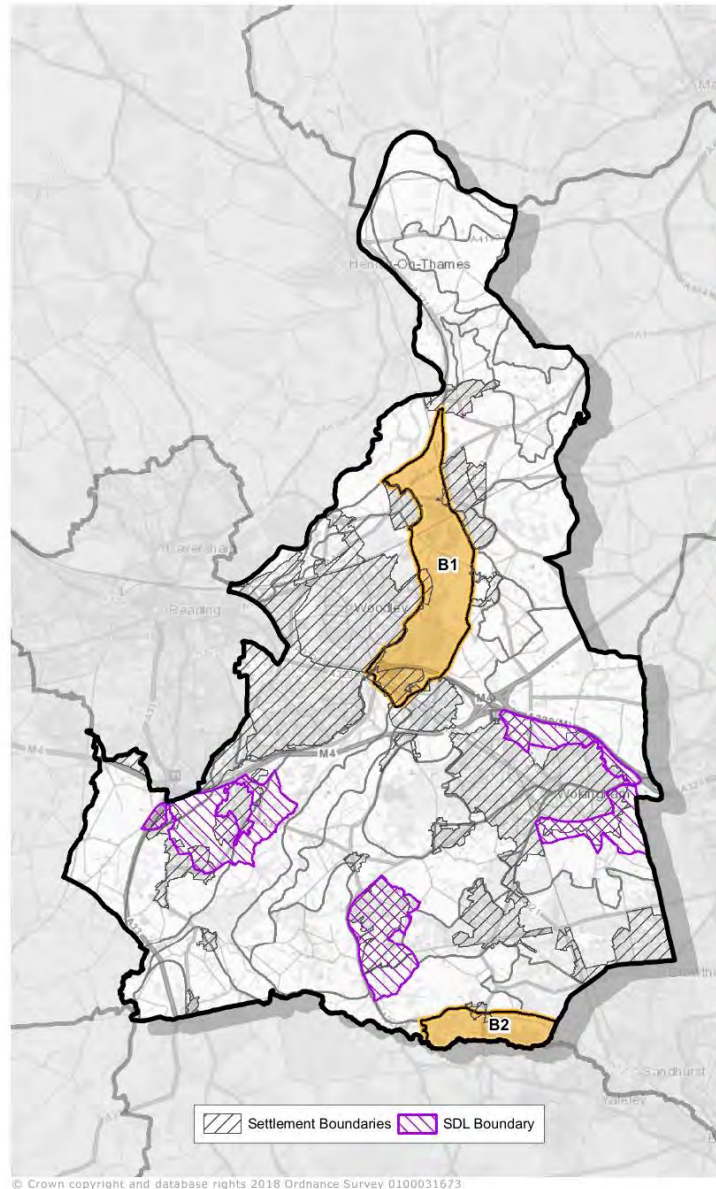


B: River Valley With Open Water



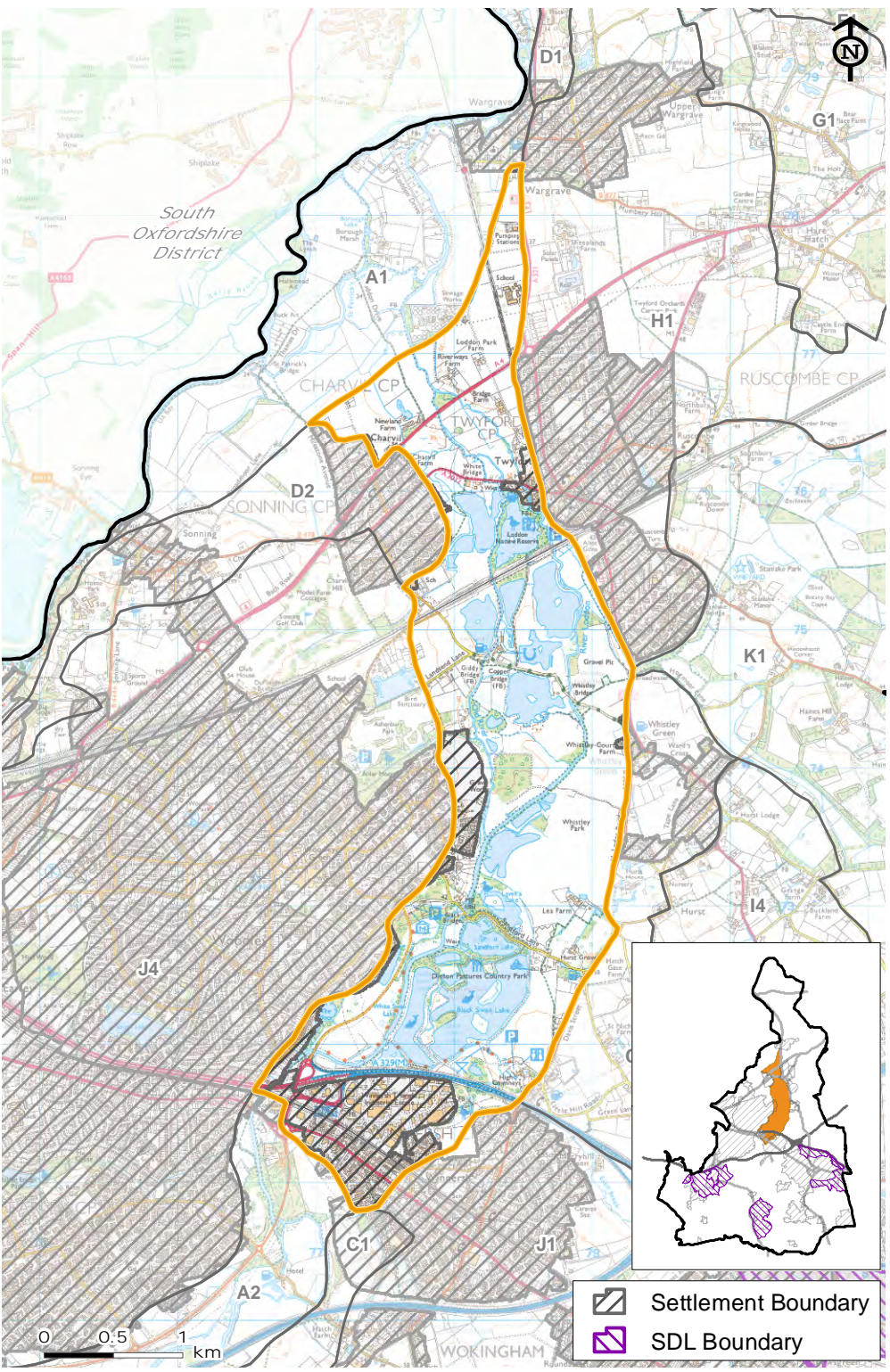
Description

The LCT is distinguished by a flat lowland alluvial or river terrace floodplain, where mineral extraction has had a significant and lasting impact on the character and use of the valley landscape. Restored gravel workings with large expanses of open water support wetland vegetation and are popular for recreation.

Landscape Character Areas

The River Valley with Open Water LCT is subdivided into two Landscape Character Areas:

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



SUMMARY

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.

The character area follows a linear course connecting with the River Valley landscape types of A2: Loddon to the south and A1: Thames to the north. The northern boundary represents the transition to the Thames floodplain. The southern and western boundaries are marked by the edge of built up areas, of the Winnersh Triangle Industrial Estate (parallel to the A329) and Woodley-Charvil respectively. The eastern boundary is defined by the settlement edge of Twyford and the distinct landscape of C2: Hurst River Terrace which follows the route of the A321 Lodge Road – Davis Street.



Key Characteristics

- Flat alluvial floodplain landscape around 35-40m AOD with an absence of enclosing valley side. The mineral resource of the area, with its pockets of river terrace gravels and sands has resulted in extensive gravel extraction, changing its original character.
- The Loddon and Old River, medium sized tributaries of the Thames, meander gently through the area. The riverine landscape is crossed by a network of drainage ditches with bank-side pollarded willows and occasional fords at river crossings.
- Restored and flooded former gravel extraction works have created large expanses of open water with fringing carr vegetation, which have developed into ecologically important wetland habitats designated as LWS. The BAP priority habitat eutrophic standing water is important for wildfowl and other birds, particularly at the Loddon Nature Reserve.
- Enclosed wooded context due to the presence of mature natural and restored woodlands around the flooded gravel pits and along riverbanks.
- Relatively undeveloped floodplain, with small and medium sized fields containing remnant pockets of traditional pastureland, and larger restored arable fields and horse paddocks near the edge of settlements.
- Popular recreational landscapes including Dinton Pastures Country Park, Charvil Country Park and Charvil Meadows.
- Built development is confined to small clusters around fording points including historic mill buildings e.g. Sandford Mill, and farmsteads at the floodplain fringe, many of which are listed buildings. A small section of the Twyford Conservation Area lies within this area.
- Urban influence of encroaching peripheral development, particularly housing development on former gravel works east of Woodley, the suburbs of Winnersh/Earley and modern commercial buildings at Winnersh Triangle located in the south near Loddon Bridge.
- Filtered views of the River Loddon and Old River including white painted bridges and occasional fords e.g. at Landsend Lane.
- Road and rail infrastructure create local noise disturbance, particularly in the south of the area with the junctions of the A329 (M), A320 and the railway lines, which cross the area.

Natural Landscape

- B1.1** The dominant influence on the physical landscape is the River Loddon. The Loddon is a medium-sized river that meanders gently through the heart of this character area. North of Dinton Pastures Country Park, for a length of about two kilometres, the Loddon splits to form two channels – the River Loddon and Old River; the latter eventually rejoining the Loddon close to the A4(T) north of Twyford. A wide and relatively flat floodplain surrounds the river channels, generally at below 40m AOD.
- B1.2** Fluvial deposition is associated with 'old age' rivers in lowland landscapes. So here the valley floor deposits are flanked by older ones of the Kempton Park Gravel and First and Second River Terrace deposits. The riverine geology of this area has become a fundamental influence on the modern

character because it is the mineral resources of the valley that led to the presence of the extractive industries. The gravel within the Loddon Valley is composed of Flints with Sandstone and Chert, making it suitable for use as a building aggregate.

- B1.3** The soils of the Loddon Valley are typical Argillic Gleys of stony fine or coarse loamy nature and associated with clayey alluvial soils affected by high groundwater and flooding. Localised flooding is a seasonal feature for example at Loddon Bridge and Sindlesham Mill. Historically, the area was not suited to arable farming, resulting in the high incidence of pasture in the remaining farmed landscape and restored arable fields.
- B1.4** The area relates to a stretch of the floodplain landscape of the Loddon River Valley, which has been subject to considerable modification as a result of gravel extraction practices. This has led to the creation of a new landscape type characterised by natural floodplain landscapes and open waterbodies created by the restoration of former gravel workings. The latter areas have now become the focus of country parks, providing important recreational space.
- B1.5** The areas of remaining pastoral farmland are concentrated in the centre of the area, between Twyford and Charvil and north of Twyford. Some of these are traditionally managed as part of the country park. The pastures tend to be small or medium scale and often have a strong rural character accentuated by the rivers and drainage channels flanked with lines of mature pollarded willows and other deciduous trees. There are also horse and pony paddocks, particularly found associated with the settled areas. Areas of farmland around Loddon Park Farm, north of the A4, are used for polytunnels.
- B1.6** Dinton Pastures Country Park represents the largest wetland site in the area totalling over 120ha. This complex of lakes, wet woodlands and wetlands supports nationally important numbers of wintering gadwall and smew and is designated through a number of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) (including Dinton Pastures, Dinton Pastures Country Park, Sandford Fen Copse, and Lea Farm). The Berkshire Aviation Museum LWS is an important site for the rare tower mustard (*Arabis glabra*) and represents one of the five largest populations of this plant remaining in England.
- B1.7** Locally and nationally important habitats in this area include BAP priority habitat wet woodland, reedbed, floodplain grazing marsh and eutrophic standing waters. Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill SSSI is an area of wet woodland, which supports over 10% of the English population of the nationally rare Loddon lily (*Leucojum aestivum*), and a number of locally restricted plants such as wild daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*). The wet woodland is dominated by alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and crack willow (*Salix fragilis*) with species such as lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) and marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*) in the field layer.
- B1.8** LWS include woodland at Whistley Mill Farm Copse and the length of the Loddon River in this area. **Lavell's** Lake LWS and LNR is designated for its open water and wetland and is managed primarily for ornithological objectives. Habitats such as wader scrapes, islands and reedbeds have been created to enhance habitat diversity for birds. The Loddon Nature Reserve and Charvil Country Park, both designated as LWS, contain several islands and shallow fringes around the lakes, which create ideal conditions for wintering birds including gadwall, tufted duck, pochard and snipe.

Cultural Landscape

- B1.9** The historic landscape in this area has been subject to considerable modification as a result of sand and gravel extraction. There are a number of cropmarks southwest of Wargrave which suggest prehistoric occupation on the Loddon close to its confluence with the Thames, probably leading to early clearance of the woodland on parts of the valley floor. A Domesday settlement is recorded at Whistley. “-leah” (a woodland clearing) indicates settlement in the forest landscape which later formed part of the Royal Forest of Windsor.
- B1.10** There is little trace of the former medieval deer park created at La Lee (Hurst), although the presence of Lea Farm may point to its location extending onto the valley floor. The focus of medieval settlement was on higher ground off the valley floor, and settlement within this area

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

- B1.11** There are a number of historic fords in the valley, including one used by Alfred the Great following the first Battle of Reading. These have generally been replaced by bridges. The Bath Road also crossed the Loddon at Twyford. Post-medieval mills at these crossing points including Twyford Bridge, Sandford Mill and Whistlemill Farm probably reflect the locations of earlier mills. The embanked Great Western Railway, completed in 1840, crosses the valley at Twyford.
- B1.12** A number of 17th and 18th century country houses were surrounded by areas of landscaped parkland. Traces of parkland are still visible around the site of Whistley Park (demolished in the mid-19th century) and at Hurst Grove.
- B1.13** Reading aerodrome, or Woodley airfield as it was later known, was the site of an air crash, in December 1931, that cost Douglas Bader both his legs. Bader went on to become a decorated Battle of Britain Spitfire pilot and Squadron Leader. He was shot down and interned in Colditz Prisoner of War camp. In later life he was knighted for his charity work with the disabled, and the Museum of Berkshire Aviation celebrates the once thriving aviation industry.
- B1.14** Early enclosure along the Loddon valley floor is suggested by the irregular field pattern shown on the first edition OS maps. However, the surviving farmland is made up of straight-sided fields characteristic of early-19th century Parliamentary enclosure and there are no intact field systems remaining. By the 1930s, the river valleys were dominated by dairy farming, but little of the original agricultural landscape survives due to more recent large-scale gravel extraction.
- B1.15** Old gravel workings have been extensively restored resulting in the creation of Dinton Pastures Country Park and Charvil Country Park. Both areas contain groups of lakes, and Dinton Pastures also includes farmed pastures. Black Swan Lake is the largest of the water bodies and is the focus of the country park with boating and picnic areas. The smaller White Swan Lake is equipped for anglers. The remaining lakes including **Sandford Lake and Lavell's Lake** are managed principally for ecological interest. These are all connected by a series of footpaths leading from the visitor car parks located near to High Chimneys and the Berkshire Aviation Museum. These trails interconnect with the rivers and with the Loddon Nature Reserve, Charvil Country Park and Charvil Meadows in the north of the area. Along the footpaths interest is added by the presence of pillboxes remaining from the Second World War defences to Reading airfield at Woodley.
- B1.16** This area is relatively inaccessible, except on foot, with transportation routes confined to the edges of the floodplain and cross-valley linkages. Most roadways are small and of rural character with river crossings accented by white-painted wood or metal railings. However, the A4 (T) and A3032 cross between Twyford and Charvil in the north and the A329 (M) and A329 with their large scale interchanges with the Winnersh relief road, cross between Winnersh and Earley in the south. The valley is also traversed by the Great Western Main Line Railway and a branch line between Twyford and Henley. These introduce movement, light pollution, and considerable noise into parts of this character area.
- B1.17** Unsurprisingly, given its propensity for flooding and low accessibility, the Loddon Valley is sparsely settled and consists of clusters of buildings or farmsteads on the periphery of the floodplain, and settlements nucleated around a river fording or bridging point. Winnersh and Woodley are the main focus of development; Winnersh has expanded along the A329 and railway. Winnersh Triangle in the south of the area exhibits all the typical characteristics of a modern industrial/business park with large office buildings and warehouses within landscaped setting of car parks and roundabouts. Woodley has expanded into the river valley on the site of former gravel works.
- B1.18** A section of the Twyford Conservation Area extends to the fording point of the Loddon. This area includes a number of mills, which historically exploited the power of the river. Elsewhere small clusters of buildings also include other mill houses, characteristically with white weatherboarding and pubs at the river crossing points. The farmsteads and other older buildings are traditionally brick-built such as the Grade II listed 17th century High Chimneys, which exhibits mullioned windows and gables.

Perceptual Landscape

- B1.19 Away from the main transportation routes, the landscape has a natural and peaceful character. There are open views across the restored gravel pit lakes but the wooded context of the fringing carr vegetation creates an enclosed landscape.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Undeveloped riverine character of much of this lowland landscape with its network of rivers, drainage ditches and restored lakes which provides a strong sense of place.
- Wooded context of natural and restored woodland areas and fringing carr vegetation around flooded gravel pits, including pollarded willows, which provide a sense of place, as well as screening development and transportation corridors.
- Remnant pockets of traditional pasture, with pollarded willows along banksides and drainage ditches.
- The mosaic of ecologically valuable wetland and woodland habitats including BAP priority habitats designated as LWS including those of national importance at Lodge Wood and Sanford Mill SSSI. The restored gravel works support a diverse range of birds and nationally scarce flora.
- Distinctive historic built form clustered at river crossings including historic mills, white painted bridges and listed buildings at Twyford, as well as the farms on the floodplain edge which give the landscape a sense of time-depth and contribute to scenic quality.
- Valued areas for recreation including the large Country Parks, accessible through a network of bridleways and public footpaths which allow enjoyment of the area.
- Localised areas of tranquillity particularly around the restored lakes, and away from transport corridors and the visual influence of adjacent settlements.

Landscape Condition

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.

Key Issues

- Changes in deciduous woodland structure through loss of structure and species diversity. Cessation of traditionally managed coppiced woodlands. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and wet woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change. Climate change is also likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows and greater flooding which may impact riverside vegetation.
- Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulting in polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in recent years there has been improvement in water quality.
- Loss of rural landscape features including pollarded willows and other trees on waterside pasture.

- Incremental loss of pasture and species rich grassland (including wet meadow) due to increasingly intensive grassland management.
- Changes in agricultural practice, with some land becoming marginal for commercial uses including conversion to horse paddocks on settlement edges and for horticultural polytunnels. This is leading to loss of traditional pasture and associated features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Changes in management that could result in loss and fragmentation of wetland habitats as a result of scrub encroachment.
- Drainage operations associated with development and agriculture affecting wetland habitats.
- High demands for recreation due to proximity to large centres of population, including water sports, mountain biking and quad biking leading to erosion and impact on tranquillity. Erosion of rights of way, ecological and other landscape features is a continuing concern in this popular area.
- Demand for new residential development and supporting infrastructure is continuing to push development onto the floodplain, such as at Woodley, impacting landscape character.
- Continued pressure for expansion, infill and densification within existing settlements on the floodplain edge, leading to the amalgamation of adjacent settlements such as Reading and Winnersh at Loddon Bridge.
- Pressure for new industrial developments, sewage treatment works and commercial premises, especially along transport corridors such as the A329 (M) and near the Winnersh Triangle, leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the landscape.
- Pressure for new roads or widening of existing roads impacting tranquillity and leading to further visual intrusion and light pollution from transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape. Demand for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting, concrete kerbing and widening threatens the rural character of the lanes.
- Overhead electrification of the Great Western Railway line as part of the Crossrail project has increased catenary wires and gantries leading to further visual intrusion.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Loddon Valley with Open Water* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the restored wetland character of the floodplain, employing management improvements to increase its robustness.

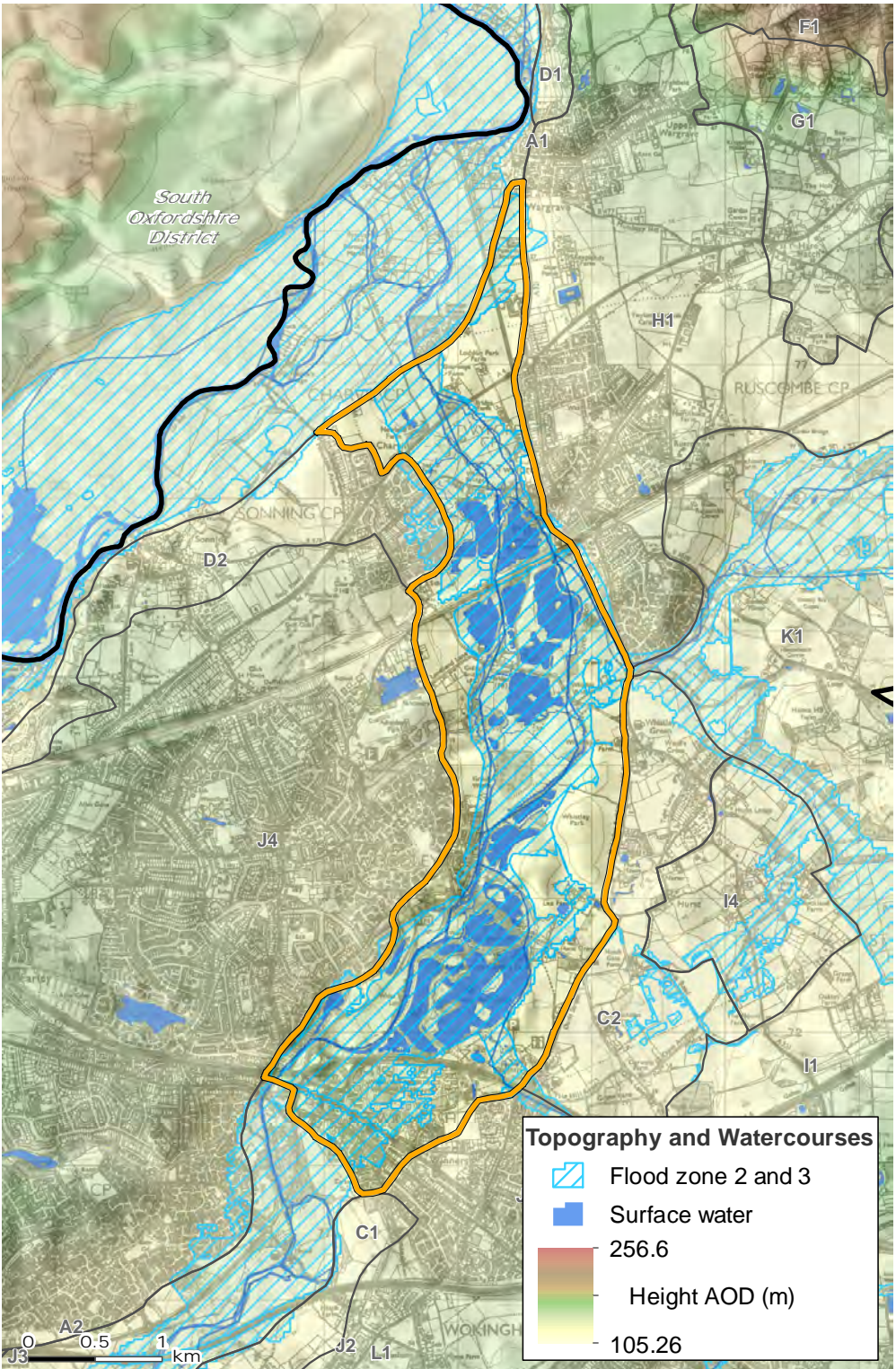
The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the restored gravel pits with their important wildlife habitats and fringing wooded areas as well as the traditional pasture and associated features. In particular there is an opportunity to consider better integration of the transportation corridors and large scale industrial/business land uses (including the Winnersh Triangle area) and recreational facilities that affect the overall perception of tranquillity and peacefulness.

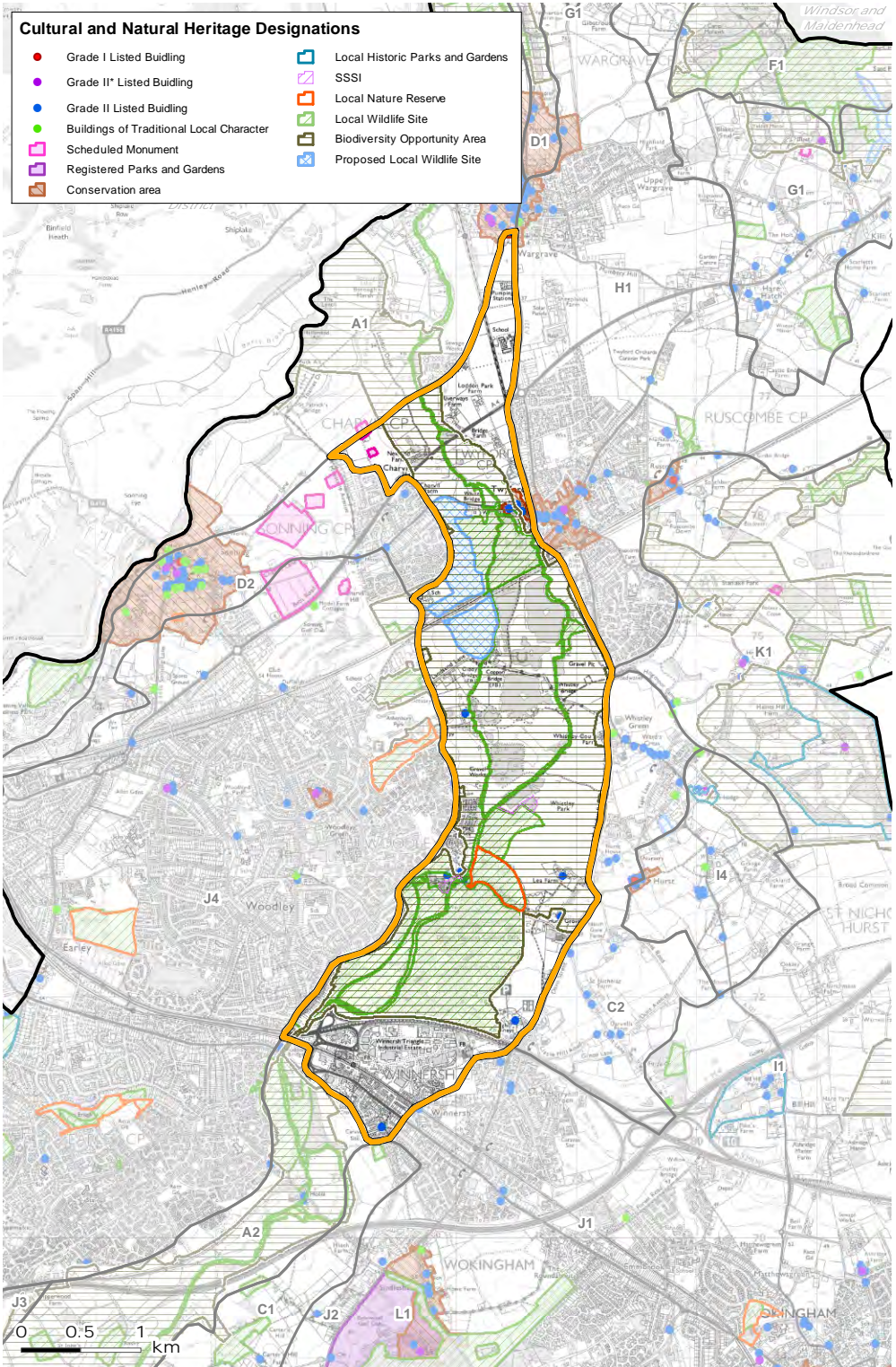
In terms of development, the aim is to avoid the spread of development onto the floodplain and avoid the amalgamation of adjacent settlements.

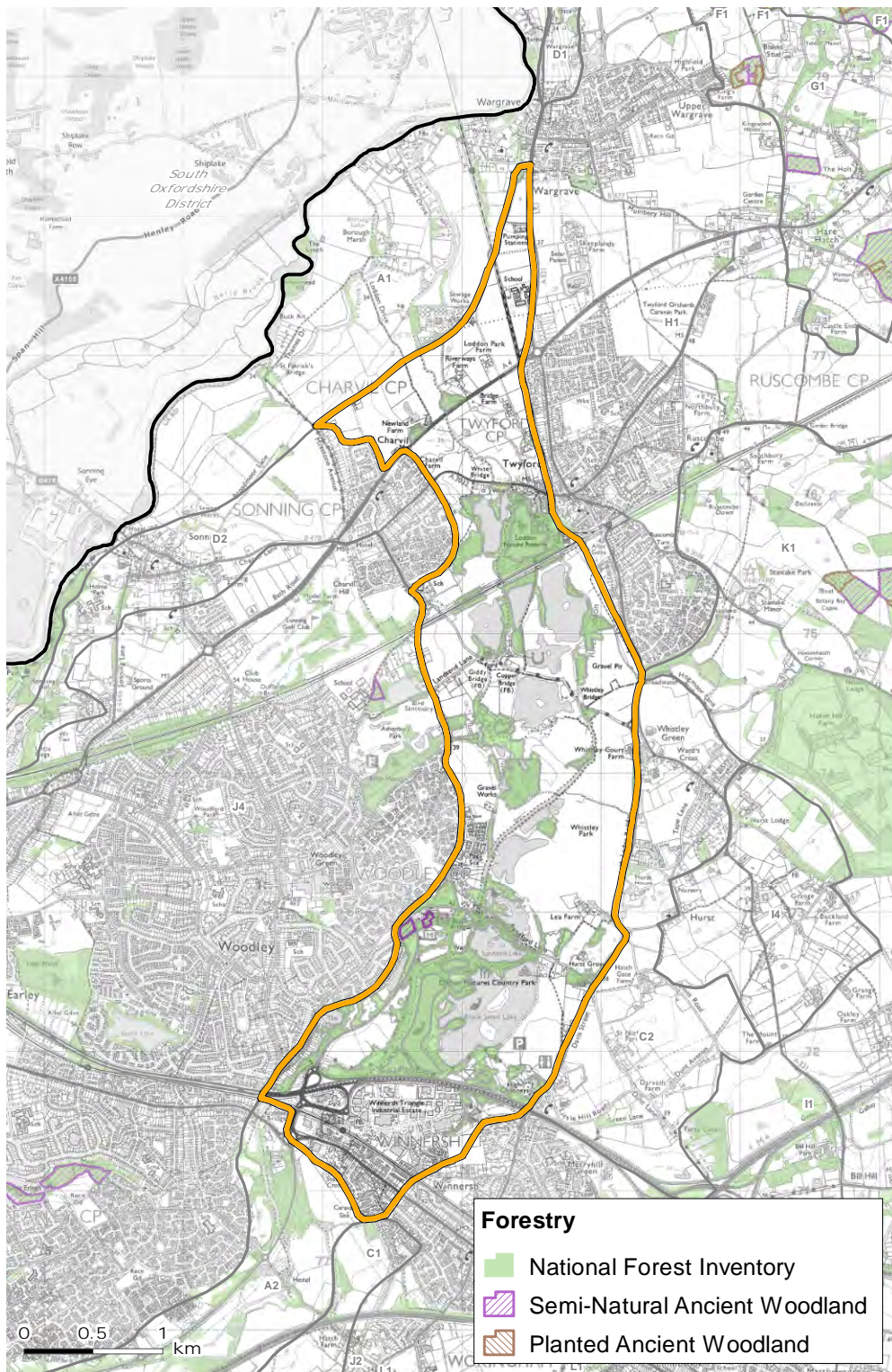
Landscape Guidelines

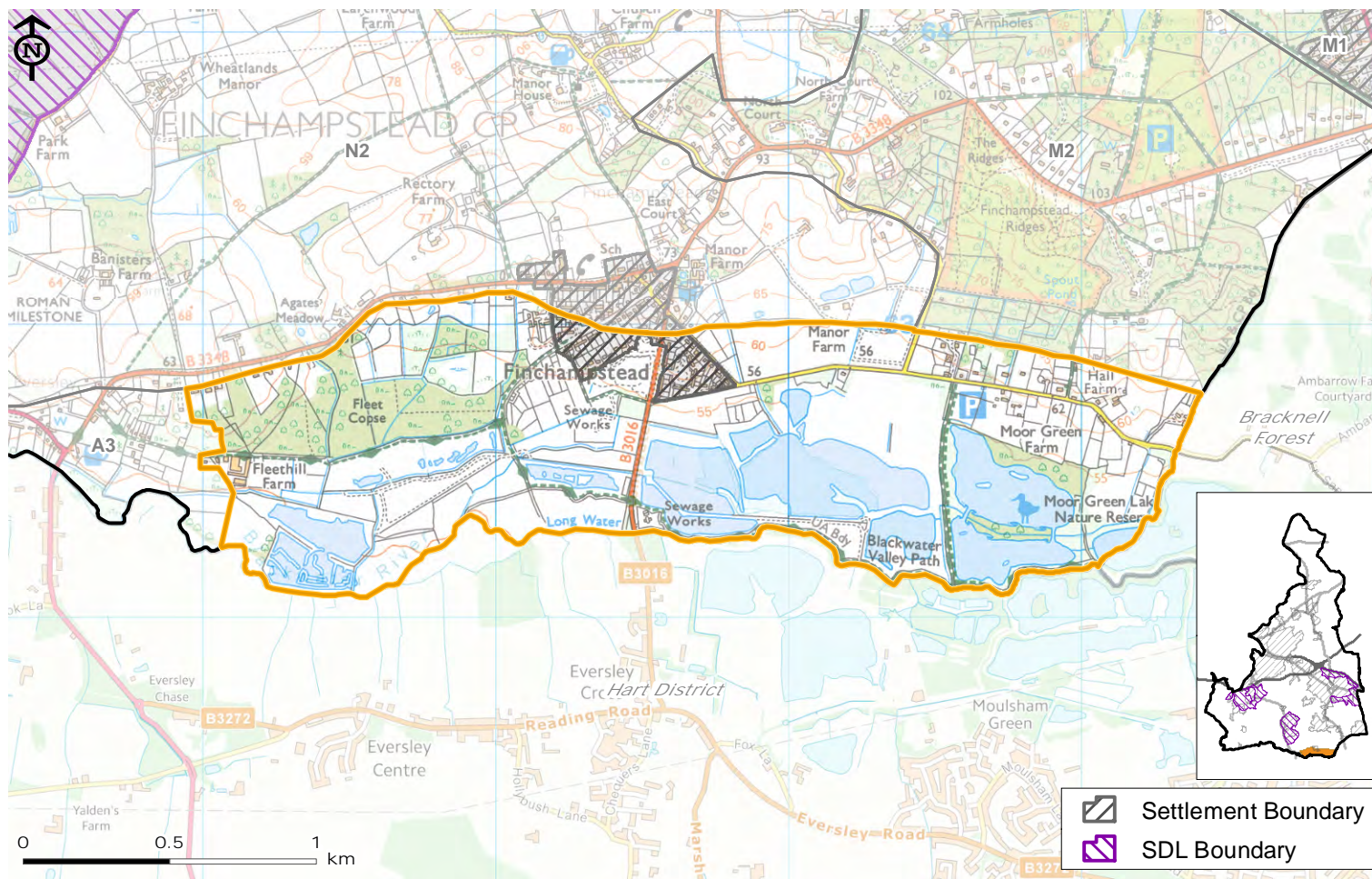
- Conserve and enhance the intrinsic character and beauty of the riverine landscape corridor and the restored gravel pits. Consider the impact of any development both inside and outside the area, particularly where it would have the potential to be highly visible or polluting in terms of light or sound.

- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape. Conserve the BAP priority habitat woodland copses and fringing carr, particularly surrounding the large lakes where it provides ecological habitats and creates an enclosed and secluded character. Continue to promote appropriate woodland management through natural regeneration and coppicing. Consider the use of trees and wetland habitats within river catchments to dampen extreme river flows.
- Manage the integration of equine related activities into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and control of associated built elements.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.
- Conserve, enhance and manage wetland, grassland and pasture habitats. Particularly protect BAP priority habitats from development, changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. Consider further opportunities for the recreation of riverside meadows or permanent pasture to restore and extend grassland habitats, particularly in relation to Dinton Pastures and maintain key features of the pastoral landscape such as hedgerows and bankside pollarded willows. The area forms part of the Loddon Valley Gravel Pits BOA. This network of habitats has been identified as a target for recreation of fen, meadow and grassland habitats and restoration and positive management of wet woodland. An appropriate wetland and grassland management regime to enhance biodiversity is critical.
- Maintain the prevailing hydrology and water tables to enable anaerobic conditions to preserve archaeological sites in low lying wetland areas, particularly along river corridors.
- Conserve and enhance the scenic value and rural character of the riverside villages and features, particularly Twyford Conservation Area and the listed and historic buildings throughout the area.
- Enhance informal recreational enjoyment of the landscape while managing recreational pressure on the river and river floodplain, particularly Dinton Pastures Country Park. Consider zoning of activities to ensure ecologically valuable landscapes e.g. areas of Loddon lily and Loddon pondweed, are protected from damaging activities and ensure appropriate management of informal recreation, particularly in relation to the Rights of Way network.
- Actively seek sympathetic integration of new recreational facilities into the landscape, such as golf courses and associated car parks.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges on the edge of the floodplain through hedges, wooded boundaries, occasional scrub planting, and large-species trees to provide visual screening.
- Conserve and enhance the rural character of the open floodplain landscape avoiding the spread of development on to the floodplain and between adjacent settlements, to protect the individual identities of settlements and retain their sense of physical and visual separation in particular protect the sensitive areas of open land between Reading and Winnersh.
- Use appropriate tree and scrub planting to help integrate roads and rail network. Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.
- Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution through the sensitive siting of any new development, especially any proposed night-time lighting.









SUMMARY

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.

The boundaries of this area are largely determined by the borough boundaries with Hart and Bracknell Forest Districts. The restored gravel workings and therefore character area continue into Bracknell Forest and Hart. The western boundary to A3: Blackwater River Valley is the limit of recent gravel extraction. The northern boundary within Wokingham borough marks the transition from the floodplain to the upland landscapes of M2: Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands and the more undulating landscape of N2: Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland.



Key Characteristics

- Flat alluvial floodplain at 55m AOD with gently sloping valley sides, loosely enclosed to the north east by the wooded ridges of Finchampstead (M2). The extensive surface geology of alluvium and river terrace deposits has resulted in extensive gravel extraction across the river valley, changing its original character.
- Riverine landscape dominated by the River Blackwater, a small river with a gently winding course enclosed by riverbank vegetation.
- A series of large open water bodies created from flooded gravel pits in varying stages of restoration which extend across the valley floor and connect to the larger restored gravel pits at Trilakes Country Park in the adjacent districts of Bracknell Forest and Hart.
- Ecologically important wetland habitats have developed around the restored gravel pits, including BAP priority habitat floodplain grazing marsh, wet woodland and grassland and create an appearance of natural landscape. Moor Green is well established as a Nature Reserve and LWS, Longwater Lane Meadow LWS is designated for its wet grassland. The floodplain is covered by the Blackwater Valley BOA. The open water of the restored gravel pits is an important habitat for birds.
- Wooded and enclosed character, created by woodland planting fringing the restored gravel pits, thick overgrown hedgerows with numerous mature hedgerow trees, and Fleet Copse LWS designated for a large BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland of ancient origin.
- Irregular fields used for small-scale agriculture including horse grazing and paddocks, south of Lower Sandhurst Road and south of Fleet Hill.
- A rural linear settlement pattern along leafy lanes on the edge of the floodplain, except for post-war development on the settlement edge of Finchampstead, where buildings tend to be set back, with long drives, and are therefore not very visible.
- Informal recreational landscape with trails and footpath connections to Trilakes Country Park, including the promoted Blackwater Valley Path.
- Wooded backdrop to views from Fleet Copse and extensive woodland on Finchampstead Ridges.
- Attractive naturalistic landscape with a backwater character created by the presence of open water surrounded by wetland vegetation.
- Strong sense of tranquility and dark night skies although disturbed locally by the busy B3016 and on-going restoration of the former gravel pits.

Natural Landscape

- B2.1 The main physical influence on this landscape is the presence of the River Blackwater. The valley has a gently sloping, and in some areas almost flat landform which contrasts with the steeper slopes of the Forested and Settled Sands leading up to Finchampstead Ridges to the north. The floodplain is comprised of alluvial and Second River Terrace deposits fringed by the sandy soils of the Bagshot Beds. This has resulted in the presence of Argillic Gley soils on the floodplain and

Gley-Podsols on the more elevated sandy soils. Both of these soil types are affected by high groundwater levels and are of marginal agricultural value.

- B2.2 The presence of sub-alluvial First and Second River Terrace Gravel led to exploitation by the aggregates industry. The area around Moor Green Farm has been restored as large lakes, part of a series which continues beyond the borough boundary to form the Yately Lakes, the foci of the Trilakes Country Park. The former Manor Farm and Fleethill Farm extraction sites are currently being restored.
- B2.3 Three Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are located in the area, and house BAP priority habitat woodland and grassland. The largest of these is Fleet Copse, a significant block of ancient woodland dominated by oak (*Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) together with a rich assemblage of higher plant species. It has been managed as coppice with standards and has retained its original woodland banks. Longwater Lane Meadow contains meadow and an area of wet rushy grassland. Moor Green Lakes LWS supports a varied range of aquatic flora and trees, including the nationally scarce pillwort (*Pilularia globulifera*). The site is also important for waterfowl.
- B2.4 A few agricultural fields remain, south of Lower Sandhurst Road. These are irregular in shape and used predominately for small-scale arable land and horse grazing and paddocks. A soft fruit farm with associated polytunnels is located north of Sandhurst Road at Manor Farm.

Cultural Landscape

- B2.5 There is little evidence of prehistoric or Romano-British clearance along the Blackwater valley. The Blackwater formed part of the southern boundary of the Saxon shire, part of the kingdom of Wessex, but the valley appears not to have been a major focus for Saxon settlement.
- B2.6 Medieval and post-medieval settlement in this area was limited to farmsteads distributed along the lane running along the valley edge. During the medieval period the valley floor is likely to have comprised open fields and common grazing. Traces of the pattern of narrow sinuous fields running across the valley floor southeast of Finchampstead, shown on the first edition OS map, are still visible despite the gravel extraction and restoration, and indicate early enclosure of the open fields.
- B2.7 Finchampstead village which is mainly situated in character area N2: Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland expanded from its historic core with newer estate development spreading into the river valley, dating from the post-war era. These developments include estates with mock-vernacular character. There is a linear settlement located along Lower Sandhurst Road at the eastern edge of the character area located on the Bagshot Beds. This settlement includes a number of detached houses set within large grounds, some of which are visible from the Moor Green Lakes. Farm buildings are present at Hall Farm and Moor Green Farm, where horse paddocks are also present.
- B2.8 Roads are limited in this area to the B3016 crossing over the Blackwater River from Hart District, and Lower Sandhurst Road on the edge of the floodplain. The B0316 is a straight road from Finchampstead to Eversley Cross. It crosses the river at Finchampstead Bridge and replaced the earlier Longwater Lane ford crossing.
- B2.9 The character area has considerable informal recreational value. A small car park with an information board is located off Lower Sandhurst Road, and leads to a footpath and the Three Castles Path bordering the area of open water at Moor Green Lakes. This path connects to the Blackwater Valley Path and to the Trilakes Country Park in Bracknell Forest District. The Moor Green Lakes Group and Blackwater Valley Conservation Partnership have built a hide by the lake to encourage bird watching. Public access west of the B3016 is currently restricted, but will be restored once the gravel restoration has been completed.

Perceptual Landscape

- B2.10 **The area exhibits a new 'natural'** landscape of open water created by mineral extraction, and has a quiet backwater character. Within the Moor Green Lakes there is a remote and even secluded character, and the area feels far from residential development. The area is a resource of tranquillity and dark skies, particularly along the River Blackwater.
- B2.11 Fleet Copse and the woodland in M2: Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands provide a wooded backdrop to much of the area, particularly above the Moor Green Lakes.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Rural riverine character of the Blackwater River and restored floodplain provide a sense of space.
- Ecologically valuable wetland habitats including BAP priority habitat eutrophic standing waters, lowland mixed deciduous woodland and floodplain grazing marsh, as well as remnant wet meadow and ancient woodland e.g. at Longwater Lane Meadow and Fleet Copse not affected by mineral extraction, which provide an important environment for flora and fauna.
- Restored gravel pit lakes which provide important ecological habitats and support a diverse range of birds, as well as opportunities for recreation.
- Undeveloped character of the valley, particularly in the floodplain, which provides a sense of naturalness and remoteness.
- Quiet rural lanes bordered by hedgerows which provide access to the area and enjoyment of the countryside.
- 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.
- Localised areas of tranquillity and peacefulness, with an experience of dark skies, particularly around the restored lakes, and away from the B0136.
- Views to the wooded backdrop of Fleet Copse and Finchampstead Ridges create an enclosed and secluded character, particularly around the Moor Green Lakes.

Landscape Condition

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 are due to be completed by December 2018, which will improve provide opportunities to improve the condition of this area.

Key Issues

- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and wet woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change. Climate change is also likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows with, at times, greater flooding and at other times drought which is likely to impact riverside vegetation habitats and recreational enjoyment thereof.
- Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulting in polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in recent years there has been improvement in water quality.

- Influence of woodland fell cycles on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines of adjacent character areas (e.g. M2: Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands).
- Loss of landscape features such as hedgerows, hedgerow standard trees, and pollarded willows on waterside pasture.
- Changes in water levels and associated habitats due to drainage schemes.
- Changes in management that could result in loss of fragmentation of wetland habitats as a result of scrub encroachment.
- Changes in agricultural practice, with the expansion of agricultural polytunnels for soft fruit growing. This is leading to visual intrusion of these elements and the loss of traditional pastoral land uses.
- Pressure for built development in adjacent areas, particularly on the skyline leading to loss of wooded ridges, characteristic of the Wokingham landscape.
- Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening threatens the intimate rural character of the lanes.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Blackwater River Valley with Open Water* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance wetland and woodland habitats.

The key aspects to be conserved, enhanced and actively managed are the River Blackwater corridor, the wetland habitats associated with the river and former gravel works, the woodland (particularly the ancient woodland) and the perceptual characteristics including the peaceful setting and dark skies.

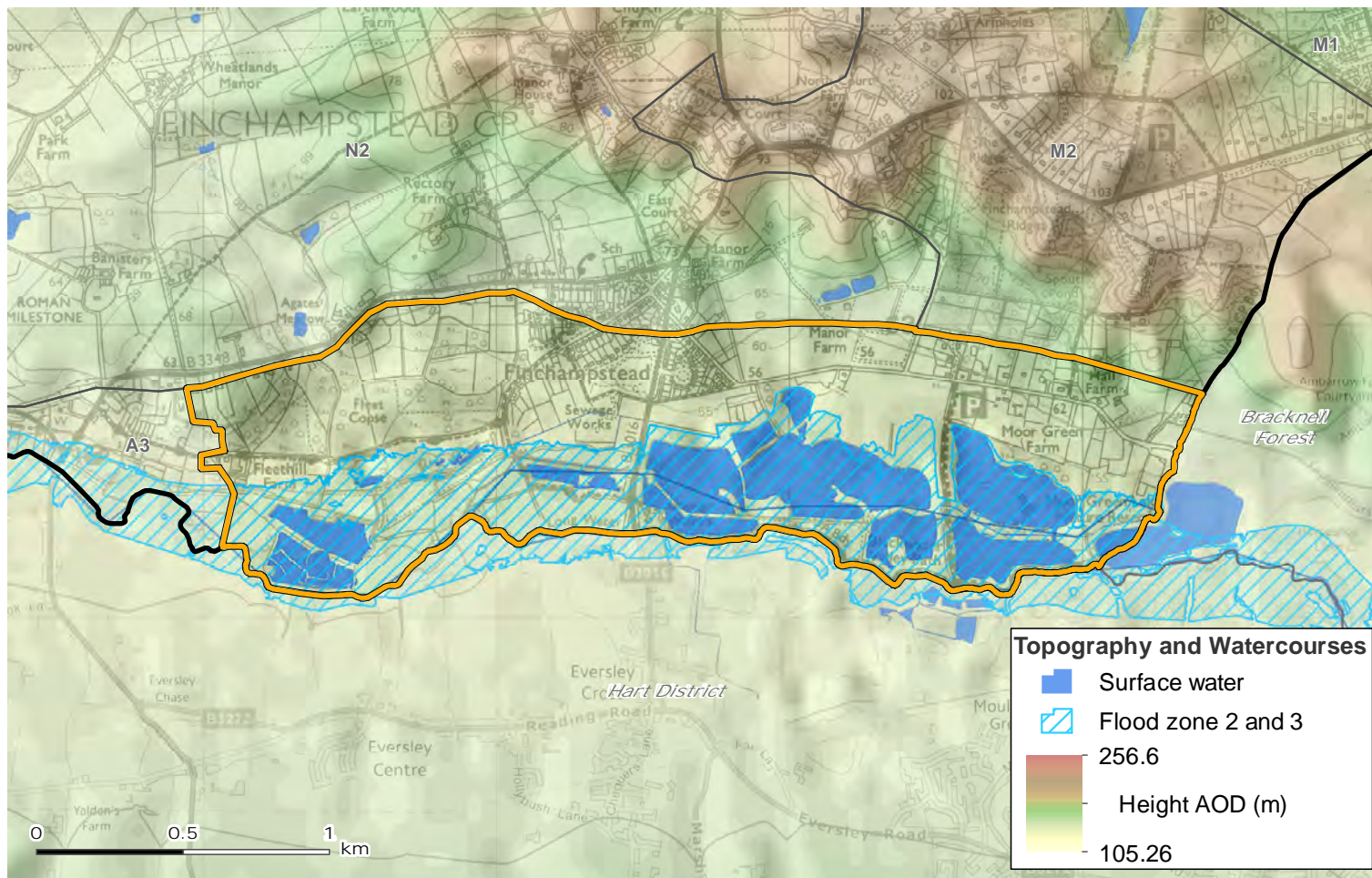
In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern and retain the views to the wooded backdrop provided by Fleet Copse and M2: Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands.

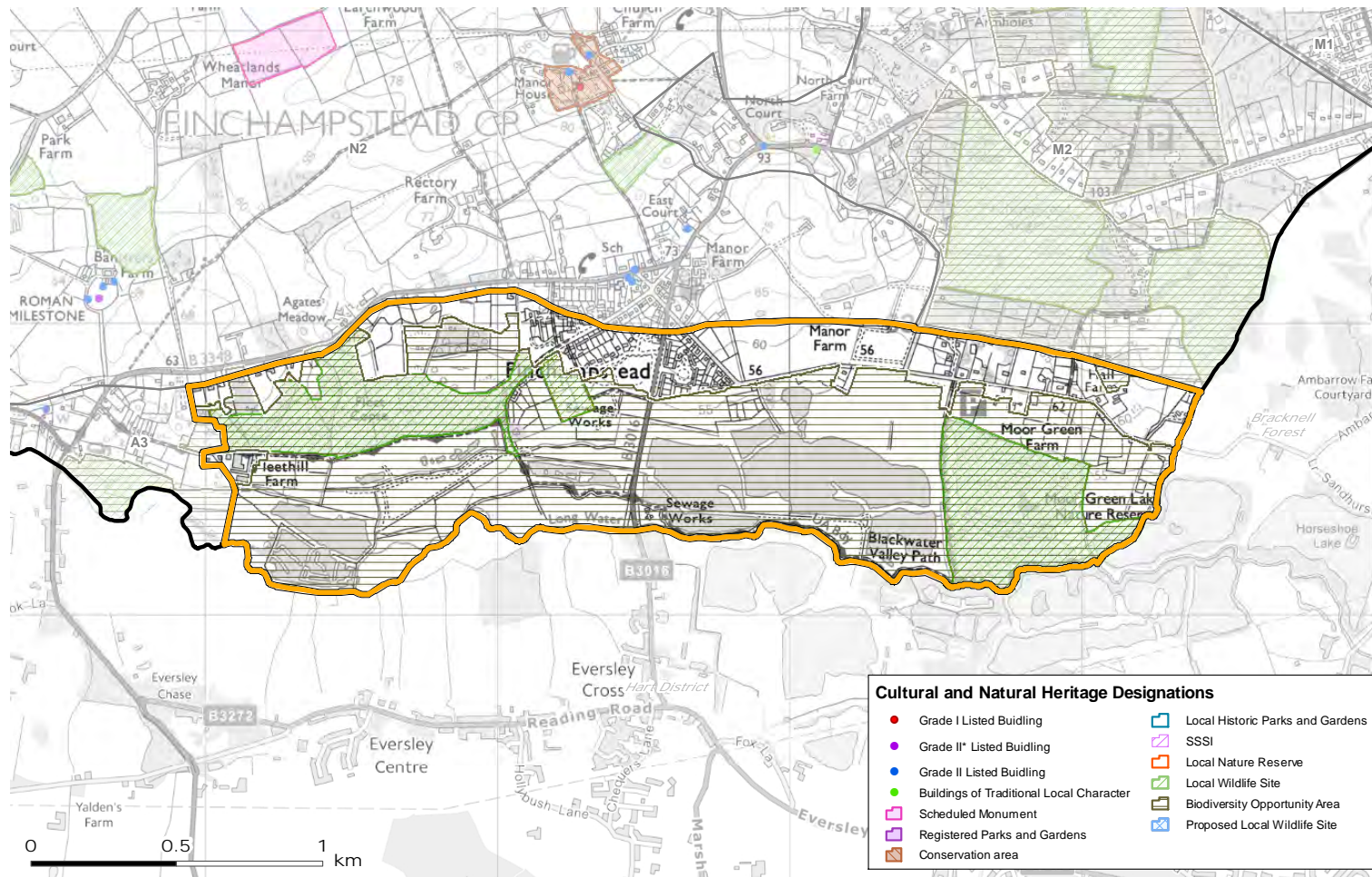
Landscape Guidelines

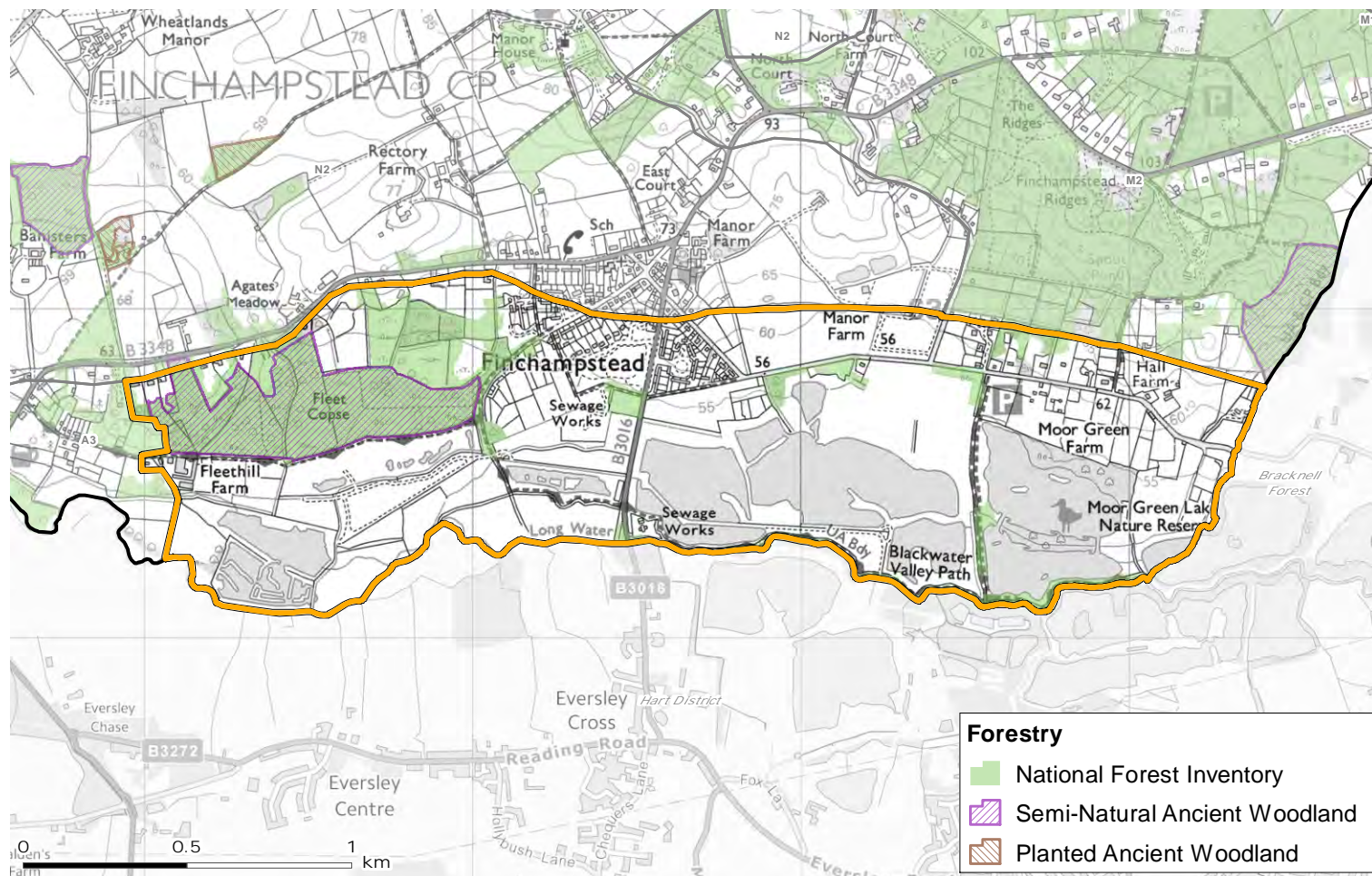
- Conserve, protect and enhance the scenic quality and naturalistic character of the river corridor and restored gravel pits, restoring former gravel extraction sites to maximise biodiversity and scenic qualities.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.
- Minimise the expansion and visual impact of agricultural polytunnels through careful siting and design.
- Reinststate or repair hedgerows with native species of hedgerow trees and shrubs to create a connected landscape pattern where there are opportunities to do so.
- Conserve, enhance and manage wetland habitats, particularly in newly restored areas of former gravel pits, and BAP priority habitats, particularly from development, changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. The area is part of the Blackwater Valley BOA. This network of re-created natural habitats, which extend into Bracknell Forest and Hart districts, has been identified as a target for habitat re-creation and restoration and positive

management of grassland and wetland habitats. An appropriate wetland management regime is critical.

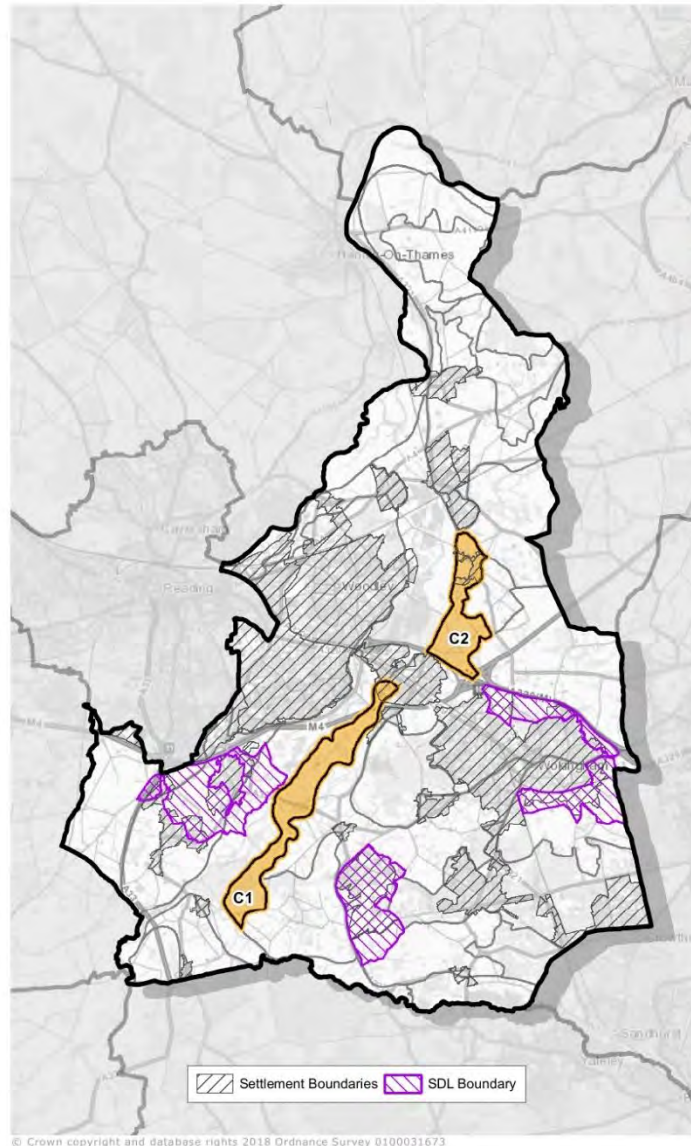
- Maintain the prevailing hydrology and water tables to enable anaerobic conditions to preserve archaeological sites in low lying wetland areas, particularly along river corridors.
- Seek sympathetic integration of new recreational facilities e.g. hides, footpaths, and associated car parks into the landscape.
- Enhance informal recreational enjoyment of the landscape and consider zoning of activities to ensure ecologically valuable are protected. Ensure appropriate management of informal recreation, particularly in relation to the Rights of Way network.
- Maintain the sparse linear settlement pattern of dispersed low density domestic scale small settlement set within large plots and farm buildings through control of new development, avoiding further linear spread of development. Consider opportunities to strengthen and enhance the landscape setting to existing villages through planting.
- Maintain and enhance the character of the rural lanes, resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage.
- Retain and maintain views to the wooded hills. Consider the impact of any development on the views to the wooded ridgeline. Consider the effects of change within the adjacent area on this valley landscape.
- Conserve and enhance the perception of tranquillity and remoteness in the landscape, including the experience of dark skies, through the management of development.







C: River Terrace



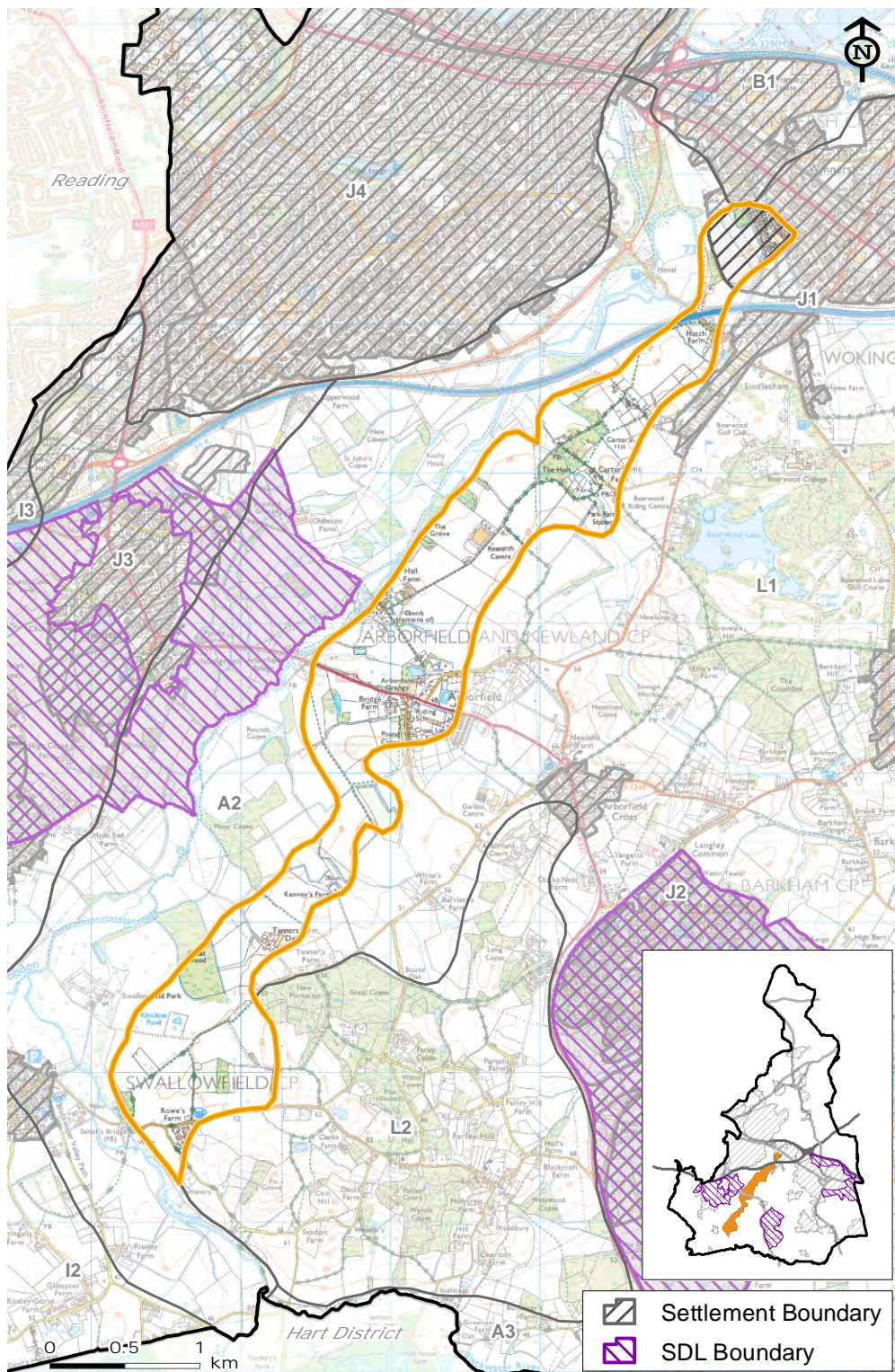
Description

The LCT is distinguished by a flat landform of younger river terraces, close to the modern rivers. A semi-enclosed landscape of large-scale agricultural fields, divided by post and wire fencing or hedgerows, with settlement connections to the adjacent river.

Landscape Character Areas

The River Terrace LCT is subdivided into two Landscape Character Areas:

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



SUMMARY

A large scale, open agricultural landscape slightly elevated above the Loddon floodplain. The area is crossed by a network of small lanes and tracks while larger roads run east-west providing access across the river. Areas of historic parkland at Swallowfield and Arborfield contrast with the intensively farmed character of the landscape.

A narrow area of land on gravel terraces to the east of A2: Loddon River Valley, located in the southwest of the borough. The boundaries largely relate to the underlying geology. The northern boundary extends to the edge of Winnersh; the southern and eastern boundaries are less clearly defined, but follow a gradual transition to the undulating landscape of J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay and the hilly landscape of L2: Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills.



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating river terrace landform between 45-50m AOD to the east of the River Loddon floodplain. The area is underlain by London Clay and river terrace gravels which give rise to loamy soils which are better drained than the floodplain, and therefore intensively farmed.
- Small water features including tributary stream running through the Holt and drainage channels and ponds.
- Intensive arable farmland with medium to large fields bound by indistinct boundaries, mainly post and wire fencing, with occasional gappy remnant hedgerows. Some horse paddocks present, and cattle grazing at the University of Reading farm and Centre for Dairy Research.
- Small woodland and copses break up the agricultural plain. BAP priority habitat mixed lowland deciduous woodland dominates, with some wet woodland designated as LWS (Cuckoo Pen, Gravel Pit Wood/The Holt, Loaders Copse, Winnersh Woodland). Pound Copse and Great Wood LWS also contain small areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland.
- Remnant historic parkland associated with the former Arborfield Hall. The presence of mature oaks provides a strong silhouette against the open sky.
- Low-density settlement of farmsteads (typically red brick with weather boarded barns), manor houses and hamlets, except for the area north of the M4 where development has extended onto the river terrace on the edge of Winnersh.
- Large, modern agricultural buildings are prominent features of the landscape.
- Tree-lined narrow lanes, tracks, byways and footpaths allow recreational access to the river terrace, and access to the Loddon floodplain, as well as the Blackwater Valley Path.
- Clear long-distance views across the adjacent floodplain due to the unvaried topography. The spire of Arborfield Church provides a landmark feature in distant views.
- Rural character and sense of remoteness, due to the predominance of narrow lanes and tracks and very low density settlement. This is interrupted by the transport corridors in the north of the area, the M4, and new Winnersh Relief Road, as well as the proposed Arborfield Cross Relief Road in the centre of the area.

Natural Landscape

- C1.1** The Arborfield River Terrace is a gently undulating terrace adjacent to the Loddon valley floor at an elevation of between 45 and 50m AOD. The area is underlain by London Clay and the younger Third River Terrace gravel of the River Loddon. The area also contains Fourth River Terrace gravels in the east and a small area of Brickearth and Second River Terrace gravels (predominantly in A2: Loddon River Valley). These give rise to loamy Argillic Gley soils that are better drained than the adjacent floodplain and are therefore intensively farmed. There is one small tributary **stream running through The Holt woodland at Carter's Hill Farm. There** are a number of small water features including drainage channels, ponds and moats.
- C1.2** Despite the presence of a number of small scale woodlands and copses, the intensively farmed landscape has a predominantly open character, partly due to loss of hedgerow boundaries. The varied field pattern includes early enclosure as well as fields typical of early-19th century Parliamentary enclosure.

- C1.3** The main land use of the Arborfield River Terrace landscape is agriculture. Settlement constitutes a small part of the landscape around Arborfield, as well as the expanding edge of Winnersh north of the M4. Farming is intensive and the predominately arable fields are divided by post and wire fences, although fragments of low flailed hedgerows still survive. Small areas of horse paddocks **are found on the edge of farms, and there is cattle grazing at the University of Reading's farm** and Centre for Dairy Research.
- C1.4** Deciduous copses and woodlands punctuate the agricultural landscape, providing a break in the field pattern and forming a backdrop to views. Mixed plantations and individual trees are a feature on the edge of Arborfield, the remnants of the designed landscape surrounding the former Arborfield Hall and Swallowfield Park, with some BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland. There are also ponds and standing water bodies associated with the designed landscapes at Swallowfield and Arborfield.
- C1.5** The soils here are somewhat damp and typically support woods dominated BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland in a combination of oak (*Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), field maple (*Acer campestre*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) with a ground layer often including **dog's mercury** (*Mercurialis perennis*) and bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*). Six woods have Local Wildlife Site (LWS) status and are generally of secondary origin. These generally have a similar composition of woody species and have often been brought under a traditional coppice regime. Great Wood and Pound Copse are recognised as ancient woodland, with a history of coppice management; the latter site forms a narrow strip and supports a high density of wild service tree (*Sorbus torminalis*).

Cultural Landscape

- C1.6** Cropmarks, including ring-ditches, indicate that clearance and settlement on the river terrace began during the prehistoric and Romano-British periods. **The "-feld" element of Arborfield** suggests a largely open and cultivated landscape in the Saxon period. The southern half below Arborfield later formed part of the Royal Forest of Windsor, and the northern half above Arborfield formed part of the chase of the Bishops of Salisbury otherwise known as Bishop's Bearwood.
- C1.7** There are traces of parkland around the former Arborfield Hall, including ornamental parkland trees and shelterbelts. The Hall itself was a late-17th century country house demolished in 1945. The influence of parkland is also seen in the south of the character area adjacent to Swallowfield Park, which was imparked by Edward III in 1354 and was also used as a stud for the rearing of horses (see A2: Loddon River Valley). The quadrangular moat at Moor Copse near Kenney's Farm, Arborfield, is now a Scheduled Monument and reflects the post-medieval fashion of enhancing the status and appearance of manors and other large houses.
- C1.8** The north of the terrace has large fields with straight boundaries characteristic of Parliamentary enclosure of Winnersh 1843, Newland 1817, Earley and Woodley 1820, in the north and Swallowfield 1817 in the south. In the south of the LCA many of the fields with small interspersed copses, shown on the first edition OS map, have wavy boundaries indicating earlier enclosure.
- C1.9** Arborfield, a village of medieval origin, forms a focus for settlement in this character area. The original medieval settlement at Arborfield was probably located close to the 13th century St **Bartholomew's church**, a chapel-of-ease to the mother-church at Sonning. The church is now a ruin, listed at Grade II and as a Scheduled Monument, and is on the Heritage at Risk register. Arborfield later shifted to its present location, and a new church was built nearer the new village in 1863.
- C1.10** Beyond the village, the area is characterised by a scattered rural settlement pattern, mainly of dispersed farmsteads occupying the drier ground offered by the terrace, with a series of rural lanes running towards the river linking the farms to fields on the floodplain.
- C1.11** The farmsteads are typically a cluster of traditional red brick buildings with weatherboarded barns and clay tile roofs. Brick wall boundaries and chimneystacks are often ornate features. However, today there are also large-scale agricultural buildings that are prominent features of the

landscape. New development north of the M4 at Hatch Farm is bringing the urban edge of Winnersh onto the river terrace.

- C1.12** There are few roads within this area, with the cross-valley A327 and Church Road linking to Arborfield and Swallowfield respectively as the main transport links. The Arborfield bypass is planned to run through this area. The north of the area is impacted by larger transport corridors including the M4 and north of the motorway, the newly completed Winnersh Relief Road.

Perceptual Landscape

- C1.13** A tranquil rural environment, with a network of lanes and tracks connecting dispersed farmsteads with fields emphasising the rural character of the landscape. This rural character is disturbed in the north of the area, where the M4 and Winnersh Relief Road add noise and movement.
- C1.14** The formal character of the parkland associated with Swallowfield and Arborfield Halls contrast with the open rural nature of the majority of the landscape.
- C1.15** Arborfield Hall, which has since been demolished, was immortalised as the 'Old House at Aberleigh' in Miss Mary Russell Mitford's *Our Village*.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Surface water, including ponds, historic moats and drainage ditches, adds visual interest and provides potential for small-scale wetland habitats.
- Small deciduous woodlands, some of ancient origin and containing BAP priority habitat punctuate the agricultural landscape providing visual diversity within the open arable fields, and form a backdrop to views, as well as providing important ecological habitats.
- Dispersed settlement pattern linked by tree-lined rural lanes emphasises the open and rural character of the landscape.
- Valued area for recreation with a network of bridleways and public footpaths which allow enjoyment of the landscape.
- Historic parkland landscapes at Swallowfield and Arborfield provide time-depth. Mature oaks create visual interest and strong silhouettes against the open sky.
- Clear views to adjacent character areas due to the gently undulating, open landscape.
- A tranquil area with a sense of remoteness, removed from roads and visual intrusion of settlement.

Landscape Condition

Individual landscape components of the Arborfield River Terrace are generally in moderate-poor condition. The most intact components are the physical landscape, particularly the terrace landform, and the tranquil rural environment, although the area generally lacks a strong sense of place. The hedgerow network and historic field system have declined, many of the coppices are unmanaged and the vernacular architecture is being eroded by the introduction of unsympathetic components. The M4, Winnersh Relief Road and on-going construction of the Arborfield Cross Relief Road and expanding development north of the M4 will further fragment the agricultural landscape.

Key Issues

- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and wet woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change. Climate change is also likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows.
- Loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past due to cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Hedgerow loss, and loss of hedgerow trees, associated with past expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture or decline in hedgerow management.
- Pressure for sand and gravel extraction. An area of land south of the A327 has been identified as a potential site for extraction (CEB7 in the Joint Minerals and Waste Plan) which may impact landscape character.
- Lack of the recruitment of young trees (through natural regeneration or planting) required to rebalance the age structure of parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the character of the landscape.
- Increasing pressure for horse/pony paddocks and grazing, particularly at settlement edges, leading to a decrease in rural intactness and affecting landscape condition.
- Demand for residential and commercial development and supporting infrastructure both inside and outside the areas is continuing to push development onto the river terrace impacting the rural and tranquil character of the area.
- Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening changes the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- Increased use of the existing road network leading to the continuous presence of background traffic noise from the M4 and other major roads across the river terrace including the proposed Arborfield Cross Relief Road linking major residential developments outside the area.
- Large, modern agricultural buildings intrude on the rural landscape.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Arborfield River Terrace* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural and agricultural landscape with its scattered rural settlement and rural lanes.

The key aspects to be enhanced and actively managed are the areas of historic parkland (registered and not currently registered), the former hedgerow boundaries and trees, and the coppiced woodlands. Open views should be maintained, including to Arborfield Church and across the Loddon river valley.

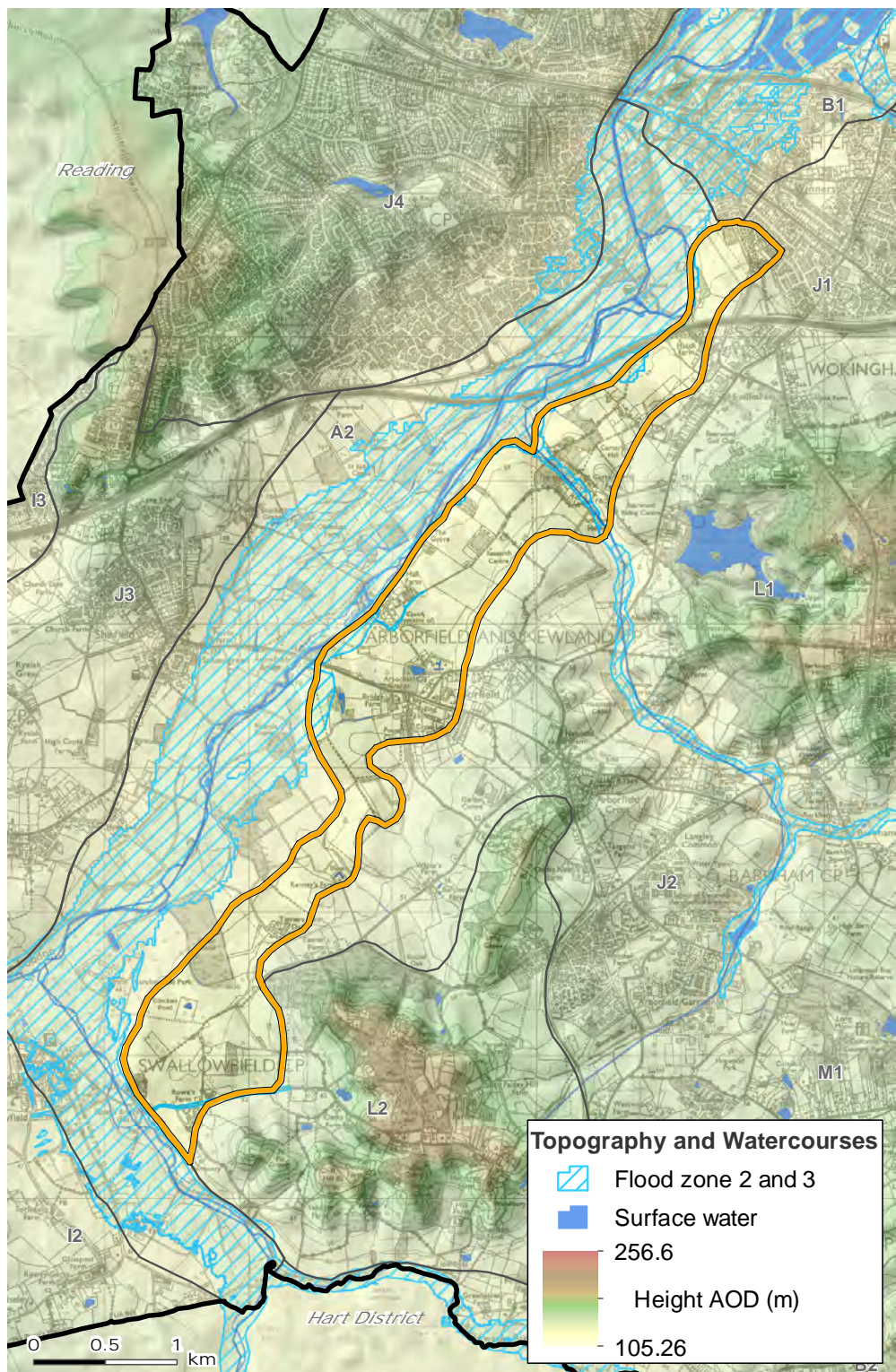
In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern, minimising primary and secondary influences from adjacent landscape areas.

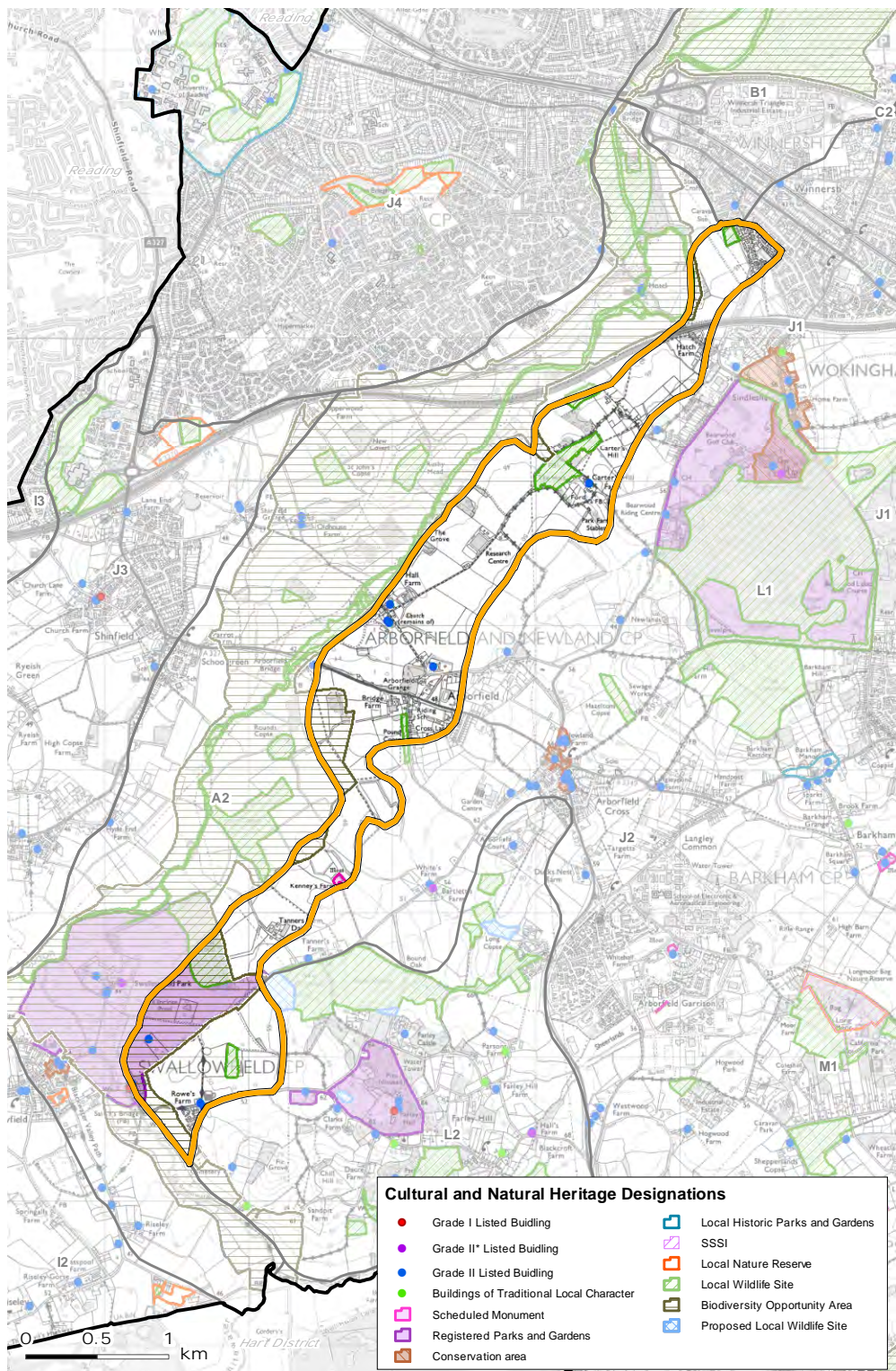
Landscape Guidelines

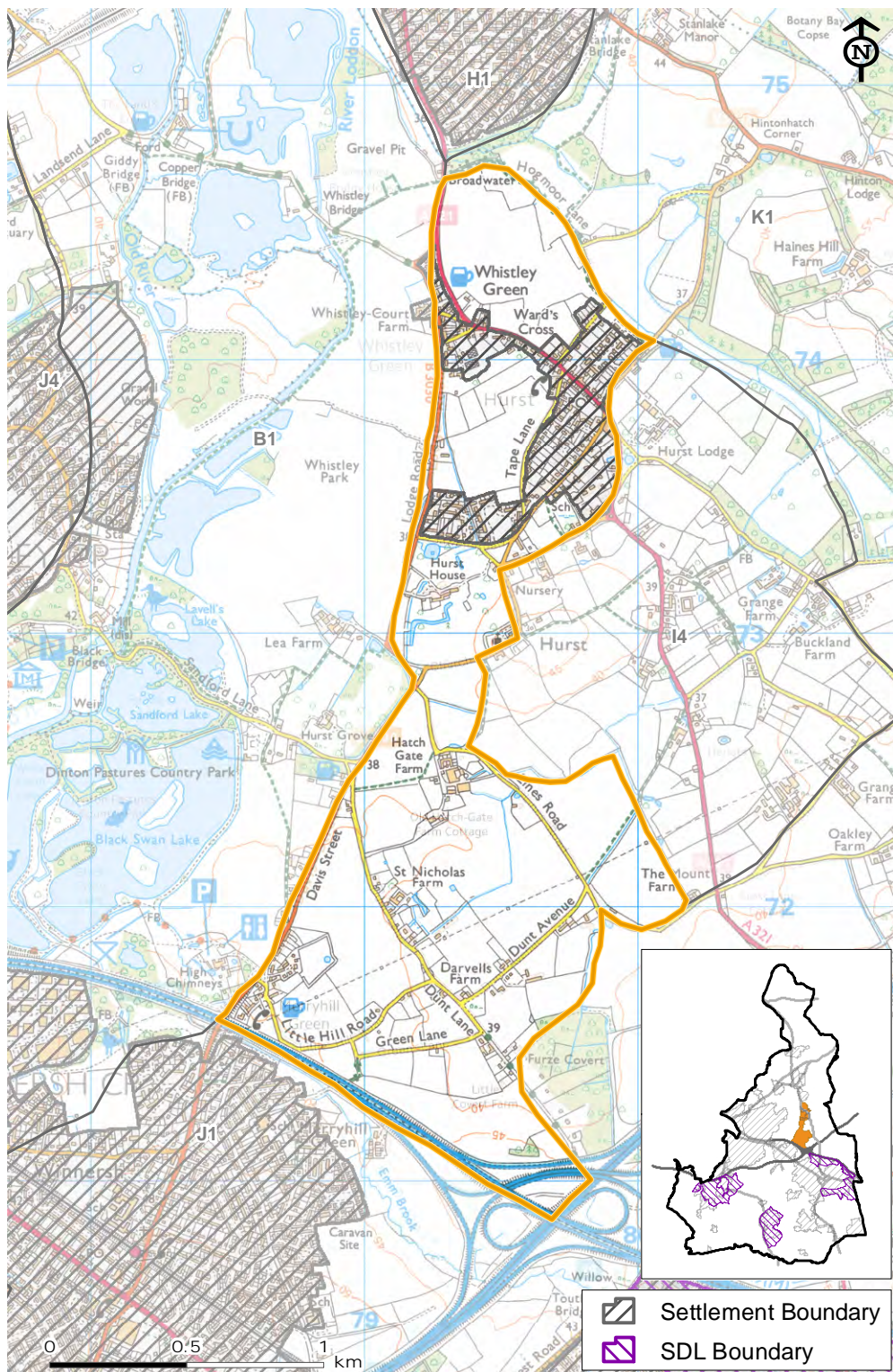
- Conserve and enhance the small woodlands which punctuate the arable landscape. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-

native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.

- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland and hedgerow planting (with hedgerow trees), using locally occurring native species in order to create green links to other woodland habitats and to dampen extreme river flows within river catchments.
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the landscape. Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.
- Reinststate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so. There has been recent planting of new hawthorn hedgerows, and this should be encouraged and continued.
- Manage the integration of equine related activities into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and control of associated built elements.
- Conserve and protect the scenic value of the parkland landscapes, including that of Swallowfield Registered Park and Garden and the parkland landscape associated with Arborfield, the listed buildings and the moated sites. Plan for the next generation of parkland trees.
- Conserve, enhance and manage woodland and parkland habitats, particularly BAP priority habitats from development and changes in land use. Swallowfield Park is part of the Loddon Valley South BOA. This network of natural habitats has been identified as a target for habitat creation and restoration and positive management of parkland and farmland for farmland birds. Mineral extraction is proposed in parts of the valley which should provide opportunities for habitat creation including reedbed creation. The 2003 Environment Agency biodiversity strategy for the Loddon catchment should be used.
- Maintain the rural character and sparse settlement pattern of Arborfield and dispersed farms through control of new development and avoiding spread of development into the area. Resist the development of large or tall structures which could obscure the open views across the open landscape.
- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale materials and landscape– as well as sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of any potential new development on valuable landscape attributes.
- Resist proposals that introduce extensive or obtrusive elements e.g. pylons on the visually sensitive landscape.
- Ensure restoration plans for gravel extraction sites are in keeping with the character of the landscape and encourage opportunities for habitat creation. Resist proposals that would impact on the intactness or integrity of the landscape or habitats.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural leafy lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage.
- Use appropriate tree and hedgerow planting to help integrate roads in relation to Winnersh Relief Road and proposed Arborfield Cross Relief Road and new junction at A327. Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.
- Protect the perceptions of tranquillity/remoteness dark skies in the landscape, through the management of development, ensuring development, including infrastructure, does not spread into the river terrace.



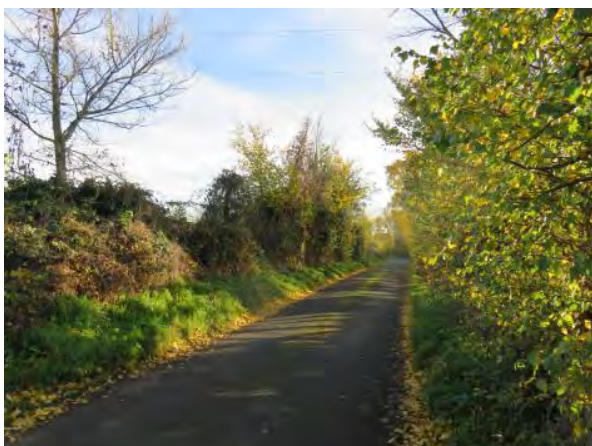




SUMMARY

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.

The Hurst River Terrace is defined to the west by the boundary with B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water. The eastern boundary is less clearly defined and corresponds with the geological boundary between the river terrace deposits and the adjoining clay and alluvial landscapes: I1: Ashridge Open Clay Lowlands and I4: Hurst Open Clay Lowlands and K1: Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland. The southern boundary is defined by the M4, which separates the rural landscape from the more settled fringe landscape of J4: Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay.



Key Characteristics

- Flat lowland landscape with gently shelving slopes down to the Loddon river valley. Geologically varied, the area is underlain by clay with sand and gravel river terrace deposits with impervious soils affected by high groundwater and short-term flooding.
- Network of water features from minor drainage channels radiating into the Loddon Valley; deep drainage ditches around the fields; and scattered farm ponds.
- Simple agricultural landscape of mainly arable farmland, with pasture enclosed in relatively large straight-sided fields, including smaller areas of horse and pony paddocks.
- Open character with relatively few boundaries marked by vegetation. Hedgerow or roadside trees are relatively scarce and scattered.
- Villages located around historic cores including Whistley Green and Hurst, which has a Conservation Area. Newer linear development within these settlements is aligned along the network of roads and rural lanes. There is no strong local vernacular, although there are fine early buildings and building character is unified by the presence of red brick.
- Regular pattern of river terrace farmsteads along the rural lanes, some of which are listed. Many have large-scale modern agricultural buildings which are prominent in the landscape.
- A rural and tranquil area, with only southern edge affected by movement and noise of the M4 and its junction with the A329 (M) and crossed by pylons.
- Wooded horizons created by the wooded character of the adjoining Loddon valley and the woods and hedgerow trees of K1 and I4.

Natural Landscape

- C2.1 The Hurst River Terrace is a relatively flat lowland landscape above the Loddon Floodplain lying almost entirely at 40m AOD with gentle shelving slopes falling to the river valley below. The character area represents a terrace of land that roughly follows the deposition of Kempton Park Gravels, over the underlying Lambeth Group and London Clay. In the south of the area, there are small areas of Third River Terrace gravels, and where these deposits have not occurred the London Clay occurs near the surface.
- C2.2 The dominant soils are typical Argillic Gleys, which are stony loams affected by high groundwater and short-term flooding. The propensity for waterlogging has led to the creation of a network of formal ditches (that often follow the roads) designed to drain water into the Loddon river valley below and the impervious soil has allowed the creation of numerous small farm ponds. The extent of waterlogging has influenced the subdivision of land between arable and permanent pasture, although this is being lost with increased drainage in modern times.
- C2.3 This area lacks woodland, but its verdant and open character is enhanced by the dark wooded horizons created by the adjacent LCAs. The openness is emphasised by the fragmented character of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- C2.4 The landscape of the Hurst River Terrace is predominantly agricultural and residential. The farmland is mixed, although arable dominates. The pastures support horses, sheep and cattle, and the arable fields are used for cropping including brassicas. Due to the close proximity of

fields, stock is sometimes released from the pastures onto the arable areas, when the crops have been fully harvested to use the unwanted parts of the crops for fodder.

- C2.5 Both the arable and pasture is set within large geometric fields of variable shape. These fields are mostly divided by post and wire fences with occasional stretches of metal estate rail and gates defining the edges of the pony paddocks. There are few boundaries marked by vegetation, although the infrequent lengths of hedgerow that have survived tend to be intact and comprise mechanically managed low flailed hawthorn monoculture hedge. Remnant hedgerow or roadside trees are sometimes present. Some property boundaries contain coniferous shelterbelt hedgerow plantations and there is often vegetation in gardens, which help to break up the landscape. However, generally the landscape appears to lack vegetation structure and is reliant upon hedgerows, trees, and woodland in the adjacent landscape types for definition.
- C2.6 There is one Proposed Local Wildlife Site (PLWS) at Vine Cottage, Hurst designated for wet woodland. The main features of habitat value are the small water bodies including the drainage channels and small farm ponds with permanent aquatic vegetation some of which support great crested newts and a good population of water voles.

Cultural Landscape

- C2.7 There is no remaining visible evidence for prehistoric or Romano-British settlement in this area. A Domesday settlement is recorded at Whistley, and Whistley Green village was established around a green. Place names containing **"-leah"** and **Hurst indicate** settlement in the forest landscape which later formed part of the Royal Forest of Windsor.
- C2.8 There is currently no trace in the landscape of the former medieval deerpark at La Lee (Hurst), which probably spanned both the terrace and the floodplain. The Tudor mansion at Hurst House was rebuilt in the 19th century, with landscaped parkland.
- C2.9 The higher ground of the river terrace was the focus for medieval settlements exploiting the valley floor for agriculture and there is a pattern of closely spaced hamlets and farmsteads sited on the edges of the floodplain, linked by narrow lanes. These include a particularly high concentration of surviving 16th and 17th century rural buildings. Many of the fields are irregularly shaped, but often with straight-sides, indicating the recent amalgamation of the smaller fields produced by Parliamentary and earlier enclosure, although there are small areas of relatively intact early post-medieval field system.
- C2.10 Linear settlement is located along the relatively dense rural roads, which have wide verges and occasional grassy roadside banks. Clusters of houses associated with the edge of the floodplain follow Lodge Road and Davis Street. These include the settlements of Whistley Green, Hurst (which has a **Conservation Area**) and **Ward's Cross**. Although there is no apparent strong rural vernacular in these areas they do have a sense of unity, albeit somewhat suburbanised, with warm red brick being characteristic throughout all ages of property and the hedges, brick walls and fences of front gardens creating a continuous frontage to the roads. There are a number of older buildings, many of which are listed, which lend a sense of historic continuity and provide local focal points. These include the flint and brick-built parish church of St Nicholas, Grade I listed, **and the distinctive brick Barker's Almshouses** nearby on higher ground, Grade II listed.
- C2.11 Elsewhere the dominant influences are clustered farmsteads and large detached halls. The farmsteads include more modern buildings with dormer windows and are frequently associated with large agricultural sheds and warehouses, which are often brightly coloured and eye-catching. Many of the halls are of high architectural quality, originating from earlier buildings, such as Hurst House built by Richard Ward in 1530 and rebuilt in 1847 by the Vicar of Hurst, incorporating old material **with its tall 'Elizabethan' style chimneys**.
- C2.12 The road network has a winding and peaceful character, which, in the rural area, results from the lack of kerbing and the distinctive character of the roadside ditches and banks, and, in the more settled parts from the wide roadside verges. There are very few footpaths within the area.

Perceptual Landscape

- C2.13 There are open views overlooking the adjoining floodplain of the Loddon. The dark wooded horizon, trees and hedgerows of the Loddon Valley to the west and Hurst lowland to the east provide enclosure and a backdrop to views and also emphasises the open nature of the landscape
- C2.14 This is a largely quiet and rural area, which feels far removed from the nearby heavily settled areas of Wokingham, Winnersh and Woodley. Only in the south, e.g. Little Hill Road and Green Lane areas, is the noise and movement of traffic on the M4 and A329 (M) apparent.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Peaceful and open character of the undeveloped arable and pastoral landscape when removed from the intrusion of major roads to the south, which provides an escape in close proximity to the urban population.
- Rural settlement pattern of small villages with historic cores and farmsteads unified by the cohesive use of redbrick which provides a cultural record of the past and adds local distinctiveness.
- A network of narrow rural lanes with characteristic roadside ditches which contribute to scenic quality.
- Small wetland habitats, including drainage channels and numerous farm ponds which are valued for flora and fauna.
- Gently undulating terrace landform provides open and clear views to the wooded backdrop of the adjacent Loddon Valley.

Landscape Condition

The landscape is in moderate condition. The physical landscape, particularly the gently shelving landform, rural settlement pattern and openness of the rural landscape are intact. However there has been loss of hedgerows and replacement with post and wire fencing, as well as field amalgamation. Linear development along roads has occurred, and there is a suburban character to buildings in villages. An increase in traffic has led to the creation of informal passing places on the rural road network, and increased disturbance due to motorway noise from the M4 and A329 (M).

Key Issues

- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and wet woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change. Climate change is also likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows.
- Hedgerow loss associated with past expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Introduction of high coniferous boundaries around individual properties.
- Potential for sand and gravel extraction impacting the tranquillity and rural character of the area.
- Despite the presence of pasture there are no areas of species-rich grassland in this area due to increasingly intensive grassland management and conversion to arable land or pony grazing.
- Increasing pressure for horse/pony paddocks and grazing, particularly at settlement edges, leading to a decrease in rural intactness and affecting landscape condition.

- Drainage operations associated with development and agriculture affecting small wetland habitats.
- Demand for residential development increasing linear development along rural lanes and continuing to push towards the amalgamation of close settlements Whistley Green and Hurst impacting rural character. Incremental suburbanisation of buildings.
- Increasing traffic on rural lanes has led to creation of informal passing places and consequent 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.
- Increase in levels of background traffic noise from the M4 and A329 (M) particularly in the south of the area.
- Large-scale modern agricultural buildings are prominent in the rural landscape.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles lead to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Hurst River Terrace* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural and agricultural landscape with its scattered rural farmsteads and small red brick villages connected by narrow rural lanes.

The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the open views overlooking the adjoining floodplain of the Loddon. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration and management of the hedgerows. Opportunities also exist to restore lost wetland and grassland habitats and reinstate woodland planting, which may mitigate the influence of the M4/A329 (M).

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green.

Landscape Guidelines

- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species in order to create a more wooded character and provide screening of the M4. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the landscape. Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows and hedgerow trees as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinstall or repair hedgerows and hedgerow trees with native species where there are opportunities to do so.
- Manage the integration of equine activities into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and hedgerow trees and control of associated built development.
- Conserve, enhance and manage wetland and resist infilling of ponds and drainage ditches due to development or changes in land use.
- Reinstall lost grassland habitats on pastoral land.

- Maintain the sparse settlement pattern of villages and dispersed farms through control of new development, avoiding further linear spread of development.
- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes.
- Conserve the peaceful and open rural character of the open landscape between adjacent village centres, to protect the individual identity of settlements, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land remaining between Hurst and Whistley Green.
- Conserve the scenic value and rural character of the villages and the listed and historic buildings throughout the area, including within Hurst Conservation Area.
- Avoid detracting tall or large structures as well as high plantings of coniferous hedges, which would be very prominent in this open area.
- Resist proposals that introduce extensive or obtrusive elements e.g. pylons on the visually sensitive landscape.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways modifications, road widening, passing bays, infrastructure and signage.
- Ensure restoration plans for gravel extractions sites are in keeping with the character of the landscape and encourage opportunities for habitat creation. Resist proposals that would impact on the intactness or integrity of the landscape or habitats.
- Maintain views to the wooded backdrop of the Loddon valley. Consider the impact of any development on the views to the wooded horizon. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts, other vertical elements, and very large agricultural or domestic buildings which have the potential to be highly visible.
- Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate major roads, particularly the M4/A329 (M) on the boundary of the area.
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity in the landscape, ensuring development and associated infrastructure does not spread onto the river terrace.

