Farmland interspersed by areas of **wetland and woodland** including **arable** farming and contained within **large field units** with **few hedgerows** or hedgerow standard trees.
- A **wooded and enclosed character** defined by natural deciduous woodland, planted mixed blocks, areas of scrubby vegetation and wet waterside vegetation; creating wooded horizons.
- **Remote, natural landscape quality** due to the general scarcity of settlement and degree of inaccessibility.
- The hamlet of **Ruscombe** adjacent to the church (with its brick walls and plain tile roofs), **farmsteads** and **manors**.
- Important **grassland** and **woodland habitats**.
- Traces of former parkland and **moats**.
- Presence of **vineyards**.
- **Remote** and **hidden** quality inaccessible quality with access confined to footpaths.

Physical Landscape

- 15.5 The *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* has a distinctive physical landscape. Once part of the London Basin, the underlying chalk in this area has been entirely capped by the clays and sandy-clays of the Lambeth Group and, in the south of the area, by later deposits of London Clay. The landform is a flat shallow basin over most of this area and at low elevation, below 40m AOD. However, there is a local hill around Stanlake Manor and around the clay landscape at Haines

Hill in the west and south of the character area respectively. Corresponding to these variations in geology and landform there are a variety of soil types in this area. The hilly clay landscapes are typically stagnogleys – loamy clayey soils but with impeded drainage at depth. In contrast, the flatter and sloping landscapes of the Lambeth group are argillic gley soils associated with clayey alluvial soils and affected by high groundwater and short term flooding. This landscape corresponds to an area, which historically, was much wetter than it is currently and was once the site of Ruscombe Lake.

- 15.6 Today, the landscape still echoes its historic wetland character with a network of tributary streams occurring throughout the area. The main tributaries are Twyford Brook and Billingbear Brook. Twyford Brook flows from Waltham St Lawrence in the east to join the River Loddon south of Twyford. At this point it is joined by Billingbear Brook, which flows around Haines Hill in a north-easterly direction. The lake area has now been drained by a series of interconnected drainage channels and ditches and these are responsible for creating a lush quality within this character area. There are also a high concentration of remnant small ponds and marshlands.

Historic Environment

- 15.7 There is considerable evidence of early prehistoric activity in this area with Mesolithic and Neolithic finds being recorded close to the watercourses of the area, particularly around the former Ruscombe Lake, and the presence of cropmarks with possible prehistoric features. These activities probably resulted in small-scale woodland clearance. However, there is little evidence after that until the Medieval period when a cluster of sites reveal evidence of settlement.
- 15.8 A quadrangular moat (with an adjacent and probably contemporary fishpond) in Bay Copse on the edge of Stanlake Park is the site of the manor house of Hinton Pipard. By 1470 the manor was known as Stanlake. The construction of moats in the Post-medieval period was a popular way of enhancing the status and appearance of a manor. A square enclosure at Ruscombe Lake is also shown on current maps. Ruscombe Lake may have still contained water in 1642, but has since been drained.

- 15.9 The current country house at Stanlake Park was surrounded by landscaped parkland, as was that at Haines Hill, traces of the parkland still evident in the now largely agricultural landscape.
- 15.10 The 1st edition OS map shows largely rectangular fields indicative of Parliamentary inclosure in the east of the area, and smaller and less regular fields, possibly representing earlier inclosure, to the north and west. Many of these earlier field systems are well-preserved. However, the area is now largely characterised by large straight-sided fields, representing the 20th century amalgamation of these earlier field systems. There are also a number of 19th century plantations (copses) south of Stanlake Park.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
BCC. No. 159	Moat and fishpond at Botany Bay Copse.
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	Some areas located around Ruscombe and Whistley Green.
<i>Conservation Areas</i>	
	Ruscombe
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	Principally manors and farms including Hines Hill, Stanlake Manor, and cluster around Ruscombe Conservation Area incorporating the church.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 15.11 The ecological importance of this area is connected to its cover of wetland and woodland including lines of poplars, ditches, and hummocky wet grassland around small ponds with marginal carr vegetation. This is, consequently, an important habitat for birds.

- 15.12 The *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* is characterised by scattered secondary woodlands most of which are around 2ha in size and are often associated with small lowland streams. In total there are five woodland sites recognised as Wildlife Heritage Sites. Botany Bay Copse is the only remaining woodland of ancient origin with Wildlife Heritage Site status, and comprises a partly wet site with species such as ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) dominating the canopy.
- 15.13 The area has also retained three areas of species rich semi-improved grassland, all of which are Wildlife Heritage Sites and occur on the boundaries of wetland features such as streams and ponds.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Botany Bay Copse 7.2 / 5.7ha	Partly ancient woodland
Surrells/Charity Woods	Ancient woodland (replanted)
Middle Copse	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Blackthorn Field 0.9ha	Unimproved grassland
Field South of Middle Copse 2.0ha	Wet grassland
Near Ruscombe Lake 2.7ha	Wet grassland, stream
Windsor Ait 1.8ha	Woodland, wetland
Wingwood Copse 2.8ha	Deciduous woodland, stream
Woodland near Hinton Hatch corner 1.4ha	Deciduous woodland
Woodland strip 1.2ha	Deciduous woodland

Designations	Summary of Importance
Vale and Northbury Woods 2.3ha	Woodland
Ruscombe Village Pond 0.089	Pond
<i>Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Middle Copse 4.2ha	Ancient woodland (partly replanted)

Rural Land Use

- 15.14 Much of the *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* character area has a natural appearance on account of the large areas of wet and damp ground that are unsuitable for farming and have been left to develop wetland communities. This natural quality is accentuated by the woodland in the area, including deciduous woodland and planted mixed blocks with scrubby vegetation suggestive of game coverts. As a consequence this area appears popular for recreation. The main uses are rambling and riding and there are a few footpaths and bridleways linking to the Loddon Valley. Also notable are the strategically placed hides and it is known that this area is actively used for shooting at certain times of the year.
- 15.15 Interspersed with the woodland and wetland there are areas of farmland. The fields tend to be very large with no hedgerows and few remaining former hedgerow standards. Pasture and arable farmland is evident, again with large undivided fields broken only by the linear woodlands along the tributaries or coniferous blocks. The few remaining hedgerows are low and gappy flailed hawthorn but are important in maintaining the medium-scale of the landscape. Within this context, around Stanlake, vineyards are found, exploiting the small areas of south-facing slopes and creating a notable and unusual feature within this landscape not found elsewhere in the district.
- 15.16 Around Haines Hill to the south the landscape is much more wooded and of parkland character. The estate is surrounded by thick shelterbelts of mixed woodland bounded by fairly dense mixed hedgerows and deep water-filled ditches. Consequently views of the interior landscape are screened and the landscape appears very private and secluded.

Settlement and Built Character

- 15.17 There are few roads, these being small rural roads and 'B' roads many of which are confined to the boundary of the area. Settlement in the area largely follows the pattern of roads, except as in the south, where small private roads lead off the public highway to provide access. The settlement has a strong character on account of the presence of numerous manors as well as domestic architecture with a strong local vernacular.
- 15.18 The largest settlement is the hamlet of Ruscombe, now almost subsumed into the outskirts of Twyford and cut off from the core of the area by a stretch of the railway line. Ruscombe is a Conservation Area dominated by houses with brick walls, timber framing and plain tile roofs. These are clustered around the church of St James, which has a square brick tower and flint walling and is set within a churchyard of Scots Pine adjacent to the former village green. Leading down a quiet country lane from the hamlet are also a number of detached cottages including timber-frame and thatch.
- 15.19 Elsewhere there are a number of stately manorial buildings. Stanlake Manor – around which the vineyards are set – is a late sixteenth century building located on a local hill. Presumably the name 'Stanlake' is a reference to the former presence of Ruscombe Lake. Similarly, the hilltop buildings at Haines Hill include Haines Hill House – an eighteenth and nineteenth century manor with earlier origins. The gatehouse of Hinton Lodge is also a noteworthy brick Elizabethan building with ornate blue brick diaper-work and tall octagonal chimneys.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 15.20 The *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* (K1) is a landscape of **moderate quality**. This is due to the combination of built and natural elements which combine to create a landscape of moderate character and in moderate overall condition. The **moderate character** is related particularly to the strength of the woodland and wetland influences and cohesive built development and settlement character. Overall,

the landscape is in **moderate condition**, although some elements are in good condition, such as the physical landscape and the settlement character (due to the presence of houses of vernacular detail and absence of unsympathetic development). There is also a good mix of habitats but these are fragmented and there is evidence of hedgerow loss.

Landscape Strategy

- 15.21 The overall objective for the *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* (K1) to **enhance** existing character. Management should seek to enhance the important features such as the sense of remoteness, natural quality, the woodland, wetland and parkland characteristics. The key characteristics that need to be considered in relation to any future change are the settlement character (and general absence of development), habitat value, and special perceptual qualities.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 15.22 The *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* (K1) is considered to be a landscape of overall **moderate sensitivity**. Most characteristics within this area are moderately difficult to recreate and of importance at a local or regional level. Within this context the characteristics which are most sensitive to change are judged to be the ecological character, due to the diversity of the habitats present including neutral grassland; the building and settlement pattern, particularly the absence of residential development over much of the area and the special perceptual qualities of remoteness and tranquillity.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 15.23 The following table sets out the main issues affecting the *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* (K1) and the associated management guidelines for addressing these issues. The main objective is to enhance the character of the landscape by ensuring that the positive characteristics contributing to the character of the area are retained whilst supporting improvements to their condition and avoiding changes that would impact upon the key sensitivities of the landscape.

Key Issues

Agriculture

- ❖ Hedgerow loss is very evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- ❖ There is evidence of incremental loss of species rich grassland due to increasingly intensive grassland management. There is only one area of neutral grassland remaining in this area.
- ❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.

Associated Guidelines

- Conserve remaining hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak standards left to form future timber trees. Consider opportunities for reinstatement of hedges and shelterbelts particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides.
- Consider opportunities for the creation of meadows or permanent pasture to restore grassland habitats lost through agricultural intensification, for example the creation of grassland field margins.
- Encourage environmentally beneficial management of both pasture and arable land.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and

- Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands. Continue to manage the poplar woodlands associated with the wetlands.
- Continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of

Key Issues

mixed woodland over the past decade.

- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.

Associated Guidelines

significant views.

- Ensure design of coppice areas is sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ Not a significant issue.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture. This is likely to increase as a result of greater flooding propensity due to climate change.
- ❖ Over-maturity of veteran parkland trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.

- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland). Avoid building in those areas which are subject to seasonal inundation.
- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland, hedgerow and street trees.

Recreation

- ❖ High demands for recreation, including shooting continue to threaten the tranquillity of the landscape.
- ❖ Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special archaeological features, wildlife habitats and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated district.

- Seek sympathetic integration of new recreational features and hides.
- Maximise the contribution made by the forestry resource for recreational purposes, to draw pressure away from more sensitive landscapes.
- Consider zoning of activities to ensure sensitive landscapes are protected from damaging activities.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.

- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres

Key Issues

- ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Associated Guidelines

and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. Seek to preserve the 'undeveloped' and rural characteristics of this area and protect the isolated character of Ruscombe.

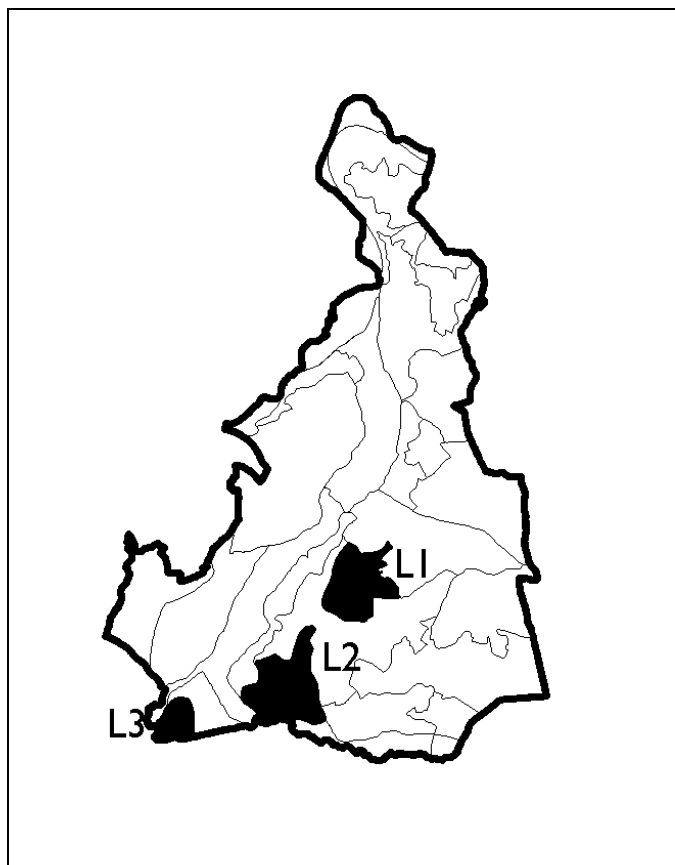
- Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained.

- ❖ Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in some areas of this landscape.

K1: STANLAKE FARMED SAND AND CLAY LOWLAND



16 LANDSCAPE TYPE L: WOODED SAND AND GRAVEL HILLS



Landscape Areas	Character
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L1: Bearwood Sand and Gravel Hills	Wooded
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L2: Farley Hill Sand and Gravel Hills	Wooded
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L3: Stanford End Sand and Gravel Hills	Wooded
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Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 16.1 There are three character areas of the landscape type *Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills*. These are small areas ranging from the centre to the south west of the district. The type is characterised by undulating hills rising from 50m AOD to 80m AOD, contrasting with the surrounding clay lowlands and river terrace. The higher parts of the areas overlie the sandy Bagshot Beds with localised deposits of river gravels and are characterised by woodlands often with coniferous vegetation. The more open lower slopes over London Clay are used for arable farming or pasture.

Key Characteristics

- Bagshot Formation and River Terrace or Head Gravel overlying London Clay geology.

- Undulating wooded hilltops.
- Open gently rising lower slopes.
- Tendency for coniferous woodland over the sand and gravel soils in the more elevated areas.
- Sparse settlement.
- Significant historic parkland.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

16.2 The *Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* landscape type does not appear as a separate landscape type in its own right within the Berkshire Landscape Assessment. The two largest of the three areas of this type (L1 and L2) occur in the *Settled Farmlands* (K) of the Berkshire assessment, which largely corresponds to the *Settled and Farmed Clays* (J) of the district assessment. At the county scale the areas separated off to form this distinct landscape type appear as a feature of the character of the wider landscape type – being described as ‘*belts of coniferous trees associated with areas of sandy nutrient-poor soils and larger coniferous and mixed woodlands on elevated areas*’. Similarly, character area L3 is part of the *Open Clay Lowlands* (L) within the Berkshire assessment that relates to the *Farmed Clay Lowlands* (I) of this assessment. The *Open Clay Lowland* also describes the presence of a ‘*wooded context*’ created by farm woods and woodland blocks – a feature which has been distinguished as a separate character area at the district scale.

L1: BEARWOOD WOODED SAND AND GRAVEL HILLS

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 16.3 The *Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* is in the centre of the district. It is an area of undulating high ground that is sparsely populated in contrast to the town of Wokingham immediately to the east. The main land use is woodland largely as part of the historic parkland of Bearwood College. This consists of distinctive coniferous planting forming a setting for the mansion house and the Bear Wood Lake. The Rhododendron Drive along Bearwood Road is a particularly distinctive feature. The influence of Bearwood is also felt through the uniform style and materials of the roadside lodges and estate houses at Sindlesham. To the south the landform is made more intricate with coombe woodland valleys and the deciduous woodland on the high ground contrasts with the sheep pastures on the lower slopes.
- 16.4 There are few roads running through the character area and a large proportion of the landscape is devoid of rights of way.

Location and Boundaries

- 16.5 The *Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* character area is located in the centre of the district immediately to the west of the town of Wokingham. It is a self-contained area surrounded by the built up and urban fringe of the *Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay* to the north and east and by the *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* to the south and west. The area is distinct as higher ground rising above the clay lowlands and the boundary loosely follows the 50m contour line. However the dense settlement to the east contrasts strongly with the adjacent wooded areas and the boundary on this side has been determined by the edge of the settlement. The B3030 has been used pragmatically to form the boundary to the west and north, where it roughly follows the 50m contour.

Key Characteristics

- **Undulating upland hills comprising London Clay** overlain by **sands and gravels** of the Bagshot Beds and Head Gravel.
- **Heavily wooded** ‘forested’ character comprising large blocks of distinctive **coniferous** planting interconnected with swathes of **mixed and deciduous woodlands**.
- **‘Private’ landscape of historic parkland** focused upon central area of Bearwood College with distinct **avenue of conifers** and **rhododendron** planting forming a distinctive feature.
- **Vast artificial landscaped lake** (Bear Wood Lake).
- Smaller scale intimate rural patchwork of **deciduous woodland and sheep pasture** associated with the **hills and relatively incised valleys** to the south forming part of **‘the Coombes’** (J2).
- **Very sparsely settled** with small stretches of roadside ribbon development, some new executive style houses and isolated farm buildings
- Jacobean style **Bearwood** (large former country house) and outlying **estate buildings** which are largely screened from view by the enclosing woodland of characteristic red brick and diaper patterned walls with decorative bargeboards.
- Woodland defines and screens the **western boundary of the town of Wokingham** and creates a **wooded backdrop** to views from the surrounding landscape.
- Recreational use including **golf courses, horse riding establishments** and network of public **footpaths**.
- **Few roads** creating a relatively **secretive** landscape.
- Red brick Georgian building of **Barkham Manor** set within a walled development to the south.

Physical Landscape

- 16.6 This area of undulating high ground is dominated by the sandy geology of the Bagshot Formation (formed in the Palaeogene period) with later, now localised, deposits of river gravel. It is an outlying

spur of the sandy area that forms much of the south east of the district.

- 16.7 From the southern border of the area, the land rises over the rolling London Clay to the steeper hillsides of the overlying sand and gravel deposits. Centred on the deciduous woodland of The Coombes, a pattern of valleys eroded by water from the higher ground gives variety to the landform. Some of the valleys are now dry but others have streams running down to join tributaries of the River Loddon.
- 16.8 There are localised deposits of Head Gravel at the core of the coniferous woodland to the north east and to the south east at Gravelpit Hill, a name indicating past exploitation of this resource. To the north and west of the area the London Clay geology is reflected in the more gently rolling topography.
- 16.9 Soils follow the underlying geology with sandy Gley Podzols over the Bagshot Formation to the southeast and Stagnogley Soils, clayey or loamy soils with impeded drainage, to the north and west over the London Clay areas. The sandy soils are free draining making the higher area generally dry with no streams. However, there are a number of small open water bodies on the river gravel, indicating past gravel extraction plus the much larger Bear Wood Lake, created as a clay pit for building bricks.

Historic Environment

- 16.10 There is no evidence to support the presence of prehistoric or Roman activity in this marginal upland landscape. The 'Bear' name of this area, found elsewhere in the district, may derive from the Saxon *bare* meaning swine pasture, the swine being fattened on woodland fodder before autumn slaughter or may derive from the locally prominent A'Bear family, who claimed descent from the Norman 'de la Bere' family. Locally, the popularity of the sport of bear baiting within the town of Wokingham has also been suggested as an origin of the name.
- 16.11 Clearance probably commenced in medieval times – much of the area becoming a large open common but was inclosed in the 1820s to form a landscaped park. Consequently, there is little evidence of the

medieval landscape at Bearwood, due to the extensive landscaping of the 19th century estate. However, south of the estate, around areas of woodland including The Coombes, there are a number of fields, possibly assart inclosures encroaching into the woodland, which survive intact.

- 16.12 The Bearwood estate had its own brickworks, making the four and a half million bricks from which the Bearwood mansion was built between 1865 and 1874. The house, probably the largest in the county outside Windsor Castle, was built for John Walter III the founder of *The Times* newspaper and one of the top ten landowners in the county. A dam was built around the site from which the clay was extracted for the bricks, and then flooded to create the 19 hectare lake which is the centrepiece of the modern landscape.
- 16.13 The landscaped park continued to be developed through the 19th century, with extensive plantings, and other buildings being put up on the estate. More recently recreation uses such as golf courses have been incorporated into the historic framework.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	There is a small part of one located in the south west of the area straddling boundary/B3030
<i>Conservation Area</i>	
	Sindlesham
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	Cluster in Sindlesham Conservation area including Bearwood College, Chapel, Main Lodge also Arborfield/Park Lodge (golf course clubhouse), St Catherine's Church.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens</i>	
Bearwood College Grade II*	C19 landscape park and woodland

Designations	Summary of Importance
	surrounding a Victorian country house standing on formal terraces, with a Pulhamite rock and water gardens of c 1ha. William Sawrey Gilpin employed here c 1820.

Ecological Character

- 16.14 The *Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* is a heavily wooded landscape. The majority of this woodland is of secondary origin and characterised by mixed plantations on relatively dry, free-draining soils. The extensive woodland estate at Bearwood, for example, totals around 129ha and includes species such as Scot's pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*). This estate is partly given over to a golf course and is generally heavily used for recreation; it has however retained important areas of open water and remnant heathland.
- 16.15 Coombes Wood is a 32ha site that is contiguous with the Bearwood estate and has a similar mixture of conifers and broadleaved trees.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Importance</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Halzeltons Copse 2.5 / 2.6ha	Woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
The Coombes 32.6ha	Woodland
Bearwood Estate 129.0ha	Woodland, open water, heath

Rural Land Use

- 16.16 The principal land use in this area is woodland, subsidiary uses are historic parkland, leisure (golf courses) and, to the southwest, agriculture.
- 16.17 The park of Bearwood College forms the core of the area. Most of the park is wooded, largely coniferous with both ornamental specimen trees and later forestry planting. Limited areas of open parkland have some more typical parkland planting of oak, and around the lake and on the islands there is mixed woodland including oak, holly and yew.
- 16.18 Parts of the estate are given over to leisure use with the lake used for watersports by the school and the two golf courses. The latter are substantial areas of amenity grassland on the periphery of the park.
- 16.19 A band of mixed woodland is an important feature bordering on the edge of the suburbs of Wokingham. To the south west of the area on the lower slopes rising up to the deciduous woodland of the Coombes are sheep pastures. These are small-scale fields fitting into the landscape formed by the undulating coombe valleys. The woodland on the higher slopes frames these more open areas.

Settlement and Built Character

- 16.20 The lack of settlement in the heart of the area is a key characteristic. Apart from that connected to Bearwood College there are just a few farms and limited residential development on the Bearwood Road.
- 16.21 Bearwood College (listed grade II*), now a private boarding school, was built in 1865–74 in Jacobean style and on a massive scale of red brick with stone dressings. This now forms the centre of a Conservation Area at the north of the area including part of Sindlesham. Houses here are contemporary with the main house and were built by the owner of the estate, John Walter II at the same time along with the five lodges, which are noticeable feature from the roads. All these buildings share a palette of materials and features of red brick with black brick diaper patterning, decorative barge boards, steep roof pitches and occasional stone detailing, and their distinctive character contributes to the dominance of the historic estate.

- 16.22 John Walter II also established workshops to make bricks, stone and gas and a timber mill to produce building materials for the estate, which at that time extended to Wokingham, Barkham, Finchampstead, and Sandhurst and some of these industrial buildings survive close to the Bearwood Riding Centre.
- 16.23 The parkland was laid out in the 1820s when Gilpin worked here, however new and distinctive features were added soon after the current house built in 1865–74. Under the influence of Loudon conifers were used extensively most notably in the 250 metre long Wellingtonia Avenue along the drive to the north front of the house.
- 16.24 There are few roads through the area, just the Bearwood Road which forms a boundary to the parkland and, in spring, is visually appealing, being lined with mature rhododendron, and with a verge expanded to a wide grassed roadside edge with a deep ditch and mature conifers.
- 16.25 At the south end of Bearwood Road there is settlement along the road forming part of suburban edge of Wokingham. There is also an enclave of detached, executive style houses further to the north.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 16.26 The *Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* (L1) is evaluated as being a landscape of **high quality**. This is due to the combination of a strong character and good condition. The **strong character** is related particularly to the synergy between the topography, woodland and historic ambience which create a distinctive landscape with a strong sense of place. The **good condition** of the landscape relates to the privacy and secrecy resulting from the relative absence of intrusive infrastructure and development (including roads), the dense woodland character accentuating the landform which creates intimacy and the contrasting context of undulating combe pasturelands. However, there are opportunities to improve the condition of some elements including the relationship of the college with former estate

buildings, the biodiversity of the woodland and the impact of newer ribbon development at the periphery of the area.

Landscape Strategy

- 16.27 This overall strategy is to **conserve** and strengthen existing character. The key characteristic to be conserved through ongoing management, is the woodland and the features associated with the historic landscape. The character and condition of the *Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* could be strengthened through, for example, enhancements to the lake and woodland habitats and management of the locally distinctive Rhododendron Drive.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 16.28 The *Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* is a landscape of overall **moderate sensitivity** as a result of most elements having a low level of recreatability and/or regional importance. Of particular sensitivity is the woodland which fulfils many functions including: providing a backdrop to the surrounding landscape and accentuating the landform; being an integral part of the listed historic parkland estate; and providing a habitat of noted ecological value. The wooded context and 'private' secluded character may mean that some changes can be accommodated without being visually apparent. However, the area is particularly sensitive as a result of its function as the wooded backdrop to the western edge of Wokingham town. Any large scale change such as clear felling or construction of tall, visually dominant structures would have an impact on these important views from the town.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 16.29 The following table sets out the main issues affecting or with potential to affect the character of the *Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* (L1). The overall objective is to retain and improve the condition and robustness of the current character including the woodlands, historic elements, the sparse 'estate' settlement pattern, parkland and pastureland and to protect the wooded backdrop which acts as a buffer to Wokingham.

Key Issues

Associated Guidelines

Agriculture

- ❖ The declining viability of livestock grazing has potential to result in conversion to other land uses and loss of grassland habitats.
- Conserve and protect the pasture in the 'Coombes' and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.
- Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
- ❖ Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- Seek to actively manage woodlands by controlling exotic invasive species that are threatening the locally distinctive species. Ensure active management of the Rhododendron Drive which is a locally important feature.
- ❖ In the past expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands has resulted in a change in character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora.
- Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnecting valleys. The aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in areas which have been converted to coniferous monoculture plantation.
- ❖ Influence of woodland fell cycles on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines.
- Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive ridgelines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.

Minerals

- ❖ No issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Loss and fragmentation of acid grassland and heath habitats as a
- Conserve and restore (the few) remnant heathland habitats to link

Key Issues

result of scrub encroachment or conversion to woodland has occurred in the past.

- ❖ There is evidence that drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture.

- ❖ Over-maturity of veteran parkland is an on-going concern.

Associated Guidelines

existing fragmented sites and seek to prevent further habitat loss.

- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats – the lake and tributary streams – through appropriate management and seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland). In particular seek to enhance the habitat value of the lake.

- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland trees.

Recreation

- ❖ High demands for recreation, including golf, horse riding and mountain biking continue to threaten the tranquillity of the landscape.

- ❖ Pressure for formal recreation facilities that could have an impact on the character of the landscape.

- ❖ Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated district.

- Seek sympathetic integration of new recreational features and seek to locate such activities in less sensitive areas.

- Recreation facilities to be sympathetically sited and integrated into the landscape.

- Maximise the contribution made by the forestry resource for recreational purposes, to draw pressure away from more sensitive landscapes.

- Consider zoning of activities to ensure sensitive landscapes are protected from damaging activities.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas and threaten relatively unsettled landscapes.

- ❖ Pressure for expansion of built

- Conserve the unsettled character of this area. In particular maintain the rural and undeveloped character of this area in relation to Wokingham town.

- Preserve the woodland that is

Key Issues

development on the edges of towns is leading to suburbanisation of the landscape, loss of individual settlement identity and blocking of views.

- ❖ Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham District landscape.

Associated Guidelines

currently acting as a buffer to the outer edge of Wokingham town.

- Consider the impact of any development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Retain the wooded skylines of Wokingham District: it is unlikely that any ridgeline development would be suited to this area.

Infrastructure

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.

- Undertake sympathetic screening to minimise the impact of new and existing roads.
- Avoid the creation of any new roads through this area.

LI: BEARWOOD WOODED SAND AND GRAVEL HILLS



L2: FARLEY HILL WOODED SAND AND GRAVEL HILLS

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 16.30 The *Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* is a small, discrete area in the south of the district. It is an elevated landscape of small hills and knolls with the low fertility of its sandy soils reflected in the use of the higher areas as woodland with a distinct coniferous element. Alongside the woodland are pastures, and on some lower slopes, arable farming. The quiet and rural ambiance is enhanced by the hedgerows and hedgerow trees, the intricate network of winding rural roads and lanes, the traditional architecture of the timber-framed farmhouses and the brick built cottages and historic houses at Farley Hill. The informal tracks and overgrown hedgerows contribute to the rural character, although some more marginal uses of the land for paddocks and semi-industrial yards create a sense of neglect in parts of the area.

Location and Boundaries

- 16.31 The *Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* character area is located at the south of the district. Topographically distinct, this compact area of undulating hillocks and small knolls rises from the surrounding lower land of the *Loddon River Valley* and *Blackwater River Valley* west and south and from the *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* to the north and east.
- 16.32 The boundaries of the area largely follow the base of the slopes along the 50m contour line. To the east and west of the area where the slopes are not so distinctly defined the boundaries follow a series of minor roads and the A32.

Key Characteristics

- Area of upstanding **small undulating hills** of **London Clay** overlain by **sands and gravels**.

- **Intricate mix of land use** dominated by woodland, pasture and arable land with a **secluded, remote and highly rural atmosphere**.
- **Extensive network of mixed, coniferous and deciduous woodland, copses and historic parkland**, including **ancient woodland and coppice**.
- **Close knit pattern** of dispersed farmsteads, hamlets and historic houses including a rich and **picturesque vernacular built heritage** including **brick, timber-framing, thatch and clay tiles**.
- Some signs of **urban fringe characteristics** influencing the rural landscape, arising (new development and paddocks).
- **Small sinuous pastures** carved out from woodland and **arable fields** on the lower slopes usually bounded by **thick and overgrown hedgerows**.
- **Quiet winding rural lanes** and steep muddy **sunken tracks** through the woodlands.
- Presence of **marginal land use** including **semi-industrial** areas and **rough pony paddocks** creating pockets of **neglect**.
- Network of **recreational footpaths** and **bridleways**.
- **Views** to the Blackwater, Broadwater and Loddon Valleys, with this area forming a **wooded backdrop** to views from the valleys.

Physical Landscape

- 16.33 The area is a convoluted series of small knolls or hills rising to 80m AOD centred on Farley Hill. The topography of the area clearly expresses the underlying geology. The sand of the Bagshot Formation lies over the London Clay forming islands of higher land. The largest deposit is in the centre of the area forming Farley Hill, outlying deposits to the north and south east form smaller hillocks at Fir Grove and Long Copse. Over the Bagshot Formation lie smaller sections of river gravel, 6th River Terrace, in the centre and south and Head Gravel to the north.
- 16.34 The soils in the area are Podzols/Brown Sands over the central higher area. These are well drained, stony, sandy soils, while the surrounding area of the gentler slopes of the London Clay has clayey

or loamy soils. Water shed from the higher land has eroded valleys down the sides of the hills forming a complex and small scale landscape. Some streams still flow down these valleys and there are signs of drainage ditches in others. There are disused gravel pits on Farley Hill, and a number of other open water bodies may have been gravel or clay pits.

- 16.35 On the central area of Farley Hill the poor fertility of the soil makes it unsuitable for agriculture and here the land use is largely mixed woodland with conifers visually prominent. The lower slopes of the hills support some arable farming mixed with pasture on the more fertile soil over the London Clay.

Historic Environment

- 16.36 The Roman road between London and *Calleva* (Silchester), known locally as the Devil's Highway, enters the area at Lea Copse where it can be traced for a short length. There is however, little evidence of either prehistoric or Romano-British settlement.
- 16.37 Place names such as Farley and Langley (containing “-*leah*” – a woodland clearing) indicate settlements within woodland, the whole area being part of Windsor Forest. The area is characterised by a low level of settlement consisting mainly of quite closely spaced farmsteads linked by a network of lanes, including the former Wokingham Lane which runs west from Langley Common.
- 16.38 The piecemeal clearance of woodland to form cultivable land by assarting, and later by agreement, can be seen in the pattern of small irregular fields intermixed with woodland around Farley Hill, where the woodland remains a dominant feature. This early enclosure landscape covers an extensive area, once contiguous with adjacent lands around the Loddon (A2 and C1) and Spencers Wood (J3). A considerable amount of this early field system remains well-preserved.
- 16.39 Later development has also influenced landscape character. In particular the elevated ground at Farley Hill became the site of the 18th and early 19th century country houses and landscaped parks (now EH registered) at Farley Hall, Farley Hill Court and Farley Castle (formerly Wragg Castle). The possible ‘motte’ at Farley Hill Court is

likely to be a landscaping feature. Additionally, some of the woodland represents 19th century plantation – such as New Plantation at Farley Castle. The small common at Farley Hill Common was not enclosed for farmland until 1865.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	Roman road at south of area (Devil's Highway) plus areas adjacent to this to south east and site to west of A327, and east of Farley Hill Farm.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	Large detached country houses and associated buildings including Farley Hall (grade I) stable (grade II) walled kitchen garden (grade II), Farley Castle, Farley Court, Halls Farm and Farley Hill Farm.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
Farley Hall (Grade II)	Country house built 1729 with gardens and a landscape park (23 ha), including remains of an early to mid 18 th century layout.

Ecological Character

- 16.40 The *Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* is characterised by a number of scattered woodlands, many of which are of ancient origin. Six woodlands have been designated as Wildlife Heritage Sites, of which four are ancient. They range in size from the 15.1ha of Wyvol's and Pickett's Copse to smaller blocks such as Claypits Copse which is only 1.7ha.
- 16.41 Having developed on slightly sandy soils these woodlands often have heathy elements, such as the small remnant area of heath at the Farley Hill Woods complex. Typically these sites are acid oak woods,

with dominant tree species including ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), oak (*Quercus robur*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and birch (*Betula pendula*).

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Importance</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Whealers Copse/Featherstone Copse 1.9/1.5ha	Ancient woodland
Westwood Copse 3.7/3.7ha	Ancient woodland
Wyvols Copse/Picketts Copse 15.1/13.7ha	Ancient woodland (mostly replanted)
Long Copse/Robin Copse/Spring Copse 6.8/3.8ha	Partly ancient woodland
Lea Copse	Ancient woodland (replanted)
Hornes Copse	Ancient woodland
Church Lane Copse	Ancient woodland
Emms Copse	Ancient woodland (replanted)
Westlands Copse	Ancient woodland
Great Copse	Ancient woodland
Spring Copse	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Claypits Copse 1.7ha	Woodland
Fairley Hill Woods/Great Copse/New Plantation/Kiln Copse 19.3ha	Woodland, wet gullies, heath

Rural Land Use

- 16.42 *Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* is a varied area with a mixture of land uses. The dominant land use is woodland, which ranges across the area both on the hill tops and the sides of the slopes. The woodland is mixed with conifers, such as Scots pine particularly noticeable in the Farley Hill area, along with beech, birch, holly, yew and rhododendron. The woods are irregular in outline and vary in size including small blocks loosely connected to the larger areas which makes the landscape enclosed and intimate in scale. The woods mark out this topographically distinct area from the low-lying surrounding land, forming a wooded horizon, framing views across the river valleys and strengthening the wooded character of the district. The enclosure given by the woods on the hills themselves adds drama to the open views out across the valleys.
- 16.43 Farmland is the other principal land use, mainly on the slopes of the hills with some arable on the lower slopes, but with more land devoted to permanent pasture, rough grazing and paddocks. The latter are a sign of the marginality of agricultural land use in the area, which is further emphasised by the semi-industrial use of some farmland. Fields are small and sinuous in outline following the varied topography of the hill slopes and often enclosed or partially enclosed by woodland. The hedgerows and hedgerow trees add to the rural, wooded character of the area with their overgrown appearance. The paddocks, while still small scale, detract from the unity of the landscape as they are geometric in outline with post and rail fences rather than hedges.
- 16.44 The historic parkland of Farley Hall occupies a central block of Farley Hill, bounded by public lanes, with gardens and an early/mid 18th century landscape park of 23 ha possibly designed at least in part by Charles Bridgeman. The Hall stands at the edge of the woodland with views across to Swallowfield Park and the valley of the River Loddon. The woodland to the east of the hall may have been part of the pleasure gardens, the more open terraced lawns to the west give way to parkland running down to the lake. The park extends its influence on the landscape through the lodges, two of which survive, and the hedge along Bunglers Hill of holly, yew and laurel.

Settlement and Built Character

- 16.45 Settlement in this area is in a regular pattern of farms dispersed on the hill slopes, with the scattered hamlet of Farley Hill crowning the central higher area. Scattered on the high ground around the village are the grander historic houses, Farley Hall, Castle and Court, backed by the woods, with views out over the hillsides.
- 16.46 There is a rich variety of vernacular materials and architectural styles with timber framed farmhouses and cottages, some infilled with red brick and with thatch or clay tiled roofs. There are also Victorian red brick houses with clay tiles or slate roofs and decorative barge boards in the hamlet of Farley Wood. Signs of the historic parkland of Farley Hall are the small brick lodges as well as the former kitchen garden below the park to the east with its brick gardener's cottage set into the north wall (listed grade II). The house itself is early 18th century, Queen Anne style built of red brick. There has been some recent residential developments plus the conversion of the early 19th century gothic style brick built Farley Castle to apartments.
- 16.47 An intricate network of winding rural roads and lanes, bridleways and footpaths links the farms and hamlets. Although there are a lot of access ways, because of the highly wooded nature of the landscape it still feels secluded. The lanes are highly rural in character, a small proportion are sunken, bordered by bulky hedgerows and by woodland. They are without kerbs, sometimes with rough grassed triangular islands at junctions and with little intrusive signage.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 16.48 The *Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* (L2) is a landscape of overall **high quality**. The landscape has such a strong character that despite its moderate condition it is overall perceived to have a high quality. Particularly important components of the **strong character** are the distinctive hilly landform; intimate pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farmland; distinctive vernacular settlements and the strong ecological character imparted by the copses. The perceptual rural characteristics of seclusion and remoteness and

views to the Blackwater Valley are also fundamental to landscape character. The **moderate condition** relates to the considerable opportunities for minor but significant changes to bring the landscape closer to its optimum condition, with the condition of the remnant parkland, suburbanising trends, presence of incongruous features and replacement of overgrown hedgerows with fences all of particular concern.

Landscape Strategy

- 16.49 The overall strategy for the *Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* (L2) is to **conserve and strengthen** existing character. The key characteristics to be conserved are those contributing to the strong rural character as described above, i.e. the views, intimate pattern of pastures, rural lanes woodland and arable farmland and vernacular settlement. Aspects to be strengthened should focus on improving those characteristics which are not in optimum condition, namely restoration and management of historic parkland, ancient woodland coppice and the connecting hedgerows. Enhancement of marginal farmland and paddocks is also recommended.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 16.50 *Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* (L2) is considered to be a landscape of overall **moderate sensitivity** as a result of the largely regional scale of importance of individual components and their low or moderate recreatability value. However, within this context there are elements of high sensitivity, in particular the woodland which includes significant areas classified as being of ancient origin and sensitive on account of their ecological value. Other sensitive attributes are the important perceptual characteristics, the role of this area in relation to the setting of the Blackwater and Loddon valleys, historic parkland and small-scale character – including the close knit settlement and historic land use pattern, vernacular built character and presence of quiet winding rural lanes and steep sunken tracks. The wooded context may mean that some changes can be accommodated without being visually apparent. However, the area is sensitive as a result of its function as a strong wooded horizon. Any large scale change such as clear felling or construction of tall, visually dominant structures would have an impact on these views.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

16.50 The following table sets out the main issues affecting or with potential to affect the character of the *Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* (L2). The overall objective is to avoid loss of positive characteristics whilst actively strengthening the condition of those elements with potential to improve the overall quality of the landscape.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ Hedgerow loss is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.	• Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.	• Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
❖ The declining viability of livestock grazing is resulting in conversion to other land uses such as paddocks.	• Conserve and protect pasture and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing. Consider opportunities for re-creation of lost grassland habitats.
❖ Changes in agricultural practice, including conversion to hobby farms and paddocks is leading to changing management regimes and loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees.	• Seek to manage set-aside land, paddocks and hobby farms to enhance the visual and ecological quality of the landscape, for example through planting boundary hedgerows. Prevent intrusion of temporary structures.

Key Issues

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.
- ❖ Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- ❖ In the past expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands has resulted in a change in character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora.
- ❖ Influence of woodland management on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines.
- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to

Associated Guidelines

- Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
- Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views, particularly to the Loddon and Blackwater valley.
- Seek to actively manage woodlands by controlling exotic invasive species that are threatening the locally distinctive species.
- Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnecting valleys. The aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in areas which have been converted to coniferous monoculture plantation.
- Develop sympathetic management to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive ridgelines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.
- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as

Key Issues

meet renewable energy obligations increased.

Associated Guidelines

recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ No issues known.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Loss and fragmentation of heath habitats as a result of scrub encroachment or conversion to forestry has occurred in the past.
 - ❖ Over-maturity of veteran parkland and hedgerow is an on-going threat to the landscape.
- Conserve and restore remnant heathland habitats to link existing fragmented sites and seek to prevent further habitat loss. Areas of recently wooded heath are a key target for restoration.
 - Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland and hedgerow trees.

Recreation

- ❖ Potential pressure for more paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a fragmentation of the rural landscape.
 - ❖ Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated district.
- Develop guidance on management of paddocks – to be sensitive to existing landscape character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows.
 - Maximise the contribution made by the forestry resource for recreational purposes, to draw pressure away from more sensitive landscapes.
 - Consider zoning of activities to ensure sensitive landscapes are protected from damaging activities.

Built Development

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.
 - ❖ Potential pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham District landscape.
- Consider undertaking character appraisals of settlements within Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation.
 - Consider the impact of any development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas, particularly from the Loddon and Blackwater valleys. Retain the

Key Issues

- ❖ This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies'. Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape.

Associated Guidelines

wooded skylines of Wokingham District.

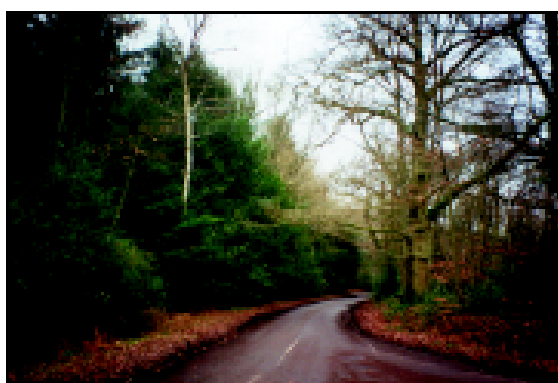
- Conserve the resource of dark skies in Wokingham District. Monitor development proposals and ensure measures are taken to minimise light pollution (e.g. full cut off lights). Promote guidance to encourage appropriate lighting of domestic/commercial properties.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the landscape.

- Maintain the historic leafy lanes and sunken tracks with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural locations.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated landscape.

L2: FARLEY HILL WOODED SAND AND GRAVEL HILLS



L3: STANFORD END WOODED SAND AND GRAVEL HILLS

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 16.51 The *Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* is a small area of high ground to the far south east of the district. The fertile loamy soils are used for arable farming, which dominates the landscape. Farmland is interspersed with blocks of woodland on the higher ground. Field boundaries are low hedgerows with mature or over mature oaks. The underlying sandy geology of the higher ground is reflected through the presence of coniferous and heathy vegetation in the woodland. In the higher central area there is a more enclosed, rural character with sunken and winding lanes bounded by thick hedgerows. Settlement is sparse with just a few farms and villages in the area and most buildings are 19th or 20th century brick with some large metal clad agricultural buildings visually prominent.

Location and Boundaries

- 16.52 The *Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* area is located at the south west corner of the district. It is topographically distinct from the surrounding lowland areas, the *River Loddon Valley* and *Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland*, as undulating high ground which forms the northern end of a ridge of hills largely outside the district.
- 16.53 The southern boundary coincides with the district boundary. To the west the boundary is based on the 50m contour line marking the base of the slope from the River Loddon valley floor. To the east the hillside is less steep and the rise of the hill less defined, here the boundary approximately follows the 70m contour and skirts the western edge of the settlement of Riseley.

Key Characteristics

- Small area representing the northern end of a ridge of clay hills extending from beyond the district overlain by the sandy deposits

of the Bagshot Formation and 6th River Terrace.

- **Simple landscape** of woodland and farmland with **views** to the Loddon valley.
- Fertile, loamy soils used for **arable farming** with small areas of sheep pasture. Varied field pattern and size with both assarted and parliamentary enclosures.
- **Coniferous and mixed woodland** located along the ridge top and forming a **visual contrast** and **wooded backdrop** to the surrounding farmed landscape and accentuating the landform.
- Network of hedgerows which tend to be **thin and flailed** on lower slopes, with **thicker and denser hedges** on higher ground with **mature or over-mature oak standards**.
- Deeply **sunken single-track lanes** with banks, ditches and hedges on the higher ground.
- **Sparsely populated**, residential buildings mainly **modern brick**.
- **Industrial scale, metal clad farm buildings prominent** on the skyline.
- **Bisected by the A33**.

Physical Landscape

- 16.54 This area reflects its simple underlying structure as the northern end of a larger area of the sandy geology of the Bagshot Formation over the London Clay. On the central high ground the Bagshot Formation is overlain by the gravel deposits of the 6th River Terrace.
- 16.55 On the undulating western slopes the gradient, although gentle is striking because of the proximity of the River Loddon valley. Here the land rises from 50m to 75m AOD. To the east the land shelves even more gently down to the *Riseley Arable Open Clay Lowland*.
- 16.56 The soils follow the pattern of the underlying geology land over the gravel and sand having stagnogley soils, clayey or loamy with drainage impeded by an impermeable layer. On the lower west and east slopes the soil is Argillic Gley, stony fine or coarse loamy soils with high groundwater. The generally fertile, loamy soil gives rise

to arable farming through the whole area although on the higher ground this is mixed with woodland blocks with heathy vegetation in some areas, reflecting the underlying sandy geology.

Historic Environment

- 16.57 There is evidence of a Mesolithic site in this area with a later small Roman settlement also occupying this higher land overlooking the Loddon valley. However, in recent times settlement has developed on the lower lying ground at the edge of the valley such as the settlements of Riseley and Stamford End.
- 16.58 The irregular outlines of the surviving woodland suggests assart incursions. The pattern, around them, of small regular fields with wavy boundaries, and less regular fields, may represent informal inclosures of late Medieval and Post-medieval date, possibly the result of rationalisation of small assarts. Some of this pattern has remained well preserved, particularly to the west of the area.
- 16.59 This area contains a loose network of winding lanes linking the farmsteads, with the Reading to Basingstoke turnpike, established in 1718, passing through Riseley at the edge of the area. This has since been replaced by the recent cutting of the A33 trunk road which runs through the heart of this area.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	Area to south of New Barn Farm
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
None	
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 16.60 This small character area has retained two significant blocks of woodland. The typical woodland type on these sand and gravel

substrates is acid oak woodland, where the ground layer is often dominated by bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*).

- 16.61 Highgrove Copse is registered as an ancient wood, and has a history of being managed as coppice with standards.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Importance</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Highgrove Copse 5.3/9.7ha	Ancient woodland
Collins/St Legers Copse 15.2ha	Ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
None	

Rural Land Use

- 16.62 There are two land uses in the *Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills*; agriculture and forestry. The lower western and northern slopes of the ridge are devoted mainly to arable farming with a limited amount of sheep pasture. Here, fields are very large with sinuous lines of hedgerows rising up the slopes to the wooded ridge. The hedgerows are predominantly low flailed hawthorn, and hedgerow trees are mature or over mature oaks, with no young trees to replace them. The mature hedgerow trees silhouetted against the sky and the dark woodland on the higher ground form a visual counterpoint to the wide open arable fields and accentuate the curves of the landform.
- 16.63 Much of the higher ground is covered by blocks of woodland, both mixed and coniferous. The wedge of woodland between Highgrove Copse and the A33 is conifer plantation while St Leger's Copse

contains hazel coppice, along with more heathy vegetation such as birch and broom reflecting the underlying sandy geology of the ridge.

- 16.64 In contrast to the very simple and open landscape of the western slopes rising from the River Loddon valley, the upper area of the ridge is more complex with the large arable fields interspersed with woodland and with more intact, taller and thicker hedgerows.

Settlement and Built Character

- 16.65 There is very little settlement in this area, just a few farms and a small section of the village of Riseley. The farms and farm buildings are 19th/20th century red brick and large scale agri-industrial respectively, the latter being particularly noticeable on the brow of the hill.
- 16.66 The area is fairly accessible with a loose network of rural roads and tracks apart from the A33 trunk road with cuts through the area from north to south but is without access points within the area. On the higher ground are winding rural lanes, some sunken with deep banks and also some roadside ditches.

Perceptions of the Landscape

- 16.67 Mary Russell Mitford, authoress or '*Our Village*' often walked along Woodcock Lane (a footpath now running along the A33 Swallowfield bypass) of which she wrote:"

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

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 16.68 The *Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* (L3) is a landscape of **moderate quality** due to its significant strength of character and moderate condition. The overall **significant character** derives from the strongly rural and remote character with a sense of elevation and

views to Loddon valley, presence of mixed woodland providing a wooded backdrop to the surrounding landscape, mixture of arable and pastoral fields, sparse settlement and deeply sunken rural lanes but with a general absence of a strong historic field pattern or architectural consistency. The **moderate condition** arises from the significant opportunities that exist to improve the presentation and robustness of the key characteristics, particularly the integration of farm buildings and houses, the intactness of the wooded skylines, and the ecological value of the habitats.

Landscape Strategy

- 16.69 The overall strategy for the *Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* (L3) is to **enhance** existing character. The key characteristics to be conserved or considered in any change are the perceptual characteristics including the intervisibility of this area with the surrounding landscape (particularly views to/from the Loddon), the rural character, mixed woodland (including ancient woodland), sparse settlement and rural lanes whilst enhancements should be made, where possible, to the condition and quality of landscape elements including the settlement and built form and management of hedgerows.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 16.70 The *Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* (L3) is considered to be a landscape of overall **moderate sensitivity** with key characteristics being mostly of local importance. However, within this context, there are a number of elements with higher sensitivity including the small areas of ancient woodland, skyline woodland, the sunken lanes, sense of remoteness and rural character and sparse built development.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 16.71 The following table sets out the key issues affecting the character of the *Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* and the associated management guidelines. The overall objective is to prevent loss of positive characteristics whilst enhancing the condition of those elements with potential to improve the overall quality of the landscape.

Key Issues

Agriculture

- ❖ Past hedgerow loss due to the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
 - ❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.
 - ❖ Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.
- Conserve remaining hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
 - Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
 - Encourage environmentally beneficial management of both pasture and arable land.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
 - ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase
- Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
 - Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of

Key Issues

in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.

- ❖ Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- ❖ In the past expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands has resulted in a change in character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora.
- ❖ Influence of woodland fell cycles on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines.
- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.

Associated Guidelines

significant views.

- Seek to actively manage woodlands by controlling exotic invasive species that are threatening the locally distinctive species.
- Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnecting valleys. The aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in areas which have been converted to coniferous monoculture plantation.
- Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive ridgelines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained. It may be appropriate to strengthen the wooded skyline element.
- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ No known issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Loss and fragmentation of acid grassland and heath habitats as a result of scrub encroachment or conversion to forestry has occurred in the past.
 - ❖ Over-maturity of veteran hedgerow trees is an on-going
- Conserve and restore remnant heathland habitats to link existing fragmented sites and seek to prevent further habitat loss. Areas of recently wooded heath are a key target for restoration.
 - Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
threat to the landscape.	hedgerow trees.
Recreation	
❖ No significant issues or pressures	
Built Development	
❖ Demand for residential development, is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.	• This rural area is considered unsuitable for large scale residential development. Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements.
❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.	• Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open and elevated landscape.
❖ Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham District landscape.	• Consider the impact of any development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Retain the wooded skylines of Wokingham District.
❖ This character area contains a reservoir of ‘dark skies’. Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape.	• Conserve the resource of dark skies in Wokingham District. Monitor development proposals and ensure measures are taken to minimise light pollution (e.g. full cut off lights). Promote guidance to encourage appropriate lighting of domestic/commercial properties.
Infrastructure	
❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.	• Maintain the historic leafy and sunken lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character.
❖ Increasing demand for	• Particular care should be taken in the

Key Issues

communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

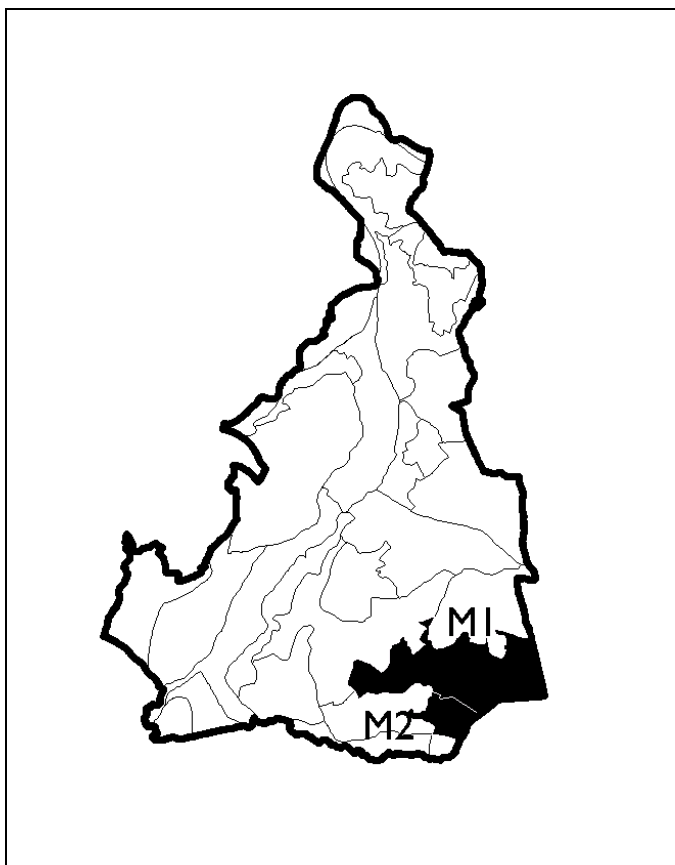
Associated Guidelines

siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated landscape.

L3: STANFORD END WOODED SAND AND GRAVEL HILLS



17 LANDSCAPE TYPE M: FORESTED AND SETTLED SANDS



Landscape Areas	Character
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M1: Finchampstead Forested Sands.	and Settled
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M2: Finchampstead Ridges Settled Sands	Forested and
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Characteristics of Landscape Type

- 17.1 There are two areas of the *Forested and Settled Sands* landscape type, located in the south east of Wokingham. This landscape type is characterised by post-Victorian and modern detached houses that are arranged along or located off long linear rides. These are set within a strongly wooded context that includes coniferous plantation, mixed woodlands and mature trees retained within the development. The landscape includes areas of heathland and wetlands and is therefore a popular visitor destination including country parks and numerous footpaths.

Key Characteristics

- Upland plateau, strongly influenced by the acidic sands of Camberley Sand and Windlesham Formation.

- **Densely-wooded** including **mixed woodland** and **coniferous** plantations and with **Heathland** in woodland clearings.
- Concentration of **low-density modern linear and estate settlement** around Victorian cores aligned along **linear rides** within a wooded context.
- **Large lakes** and **wetlands** of ecological significance.
- Recreational landscapes including **country parks** and **National Trust** land.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

17.2 The *Forested and Settled Sands* correspond to ‘*Type I: Forested Sands*’ of the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, largely following the boundaries of ‘*I2 Crowthorne Forested Sand*’ of that assessment. The main distinction is that in this assessment the boundaries are drawn tight to the edge of the forested area, thus excluding the areas of sandy pastoral landscapes to the south and north, which are classified here as *Pastoral Sandy Lowland*. In the Berkshire Assessment a limited amount of the pastoral sands were included as the setting and context of the *Forested Sand*, which is bordered by *Type K: Settled Farmlands*. It is therefore noted that the boundaries between these areas are not absolute and an extension of or clearance of woodland plantation could influence the perception of the boundary between these related zones.

M1: FINCHAMPSTEAD FORESTED AND SETTLED SANDS

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 17.3 The *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands* are found covering a large area in the extreme southeast of Wokingham, encompassing the settlements of Finchampstead (North) and Crowthorne. This landscape is characterised by its densely wooded context, which creates a strong sense of enclosure throughout. The woodland character is varied with semi-natural areas and large areas of forestry plantations, which are tolerant of the underlying sandy and acidic soil conditions. It is also notable for the high incidence of conifers including Scots Pine and exotic species. Within woodland clearings a more heathy character is evident with areas of heathland vegetation located within plantations and adjacent to roads. A number of large lakes and associated wetlands are also present created from former brickworks and these form another focus for recreation in the area, including a Country Park located around Long Moor. The roads are a particularly characteristic feature of this area being very long and straight and originating from the historic rides created through the Royal Forest for Queen Anne. These have provided the framework for settlement, which also follows a strongly linear pattern of detached houses (mostly post-war) within a retained woodland setting and with modern estate infill between the rides.
- 17.4 Away from the areas of settlement, the landscape exhibits a distinctly remote character, although the presence of numerous recreational trails makes this an accessible landscape.

Location and Boundaries

- 17.5 The *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands* character area is located south of Wokingham in the far south east of the district being contiguous with the *Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands* (M2) character area. It encompasses the settlements of

Finchampstead North as well as much of the Pinewood region of Crowthorne, which extends into Bracknell Forest District. The eastern boundaries of this area are defined by the district boundary and the character area extends into the adjoining district. To the north the boundary is defined by the edge of the forested and settled area, following the woodland or settlement boundary. This is based upon current land use patterns and geology (the transition to river terrace sediments). To the south the boundary is defined by the transition to the more topographically varied and open character of the Finchampstead Ridges. The western boundary follows the transition between sands to clay, as well as the edge of the wooded areas.

Key Characteristics

- **An elevated landscape** comprising a **shelving plateau**, underlain by acidic sands strongly influencing land cover and ecological character.
- A landscape **dominated by interconnected forestry and woodland**,
- **Large areas for public recreation** space including California Country Park, Forestry Commission land and golf courses.
- A predominant absence of **farmland**.
- **A strong sense of enclosure** and disorientation afforded by the often continuous swathes of large coniferous woodland mass.
- **Underlying, heathland character** often typifying areas of woodland clearing such as at California Park.
- A landscape of good **public accessibility**.
- **Long straight roads** i.e. Nine Mile Ride projecting strong linear character to the landscape. Linear rides and private roads are also a feature.
- Strong settlement character – with **residential properties of post war and modern suburban character** in a variety of styles, largely aligning the long linear rides.
- **Rich wildlife habitats** associatic with the acidic soils including

numerous large lakes and bogs –containing notable and regionally restricted species.

- A landscape offering a sense of **remoteness and solitude**.

Physical Landscape

- 17.6 The character of the *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands* is dominated by the presence of an assemblage of sandy formations. These include the Bagshot Beds, which are fine to medium grained sandy deposits with clay and silt. There are also localised deposits of the Camberley Sand Formation and Windlesham Formation (the latter being capped with areas of alluvium and) and (at the most elevated point) the Sixth River Terrace. These create gley-Podsols, soils, which have impeded drainage and create nutrient-poor acidic conditions, unsuited for arable farmland.
- 17.7 There are no watercourses. However, there are several relatively large lakes or meres and numerous small ponds located across the plateau, which originate from historic brick pits. The most significant of these are Longmoor Lake, Queen's Mere, King's Mere and Heath Lake. These water bodies tend to be acidic and are surrounded by boggy and marshy areas created by the poorly draining soil, such as Longmoor bog and Silverstock Bog.

Historic Environment

- 17.8 The presence of a two round barrows northwest of Warren Lodge suggests there may have been an expansion of settlement from the valleys onto less favourable sandy soils during the Bronze Age, leading to the early development of commons and heathland as the ground was cleared and cultivated, and the soils depleted.
- 17.9 The Roman road between London and Calleva (Silchester), known locally as the Devil's Highway, runs east-west through the area, remains of the agger (earthen embankment) surviving in Crowthorne and Finchampstead parishes.
- 17.10 During the Medieval period, this was part of Windsor Forest, the wood and heathland being largely unpopulated. An area around the current site of Ravenswood was established as a deer park – one of

only four in the whole of Wokingham District. Early maps show only small areas inclosed for agriculture within this zone, with large tracts of woodland that would have been exploited for hunting and for timber. The inclosure of Windsor Forest was carried out mainly between 1813 and 1817, with the last remnants of heaths being swept away in 1857 and replaced by plantations. Post-medieval and modern forestry plantations now comprise an important component of the landscape. A number of straight rides through this forested landscape, such as the Nine Mile Ride, were created for Queen Anne (and later George III), so that in old age, when she was unable to hunt, she could follow in her carriage.

- 17.11 Crowthorne developed in the second half of the 19th century when the establishment of Wellington College and Broadmoor Hospital attracted people to the area for work. Outlying settlements to the west of the town, which have developed since 1870, are characterised by long narrow land-parcels associated with individual dwellings, strung out along the roads. The scenic woodland landscape, close to London, made the heathland a popular setting for country houses surrounded by mostly small ornamental and landscaped parks.
- 17.12 A number of lakes in the area are of recent date, Longmoor Lake, for instance, having been excavated in the late 19th century for brick-making, the surrounding area being developed in the early 1950's as a holiday camp. To the east, Kings' Mere and Queen's Mere are close to the site of the former California brickworks, connected by the California Tramway to the South Eastern and Chatham Railway.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
BCC No. 156	Barrow to N.W. of Warren Farm.
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	Four small areas covering small proportion of total area including area associated with tumulus, near Puckeridge House and part of Devils Highway Roman Road.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	Only two in the entire area (Near Kings Mere and near Wheatlands Farm)
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens</i>	
None.	

Ecological Character

- 17.13 The *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands* is characterised by a large number of sites with significant biological interest. The sandy soils support a range of community types, but perhaps most characteristic are the sandy heaths, valley bogs, wet woods, and large expanses of mixed secondary woodland.
- 17.14 The area supports two sites of national importance, including Longmoor Bog (SSSI), which is a 14ha site and represents one of a few base-poor valley mires remaining in Berkshire. The site comprises an area of well-developed carr dominated by alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), downy birch (*Betula pubescens*), grey willow (*Salix cinerea*) and alder buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*). The field layer includes notable species such as white sedge (*Carex curta*), bottle sedge (*C. rostrata*) and marsh pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) in the less acidic centre, with common spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza fushii*) and common wintergreen (*Pyrola minor*) occurring in the drier areas. On the northeast side, the mire grades into dry, acid secondary woodland comprised of predominantly Scot's pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) oak (*Quercus robur*) and silver birch (*Betula pendula*). To the south and southwest the mire gives way to wet heath where regionally restricted plants such as round-leaved sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), common cotton-grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and several species of bog moss (*Sphagnum* spp.) are found.
- 17.15 The nationally important Heath Lake (SSSI) consists of a small shallow lake, surrounded by birch and pine woodland with areas of relict heathland. The site is of particular interest for its populations of restricted aquatic plants species, including the national scarce six-stamened waterwort (*Elatine hexandra*), shoreweed (*Littorella*

uniflora) which is generally restricted to north England, and the pillwort (*Pilularia globulifera*). In recent years, however, this site has shown signs of decline and populations of these important plant species have fallen.

- 17.16 The character area also supports seven Wildlife Heritage Sites, the majority of which are lakes and open heath surrounded by mixed woodland. Species that are characteristic of these mixed woodlands are birch, pine, oak and sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), with climbing corydalis (*Ceratocarpus claviculata*) sometimes dominating the ground layer. Many of these acid woodlands have also been colonised by the invasive rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*), which often requires management to control its spread.
- 17.17 There may be an opportunity in this character area, particularly in large plantations such as Gorrick plantation, to restore areas of coniferous and mixed woodland into open heath communities.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
Heath Lake 5.4ha	Open water
Logmoor Bog 12.5ha	Wet bog
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
Heathlake	Dry, humid and wet heath, woodland, acid lake
Longmoor Bog	Humid and wet heath, lowland valley mire, bog carr woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Shepperlands Copse 9.8ha - <i>Part of this site also falls within N2</i>	Woodland
Longmoor Lake 3.0ha	Open water

Designations	Summary of Importance
Queens Mere and Oregon Bog 17.1ha	Bog, heath
Silverstock Bog 18.8ha	Bog, heath
Woodcray Cottage Wood 8.5ha	Bog, heath
Gorrick Plantation 64.9ha	Woodland
Trenches Bridge 7.8ha	Wet woodland
Longmoor Bog 12.57ha	Wet heathland
The Moors/Evencons Farm 5.56ha	Meadow/woodland
Finchampstead Ridges 23.85ha	Woodland, dry heath, ponds
Fisher's Copse 13.83ha	Woodland
Simons Wood and Heath Lake 17.77ha	Wood, heath, pond

Rural Land Use

- 17.18 The principal elements of landcover and landuse, outside of the settled areas, are woodland/forestry frequently used as recreation areas.
- 17.19 The infertile and sandy soils are suitable for coniferous plantation including pine, fir and spruce. The largest continuous swathe is Gorrick Plantation, owned by the Forestry Commission, located south of Gardeners Green. The plantations are managed on a commercial rotation, with public access permitted. Within the context of the coniferous woodland there are more open areas characterised by regeneration birch and rhododendron and indicative of sympathetic rotations. In some clearings a colourful heathy character with bracken, gorse and heather has resulted. Elsewhere, much of the woodland is mixed with both coniferous and broadleaved species. Collectively the woodland creates a highly enclosed landscape permitting few views internally.
- 17.20 The woodland and wetlands provide the focus for recreational use in this area. The main 'formal' recreation area is California Country Park, which is focussed on Longmoor Lake and includes an outdoor swimming pool, caravan and camping park, visitor centre and café.

- 17.21 There are also a high proportion of other woodland and wetland landscapes, which are accessible to the public, including Kings Mere and Heath Lake. Many of these areas are interconnected by the extensive system of bridleways and footpaths throughout this area, which permit long circular walks and also connect to the nearby town of Wokingham. In addition to the informal natural landscapes there is also one golf course, the Royal East Berkshire Golf Course, located on the outskirts of Crowthorne. This is well integrated into the surrounding landscape with coniferous copses and birch.

Settlement and Built Character

- 17.22 The built character of the landscape is one of the dominant elements affecting landscape character. Much of the settlement is located along the long linear rides such as Nine Mile Ride (A340) and Duke's Ride. These have been urbanised with kerbs, lighting, signage and roundabouts, but remain characterised by roadside rhododendron 'hedges' and occasional colourful patches of gorse and heather. The rides are interconnected, which has led to many of the linear settled areas joining and the subsequent infill of the intervening areas with more settlement. The perception is of an area considerably more settled than is actually the case with an impression of linear ribbon development. The settled landscape is predominantly low-density two-storey residential and bungalows set in large gardens. The buildings are set back from the road behind walls and fences and the gardens retain mature conifers, particularly Scots Pine. There are schools and shops associated with the residential areas but no large-scale industrial or commercial buildings.
- 17.23 For the most part the settlement in these areas is relatively new being almost entirely post-Victorian and including a high proportion of post-war and modern estate dwellings. There is no obvious local vernacular. Some Victorian buildings with yellow brick and bargeboards, such as Crowthorne Station, stand out. However, generally the architecture is unremarkable, increasingly of suburban style using engineered brick. The absence of churches or obvious centres of development is notable.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 17.24 The *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands* (M1) is judged to be a landscape of **high quality**. The combination of built and natural elements in this area combine to create a landscape of strong character, which is in good overall condition. The **strong character** relates to the fact that despite the fact that much of this landscape has ‘suburban’ character it does have a very strong sense of place and distinctive pattern of elements, namely, continuous interconnected forestry and woodland, acidic wildlife habitats including large lakes and bogs, recreational areas and the settlement pattern of post-war properties along long straight rides. Similarly the landscape is in **good condition**, with the areas of forest and housing the landscape are well-managed.

Landscape Strategy

- 17.25 The overall strategy for the *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands* is to **conserve and strengthen** existing character. The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the forestry and woodland, important wildlife habitats, and recreational use. In particular there is an opportunity to consider restoration of heathland within the woodland context. The aim should be to link and connect existing heathland areas.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 17.26 The *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands* (M1) is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity** due to the largely regional degree of importance for most components and the variable recreatability of the different landscape components. However within this context there are some aspects of character that would be highly sensitive to change, particularly the elevated plateau which is visible in the wider landscape, the long straight historic rides, the important ecological habitats, the forest, and the perceptual qualities, which are unique within Wokingham District.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

17.27 The following table sets out the main issues affecting or with potential to affect the character of the *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands* (M1) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to maintain those aspects that are currently contributing to character, whilst only permitting change that will strengthen or add to the character of the landscape.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ No issues (not agricultural land)	
Forestry and Woodland Management	
❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.	• Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.	• Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
❖ Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.	• Seek to actively manage woodlands by controlling exotic invasive species that are threatening the locally distinctive species. However, maintain rhododendron adjacent to roads where they are an integral part of the character of the area.
❖ In the past expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands has resulted in a change in	• Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnecting

Key Issues

character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora.

- ❖ Influence of woodland fell cycles on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines.

Associated Guidelines

valleys. The aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in areas which have been converted to coniferous monoculture plantation.

- Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive skylines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.

Minerals

- ❖ No significant issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Loss and fragmentation of acid grassland and heath habitats as a result of scrub encroachment or conversion to forestry has occurred in the past.

- Conserve and restore remnant heathland habitats to link existing fragmented sites and seek to prevent further habitat loss. Areas of recently wooded heath are a key target for restoration. An appropriate heathland management regime is critical.

- ❖ Drainage operations or scrubbing-up would result in loss of wetland habitats.

- Conserve remaining important wetland habitats through appropriate management.

Recreation

- ❖ High demands for recreation, including mountain biking and quad biking continue to threaten the tranquillity of the landscape. Erosion of rights of way is a key concern.

- Seek sympathetic integration of new recreational features and seek to locate such activities in areas of low tranquillity. Encourage the use of this landscape for informal recreation but ensure appropriate management, particularly in relation to the Rights of Way network.

- ❖ Pressure for golf courses that have an impact on the character of the landscape.

- New and existing golf courses to be sympathetically sited and integrated into the landscape.

- ❖ Recreational pressure leading to erosion of rights of way, special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in

- Maximise the contribution made by the forestry resource here for recreational purposes, to draw pressure away from more sensitive elevated landscapes.

Key Issues

this well-populated district.

Associated Guidelines

- Consider zoning of activities within this area to ensure ecologically sensitive landscapes are protected from damaging activities. Ensure management of recreational uses.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.
 - ❖ There is continuing pressure for expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.
 - ❖ Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham District landscape.
- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land remaining along the A321 between Finchampstead and Wokingham and retain blocks of woodland along the rides.
 - Consider undertaking character appraisals of settlements within Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation.
 - Consider the impact of any development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Retain the distinctive wooded skylines of Wokingham District.

Infrastructure

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.
 - ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the elevated
- Undertake sympathetic screening to minimise the impact of new and existing roads.
 - Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in

Character Area M1: Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands

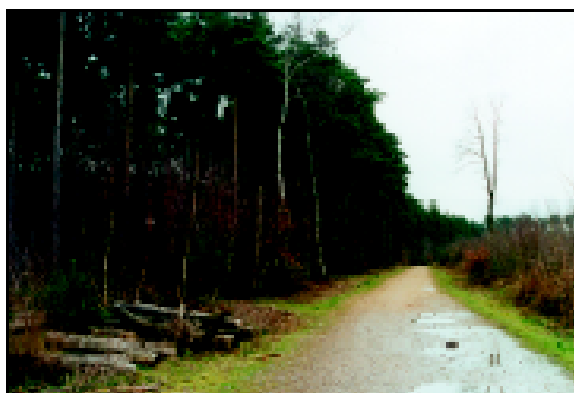
Key Issues

landscape.

Associated Guidelines

this elevated landscape.

M1: FINCHAMPSTEAD FORESTED AND SETTLED SANDS



M2: FINCHAMPSTEAD RIDGES FORESTED AND SETTLED SANDS

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 17.28 The *Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands* comprise a small area in the southeast of Wokingham District, located to the south of Finchampstead North and to the west of Crowthorne. This landscape is characterised by its distinctive ridgeline topography and woodland. The woodland character is varied with natural and semi-natural areas as well as mixed woodland plantation including a high proportion of conifers tolerant of acidic sandy soil conditions. The landscape also has a high proportion of heathland. This attractive colourful and increasingly rare habitat is particularly evident on the National Trust land at Finchampstead Ridges. There are spectacular views from the upland plateau into the Blackwater valley and adjoining counties of Hampshire and Surrey and complementary views of the wooded ridge from these areas. The National Trust land also includes important woodland and wetland habitats including Heath Pond – a base poor wetland. Many of the roads in this area are straight, including the dramatic Wellingtonia Avenue which is an important landmark, providing a gateway to the district from the south west. Large detached properties are located along the roads.
- 17.29 The absence of farmland in the landscape and the natural setting afforded by the woodland and heathland, makes this a landscape of particularly important recreational value.

Location and Boundaries

- 17.30 The *Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands* character area is located south of Wokingham in the far south east of the district and is contiguous with the *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sand* (M1) with which it shares many characteristics. The eastern boundaries of this area are defined by the district boundary and therefore, in fact, the character area extends into the adjoining

Bracknell Forest district. To the north the boundary is defined by the edge of the *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands* (M1), following one of the former linear rides reaching from the A321 roundabout east of Wellington College to Finchampstead North approximately along the 75m AOD contour. This boundary is representative of the transition from the more undulating topography with Camberley Sand and Eighth Terrace Deposits of this area to the Bagshot Bed plateau of M1. To the south the boundary is defined by the current woodland edge, which follows the edge of the Blackwater River Valley (A3).

Key Characteristics

- An **elevated landscape** comprising a distinctive **undulating ridgeline**, underlain by **acidic sands** influencing both land cover and ecology.
- Elevated topography allows **extensive views** into Surrey and Hampshire.
- Large areas of **mixed forest and deciduous forest** and important **heathland**, much owned by the **National Trust**, giving a natural setting and of habitat value.
- A landscape of **high public accessibility** and **recreational use**.
- There is a predominant **absence of farmland** within the landscape.
- A **strong linear character** evoked by the presence of **long straight roads** (including the dramatic **Wellingtonia Avenue**) originating from former forest rides.
- **Long distance** southerly views to the Blackwater Valley (A3) and into Surrey can be gained from the ridgeline.
- Presence of **wetlands of acidic character** and of **ecological significance**.
- Low-density **detached houses** enclosed and screened within large gardens containing **retained woodland**.

Physical Landscape

- 17.31 The character of the *Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands* is largely attributable to the presence of a distinctive ridgeline comprised of a unique assemblage of sandy geological formations not found elsewhere in the district. The ridgeline is known as the Finchampstead Ridges and includes the National Trust property of the same name, from which there are dramatic long-distance views into the Blackwater and Surrey beyond.
- 17.32 The dominant surface influence is the Camberley Sand Formation. However, at the uppermost point of the ridgeline, which reaches up to 100m AOD, the sands are overlain by the gravels of the Eighth River Terrace. Underlying the Camberley Sand Formation and emerging at lower elevations along the ridgeline (65m AOD along the boundary with the Blackwater Valley) are the Windlesham Formation and Bagshot Beds. These formations are dominated by sandy substrates that are laminated or inter-bedded with thin layers of clay, giving rise to gley-Podsols soils, which have impeded drainage and create nutrient-poor acidic conditions, unsuited for arable farmland.
- 17.33 There are no streams or brooks along the ridges. However, there are a few small ponds including the tiny Spout Pond and the more sizable and ecologically-significant Heath Pond (both within National Trust owned land).

Historic Environment

- 17.34 With a similar historic development pattern to M1 it is likely that expansion of settlement from the valleys onto these sandy soils occurred during the Bronze Age leading to the early development of heathland in the area as the ground was cleared and cultivated.
- 17.35 The former Roman road known as The Devil's Highway – connecting London and Calleva (Silchester), runs east-west through the area although only small sections are visible.
- 17.36 This area was part of Windsor Forest, and therefore largely unsettled with large tracts of woodland exploited for hunting and for timber. A number of straight rides were created through the forest for royalty (Queen Anne) so that the hunt could be followed by carriage and

these have formed the basis of the modern transport networks. The inclosure of Windsor Forest was carried out mainly between 1813 and 1817, and most of the heaths replaced by plantations, albeit a significant proportion of heaths and woodlands survive in this area. The scenic woodland landscape, close to London, made this area a popular setting for country houses.

- 17.37 Nearby Crowthorne developed with the establishment of Wellington College. Around which time (in the 1870s) the grand avenue of *Wellingtonia sequoia* known as the ‘Wellingtonia Avenue’ was planted by John Walter II, owner of the *Times* newspaper, as a memorial to the Duke of Wellington.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	These comprise an area around Heath Pond and part of the Devils Highway Roman Road.
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
None	
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 17.38 The *Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands* are characterised by areas of mixed woodland, together with mosaics of remnant heath and open water.
- 17.39 The character area supports three Wildlife Heritage Sites, which form relatively large blocks of mixed woodland with smaller area of heath and open water. Part of Fishers Copse is recognised as being woodland of ancient origin.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Fishers Copse 13.8 / 17.4ha	Partly ancient woodland
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
None	

Rural Land Use

- 17.40 Like *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands (M1)* this landscape is notable for its absence of farmland. This area is dominated by its recreational use within a natural setting of mixed woodland and heathland.
- 17.41 The majority of this area is covered by mixed woodland including a high proportion of conifers. Much of the woodland area is owned by the National Trust. These areas are Heath pond, which includes the pond by the same name; Simons Wood with its hundred-year-old Scots Pine, which contains the principal visitor car park for the area; and the Finchampstead Ridges. The Finchampstead Ridges includes a large common of managed heathland – the colour of the gorse and heather in combination with the views and openness of the ridge top location contrasting with the darkness and enclosure of the woodland landscapes and making this area a popular local beauty spot. Connecting these properties is a dense network of public footpaths, bridleways and walks.

Settlement and Built Character

- 17.42 This area appears sparsely settled because the residential development that has occurred in this area is of low-density being arranged linearly and consisting of large houses set within extensive wooded gardens linked to the rides by long driveways. In contrast to

M1 the linear settlement tends to occur on only one side of the road leaving the other side open.

- 17.43 The main focus of settlement is the B3348, which stretches from close to Wellington College in a long drive until it reaches Finchampstead Ridges at which point it takes angular meanders to follow the ridge top. The first section of this drive is the long avenue of *Wellingtonia* trees, which are a dramatic sight and important local landmark reaching some 30m in height. The large detached houses along this avenue are mostly hidden behind rhododendron hedges and fences in a woodland setting. This pattern continues along the more open ridgeline and extends to North Court at the end of the wooded ridgeline.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 17.44 The *Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands* is considered to be a **high quality** landscape. This is because it has a strong character and is in good overall condition. The **strong character** relates to the key characteristics which create a distinctive sense of place with all making a strong contribution to overall landscape character – in particular the distinctive ridgeline, the woodland, heathland and the *Wellingtonia* avenue. The **good condition** is as a result of the well-managed and maintained nature of the woodland, heathland and properties in this area.

Landscape Strategy

- 17.45 The overall strategy for the *Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands* (M2) is to **conserve** existing character. This entails active management of all of the elements that are positive characteristics of this landscape as outlined above. In particular there is an opportunity to consider restoration of heathland on former areas of heathland, now wooded. The aim should be to link and connect existing heathland areas.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 17.46 The *Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands* (M2) landscape is considered to be of **high sensitivity**. The recreatability of the different landscape components are largely considered to be low and most are considered to be important at the regional scale. The elements considered most sensitive are the ridgeline and associated views into/from the Blackwater Valley (A3) and Surrey, the Wellingtonia Avenue, and the important woodland and heathland habitats managed by the National Trust.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 17.47 The following table sets out the main issues affecting or with potential to affect the character of the *Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands* and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to ensure that the area remains as a distinctive wooded ridgeline supporting valued heathland and woodland habitats and retains its scenic and recreational qualities.

Key Issues	Associated Guidelines
Agriculture	
❖ No issues (non-agricultural)	
Forestry and Woodland Management	
❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.	• Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed	• Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views or habitats.

Key Issues

woodland over the past decade.

- ❖ Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- ❖ In the past expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands has resulted in a change in character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora.
- ❖ Influence of woodland fell cycles on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines.

Associated Guidelines

- Seek to actively manage woodlands by controlling exotic invasive species that are threatening the locally distinctive species.
- Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnecting valleys. The aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in areas which have been converted to coniferous monoculture plantation.
- Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive ridgelines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.

Minerals

- ❖ No known issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Loss and fragmentation of acid grassland and heath habitats as a result of scrub encroachment or conversion to forestry has occurred in the past.
 - ❖ The threat of scrub encroachment to wetland habitats.
 - ❖ Over-maturity of veteran street trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.
- Conserve and restore remnant heathland habitats to link existing fragmented sites and seek to prevent further habitat loss. Areas of recently wooded heath are a key target for restoration. An appropriate heathland management regime is critical.
 - Conserve remaining important wetland habitats – Heath Pond – through appropriate management.
 - Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of street trees. In particular plan for the long-term management of the Wellingtonia Avenue.

Key Issues

Associated Guidelines

Recreation

- ❖ Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated district.
- Maximise the contribution made by the forestry resource in M1 for recreational purposes, to draw pressure away from the more sensitive landscapes here.
- Consider zoning of activities to ensure sensitive landscapes are protected from damaging activities.

Built Development

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.
- Consider undertaking character appraisals of settlements within Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation.
- ❖ Infilling of former heaths with built development has resulted in loss of settlement structure, communal areas and village focus.
- Restrict further ribbon development and consider opportunities to strengthen and enhance the landscape setting to the villages through planting.
- ❖ Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham District landscape.
- Consider the impact of any development on skylines – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Retain the wooded skylines of Wokingham District.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Increasing transport pressures on rural roads is occurring as a result of traffic taking diversions to avoid delays in the urban areas leading to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air pollution in rural areas.
- Consider the use of traffic calming and access restrictions to maintain the tranquillity of the most rural areas. This would also make the use of rural roads more attractive for cyclists and recreational users.
- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the elevated
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in

Character Area M2: Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands

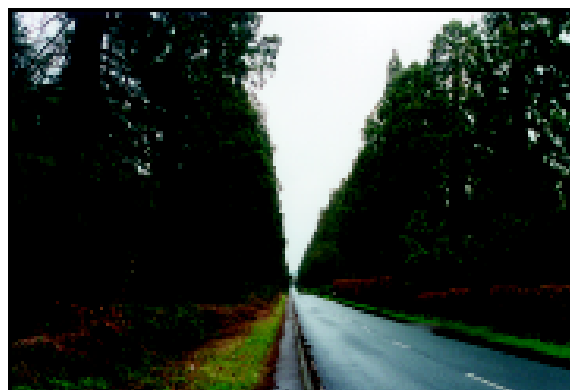
Key Issues

landscape.

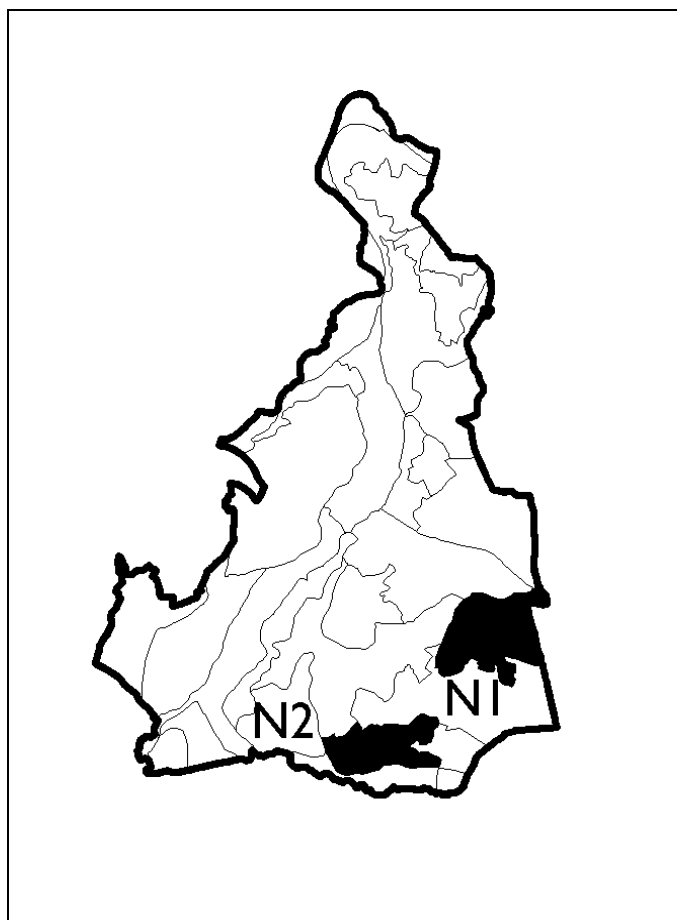
Associated Guidelines

this elevated landscape.

M2: FINCHAMSTEAD RIDGES FORESTED AND SETTLED SANDS



18 LANDSCAPE TYPE N: PASTORAL SANDY LOWLAND



Landscape Areas	Character
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N1: Holme Pastoral Sandy Lowland	Green
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N2: Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland	
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Characteristics of Landscape Type

18.1 There are two areas of *Type N: Pastoral Sandy Lowland*. These sandy, farmed landscapes are found in the south east of Wokingham District being closely associated with and transitional between the sandy, forested landscapes of *Type M: Forested and Settled Sands* and the clay, farmed landscapes of *Type J: Settled and Farmed Clay*. This type is distinguished by an undulating landform and sandy geology, giving rise to poorer soils that are predominantly used for pasture.

Key Characteristics

- Shelving, gently and steeply undulating landform.
- Sandy geology dominated by Bagshot, Windlesham and Camberley Sand Formations with London Clay influences.
- Pastoral Farmland in fenced enclosures, including rough paddocks.

- Bracken and gorse along roadsides creating a heathy appearance.
- Small clustered hamlets, large manors and farmsteads.

Relationship to Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

18.2 The *Pastoral Sandy Lowland* falls almost entirely within *Landscape Type K: Settled Farmlands* of the Berkshire assessment. Type K is described as being a transitional landscape grading from the *Open Clay Lowlands* to the north and the *Forested Sands* to the south/east. Therefore, it can be considered that the *Pastoral Sandy Lowland* represents one of the subdivisions in that type which becomes evident at the more-detailed level of a district study. As described for *Landscape Type M: Forested and Settled Sands* there have been some small boundary adjustments around the perimeters of Type M because the boundary in this assessment has been drawn more tightly to the current edge of the wooded area.

N1: HOLME GREEN PASTORAL SANDY LOWLAND

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 18.3 The *Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland*, located south of the town of Wokingham, is characterised by its predominantly pastoral land use with smaller areas of arable land. The landscape here is gently undulating, opening out into flatter areas east of Holme Green and is set within a partially wooded context created by the *Settled and Forested Sands* to the south and the urban areas of Wokingham in the north.
- 18.4 The underlying geology is London Clay. However, the clay has largely been capped by Bagshot Beds and fifth and sixth river terraces resulting in strong sandy and acidic influences. This has led to a high proportion of pastureland, now characterised by hobby-farms comprising medium sized enclosures for sheep and cattle, rough horse and pony paddocks with their associated infrastructure, and smallholdings for chickens and more unusual animals such as guinea fowl and ostrich. Within this pastoral context, particularly where the London Clay remains the dominant influence, some areas are under arable cultivation in large undivided fields. The proximity to the built-up area has led to the establishment of 'pick-your-own' fruit farms growing strawberries and raspberries and Christmas tree plantations.
- 18.5 The rural area is sparsely settled. However, the edges of Wokingham are visible. There are a few clusters of settlement at Home Green and Gardeners Green and the area is also characterised by the presence of large manor houses which have been converted into education establishments.
- 18.6 Overall the landscape appears generally peaceful despite the proximity to Wokingham town. It has 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 including gorse and bracken.

Location and Boundaries

- 18.7 The *Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland* is located directly south of the town of Wokingham between *J1: Wokingham–Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay* in the north and *M1: Forested and Settled Sands*. The southern boundaries are defined by the perceived edge of the forested area, therefore following the current extent of the Gorrick Plantation and interconnected woodland areas. To the west it follows the A321 along the edge of the settled area of Finchampstead North. The northern boundary is defined (for the purposes of this assessment) by the edge of Wokingham town, which approximately follows the Railway Line. The district 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). Aslong the eastern boundary, the woodland and topography help maintain a clear visual and physical separation between the built up areas of Wokingham town and Bracknell.

Key Characteristics

- **Shelving to gently undulating landform** underlain by a **sandy geology**.
- An **agricultural landscape** defined predominantly by **pastoral farming** contained within **medium-sized and geometrically shaped fields** and largely divided by post and wire and rough timber fencing.
- **Small scale ‘hobby’ farming** including a number of **equestrian paddocks** and exercising areas bound by often **unkempt fencing** and supported by **temporary-looking facilities** such as caravans and sheds.
- **Speciality farms**, including **‘Pick Your Own’**, Christmas trees and unusual breeds such as ostrich and guinea fowl farms.
- Presence of **small businesses** indicates **economic diversification** aside from agriculture.
- **Scrubby vegetation** including wooded tributaries, shelterbelts with

gorse, bramble and bracken.

- **Dispersed settlement** including large **manors** being used as educational establishments and hamlets.
- Recreational value in the form of a golf course and numerous **footpaths** and **bridleways**.
- A landscape evoking a generally **peaceful character**.
- **Views of the southern fringes of Wokingham** with some areas of land providing an important break between Finchampstead and Wokingham.
- **Pine clumps** are a locally distinctive feature forming the approach to Wokingham.

Physical Landscape

18.8 *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 gravelly 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 west 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 some drainage ditches, although these are not as prevalent as, for example, in the *Arable Clay Lowlands*.

18.9 The Emm Brook tributaries are a branched network of very small brooks set within very narrow and shallow valleys. These create some 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.

Historic Environment

- 18.10 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) indicate settlement in a forest environment, the area being part of Windsor Forest.
- 18.11 The area formed the agricultural hinterland to Wokingham (J1), first recorded in 1146. The 1st edition OS map shows a pattern of small irregular fields over much of the area, indicating early inclosure, although the larger, straight-sided field around Tangley are characteristic of early 19th century Parliamentary inclosure. There was considerable boundary loss as fields were amalgamated in the 20th century, although surprisingly the areas closest to the urban edge of Wokingham have remained the best preserved.
- 18.12 In the rural areas 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.
- 18.13 In 1759 the Windsor Forest Turnpike Trust created a new road through Wokingham. The branch of the South Western Railway line between Staines and Reading, opened in 1849, and the South Eastern Railway both pass through the area, subsequently stimulating urban development, Wokingham eventually becoming the Berkshire’s fifth largest town by 1930.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
None	

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	Numerous fairly large areas including around Ludgrove School, Gardeners Green and Bigwood House.
<i>Conservation Areas</i>	
	Langborough Road Wokingham Town Centre (urban area not covered by this assessment)
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	Henry Lucas Hospital – Grade 1 listed almshouses in the former grounds of Luckley Park. Cluster of buildings at Holme Green, scattered throughout the area and associated with the Wokingham Conservation Area.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens</i>	
None.	

Ecological Character

- 18.14 The Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland is largely dominated by urban and arable land uses. The area has retained one Wildlife Heritage Site, a wet acid woodland near to Ludgrove School.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Big Wood	Ancient woodland (replanted)

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
Nr Ludgrove School 1.0ha	Wet woodland
Gorrick Plantation 64.95ha	Woodland, heath/bog flora + grass snakes
Trench's Bridge 7.82ha	Woodland

Rural Land Use

- 18.15 This landscape is predominantly in agricultural use. The farmland is dominated by medium-sized open pastureland supporting a wide variety of animals including sheep, cattle, goats and some pigs. The fields are divided by geometrically-arranged post-and-wire or rough timber fencing. In some places hedgerows have been retained but these are generally gappy and unconnected and marked by rough overgrown hedge banks including gorse, bracken and bramble. Rarely there are mature oaks 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. Interspersed with the larger pastures are areas of smaller fields that are enclosed by higher mesh fences. At close range these can be identified as poultry farms with chickens, guinea fowl and even ostriches.
- 18.16 In particular, medium sized paddocks and liveries are common, with equestrian uses particularly concentrated to the south of this character area adjacent to the forest –exploiting the woodland rides through the *Forested and Settled Sands*. The horse and pony paddocks are of medium size and, again, enclosed by fences rather than hedgerows. The equestrian areas have a rough and marginal appearance with the presence of wooden shacks and caravans and informal infrastructure used as jumps such as old painted barrels. Other recreational uses are also evident. These 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. There is also a small fishing lake near Gardeners Green.

- 18.17 To the north and east, corresponding to the flatter areas with clayey stagnogley soils there are some areas of large arable fields. Small areas of speciality crops such as strawberries and raspberries are also grown in small enclaves. These are generally pick-your-own and farm shop establishments, exploiting this area's location close to the settled areas of Wokingham and Bracknell.

Settlement and Built Character

- 18.18 The main settlement in the vicinity of this area is Wokingham, the principal town of the district. Wokingham, which is described more fully in *Settled Open Clay Lowlands*, has expanded out from an elevated area of Bagshot Beds and river terraces located between tributaries of the Emm Brook onto the adjoining clay lowlands. Only the southern outskirts of Wokingham are visible from the rural area of the *Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowlands*. These have expanded southwards until the limit imposed by the railway line that passes through this area and appear as a subtle line of detached white-rendered and brick houses integrated within a wooded context and following the upper 'valley' edge of the Emm Brook.
- 18.19 There are also small settlements at Holme Green, Chapel Green and Gardener's Green. These have no obvious distinctive common vernacular, although clay tile, render and dark weatherboard are evident. They are located in subtly elevated areas and from afar, like Wokingham, appear integrated into a wooded 'ridgeline' context. Elsewhere settlement is sparse and restricted to scattered farmsteads and large buildings set in extensive grounds used for private schools such as Ludgrove School and Holme Green School. The settled areas are connected by a network of rural roads and private lanes.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 18.20 The *Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland* (N1) is a landscape of **moderate quality** due to the moderate landscape character and moderate condition. The **moderate character** relates to the combination of different characteristics with the strongest elements being the undulating landform, peaceful character and the open

pastoral farmland and paddocks. Weaker elements are the historic field patterns which have virtually disappeared (except for some areas close to Wokingham) and urban fringe influences. The overall **moderate condition** relates to the good condition of some elements set against the poor survival of historic patterns and habitats and the loss of field boundaries and untidy appearance of temporary structures/features within fields (such as caravans) leading to a sense of neglect.

Landscape Strategy

- 18.21 The overall strategy for the *Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland* is to **enhance** the existing character. The key opportunities for enhancement relate to historic field patterns and hedgerows – with potential for replanting and management of boundaries, and enhancement of ecological character. Management of urban fringe activities on marginal land is also required. The open views and appearance of settlements being integrated within the rural landscape context should also be conserved and enhanced.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 18.22 The *Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland* is a landscape of overall **moderate sensitivity** as a result of all landscape components being of low or moderate recreatability and important at the local level. The most sensitive components, are the perceptual characteristics of the landscape including the sense of openness and the generally peaceful character. Other characteristics with some sensitivity are the small areas with ecological value (which include the wooded tributaries and shelterbelts with gorse, bramble and bracken), the rural land use pattern and the rural views and setting to the edge of Wokingham.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 18.23 The following table sets out the main issues affecting or with potential to affect the character of the *Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland*. The overall objective is to improve the character of the area through management and enhancements to the condition of the open pastoral farmland and paddocks and the ‘rustic’ appearance of this area whilst allowing change to occur that would complement and reinforce the existing character.

Key Issues

Agriculture

- ❖ Hedgerow loss is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture and introduction of post and wire fencing.
- ❖ Recent years have seen loss of viability of small farms leading to neglect of agricultural land and decline in management of agricultural features such as hedgerows.
- ❖ The declining viability of livestock grazing is resulting in conversion to other land uses such as pony paddocks and loss of grassland habitats.
- ❖ Decline in demand for traditional countryside products leading to loss of rural features e.g. loss of pollarded willows on waterside pasture (also affected by river management practise).
- ❖ Changes in agricultural practice, including conversion to hobby farms and equestrian enterprises, is leading to changing management regimes (due to lack of knowledge and resources) and loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and

Associated Guidelines

- Conserve remaining hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak 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.
- Promote active management of features of the agricultural landscape and promote agri-environment management through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship, to facilitate reinstatement of lost or declining features, such as standard oaks and hedgerows.
- Conserve and protect pasture and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing. Consider re-creation of lost grassland habitats.
- Encourage and develop markets for products to encourage farm diversification supporting such features. Support market gardening as a characteristic of this area.
- Seek to manage set-aside land, paddocks and hobby farms to enhance the visual and ecological quality of the landscape, for example through planting boundary hedgerows. Also avoid proliferation of sheds/temporary

Key Issues

hedgerow trees.

- ❖ Presence of marginal agricultural land being kept in 'hope' value, particularly around settlement edges, which is of poor visual character.

Associated Guidelines

buildings on land of this nature.

- Seek to maintain a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for the village or town.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ There is evidence of loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.

- Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views and retain woodland associated with the tributaries.

- ❖ Potential demand for large areas of energy crops (such as coppiced willow woodlands) as demand to meet renewable energy obligations increased.

- Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.

Minerals

- ❖ No known issues.

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Loss and fragmentation of acid grassland and heath habitats as a result of scrub encroachment or conversion to forestry has occurred in the past.

- Conserve and restore remnant heathland habitats to link existing fragmented sites and seek to prevent further habitat loss. Areas of recently wooded heath are a key target for restoration.

- ❖ Over-maturity of hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.

- Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees.

Recreation

- ❖ Pressure for golf courses that have an impact on the character of the

- New golf courses to be sympathetically sited and

Key Issues

landscape.

- ❖ Pressure for more horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.

Associated Guidelines

integrated into the landscape.

- Provide guidance on sensitive management of paddocks to respect landscape character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.

- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent towns and village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. This is particularly important in this area which is close to Wokingham.

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.

- Consider undertaking character appraisals of settlements within Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation.

- ❖ Infilling of village greens and former heaths with built development has resulted in loss of settlement structure, communal areas and village focus.

- Restrict further ribbon development and consider opportunities to strengthen and enhance the landscape setting to the villages through planting. Consider creating new village greens which could help to maintain the individual character of individual settlements.

- ❖ Pressure for expansion of built development on the edges of towns is leading to suburbanisation of the landscape, loss of individual settlement identity and blocking of views.

- Consider possibilities for woodland creation in urban fringe areas such as South Wokingham where these could enhance landscape character and quality, provide recreational potential, and assist in the positive integration of the urban and rural landscape while conserving significant views to landmark features.

Key Issues

- ❖ Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.

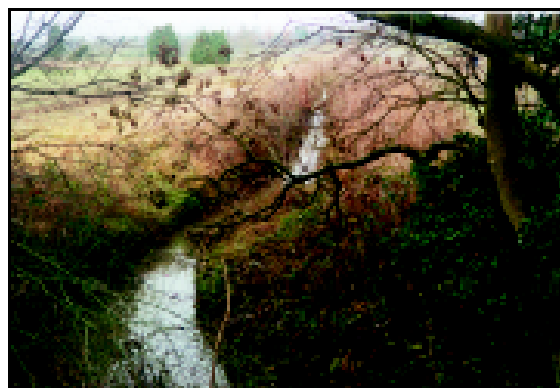
Associated Guidelines

- Care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings with potential to be highly visible in this open landscape ensuring that key landscape characteristics are maintained.

Infrastructure

- ❖ There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.
 - ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.
- Undertake sympathetic screening to minimise the impact of new and existing roads.
 - Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.

NI: HOLME GREEN PASTORAL SANDY LOWLAND



N2: FINCHAMPSTEAD PASTORAL SANDY LOWLAND

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

- 18.24 The *Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland* is found in the south of Wokingham district to the north of the *Blackwater River Valley*. This area is characterised by gently to steeply undulating pastures rising to a gentle ridge and set against the wooded backdrop of the *Settled and Forested Sands*. Local areas of arable land are also evident.
- 18.25 The landscape is strongly influenced by the sandy and acidic soils formed due to the underlying presence of the Camberley Sand Formation, Windlesham Formation and Bagshot Beds. In combination with the undulating landform these 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.
- 18.26 The landscape has a strongly rural character with narrow rural lanes often bordered by grassy banks with roadside trees. Roadside ditches are also present and some very small brooks draining to the River Blackwater. Settlement is sparse, comprising scattered farmsteads, grand manor houses and clusters of buildings located along the prominent ridgeline or on locally elevated hills. These have good views out into the surrounding landscape and become landmarks when viewed from below. The exception to this pattern is the small and picturesque village of Finchampstead, the largest settlement of the area, which is located at the edge of the Blackwater River Valley (A3) following a clustered nucleated pattern.

Location and Boundaries

18.27 The *Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland* is located in the south of Wokingham district between the *Blackwater River Valley* (A3) and the *Forested and Settled Sands* (M1). 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 field boundaries that approximately represent the transition from a pastoral to more open arable landscape. This area is particularly allied to *M2: Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands*, to which it is connected along the ridgeline.

Key Characteristics

- **Gently to steeply undulating** landform culminating in a **prominent ridgeline** to the north with **views to the surrounding lowlands**.
- **Poor soil** as a result of underlying sandy formations including Bagshot Beds, Camberley Sand Formation and Windlesham Formation with areas of London Clay resulting in a **predominantly pastoral landscape**.
- Mixed pastoral landscape of **open small and medium sized fields** divided by **post and wire** or **timber fences** with grazing **sheep, horses and cattle**, following a variety of enclosure patterns.
- **Scrubby** and overgrown **shelterbelts, roadside belts, small farm woods** and **scattered remnant hedgerow trees** enhancing the **wooded context** created by adjoining *Forested and Settled Sands*.
- **Quiet rural landscape** with an unobtrusive network of **rural roads** bordered by **grassy banks** with bracken, furze and ash avenues.
- **Drainage ditches** and small **brooks** and drainage channels.
- Dispersed settlement patten excepting the nucleated edge-of-river floodplain village settlement of **Finchampstead** and small clusters of buildings with characteristic vernacular influences

including brick, timber frame and thatch.

- **Farmsteads** and **manors** located on **elevated areas** and following the route of the Devil's Highway former **Roman Road** creating an illusion of parkland.
- **Barrows** and former **Roman villa complex** (SAM).
- Dense network of public **footpaths** and **bridleways**.

Physical Landscape

18.28 The underlying geology is dominated by the varied sandy strata of the Bracklesham Group, comprising the clayey sands of the Bagshot Beds and sands of the Windlesham and Camberley Sand Formations. These are locally overlain by gravely river terrace deposits including (at high elevations) the eighth river terrace and (at low elevation) the first river terrace. 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 some 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 dominated by the roadside drainage ditches and a scattering of small ponds associated with dwellings.

18.29 The topography of this landscape is distinctive comprising a gentle but prominent ridgeline at between 60m and 100m AOD, which bisects this area in a west-east direction connecting to the wooded ridge of the *Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands*. This slopes southwards to the adjoining Blackwater valley and northwards to the forests of the *Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands*.

Historic Environment

18.30 The two round barrows located nearby at Warren Lodge (M1) suggests there may have be 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 1st edition OS map as the site of a supposed ‘camp’.

- 18.31 Cropmarks at Wheatlands Manor indicate the presence of a large Roman villa complex, comprising at least three aisled buildings and other features, 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, its drive lying along the line of the Roman road.
- 18.32 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 mainly of quite 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 inclosure of Windsor Forest, although a number of less regular fields, and the boundaries of the surviving areas of woodland, suggest earlier assart and other voluntary inclosures. Within this area there are fragmented pockets of well preserved enclosure/field systems.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Scheduled Ancient Monuments</i>	
BCC. No. 187	Roman Buildings S.W. of Wheatlands Farm.
<i>Regional Archaeological Site</i>	
	There are several small sites including and connected to the Devils Highway Roman Road,
<i>Conservation Area</i>	
	Finchampstead Church
<i>Listed Buildings</i>	
	These include farmsteads and large detached properties including the cluster at Bannisters Farm, Lead Farm,

Designations	Summary of Importance
	central Finchampstead, East Court Cluster around Manor Farm Church Farm.
<i>English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens</i>	
None	

Ecological Character

- 18.33 The *Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland* is characterised by scattered woodlands within a landscape largely dominated by pastoral land uses. The woodlands here 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.
- 18.34 The character area contains three wooded sites with Wildlife Heritage Site status. The Bannister's Copse complex of woodland is partly of ancient origin and represents a slightly fragmented cluster of woodland blocks. In recent years however some woodland has been planted in this area, aiming to link existing patches together and creating a larger core area.

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Sites of Special Scientific Interest</i>	
None	
<i>Local Nature Reserves</i>	
None	
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site/Registered Ancient Woodland</i>	
Banisters Copse / The Warren / Coppice Ground Plantation / and EFT Plantation 7.9 / 5.0ha	Partly ancient woodland
Fleet Copse	Ancient woodland
Great Thrift	Ancient woodland (partly replanted)

Designations	Summary of Importance
<i>Wildlife Heritage Site</i>	
East Court Woods 2.0ha	Woodland
Shepperlands Copse 9.8ha – <i>Part of this site also falls within M1</i>	Woodland

Rural Land Use

- 18.35 The principal land use of the area is as farmland, the majority of the landscape being improved permanent pasture for grazing animals with some areas of arable land also evident. The pastures are of varying size being generally small or medium-sized and divided by geometric post and wire fences or rustic wooden pole fences. They are therefore considerably more divided than their historic pattern. Where vegetation is a feature of the field enclosure pattern this takes the form of scrubby overgrown shelterbelts or former hedgerows punctuated by mature, often stag-headed, trees. Similarly the rural roads are often bordered by rough grassy banks with bracken and furze and with broken avenues of mature ash or poplar trees bordering the shallow water-filled roadside ditches.
- 18.36 Within the fields there are also a number of small farm woods. In combination with the shelterbelts and the adjoining wooded landscapes of the Settled and Forested Sands these create a subtly wooded context throughout much of the area.
- 18.37 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.

Settlement and Built Character

- 18.38 The largest settlement in this area is Finchampstead, which falls partially within character area *A3: Blackwater River Valley*. Finchampstead has a rural character with some noticeable vernacular influences including dark timber-framed houses with white render and thatched roofs (Finchampstead Church is a Conservation Area).

Finchampstead is an attractive nucleated settlement, which has expanded out from its historic core with newer estate development continuing into the *River Valley* character area. These recent development includes estates with mock-vernacular character.

- 18.39 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 seventeenth 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. Near Church Farm is the interesting eighteenth century church of Saint James with its impressive brick-built and pinnacled Norman-tower. Away from the route of the Devil’s Highway are, to the south, Banister’s Farm (also seventeenth 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 eastern boundary of the area.

EVALUATION

Landscape Quality

- 18.40 The *Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland* is a **high quality** landscape. This is because of the combination of a good condition and strong character. The **strong character** results from characteristics including the distinctive undulating landform which rises to a locally-prominent ridgeline enclosing the Blackwater valley; the coherent pattern of settlement, predominantly pastoral land use and the peaceful rural ambience. The landscape components of the *Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland* largely conform to their ideal state resulting in the perception of **good condition** overall. However, there is scope to further enhance condition with the main

opportunities being through strengthening of the habitat value and reinstatement and management of the historic hedgerow pattern.

Landscape Strategy

- 18.41 The overall strategy for the *Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland* is to **conserve** and **strengthen** existing character including the undulating landform, the coherent pattern of settlement, predominantly pastoral land use and the peaceful rural ambience. There are opportunities to strengthen the hedgerow network and woodland areas.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 18.42 The *Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland* (N2) is considered to be a landscape of overall **moderate sensitivity** due to the variable sensitivity range of different landscape components. In this context the elements of character most sensitive to change are the landform, as a result of its visibility from adjoining landscapes; the historic landscape, including the Roman villa complex; the settlement pattern with nucleated settlement, and farmsteads and grand manors located along elevated 'ridge'; and the rural quality of the landscape.

The Changing Landscape: Key Issues

- 18.43 The following table sets out the main issues affecting or with potential to affect the character of the *Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland* (N2) and the associated management guidelines for dealing with these issues. The overall objective is to conserve the current character and to ensure that any change respects the key sensitivities of the landscape outlined above.

Key Issues

Agriculture

- ❖ Hedgerow loss is evident – this is associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.

Associated Guidelines

- Conserve hedgerows and shelterbelts as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak standards left to form future timber trees. Consider opportunities for reinstatement of hedges, particularly where they have been

Key Issues

- ❖ The declining viability of livestock grazing is resulting in conversion to other land uses such as pony paddocks and loss of grassland habitats.
- ❖ Changes in agricultural practice, including conversion to hobby farms and equestrian activities is leading to loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

Associated Guidelines

lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides.

- Conserve and protect pasture and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing. Consider opportunities for re-creation of lost grassland habitats.
- Seek to manage set-aside land, paddocks and hobby farms to enhance the visual and ecological quality of the landscape, for example through planting boundary hedgerows.

Forestry and Woodland Management

- ❖ Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
 - ❖ There is evidence of past loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the native deciduous woodland resource in past years. The state of the countryside report for the South East (2001) indicates an increase in broadleaved and mixed woodland over the past decade.
 - ❖ Influence of woodland fell cycles on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines.
- Conserve all woodland sites and continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
 - Aim to continue to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
 - Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive ridgelines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.

Minerals

- ❖ No issues.

Key Issues

Associated Guidelines

Habitat/Natural Features

- ❖ Loss and fragmentation of acid grassland and heath habitats as a result of scrub encroachment or conversion to forestry has occurred in the past.
 - ❖ Over-maturity of veteran hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the landscape.
- Conserve and restore remnant heathland and grassland habitats to link existing fragmented sites and seek to prevent further habitat loss. Areas of recently wooded heath are a key target for restoration.
 - Consider a tree planting programme to plan for the next generation of parkland, hedgerow and street trees.

Recreation

- ❖ Pressure for golf courses that have an impact on the character of the landscape.
 - ❖ Pressure for more horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
 - ❖ Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated district.
- New golf courses to be sympathetically sited and integrated into the landscape.
 - Paddocks to be sensitive to existing landscape character by retaining features of the landscape such as hedgerows. Temporary structures should be discouraged.
 - Maximise the contribution made by the forestry resource for recreational purposes, to draw pressure away from more sensitive landscapes.
 - Consider zoning of activities to ensure sensitive landscapes are protected from damaging activities.

Built Development

- ❖ Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent areas.
 - ❖ There is continuing pressure for expansion and infill within existing
- Protect the individual identity of settlements by conserving the rural character of the landscape between adjacent village centres and avoiding amalgamation of these settlements. Conserve the low density settlement patterns in this area.
 - Consider undertaking character appraisals of settlements within

Key Issues

settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.

- ❖ Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham District landscape.

Associated Guidelines

Wokingham District to identify features worthy of conservation.

- Consider the impact of any development on skylines, particularly the sensitive ridgeline – where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Retain the wooded skylines of Wokingham District.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.

- Maintain the historic leafy lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural locations.

- ❖ Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the elevated and open landscape.

- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated and open landscape.

N2: FINCHAMPSTEAD PASTORAL SANDY LOWLAND



APPENDIX 1: Field Record Sheet

WOKINGHAM DISTRICT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT: FIELD SURVEY SHEET

Sheet No: _____ Photograph Nos: _____
Location: _____ Date: _____
Direction of view: _____ Time: _____
OS Grid Reference: _____ Weather: _____

FINAL APPRAISAL (To be determined on completion of field and desk survey)

FINAL LANDSCAPE TYPE:	FINAL CHARACTER AREA:
------------------------------	------------------------------

DRAFT LANDSCAPE TYPE _____

DRAFT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA: _____

Keywords describing the landscape: _____

PHYSICAL FEATURES

GEOLOGY

<input type="checkbox"/> Alluvial Drift	<input type="checkbox"/> London Clay	<input type="checkbox"/> Windlesham Form.	<input type="checkbox"/> Bagshot Beds
<input type="checkbox"/> Clay-with-Flints	<input type="checkbox"/> Bagshot Beds	<input type="checkbox"/> Camberley Form.	<input type="checkbox"/> Chalk

ELEVATION

<input type="checkbox"/> Lowland (<50m)	<input type="checkbox"/> Transitional (50-75)	<input type="checkbox"/> Upland (>75m)
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LANDFORM

<input type="checkbox"/> Flat	<input type="checkbox"/> Steep slopes	<input type="checkbox"/> Escarpment	<input type="checkbox"/> Broad valley
<input type="checkbox"/> Shelving	<input type="checkbox"/> Gentle slopes	<input type="checkbox"/> Knoll	<input type="checkbox"/> Narrow valley
<input type="checkbox"/> Rolling	<input type="checkbox"/> Floodplain	<input type="checkbox"/> Plateau	<input type="checkbox"/> Shallow valley
<input type="checkbox"/> Undulating	<input type="checkbox"/> Hills	<input type="checkbox"/> Coomb Valley	<input type="checkbox"/> Deep valley

WATER/HYDROLOGY

<input type="checkbox"/> River (S/M/L)	<input type="checkbox"/> Stream/tributary	<input type="checkbox"/> Flooded gravel pits	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineered/artificial
<input type="checkbox"/> Speed (F/M/S)	<input type="checkbox"/> Drainage channels	<input type="checkbox"/> Lake	<input type="checkbox"/> Locks/Weirs
<input type="checkbox"/> Clarity (C/M)	<input type="checkbox"/> Drainage ditches	<input type="checkbox"/> Ponds	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> River Meanders?	<input type="checkbox"/> Spring	<input type="checkbox"/> Bog	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

LAND COVER

LAND USE CONSULTANTS

LAND USE

<input type="checkbox"/>	Farmland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Residential	<input type="checkbox"/>	Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/>	Natural
<input type="checkbox"/>	Forestry/woodland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Military
<input type="checkbox"/>	Historic Parkland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Leisure/Recreation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mineral Working	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other

LAND/VEGETATION COVER (INDICATE RELATIVE %)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Arable	<input type="checkbox"/>	Amenity grassland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Small farm woods	<input type="checkbox"/>	Heathland
<input type="checkbox"/>	Perm. pasture	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conif. plantation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shelterbelts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Scrub
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pasture	<input type="checkbox"/>	Christmas trees	<input type="checkbox"/>	Copses/ clumps	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wetland/Aquatics
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ley/improved	<input type="checkbox"/>	Decid. woodland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Woodland belt	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gardens
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rough grazing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mixed woodland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hanging woodland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Common
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wet Meadow	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parkland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Scattered Trees	<input type="checkbox"/>	Green
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chalk grassland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Avenues	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hedgerow trees	<input type="checkbox"/>	Paddocks
<input type="checkbox"/>	Set-aside	<input type="checkbox"/>	Orchards (type..)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hedgerows	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other

Notes on ecological character _____

LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS/FEATURES ✓ Subtle ✓✓ Evident ✓✓✓ Conspicuous

<input type="checkbox"/>	Motorway	<input type="checkbox"/>	Farm buildings	<input type="checkbox"/>	Earthworks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nucleated settlem.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dual Carriageway	<input type="checkbox"/>	Manor/Parkland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moats	<input type="checkbox"/>	Linear settlement
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rural Road	<input type="checkbox"/>	Landmark Building	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ridge and furrow	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dispersed settlem.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rural Lanes Track	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mills	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tumuli	<input type="checkbox"/>	Industrial workings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sunken Lane	<input type="checkbox"/>	Church	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hamlet	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mast/poles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bridleway	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fortifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	Village	<input type="checkbox"/>	Telecom. Masts.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Footpath	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hill forts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Town Edge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	Railway	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/>	Suburb	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other

BUILT/ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

<input type="checkbox"/>	Timber-frame	<input type="checkbox"/>	Brick - traditional	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stone	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tile
<input type="checkbox"/>	Weatherboard	<input type="checkbox"/>	Brick - modern	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slate	<input type="checkbox"/>	other
<input type="checkbox"/>	Flint	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conglomerate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thatch	<input type="checkbox"/>	other

Notes on built/settlement character _____

LAND USE CONSULTANTS

FIELD PATTERNS

<input type="checkbox"/>	Banks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fence - rural	<input type="checkbox"/>	Geometric	<input type="checkbox"/>	Small
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ditches	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fence – ‘urban’	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sinuous	<input type="checkbox"/>	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	Walls - rural	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hedge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Irregular	<input type="checkbox"/>	Large
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wall – ‘urban’	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hedgerow trees	<input type="checkbox"/>	Regular	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other

PERCEPTION

VIEW	distant	framed	intermittent	panoramic	corridor
SCALE	intimate	small	medium	large	
ENCLOSURE	confined	enclosed	semi-enclosed	open	exposed
VARIETY	complex	varied	simple	uniform	
TEXTURE	smooth	textured	rough	very rough	
COLOUR	monochrome	muted	colourful	garish	
MOVEMENT	remote	vacant	peaceful	active	

UNITY	unified	interrupted	fragmented	chaotic
NATURALNESS	undisturbed	restrained	tamed	disturbed

LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION AND ADDITIONAL NOTES

[illegible]

LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

(highlight condition/survival, threats/pressures, fragility/vulnerability, management issues and opportunities)

Agriculture

.....

.....

Field patterns/boundaries

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.....

Trees and woodland

.....

.....

Archaeology/historic components

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.....

Buildings/settlement/development

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Linear features

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Quarrying/mineral reclamation

.....

.....

Other land uses

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General Notes on Management

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.....

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.....

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**NOTES ON OTHER AREAS/FEATURES WITHIN DRAFT CHARACTER
AREA**

APPENDIX 2: Consultees

APPENDIX 2A

Communities of Interest

Samantha King
Thames and Chiltern Team
English Nature

Frank Lucas
South East Region Office
RSPB

Mike Habergan
Forestry Commission

Andrew Davies
Country Landowners
Association

Steve Williams

Peter Colling
Tourism South East

Graham Scholey
Conservation Team Leader
Environment Agency
Thames Region

Berkshire Joint Strategic
Planning Unit

Richard Copas
Environment Agency

Director of Planning Services
Oxfordshire County Council

Valerie Carter
SEEDA

Tim Richings
Planning Strategy Group
Hampshire County Council

Mr. Dougal Driver
Team Leader
GOSE

Karen Hearshaw
Environment Department
Surrey County Council

David West
Countryside Agency

Director of Planning Services
South Oxfordshire District
Council

Ian Corbryn
Bucks, Berks and Oxon Wildlife
Trust

Christopher Swanwick
Director of Planning
Wycombe District Council

CPRE, London

Appendices

Sheila Holden
Head of Planning and
Environment
Windsor and Maidenhead Royal
Borough Council

Director of Planning
Bracknell Forest Borough
Council

Director of Planning
Hart District Council

Director of Planning
West Berkshire District Council

Director of Planning
Basingstoke and Deane Borough
Council

Workshop Participants

Cllr M. A. Long (Finchampstead South)
Mr DC Macdonald (The Wokingham Society)
Cllr F. A. Rolls (Redhatch, Earley)
Mr. C. Renham (Joel Park Residents Assoc.)
Mrs Doreen Dye (Wokingham F.O.E.)
Alan Scott (Barkham PC)
Don Bullock (Shinfield P.C.)
Dr S P Wilford (CPRE)
Sheila Viner (Holt Copse Volunteers)
John Mead (Holt Copse Volunteers)
Hurst Village Society (Wendy Tobitt)
Diane Harker – Berkshire Environmental News
Cllr Rusty Atkins (Sonning PC)
Cllr Graddon (Charvil)
Cllr Robertson (Norreys Ward)
Roger Brown (Winnersh PC)
Cllr J Lissaman
Tony Mattingly (Woodley TC)
Cllr Annette Drake (Hurst)
Chris King, Loddon Valley Ramblers

Internet/Hard Copy Consultation Comments

Charvil Parish Council

Councillor M. Long

Wokingham Town Council

Barkham Parish Council

Earley Town Council – Cllr Fiona Rolls

Environment Agency

Gregory Gray Associates

Hankinson Duckett Associates response on behalf of University of Reading

Shinfield Parish Council

Sonning West Drive Residents

The Landscape Partnership

Twyford Parish Council

Wargrave Parish Council