

Topic Paper

Valued Landscapes

January 2020

To accompany the Draft Local Plan Update consultation



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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1. Background

- 1.1 This paper provides background evidence and justification for Wokingham Borough Council's designation of Valued Landscapes as per Policy NE6 of the Draft Local Plan. It sets out the relevant legislation and policy guidance and details the methodology used for determining Valued Landscapes across the Borough. It is intended that this paper inform the development of the Local Plan Update and demonstrate how evidence has been applied in order to formulate policies designating Valued Landscapes in Wokingham Borough.
- 1.2 The outputs of this work will also help assist officers in Development Management when assessing future planning applications.
- 1.3 Work on the Borough's Valued Landscapes builds on the Council's most recent Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), (2019), as well as the 2004 Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment and offers an objective description of the landscape including its features and attributes. The LCAs provide an evidence base to support policies within the LPU and more widely guide decision making around development and the management of future change. They are designed to be used both as a positive tool to guide new development or land uses in a way that understands and responds to local variations in landscape character and to protect and enhance the special qualities and local distinctiveness of Wokingham's landscape. The updated LCA contains more detailed evaluative information to provide greater understanding of key sensitivities and values to help in decision-making and accommodating change by providing an understanding of what is valued and why.

2. What makes a Landscape?

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

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

3. Planning Framework

- 3.1 Given the importance and prominence of landscape matters, various policy and guidance has been published across a variety of scales. Some of this considers landscape in its entirety, whereas others consider landscape with greater specificity.
- 3.2 Whilst it is noted that no landscapes within the borough are currently designated as being of international cultural significance, the UNESCO Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention recognises the twin roles of nature and people in the development of landscapes:

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

- 3.3 Landscape is further an important element of national planning policy, with Paragraph 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) (NPPF) stating: *'The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development'*. Paragraph 8c) states that one of three 'overarching objectives' is an environmental one:

'c) an environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy'.

- 3.4 Paragraph 20 of the NPPF states that: *'Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development and make sufficient provision for:*

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

- 3.5 Paragraph 170 of the NPPF further states:

¹ UNESCO Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, 10th July 2019, paragraph 47.

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

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland'*

3.6 The overall objective for the natural and local environment being that planning policies and decisions should protect, contribute towards and enhance valued landscape by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

3.7 The NPPF states at paragraph 171 that:

'Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value'. It continues that plans should: '...take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries'.

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

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

3.9 Together this policy and guidance provides the basis from which policies and plans can be prepared as part of recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

3.10 In September 2019 the Government published the final report of the Glover Review into the Nation's designated landscapes. The Government has yet to respond fully to that review. However the Review saw 'strong merit' in the re-designation of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) as a National Park. In addition the Review found that amending the boundaries of existing national landscape designations like the AONB 'needs to work faster and better' and that there should be a renewed vigour in the process for boundary changes'. A review of the Chilterns AONB boundary changes – which included proposals to include parts of Wokingham Borough within the AONB – was put to Natural England in 2014.

4. An Introduction to Valued Landscapes

4.1 The historic environment includes: *'All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past activity...*

*and landscaped and planted or managed flora*². Valued Landscapes include landscapes valued for their cultural and wildlife heritage. Whilst numerous historic landscapes have been included in the assessment of features likely to raise the landscape above that of ordinary countryside, the Valued Landscape Assessment builds in greater detail on the work of the recent Historic Landscape Characterisation Study for East Berkshire (2019).

- 4.2 Similarly, sites of value for nature conservation have been included in the initial mapping of Valued Landscapes and the detailed final assessment of the Valued Landscapes will build on the Wokingham Biodiversity Action Plan (2012-2024). The BAP outlines landscape-scale biodiversity and wildlife aspirations which are dependent on such landscape features as chalk soils that form chalk grassland or low-lying waterlogged land that creates wet woodland. It is these features of the landscape that are of particular note or rarity upon which wildlife and biodiversity depend.
- 4.3 Locally valued landscape forms part of the council's strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure and planning for the enhancement of natural capital. They also have wider benefits, including helping to address and mitigate the impacts of climate change, and encouraging healthy and active lifestyles.
- 4.4 Reference to 'protecting and enhancing valued landscapes,' in NPPF paragraph (170(b)) further serves to highlight the national importance of valued landscapes in the context of enhancing and preserving the natural environment. This further provides opportunities at a local level to identify valued landscapes in order to reinforce the protection and enhancement of these areas.
- 4.5 The Landscape Institute's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (Revision 3, 2013) provides a summary of the range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes. These factors are widely used when considering the value that can be attached to landscapes, and are set out in Box 5.1 from the GLVIA below.

² NPPF (Feb 2019) Annex 2: Glossary

Box 5.1

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

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

Based on Swanwick and Land Use Consultants (2002)

4.6 Further to this range of factors, planning appeal decisions and court rulings/judgements can provide additional information on how to interpret national policy and guidance, some of which are highlighted below.

4.7 A systematic approach to assessing valued landscapes, based on the factors set out in GLVIA Box 5.1, has been supported by Appeals Inspectors and in the High Court. Mr Justice Ouseley, in *Stroud v SoSCLG*³, has said that valued landscape would require to have:

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

4.8 A valued landscape therefore does not have to be designated but it must demonstrate attributes or features that take it above the ordinary.

4.9 In addition, the Aylesbury Road, Wendover Public Inquiry Inspector's Decision Letter (dated 9th October 2017)⁴ states:

'... The small site itself may not exhibit any of the demonstrable physical features but as long as it forms an integral part of a wider 'valued landscape' I consider that it would deserve protection under the auspices of paragraph 109 of the Framework. To require the small site itself to demonstrate the physical features in order to qualify as a valued landscape seems to

³ [2015] EWHC 488 (Admin) paragraph 16.

⁴ Appeal Decision APP/J0405/W/16/3158833 paragraph 65.

me to be a formulaic, literal approach to the interpretation of the question and an approach which could lead to anomalies. It could lead to individual parcels of land being examined for physical characteristics deterministic of value.'

- 4.10 It should be noted that this appeal was considered under the NPPF (2012), which highlighted the importance of protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. The Wendover appeal decision also gave valuable guidance on how to address the issue of the character, quality and extent of a given 'landscape' in the context of plan making:

'Further I do not accept that the Stroud case is authority for the proposition that one must only look to the site itself in seeking to identify demonstrable physical characteristics. In examining matters Mr Justice Ouseley confirmed that the Inspector was entitled to come to certain judgments about the factors and evidence in relation to matters outside the confines of the site itself. When assessing what constitutes a valued landscape I consider it more important to examine the bigger picture in terms of the value of the site and its surroundings. That is not to borrow the features of the adjoining land but to assess the site in situ as an integral part of the surrounding land rather than divorcing it from its surroundings and then to conduct an examination of its value'.⁵

- 4.11 The need to identify the area is supported in the same paragraph of the Wendover appeal where the Inspector said:

'In coming to a view as to whether or not a site falls to be classed as a valued landscape within the terms of the Framework, it seems to me that one first has to consider the extent of the land which makes up the landscape under consideration before examining whether or not there are features which make it valued'.⁶

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

5. The Method used to determine which areas merit Valued Landscape designation locally

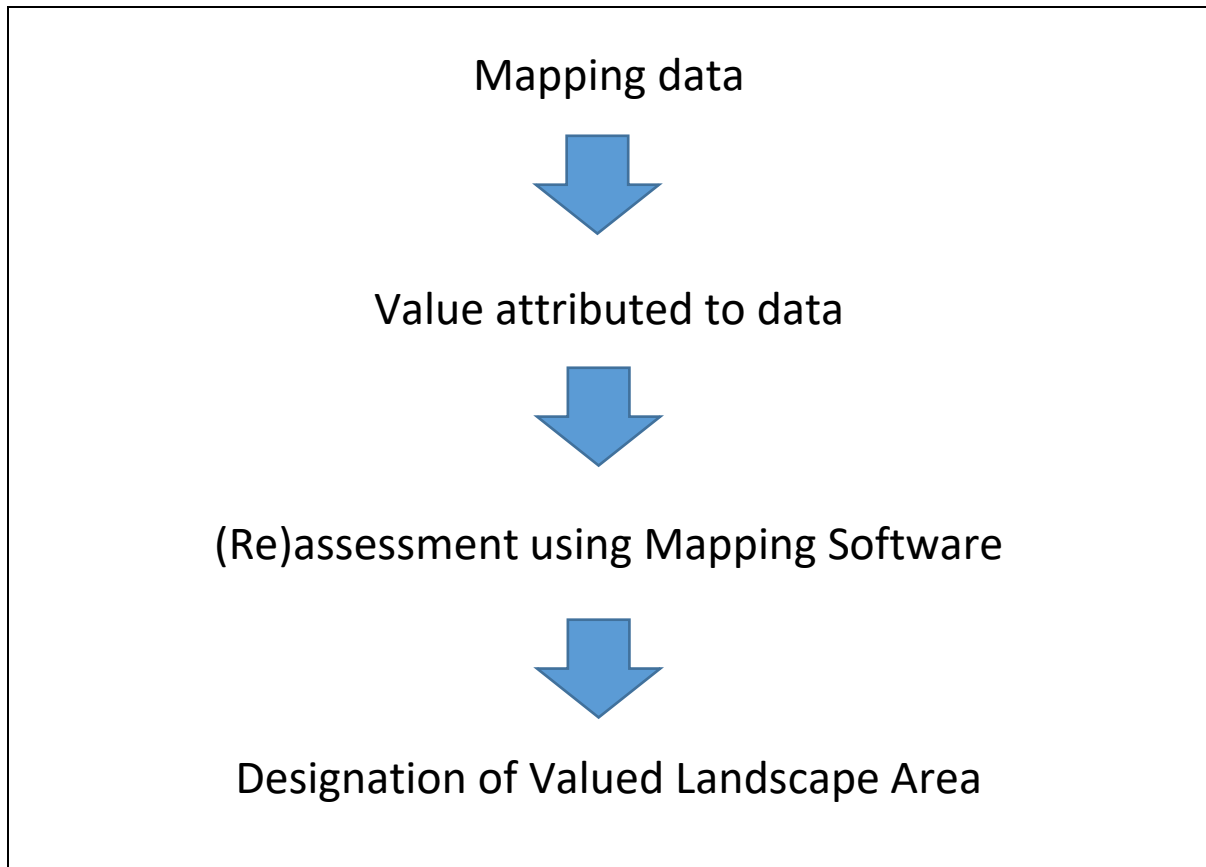
- 5.1 This chapter sets out the robust methodology used to assess areas that may be considered valued landscapes. This comprehensive methodology takes into account both quantitative and qualitative data that together help to inform the process. This four step process takes into account variety of quantitative and qualitative methods, that together help to determine areas of valued landscape.
- 5.2 The assessment process was an iterative one, which makes it robust, though it is acknowledged that it was centred largely on available information and therefore subject to limitations. No assessment of the value of a landscape can be full and final. It is not possible to know the complete history of a landscape, understand all the ecology, comprehend the full range of uses a landscape is put to, or comprehensively interpret and assess the sum of all the parts. As well

⁵ APP/J0405/W/16/3158833 paragraph 65.

⁶ APP/J0405/W/16/3158833 paragraph 65.

as this, landscape changes over time and new methods of evaluating the landscape become available.

- 5.3 Whilst there will always be shortcomings in such methodologies, the Council considers this process to be robust and an essential first step towards the strategic valued landscape assessment of the borough. It is an assessment that will be taken forward in more detail on the ground and through the heritage, biodiversity and other records and data.



1. Digital Layering

- 5.4 The first step for the Wokingham Valued Landscape Assessment, was to digitally layer maps showing the ‘demonstrable physical attributes’ referred to by Mr Justice Ouseley⁷. This was achieved by layering maps of ‘factors’ and ‘attributes’ of valued landscape importance over one another and adding a narrow buffer zone to show the influence such factors and attributes carry across the landscape and how they influence neighbouring spaces through short, medium and longer distance visual impacts.
- 5.5 The aim of this process was to build an initial heat map showing the sum of those factors and attributes, highlighting the spatial distribution of highly valued landscapes across the borough which would form the basis for a more in-depth assessment by officers in working out the extent and character of each valued landscape. This builds on the statement of Inspector in the Aylesbury Road, Wendover Inquiry, in that it is important to determine the extent of the landscape before deciding on whether it is a Valued Landscape.

⁷ [2015] EWHC 488 (Admin) paragraph 16.

- 5.6 Referring to the Nanpantan Road appeal⁸ the Inspector in Aylesbury Road, Wendover further draws attention to the relationship between people and place and its importance in defining and refining the concept of ‘landscape’ as opposed to ‘land’:

‘To my mind the term ‘landscape’ denotes an area somewhat wider than the appeal site in this case. In this regard I note the reference of my colleague in the Loughborough appeal to the GLVIA definition of landscape as ‘an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors’. I endorse the view that ‘it is about the relationship between people and place, and perceptions turn land into the concept of landscape’⁹

- 5.7 This speaks to the importance of the Local Plan process and the need to consult the public. It is clear, from Mr Justice Ouseley’s judgement¹⁰, that not all land ‘valued’ by the public is ‘valued landscape’. However, from both the Nanpantan Road and Aylesbury Road Appeal Decisions we see that the relationship between people and place is important. In this light, the assessment of the character and extent of areas identified by the VLA will be further informed through the LPU public consultation process, as well as cross-boundary Duty to Cooperate discussions and through on-site assessment.
- 5.8 The Attributes Table 2 in Appendix 1 sets out the data used to inform the digital layering process to build a high level heat-map of the whole borough which mapped grid squares of 25m x 25m. The features and attributes included in this table were drawn from a wide range of datasets, including European, national and local nature and heritage conservation designations. Other datasets were drawn from specialist research, notably the colour coded tranquillity mapping¹¹ and the dark skies mapping¹² from studies by CPRE provided the basis for the tranquillity and night light scoring. The scoring regime was drawn up by a selection of officers with skill sets covering landscape architecture, trees, ecology and cultural heritage. The scoring was balanced to reflect the relative importance and comparability of each ‘attribute’ across and within the various ‘factors’ (Table 2 in Appendix 1). The scoring was weighted by attribute, with a highest score of 1, and the lowest score of 0.
- 5.9 One area addressed by Box 5.1 but not covered by this methodology is that of Associations; the artists, writers or historical events that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of a landscape. The Box 5.1 ‘factor’ of ‘Associations’ is discussed in the text of each Valued Landscape Narrative (see Appendix 2).
- 5.10 A further data source for these factors and attributes was research undertaken as part of defending valued landscape arguments during planning appeals. This included long linear features of the ‘Historic Straight Rides’ associated with the use of the Royal Forest of Windsor for hunting in the early modern period; and the Second World War GHQ Stop Line defences built as a deterrent to German invasion in 1940.

⁸ Land South of Nanpantan Road, Loughborough, APP/X2410/W/15/3028159 and APP/X2410/W/15/3028161, decision date 16th January 2017

⁹ Aylesbury Road, Wendover, Buckinghamshire, APP/J0405/W/16/3158833, Paragraph 67, decision date 9th October 2017

¹⁰ [2015] EWHC 488 (Admin) paragraph 9.

¹¹ Based on Tranquillity mapping for CPRE by Northumbria University. cf Tranquillity Mapping: Developing a Robust Methodology for Planning Support Technical Report on Research in England, January 2008 (revised)

¹² Based on Campaign to Protect Rural England dark skies analysis. cf Night Blight – mapping England’s night pollution and dark skies, CPRE, June 2016

- 5.11 It was decided that some designations and policy constraints should not be included as a factor as part of this methodology. For example, the Metropolitan Green Belt was not included because it is not an indicator of landscape quality but a planning designation which seeks to check unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas and safeguard the countryside against encroachment amongst other things.
- 5.12 It is important to note that whilst the relative weighting given to each attribute, in terms of scores out of one, this was a matter of professional judgement. The initial heat mapping of the Borough was a qualitative exercise designed to highlight hot-spots for further consideration, not a quantitative exercise to attribute a numerical score to each grid square.
- 5.13 The attributes could then be displayed based on two calculations, one based on the sum score and one based on the average. The sum score was considered to be the most robust approach in that it more closely reflects the Box 5.1 assessment of landscape, and the concept that landscape is itself not an average of its parts, but a sum of its parts.

2. Data Interrogation and Display

- 5.14 The second step of the process was to consider how to display the data, in order to interrogate it in more detail. This included determining which elements of the borough were sufficiently valuable to warrant further investigation.
- 5.15 At a national level, 9.3% of land in England is designated as a National Park and 15% AONB. In addition, there are other designations such as UNESCO World Heritage Sites - cultural landscapes of international importance. Therefore, whilst some of these designations overlap, just over 25% of the landscape in England is designated at a national level. When considering this in the context of Wokingham Borough, areas that were located wholly within the highest scoring 25% of landscape in the borough were identified. This exercise highlighted those areas of landscapes that displayed the highest number of features and attributes of valued landscape importance.
- 5.16 This process was carried out in order to examine '*the bigger picture in terms of the value of the site and its surroundings*' as per the Wendover appeal led on determining the character, quality and extent of the surrounding landscape. It effectively narrowed down the assessment to the highest performing quartile of landscapes in the borough.
- 5.17 The filtering out of parts of the countryside also meant the rejection of some areas of potentially valued landscape, for example sites that were perhaps too small to be considered a 'landscape'¹³ or sites that were too urban in nature e.g. Sites of Urban Landscape Value which are addressed under a separate policy designation and the subject of a separate topic paper. Notwithstanding this, some Conservation Areas were included in the Valued Landscape areas, especially where they were considered to represent small rural villages, such as Remenham Henley Bridge and Remenham Church.

¹³ Aylesbury Road Wendover appeal APP/J0405/W/16/3158833 paragraph 67

3. Further scrutiny of the landscape areas

5.18 The third step in the process was to consider the identity of each of the potential valued landscapes and examine the data, to check the aggregation of physical attributes or features. This was initially carried out as a desk-based exercise.

5.19 The process of uncovering the identity of each valued landscape was an iterative one, with the interrogation of the data that formed the basis of the digital layering and heat map exercise and cross-referencing and further scrutinising these layers, using aerial photographs. The views of a number of council officers, across disciplines and departments were taken into consideration including those from landscape architecture, trees, ecology and cultural heritage backgrounds. It was important that each Valued Landscape was recognisable and understandable by a range of professionals as well as the public.

5.20 This process resulted in a ranking of all the contiguous areas of Valued Landscape ‘hot-spots’. The top 30 performing areas based on the layering of data were then re-assessed to allow for areas of Valued Landscapes to be conjoined, or separated out, in recognition of their geography, similar or differing characteristics and features respectively. Table 1 below sets out how these were grouped together to form 11 distinct and recognisable Valued Landscapes:

Table 1 – showing the amalgamation of VLA hot-spots into 11 Valued Landscape Areas	
Ranking	VLA, SULV or other
1A	River Thames VL
2A	River Thames VL
11	River Thames VL
28	River Thames VL
1B	River Loddon VL
21	River Loddon VL
1C	Spencers Wood Southern Ridge VL
20	Spencers Wood Southern Ridge VL
1D	Forest and Rides VL
3	Forest and Rides VL
10	Forest and Rides VL
16	Forest and Rides VL
18	Forest and Rides VL
26	Forest and Rides VL
2B	Chilterns Chalk VL
4	Barkham and Bearwood VL
13	Barkham and Bearwood VL
17	Barkham and Bearwood VL
22	Barkham and Bearwood VL
29	Barkham and Bearwood VL
5	River Blackwater VL
6	Bowsey Hill VL
23	Bowsey Hill VL
7	Haines Hill VL
9	Haines Hill VL
14	Haines Hill VL
8	Billing Bear VL
12	Billing Bear VL

Table 1 – showing the amalgamation of VLA hot-spots into 11 Valued Landscape Areas	
Ranking	VLA, SULV or other
27	Billing Bear VL
15	Risley Woods VL
19	SULV
24	Whiteknights campus - University of Reading
25	SULV
30	SULV

5.21 This shows that the River Thames Valued Landscape is the primary feature in the four areas that together constitute the landscape in this Valued Landscape Area (VLA). However the River Thames VLA and the Chilterns Chalk VLA were considered to be distinct entities that were separated rather than conjoined.

5.22 This landscape-led process was further aided by the Borough’s Landscape Character Assessments. Whilst Valued Landscape will to a great extent reflect the Borough’s Landscape Character Assessment, there will be places where the overlaying boundaries of LCAs and Valued Landscape Areas differ. This is particularly true where Valued Landscapes reflect features that cross LCA boundaries, such as rivers, geology or old roads, or other historic features.

5.23 It is worth noting that those areas of countryside located adjacent to or outside of the eleven Valued Landscape Areas are still considered to contribute and enhance the natural and local environment as per Paragraph 170(b) of the NPPF (Feb 2019):

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

4. Delineating boundaries

5.24 The fourth and final step in the process was to determine the boundaries of each of the identified valued landscapes. The outputs of this process have resulted in a number of overlapping layers. As a result, it is important to consider where one or more elements of the landscape depends on views out of and into the landscape and as such professional judgement is required.

5.25 The measurements of earlier landscapes, particularly medieval ones, was based on ergonomics or everyday items: the inch, yard, rod, pole, perch, furlong and mile all relating to the sizes of parts of the body or every-day, often agricultural, objects. An inch being a thumbs width or the length of three grains of barley laid end-to-end. The boundaries of all eleven Valued Landscapes and their distribution across the borough are shown on Map 1 (Appendix 3) and are provisionally delineated by an indistinct buffer zone, set at a width of 100m (50m within the VL area boundary and 50m outside of the VL area boundary). The two 50m zones within and just outside of the Valued Landscape area are considered to constitute a suitable buffer on the ground. The buffer is intended to act as a guide for planning professionals and the public, acting as a transition zone between the part of the landscape that is ‘mere countryside’ and the ‘valued landscape’. These buffers will be subject to minor revisions following the LPU consultation and ground truthing by officers.

5.26 A map and narrative description of each of the 11 Valued Landscape Areas can be found in Appendix 2. The narratives have been developed with reference to both the 2004 and 2019 versions of the Borough's Landscape Character Assessments.

6. Cross Boundary matters

- 6.1 It is recognised that landscape is not confined to specific administrative boundaries and there are cases where some of the Valued Landscapes identified spill over Wokingham Borough's administrative boundary into neighbouring Local Planning Authority areas. For the purposes of this study, where this is the case only the sections of the Valued Landscape (and the associated buffer) that fall within the administrative boundary of Wokingham Borough have been mapped and included as part of the Valued Landscape Areas.
- 6.2 It is anticipated that discussions will take place with the relevant neighbouring Local Planning Authorities and other relevant stakeholders over the coming months in order to refine the methodology used and its outputs.
- 6.3 Valued Landscape Assessment work carried out by neighbouring Council's in the future may well result in amendments to the Valued Landscape Areas in Wokingham Borough. For example land previously not judged to be 'valued landscape' sandwiched between the edge of another Valued Landscapes and the borough boundary may, in the light of future survey by neighbouring authorities be considered to be important as part of a larger continuum of Valued Landscape spanning across the Borough boundary. Failing to include this 'island' of landscape would, in the words of the Inspector in the Aylesbury Road Wendover appeal, lead to 'anomalies'.¹⁴
- 6.4 It is worth noting that one of the Valued Landscapes that has been identified – known as Billing Bear – is located adjacent to the administrative boundary of Bracknell Forest. The landscape here is open and rural in nature and forms part of a gap between the settlements of Binfield (in Bracknell Forest Council's administrative area) and Wokingham town. A planning application for 350 homes concerning part of the same settlement gap - Land South of Foxley Lane in Binfield - was dismissed at appeal in February 2018. In the appeal decision, the Inspector found that the development would result in:
- 6.5 *'...significant harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape, which I judge to have sufficient qualities to be deemed to be valuable. There is conflict with the development plan here (EN8, EN20 and H5) and the proposal runs counter to the NPPF objective to protect and enhance valued landscapes. The harm to landscape attracts significant weight'.¹⁵*
- 6.6 Whilst the appeal decision relates to land outside of Wokingham Borough, it is of significance here given that the site in question formed part of the same wider landscape and settlement gap as that within the Billing Bear Valued Landscape Area.

¹⁴ APP/J0405/W/16/3158833 paragraphs 64 and 65

¹⁵ Appeal decision ref. APP/RO335/W/17/3177088, paragraph 87, page 17

7. Concluding remarks

7.1 The work undertaken to identify each Valued Landscape within Wokingham Borough is considered to be a local response to the work undertaken at a national level to identify AONBs and National Parks. The Valued Landscape Assessment is considered to complement the Borough's Biodiversity Action Plan (2012-2024) as it is features of the landscape that are of particular note or rarity upon which wildlife and biodiversity depend. It also builds on the work of the recent Historic Landscape Characterisation Study for East Berkshire (2019).

7.2 The Valued Landscapes identified through this project will be formally designated in the Local Plan Update (Policy NE6). In accordance with the requirements of the NPPF, this Policy seeks to protect, contribute to, and enhance the features that contribute to the attributes and quality of valued landscapes and specifically the criteria set out in the Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) Box 5.1¹⁶:

- a. Landscape quality (condition)
- b. Scenic quality
- c. Rarity
- d. Representativeness
- e. Conservation interests
- f. Recreation value
- g. Perceptual aspects
- h. Associations

7.3 The policy also seeks to embody the principles of green infrastructure¹⁷, to deliver a wide range of benefits for people.

7.4 It is noted that no assessment of the value of a landscape can be full and final, and that this process is to an extent an iterative one. Ground-truthing and public consultation of the Local Plan Update will inform any alterations to the current proposed Valued Landscape Areas. It is not possible to take into account every aspect of a landscape, its features, history or characteristics. As well as this, landscape changes over time and new methods of evaluating the landscape become available and it is accepted that this valued landscape evaluation may need to be revisited in the future. Nevertheless, the process and methodology outlined in this Topic Paper demonstrate that a robust approach was used to identify 11 Valued Landscapes across the borough, which will serve an important purpose over the lifetime of the Local Plan Update.

7.5 The Glover Review (2019) saw 'strong merit' in the re-designation of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) as a National Park. A review of the Chilterns AONB boundary changes – which included proposals to include parts of Wokingham Borough within the AONB – was put to Natural England in 2014. It may be that parts of the landscape, whether identified as 'Valued Landscape' or not in this assessment, will be recommended for inclusion within the Chilterns AONB or National Park as it may become. It is acknowledged that reviews of nationally important landscapes and their boundaries (as and when they are forthcoming from Central Government) will be seen in the wider context of these landscapes and will take precedence over any local assessment such as this.

¹⁶ The Landscape Institute's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (Revision 3, 2013)

¹⁷ Green Infrastructure (GI) is a network of high quality green and blue spaces and other environmental features.

Appendix 1: Table 2 – Attributes Table

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

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

Appendix 2: Valued Landscape area Narratives and maps

1. Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape
2. Billingbear Valued Landscape
3. Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape
4. Chilterns Chalk Valued Landscape
5. Forest and Rides Valued Landscape
6. Haines Hill Valued Landscape
7. Risleigh Woods Valued Landscape
8. River Blackwater Valued Landscape
9. River Loddon Valued Landscape
10. River Thames Valued Landscape
11. Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape

Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape Narrative

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

Bacon v Allwright: bill of information; interrogatories; depositions - answer of Margaret Allwright¹⁸

Introduction

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

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

In the north the Valued Landscape centres on the Registered Historic Park and Garden, in the south it centres on the ancient Langley Common, many of the landscape features of which appear on Nordens 1607 map of the royal forest of Windsor.

Features of the Valued Landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (WDLCA) (2004) categorises this area as L1 'Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills'. It confirms that this is a high quality landscape with strong character and a strong sense of place (para.16.26). The Assessment confirms that the landscape is in good condition (para, 16.26) and states that the landscape strategy is to conserve and strengthen existing character, including woodland and features associated with the historic landscape (para. 16.27).

The J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' landscape lying to the south-west is described as being of moderate quality, moderate character and moderate condition. The part lying

¹⁸ STAC 8/20/22 Attorney General v Allwright, Court of Star Chamber: Proceedings, James I, Berkshire, 1614

to the east of Arborfield is arguably of higher quality than this would suggest, because of its visual and cultural links with the L1 landscape to the east. It is true that this part of the landscape has far fewer woodlands and hedgerows but it is very likely that it has had an open character for many centuries, probably as part of a medieval strip farming system associated with the village of Arborfield Cross. The urban conurbation of modern Reading is visible from high points along the B3030 but not generally from the land to the east of this road, where the landscape is more contained by the high land occupied by the B-road and Arborfield Cross. The tranquillity and relative remoteness of this landscape is thus preserved by this important western part of the landscape. The landscape strategy of the J2 “Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay’ landscape is to enhance ‘the historic field system, habitats... rural lanes and wooded valleys... and more general improvements to woodland, farmland and habitat management’ (para 14.44).

Scenic Quality – The Barkham Village Design Statement (adopted SPD) refers to the parish of Barkham lying principally in open farmland which rises gently toward the ridge known as Barkham Hill. The parish boasts a number of significant landscape features and views recorded in the Statement. The Coombes area was identified under the Wokingham and District Local Plan (2004) as an Area of Special Landscape Importance.

The WDLCA (2004) states that the strong character of the L1 ‘Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills’ landscape 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 coombe pasturelands’*. The overall strategy is to *‘conserve and strengthen the existing character’* and identifies the *‘woodland and the features associated with the historic landscape’* as the key characters to be conserved. An important aspect of landscape that has been identified in the WDLCA (2004) is the *‘locally distinctive Rhododendron Drive’*. Whilst this is at odds with a note to enhance ‘woodland habitat’ it is true that – for a few brief weeks in the year - the ‘Rhododendron Drive’ or more properly the Rhododendron-lined Bearwood Road is a spectacular landscape feature when in bloom.

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

Rarity – The bulk of the Valued Landscape centres on the Registered Historic Park and Garden and is thus clearly of national importance and also rare at a national level. Whilst the Reading Football Club development has undermined the character of the Park’s second phase of development, it has compensated in Valued Landscape terms because of the increased recreational interest offered by the sports facility. The southern part of the Valued Landscape incorporates much of the countryside

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

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

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

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

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

Habitats of principal importance:

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

The Ancient Tree Inventory¹⁹ shows a wide variety of **Ancient and Veteran Trees** with notable aggregations around Barkham Manor (a selection of half a dozen ancient and veteran oaks - all over 6m in girth - in pasture and woodland to the north of the listed building), and in an avenue of Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) at Bearwood Park. This avenue is one of a handful in the borough which were planted seemingly because of the close association of the borough and its inhabitants with the first Duke of Wellington (1769 - 1852) – the hero of Waterloo. The Duke died at about the time of the ‘discovery’ of the tree by Augustus T. Dowd in 1852. The first seeds and seedlings were commercially available in the UK shortly afterwards and were popular with landowners.

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

¹⁹ The Government’s online planning guidance: *Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development*, last updated 5th November 2018

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

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

Notable buildings outside the conservation areas include: the Grade II late 17th century Mole Bridge Farmhouse and the Grade II 17th century The Glen in the west of the Valued Landscape. There are notable medieval buildings around Barkham village including the Grade II listed: 15th Century Sparkes Farmhouse, Church Cottage (on a moated site) and the Grade II listed late 16th Century Langleypond Farmhouse, which has been assessed by some as being a Tudor hunting lodge and a tangible link between the medieval hunting and modern settlement of this landscape.

There is also a fine assembly of farm buildings: engine shed, barns, and cattle sheds at Newlands farm yard on the edge of the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area. Quite apart from the setting of the listed buildings, and with references to Newlands in the historic record going back to the middle ages, this link with the Valued Landscape appears is important.

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

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

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

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

Culturally this landscape is important, being on the edge of the historic Royal Forest of Windsor between Bigshotte Walke and Bishop's Bear Wood Chase. The line of the boundary is picked out in today's landscape by roads and footpaths from Arborfield through the medieval centre of Barkham, to Wokingham lying to the south of the current Barkham Road. Two important conflicts between local residents and John Maltravers, on the one part, and King James I on the other, highlight the importance of Forest landscapes (that is land falling under Forest law) and the assertion of the pre-conquest rights of common people against the usurpation of those rights by powerful interests such as the nobility or the Crown. The latter case is discussed in some detail by Dan Beaver and the quote at the header of this narrative is from his work²⁰.

Recreational Value – The Barkham Village Design Statement states:

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

Much of the northern part of the Valued Landscape is covered by Bearwood Lakes Golf Course and the Reddam House school, which, whilst both privately run, have a quasi-public face and their landscapes can be enjoyed by workers, members, scholars and in those views in from public roads and other rights of way.

Perceptual Aspects – This is a wooded and pastoral landscape, just a short distance from the busy transport corridors of the M4, A329M and M3, the mainline to Waterloo and the Berkshire towns of Wokingham and Reading. Notwithstanding this, the landscape is a haven of tranquillity²¹ and incorporates a sizeable area of relatively dark skies²². These perceptual qualities are important and increasingly rare in the borough and the eastern part of the county.

Associations – As well as early associations with the Bishops of Salisbury and with Monarchs from Elizabeth I to the enclosures of the Royal Forest in the early 19th Century (reigns of George III, Geo. IV, Wm. IV and Victoria), the landscape has associations with a number of individuals of national importance. Whilst they are not household names now John de Maltravers, a regicide of the

²⁰ BEAVER. D, *Hunting and the age of violence before the English Civil War*, 2008 Cambridge

²¹ Based on Tranquillity mapping for CPRE by Northumbria University. Cf Tranquillity Mapping: Developing a Robust Methodology for Planning Support Technical Report on Research in England, January 2008 (revised)

²² Based on Campaign to Protect Rural England dark skies analysis. cf Night Blight – mapping England's night pollution and dark skies, CPRE, June 2016

despised Edward II, held land in Barkham much to the annoyance of local residents who petitioned the King:

"To our Lord the King and to his Council complain the inhabitants of Yeingdon [Evendons Farm – near Wokingham], Finchamstede [Finchampstead], Earle [Earley], Erbourgfild [Arborfield] and Nywelend [Newlands] that where they had their village, and villagers paid rights to a common pasture called Langenhurst in the town of Berkham which is within the bounds of the forest of Wyndsore. And themselves and their ancestors have had and used the common rights in the said pasture as appended to their free tenantry of time and of mind. Then moreover Mr. Johan de Mautravers as justice of the forest residing as Wyndsore ... seized this pasture and had it enclosed by a ditch and a hedge claiming the said common pasture as appended to the Manor of Berkam so that they cannot enjoy their common use as they were wont to use it, and pay without reason, and to their dispossession and to their great damage to which they beg remedy"²³.

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

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

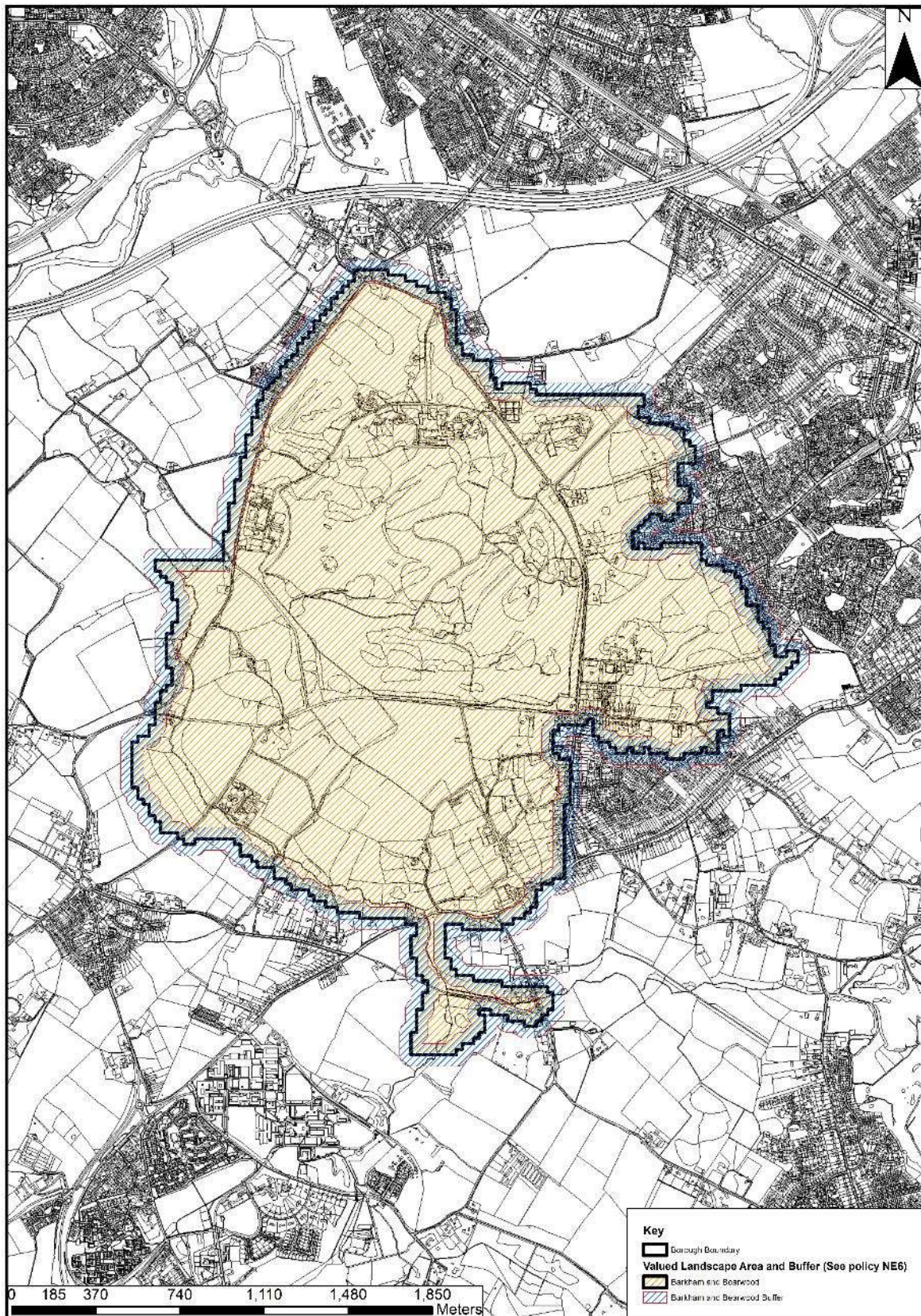
The historic concerns of local people over the enclosure of common land has already been mentioned. Within Langley Common – anciently 'Langenhurst', or Bearwood Common (both within the Valued Landscape) - the Allwrights, the Webbs and other villagers of Barkham and surrounding parishes rose up to confront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

Ironically the landscape achieves importance because of its association with another rich and powerful man – John Walter II – who built a huge estate across the lands of the borough, centred on this Valued Landscape Area. However, far from being the scion of a mighty Norman or Plantagenet

²³ Ancient Petitions, 8315, Record Office, London – translated from the old French.

house, John Walter II purchased a patent in the new technology of block type. He soon established The Daily Universal Register which in a few years became the Times of London, the well-established daily newspaper. The works of John Walter II in establishing and innovating this business cannot be underestimated and, having purchased an estate at Bearwood, he employed his considerable vigour in simultaneously working and adorning the landscape, making his estate as self-sufficient as possible. A work continued by John Walter III. This has resonances of the modern struggle to achieve economic growth whilst addressing the need for beauty, biodiversity and more recently the issue of climate change.

Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape



Billingbear Valued Landscape Narrative

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

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

*Alexander Pope (1688 – 1744)
'Windsor Forest'²⁴*

Introduction

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

In the hot-spot analysis to uncover the borough's Valued Landscapes²⁵ smaller hot-spots of landscape value were found to the south of, but not currently included in, this Valued Landscape. One of these is immediately adjacent to the Land south of Foxley Lane appeal site in Binfield²⁶. In that appeal the Inspector, Philip Major, concluded that:

the attractive and available views over the land, the presence of woodland, trees and hedgerows, rolling topography and fieldscape, the walks adjacent to the land along country lanes which are designated as part of a Ramblers Route, the absence of built development, and the perception of the

²⁴ Pope A, Windsor Forest, 7 March 1713, Publisher B. B. Lintot

²⁵ See Valued Landscape Topic Paper

²⁶ APP/R0335/W/17/3177088

land as quintessential English countryside, provide significant reasons to enable me to make the judgement that this location is rightly assessed as a valued landscape by the local population. The landscape has sufficient features and characteristics of quality which set it above the ordinary. I accept that it should be regarded as valued in the terms set out in the NPPF²⁷.

Features of the Valued Landscape

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

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

Scenic Quality – The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) summarises the scenic quality of the landscape and identifies valuable landscape attributes that relate to scenic quality.

For the scenic quality it states:

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

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

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

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

²⁷ APP/R0335/W/17/3177088 paragraph 28

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

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

Even so, the attractive and available views over the land, the presence of woodland, trees and hedgerows, rolling topography and fieldscape, the walks adjacent to the land along country lanes which are designated as part of a Ramblers Route, the absence of built development, and the perception of the land as quintessential English countryside, provide significant reasons to enable me to make the judgement that this location is rightly assessed as a valued landscape by the local population. The landscape has sufficient features and characteristics of quality which set it above the ordinary. I accept that it should be regarded as valued in the terms set out in the NPPF.²⁸

The Inspectors' description of what, earlier in his Decision Letter, he calls the '*quintessential English countryside*' fits the nearby Billingbear Valued Landscape. Both landscapes are highly representative of the English lowlands.

In addition Forest Road, with its wide verges and deep ditches, its appearance on a late 18th Century map²⁹, and its resemblance to the historic straight rides of the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape, makes this feature both important and representative of that period of the landscape of the Royal Forest of Windsor.

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

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

²⁸ APP/R0335/W/17/3177088

²⁹ PRIDE Thomas, A topographical map of the town of Reading and the country adjacent to an extent of ten miles, 1790, Thomas Pride (publisher)

The Ancient Tree Inventory³⁰ records few **Ancient or Veteran Trees**. However, there is a good assemblage of **ancient woodland** with four sites recognised as Local Wildlife Sites. Ashridge Wood once occupied a much greater area but it is now only represented by woodland left after the centre was felled many years ago.

There are 4 Local Wildlife Sites within this Valued Landscape: They are: North Ockett Wood, Pond Wood, Tippen's Wood and Beech Wood. The woods form an assemblage of ancient woodland, some modified by the planting of sweet chestnuts but many with ancient woodland plants in the field layer including bluebells, wood sorrel and primroses.

A characteristic feature of this landscape is its lack of development. As well as being characteristic, this is also a historic feature of the landscape. There are therefore only two listed buildings within the Valued Landscape. Grade II Targetts Farmhouse, a late 15th Century timber- framed house of L-shaped plan form with a timber frame partly encased in painted brick and an old gable-ended tiled roof. The Grade II listed building at Marchfield House is an 18th Century building within landscaped surroundings containing a small lake.

The Valued Landscape contains one locally listed historic park and garden, Billingbear Park. Originating as a medieval deer park, Billingbear was bisected by the construction of the M4 Motorway: The WBLCA (2109) states:

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

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

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

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

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

The Wokingham Borough LCA states that this is a landscape with '*few footpaths and little access across the large arable fields*'. However, the open landscape, the framed and distant views and the

³⁰ The Government's online planning guidance: Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development (last updated 5th November 2018), refers planners and developers to the Ancient Tree Inventory - an online resource of the Woodland Trust.

network of straight, small-scale rural lanes combine to give the area a level of access above what might be expected from this description.

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) which, for the I1 ‘Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland’ LCA states:

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

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

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

And

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

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

Pope was born in London on 21 May 1688, his father was a successful linen merchant in London but in 1700, his family moved to a small estate at Popeswood in Binfield just over a kilometre to the south-east of the Valued Landscape, and to the other side of the Valued Landscape (Foxley Hill Valued Landscape) identified in the appeal at Foxley Road Binfield in adjacent Bracknell Forest.

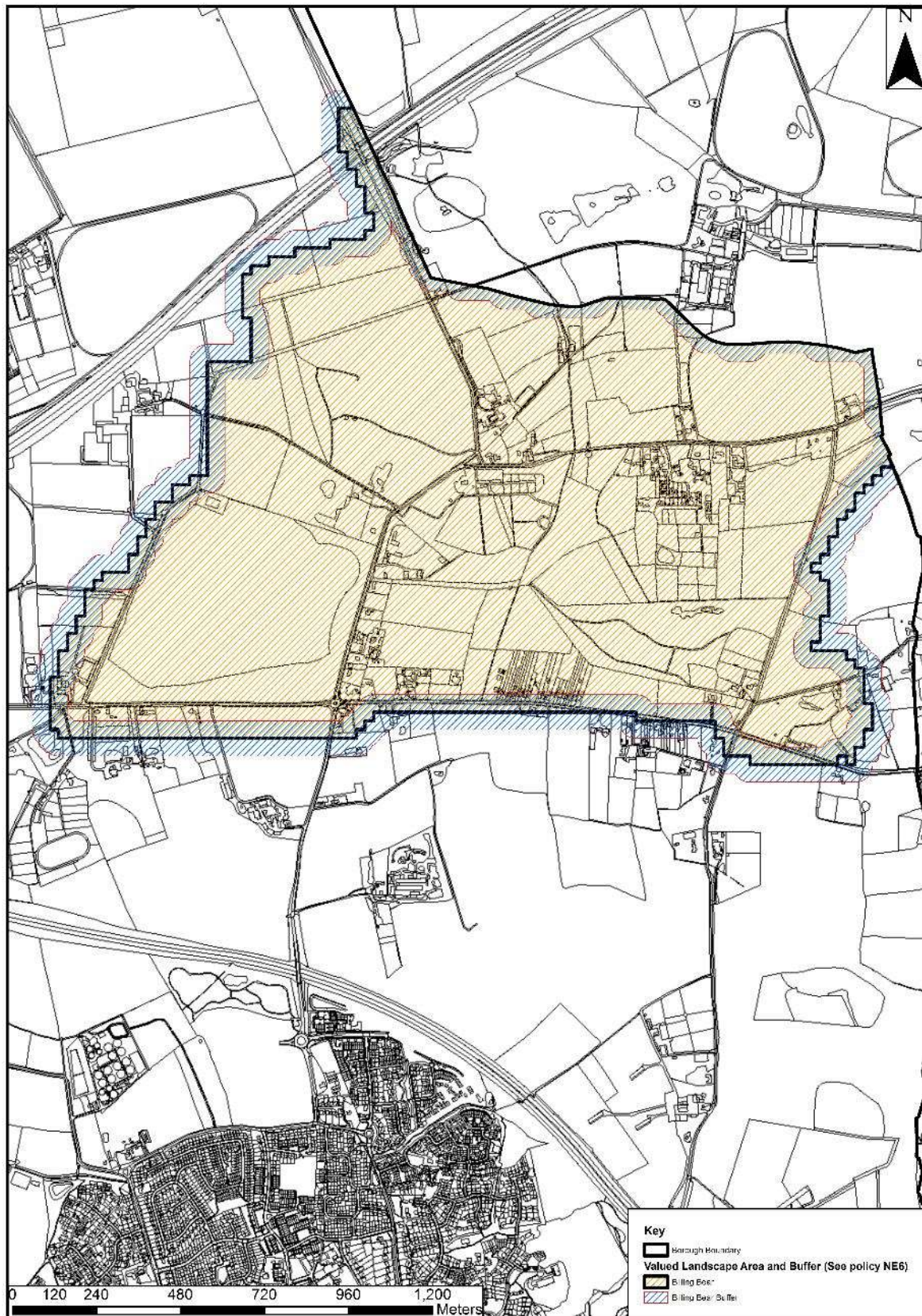
The move was due to perceived strong anti-Catholic sentiment and a law preventing Papists from living within 10 miles of London or Westminster³¹.

The ridge, which runs through the Valued Landscape, is close to Pope’s childhood home. There is no known record of Pope referring to specific places within the Valued Landscape. However, with its views across to the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape, the ridge would have been a good place to take

³¹ An Act to prevent and avoid dangers which may grow by Popish Recusants" (3. Jac. 1, v).

views to where *'wrapt in clouds the blueish hills ascend'* as Pope later described regarding views from Windsor Forests in his 1713 poem of that name. Indeed, though the poem was first published in that year the first part was written in 1704 when Pope was just sixteen years old and still lived at Popeswood.

Billingbear Valued Landscape



Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape Narrative

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Valued Landscape has exceptional tranquillity and scenic beauty and its southern parts lie across the London to Bath Road, for many centuries a highly significant highway. The popularity of the 'season' in Bath being highlighted in the novels of Jane Austen (a onetime resident of nearby Reading). The transport links between the capital and the important tourist destination of Bath combined with the scenic rural location made this an ideal location for country seats. This small area has a number of fine examples including the home of a descendent of the Grand Inquisitor of Spain, whose Jewish father converted to Anglicanism, and who was a General at the battle of Waterloo.

Features of the Valued Landscape

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussing the scenic quality of the F1 ‘Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls’ LCA it lists:

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

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

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

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

Unusually the description of the F1 ‘Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls’ LCA does not assist in this case, but it does point to the landform and the sinuous wooded skyline and the visual function of the area as a wooded backdrop. The absence of settlement and the palette of strong perceptual characteristics are mentioned. These features are rare within the borough and the eastern part of

the county. Particularly and increasingly rare at the regional level are the palette of strong perceptual qualities (remoteness, enclosure, isolation and elevation). Ancient woodlands which are rare in the borough are not, however, rare in the region (Sussex and Hampshire being particularly rich in these for example), although they are nationally rare and their preservation and enhancement is strongly supported in planning policy.

For the G1 'Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes', the LCA identifies the '*scattered ancient woodlands with other key sensitivities including the buildings and parklands*' due to their regional scale of importance). It identifies the intimate rural land-use pattern and perceptual characteristics as being important but of a lower level. The land use pattern and the perceptual characteristics are without doubt rarer now in the borough, and indeed the south-east region, than they were when the WDLCA (2004) was produced.

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

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

Place names in the less wooded part of the Valued Landscape indicate early usage by the Anglo-Saxons of the valleys and hills for pasture, many deriving from Old English: '*denu*' meaning a 'valley'; '*denn*' meaning a summer pasture (especially for swine); '*bearu*' meaning a 'grove'; and '*bæ̅r*' meaning 'swine pasture'³².

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

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

The high density of great Georgian houses both contributes to the landscape and take inspiration from it. The Arts and Crafts movement appears also to have taken inspiration from this landscape

³² GELLING Margaret, Place Names in the Landscape, 1984, J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd. 97 and 189

and the buildings of these movements are 'representative' in that they are good examples of their types.

Perceptual aspects - The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) provides an assessment of the perceptual aspects of the landscape.

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

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

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

And that:

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

The list of 'Key Characteristics' continues stating that there is:

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

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

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

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

And:

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

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

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

And:

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

And under 'valuable landscape attributes' it states:

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

And:

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

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

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

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

The Ancient Tree Inventory³³ (ATI) shows a wide variety of **Veteran Trees** including an oak with a girth over six metres at Yeldall Manor. There is a notable absence of veteran trees within the wooded areas and whilst this is probably a result of intensive coppice management some boundary trees might have been expected. There are some veteran trees marking boundaries in the Valued Landscape however, including a fine oak with a girth of nearly six metres, on the footpath some four hundred metres north of Yeldall.

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

The ATI assesses the important avenue of Wellingtonia trees at Yeldall Manor as 'notable' trees. They are young and, for this huge species, they are small trees – with girths of just under 4.5 metres, which would be considered small in their native Wellingtonia groves in the western Sierra Nevada,

³³ The Government's online planning guidance: Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development, last updated 5th November 2018

California. However, for the English countryside, and standing together as an avenue, they make an outstanding contribution as an important feature of the Valued Landscape.

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

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

The Grade II listed building at Hare Hatch House in Tag Lane is a large, late 18th Century house which was moved to its current location in 1912 from a position thirty metres north of the Bath Road, as shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1883³⁴. The Grade II listed building at Hare Hatch Grange is a late 18th Century country house approached by four stone steps

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

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

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

³⁴ Berkshire Sheet XXXVIII Area of Hurst, six inches to one statute mile, surveyed 1872 – 1875, published 1883, Ordnance Survey

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019).

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

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

And:

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

The 'Key Characteristics' section states that this is:

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

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

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

And is a:

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

Associations – Lieutenant-General Sir David Ximenes KCH (1777 - 1848) was a British Army officer, magistrate and Berkshire landowner. His father, also David, paid for the Elizabethan House at Bear Place, Hare Hatch to be demolished and the current building to be erected in its place in 1784 at a cost of £843³⁵. He and his brother, Sir Morris Ximenes, who served with Wellington in the Peninsular War, spent their childhoods at Bear Place.

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

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

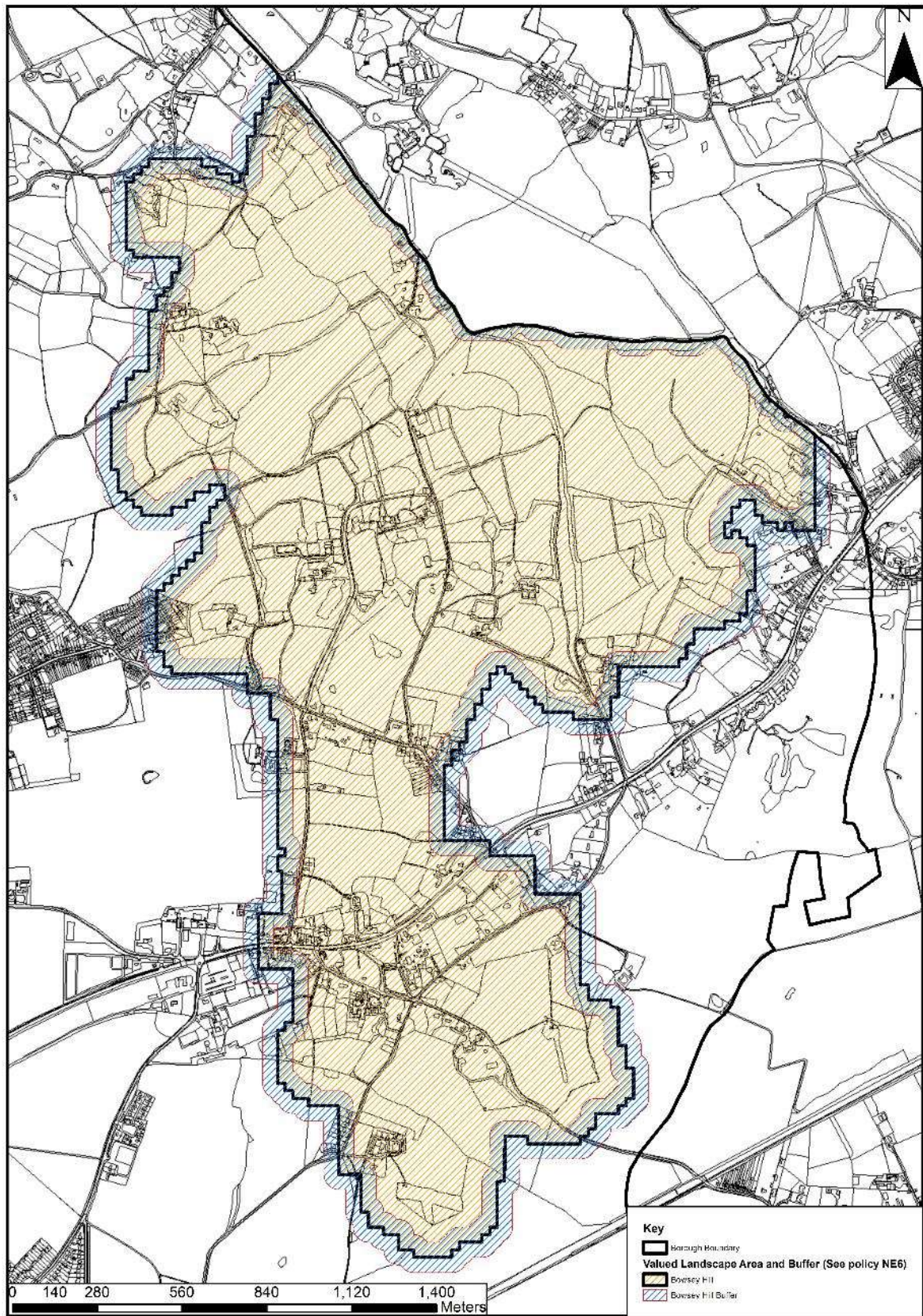
There are landscape connections to Gertrude Jekyll who lived at Wargrave Manor and explored further afield to exercise her artistic talents at Crazies Hill where she designed the well house above Rebecca’s Well and painted the gable front (previously known as Phillimore’s Spring – named after Rev Greville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

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

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

³⁵ V.C.H. Vol.III. p.192. B.O.E. (Berkshire) p.258.

Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape



Chilterns Chalk Valued Landscape Narrative

Writing of one of the foremost properties of the Valued Landscape, Park Place, set in the centre of the lime rich chalk - so important for many plants including lavender - the Victoria County History states:

In 1752 it was purchased by General (afterwards Field-Marshal) the Hon. Henry Seymour Conway, who started the cultivation of lavender in Remenham and established a distillery there. The house, which he had much improved, became the rendezvous of many distinguished people, among whom were Horace Walpole, David Hume, the poet Gray, and Mrs. Damer the sculptress, who carved the keystones of Henley Bridge. The grounds were laid out by Conway according to the taste of the period. At the upper end of the Happy Valley in the park was placed a Grecian ruin built of stones brought from Reading Abbey, and stones from the same place were used to build the bridge over the valley which carried the road from Henley to Wargrave. On a hill beyond the pleasure grounds was a Druidic temple presented to Conway by the inhabitants of Jersey (where it was found near St. Helier in 1785), when he was governor of that island.

Victoria County History: Remenham Parish³⁶

Introduction

The **Chilterns Chalk Valued Landscape** sits on a chalk plateau to the east of Henley-on-Thames. It is bounded by the River Thames Valued Landscape along roads traversing the foot of the chalk scarp roughly along the 40m contour to the west and north. To the south it meets the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape to the south-east. The Valued Landscape shown in the borough's Local Plan Update stops at the boundary with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. However, the Valued Landscape itself may continue across the boundary into the neighbouring area. In addition, this Valued Landscape shares many characteristics with the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which lies to the north, just a short distance across the River Thames Valued Landscape.

The Valued Landscape incorporates two Landscape Character Areas (LCA): D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' and E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' as categorised in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA) (2019).

Features of the Valued Landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The Valued Landscape sits within the areas D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' and E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' of the WBLCA (2019).

The WBLCA (2019) discussed landscape condition. In the 'Key Characteristics' of the LCA it states:

For the D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' LCA, it states:

³⁶ A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3. Victoria County History, London, 1923 pages 160-163

The landscape is in good condition. The dramatic landform with large tracts of woodland, open pasture of a distinctly 'downland' character and views to the Thames Valley and Chilterns AONB are intact and create a distinctive character and sense of place.

And:

Hedgerow removal has led to some loss of field patterns, and replacement by post and wire or post and rail fencing reduces the intimate character. Remnant hedgerows are in variable condition. Remaining chalk grassland has been eroded, while former parkland is now under arable cultivation. Increased traffic on the steep lanes has changed their character in places.

For the E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' LCA, it states:

The estate management restoration, including recent replanting of hedgerows along the rural roads is improving the condition of the landscape, to moderate-good. There is a lack of semi-natural habitats, particularly woodland which is relatively sparse in comparison with other rural areas of the borough. The distinctive views across to the wooded hills of F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls are intact. The busy A4130 disturbs the otherwise tranquil landscape.

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

For the D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' LCA it states:

Steep and densely wooded slopes interspersed with more open areas giving views across the Thames valley to the Chilterns AONB and forming part of views out of the AONB. A sparsely settled area with large country houses and historic estates connected by steep and sunken rural lanes with dense hedgerows. Rights of way including the Chiltern Way allow access to this relatively quiet and remote landscape.

In the 'Key Characteristics' section of the D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' LCA, it identifies the following that relate to scenic quality and expands upon them:

Dramatic chalk slopes and cliffs rising sharply from valley floodplain of the River Thames; heavily wooded character created by woodlands blanketing the steepest slopes; small pastoral fields in the west contrast with larger arable fields in the north; areas of open grass pastures suggestive of 'downland'; formal parkland estates associated with large country houses on the chalk slopes overlooking the river; small hamlets clustered on the floodplain edge with a consistent vernacular character; and rural lanes and tracks, frequently sunken, and enclosed by steep banks and hedges, which wind up the dry valleys.

For the E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' LCA, it states:

A flat, elevated and open landscape dominated by arable farmland. Settlement is restricted to the linear cluster of buildings at Remenham Hill. The designed estate landscape at Park Place results in there being little public access. There are impressive views of the wooded hills of

High Knowl and Bottom Boles Wood to the south.

In the 'Key Characteristics' section, it highlights the following relating to scenic quality and expands upon them in the text:

Predominantly flat landform with upland 'plateau' character, underlain predominately by Chalk; large scale agricultural landscape intensively farmed for arable production; large open fields with relatively few hedgerow trees; restored hedgerows and shelterbelt planting along the rural lanes; generally unwooded, although shelterbelt planting and strips of both mixed and priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland can be found along rural lanes and tracks with larger copses within Park Place estate; valuable semi-natural habitats including local wildlife sites; .designed landscape at Park Place (Grade II Registered Park and Garden) on the plateau edge and exploits views over the Thames to the Chilterns; new estates recently created to the east of Park Place with new country mansions set in mature parkland; largely unsettled landscape characterised by scattered farmsteads and individual houses linked by narrow lanes; Remenham Hill is the only settlement and consists of a ribbon of large detached 19th and 20th century houses.*

Rarity – Assessing rarity of landscape types and individual features is difficult, but a number of sources can assist. The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (WDLCA) (2004) provided an indication of this in the assessment of sensitivity where it assessed the re-creatability of landscape elements. Helpfully, it identifies a comprehensive list of nationally important elements: the ancient woodland, remnant chalk grassland, historic parkland and gardens of Park Place and Temple Combe, the dramatic landform, the perceptual characteristics (remoteness), the inter-visibility of the landscape with the River Thames [Valued Landscape], and most importantly the Chilterns AONB. On the plateau, the WDLCA (2004), whilst acknowledging the only local (borough) importance of the land-use pattern, places particular importance on the flat landform, the sense of openness and views.

All of these features are highlighted in the most recent Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019). However, a new element should be included, which is the inter-visibility of the landscape with the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape. A further element which is often overlooked is the underlying chalk geology and calcareous soils. These features are critical to the formation, management and restoration of this Valued Landscape. They are also key in restoring and stitching back together the wider chalk landscape, including those parts which, because of neglect, no longer create sufficient landscape 'heat' or interest to be considered 'hot-spots' under the council's current Valued Landscape assessment. Restoration of neglected chalk landscapes is straightforward if the will to do so is there. It can and should be achieved because these landscapes are rare, both for their scenic and perceptual characteristics, and their cultural and wildlife heritage value. The need to conserve and enhance the landscape is supported by legislation and the Glover Review for both the landscape generally and, in particular, the Chilterns landscape. In relation to the Chilterns AONB, the Glover Review (2019)³⁷ states:

³⁷ Glover J, Landscapes Review, 2019, H M Government

Some national landscapes – the Chilterns for instance – risk changing very fast as a result and mostly not for the better. We shouldn't just accept this as sadly unavoidable. It should shame our generation to leave uglier, less liveable human settlements than those left for us by the generations which came before.

And:

The aim should be to enhance natural beauty and nature in an area of high landscape value, while giving due recognition to the importance of the Chilterns for access and enjoyment.

Due to the character, quality and rarity of this landscape, the Chilterns AONB Board submitted a request to Natural England in 2013³⁸ for a boundary review. This request included areas within the Chilterns National Character Area. Within the borough, this included the Chilterns Chalk Valued Landscape, the River Thames Valued Landscape and Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape and adjacent countryside. The Glover Review's recommendation for a speeding up of boundary changes, as well as National Park status for the AONB (in the light of hugely increased pressure on the landscape), supports arguments that this is a rare and valuable landscape. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019 – 2024³⁹ highlights the increase to the area of the Chilterns AONB as a policy objective under General Policy 2:

Review the boundary of the protected area to cover the wider area of the Chilterns landscape that merits it.

The rare chalk landscape is recognised in the Glover Review, the Chilterns AONB Management Plan, and the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019). Whilst there is room to conserve and enhance the local environment, this Valued Landscape is a good example of this landscape character type.

Representativeness – 'Rarity' is discussed in the previous section. However, the characteristics and features which make a landscape rare in the national context make it distinctive and representative of its type. The Valued Landscape is, in most ways, representative of chalk landscapes across the south-eastern part of England where the chalk geology occurs. However, two elements are particularly unusual and interesting.

The high chalk plateau is, as the WBLCA (2019) notes, unusually flat and open having been denuded of vegetation by agriculture, including historic lavender production as well as modern agricultural enterprises. The high cliffs and scarp slopes carved through the chalk by the River Thames are another element of particular and rare quality, less 'representative' of the landscape. However both elements of the chalk landscape have their parallels. The Goring Gap between the Chilterns AONB and the North Wessex Downs AONB is a good example, representing steep slopes carved out of the chalk by the erosive power of a river (in this case the same river). Likewise, the cliffs above the village of Cliffe across the River Ouse at Lewis in the South Downs National Park also have a similar

³⁸ The Case for Reviewing the Boundary of the AONB, 2013, Chilterns Conservation Board

³⁹ The Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019 – 2024, Chilterns Conservation Board

characteristics. The high chalk plateau in the Chilterns Chalk Valued Landscape is reminiscent of the High Chalk Plain in Wiltshire, albeit on a smaller scale and without the tanks.

Conservation Interests – In terms of **wildlife and biodiversity** the Chilterns Chalk Valued Landscape provides an important mix of wildlife sites and habitats.

Habitats of principal importance:

- **Lowland mixed deciduous woodland** and **Lowland beech and yew woodland** mostly on the western and northern scarp slopes adjacent to the River Thames Valued Landscape. Some of which is Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). There may be remnants of **Wood Pasture and Parkland** remaining in historic parks.
- Natural England survey data indicates that **Wet woodland** may be present but it is likely to be in the less well drained valley bottoms on the very edge of the Valued Landscape.
- Notwithstanding the ideal geology for this habitat, **Lowland calcareous grassland** occurs, but is rare. One example is the grassland in Happy Valley – part of the Park Place pleasure grounds. Happy Valley and Conways Bridge is a Local Wildlife Site.
- **Traditional orchards** are reported but exist at a very local scale.
- **Ponds** are present but due to the porous geology they tend to be located in the heavier soils accumulated in valley bottoms. Where ponds are present in proximity to woodland they often act as habitat to woodland animals such as the protected Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*).

The Ancient Tree Inventory⁴⁰ shows a wide variety of **Ancient and Veteran Trees** with notable aggregations, as might be expected, in the parkland at Park Place. There is a large block of **ancient woodland** at Remenham Wood and four other smaller blocks to the south and to the east. These can be clearly seen in the Forestry map for the D1 ‘Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes’ LCA on page 128 of the WBLCA (2019).

Much of the D1 ‘Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes’ LCA , which forms a crescent around the north and west of the Valued Landscape, forms the Chilterns Escarpment **Biodiversity Opportunity Area**.

Local Wildlife Sites: There are 12 Local Wildlife Sites within the Valued Landscape – with the greatest aggregation, in terms of numbers and area, being on the hard to farm steep slopes and valleys of the western edge and northern sides of the Valued Landscape. Some Local Wildlife Sites are also located within traditional parkland landscapes.

Although not publicly accessible, an old chalk quarry known as Remenham Church Lane Quarry can be viewed from the lane and is a **Local Geological Site**. The Berkshire Geoconservation Group state that this site is:

⁴⁰ The Government’s online planning guidance: Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development, last updated 5th November 2018

A disused quarry in the Lewes Nodular chalk / Seaford chalk formation of the White Chalk subgroup (formerly Upper Chalk). It contains good fossils of this horizon and flints are of main interest is the infilled fissures (caused by freeze thaw action). These are well displayed at the upper surface (see photograph)... The site is considered of structural and stratigraphical interest⁴¹.

In terms of the **cultural heritage and built form**, the Valued Landscape encompasses part of the Remenham Bridge Conservation Area and touches on the Remenham Conservation Area to the north-west. Both of these are discussed in more detail in the River Thames Valued Landscape. The Chilterns Chalk Valued Landscape is contiguous with the River Thames Valued Landscape along the whole of its western and northern boundaries.

The Valued Landscape forms the setting and, when viewed from the river or bank, forms the backdrop for the two Conservation Areas, as well as for the individual buildings and structures in the landscape. The locations and forms chosen for such buildings are dictated by the landscape – the smithy on an important route north, Remenham Court close to Henley-on-Thames and on the turnpike to London, the Folly buried within the topography of the landscape.

Park Place and Temple Coombe is a Grade II* **Registered Park and Garden** forming the setting for Park Place House which is discussed in further detail elsewhere within this narrative. The house and park sit high up on the chalk with grand views of the River Thames. The parks and gardens are described by Historic England in the Register⁴²:

Park Place, a C19 country house on the site of an earlier house, surrounded by C18 and C19 gardens and pleasure grounds and landscape park, with work in the mid to late C19 by Robert Marnock. A second, smaller estate, Temple Combe, developed during the late C18, lies enclosed within the Park Place estate.

There are a score of **listed buildings** ranging from the grand, Grade II 19th Century Remenham Court (formerly listed as Remenham Lodge - C.1830-1840), to the earlier and more humble Grade II listed building at The Old Smithy, which originates from the 17th Century or earlier. The list for the Valued Landscape includes a Grade II folly in the landscaped park at Park Place. Originating from the mid to late 18th Century, the folly is a small, hemispherical, structure built of knapped flint, shells, tiles and flint nodules. It was built into a chalk slope, probably for Sir Henry Conway who lived at, Park Place from 1751 to 1795.

The long-distance routes north to south and the later 18th Century turnpike that quarter the Valued Landscape are also important to the culture of the area and are discussed elsewhere in this narrative

Recreational Value - The WBLCA (2019) assesses public accessibility of the D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' and E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' LCAs. The WBLCA (2019) notes, in a list of the 'Key Characteristics', that this area has 'good public accessibility' as follows:

⁴¹ Berkshire Geoconservation Group website <https://berksgeoconservation.org.uk/lgs.php>

⁴² The Historic England *National Heritage List for England* has been a live publication since 2011. It can be found at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list>

For the D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' LCA, it states in a list of 'Key Characteristics':

Limited access by footpath except for the promoted route of the Chilterns Way which runs along the lower slopes connecting to the Thames Path before climbing to Remenham Hill.

Sense of peacefulness due to the intimate scale, limited settlement and remoteness of the landscape with a strong experience of 'dark skies'.

And:

Glimpsed picturesque views across the Thames Valley to the Chilterns AONB which can open out dramatically in places.

The list of valuable landscape attributes in the WBLCA (2019) acknowledges the recreational value stating that the landscape has:

Steep winding rural lanes enclosed by steep banks and hedges provide a visual interest while travelling through the area.

The list also highlights the importance of:

Picturesque and attractive long views to the river Thames and Chilterns AONB, and across the undulating topography within the area

For the E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' LCA, it states in the list of valuable landscape attributes that the landscape has:

Impressive views of the wooded horizons of High Knowl, Bottom Boles Wood and Bowsey Hill.

Partly because of the lack of Public Rights of Way, and also the general absence of large roads or railways, this high quality landscape is a quiet, tranquil haven of peace and dark skies.

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) which identifies much of the area (with the exception of the A4130 corridor), as being tranquil, peaceful, remote and relatively inaccessible, with an experience of dark skies.

For the D1 'Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes' LCA, it states:

Sense of remoteness created by limited modern development and infrastructure and the often enclosed character of the landscape with an experience of 'dark skies'. The promoted footpath of the Chiltern Way provides access through this intimate landscape.

Limited access by footpath except for the promoted route of the Chilterns Way which runs along the lower slopes connecting to the Thames Path before climbing to Remenham Hill.

And

Sense of peacefulness due to the intimate scale, limited settlement and remoteness of the landscape with a strong experience of 'dark skies'.

For the E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture' LCA, it states:

Tranquil and remote rural area, with a strong experience of dark skies, due to its relative inaccessibility, particularly on the Park Place estate and the new estates at Hamilton and Stowdes. The area is crossed by small estate roads and limited public rights of way including the Chiltern Way. The busy A4130 introduces a corridor of movement, light, and noise across the north of the area.

And

Quiet and remote rural character with dark skies, evoked by the strong sense of openness on the plateau landscape and a lack of public access, particularly in the west of the area.

Associations – The large landscape has relatively easy access to London with routes to the capital across the chalk and along the River Thames. A new Turnpike Act 1718 created a turnpike trust for the road from Maidenhead to Henley-on-Thames, part of a longer main post and coach road between London and St David's in West Wales. The road between Remenham Hill and Aston was formerly part of a north to south route carrying traffic between Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, crossing a ferry between Aston and Mill End. Throughout modern history, this has been an attractive location for high society.

At the time of Domesday (1088) the manor of Remenham was owned by Queen Edith, daughter of Earl Godwin (the father of Harold Godwinson – last Anglo-Saxon King of England) and wife of Edward the Confessor.

During the Middle Ages, Remenham passed through the hands of notable families including the Earls of Warwick, the de Montforts, and the Sandys family.

Of Park Place and Temple Coombe, and estate occupying the southern part of the Valued Landscape, the Historic England listing states:

In 1719 Mrs Elizabeth Baker sold land called Park's Place, also known as Stowdes, to Lord Archibald Hamilton, who at some time after this erected a Palladian mansion called Park Place on a new site (VCH 1923). In 1738 Park Place was sold to Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707-51) (ibid). Following Frederick's death in 1751 the estate was bought by General the Hon Henry Seymour Conway (1720-95)...⁴³

⁴³ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000588>

Lord Hamilton who lived much of his life at Park Place was an active politician and a former Governor of Jamaica. He played a role in setting up some of the founders of the Bahamian pirate gang, including Henry Jennings, Francis Fernando, and Leigh Ashworth, for which he was arrested and brought back to England in 1716 by the Royal Navy^[5]. He was acquitted by a board of Trade inquiry and released. His son Sir William Hamilton, the diplomat and husband of the unfaithful but famous Emma Hamilton, was present as aide-de-camp to General Conway, at the abortive attack on Rochefort in September 1757.

As described at the start of this narrative, General Conway, was a later owner of Park Place, after Hamilton. In his ownership it was a rendezvous for many in Georgian high society, including his cousin Horace Walpole and their friend, the poet Thomas Gray with whom they were at Eton. As well as these influential men, their company included Conway's daughter Anne Seymour Damer; the traveller, author, theatrical producer, actress, and acclaimed sculptress. Conway's erection of a gothic bridge and druid's temple have been attributed to Reverend. Gainsborough, brother of the landscape painter Thomas Gainsborough.

Vincent, in his 'The Story of the Thames' (1909) refers to Mrs Lybbe Powys comments on Park Place who wrote in 1762 of its excellent landscape but indifferent architecture:

*"We went to see Park Place, the seat of General Conway and one of the most capital situations in England. The house stands agreeably, but is too indifferent for the surrounding grounds."*⁴⁴

In the later part of the 19th Century, the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll – famous now for her work with Edwin Lutyens including a house and garden at the Deanery in nearby Sonning – had an early and close association with the landscape. As the WBLCA (2019) states:

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

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

Her appreciation for the underlying landscape is also apparent in her comment that she:

"...only hated Berkshire because it was not Surrey, and the chalk because it was not sand".

The Historic England listing of Park Place and Temple Combe brings the history of illustrious associations closer to modern times:

The house was rebuilt c 1871, following a fire, for John Noble of Noble's Paints and Varnishes (who had bought the estate in 1867), together with a new stable block. The grounds were

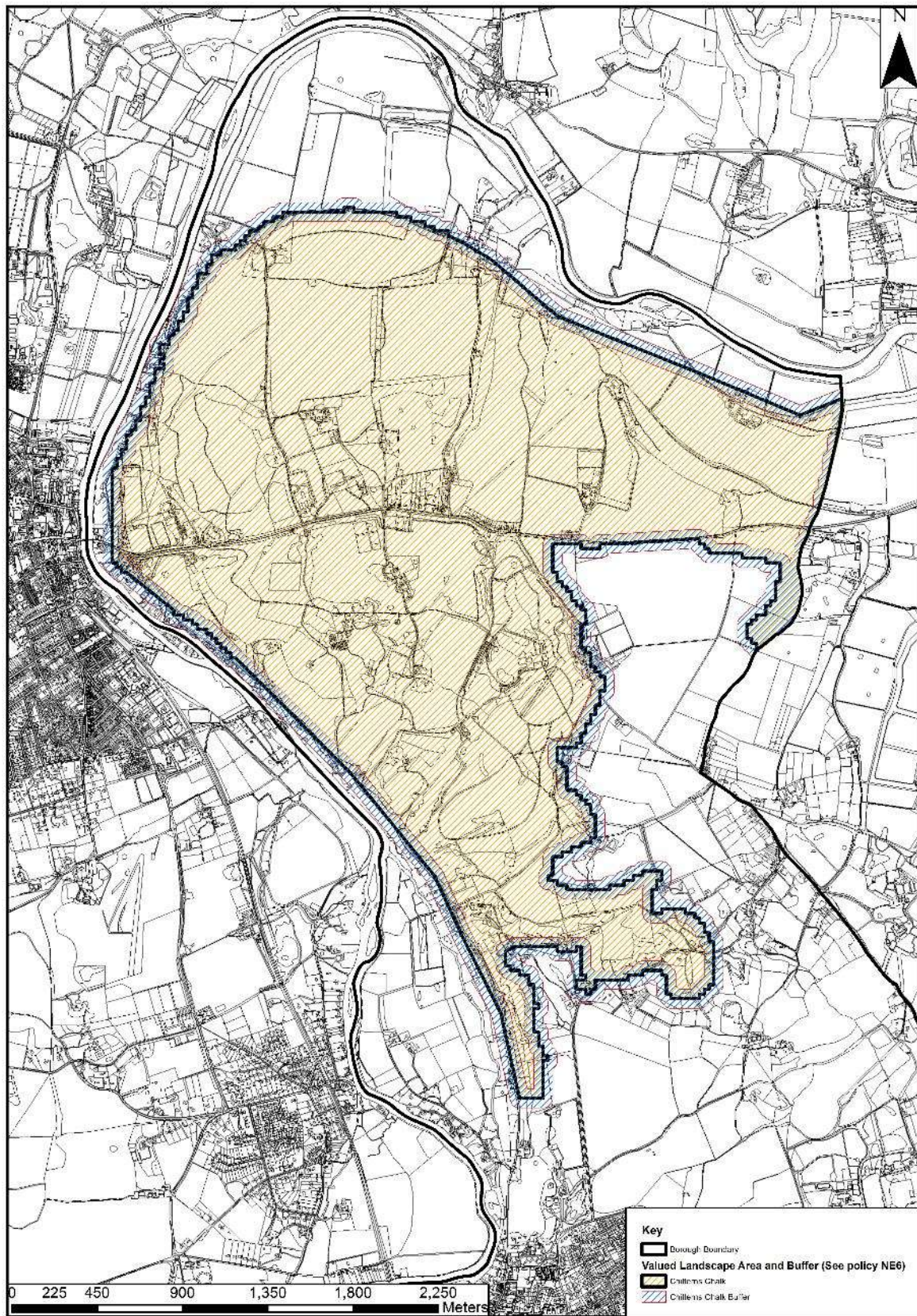
⁴⁴ VINCENT, The Story of the Thames, 1909, Smith Elder

subject to extensive 'landscape gardening' carried out under Robert Marnock (1800-89) c 1869, who planted thousands of specimen trees and shrubs, 'as far as possible every known variety!' (Noble 1905)⁴⁵

Thomas Cundy was an architect of the new Park Place and he had also held the position of surveyor to Lord Grosvenor's London estates, covering the entire period of builder Thomas Cubitt's developments for Lord Grosvenor in Belgravia and Pimlico in London.

⁴⁵ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000588>

Chilterns Chalk Valued Landscape



Forest and Rides Valued Landscape Narrative

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

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

From the Wokingham Sites and Monuments record⁴⁶

Introduction

The **Forest and Rides Valued Landscape** centres on the locally listed deer park of Ravenswood – now the site of a charitable education facility – which lies to the south of the B3040 Nine Mile Ride and on the Gorrick Plantation land, which lies to the north of that road. As the name of the landscape suggests the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape gains much of its identity and cohesiveness from its role in later development, in particular of the hunting landscape from the reign of Queen Anne, to that of her distant cousin King George III. The wide straight rides with deep ditches, to aid drainage on either side, were created to facilitate the carriages carrying monarchs and their courts following the royal stag hounds as they sought diversion in the forest. The link between hunting, the historic straight rides and the Bigshotte Railes, (a particular kind of deer park associated with the protection and feeding of deer for the hunt and the exclusion of domestic grazers and browsers), is clear. When the historical record is examined, the constant need for money to maintain the park and its boundaries appears to be a reflection of the monarchy's lack of sufficient funds. In the end, the cost of maintaining the Royal Forest, coupled with the gradual wearing-away of much of it through assarts⁴⁷ (legal and illegal), was a factor in the final sale of the forest through the Inclosures of the early 19th Century. The medieval hunting landscape can be characterised by deer, diversion and debt.

Historic settlements were dispersed in small hamlets between the town of Wokingham and the villages of Finchampstead and Crowthorne. The landscape was amongst the very last parts of the Royal Forest of Windsor to be inclosed in 1817. In ancient times, the Roman road from the important Civitas of Calleva Atrebatum (the former settlement of the Atrebates tribe at modern-day Silchester) ran through the middle of the Valued Landscape to Londinium (now London). Nowadays the A327 runs north-south in the west and the A321 in the east of the Valued Landscape but generally the road network is characterised by smaller historic lanes together with the 18th Century historic straight rides which are characteristic. It is these historic straight rides, most often lined with either

⁴⁶ Record entry number 00399.00.00. Bigshotte Rayles or Railes, and Hannican's or Hanekin's Lodge are synonymous of the parkland now known as Ravenswood Park. The park is classified as a medieval to post-medieval deer park.

⁴⁷ An assart was an enclosure of the hunting forest which was then converted to agriculture

dense woodland or linear development, which help define the character and extent of the Valued Landscape.

That part of the M1 'Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands' landscape is 'valued landscape' (paragraph 170(a) of the NPPF: 2019) and was confirmed by Inspector Wendy McKay in her Decision Letter. The Inspector said:

The Council accepts that there is a hierarchy of landscape and that the appeal sites do not fall within one of the nationally designated landscapes which are specifically referred to in paragraph 115 of the Framework. Nonetheless, given the identification of this landscape as being of high quality, the reference to the LCA in MDD Policy TB21 and the location of the sites within the historic parkland, I consider that this landscape is appropriately categorised as a 'valued' landscape for the purposes of paragraph 109 of the Framework.⁴⁸

From this it is clear that, in the Inspector's opinion, the Valued Landscape centres on the locally listed medieval deer park of Bigshotte Railes (now Ravenswood Park) but includes other land. Elsewhere in this judgement, the Inspector gives weight to the historic straight Nine Mile Ride. This assessment gives great weight to the Inspector's decision in determining the character and extent of the Valued Landscape. The historic and landscape links between the rides, the park and the wider landscape of the Royal Forest are what gives this Valued Landscape its' cohesiveness character and distinctive shape.

Features of the Valued Landscape

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

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

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

The survival of former field patterns, the remnants of historic parklands, woodland blocks and the hedgerow network are in good condition. The new South of the M4 SDL and other development, and urban edge of Reading fragment the rural character of the northern part of the area, while the major transport corridors introduce noise and movement, except where well screened by ground modelling or trees.

⁴⁸ Appeals APP/X0360/C/15/3141000 and 3141001 (paragraph 174)

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

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

For the M1 'Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands' LCA, which together with the M2 'Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sand' LCA, forms the bulk of this Valued Landscape, it states:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And also:

A rural character away from development and roads, with views across to adjacent

character areas including across the Loddon Valley.

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

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

And also:

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

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

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

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

And:

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

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

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

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

And:

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

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

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

And:

Rural character of the pattern of pastoral fields interspersed with scattered woods and hedgerow oaks which provide visual diversity as well as continuity with the adjoining forested landscape of the Finchampstead Ridges.

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

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

The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (WDLCA) (2004) M1 ‘Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands’ LCA supports this and describes the following features as being ‘*unique within Wokingham District*’ (paragraph 17.26):

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

The Wellingtonia Avenue is one of, if not the, finest avenues in the Country and is considered to be of both national and regional importance. This feature is discussed elsewhere in this narrative. There are cultural and wildlife heritage sites of national importance in the landscape and they are also discussed elsewhere.

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

Whilst both the foresters lodge (Bigshott Lodge) and the mansion that replaced it have now gone, the parkland setting and its boundaries are largely retained and a large part of the parkland remains open and undeveloped. This provides another glimpse of the ancient hunting landscape.

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

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

Habitats of principal importance include:

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

The Ancient Tree Inventory⁴⁹ shows a wide variety of **Ancient and Veteran Trees** with notable aggregations, as is to be, at the core of Ravenswood Park (a selection of ancient and veteran oaks and sweet chestnuts) retained amongst modern buildings in the location of the former Hannican's Lodge. The clearest aggregation of ancient and veteran trees in the Valued Landscape is the avenue of Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) growing either side of the historic ride, now known as Wellingtonia Avenue. These trees were planted by John Walter II, who also planted a similar but smaller avenue at his mansion at Bearwood Park. Avenues of this species are not uncommon in the borough, due to their close association with the first Duke of Wellington whose country seat, Stratfield Saye, is just across the Hampshire border and in whose honour these trees are named. However, due to the size of the trees, the intactness and prominent position of the avenue, it has been described as one of the finest in the country.

There are two **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** in the Valued Landscape: Heath Lake and Longmoor Bog. Heath Lake is a rare lowland example of a shallow acid lake surrounded by birch and

⁴⁹ The Ancient Tree Inventory is an online resource made available by the Woodland Trust. The Government refers developers to this resource in online planning guidance on Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development – last updated 5th November 2018

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

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

Local Wildlife Sites: There are 14 Local Wildlife Sites including a large aggregation to the west and east of the railway and north of Nine Mile Ride. This aggregation includes Gorrick Plantation which is one of a number of excellent places for informal recreation in a wildlife-rich and tranquil setting.

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

In terms of the **cultural heritage and built form**, the Valued Landscape encompasses and forms an important part of the setting of the Finchampstead Church Conservation Area, an area of high land overlooking the valleys to the south.

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

There are just over a dozen listed buildings, ranging from the grand and ceremonial – like the Grade II listed building at West Court (a former manor house with a 17th Century core and substantial additions and rebuilding in 1800, 1835, 1901 and 1964, and later used as an officers' mess) in the west of the Valued Landscape - to the more pastoral – like the Grade II listed building The Queens Oak, an early 17th Century cottage, now used as The Queens Oak public house in the south.

The Valued Landscape forms the setting for the conservation area, as well as for the individual buildings and structures in the landscape. The form and location of many of the principal buildings is, in part, a response to the historic, geological, topological and geographical features of the landscape, in which they sit.

The Roman road from Calleva to London runs east-west through the Valued Landscape with remains of the earthed embankment (agger) still visible in some places in Crowthorne and Finchampstead.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And

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

For the M1 ‘Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands’ LCA, which with the M2 ‘Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands’ LCA, forms the bulk of the Valued Landscape:

Localised area of remoteness within woodlands and smaller areas of pasture, mire and heath, which provide a sense of tranquility.

And:

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

For the M2 ‘Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sand’ LCA, which together with the M1 ‘Finchampsptead Forested and Settled Sands’ LCA, forms the bulk of the Valued Landscape:

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

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

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

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

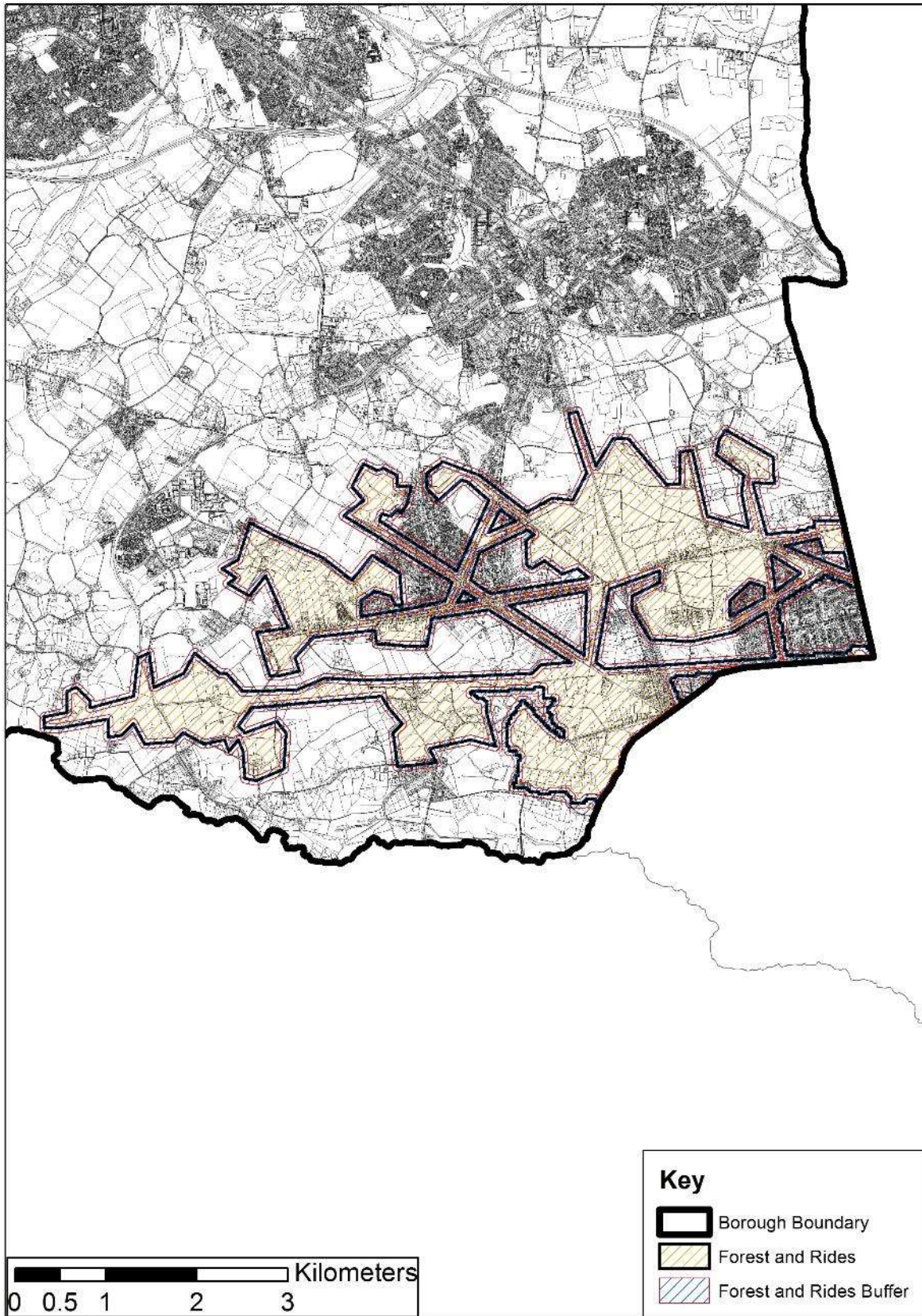
Associations – The principal associations of this Valued Landscape are with Queen Anne and King George III, for whom the straight rides were created. King George III, ‘Mad King George’, is

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

Another close association is with the Duke of Wellington whose country seat was at nearby Stratfield Say just across the county boundary in Hampshire. The WBLCA (2019) states the following in its assessment of the M2 'Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands' LCA:

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

Forest and Rides Valued Landscape



Haines Hill Valued Landscape Narrative

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

Obituary of the then owner of Haines Hill⁵⁰

Introduction

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

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

For the K1 'Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay' LCA it states that it is:

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

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

A relatively flat lowland agricultural landscape lying to the east of the floodplain of the River Loddon. Arable fields tend to be large, with areas of horse and pony grazing. The area has a strong connection to the river valley, with water-filled ditches and ponds throughout. A network of rural roads connects farms and the small settlements of Whistley Green and Hurst.

When assessing the I4 'Hurst Farmed Clay' LCA, it states that it is:

A relatively flat lowland agricultural landscape lying to the east of the floodplain of the River Loddon. Arable fields tend to be large, with areas of horse and pony grazing. The area has a strong connection to the river valley, with water-filled ditches and ponds throughout. A network of rural roads connects farms and the small settlements of Whistley Green and Hurst.

⁵⁰ The Times of London, 7th August 2011

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

Features of the Valued Landscape

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

For the K1 ‘Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay’ LCA, it states:

The combination of natural elements, including woodland and wetland and the cohesive settlement character with a strong local vernacular details and absence of unsympathetic development, results in a rural landscape in overall good condition. There is also a good mix of habitats but these are somewhat fragmented and there is evidence of hedgerow loss.

For the I1 ‘Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland’ LCA, it states:

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

For the I4 ‘Hurst Farmed Clay’ LCA, it states:

The rural character of the landscape, the small watercourses, and general absence of development and the intimate small-scale of the landscape are in a good condition. The overall moderate condition of the landscape as a whole results from the subdivision of landholdings and creation of paddocks with associated temporary structures, combined with loss of hedgerow boundaries or their lack of management.

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

For the K1 ‘Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay’ LCA, it lists:

Varied wooded character with a mosaic of plantation, mixed and broadleaved woodland which with the natural riparian woodland provides scenic quality and a sense of seclusion; the pattern of open arable fields interspersed with woodland blocks and riparian corridors which provide visual diversity and a naturalistic sense of place; lightly settled character and absence of unsympathetic development; a high number of historic buildings with strong local vernacular contribute to the scenic quality of the area.

For the I1 ‘Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland’, LCA, it lists:

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

For the 'I4 Hurst Farmed Clay' LCA, it lists:

Watercourses and vegetated drainage ditches create visual interest; rough hedgerows and hedgerow trees create an enclosed landscape; the intimate character of small-scale pastures provides a distinctive sense of place.

Rarity –Assessing rarity is difficult but a number of sources can assist. The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (WDLCA) (2004) gives an assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape, the re-creatability and importance of features.

For the K1 'Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay' LCA, the WDLCA (2004) states that '*most characteristics within this area are of importance at the local or regional level*'. The WDLCA (2004) also mentions specifically: the diversity of habitats including neutral grassland, the building and settlement pattern particularly the absence of residential development over much of the area, and the perceptual qualities of remoteness and tranquillity.

For the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA, the WDLCA (2004) mentions the presence of ancient woodland and the remaining rural peaceful character that would be difficult to replace / restore if changed. It notes that most of the '*characteristics are of local importance*' although it does state that they '*may be highly valued because of their increasing scarcity in the region*'. The characteristics are provided in that document and many are also reflected in the latest WBLCA (2019). The WDLCA (2004) mentions the '*strong wooded horizons*' which it says are sensitive to change. Importantly, the WDLCA (2004) identifies the undeveloped ridge itself as important to the setting of nearby Wokingham.

For the I4 'Hurst Farmed Clay' LCA, the WDLCA (2004) identifies elements of local importance that would be difficult to re-create. They include: the peaceful, rural quality; the low density settlement; and the distinctive small-scale pattern of pastoral fields, units, drainage ditches and hedges.

It should be noted that elements of only local importance might not appear highly significant when considering a Valued Landscape. But in fact they are significant because even features that are of only local importance still lift the local landscape above the ordinary countryside. These features therefore contribute to an enhanced level of interest and enhanced value.

This assessment is supported by the WBLCA (2019) which lists these features under the heading 'valued landscape attributes'.

Representativeness –Of particular importance in this Valued Landscape is the small-scale landscape with overgrown hedges and freshwater habitats, including roadside ditches and ponds. Due in part to the inaccessibility of the landscape, the sense of intimacy and tranquillity with a local experience of dark skies is a good example of such a landscape in close proximity to Twyford.

The large manor houses and the parks and gardens are also representative, as are the ancient woodlands close to Stanlake Manor.

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

Habitats of principal importance include: Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland; Wet Woodland; Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland; Lowland Meadows; Rivers and Ponds. There may be some Traditional Orchards but this requires ground truthing. The Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland predictably surrounds Haines Hill, Stanlake Manor and Hurst Lodge.

Ancient Woodland is scattered sparsely throughout the landscape, but with an aggregation to the east of Stanlake Manor with one wood, Botany Bay Copse, incorporating a **moated site** of archaeological interest.

The Ancient Tree Inventory⁵¹ shows a wide variety of **Veteran Trees** with notable aggregations, as might be expected, at Stanlake Park and a handful at St Nicholas Church, Hurst. There is a notable absence of veteran trees at Haines Hill Park, but this may be an artefact of where recorders have been able to access the land.

Local Wildlife Sites: There are four Local Wildlife Sites: Grassland Opposite Blackthorn Farm; Windsor Ait; Wingwood Copse and Wood near Hintonhatch Corner. As their names suggest, they represent a range of habitats.

There are two **locally listed historic parks and gardens:** Hurst Lodge and Haines Hill both located near the village of Hurst.

In terms of the **cultural heritage and built form**, there are thirteen **listed buildings** within the Valued Landscape. They include a Grade II listed building from the late 16th Century, a timber framed thatched barn with weatherboarding and a brick rubble and flint base and the Grade II listed building at Gardeners Cottage on Broadcommon Road. The cottages are 18th Century brick with tiled roofs, with 19th Century gabled porches. Haines Hill is a Grade II* country house of late 16th Century origins, formerly H-shaped with a long gallery and several courtyards. The windows and walls of each end of the gallery were rebuilt in the 'Queen Anne' style by the Biggs family. The front part of the house was built in 1760 in the Georgian style by James Edward Colleton.

⁵¹ The Ancient Tree Inventory is an online resource made available by the Woodland Trust. The Government refers developers and planners to this resource in online planning guidance on Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development – last updated 5th November 2018

The Valued Landscape forms the setting for these buildings, other listed structures and for the locally listed parks and gardens at Hurst Lodge and Haines Hill.

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

For the K1 'Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay' LCA, the WBLCA (2019) notes that the area has a:

Remote and hidden character of the rural landscape despite the proximity of Twyford due to the sparse settlement pattern and access confined to footpaths and small roads running through the landscape:

For the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA, it notes the '*relative inaccessibility by footpath which results in a sense of tranquillity despite proximity to urban centres and motorways*'.

For the I4 'Hurst Farmed Clay' LCA it recognises '*Informal recreation provided by the footpaths west of the A321*'.

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

Assessing the 'K1 Stanlake Farmed Clay and Clay', it states that this LCA has a:

Remote and hidden character of the rural landscape despite the proximity of Twyford due to the sparse settlement pattern and access confined to footpaths and small roads running through the landscape. The area is also a resource of 'dark skies'.

When looking at the I1 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' LCA, it states the landscape has a:

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

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

A rural and tranquil landscape due to the settlement pattern of closely spaced farmsteads linked by a network of country lanes character with localised experience of dark skies.

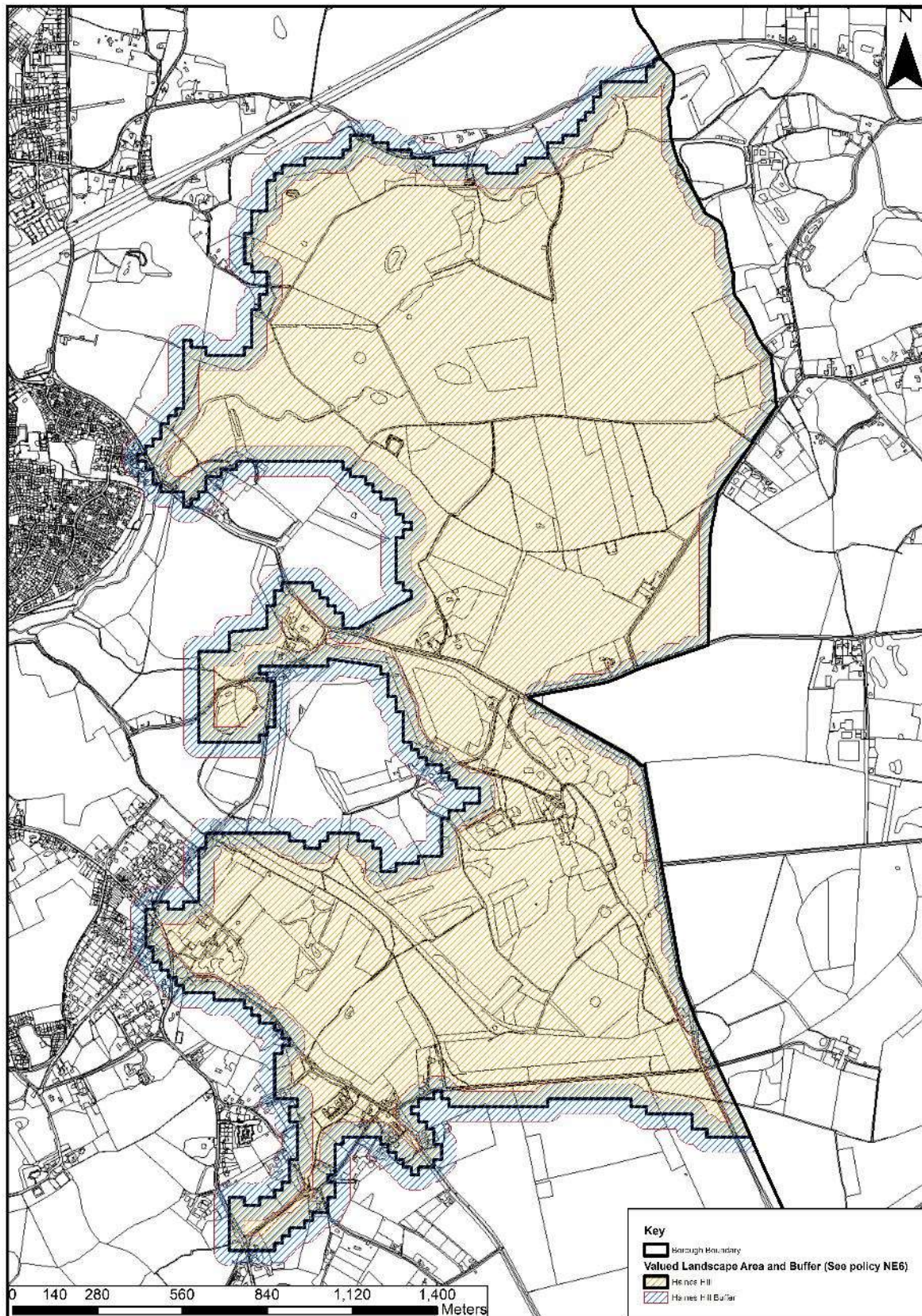
Associations – Haines Hill House was built originally by the Windebank family. Sir Francis Windebank (1852 - 1646) who was, at one time, Secretary of State to Charles I and lived at Haines Hill. He received advancement because of his Catholic faith and plotted with the King in secret to undermine the protestant cause. He was allowed by the King to flee the country when, in 1640, Parliament discovered that he had been offering pardons to recusant priests. He wrote to the Lord Chancellor from France affirming his belief in the Church of England, but died in 1646 having received into the Roman Catholic Church.

During the Civil War, Haines Hill House came into the possession of the Bigg family. From the Bigg family it descended first to James Edward Colleton (MP for Loswithiel and great-grandson of the royalist general Sir John Colleton, 1st Baronet (1608 – 1666). James Edward added the large block on the east side in 1760.

Haines Hill House descended from James Edward Colleton to the Garth family, one of whom, Captain Thomas Colleton Garth, founded the Garth Hunt which first met there in 1852.

Hurst Lodge has associations with two notable local families: the Barkers, whose ancestor, John Barker was, for thirty-four years, gentleman usher to Queen Elizabeth I. His great-great granddaughter married David, fourth Lord Cardross in 1697 and sold the property in 1742 to Robert Palmer of Hurst, ancestor of the Palmer family of Sonning.

Haines Hill Valued Landscape



Risley Woods Valued Landscape Narrative

Introduction

The **Risley Woods Valued Landscape** is the smallest of the Valued Landscapes in the borough comprising 74 hectares, or five percent of the largest, the River Loddon Valued Landscape. The Risley Woods Valued Landscape sits close to and above the River Loddon which wraps around it from the west to the north-east.

The Risley Woods Valued Landscape falls almost entirely within the L3 'Stanford End Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' Landscape Character Area (LCA) and centres on a block of ancient woodland within that LCA. The Valued Landscape lies above the 55m contour on the northern end of a ridge of London clay and is bisected by the A33 road which runs north-south through the landscape. The Valued Landscape is located in the extreme south-west and sits on the southern boundary with Hart District in Hampshire. Close by to the west and north lie the River Loddon and Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscapes.

The Valued Landscape sits between Second World War forward defences at Stanford Bridge and the line of General Headquarters (GHQ) Stop Line, built in 1940, as a defence against German Invasion. Within a hundred metres of the southern boundary of the Valued Landscape, lies the Historic Park and Garden of Stratfield Say in Hampshire – the seat of the Duke of Wellington.

The Risley Woods Valued Landscape lies within a hundred metres of the River Loddon Valued Landscape to the west through north-east, mirroring the Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape which lies one kilometre to the north across the River Loddon.

The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA) (2019) describes the landscape as:

A small but topographically distinct area of higher ground, characterised by sparse settlement linked by sunken rural lanes. The area is predominately used for arable farming with a strong network of low hedgerows, interspersed by heathy woodland blocks. An isolated and rural character bisected and disturbed by the busy A33.

Features of the Valued Landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The WBLCA (2019) assessment of the L3 'Stanford End Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' Landscape Character Area (LCA) assesses the condition of this landscape, and states:

The pattern of arable and pastoral fields with mixed woodland, linked by rural lanes and little settlement is intact and in overall good condition. The busy A33 is a detracting element, and

disturbs the rural character and tranquillity of the area. There are opportunities for woodland and hedgerow habitat recreation and strengthening.

Scenic Quality – The WBLCA (2019), when discussing the scenic quality of the L3 ‘Stanford End Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills’ Landscape Character Area (LCA), identifies the following valuable landscape attributes relating to scenic quality: rural farmed character due to the mosaic of irregular fields of varied size, woodland and sparse settlement; variety of the mixed and coniferous woodlands of ancient origin and network of thick hedgerows with hedgerow trees; the wooded skyline which provides a distinctive backdrop to surrounding areas, including in adjacent boroughs; deeply sunken and winding lanes on higher slopes which contribute to scenic rural quality; network of mature hedgerows with mature oak standards which are silhouetted against the sky, giving an enclosed character and sense of place; views to Loddon Valley over the surrounding landscape gives a sense of place and orientation.

Rarity – The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (WDLCA) (2004) provides an assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape, the re-creatability and importance of features. This helps in assessing rarity. It says:

....key characteristics being mostly of local importance. However within this context, there are a number of elements with higher sensitivity including the small areas of ancient woodland, skyline woodland, the sunken lanes, sense of remoteness and rural character and sparse built development.

The elements that are rare, which are important at a higher level than just the local, are: skyline woodland; the sunken lanes; a sense of remoteness; the rural character and sparse built form.

The uniqueness of ancient woodland is recognised in Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework which defines ‘irreplaceable habitat’ as:

Irreplaceable habitat: Habitats which would be technically very difficult (or take a very significant time) to restore, recreate or replace once destroyed, taking into account their age, uniqueness, species diversity or rarity. They include ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees,⁵²

Whilst ancient woodland is well represented in parts of the south-east of England it is, therefore, clearly a feature of national rarity.

In addition, although four hundred miles of the GHQ stop line defence, in depth, were built, it is still a relatively narrow linear feature covering little land area that, when seen on the scale of regional or national landscapes, should consequently be considered a landscape feature that is nationally rare.

Representativeness –The area is predominantly rural with low density development, but with high density woodland. It has a close association with the River Loddon Valued Landscape which it overlooks. There are good examples of ancient woodland clusters in the Valued Landscape.

⁵² Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), *the National Planning Policy Framework – Annex 2: Glossary*, 2019.

The value of this ridge of high land in scenic terms is high. The value of perceptual aspects, for example views across the landscape and dark skies, is high and the landscape is a good example at the borough level.

Notwithstanding the presence of the A33, there are areas of tranquillity and even a feeling of remoteness.

The archaeology is likely to be of interest given the presence of a small Roman settlement and the nearby Roman road. The use of this high land in the Second World War defences is still to be assessed. The Valued Landscape falls between the forward pillboxes at Stanford End Bridge and the General Headquarters Stop Line, which ran along the eastern, right bank of the Whitewater and Broadwater rivers to the east. The Basingstoke Road running through the village, immediately to the east, was the main route between Reading and the military camps at Aldershot. This high land, with good views across the River Loddon and land to the west (the direction of expected invasion), is likely to have been strategically important.

Perceptual aspects –The WBLCA (2019) provides an assessment of the perceptual aspects of the L3 ‘Stanford End Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills’ Landscape Character Area (LCA). In the section on ‘valuable landscape attributes’ it states that there are:

Views to Loddon Valley over the surrounding landscape gives a sense of place and orientation.

And the landscape is:

Strongly tranquil and remote character, with experience of dark skies due to sparse settlement.

In the list of ‘Key Characteristics’ for this LCA, it continues to state that this area has a:

Tranquil and remote character, which has dark skies, locally interrupted by the busy A33, which bisects the area, isolating the western half from the rest of the borough.

And that there are:

Extensive views over the Loddon Valley from the ridge.

Conservation Interests – In terms of **wildlife and biodiversity** there are no sites that are currently considered nationally important. However the Risley Woods Valued Landscape encompasses an important group of **ancient woodlands** which form part of a collection of Local Wildlife Sites and are themselves protected in the National Planning Policy Framework (2019).

Habitats of principal importance include: Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland; Wet Woodland; There may also be some Traditional Orchards which appears to be newly planted.

The Ancient Tree Inventory⁵³ (ATI) shows no ancient or veteran trees within the Valued Landscape. However this may be a result of lack of surveying or trees missed in survey rather than an absolute absence of such trees.

Local Wildlife Sites: There are three Local Wildlife Sites within the boundaries of this relatively small Valued Landscape: Highgrove Copse, St Leger's Copse and Collin's Copse. These are all ancient woodland, some plantation on ancient woodland sites and some ancient semi-natural woodland, with an interesting flora of ancient woodland indicator species.

In terms of the **cultural heritage and built form** whilst there are eleven **listed buildings** in the village of Riseley there are only three listed buildings that fall within this small Valued Landscape. They are: Bull Lane Cottage, a Grade II listed 17th Century cottage, timber framed with brick and painted brick infill and a thatched roof and flanking chimney on the south gable. Pound House is a Grade II listed former cottage, now a house, originating in the 16th Century. It is part timber-framed with painted render infill and part painted brick. It has an old tile gabled roof with one flanking chimney and one chimney on the ridge. Coldharbour Cottage is a Grade II listed cottage in Swallowfield Lane. Of late 16th Century origin, it was restored in the late 20th Century. It is timber-framed on a brick plinth with painted render infill with a thatched gabled roof and flanking chimneys

The Valued Landscape forms an important part of the backdrop for the village and for these buildings. It also serves to screen the village and its listed buildings from the visual, and light and noise pollution impacts of the A33.

The course of the major Roman road from Londinium (London) in the east, to Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum) in the west, passes a hundred metres to the south of the Valued Landscape.

Recreational Value - The WBLCA (2019) assesses public accessibility of the various Landscape Character Areas for each LCA. There are few public footpaths, but there are well-used informal routes through woodland and narrow winding lanes, which are relatively quiet and are used for walking and the quiet enjoyment of the landscape.

In the 'Key Characteristics' section of the L3 'Stanford East Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' LCA it describes the landscape from this perspective. The WBLCA (2019) states there are:

Single-track lanes, deeply sunken and bounded with banks, ditches and hedges on the higher ground.

And the LCA has:

Extensive views over the Loddon Valley from the ridge.

In the section on 'valuable landscape attributes' it describes the most important attributes of the LCA and states that there are:

⁵³ The Government's online planning guidance: Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development, last updated 5th November 2018

Deeply sunken and winding lanes on higher slopes which contribute to scenic rural quality.

And:

Views to Loddon Valley over the surrounding landscape gives a sense of place and orientation.

In the section on 'Key Issues' for the L3 'Stanford East Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' LCA, it states that:

The A33 brings noise and movement to the area, disturbing the tranquillity. Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes and, by encouraging greater traffic volumes, also threatens the tranquillity of the area.

Informal recreation in this Valued Landscape is dependent on the intimate rural character of the lanes and low traffic volumes.

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

When assessing the L3 'Stanford East Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' LCA it states, in the 'Key Characteristics' section, that the LCA has :

Extensive views over the Loddon Valley from the ridge.

And a:

Tranquil and remote character, which has dark skies, locally interrupted by the busy A33, which bisects the area, isolating the western half from the rest of the borough.

In the section on 'valued landscape attributes' it states that there are:

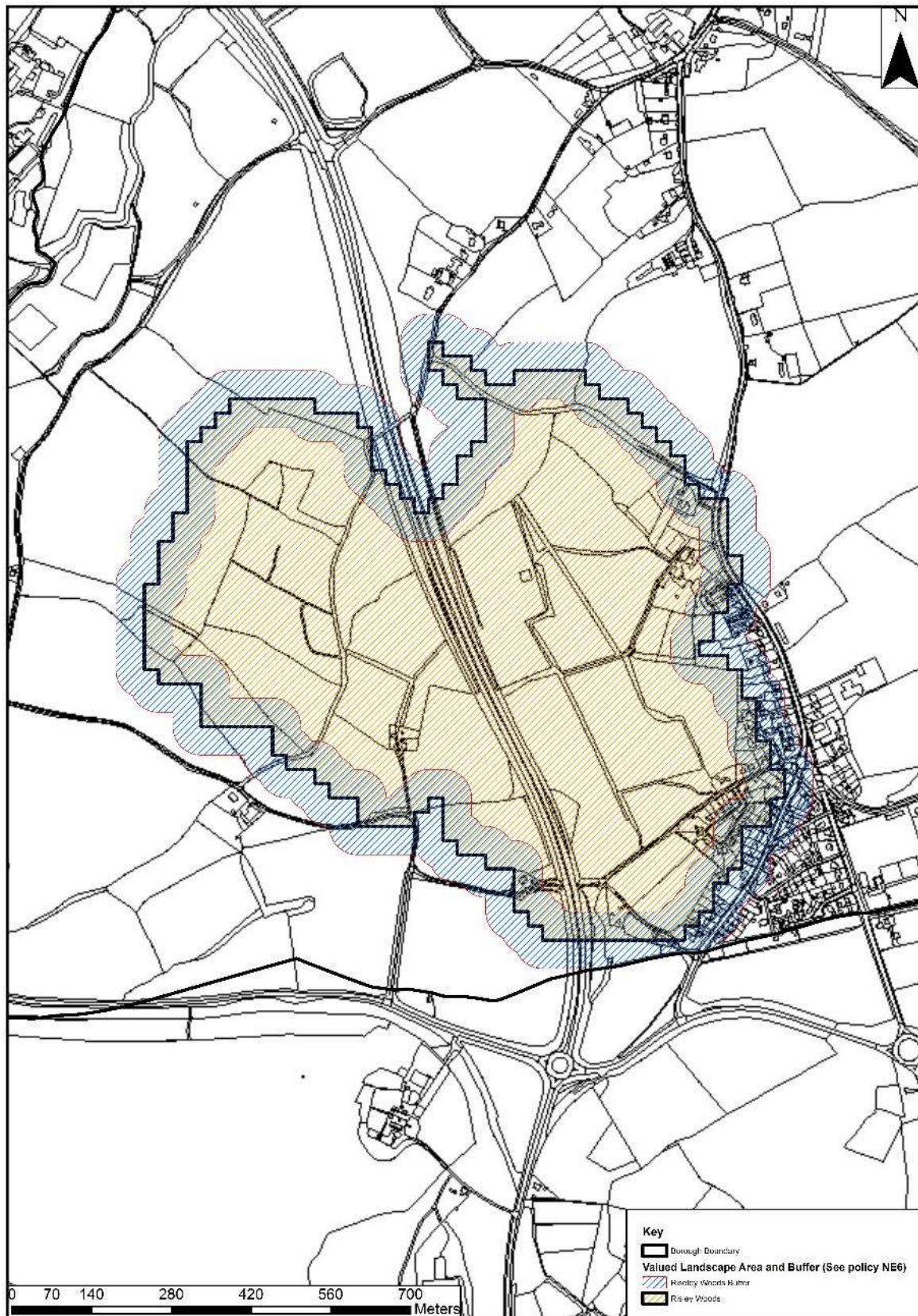
Views to Loddon Valley over the surrounding landscape gives a sense of place and orientation.

And the landscape has a:

Strongly tranquil and remote character, with experience of dark skies due to sparse settlement.

Associations – There are currently no known associations for this Valued Landscape.

Risley Woods Valued Landscape



River Blackwater Valued Landscape Narrative

The tiny river Blackwater on the Surrey Berkshire border. You may never have heard of it, but I assure you it is well worth looking at, especially if you are a small river enthusiast. ... So it was that I started tackling up with ever-so-slightly trembling fingers, as the swims were absolute classics straight out of Mr. Crabtree's book. Bends, runs, shallows, overhangs: "there's a Chub Mr Crabtree!" and mysterious pools where the current slowed. Some swims you just knew the stick float would hold up, then dip away to a bite.

from Totally Awesome Fishing's website
quoting the popular angling classic *Mr Crabtree goes fishing*⁵⁴

Introduction

The eponymous **River Blackwater Valued Landscape**, centres on the river of that name. The River Blackwater flows east to west along the southern boundary of the borough. It has been the shire or county boundary since Anglo-Saxon times. The Valued Landscape sits within the A2 'Loddon River Valley', the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' and the B2 'Blackwater Valley' with Open Water Landscape Character Areas identified in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA) (2019). The extensive gravel workings have modified the landscape in the east, where gravel pits have been restored and managed for recreation and nature conservation. In the west of the gravel workings at Fleethill Farm, the river meanders through a natural landscape, briefly merging with the Whitewater River to become the Broadwater, before mixing its waters with the Loddon at Swallowfield Park. The Whitewater and the Broadwater were fortified in 1940 with pillboxes and other features as part of the Second World War defences against the predicted German invasion. However, today this is not a grand landscape or a complex one. Its value lies to a great extent in the peaceful and tranquil river, and the many opportunities for the quiet enjoyment of the countryside by the many residents who live here.

Features of the Valued Landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The Valued Landscape sits within the A2 'Loddon River Valley', the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' and the B2 'Blackwater Valley with Open Water' Landscape Character Areas as defined by the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019). The WBLCA (2019) discusses landscape condition. For the A2 'Loddon River Valley' the LCA states:

The meandering course of the river and the flat floodplain landscape is intact. For the most part this is a remote and rural landscape with characteristic riverside features and important wetland habitats which contribute to the overall perception of a landscape in moderate condition. However, views to adjacent large scale development and busy infrastructure corridors, particularly in the north of the area fragment the rural landscape. There are opportunities for improvement and particular enhancement to habitat interconnectivity.

⁵⁴ Totally awesome fishing website - <http://www.totallyawesomefishing.com/coarse/articles/river-blackwater/>

It is clear from this that the impacts of development on the northern part of the LCA reduce the quality of the landscape to an 'overall perception of only moderate'. However the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' stresses that *'for the most part this is a remote and rural landscape'*.

For the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' LCA it states:

The strong character and individual landscape components of the Blackwater River with its distinctive intact floodplain are generally in good condition. However, there are opportunities to restore and improve condition through the reinstatement and management of declining hedgerows and the enhancement of areas around settlement. Rural lanes have also become busier.

Considering the B2 'Blackwater River Valley with Open Water' LCA it states:

The perceptual characteristics of a calm, quiet character and new 'natural' landscape of open water created by mineral extraction are valued, and it is now in good condition. Restoration works of former gravel extraction sites at Manor Farm and Fleethill Farm... will provide opportunities to improve the condition of this area.

Scenic Quality – The WBLCA (2019) summarises the scenic quality of the landscape and identifies valuable landscape attributes that relate to scenic quality. Discussing the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA the WBLCA (2019) states:

This area occupies the flat alluvial floodplain of the River Loddon and its tributaries, the Broadwater and the Blackwater. An agricultural landscape of irregular fields, with large scale arable fields on better drained areas and small scale wet meadows on frequently flooded land adjacent to the river. A largely peaceful area, disturbance comes from major roads which cross the floodplain including the M4, and adjacent developments in Earley, Winnersh, the expanding settlement of Shinfield and new Science and Innovation Park.

Developing the theme of scenic quality further the WBLCA (2019) lists the following valuable landscape attributes for the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA: the naturalness of the meandering course of the River Loddon and wide floodplain landscape; the wooded backdrop of mature broadleaved woodland copses and natural riparian corridors; important wetland features and habitats; historic riverside features including medieval moated sites, old brick watermills and bridges; the registered historic parkland at Swallowfield and the GHQ Stop Line and associated Second World War features following the course of the rivers; sparse settlement pattern of farmsteads and the village of Swallowfield, with a strong local vernacular which contribute to the scenic quality of the area.

For the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' LCA the WBLCA (2019) states:

A section of the Blackwater River Valley which has been exploited for gravel extraction and is being restored as the Moor Green Lake Nature Reserve. Scattered and small scale settlement is located at the edge of Finchampstead and north of Lower Sandhurst Road.

Looking at this in more depth in the ‘valued landscape attributes’ table it lists: rural riverine character of the Blackwater River and restored floodplain; ecologically valuable wetland habitats as well as remnant wet meadow and ancient woodland; restored gravel pit lakes; undeveloped character of the valley providing naturalness and remoteness; quiet rural lanes bordered by hedgerows; recreational value of the Moor Green Lake Nature Reserve and the public rights of way; views to the wooded backdrop of Fleet Copse and Finchampstead Ridges create an enclosed and secluded character.

The valuable landscape attributes noted for the B2 ‘Blackwater River Valley’ LCA include: rural riverine character of the Blackwater River and restored floodplain; ecologically valuable wetland habitats; restored gravel pit lakes providing ecological habitats and opportunities for recreation; undeveloped character of the valley which provides a sense of naturalness; quiet rural lanes bordered by hedgerows; recreational value of the Moor Green Lake Nature Reserve and the public rights of way; views to the wooded backdrop of Fleet Copse and Finchampstead Ridges.

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

When discussing the A2 ‘Loddon River Valley’ LCA the WDLCA (2004) mentions the naturalness of the river and its associated habitats; the presence of mature trees; and the remote tranquil character and absence of development on the valley floor. The LCA notes the presence of characteristics of national and regional importance for example numerous Wildlife Heritage Sites.

The WDLCA (2004) states that the A3 ‘Blackwater River Valley’ LCA is: ‘...*important at the regional (or even national) level, including the wetlands habitats, low density settlement pattern and distinctive vernacular architecture.*’

It highlights the ‘*most valued and sensitive aspects of this landscape*’ which it says are ‘*the perceptual characteristics including the tranquillity and sense of ruralness that are of local value but increasingly rare throughout the region*’. Given that this was written in 2004 and that the locality has undergone high levels of house and infrastructure building since then, the aspect of the ‘rarity’ has increased in value and is now considered to be of regional value.

With regards to the B2 ‘Blackwater River Valley with Open Water’ LCA, the WDLCA (2004) comments that the ‘*immediate river corridor and channel*’ are very sensitive to change. Natural watercourses of this character and quality are rare in the borough and this river is considered to be of regional importance.

The rare and important Second World War GHQ Stop Line is discussed in more detail in the River Loddon Valued Landscape narrative. In this Valued Landscape its course passes briefly along the Broadwater River and then turns south along the Whitewater River into Hampshire. It is however worth quoting the late Professor Holmes that: ‘*Our landscape is indeed given added meaning by*

*these defences*⁵⁵. The presence of archaeological, historical and cultural features (buried tank ditches, pillboxes, and cultural references) and the geographical and topographical features modified to create the GHQ Stop Line) gives ‘added meaning’ to the landscape taking this site beyond mere countryside’.

Representativeness – ‘Rarity’ is discussed in the previous section. However the characteristics and features which make a landscape rare in the national context tend to make it distinctive and representative of its type. The Valued Landscape is in most ways representative of many lowland river landscapes in the south east. The areas of past minerals workings contrast with the reaches of more natural river; the current or recently ceased workings are yet another contrast. Yet in this variety, the river shows many similarities with lowland rivers across lowland England.

This river is relatively accessible and also close to a number of centres of population: the Arborfield Strategic Development Location; Finchampstead; Crowthorne, Sandhurst and Yateley – an urban crescent enclosing the eastern end of the landscape. This is representative of river landscapes that were common in the south-east a generation ago. Such landscapes are increasingly rare, but this landscape is both rare and tranquil, and accessible to a densely populated catchment of residents to whom this landscape is a popular.

Conservation Interests – In terms of **wildlife and biodiversity** the River Blackwater Valued Landscape provides an important assemblage of wildlife sites and habitats valued at the borough level.

Habitats of Principal Importance include: Eutrophic standing waters; Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh; Lowland mixed deciduous woodland; Wet woodland and potentially areas of Traditional Orchards.

The Valued Landscape falls within the Blackwater Valley and Loddon Valley South **Biodiversity Opportunity Areas**. The Ancient Tree Inventory⁵⁶ shows a wide variety of **Ancient and Veteran Trees** with notable aggregations along the valley between The Street in the west and Longwater Road in the East. Because much of the land is low-lying and susceptible to flooding there is not a great assemblage of **ancient woodland**. However ancient woodland does occur on the higher land and some are named on tithe maps that give glimpses into the history of the area including: King’s Copse or King’s Coppice and Poors Copse. In addition, hedgerow surveys indicate that there is a density of **important hedgerows** within the Valued Landscape at Finchampstead and many of these date from the medieval period.

Local Wildlife Sites: There are 6 Local Wildlife Sites within the Valued Landscape: Fleet Copse, Longwater Lane Meadow, The Marshes Riseley; Wyvol’s Copse; Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve and Eversley Meadow. The habitats represented are varied, including (respectively): ancient semi-natural woodland; grassland; woodland, wet woodland and grassland; restored ancient woodland;

⁵⁵ HOLMES E R in the foreword to FOOT William, Beaches, Fields, Streets and Hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of 1940, 2006, Council for British Archaeology Report 144

⁵⁶ The Government’s online planning guidance: Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development, last updated 5th November 2018

gravel pits with importance for birds; wet woodland and neutral grassland. Some of these sites are supported by active volunteer groups who carry out not only maintenance and habitat management, but ecological monitoring as well.

The Longwater Road gravel Pit is a **Local Geological Site**. However quarrying ceased in 2012 and the site was restored for amenity and wildlife conservation. The geological features that were exposed by quarrying are therefore no longer visible.

A significant part of the Valued Landscape is susceptible to flooding. Because of this the landscape was never densely populated and a characteristic feature is its lack of development. Other than buildings that needed to be located close to the river (e.g. water mills) houses, cottages and inns were traditionally located outside areas likely to be flooded. Because of this historic general lack of development there are only five **listed buildings** in the Valued Landscape area: Riseley Farmhouse, Angel Sprints, Nutbean Farmhouse, The Poors House and New Mill. The Grade II New Mill, was a mill and millhouse of 15th Century origin and now occupied by a restaurant. The structure is part timber framed, with painted brick infill and part weather-boarding and painted brick, and an old tile gabled roof. The Interior has many exposed timbers, a large inglenook fireplace and the mill wheel, gears and machinery fully restored and in working order enclosed behind a glass screen.

The curiously named Grade II Angel Sprints was once known as Angel Inn but is now a Grade II listed cottage. Originating in the late 16th Century it is of timber frame construction with painted brick infill and thatched hip roof, with thatch swept down at the rear to low eaves level. Grade II listed Poors House is a timber framed, thatched cottage of early 16th Century origin. Nutbean Farmhouse (Grade II) is of late 16th Century origin; a timber framed, part painted stucco infill, part painted brick structure with weatherboarding. There is an old insurance plaque at first floor level. Riseley Farmhouse in Part Lane is Grade II listed. Its origins are as an early 16th Century hall house and byre and it is now a farmhouse.

Recreational Value - The WBLCA (2019) generally assesses public accessibility of the A2 'Loddon River Valley', A3 'Blackwater River Valley' and B2 'Blackwater Valley' Landscape Character Areas in each LCAs chapter.

The recreational value of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA is addressed in the 'Landscape Characteristics' table, which states:

'Little public access to the floodplain except for the Blackwater Valley Path which runs south and east of Swallowfield. Busy roads cross the flood plain, including the A33, M4 and Winnersh and Shinfield Eastern Relief Roads, and create physical and visual severance along the floodplain.'

With regards to the recreational value within the A3 'Blackwater River Valley' LCA, the cultural landscapes section states:

'Rural roads run along the northern boundary of the area on the slopes of the valley side, and also cross the valley. To the west of the borough the roads typically become rural tracks

bounded by thick hedges with trees and deep ditches as they near the river which they cross by fords rather than bridges. These tracks and the network of footpaths including the promoted Blackwater Valley Path, give particularly good access to the river and floodplain for leisure use’.

In the A3 ‘Blackwater River Valley’ LCA ‘valuable landscape attributes’ table it states:

‘Recreational value of the public rights of way including the promoted Blackwater Valley Path which give access to the area. Their presence provides opportunities for the river and surrounding area to be used for leisure, especially in the east, near Fleethill Farm.’

In the ‘Key Characteristics’ table for the B2 ‘Blackwater Valley’ LCA, it states:

‘Informal recreational landscape with trails and footpath connections to Trilakes Country Park, including the promoted Blackwater Valley Path.’

The B2 ‘Blackwater Valley’ LCA ‘valuable landscape attributes’ table states:

‘Recreational value of the Moor Green Lake Nature Reserve and the public rights of way including the promoted Blackwater Valley and Three Castles Paths which give access to the area and enjoyment of the river valley.’

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the WBLCA (2019) which identifies high levels of tranquillity and dark night skies.

For the A2 ‘Loddon River Valley’ LCA it identified ‘valuable landscape attributes’ stating it is a:

‘Remote and rural landscape in the south of the area due to the limited access to the floodplain and absence of development on the valley floor...’ with: ‘Localised areas with a strong sense of tranquillity particularly in the south, with naturalistic qualities and experience of dark skies away from roads and visual influence of large scale settlement in adjacent areas.’

Considering the A3 ‘Blackwater River Valley’ LCA, the valuable landscape attributes lists states that the landscape has:

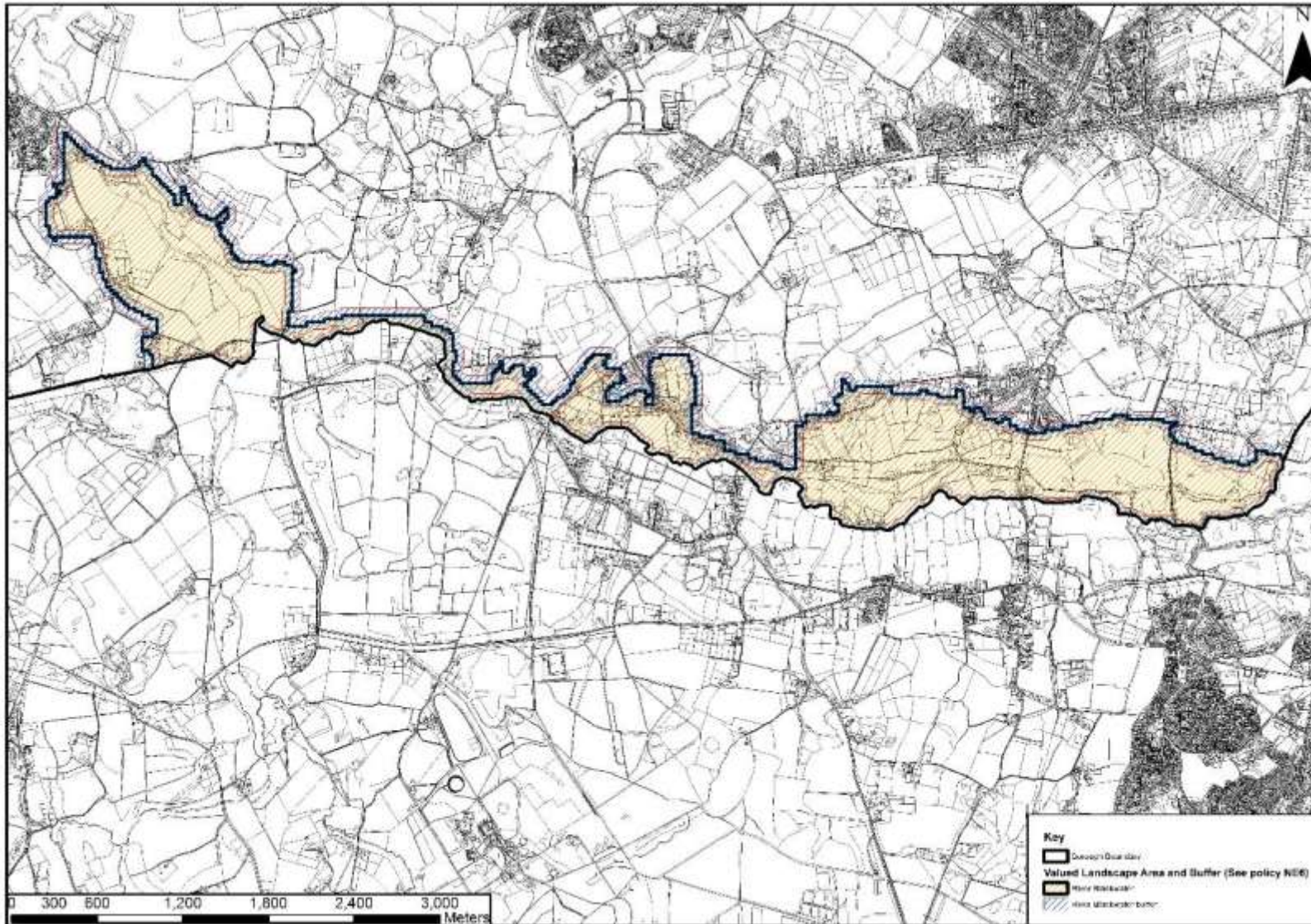
‘strong perceptual characteristics, including intimacy, tranquillity and remoteness and experience of dark skies which are rare within the borough.’

In a list of valuable landscape attributes, the B2 ‘Blackwater Valley’ LCA states the area has:

‘localised areas of tranquillity and peacefulness, with an experience of dark skies, particularly around the restored lakes, and away from the B0136...’ and ‘views to the wooded backdrop of Fleet Copse and Finchampstead Ridges create an enclosed and secluded character, particularly around the Moor Green Lakes’.

Associations – This landscape has no known associations with national or local figures. This landscape is, however, a popular and populist landscape. Because of its tranquillity, undeveloped nature and the many opportunities for the quiet enjoyment of the countryside, the associations with this Valued Landscape are with the people of the local community.

River Blackwater Valued Landscape



River Loddon Valued Landscape Narrative

I spent a fortnight at Wargrave with my friend Mr. Marks. We had perfect weather, the grey morning mists which hung about the river, giving way each day to the sun, the thin sear foliage on the willows softly gleaming out like clouds of gold dust, and in the evening the banks in the lanes bright with numerous glowworms. I made studies here for my picture called "Willow, Willow" from the banks of the Loddon, which joins the Thames at Shiplake Weir

George Leslie Dunlop in Our River (published 1888)⁵⁷

Introduction

The **River Loddon Valued Landscape** runs the entire length of that part of the river within the borough. It mostly occupies the A2 'Loddon River Valley' and B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' Landscape Character Areas (LCA) as identified in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA) (2019). The Valued Landscape occupies the flat alluvial floodplain of the river, from where it enters the borough to the west of Risley, to where it joins the River Thames Valued Landscape upstream of Wargrave.

The Valued Landscape has important landscape features along its' entire length from the Roman Road on its south-western boundary to the Habitats of Principal Importance on the floodplain where it joins the River Thames Valued Landscape. Although bisected by the A329(M) and two railway crossings, it represents a significant green and blue infrastructure corridor running diagonally across the southern half of the borough. It is valued for its character and appearance, biodiversity, history, perceptual qualities, recreational value and associations. The southern half is more natural but the northern part above the A329(M) has been substantially modified, principally by gravel extraction and the development of housing and transport. Many of the existing minerals extraction sites have been developed for recreation, in many cases, mitigating for the loss of naturalness through restoration and further management for the public benefit.

Where it has been necessary to indicate which bank of the river a feature of the landscape lies, the normal convention of labelling the left and the right banks viewed when facing downstream have been used in this narrative.

Features of the Valued Landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The Valued Landscape sits within A2 'Loddon River Valley' and B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCAs. The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) discusses landscape condition in the 'Key Characteristics' section of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' and B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCAs. On landscape condition of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA, it states:

⁵⁷ LESLIE, George Dunlop *Our River (The Thames)*, 1881, Bradbury Agnew and Co.

The meandering course of the river and the flat floodplain landscape is intact. For the most part this is a remote and rural landscape with characteristic riverside features and important wetland habitats which contribute to the overall perception of a landscape in moderate condition. However, views to adjacent large scale development and busy infrastructure corridors, particularly in the north of the area fragment the rural landscape. There are opportunities for improvement and particular enhancement to habitat interconnectivity.

The A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA landscape, containing the lower part of the Valued Landscape is not greatly affected by the disturbance from the M4 motorway and the settlements of Earley and Winnersh to the north. Although development pressure continues for housing and of busier and faster moving roads, the southern part of the LCA still demonstrates many characteristics of the natural river and floodplain.

For the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA, it states:

This peaceful floodplain landscape in the valley of the River Loddon falls between the urban areas of Woodley and the large villages of Winnersh, Twyford and Charvil. Former gravel extraction has modified the landscape resulting in a mix of land uses including open water bodies, landfill sites, and restored agricultural fields, nature reserves and country parks.

Scenic Quality – The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) summarises the scenic quality of the landscape and identifies valuable landscape attributes that relate to scenic quality.

For the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA it states:

The meandering course of the river and the flat floodplain landscape is intact. For the most part this is a remote and rural landscape with characteristic riverside features and important wetland habitats which contribute to the overall perception of a landscape in moderate condition. However, views to adjacent large scale development and busy infrastructure corridors, particularly in the north of the area fragment the rural landscape. There are opportunities for improvement and particular enhancement to habitat interconnectivity.

Within the 'Key Characteristics' section for the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA, the WBLCA (2019) highlights the following relating to scenic quality and expands upon them in the main text: *the naturalness of the River Loddon and wide floodplain; the wooded backdrop of mature broadleaved woodland and natural riparian corridors; important wetland features and habitats; historic riverside features including medieval moated sites, old brick watermills and bridges, registered historic parkland at Swallowfield and the GHQ [General Headquarters] Stop Line and associated Second World War features following the course of the river; sparse settlement pattern of farmsteads and the village of Swallowfield and a strong local vernacular*

Regarding the scenic quality of the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA, it states:

The undeveloped nature of much of the floodplain crossed by rivers, and characterised by open water bodies and associated wetland habitats are in moderate condition. The urban influence and potential expansion of the settlement edge from Winnersh and Woodley/Earley and the increasing impact of the busy road and rail network means that there is a considerable need but also opportunities for landscape improvements.

In the 'Key Characteristics' section for the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA the WBLCA (2019) highlights the following relating to scenic quality: *undeveloped riverine character with its network of rivers, drainage ditches and restored lakes which provides a strong sense of place; wooded context and fringing carr vegetation with pollarded willows; remnant pockets of traditional pasture, with pollarded willows along banksides and ditches; mosaic of ecologically valuable wetland and woodland; restored gravel works supporting a range of birds and nationally scarce flora; distinctive historic built form clustered at river crossings including historic mills, bridges and listed buildings at Twyford; farms on the floodplain edge giving a sense of time-depth and contributing to scenic quality.*

Rarity – Assessing rarity of landscape types and individual features is not simple. However, a number of sources can assist, including the Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (WDLCA) (2004). This archive document provides an indication of rarity in it's' assessment of sensitivity where it addressed the re-creatability of landscape elements.

In assessing the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA, as a landscape with high sensitivity to change, it identified the following as being features which would be hard to re-create: the naturalness of the river course and its associated habitats; the presence of mature trees and the area's tranquil remote character and absence of development on the valley floor. Many of the characteristics were notes to be of regional and national importance including: Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI; numerous World Heritage Sites (WHS) and the Registered Park and Garden at Swallowfield. Chapter A2 of the WDLCA (2004) also noted the visual sensitivity to change because of the valley form with its' potential for views from the adjacent river terrace (in the C1 'Arborfield River Terrace' LCA) and farmland (in the J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA).

In looking at the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA, the WDLCA (2004) identifies the far northern part of the River Loddon Valued Landscape as being of overall moderate sensitivity to change. It identifies wetland habitats as being most sensitive to change and notes that many are of national importance because of the rarity of the flora and fauna present. It appears to give local significance to small areas of land between settlements and the potential for views across the floodplain from the C2 'Hurst River Terrace' LCA lying to the east.

Particularly rare features of this Valued Landscape are: Registered Historic Park and Garden at Swallowfield; the Second World War GHQ Stop Line which reinforced the natural barrier of the River Loddon in this southern part; and the high concentration of buildings or sites with moats – medieval feature created for Status (for example at Sheepbridge Court) or, as in the case of the fortified Beaumys Castle for defence (although NB Beaumys sits adjacent to the River Loddon but is within the boundary of the Spencers Wood Southern Clay Ridge Valued Landscape).

Representativeness – ‘Rarity’ is discussed in the previous section. However, opposite of rarity is representativeness. Unless a landscape type is particularly common, which this particular Valued Landscape is not, the characteristics and features which make a landscape rare are also those that make it distinctive and therefore representative of its type. Notwithstanding the many special features that make this part of the countryside a Valued Landscape, the River Loddon is in many ways representative of many lowland river floodplain landscapes in the south east.

Conservation Interests – In terms of **wildlife and biodiversity** the River Loddon Valued Landscape provides an important mix of wildlife sites and habitats:

There is a wide range of **Habitats of principal importance** including: lowland mixed deciduous woodland; wood pasture and parkland remaining in historic parks; wet woodland; lowland meadows; coastal and floodplain grazing marsh; ponds; and rivers. Traditional orchards are reported but exist at a very local scale.

The Loddon Valley Gravel Pits and the Loddon Valley South **Biodiversity Opportunity Areas** lie within the Valued Landscape and are described in the Berkshire Biodiversity Action Plan⁵⁸.

There are three **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** in the Valued Landscape: two at Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill SSSI and one at Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI.

First designated in 1952 the Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI designation⁵⁹ states:

The site comprises Stanford End Mill meadows, a series of traditionally-managed seasonally waterlogged hay meadows, and a 4 km stretch of the River Loddon, a tributary of the River Thames. The valley is situated on Tertiary deposits of Valley Gravel and River Alluvium overlying London Clay.

And:

The site is of interest particularly for nationally important populations of two rare plants: the fritillary Fritillary meleagris, a native bulb of unimproved damp meadows now mainly confined to scattered localities in southern Britain, and the Loddon pondweed Potamogeton nodosus, a very rare aquatic species for which this length of the River Loddon is the national stronghold.

Additionally the SSSI designation highlights the following: sparse oak, ash and alder trees giving only moderate shade (that encourages growth of water plants); numerous cricket-bat willows grown commercially; two rare pea-mussels Pisidium moitessierianum and P.tenuilineatum whose presence reflects the high water quality and base-rich conditions. Several uncommon species of mollusc in the meadows, including the snails Vertigo antivertigo and V.mouliinsiana which are restricted to fens and marshes; a variety of coarse fish, water voles and nesting birds, including little grebe, moorhen, coot, mute swan and kingfisher.

⁵⁸ The Berkshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), 2011, Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum

⁵⁹ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1002963.pdf>

First designated in 1953, Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill SSSI designation⁶⁰ states:

The woodlands are situated on London Clay, which is largely overlain by alluvium at Sandford Mill and valley gravel at Lodge Wood. The poorly-drained and seasonally-waterlogged soils conform to the Fladbury 3 and Hurst associations, and consist of stoneless, fine, clay-like silts and loams. Both woodlands occur on relatively flat ground which is affected by groundwater and susceptible to intermittent flooding from the Loddon.

And:

*Although Lodge Wood is shown on Rocque's map of Berkshire in 1761 and may be an ancient woodland site, management has modified its original composition and structure. Both woodlands are dominated by alder and crack willow *Salix fragilis*, together with some ash. There is a relatively poorly developed understorey which includes hazel, dogwood, elder, blackthorn and red currant *Ribes sylvestre*. The southern part of Lodge Wood is drier, and dominated by pedunculated oak and ash, with some hawthorn and spindle and occasional planted exotics.*

Of particular interest in the Valued Landscape is the presence of the Loddon Lily which occurs in only 48 sites in England. The two sites of this SSSI are a stronghold for this species which derives its common name from the River Loddon. At the time of designation they contained ten percent of the population of the species in England. The designation states:

*Both Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill Woods support large colonies of Loddon Lily or summer snowflake *Leucojum aestivum*. This species has a very restricted distribution in Britain, and is listed in the British Red Data Book of vascular plants. In England it is largely confined to the Thames Basin, with one centre of distribution between Reading and Windsor, and another between Goring and Abingdon. It was first recorded from near Reading in 1799, and from the confluence of the Thames and Loddon in 1809. Because of its mode of dispersal the Loddon Lily is almost wholly associated with rivers, and the majority of colonies are found on islands or in dense willow carr. After flowering in April or May, when it is pollinated by bees, the fruits develop flotation chambers. Although they remain attached to the stem, in the event of flooding the stems break and the fruits are carried downstream and stranded amongst debris in thickets or on flood-plains. The bulbs can also be transported during heavy floods and deposited on river banks.*

There are three Local Nature Reserves (LNR) within the River Loddon Valued Landscape: Alder Moors, Lavells Lake and Swallowfield Meadow.

Alder Moors LNR is ancient woodland dominated by alder trees. There is a rich ground flora including bluebells, marsh marigolds, primroses and wood anemones. Lavell's Lake LNR is at the northern most tip of Dinton Pastures Country Park and is managed by Wokingham Borough Council in partnership with the Friends of Lavell's Lake. Emphasis is placed in encouraging bird species and the site is known nationally for both resident and migratory species. The Friends of Lavell's Lake record '125 species recorded in the breeding seasons since records began in 1979 and 108 in

⁶⁰ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1003870.pdf>

winter⁶¹. Swallowfield Meadows LNR is a small site of only 0.7 hectares. It incorporates four balancing ponds and ditches as part of flood prevention measures. As well as a rich variety of habitats, the ponds and ditches have attracted endangered northern water voles (*Arvicola amphibius*).

The Ancient Tree Inventory⁶² shows aggregations of **Ancient and Veteran Trees** at Swallowfield Park and Dinton Pastures Country Park and a number of large girth pollard willows lining the river and drainage ditches within the floodplain.

There are a number of smaller **Ancient Woodlands** mostly on higher ground above the river floodplain. Some small ancient woodland are sited on the urban fringes of Woodley in the north of the Valued Landscape, for example: Sandpit Copse, Norris's Copse and Alder Moors Copse. Others, like the group of larger than average woodlands between Swallowfield and Arborfield grow in the countryside north-east of Swallowfield Park: Great Wood, Moor Copse and Rounds Copse.

There are 29 **Local Wildlife Sites** within the Valued Landscape incorporating a wide range of habitats and a wide variety of species.

In terms of the **cultural heritage and built form**, the Valued Landscape encompasses parts of the following **Conservation Areas**: Swallowfield, Twyford Station and Twyford.

The Valued Landscape forms the setting, and forms part of views in an out, of the Conservation Areas and listed buildings and structures in, and adjacent to, the Valued Landscape. The locations and forms chosen for such buildings were influenced by the landscape; and the buildings in their turn have helped add features of value to the landscape. The site of Swallowfield Court, a royal building and park, was at the western edge of the Royal Forest of Windsor and, in the crotch of two rivers would have been more easily defended and imparked. It may have been a defensive position in its earliest origins as, for example, the nearby moated site at Beaumys Castle situated next to the River Loddon in the adjacent Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape. Both sites depended on the low lying water-logged landscape for the formation of a defensive moat or park boundaries. Another listed building for which the riverside location was essential is the Grade II listed Sandford Mill, an 18th Century building on Sandford Lane which, as a working mill, derived its power from the River Loddon.

The Valued Landscape has two Grade II **Registered Historic Parks and Gardens**: Swallowfield Park⁶³ and a small portion of Stratfield Saye Park⁶⁴ that touches its south-western edge. The parks and gardens are described by Historic England in the National Heritage List for England⁶⁵:

⁶¹ <http://rva.org.uk/organisation/friends-of-lavells-lake/>

⁶² *The Government's online planning guidance Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development (last updated 5th November 2018) directs planners and developers to the Woodland Trusts online map at: <https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/tree-search/>*

⁶³ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000537>

⁶⁴ <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000866>

⁶⁵ Historic England, *National Heritage List for England- Park Place, and Temple Combe*, last updated 31 January 2020, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000588>

Swallowfield Park is a Grade II listed park and garden. The manor of Swallowfield was in royal ownership since before Great Domesday (1086)⁶⁶ until the reign of Elizabeth I. The Historic England Register entry for the park and garden⁶⁷ states:

Swallowfield Park was enclosed by Edward III in 1354, remaining in royal ownership until the C16. The estate ...passing by marriage into the hands of Henry Hyde (d 1709) shortly before he became second Earl of Clarendon in 1674. In 1685 Lady Clarendon (d 1700) was accompanied to Swallowfield by John Evelyn who wrote an account of the estate in his diary for 22 October 1685, describing the features and plants he found, 'the gardens and waters as elegant as 'tis possible to make a flat [site] by art and industry and no mean experience ... the nurseries, kitchen garden full of the most desirable plants, two very noble Orangeries well furnished, but above all the canal and fishponds. The second Earl rebuilt the house 1689-91, the designs being those of William Talman, Comptroller of the King's Works. Edward Hyde, the third Earl, sold the estate some time before 1718 to the nabob Thomas Pitt, late Governor of Madras, known as 'Diamond Pitt, who bought the estate with part of the proceeds of selling the Pitt or Regent diamond, and died there in 1726. Pitt employed John James to alter the house, and it is also thought that James designed the bridge in the park (Inspector's Report 1990).

And:

The estate was sold out of the Pitt family in 1737, passing through various families during the remainder of the C18, and being sold to Sir Henry Russell, first Baronet in 1820. The formal landscape of rides present to the south of the house in the 1760s (Rocque, 1761), laid out in patte d'oe form, had disappeared by the 1790s (Pride, 1790), by which time the park had been entirely landscaped. In the early C19 (estate map, 1809) the estate was crossed by a network of ponds and canals, these being removed in the 1850s. The estate remained in the Russell family until 1965 when it was divided up and sold, the house and stables being converted into residential apartments for the Country Houses Association, in which use they remain (1998).

Stratfield Saye is a Grade II park and garden with similarly ancient origins, but its chief interest lies in being the seat of the first Duke of Wellington, the Iron Duke, Arthur Wellesley the victor of Waterloo. The Register entry states:

A mid to late C18 garden, laid out from 1745 by George Pitt, Lord Rivers, comprising walled and formal compartments and informal, tree-planted pleasure grounds which are set within a landscape park of the same period; the estate was further developed and planted throughout the C19 and C20 by the dukes of Wellington, whose home it became from 1815.

And:

⁶⁶ Great Domesday Book, 1086, National Archive E 31/2/2 -

⁶⁷ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000537>

A manor was formed at Stratfield Saye in the C11 and was owned by the Stotefield family in the C12. It acquired its present name by the marriage of a Stotefield heiress to Robert de Say. William de Say was granted a licence to inclose his wood to form a park in 1216 and by c 1340, a house had been built there (VCH 1911). In the late C14, the estate passed by marriage to the Dabridgecourt family and remained in their ownership until, in the early C17, their indebtedness to Sir William Pitt enforced conveyance of the estate, in various parcels of land and buildings throughout the 1620s, to the Pitt family. Sir William Pitt is traditionally credited with the building of the present house, on obtaining final possession of the estate in 1630 (CL 1948). The marriage of his grandson, George, to the daughter of John, Earl Rivers (she was the widow of Lord Chandos of Sudeley), brought the connection with the Rivers peerage to the Pitts of Stratfield Saye and when a descendent, another George, was ennobled in 1776, he took the title Baron Rivers of Sudeley. Lord Rivers had succeeded to the estate in 1745 and, through the second half of the C18 until his death in 1803, he made major changes and improvements, these being recorded in some detail in an account written by his steward, Mr Brookes, in a manuscript of c 1810 (CL 1948). Lord Rivers removed the regular terraces and square fishponds with clipped hedges and quaint parterres, and felled most of the avenues. The present walled gardens north-west of the house were built and the pleasure grounds planted with an arboretum of exotic trees. The park was greatly enlarged and planted with specimen trees which gradually recede into open groves thence by a gentle transition into a depth of thick woodland forming a varied and picturesque horizon, while the course of the River Loddon was widened and smoothed.

And:

Following his victory at Waterloo in 1815, the Duke of Wellington purchased the estate in 1817. Probably for financial reasons, none of the various designs for the replacement of the house, prepared by architects such as James Wyatt's eldest son Benjamin Dean Wyatt, and C R Cockerell, were pursued (drawings at Stratfield Saye). The first or Great Duke made a number of additions and alterations to the house, adding the conservatory and the outer wings. Planting in the gardens and park continued throughout the C19 and C20 by the Great Duke and his descendants, the most notable tree species being the Wellingtonia which was first planted at Stratfield Saye by the second Duke in 1854, following its introduction in 1853. The estate remains (1999) in private hands.

The Roman Road forms the northern boundary of Stratfield Saye Park and the southern edge of the Valued Landscape. The course of this major Roman transport artery from Londinium (London) in the east, to Silchester (Callewa Atrebatum) in the west, runs along Welsh Lane and crosses the River Loddon just to the south of the borough boundary, a few metres upstream of Stanford End Bridge.

The Park is well screened and no features other than trees and hedges, and a Second World War pillbox glimpsed between them, are visible from the Valued Landscape. This pillbox twinned with one on the other side of Welsh Lane guarded the bridge from attack from the west. Together they formed a forward position of the Second World War General Headquarters Stop Line. This four hundred mile defence (in depth), was built using natural defensive features such as rivers and high ground wherever possible. The River Loddon, and other geographical features, were an important

part of the natural defences strengthened by structures such as pillboxes and tank ditches rapidly constructed during the summer of 1940 in preparation for the expected German invasion.

In the foreword to *Beeches, fields, streets and hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of England 1940*⁶⁸. Professor Holmes makes a strong case for the special protection of landscapes of the GHQ Stop Line. He writes 'Our landscape is indeed given added meaning by these defences'. Whilst some of the defences have been lost from the landscape the presence of many others (including features of archaeological, historical and cultural interest e.g. buried tank ditches, pillboxes etc.) combined with the geographical and topographical features modified to create the GHQ Stop Line have created the specific features that, in Professor Holmes's opinion give 'added meaning' to the landscape.

There are thirty-nine **listed buildings and structures** ranging from the Grade II 17th Century Waggon and Horses public house on the Old Bath Road at Twyford, to the Grade II* Sheepbridge Court a late 16th and 17th Century farm house on a 13th Century moated site⁶⁹, one of two **scheduled monuments** in the Valued Landscape (the other being early 13th Century Beaumys Castle⁷⁰ lying within the buffer zone of this Valued Landscape but described in the narrative for the Spencer's Southern Ridge Valued Landscape which is contiguous with the River Loddon Valued Landscape at this point). Moated sites were built between 1250 and 1350 AD and are rare in the south of England and so it is worth noting that there is one other moated site in the vicinity of the Valued Landscape but not within it as currently mapped. The site lies within two-and-a-half kilometres to the north-east of Sheepbridge Court at Kenney's Farm⁷¹ where a modern house sits with the moat.

A cluster of listed buildings and structures sit on the left bank of the River Loddon just upstream of the A33 crossing. The site of the 12th Century priory of Stratfield Saye (dissolved 1399) lies immediately to the south-west of Beaumys castle on the left bank of the river. The old abbey meadows forming part of the Standford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI. The site is now occupied by three listed buildings or structures: a Grade II late 17th Century Dovecote and wall, a Grade II 18th Century timber framed granary, and the Priory mansion itself, a Grade II* 16th Century extended brick house with some timber framing in older parts with old tile roofs gabled, and one half hipped.

The Waggon and Horses public house, a former 17th Century Inn is Grade II and situated on the Old Bath Road at Twyford, convenient for the crossing of the river at the two fords of the braided river channel reflected in the name of the village.

Recreational Value – The WBLCA (2019) assesses public accessibility of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' and B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCAs. The recreational opportunities of the northern and southern halves of the Valued Landscape are different and complementary. The southern portion offers fewer opportunities to access the landscape but greater tranquillity. The northern or downstream portion of the Valued Landscape offers a greater number and variety of riverine and wetland experiences, with reduced tranquillity.

⁶⁸ HOLMES E R in the foreword to FOOT William, *Beaches, Fields, Streets and Hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of 1940*, 2006, Council for British Archaeology Report 144

⁶⁹ Sheepbridge Court moat <https://historicalengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1013336>

⁷⁰ Beaumys Castle moat <https://historicalengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1013179>

⁷¹ Kenney's Farm moat <https://historicalengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1013139>

For the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA it states:

There is a loose network of lanes serving this primarily agricultural landscape, with a limited number of river crossing points.

And comments on severance and lack of access, stating there is:

Little public access to the floodplain except for the Blackwater Valley Path which runs south and east of Swallowfield. Busy roads cross the flood plain, including the A33, M4 and Winnersh and Shinfield Eastern Relief Roads, and create physical and visual severance along the floodplain.

Further downstream, in that portion of the Valued Landscape lying north of the A329(M), located in the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA, the WBLCA (2019) states there are:

Popular recreational landscapes including Dinton Pastures Country Park, Charvil Country Park and Charvil Meadows.

The River Loddon is a landscape valued by local anglers including the seven hundred members of the Twyford and District Angling Club⁷².

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the WBLCA (2019) which identifies some disturbance and light pollution along transport corridors, but higher levels of tranquillity and dark night skies in other parts of the Valued Landscape.

For the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA it identifies 'valuable landscape attributes' stating that it is a:

Remote and rural landscape in the south of the area due to the limited access to the floodplain and absence of development on the valley floor.

With:

Localised areas with a strong sense of tranquility particularly in the south, with naturalistic qualities and experience of dark skies away from roads and visual influence of large scale settlement in adjacent areas.

And a:

Tranquil and rural character away from river crossings and visual influence of large scale settlement in adjacent areas. The south of the area is also a resource of 'dark skies'.

For the B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' LCA, it states that the landscape has:

⁷² Twyford and District Angling Club website <https://www.tdfc.org.uk/>

Localised areas of tranquillity particularly around the restored lakes, and away from transport corridors and the visual influence of adjacent settlements.

Associations – This landscape has a very high number of close associations with nationally important figures.

The manors of Shinfield and Swallowfield were important royal manors at the time of Edward the Confessor and William I, not to mention King Harold Godwinson (the Anglo-Saxon King and victor at Stamford Bridge who died at Hastings and was written out of Domesday as the new Norman oligarchy stamped its mark on nation and landscape).

Swallowfield Court continued to be a royal residence on the fringes of the Royal Forest of Windsor and Edward III improved and imparked it in 1354. Swallowfield Court remained an important royal residence and was endowed to Catherine of Aragon, the wife of Henry VIII as part of her dowry.

A famous non-royal association is with Thomas ‘Diamond’ Pitt (1653 –1726). He was the grandfather to William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham ("Pitt the Elder") and was great-grandfather of William Pitt the Younger, both Prime Ministers. ‘Diamond’ Pitt is best known for his purchase of a 410 carat uncut diamond acquired from an Indian merchant in Madras in 1701.

Pitt bought the diamond for 48,000 pagodas or £20,400, and sent it back to England in 1702 concealed inside his eldest son Robert's shoe. A 141 carat stone, with several secondary stones, was cut from the rough stone. Pitt and his sons took the diamond to Calais in 1717 and the stone was sold to the French regent, Philippe II, Duke of Orléans, for £135,000, becoming one of the crown jewels of France. "Le Régent", as the stone is known, is on display in the French Royal Treasury at The Louvre. With the proceeds of the sale, Pitt bought property including at Swallowfield Court and Park – his favourite residence.

The present house of Swallowfield Court was mainly built by Lord Clarendon in 1689–90. According to the Victoria County History, the gardens of Swallowfield Court were visited and described by John Evelyn, who wrote much about *'the delicious and rarest fruits,' the 'innumerable timber trees in the ground about the seate,' the walks and groves of elms, limes, oaks and other trees, the quarters, walks and parterres, nurseries, kitchen garden, two very noble orangeries, and, 'above all, the canal and fishponds, the one fed with a white, the other with a black running water, stored with pike, carp, bream and tench*⁷³.

A further association relates to the Duke of Wellington who ‘retired’ to his estate at nearby Stratfield Saye in 1817. He was active in local affairs and appears to have been held in high regard with numerous notable (and now highly visible) plantings of Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), a tree discovered after his death but named in his honour. It is these trees that now adorn the Victorian estates on the high clay ridge that forms the core of this Valued Landscape.

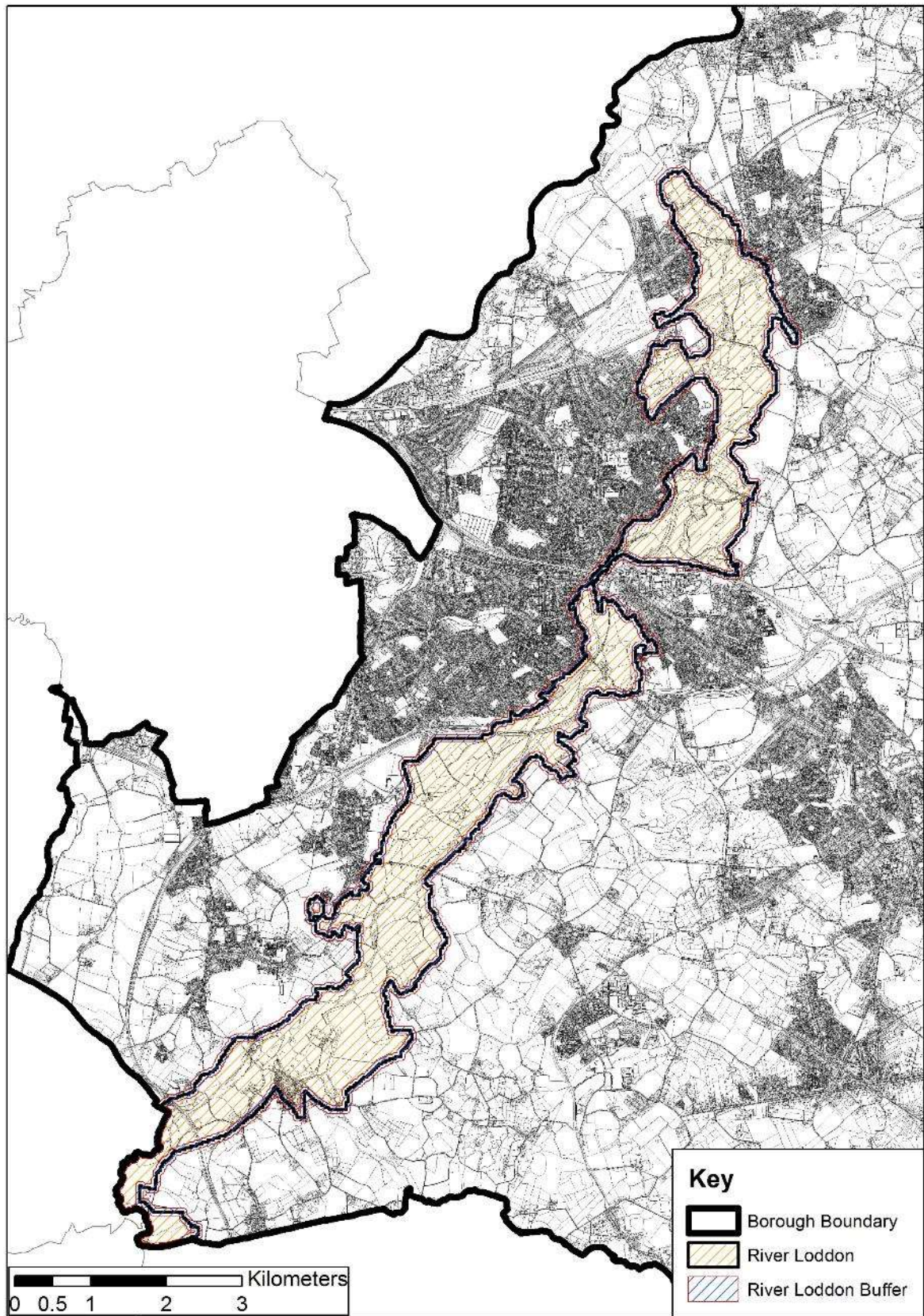
⁷³ A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3. 1923 Victoria County History, London, pages 267 - 274

One further association from that period was with the writer Mary Russel Mitford (1787 Alresford, Hants - 10 January 1855 Swallowfield Berks), a contemporary and acquaintance of Jane Austen, who is best known for *'Our Village'*⁷⁴, a collection of chapters of contemporary village scenes and characters based on her life at Three Mile Cross. She was schooled at Reading Abbey Girls School (also attended by Jane Austen). Mitford met Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 1836, and they became close friends. Mitford was granted a civil list pension in 1837 (she was a favourite of many powerful Victorians including the Queen) partly due to her heroic struggle to support her spendthrift father. In 1842, her father died. A subscription was raised to pay his debts, and the surplus helped ease Mitford's financial burdens. In 1851 she moved from Three Mile Cross to a cottage in Swallowfield, where she died on 10 January 1855. She is buried in Swallowfield churchyard.

The architect of the home defences during the early months of the Second World War was General Edmund Ironside. William Edmund 'Tiny' Ironside, 1st Baron Ironside, GCB, CMG, DSO (6 May 1880 – 22 September 1959) was a career soldier. He served throughout the Second Boer War spying on German colonial forces in South West Africa. He commanded troops on the front during the First World War before being appointed to a position on the staff. In 1918, he was given command of a brigade on the Western Front. In 1919, he was promoted to command the Allied intervention force in northern Russia following the Bolshevik Government's withdrawal from the First World War. As Governor of Gibraltar, preparing for retirement, he was recalled to the UK and appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff on the outbreak of the Second World War. After nine months, he took Command of Home Forces responsible for preparing the defence of the country for an expected German Invasion. As the architect of an astonishing system of defence lines hurriedly built during the summer of 1940, he retired with the rank of Field Marshall on July 19th 1940. This astounding man would have been intimately aware of the terrain he was preparing to defend and, as the GHQ Stop Line that he devised passed through the grounds of Swallowfield Park, it is not unlikely that he at least passed through this landscape in the whirlwind of action that he brought to the Home Front in a country stunned by the aftermath of the British Expeditionary Force's defeat in Normandy and retreat from Dunkirk.

⁷⁴ MITFORD Mary Russel, *Our Village*, 1835, Sampson Low, Son & Co

River Loddon Valued Landscape



River Thames Valued Landscape Narrative

Introduction

It is a part of the river in which to dream of bygone days, and banish forms and faces, and things that might have been, but are not, confound them.

Jerome K Jerome, 1889, Three Men in a Boat

The **River Thames Valued Landscape** centres on the River Thames which forms the northern boundary of the borough and the ancient boundary between the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. The River Thames arises in Lechlade, Wiltshire, has the largest water catchment of Britain's rivers and is the longest river entirely in England (215 miles, or 346 km). It passes through Oxford, Reading, Henley, Maidenhead and Windsor. The navigation starts at Lechlade near its source and continues to Teddington Lock in Richmond, where the river becomes tidal. Navigation in the tidal Thames continues to the Pool of London and onwards to the North Sea.

The Valued Landscape roughly follows the line of the flood plain but takes in higher ground where settlements, land use or features are intrinsically linked with the landscape of the river. The Valued Landscape's northern boundary is determined by the borough boundary for the purposes of the Borough's Local Plan Update. The River Thames Valued Landscape abuts the Chilterns Chalk and River Loddon valued landscapes to the east and south respectively.

Features of the River Thames Valued Landscape

Please note that the standard approach of referring to the left and right banks of the river is used in this text. Left refers to the left bank, and right to the right bank when facing downstream.

Landscape quality (condition) – The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (WDLCA) (2004) identified this is a high quality landscape and this is clear and evident from any visit to the area. There are some elements of the landscape that are industrialised to a limited extent, for example the western end of the landscape at the confluence with the River Kennet, but even here the built form has quality and historic importance and adds to, rather than detracts from, the landscape quality. In other places, housing or other built form constructed in more recent years generally detracts from the natural landscape, however the strength of character and quality given to the landscape by the River Thames and its associated landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage over-ride and over-rule the negative impacts of less well judged development.

Scenic Quality – The WDLCA (2004) stated at paragraph 5.40 that the Thames River Valley (A1) LCA is a 'landscape of overall high quality' and 'this is because the area has a strong landscape character which is in generally good condition.' The LCA states that 'the strong character is derived from the distinctive river channel with associated waterside habitats and the presence of picturesque and traditional settlements on the floodplain edge'. In addition road and rail crossings provide focal points and interest when viewed from the navigation and the national trail.

Rarity – The Thames is Britain’s largest river in terms of catchment area (though not in terms of length or discharge). The landscape of the Thames main river is extremely rare and the landscapes of crossing points, particularly those like Sonning and Henley where the settlement is perched above the river on rocky outcrops (chalk in this case) are rarer still. The bridges at such road crossing are also a rare element, as are the Conservation Areas and listed buildings often found at such points. The bridges over the Thames of the Great Western Railway (GWR) are of great historical significance and rarity; only one GWR bridge is an original Brunel bridge – built in 1840 (widened 1892) - at the confluence with the River Kennet at the western end of the part of the River Thames Valued Landscape that lies within the borough. The other rail bridge is at Wargrave, on the GWRs Henley branch line built in 1857, the bridge is an iron structure in contrast to I K Brunel’s bridge which is built on skew having central elliptical arch with two round flood arches to either side. In Wargrave and Remenham footpaths called ‘Ferry Lane’ approach the river affording views but no longer any crossing points. By definition all river crossings are both intimately associated with, and owe their being, to the riverine landscape but because of the size of the river and the history of the transport corridor these bridges, road and rail, are particularly important.

Representativeness – There are other such landscapes that are similar to the River Thames in this area (such as Thames at Wallingford) but they are rare. The landscape here incorporates fine villages including the settlements of Sonning, Wargrave and Henley which grew up to service the trade along the river, a major trade route before the development of toll-roads in the 18th century. These villages centre on conservation areas which run from the settlements, usually on higher ground to avoid flooding, down to the river itself. The river delineates the counties of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire and was also the boundary between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. The river is representative of many lowland rivers but, because it is one of the largest in the country, it is a particularly fine example.

Conservation Interests – In terms of **wildlife and biodiversity**, the River Thames Valued Landscape offers an almost unique habitat for wildlife because of its position as the country’s largest lowland river with its in-stream habitats, emergent vegetation, flood plain habitats with examples of wetland and lowland meadow habitats.

Riverine habitats represent some of the longest uninterrupted stretches of habitat in the country. They are important as habitats in their own right and for terrestrial ecosystems and habitats, feeding nutrients and water into these and acting as dispersal and migration routes for aquatic plants and animals. They are also important for terrestrial species such as bats, many species of which forage along rivers. The Thames is, therefore, particularly important for wildlife.

Species which have a particular link with the features of this Valued Landscape include freshwater fish and invertebrate species such as river lampreys (*Lampetra fluviatilis*) and wild salmon (*Salmo salar*) which spawn in gravel bottomed tributaries migrating up rivers from the sea where the fish spend most of their adult lives.

Terrestrial species particularly at home in and around the river are the rare Daubentons Bat (*Myotis daubentonii*) and amphibians such as the grass snake (*Natrix natrix*).

Habitats of principal importance:

- **Wood Pasture and Parkland** habitat are present in the general area including some in adjacent Valued Landscapes - such as Park Place, Aston - and others within neighbouring administrative areas – for example the parkland at Fawley Court on the left bank of the Thames, just north of Henley . However, the pre 1800 Parkland at Culham Court is present as scattered remnants only and that at Holme Park at Sonning can now be best described as ‘defunct’
- Blocks of scattered **Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland** grow on islands or ‘eyots’ in the navigation channel and bankside with particular concentrations north of Wargrave Marsh and south-west of Sonning. Other small blocks of deciduous woodland can be found, many of which are planted around the mixed deciduous woodland habitat. Ancient woodlands tend to be located on the scarp slope of the adjacent Chilterns Chalk Valued Landscape.
- An area of **Lowland Fen** sits on the northern end of the island largely occupied by Lower Rivermead Farm, north-west of Wargrave.
- A sizeable area of **Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh** sits on the right bank of the river one to two kilometres upstream of its confluence with the River Loddon.

No in-stream habitats have been identified as being of special importance on Natural England, or other mapping, but it is likely that this merely represents a survey bias against such generally inaccessible habitats. It is likely that in-stream habitats will emerge as being of importance as survey methods and efforts increase. This is likely to be the case for side channels and less well-used navigations such as Hennerton Backwater.

The Ancient Tree Inventory⁷⁵ shows a wide variety of **Ancient and Veteran Trees** with notable aggregations around the villages and conservation areas of Sonning and Wargrave and the right bank of the river at Henley Bridge and the hamlet of Remenham.

Nature reserves, valuable for wildlife conservation and recreation include the Suttons Business Park which comprises a small area of ponds with Biodiversity Action Plan Lowland priority Fen habitat. The site is particularly valuable for birds and amphibians and sits adjacent and to the east of a large area of restored meadows on the east bank of the river. The nature reserve and meadows are managed by the Oracle Corporation and are accessible to the public.

Charvil Meadow is a good example of a flood meadow used in the past for summer hay with the aftermath grazed off before flooding in the winter. This enhanced the diversity of the wildflowers and fauna. The site is managed by Wokingham Borough Council and is accessible to the public.

Wargrave Marsh, as it’s’ name suggests, is more accessible to boaters than from the land. It sits between the river and Hennerton Backwater which is also a navigation. The marsh was an extensive area of Lowland Fen, wet grazing and Grazing Marsh but is now subject to much scrub colonisation. This was formerly towpath but there is still pedestrian access along this, right bank of the river.

⁷⁵ The Government’s online planning guidance: Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development, last updated 5th November 2018

Ratty's Refuge at the River and Rowing Museum is a very small reserve designed as a wildlife garden for the Chelsea Flower Show in 2008. It can be viewed from the terrace by the museum café.

In terms of the **cultural heritage and built form**, the Valued Landscape encompasses four conservation areas, three of them based around the riverside villages of Sonning and Wargrave and hamlet of Remenham. The last of the conservation areas is based on the area on the right bank of the River Thames and surrounding Henley Bridge and the Leander club, the traditional home and start line of the Henley Royal Regatta.

In addition there are over a hundred listed buildings and structures in this Valued Landscape area, with concentrations in the four conservation areas of Remenham: Henley Bridge – 5, Remenham Church – 2, Sonning – 47 and Wargrave – 35.

Notable structures outside the conservation areas include: the Grade II listed, 19th century Railway Bridge designed and built by IK Brunel. Sitting adjacent to East Reading in the south-west of the Valued Landscape it crosses the River Kennet and marks the south-western most boundary of the Valued Landscape. In the north-eastern part of the Valued Landscape sits Aston Farmhouse a Grade II listed 16th century hall house in the open countryside. Listed separately but designed as part of the listed Grade II* Fawley Court pleasure grounds across the river in Buckinghamshire, the 18th century folly on Temple Island, is another notable structure and marks the finish line for the Henley Royal Regatta.

There are also a number of listed buildings, situated across the borough boundaries but contributing to this Valued Landscape, including at Shiplake in South Oxfordshire, where there is a notable aggregation of listed buildings associated with the ancient village and the college. As well as listed buildings there are Buildings of Traditional Local Character including Pool Court, set back from Thames Street at Sonning and overlooking the Valued Landscape. The building is listed in Pevsner and is by architect Francis Pollen. Some of these character buildings are listed in Conservation Area Appraisals.

The Valued Landscape forms the setting for these conservation areas as well as for the individual buildings and structures. Indeed the form and location of many of these buildings is in major part a response to the features of the landscape in which they sit. So, for example the Henley Royal Regatta Headquarters and Rowing Museum, a Grade II post-modern structure, designed in 1984-1986 by the Terry Farrell Partnership, is purposefully located on the right bank of the river immediately adjacent to Henley Bridge the starting point for the regatta races.

From the perspective of **archaeological heritage**, there is an aggregation of scheduled monuments to the south of the Valued Landscape. They sit on high ground, perched on the northern slopes of the chalk at Charvil, and overlook the Valued Landscape, which forms their setting and was clearly a foraging and hunting ground for such settlements. However, although it is important to conserve the visual link between any pre-historic settlements on high ground and the river itself, these features have not been included in the Valued Landscape, it being limited to the landscape of the river and its floodplain at this time.

Culturally, the River Thames is itself important as a county boundary and previously the boundary between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. After the Norman invasion, the Thames marked the boundary of the Royal Forest of Windsor, the Crown's premier hunting forest. Although the western part of the Valued Landscape falls within Bishops Bear Wood 'Chase'; the private hunting forest of the Bishops of Salisbury, who had a palace at Sonning, the river proving to be an enduring demarcation and barrier to incursion.

Wharfs and crossings also form part of the archaeological heritage of the Valued Landscape, including evidence for a wharf at Broken Brow (where oak from the Royal Forest of Windsor was shipped for use in the hundred years war) and the remains of the 12th Century bridge, which forms part of the sub-structure of the present-day bridge over the Thames at Henley. Most of the towns and villages within and adjacent to the Valued Landscape grew up on higher ground near wharves and crossings for reasons of trade and security. Sonning is a good example, sitting high on a chalk outcrop above the river crossing and being a seat of the Bishops of Salisbury from Saxon to Elizabethan times. These towns and villages have benefitted from the transition of the river from navigation for commerce to an important tourist route and attraction.

Recreational Value – The National Trail runs along the right bank of the river from Reading, crosses over the Thames at Sonning Bridge and then runs down the left bank until Shiplake Lock, where it deviates inland until Ferry Eyot, when it re-joins the River Thames on the left bank. At Henley it crosses the bridge and once again joins the right bank of the River, which it follows until it deviates slightly inland through the hamlet of Aston, before it leaves Wokingham Borough east of Lower Culham Farm.

The National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 4 is a long distance route between London and Fishguard (in Cornwall). It runs a short distance along the right bank of the River from Reading to Sutton's Business Park where it turns inland. From the Business Park a 'link route' runs along the Thames to Sonning, where it again moves to higher ground through the northern part of Charvil to Wargrave and Crazies Hill where it joins NCN Route 52, which arcs north-east and turning south-east, passing out of the Borough.

The Thames navigation runs from the tidal Thames, managed by the port of London Authority, to the length of the river upstream of Teddington Lock managed by the Environment Agency. This part of the river takes the navigation upstream to the furthest navigable point at Lechlade. The River Thames Valued Landscape sits roughly central to the eastern half of the non-tidal Thames and the river in the Valued Landscape is therefore navigable along its entire length. Because of this traditional navigation, the river is a huge, regionally important, recreational asset, but the landscape of the river is what draws people to it. It is not a natural landscape; it has been modified and managed to benefit the people who live by it, use it or gain enjoyment from it. An example of this is the course of the prestigious and world famous Henley Royal Regatta, held annually at this site since 1839 (apart from breaks for two world wars). Here, the river landscape and townscape is modified to increase enjoyment of the races: pavilions have been built, field hedges removed, trees are not allowed to impede the view and a new museum constructed. The focus in this reach is the river, the races and the enjoyment thereof.

Angling is popular along the length of the Thames. In the non-tidal Thames, the predominant species are roach (*Rutilus rutilus*), dace (*Leuciscus leuciscus*), bream (*Abramis brama*), chubb (*Squalius cephalus*), pike (*Esox lucius*) and perch (*Perca fluviatilis*).

Other recreational features of the landscape include facilities for the quiet enjoyment of the countryside, including local walks and areas for wildlife and bird watching. Other places offering recreational opportunities include unique venues that owe their form, function or location to the River Thames landscape. Features of value in this context include traditional and longstanding places of recreation, such as The Bull and Big House pubs at Sonning (traditionally the White Hart Hotel) the former of which is mentioned in *Three Men in a Boat*, by Jerome K Jerome (1889).

Perceptual Aspects – This is a pastoral landscape, just a short distance from transport corridors and the towns, and notwithstanding disturbance from visitors, this landscape is part of a haven of tranquillity running through the south-east region from London to Oxford and beyond. There are reservoirs of dark skies particularly in the landscape of the lower reaches below Henley.

Although the wider landscape of the floodplain, and views into it are tranquil, this is a busy landscape. However, in many ways its busyness is characteristic. The road and rail crossings, the boat traffic, and the walkers and cyclists are key to the River Thames landscape. Indeed there is much evidence that the river has been a transport route since at least Anglo-Saxon times. Features relating to its recreational uses are part of the character of the landscape.

Associations – There are strong cultural associations between the landscape of the River Thames at or near this point and artists and writers including Jerome K Jerome (1859-1927), Jane Austen (1775-1817), Sir John Everett Millais PRA (1829-1896), Sir Stanley Spencer CBE RA (1891-1959) – at nearby Cookham situated downstream of this reach of the river - and William Holman Hunt OM (1827-1910) – a resident of Sonning. Modern artists associated with this landscape include the Hollywood actor George Clooney. These associations add to the value of this riverine landscape generally but particularly the setting of sites and buildings such as the White Hart Hotel – now the Great House – which was recommended by the painter and writer George Leslie Dunlop in his seminal work – ‘Our River’. In this book he also mentions Mr Sadler, the lock keeper at Sonning Lock who was a celebrated 19th Century poet, bee-keeper and rose-grower.

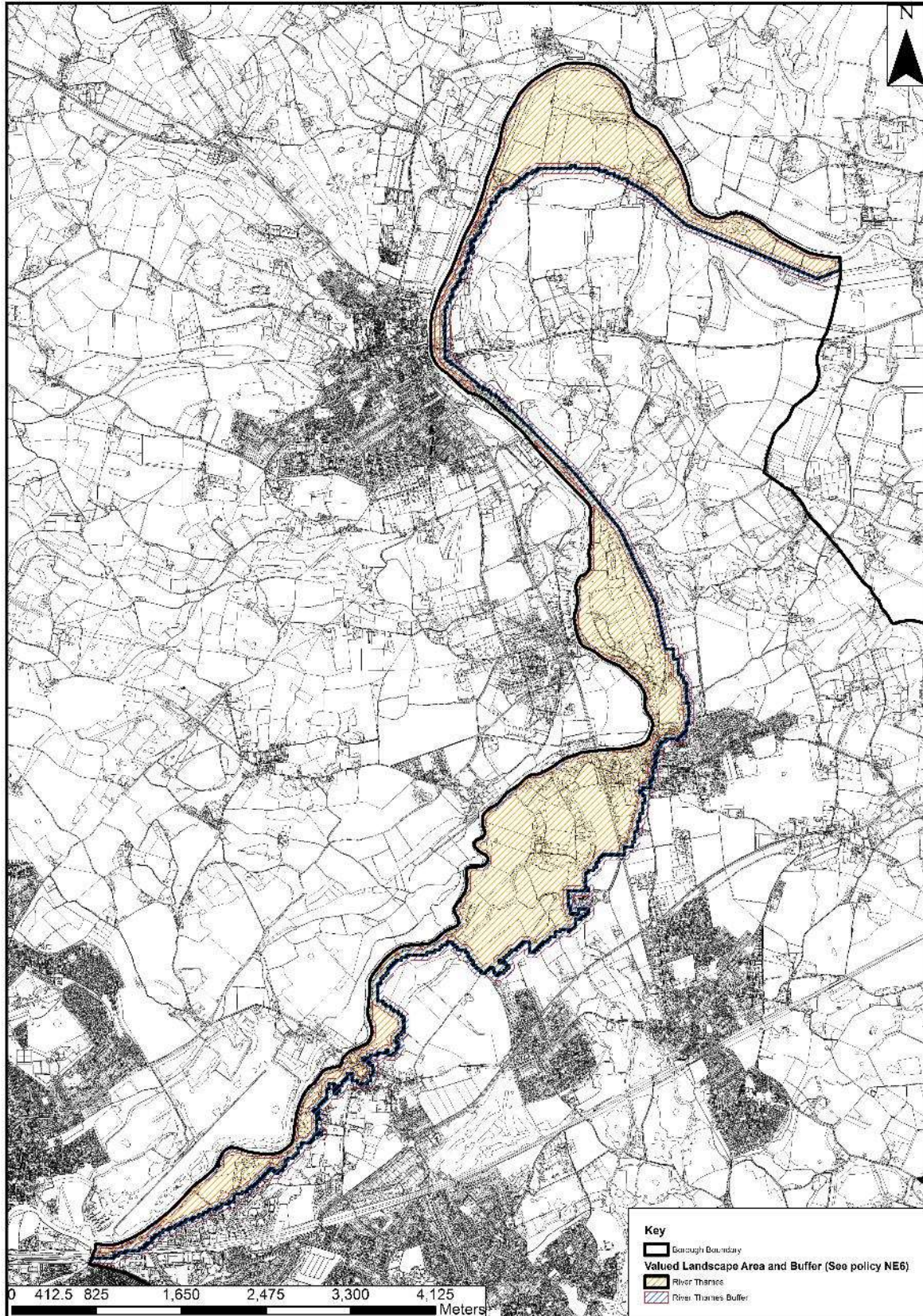
In Late Victorian times numerous now-respected artists and writers took up residence in local towns and villages. Charles Kerr - a London painter who painted ‘Wargrave Church’, one of 27 of his works exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1884 and 1904 was one of many residents at the St George and Dragon Inn in that town. Vicat Cole and William Gosling are also closely associated with the river and its landscape around Wargrave and painted ‘Wargrave’ and ‘Near Wargrave on the Thames’ respectively.

Alfred Glendening (1840 - 1910) also painted the river landscape notably ‘*Gathering Rushes on the Thames near Wargrave*’. Other artists and writers who lived and worked in Wargrave are Frederick Walker, Benjamin Leader, Henry Marks, Edward Duncan and Samuel Jackson. Jackson, particularly, made many paintings of the river and village.

Henley too has its associated artists and whilst there is no evidence that the River Thames Valued Landscape inspired any of his earlier work, the celebrated pop musician, George Harrison MBE from 'The Beatles' lived in Friar Park, a few hundred yards from the river, from 1970 until his death in 2001.

Upstream and Downstream of the River Thames Valued Landscape, the river has inspired painters, writers and other artists. The associations of this landscape with the arts run wide and deep.

River Thames Valued Landscape



Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape Narrative

*We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds,
we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills;
we shall never surrender.*

Winston S Churchill, 4 June 1940⁷⁶

'despite initial shortages of weapons and building materials, the defence systems put in place from 1940 to the Spring of 1941 were highly complex and meticulously planned, making full use of landscape features and natural topography, and set back in depth from the coastal front edge in protection of the nation's heartlands. At their most developed in 1941 they would have presented a considerable obstacle to invading German forces;

William Foot in 'Beaches, Fields, Streets and Hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of 1940'⁷⁷

Introduction

The **Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape**, as its name suggests, sits on the southern end of a high ridge of clay running from Spencers Wood down to Beech Hill in the south. The ridge rises to a flat sandy plateau at 66m above ordnance datum (AOD) which broadens out at the southern end. The Valued Landscape forms a 'figure C' on the map, slightly tilted towards the north-east with its northern arm in the southern part of the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' Landscape Character Area (LCA) with a spur extending into the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA to the east.

It is on this high hill, and the fields behind the Foudry Brook, the River Loddon and the Blackwater Rivers, that the defenders made their preparations. A broken army fresh from the defeat at Dunkirk augmented by the old men and the young lads of the Local Defence Volunteers. The Valued Landscape centres on an important defended location in the General Headquarters (GHQ) stop line that ran from Bath to London. The whole defence – approximately four hundred miles was built in a few months in the summer of 1940 using every advantage offered by the topography or other physical geography. This portion of the defences, offering a commanding position above the surrounding countryside, strengthened the gap between the Foudry Brook and Loddon Rivers and blocked a route from the south-west to Reading and London. Whilst the air force fought the Battle of Britain in the skies above, the army aided with the support of local contractors, and council workers digging in around the landing grounds, in the fields and streets and, as here, on the hillsides.

But the medieval castle that sits below the hillside, shrouded in woodland, was also fortified against attack. Skirmishes preliminary to the English civil war that took place in the first quarter of the 14th Century (the Despencer War 1322-23) involved the sacking of Beaumys Castle. Later, in 1347, the

⁷⁶ A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3. Victoria County History, London, 1923 pages 160-163

⁷⁷ FOOT William, *Beaches, Fields, Streets and Hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of 1940*, 2006, Council for British Archaeology Report 144

widow of the Seneschal of Gascony was kidnapped when the Castle was again attacked whilst the King's son, Lionel the first Duke of Clarence, then just a boy, was in residence.

An appeal at Lambs Lane in 2018 found against the Council's case that there was a Valued Landscape⁷⁸. However, that landscape was more extensive and less well-defined stretching into adjacent LCAs. Further research has been undertaken since that time and this has led to a more closely defined and focused Valued Landscape.

Features of the Valued Landscape

Landscape quality (condition) – The Valued Landscape sits within J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and farmed Clay' and the A2 'Loddon River Valley' Landscape Character Areas. The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA) (2019) discusses landscape condition in the 'Key Characteristics' of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' and J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCAs. On landscape condition of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA it states:

The meandering course of the river and the flat floodplain landscape is intact. For the most part this is a remote and rural landscape with characteristic riverside features and important wetland habitats which contribute to the overall perception of a landscape in moderate condition. However, views to adjacent large scale development and busy infrastructure corridors, particularly in the north of the area fragment the rural landscape. There are opportunities for improvement and particular enhancement to habitat interconnectivity.

For the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA it states:

The survival of former field patterns, the remnants of historic parklands, woodland blocks and the hedgerow network are in good condition. The new South of the M4 SDL and other development, and urban edge of Reading fragment the rural character of the northern part of the area, while the major transport corridors introduce noise and movement, except where well screened by ground modelling or trees.

The southern part of the LCA is in good condition. Analysis of the landscape on the ground, shows that the main transport corridor, the A33, is well screened by trees and cut in to the lower slopes, traversing the hillside at the extreme southern end of the LCA.

Whilst the north of the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' landscape is more urban, the WBLCA (2019) confirm the rural character of the southern part of the LCA:

The south remains rural with a number of woodlands remnant parklands and open pasture.

The LCA, speaking to the well-defined boundaries of the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA states:

⁷⁸ APP/X0360/W/18/3199728

The Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay is a locally prominent clay ridge that separates A2: Loddon River Valley on its eastern edge from I3: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland on its western boundary. Both boundaries are defined by topography, where the clay ridge ends. The northern boundary extends into the urban edge of Woodley-Earley, and the southern boundary by the borough boundary, although the landscape character extends into West Berkshire.

The southern part of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' landscape, containing the lower part of the 'figure C' of the Valued Landscape, is not greatly affected by the disturbance from the M4 motorway nor the settlements of Earley and Winnersh to the north. It follows the line of the GHQ line, which dog-legs running downstream along the River Loddon and then turning right up the Blackwater at Swallowfield Park, before passing into Hampshire. This part of the A2 'Loddon River Valley' landscape is not only the site of Second World War defences but links the medieval Beaumys with Swallowfield Park, a royal residence from pre-Domesday till the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

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

For the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA it states:

An undulating landscape of large arable fields with some pasture. Ongoing development in the north of the area, part of the South of the M4 SDL, is increasing the settled character of the area adding to the urbanising influence of its proximity to Reading. The south remains rural with a number of woodlands remnant parklands and open pasture.

In the 'Key Characteristics' section of the WBLCA (2019) it highlights the following relating to scenic quality for this LCA and expands upon them: *rolling clay ridge above the valley and the lowlands to the west, rising to a flat sandy plateau at 66m AOD; small scattered mixed deciduous woodland blocks and copses; fragmented unimproved meadow habitats: Large arable fields with some pasture, with an intact hedgerow network and hedgerow oaks; remnant parkland; settlement more scattered in south with traditional farmsteads many with a strong vernacular; network of rural lanes bordered by water-filled ditches; sense of elevation from the ridgeline and good views over surrounding lowlands.*

Regarding the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA, the WBLCA (2019) states:

This area occupies the flat alluvial floodplain of the River Loddon and its tributaries the Broadwater and the Blackwater. An agricultural landscape of irregular fields, with large scale arable fields on better drained areas and small scale wet meadows on frequently flooded land adjacent to the river. A largely peaceful area, disturbance comes from major roads which cross the floodplain including the M4, and adjacent developments in Earley, Winnersh, the expanding settlement of Shinfield and new Science and Innovation Park.

In the section on 'Key Characteristics', it highlights the following relating to scenic quality for this LCA and expands upon them in the text (other features of interest to the adjacent River Loddon Valued Landscape are discussed in the relevant Valued Landscape narrative):

The naturalness of the meandering course of the River and floodplain; a strong sense of place; the wooded backdrop of mature broadleaved woodland; historic riverside features including medieval moated sites, old brick watermills and bridges; the GHQ Stop Line and associated Second World War features; Sparse settlement pattern of farmsteads ...characterised by a strong local vernacular; remote and rural landscape in the south of the area.

The 2003 Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (BLCA) places this landscape in the K1 'Spencers Wood Settled Farmland' LCA, broadly to the same extent as the WBLCA (2019) J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA.

The BLCA (2003) identifies: the peaceful, rural quality of the less urbanised areas, the intact historic field boundary pattern with mature oaks and hedgerow standards, the small copses and farm woodlands, all features of the clay ridge particularly its southern and western parts, the wooded horizons and historic parklands are there too.

The BLCA summarises the strength of the landscape character of the K1 'Spencers Wood Settled Farmland' LCA (in extent of its southern parts the same as the borough's J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA) in paragraph 15.24, as follows:

This landscape has...a certain degree of fragmentation and lack of continuity(although locally varied but not particularly weak or strong)

And

The variability from a more intact system to the south and west to a more settled and urbanised landscape in the north and east affect the overall strength of character.

A key element of the assessment for this landscape is that it is 'locally varied, but not particularly weak or strong'. Additionally, the variability from a more intact system in the south and west to a more settled and urbanised landscape in the north and east, affect the overall strength of character. Understanding this variability is key when assessing this particular landscape character area. The quality of the southern part of the LCA is high. Therefore, the Valued Landscape is of high quality. This is apparent when the landscape is seen and experienced by car or, better still, on foot.

Rarity – Assessing rarity of landscape types and individual features is difficult, but a number of sources can assist. The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (WDCLA) (2004) provided an indication of this in the assessment of sensitivity where it assessed the re-creatability of landscape elements. Here it identifies the following as being of local (borough) importance: early inclosure field patterns, mature hedgerows with mature oak standards. The assessment indicates the sensitivity of ancient woodland, pasture with historic field boundaries and the sense of elevation and views across adjacent lowland landscapes. The assessment confirms the national importance of the ancient woodland, which is supported by paragraph 175 c) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Another feature that the council's research indicates, which is unique at the county level, is the tank ditch and associated pillboxes and other structures making up part of the

Second World War GHQ Stop Line that falls within the Valued Landscape. The defences in Berkshire tend to follow watercourses and this particular section is a unique survival of defences where a gap between rivers and the high ground of the ridge meant that the defences were designed and laid out based on the topography of the landscape.

In Beeches, fields, streets and hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of England 1940, English Heritage and the Council for British Archaeology have produced what the late Professor Holmes says in his foreword is a ‘wonderful book, just as valuable, in its way, as any antiquarian survey of castle or camp...’⁷⁹. Professor Holmes makes a strong case for the special protection of landscapes of the GHQ Stop Line. He writes ‘Our landscape is indeed given added meaning by these defences’. The presence of features of archaeological, historical and cultural interest (e.g. buried tank ditches, pillboxes etc.) and the geographical and topographical features modified to create the GHQ Stop Line have created the specific features that, in Professor Holmes’s opinion, give ‘added meaning’ to the landscape.

In addition, the landscape of the Second World War is given added value by its cultural heritage, detailed in published histories, for example in a publication of the Swallowfield History Society where it states:

*Along this line, to strengthen the defence, were tank traps, one of which was at the Foudry Brook, Grazeley, behind Stanbury. After heavy rainfall the local children would swim in these tank traps but they wouldn’t tell their parents*⁸⁰

In the words of Mr Justice Ouseley in *Stroud v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government*⁸¹, the GHQ line, and particularly this rare example of a defended site, exhibits the ‘sort of demonstrable physical attributes which would take this site beyond mere countryside’.

The WDLCA (2004), addresses the sensitivity of the A2 ‘Loddon River Valley’ LCA, which identified the naturalness of the river course and its habitats, and the area’s tranquil and remote character. The assessment mentions more characteristics but, whilst part of a landscape contiguous with the Valued Landscape, they are addressed in the River Loddon Valued Landscape narrative. Importantly, the analysis assesses ‘views from the adjacent...farmland (J3)’ – some of which are from the Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape - as being of at least borough importance.

All of these features are also highlighted in various parts of the latest WBLCA (2019).

Representativeness – ‘Rarity’ is discussed in the previous section. However the characteristics and features which make a landscape rare in the national context tend to make it distinctive and representative of its type. The Valued Landscape is, in most ways, representative of many lowland landscapes in the south east. However as well as other ‘valuable landscape features’ identified in the

⁷⁹ HOLMES E R in the foreword to FOOT William, *Beeches, Fields, Streets and Hills...the anti-invasion landscapes of 1940*, 2006, Council for British Archaeology Report 144

⁸⁰ Swallowfield History Society – Our village in the Second World War where we are told at page 157 that:

⁸¹ Neutral citation number [2015] EWHC 488 (Admin)

WBLCA(2019), the high clay ridge with its wide sandy plateau is impressive and probably the most discrete of a number of ridges within the Berkshire landscape. In addition, the ridge is situated at the western boundary of the Royal Forest of Windsor. So whilst the landscape is 'representative', the geology, the physical and human geography, coupled with the other factors discussed in this narrative make it a unique and special Valued Landscape.

Conservation Interests – In terms of **wildlife and biodiversity**, the Spencer's Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape provides an important mix of wildlife sites and habitats.

Habitats of principal importance include:

- **Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland** predominantly on the western and southern sides of the Valued Landscape. Some of which is Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). There are remnants of **Wood Pasture and Parkland** remaining in historic parks including the parkland at Loddon Court in the south and Highlands in the north of the Valued Landscape.

The online Ancient Tree Inventory⁸² shows a wide variety of mostly **Veteran Trees and Notable** trees with aggregations in the parkland at 'Highlands' in the north of the Valued Landscape and the woodlands on the western slopes. There are small sections of ancient woodland in the south-east of the Valued Landscape around the A33 part of a wider assemblage of woodlands lying to the south-west (a few truncated by the construction of the road). These can be clearly seen in the Forestry maps for the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA in the latest WBLCA (2019).

Local Wildlife Sites: There are 3 Local Wildlife Sites within the Valued Landscape, all of them woodland sites, they are: Norman's Shaw, Wood North of Beech Hill Coverts/Clayhill, Woods between Whitehouse and Highlands.

In terms of the **cultural heritage and built form** the most important features in the landscape are those associated with the GHQ Stop Line and the medieval earthworks of Beaumys Caslte.

The GHQ Stop Line is actually a series of defences in depth, which in this Valued Landscape, wrap around the high clay ridge from the Foudrey Brook in the west to the River Loddon in the south-east. They include tank ditches running along the foot of the scarp slope to the south-west of the A33 road (fronting wood road); and a buried tank ditch running parallel to this across land surrounding Loddon Court Farm on the high plateau to the east of the road. There is also a series of pillboxes aligned to provide covering fire to those tank ditches and to defend roads approaching from the west, south and south-east. Just outside this Valued Landscape sits a pillbox defending the road bridge at Sheepbridge with a late 20th Century dwelling built over it.

There are no **listed buildings** in the Valued Landscape. The village hall, the former Headquarters of the Local Defence Volunteer (Home Guard) in the Second World War is located immediately adjacent to and fronting the Basingstoke Road, close to the northern edge of the Valued Landscape.

⁸² The Government's online planning guidance: *Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development*, last updated 5th November 2018

The Home Guard was responsible for manning many of the roadblocks and defences along the length of the GHQ Stop Line.

Recreational Value - The WBLCA (2019) assesses public accessibility of the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' and A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCAs.

For the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA it states that there is:

'a network of rural lanes bordered by water-filled ditches connect the original settlement pattern'. Of the the A2 Loddon River Valley LCA it says: 'There is a loose network of lanes serving this primarily agricultural landscape, with a limited number of river crossing points'.

Perceptual Aspects – are addressed in the WBLCA (2019) which identifies high levels of tranquillity and dark night skies.

Regarding the influence of the M3 and A33 roads on the J3 'Spencer's Wood Settled and Farmed Clay', LCA, it states:

Away from these transport corridors and settlements, particularly south of Spencers Wood, the area retains a rural character, with views over the surrounding lowland landscapes of the Loddon valley and the arable fields around Grazeley. From the south of the area there are views across West Berkshire towards Stratfield Mortimer and other nearby villages. There are areas along the southern boundary of the area with high levels of tranquillity and dark night skies.

For the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA it identified 'valuable landscape attributes' stating that it is a:

Remote and rural landscape in the south of the area due to the limited access to the floodplain and absence of development on the valley floor.

With

Localised areas with a strong sense of tranquility particularly in the south, with naturalistic qualities and experience of dark skies away from roads and visual influence of large scale settlement in adjacent areas.

Associations – This landscape has a very high number of important associations with national and prominent figures.

The manors of Shinfield and Swallowfield were important royal manors at the time of Edward the Confessor and held by William I, not to mention King Harold Godwinson (the Anglo-Saxon King and victor at Stamford Bridge who died at Hastings and was written out of Domesday by the new king William I).

In the 13th Century and early 14th Century, Hugh le Despencer (the younger) and his father (Hugh the elder) and grandfather (Hugh Justiciar) held the manor of Beaumys. Hugh (the elder) and Hugh (the

younger) were the catalysts, or perhaps the irritants, that set and lit the fuse for the Despencer War (1321-22) resulting in the forced abdication of Edward II. Hugh (the younger) left no issue but his family name is celebrated in the village of Spencers Wood, which lies immediately to the north of the Valued Landscape.

Roger Mortimer (1st Baron Mortimer) and his grandson Roger Mortimer (1st Earl of March and 3rd Baron Mortimer) held lands in west Berkshire, notably Stratfield which became known as Stratfield Mortimer – just a few kilometres to the west of the Valued Landscape. These powerful Marcher Lords were highly important and influential people in the medieval era. Mortimer raided Hugh le Despencer's manor at Beaumys during the latter's exile, in a precursor of the Despencer War. At the time of the civil war, Despencer was widely known as the King's husband and Mortimer was acknowledged as the Queen's lover. The Victorious Mortimer executed Despencer and King Edward II. King Edward III executed Mortimer.

Nicholas de la Beche, a high ranking military officer, was recognised as a national figure. He held Beaumys Manor after Despencer and was granted a license to crenelate in 1338. The fortified manor, subsequently known as Beaumys in which he and later his widow entertained and protected King Edward III's son Prince Lionel, Duke of Clarence, a son of King Edward III. De la Beche was at various times the trusted governor and protector of many of the royal children. Amongst other honours and high offices, he was made Constable of the Tower of London in 1340 and appointed Seneschal of Gascony in 1342. His name is preserved in the corrupted modern name Beech Hill, a village located on the south-western edge of the Valued Landscape.

Lionel, Duke of Clarence, (b. 29 November 1338, d. 17 October 1368), through whom the House of York later claimed the throne, was at Beaumys Castle when Nicholas de la Beche's widow was kidnapped (and later forcibly married to her captor). Lionel survived the raid. His daughter married Edmund Mortimer the 3rd Earl of March. It is through Lionel and her Mortimer ancestors that the current Queen traces her descent.

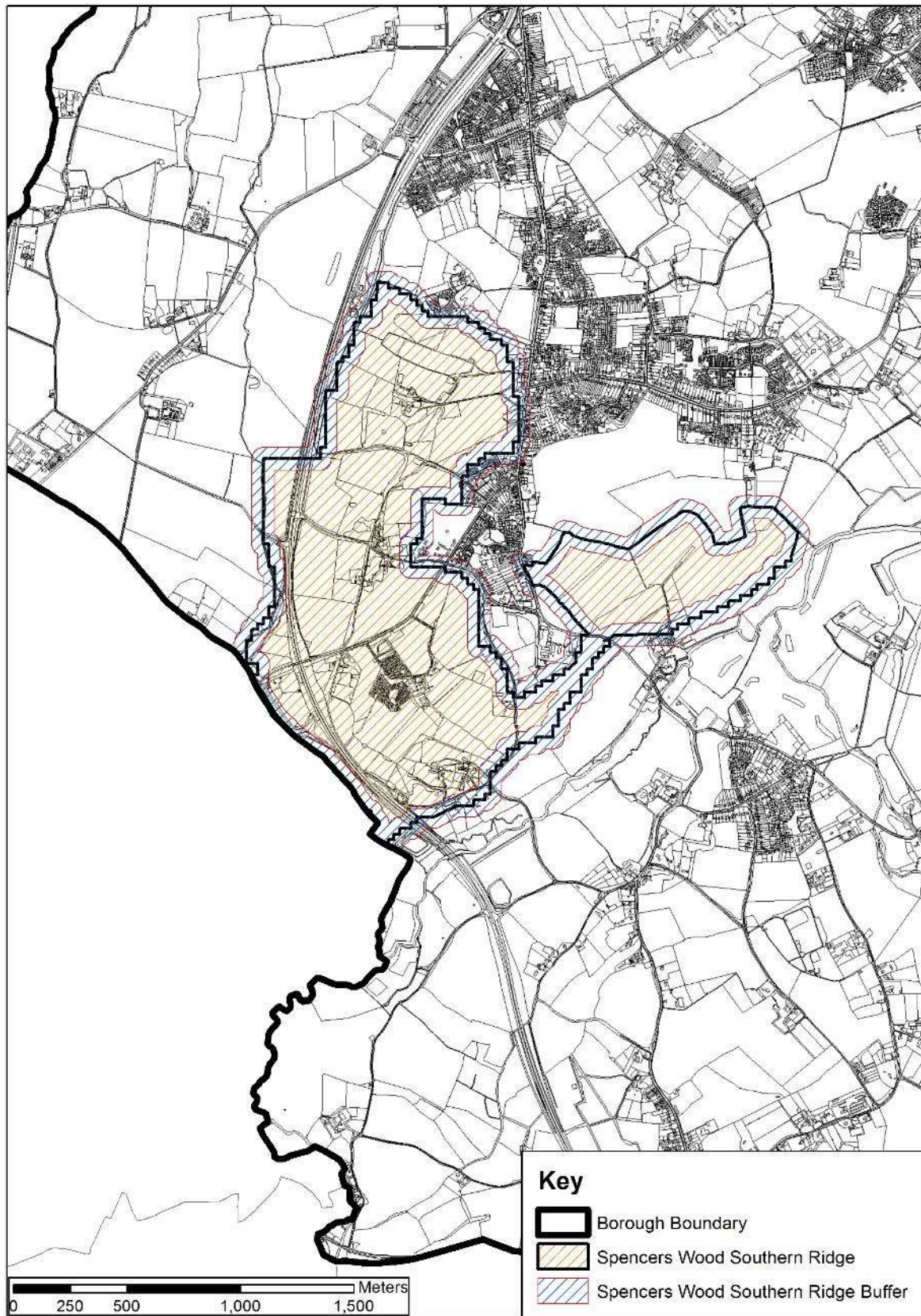
A further association relates to the Duke of Wellington who 'retired' to his estate at nearby Stratfield Saye in 1817. He was active in local affairs and appears to have been held in high regard with numerous notable (and now highly visible) plantings of Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), a tree discovered after his death but named in his honour. It is these trees that now adorn the Victorian estates on the high clay ridge that forms this landscape.

One further association from that period, was the author Mary Russel Mitford (1787 Alresford, Hants - 10 January 1855 Swallowfield Berks), a contemporary and acquaintance of Jane Austen, who is best known for *'Our Village'*, a collection of chapters of contemporary village scenes and characters based on her life at Three Mile Cross. She was schooled at Reading Abbey Girls School (also attended by Jane Austen). Mitford met Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 1836, and they became close friends. Mitford was granted a civil list pension in 1837 (she was a favourite of many powerful Victorians including the Queen) partly due to her heroic struggle to support her spendthrift father. In 1842, her father died. A subscription was raised to pay his debts, and the surplus helped ease Mitford's financial burdens. In 1851 she moved from Three Mile Cross to a cottage in Swallowfield, where she died on 10 January 1855. She is buried in Swallowfield churchyard.

The architect of the home defences during the early months of the Second World War was General Edmund Ironside. William Edmund 'Tiny' Ironside, 1st Baron Ironside, GCB, CMG, DSO (6 May 1880 – 22 September 1959) was a career soldier who was the inspiration for author John Buchan's character 'Richard Hannay' in the *'Thirty-Nine Steps'*, *'Greenmantle'* and *'Mr Standfast'*. His life was almost as romantic as Buchan's hero. Towards the end of his career he was Governor of Gibraltar and later Inspector General Overseas Forces. However, He was recalled and appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff on the outbreak of the Second World War. After nine months, he took Command of Home Forces and, having completed the planning and much of the work for the GHQ Stop Line, was retired in a reshuffle with the rank of Field Marshall on July 19th 1940. He was replaced by General Sir Allen Brooke fresh from Dunkirk.

It is conceivable that Ironside would have visited this landscape, as the main route from the Reading 'tank island' to Aldershot crossed the Loddon at Sheepbridge, and passed through the Valued Landscape. Although no evidence has currently come to light that Ironside did visit this landscape, he would have been aware of the strategic importance of this high point, and of the views the landscape afforded to the west, the likely direction of invasion. He was closely associated with the GHQ line, an important aspect and feature of this Valued Landscape.

Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape



Appendix 3: Map of Valued Landscapes across Wokingham Borough

