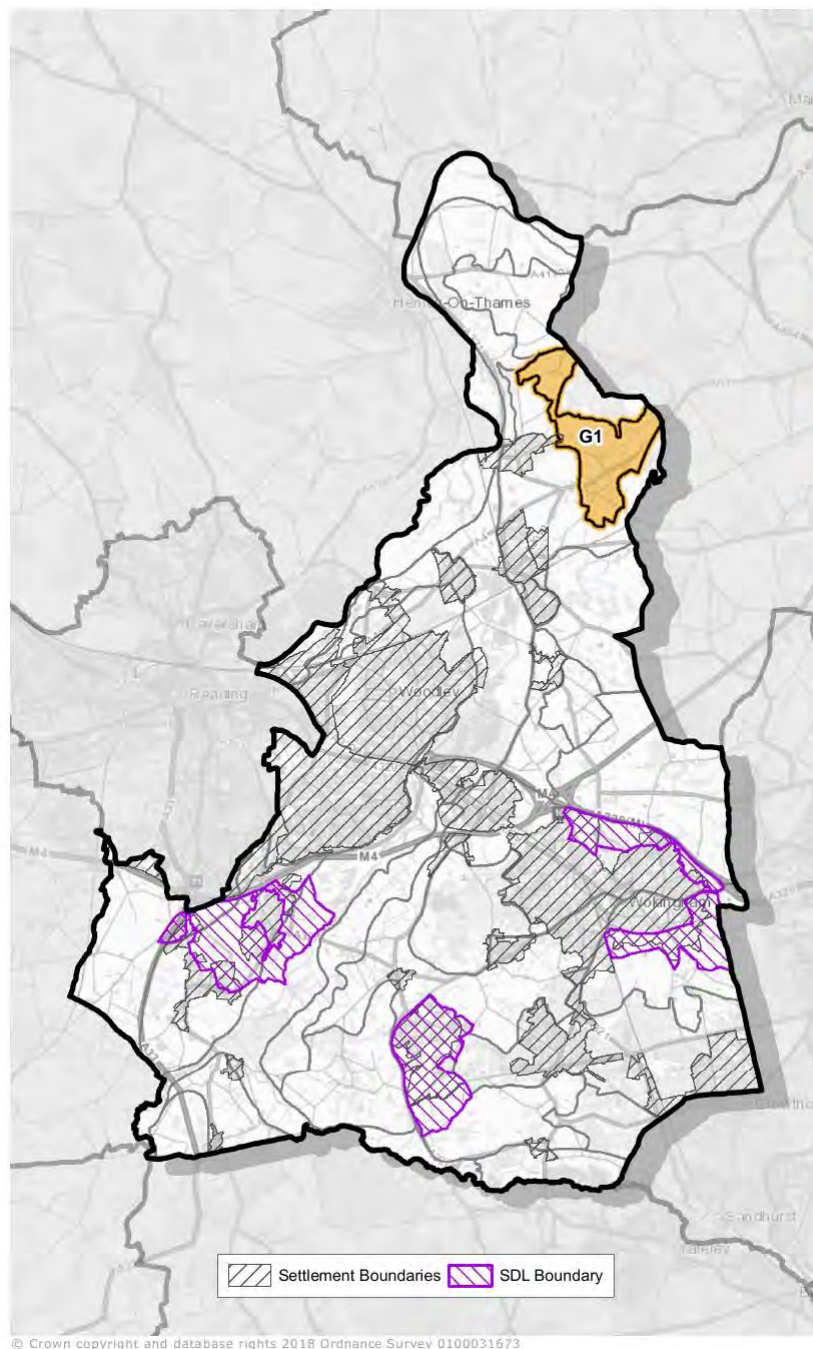


G: Farmed Chalk Slopes



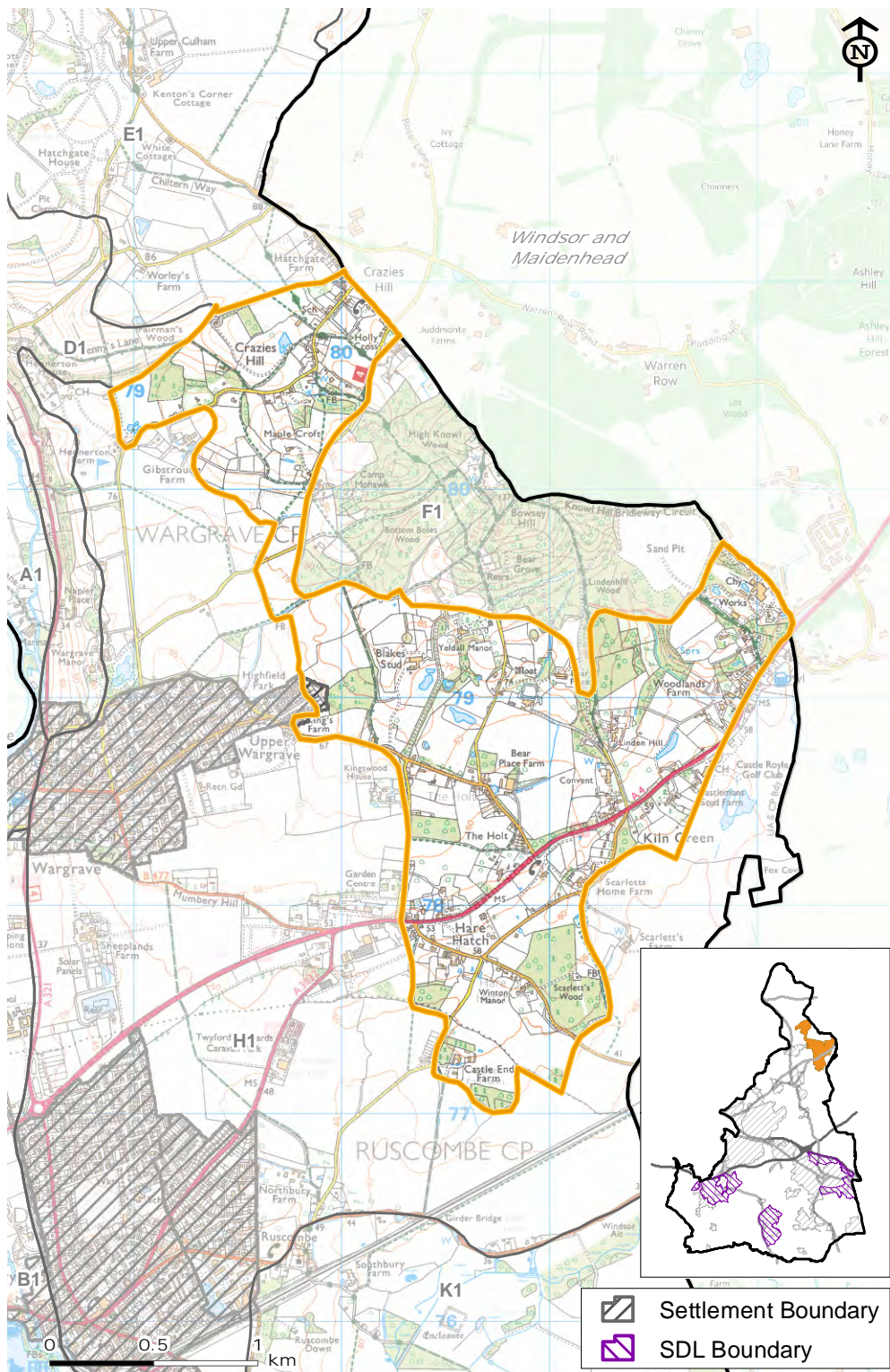
Description

The LCT is characterised by gently sloping landform supporting a mosaic of arable fields and pasture and small deciduous and mixed woodland blocks. Settlement is confined to small clustered rural hamlets, farmsteads and manors.

Landscape Character Areas

The Farmed Chalk Slopes LCT has one Landscape Character Area:

- G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes



SUMMARY

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 area is located in the north east of Wokingham Borough and is bounded by four different character areas: D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes, E1: Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau, F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls and H1: Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands. The limits of the character area have been influenced by human landscape elements, and predominantly follow the line of fields and secondary roads. These mapped features indicate a change in land use activity coinciding with changing underlying physical landscape elements of topography and geology.



Key Characteristics

- Sloping and gently undulating landform between 45 and 85m AOD which creates a transition between the flatter open ground of the Arable Chalk Lowland (H1) and hilly landscape of the Wooded Chalk Knolls (F1). The chalk formations are overlain by clayey sands of the Lambeth Group and London Clay. Poor drainage of the clay soils has resulted in roadside ditches and small farm ponds.
- Mixed agricultural land use of arable and pastoral fields, with compartmentalised land for horse grazing and exercising.
- An irregular pattern of small to medium sized field units bound by well-maintained hedgerows or wooden post and rail fencing. Larger fields in the south and west reflect the transition towards the arable farming of the chalk lowlands. Smaller irregular fields adjoin steeper ground on the woodland edge including pockets of well-preserved field systems of pre-18th century assarts.
- Numerous small woodland blocks and roadside belts of BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland, characteristically a combination of oak, ash and hazel, many of which are ancient. The ecological importance is recognised through LWS designation at **Fairman's Wood/Little Fairman's Wood, Cutler's Coppice, Scarlett's Wood** and Square Wood.
- A scattered rural settlement pattern of small linear villages and hamlets which align roads or form small clusters at crossroads as well as individual farmsteads, stud farms and large manors. These are connected by a network of leafy rural lanes crossing the landscape.
- A high number of listed buildings are scattered across landscape with clusters at Crazies Hill, Hare Hatch and Kiln Green.
- Landscaped parkland surrounding Georgian or Victorian manor houses , such as the moated manor at Bear Place (Scheduled Monument), Linden Hall and Yeldhall Manor (both Grade II listed), with its avenue of large but still young Wellingtonias. These parklands impart a designed character to parts of the landscape.
- 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).
- Tranquil farmed and estate character interrupted to the south by the busy A4 and the linear development of industrial and commercial properties alongside it.

Natural Landscape

- G1.1 The character area is underlain by clayey sands of the Lambeth Group and London Clay Formation which have been lain down over the Seaford and Newhaven Chalk Formations.
- G1.2 The overlying soils are Stagnogley soils of the Windsor series. These are clayey or loamy/clayey soils and suffer drainage problems due to an impermeable layer occurring at moderate depths. The poor drainage is indicated by the presence of roadside ditches. Drainage problems and undulating ground make this landscape less suited to large-scale mechanised arable farming and it supports mixed agricultural land use. There are a number of small farm ponds and moats associated with the farmsteads and manors.
- G1.3 The sloping and gently undulating landform, between about 45 and 85m AOD, creates a localised sense of enclosure, further exaggerated by the woodland cover. The landform appears

transitional – separating the much flatter, lower lying ground of character area H1: Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands and the distinctly elevated, hilly landscape of F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls.

- G1.4 The area is dominated by farmland, but there are a significant number of mixed and deciduous woodland blocks and belts, including ancient woodland. These are generally small but range in **size from the 12.3ha of Scarlett's wood to the 2.5ha of Cutlers coppice. The scattered wooded** areas provide an overt sense of enclosure due to the restriction of views which is further exaggerated by the presence of the wooded knolls at Bowsey Hill.
- G1.5 The ecological importance of these diverse woodlands is recognised through BAP priority habitat status and Local Wildlife Site (LWS) designation at **Fairman's Wood/Little Fairman's Wood, Cutler's Coppice, Square Wood and Scarlett's Wood** (noted for its rare hornbeam stands) and through inclusion of the area around Linden Hill within the Ashley and Bowsey Hills BOA and of Crazies Hill **within the Chiltern's Escarpment** BOA. The characteristic woodland type is a combination of ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*), generally with a history of management under a coppice with standards regime. This traditional management has commonly ceased and these traditional coppice woodlands are now often in a state of neglect.
- G1.6 The former Knowl Hill Brick Pits LWS is designated for the pools, scrub and wetland that have grown up around the pits. There are also small scattered ponds in this area, some of which are known to support great crested newts.
- G1.7 Farming is a mix of arable land and pasture contained within an irregular field pattern of varied size. Field shape is angular but irregular, probably as a result of their assart origins. Larger fields tend to be concentrated towards the west and south of the character area where they abut the arable landscape H1: Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands indicating the transition towards the arable land use of the chalk lowlands where conditions for mechanised farming techniques improve. Smaller, more irregular field units are prevalent to the north and east where they are associated with small settlements and where they neighbour the woodland edge of adjacent character area F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls. This is particularly apparent at Holly Cross and Maple Croft around Crazies Hill. Field boundaries are a mix of wooden post and rail with well managed native hedgerows. Where land has been divided for horse and pony grazing, field boundaries are often inconsistent and temporary in appearance.

Cultural Landscape

- G1.8 The Reading Bed soils of the area would have been generally unsuited to prehistoric cultivation, although there is a possible Roman villa site at Canhurst Farm, Knowl Hill. The area may have remained predominantly wooded until Saxon times when settlement expanded onto previously marginal areas resulting in clearance.
- G1.9 Hare Hatch was one of the old gates into The Royal Forest of Windsor. Place names such as Deane Farm, Dean Pit Farm and Deane Fields suggest the area was used for summer pasture by **settlements on the edge of the forest, while some of the frequent 'Bear' names, such as Bear Hill and Bear Ash,** could possibly derive from the Saxon bare meaning swine pasture, the swine being fattened on woodland fodder before autumn slaughter.
- G1.10 The small irregular fields, with uneven boundaries flanking the woodland, indicate piecemeal assart clearance of medieval/early post-medieval date and the area retains pockets of the best preserved and earliest enclosure landscapes in the borough.
- G1.11 The area remained largely unsettled, although a series of lanes developed converging on Bowsey Hill and linking the farmsteads distributed around the woodland edge. Later medieval settlement concentrated along the route of the Bath Road, with Knowl Hill, Kiln Green and Hare Hatch becoming stopping points for travellers. Crazies Hill remained a small and isolated hamlet.
- G1.12 Place names, such as Kiln Green, indicate the importance of post-medieval and modern brick making in the area, exploiting the adjacent London Clay. There were brick and lime works at Lindenhill Wood at Knowl Hill (the Star Brick Works which closed in 1992) and at Crazies Hill.

- G1.13 There is a dispersed rural settlement pattern consisting of large individual properties including farmsteads, manors and small linear villages and hamlets aligning rural lanes, or forming small clusters at junctions such as Crazies Hill, Hare Hatch and Kiln Green.
- G1.14 Crazies Hill village exhibits a range of interesting historic buildings including The Crazies (listed Grade II), **a country house built from Henley's former town hall, built in 1790 but subsequently moved to Crazies Hill in 1898** and the well house designed by Gertrude Jekyll above **Rebecca's Well**. Nearby at Holly Cross, Fox Steep (listed Grade II) is an Arts and Crafts style country house built in 1924 is of interest due to the use of wavy-edged elm and roofs finished at different levels.
- G1.15 Hare Hatch and Kiln Green are small hamlets and are located on the A4 Bath Road. Both retain coaching inns and properties of traditional vernacular. At Hare Hatch, the polychromatic Reading brick Georgian buildings of Old House, The Hill, Hare Hatch House and The Grange are all listed Grade II. At **Kiln Green, Castleman's (Grade II listed) is also of Georgian origin but bleak in appearance**. Other buildings of architectural note are the red brick Georgian property of Bear Place (Grade II* listed); the Convent of the Good Shepherd or Yeldall Manor (Grade II listed) a brick, half-timbered and gabled property built in 1894 with bay windows of various shape; and Linden Hall (Grade II listed) a property with two symmetrical bows and a tower.
- G1.16 Historic manors are a key feature of the rural landscape. Their parkland setting with sweeping lawns and coniferous standards imparts a designed character to parts of the landscape. A long straight avenue leading to Yeldall Manor is lined by Wellingtonias and is a striking feature. There **was a medieval moated 'manor'** at Bear Place, first mentioned in 1261. The present Bear Place was built in 1784, to the east of the moat, which became a feature of its landscape grounds. There are traces of other areas of parkland at Scarletts, built in 1765, and Linden Hill, although these estates have reverted to farmland.
- G1.17 There are a number of scattered farmsteads across the character area. The presence of Stud farms (Castlemans, Blakes Stud and Gibstroude) are characterised by pasture and horse exercising grounds.
- G1.18 Vehicular routes across the landscape are rural and narrow with the exception of the A4 running across the southern half, bypassing Kiln Green and Hare Hatch. Linear development along the A4 includes commercial units at Ladds Garden Village and horticultural polytunnels, a car showroom and Star Works at Knowl Hill, a former brick works and mineral extraction site now used for waste management and as an industrial estate.
- G1.19 The general absence of major roads makes for a landscape of relatively slow pace. Footpaths are concentrated in and around Crazies Hill including the Chiltern Way, and connect with the footpaths and restricted byways that filter through the wooded knolls of F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls.

Perceptual Landscape

- G1.20 Woodland blocks and belts (generally small in size) create subdivisions within the landscape, restricting the extent of views and contributing to a strong sense of enclosure. This is exaggerated further by the prominent wooded horizon provided by adjacent character area F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls.
- G1.21 The combination of small varied field patterns, woodland blocks and dispersed settlement of distinctly rural character creates a small scale, almost intimate landscape character.
- G1.22 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).

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Distinctly rural farmed and estate character due to the mosaic of 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 including BAP priority habitats and semi-natural ancient woodland, which provides valuable habitats.
- 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 have a localised impact on landscape character and contribute to the sense of place.
- Strong sense of intimacy and enclosure due to undulating topography and scattered woodlands which subdivide the landscape.
- Occasional views to the prominent wooded horizon provided by F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls.

Landscape Condition

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.

Key Issues

- Hedgerow loss associated with the expansion of fields and agricultural intensification due to the declining viability of small farms.
- Conversion of livestock grazing to hobby farms and for horse grazing resulting in the loss of grassland habitats and decline in traditional management practices. This has led to subsequent loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Temporary fencing and structures resulting in a decline in rural intactness.
- Changes in deciduous woodland structure through loss of species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands through cessation of traditional coppice management. The expansion of the coniferous component of woodlands in the past has resulted in a change in character of the woodlands and had a negative impact on the ground flora. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- Commercial use of historic manor houses and their estates as upmarket business parks leading to a dilution of distinct character of the parkland landscapes.
- 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.
- Pressure for golf courses that may have an impact on the character of the landscape.
- Demand for new residential expansion, infill and densification of existing settlements, inside and outside the area, eroding the rural character and tranquillity of the area and potentially eroding

the historic settlement form of the villages, hamlets, farmsteads and manors.

- Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening impacting tranquillity and threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- Commercial development pressure along the A4 Bath Road eroding rural character and settlement form.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing character notably varied farmed landscape and field boundaries, scattered semi-natural woodlands, and parkland landscapes, the robustness of which has declined. Open views to the prominent wooded horizon provided by the adjacent character area FI: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls should be maintained.

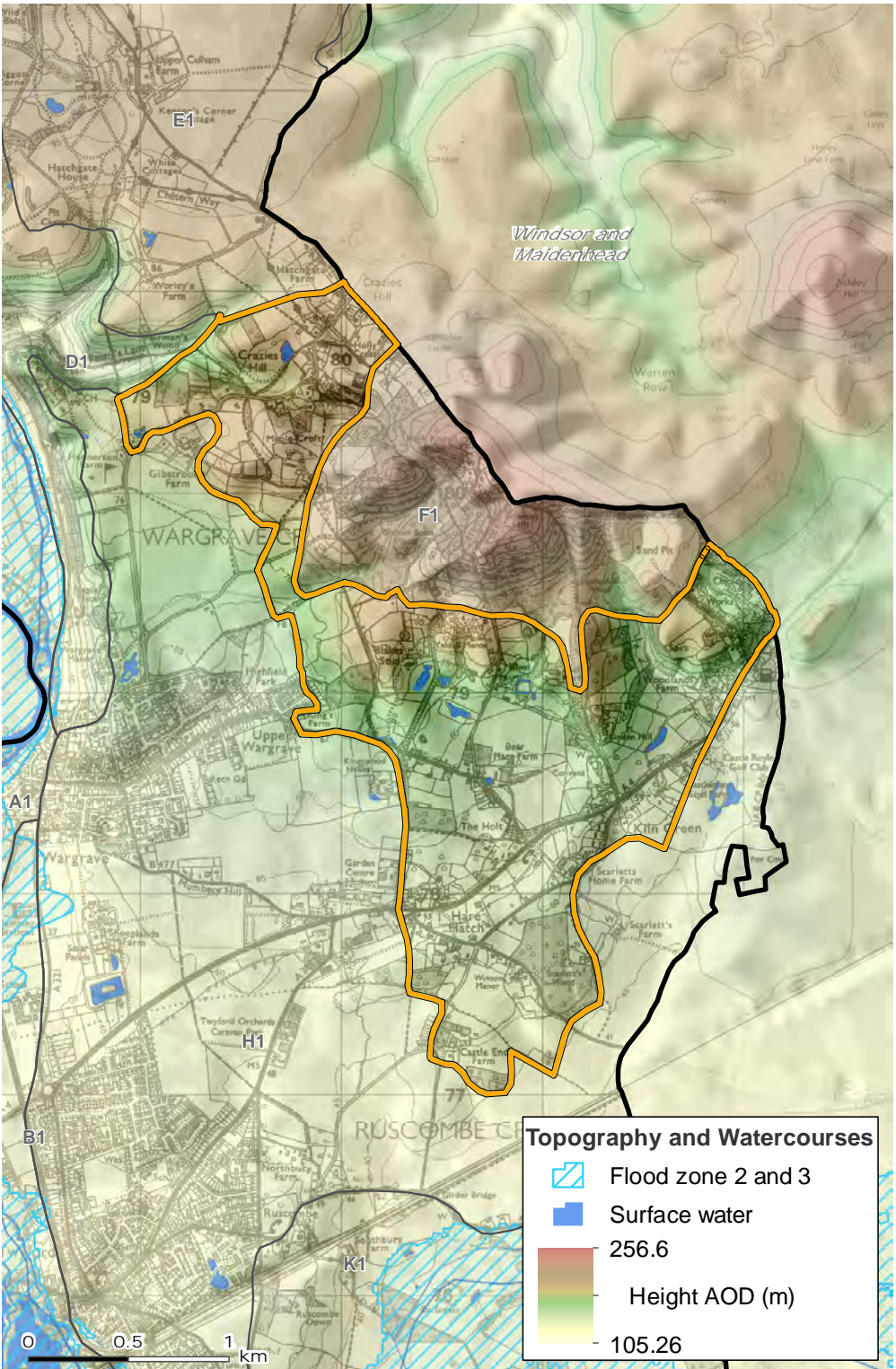
In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern and historic built form of the villages, hamlets, farmsteads and manors.

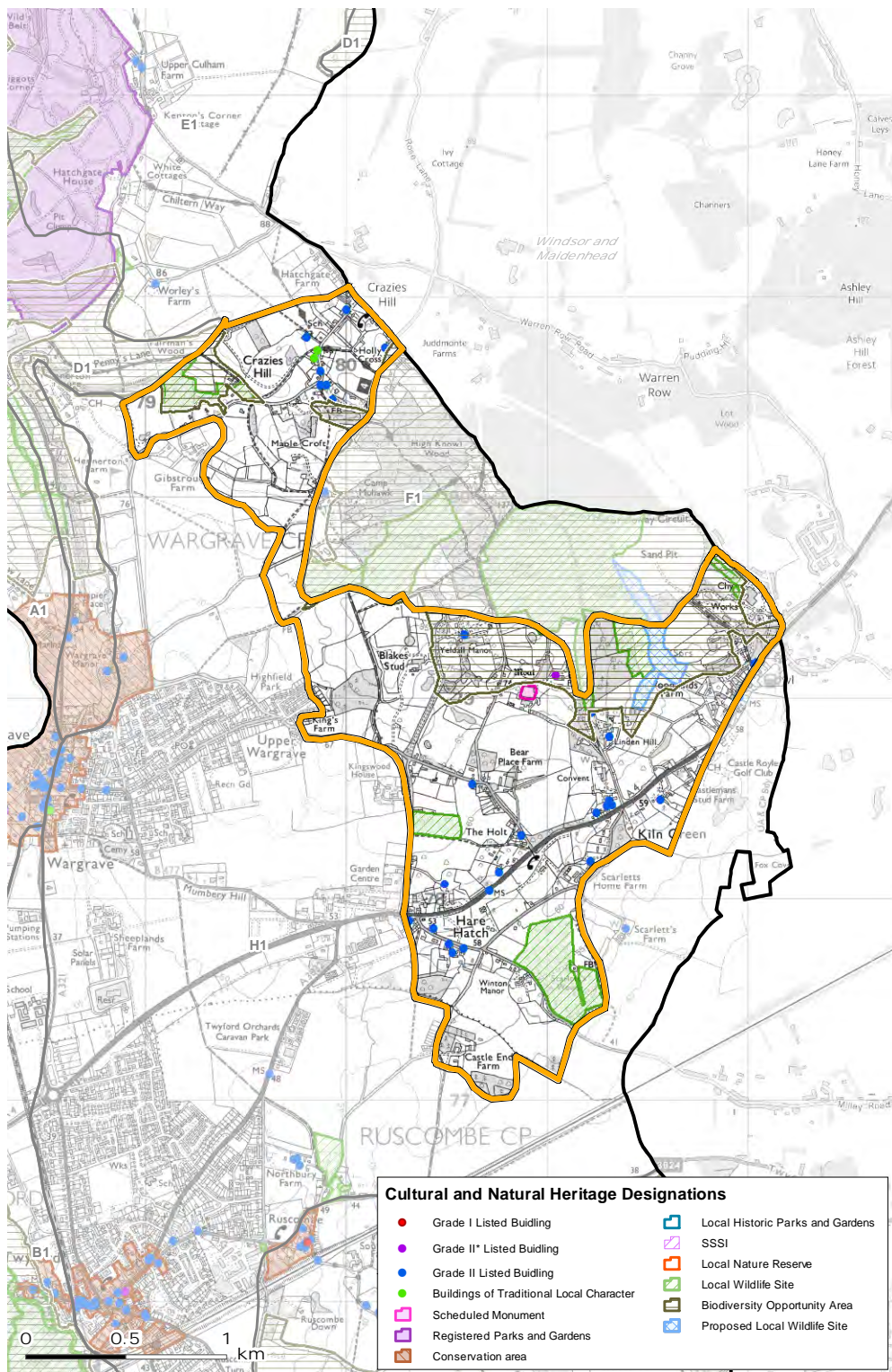
Landscape Guidelines

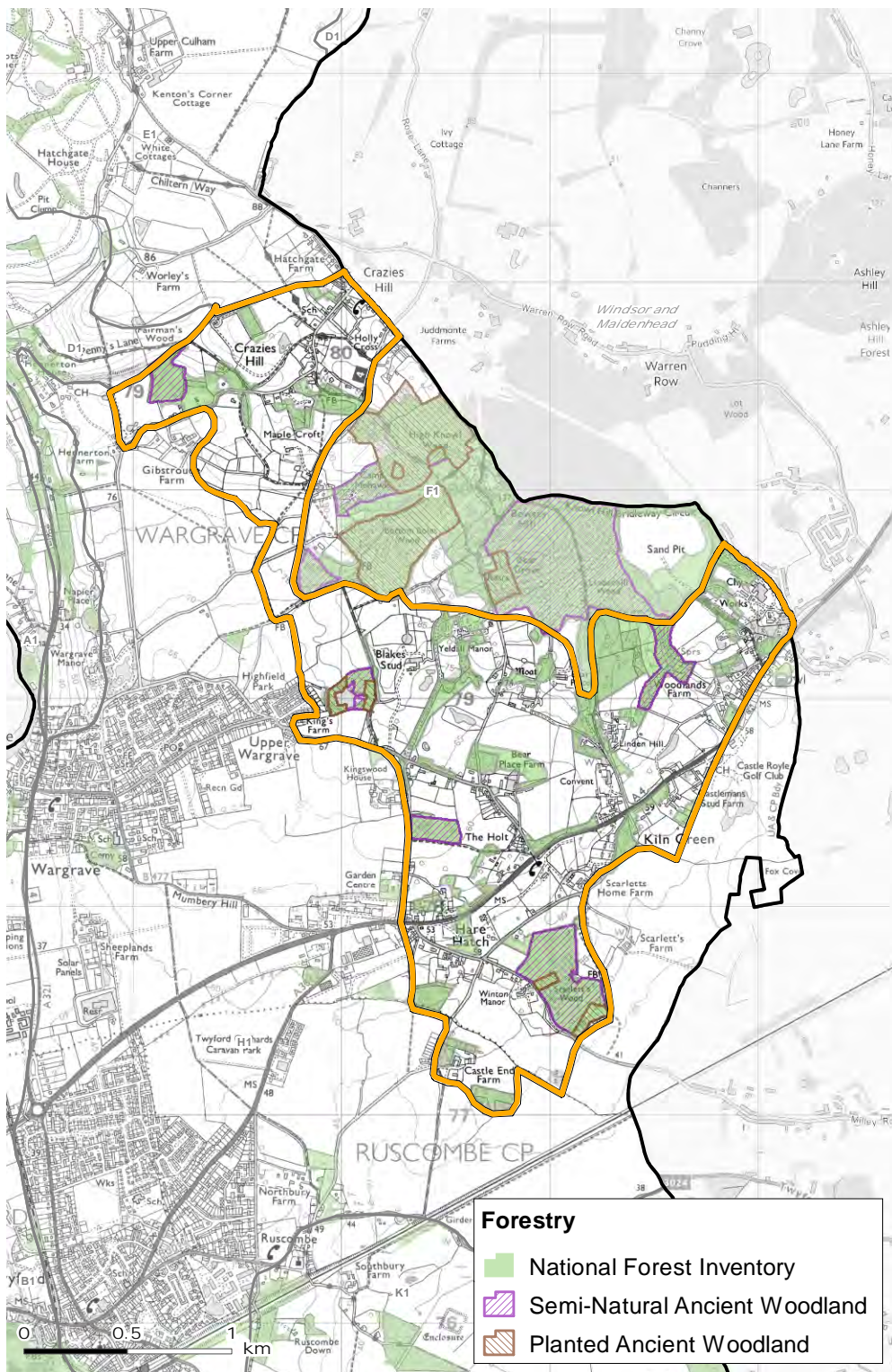
- Conserve existing woodland copses and belts including ancient woodlands. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Manage the integration of new woodland coppice using locally occurring native species and following the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnecting valley. Seek to avoid the introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Conserve the rural qualities of the farmed 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, manage, and enhance hedgerow field boundaries with standard oaks as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinststate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides.
- Conserve, protect, and enhance the intricate pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- Conserve, protect, and enhance the parkland landscapes associated with historic manor houses, planning for the next generation of parkland trees with a programme of tree planting.
- Manage the integration of equine related activities and hobby farms into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and control of associated built elements.
- Conserve, enhance and manage valued woodland habitats including BAP priority habitats and those designated as LWS. The area of land at around Linden Hill is part of the Bowsey Hills BOA and part of Crazies Hill is included within **the Chiltern's Escarpment** BOA. The network of diverse natural woodland habitats has been identified as a target for woodland habitat restoration, including replanting of ancient woodland sites. An appropriate woodland management regime is critical.
- Consider undertaking character appraisals/village design statements of key village settlements such as Crazies Hill, Hare Hatch and Kiln Green to identify distinctive features

worthy of conservation such as the variety of built styles, layouts and materials in order to protect their individual identity.

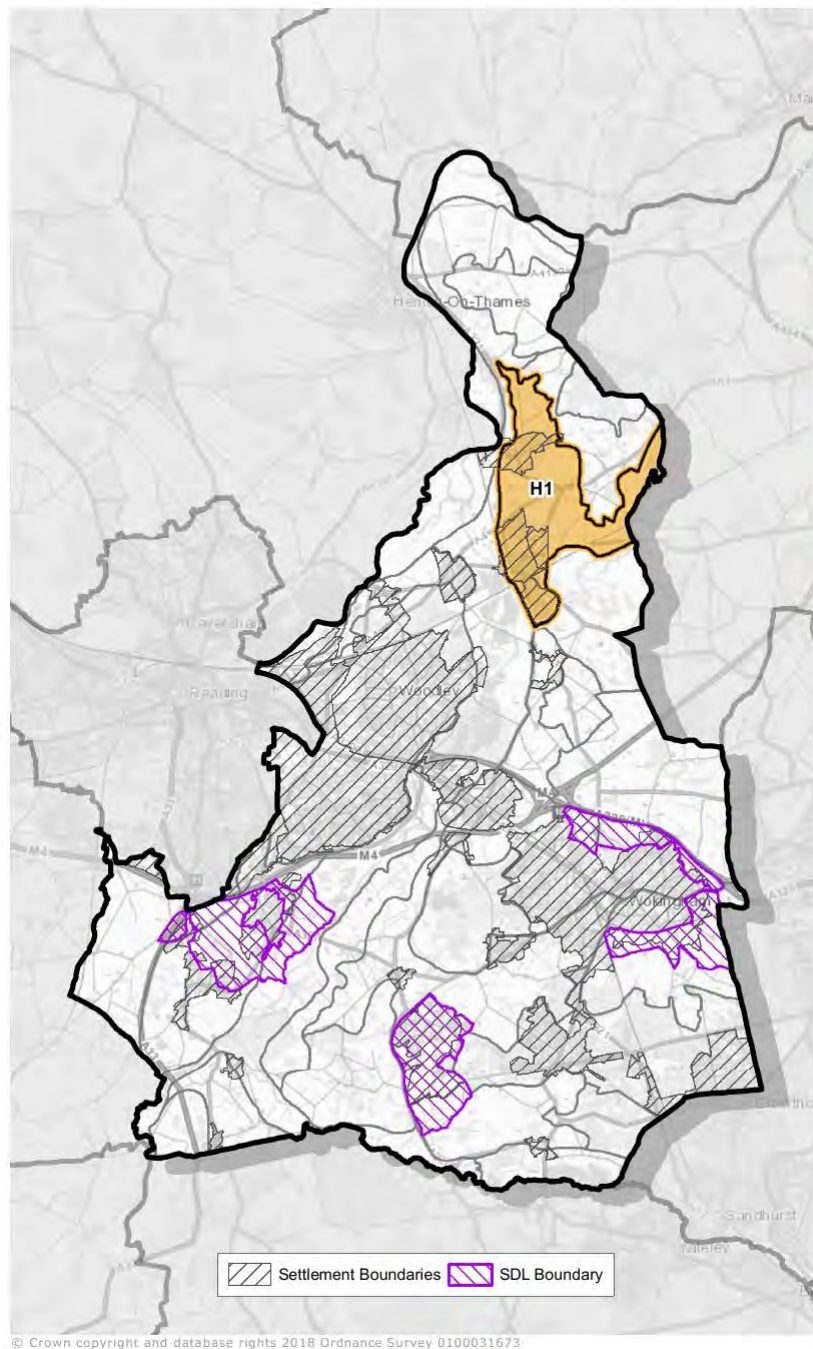
- Conserve the value of the numerous listed and historic buildings including farmsteads and large country manor houses and the parkland landscape associated with them.
- Conserve the individual identity of the villages and hamlets, farmsteads and manors through control of new development. In particular avoid the spread of linear development along the A4.
- Maintain and enhance the character of the historic leafy lanes with their ancient trees and unimproved road side verges. Resist unsympathetic highway improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural areas.
- Protect the views to the wooded knolls at Bowsey Hill and consider the effect of any change on the wooded hills on this adjacent area.
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity and intimate character of the landscape through the management of development.







H: Arable Chalk Lowlands



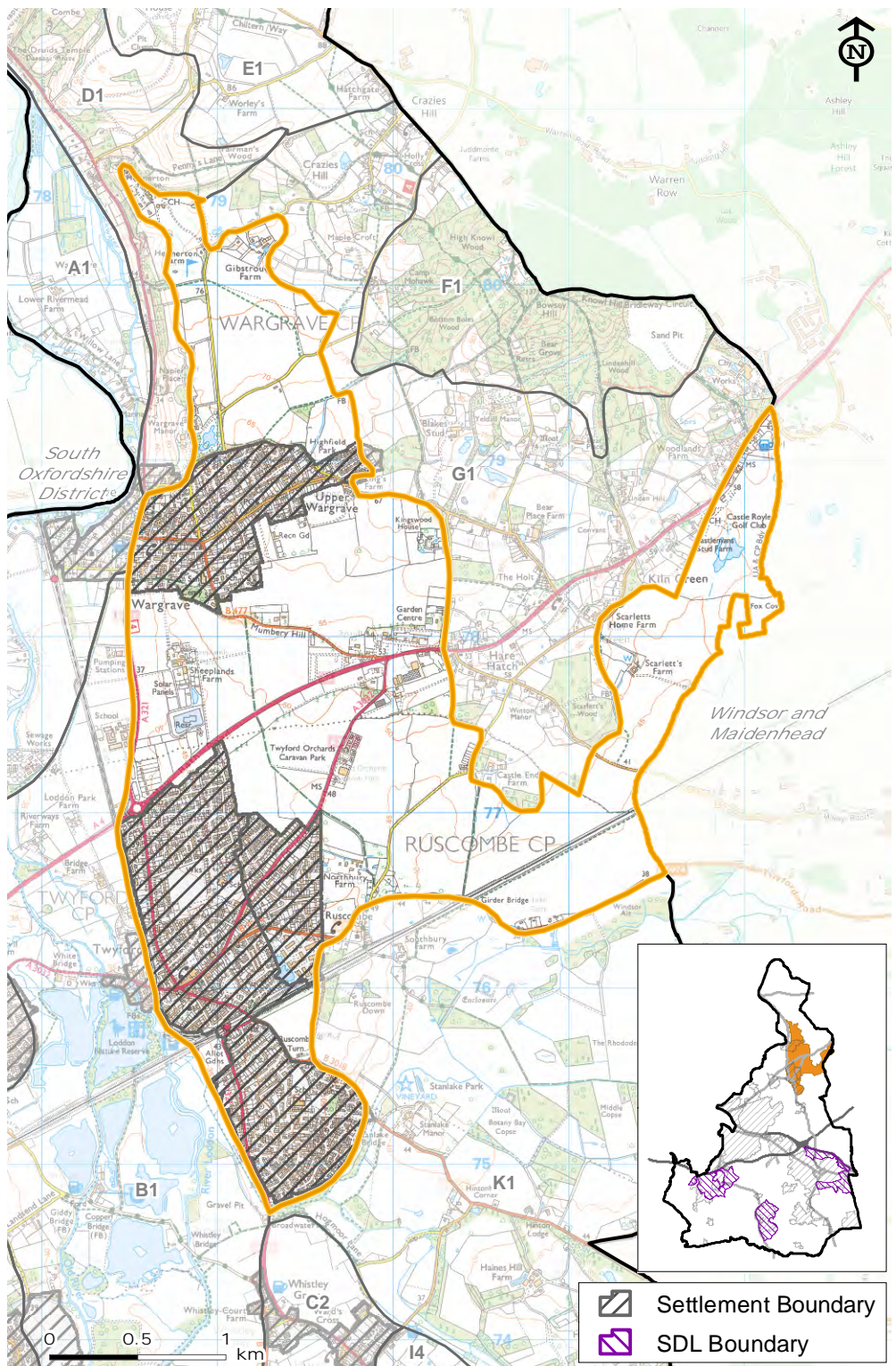
Description

The LCT is characterised by a flat to gently shelving landform, underlain by Seaford and Newhaven Chalk Formation. It supports arable farmland in large fields, and large riverside settlements. A lack of tree cover gives the landscape an open and expansive character.

Landscape Character Areas

The Arable Chalk Lowland LCT has one Landscape Character Area:

- H1: Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowland



SUMMARY

A flat to gently shelving landscape associated with the lowland chalk landscapes of the borough which supports large scale arable farming and the large riverside villages of Wargrave and Twyford. The landscape is open and expansive due to the lack of tree cover.

The area is located towards the north of the borough. The western boundary is defined by A1: Thames River Valley and B1: Loddon River Valley With Open Water. The subtle change in landform forms a discrete transition but follows the western boundaries of the riverside settlements of Twyford and Wargrave, where historic development follows the edge of the floodplain. The northern boundary with D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes is defined by a change in landform to steep wooded slopes. The eastern boundary is represented by the administrative boundary although this character area extends into the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. To the north, a more intricate land use pattern reflects a change in landscape character with G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes. The south to southeast edge is abutted by K1: Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland where the B3024 marks a change in land use and geology.



Key Characteristics

- A distinctly flat to gently shelving landform, rising from 40m to 80m AOD and underlain by a chalk geology with free draining loam soils. This is a transitional landscape between the river valley floodplains of the River Thames and Loddon and wooded knolls at Bowsey Hill.
- Intensive working arable farmland dominates with extensive areas of horticultural polytunnels between the A4 and Mumbery Hill sheltered by poplar belts.
- Extensive field units of no apparent pattern and with no obvious boundary divisions due to field amalgamation to support intensive mechanised farming methods. The area is largely devoid of woodland. Scrubby margins where fields directly align to roads give an indication of poor management.
- Enclave of plant nurseries with associated car parks along the A4 near Hare Hatch.
- Settlement is concentrated in the riverside towns of Twyford and Wargrave which have extended from the Loddon/Thames floodplain to the chalk slopes, **with 'market town' architecture** and peripheral post-war and modern dwellings. The Conservation Areas of both towns contain clusters of historic buildings. Farmland maintains separation between these settlements.
- Linear road and rail transport corridors, including the A4 (T), A3032 and A321 which run through the landscape and create a sense of disturbance in an otherwise peaceful landscape.
- Sense of remoteness due to the largely undeveloped character away from Twyford and Wargrave.
- Strong sense of openness and homogeneity due to the lack of field divisions. Poplar and coniferous shelterbelts provide vertical elements across the landscape.
- Open views across the flat landscape due to the lack of enclosing elements.
- The wooded knolls at Bowsey Hill create a sense of distant visual enclosure in an otherwise exposed landscape.

Natural Landscape

- H1.1 The landscape is predominantly underlain by a thin succession of Seaford and Newhaven Chalk Formations, with areas of Lambeth Group clays, silts and sands, particularly at Ruscombe. The Argillic Brown Earths that occur to the west of the area are well-drained, fine or coarse and loamy, locally stony and shallow and associated with slowly permeable clayey alluvial soils that are affected by high ground water and occasional short term floods. The Stagnogley Soils that occur to the east of the area are clayey or loamy over clayey soils with drainage that is impaired at moderate depths by an impermeable layer.
- H1.2 This landform is relatively undifferentiated with a total range of between 40m AOD where the landscape meets the floodplain and 80m AOD at the most elevated area at Hennerton House. The land shelves very gently in places creating a subtly undulating landform, however it generally appears flat contrasting with the dramatic backdrop of the wooded knolls at Bowsey Hill. The flatness of the land, combined with free draining soils, provide the ideal conditions for mechanised, intensive arable farming.

- H1.3 The rural landscape is mostly under arable farming characterised by a seamless expanse of large fields with sporadic boundaries of single species, short flailed hedges where these occur. There are also extensive areas of horticultural polytunnels between the A4 and Mumbery Hill sheltered by poplar belts.
- H1.4 Hedgerow loss is attributed to agricultural mechanisation and intensive farming methods. Today, scrubby margins define the interface between fields and roads, reducing the perceived condition of the landscape.
- H1.5 The area is largely devoid of woodland although mature coniferous and poplar shelter belt planting on roadside margins and on the perimeter of individual properties are an eye-catching feature in this open landscape. The area has one Local Wildlife Site (LWS) at Ruscombe and Vale Woods valued for its varied BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland, pond, swamp and rough grassland.

Cultural Landscape

- H1.6 A low density of late Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement evidence suggests that there may have been early clearance of the woodland and cultivation of the chalk soils, with an expansion of prehistoric settlement from the river valley. By the Roman period there were villa settlements, and it is possible that some of the boundaries of the villa estates survived into the Saxon period.
- H1.7 At the time of Domesday, Wargrave was one of the richest and most populous places in East Berkshire. It became a market town in the 13th century but was eclipsed by the growth of Reading and bypassed by the Bath Road. In contrast, Twyford developed due to its location on the Bath Road. There are few other settlements in the area, and the dispersed farmsteads are linked by a loose network of country lanes.
- H1.8 **The area's predominantly rural landscape is characterised by medium and large straight-sided fields typical of Parliamentary enclosure, although there are smaller and less regular fields immediately around the farms adjacent to Hare Hatch, Kiln Green and Knowl Hill.** From the 19th century the land has supported largely arable farming and the growing of vegetables, the good loam soils of the chalk being ideal for nurseries and market gardening common today. This has resulted in considerable amalgamation of fields.
- H1.9 Settlement is a key component of the landscape and is almost entirely concentrated in the western half of the area within the riverside villages of Twyford, located beside the Loddon valley towards the south, and Wargrave located at the confluence of the Thames and Loddon Rivers towards the north. These historic villages have extended over time away from the floodplain and onto the surrounding chalk slopes disguising to a degree the distinction between the river valley, river terrace and chalk landscapes.
- H1.10 **Wargrave's** long history is reflected in its architectural character, with much of the village afforded Conservation Area status. The High Street is the main north-south arterial route through the village and contains a variety of building styles. It is the array of design and detailing that provide a varied and interesting streetscape. Brick and flint details, deep-pitched roof lines, timber framed cottages and rendered brickwork are typical, along with warm orange-red roofing tiles and chimney pots. The narrowness of the High Street, the clustered density of the terrace buildings and the staggered frontages all evoke an intimate, organic character - one of distinctly human-scale. The Village Hall or Woodclyffe Hall is a landmark building. Built in 1905, it contains an ornate-bow or oriel window under its gable, an overhanging clock and an ornate, patterned façade. The library at Church Street has a similar decorative frontage.
- H1.11 Twyford was developed where the London-Bath Road crossed the River Loddon and is larger in size and less compact in form than Wargrave. The town has good transport connections with the Great Western Main Line Railway connecting Twyford directly with London and Reading and three **'A' roads cutting** through and skirting the settlement. **Expansion of the settlement in the 1960's** has diluted the nucleated shape of the village with housing estate development occurring to the north, east and south. This expansion has almost doubled the size of the settlement.

- H1.12 Twyford retains a central village core and the crossroads acts as the main shopping area. This central area has an urban fabric of mixed age and style. There are a number of polychromatic Reading brick buildings with burnt header courses, yellow brick and flint banding, Victorian properties exhibiting diaper brickwork and newer 1960s buildings of dark brick and slate roofs. As with Wargrave, a significant area of the village is designated as a Conservation Area.
- H1.13 Aside from the settlements of Wargrave and Twyford, the landscape is largely undeveloped comprising scattered farms and individual houses. There are also larger properties such as Wargrave Manor located on higher ground (discussed in D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes) with commanding views over the landscape.
- H1.14 The character is affected to the east by the presence of a concentration of nurseries around Hare Hatch, extending beyond the borough boundary. These are characterised by their large car parking forecourts, glasshouses and commercial appearance, although some appear to be in decline with neglected surrounds.
- H1.15 The relatively flat landscape and proximity to Reading has led to the development of a number of transport corridors with the A321, A3032 and A4 cutting through or forming the boundaries of the character area. The Great Western Main Line Railway runs through the south of the area.
- H1.16 Recreational elements include two golf courses in the far north west and north east of the LCA; however, there is limited recreational access into the area with only two footpaths and three bridle paths.

Perceptual Landscape

- H1.17 The landscape exhibits an overriding open character due to the flat topography, predominantly homogenous land use and lack of woodland. However, the wooded hills to the northeast provide a degree of distant visual enclosure. Similarly, the four character areas bordering the landscape have characteristics that influence this area. The landscape, therefore, to some degree has a **'borrowed'**, as opposed to intrinsic, sense of place.
- H1.18 The open nature of the field system permits panoramic views across the landscape and beyond into other character areas. Views are largely unobstructed by vertical elements, except in areas with boundary shelter belts. Posts carrying overhead wires are a feature, but are unobtrusive.
- H1.19 George Orwell resided at Scarletts Farm with the Warburg family - returning to country living after many years spent in the city. Elizabeth Cader-Cuff (1999) in her book **'Walks with Writers' notes how Orwell's 'The Lion and the Unicorn' was written here while Second World War bombers flew overhead, perhaps inspired by the openness of the landscape.**
- H1.20 William Gosling (1824-1883) painted **'Harvest Time at Hennerton'** – assumed to be in this area - a painting which appears to have reflected artistic excellence as the Art Journal commented in 1873:

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

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Rural character and sense of openness of the lowland landscape due to the homogenous land use in large amalgamated fields, flat topography and lack of trees.
- Rural buffer and sense of separation provided by the farmed landscape to the settlements of Twyford and Wargrave.
- Historic settlements with vernacular interest designated as Conservation Areas with distinctive riverside settings which provide a cultural record of the past.

- Borrowed character from adjacent landscape character areas which imparts a sense of place.
- Views across the arable landscape to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and wooded hills to the north east which provide a degree of distant visual enclosure.

Landscape Condition

The distinct flat-shelving landscape and settlements with vernacular interest and open views to surrounding character areas are in good condition. **The landscape does however 'borrow' much of its character from the adjacent landscape character areas as opposed to having a strong, 'intrinsic' sense of place.** Elements to improve include the scrubby margin field boundaries and intensively farmed arable land.

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 and soil erosion associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.
- Presence of marginal agricultural land of poor visual character, being kept in 'hope' value, particularly around settlement edges.
- Pressure for expansion, infill and densification within existing settlements, particularly in Twyford and Wargrave leading to loss of individual settlement identity and potential amalgamation with adjacent settlements, such as the development at Twyford/Ruscombe.
- Electrification of the Great Western Main Line which cuts through the area as part of the Crossrail service to Twyford Station. The gantries and catenary arrays have had a negative impact on the landscape.
- Pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly in this well-populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual and aural intrusion of transport corridors.
- Commercial development pressure along the A4 Bath Road eroding rural character and settlement form.
- Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings or Solar Photovoltaic (PV) panels leading to visual intrusion in the open landscape.
- Expansion of horticultural polytunnels and associated shelterbelts across the landscape leading to visual intrusion of these elements and affecting the characteristic openness of the landscape.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Landscape Strategy

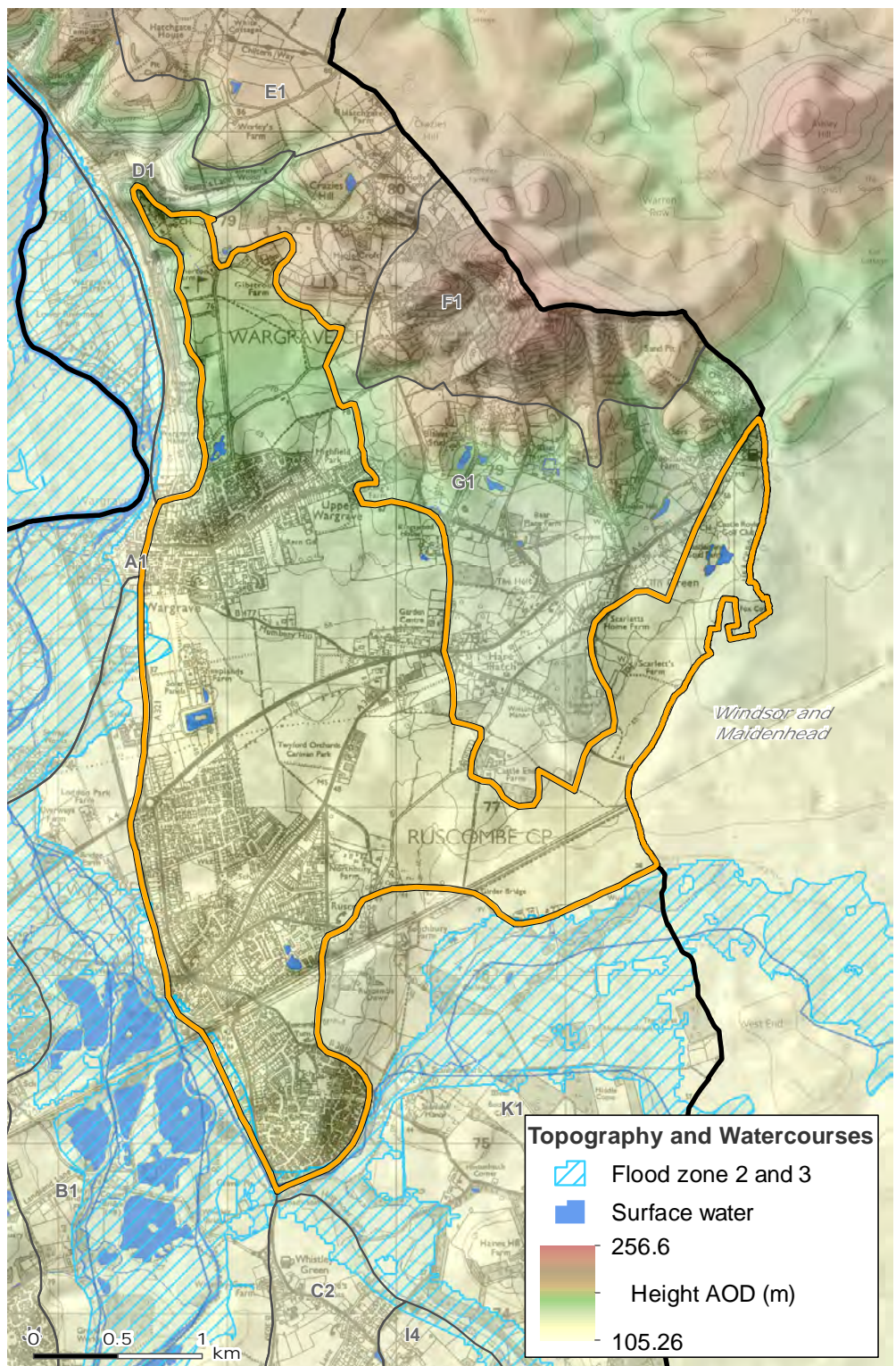
To maintain the landscape character of the *Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands* the following

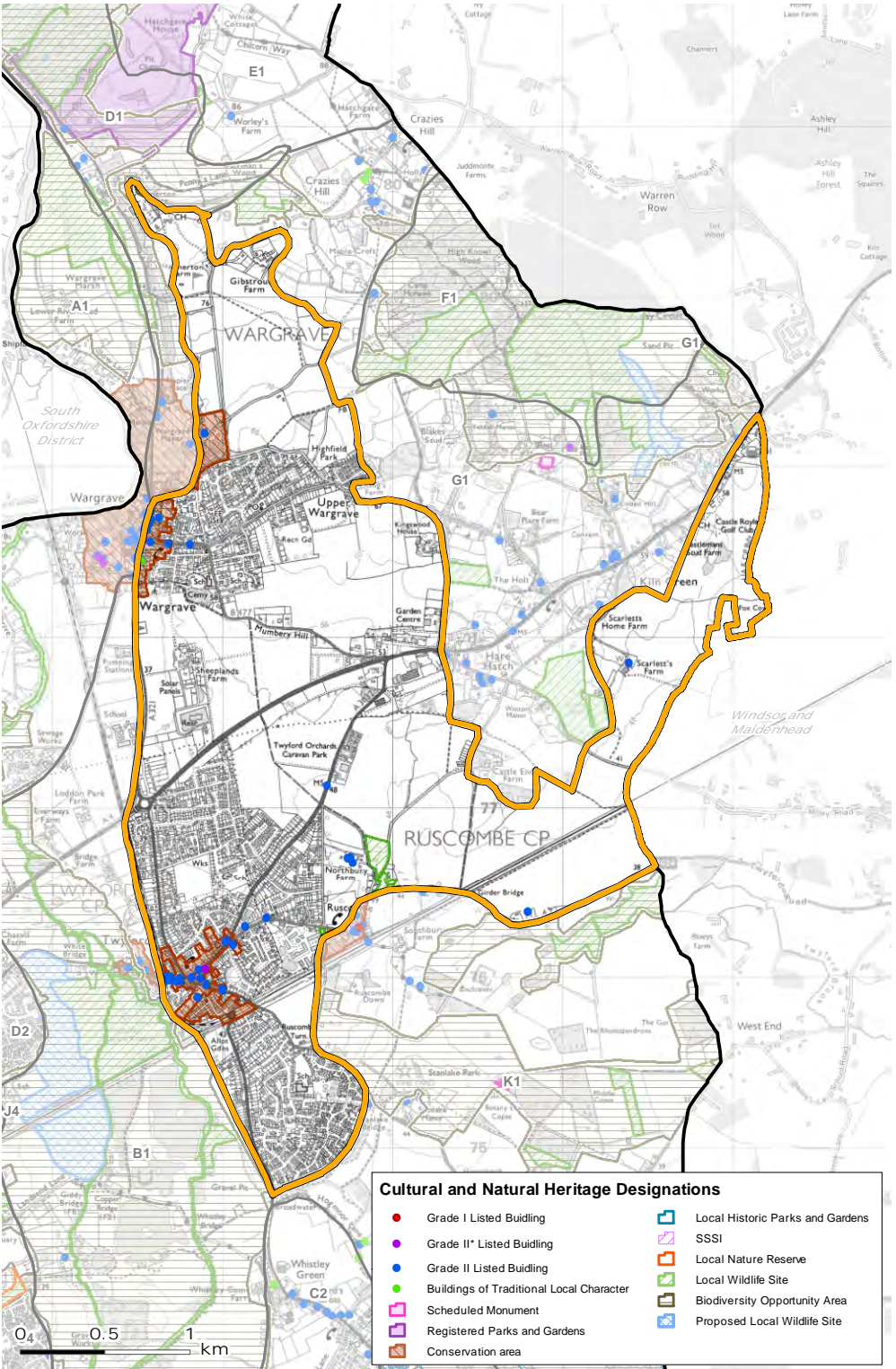
strategy is required: to enhance existing landscape character. There are management opportunities to improve the condition, intactness and presentation of the farmed landscape without affecting the sense of openness (central to the character of the landscape) particularly where this permits views across the Thames and Loddon Valleys and to the wooded hills.

In terms of development, the aim is conserve the rural setting and gaps between settlements and maintain the integrity of settlement identity, particularly enhancing the character along the A4 Bath Road.

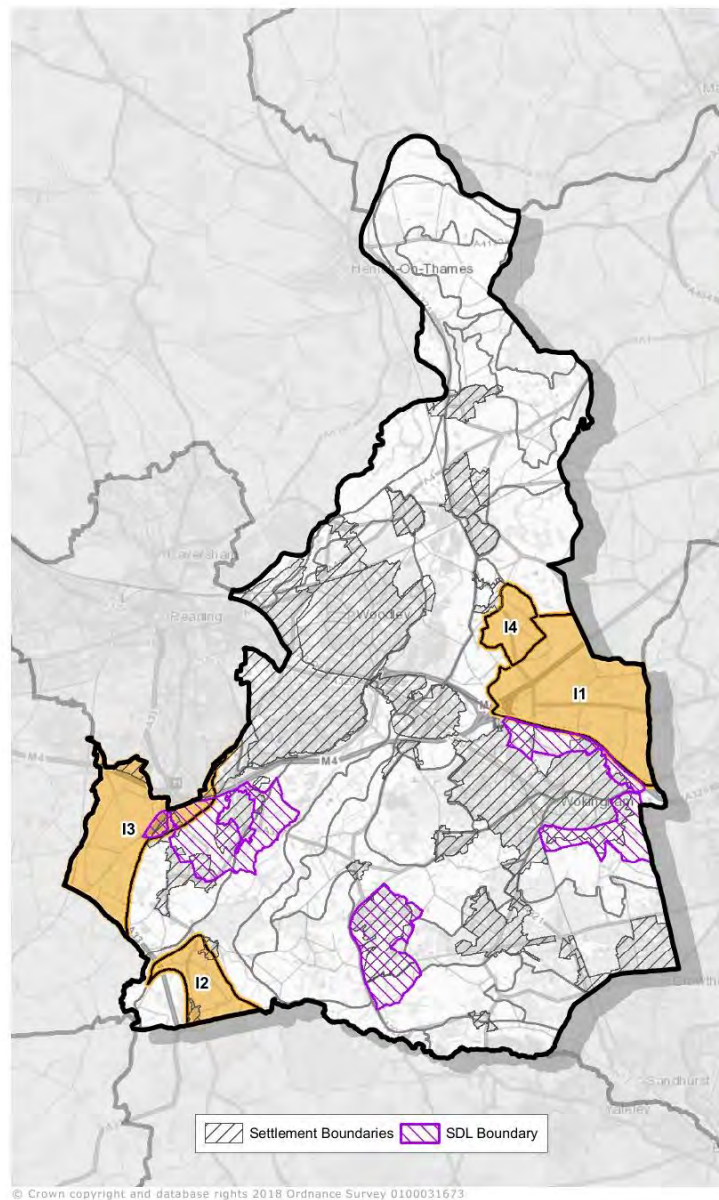
Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve the rural qualities of the farmed 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.
- Reinstate or repair remaining hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides.
- Conserve the rural character of the farmed landscape between adjacent historic towns and villages 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 between Wargrave and Twyford and avoid linear development between Hare Hatch and Twyford along the A4. Prevent encroachment into the Thames/Loddon Valleys.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through hedges, new wooded boundaries and large-species tree planting to provide visual screening and to enhance landscape character, while conserving significant views to landmark features.
- Increase the limited extent of native deciduous woodland using locally occurring native species linking to existing BAP priority habitat woodland sites in adjacent character areas.
- Recreate chalk grassland communities where these have been lost.
- Conserve historic buildings and identify local styles, layouts, densities and materials that may be appropriate in new buildings and for the landscape spaces between these buildings.
- 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.
- Use appropriate tree and hedgerow planting to help integrate existing and proposed roads.
- Minimise visual impact of large agricultural buildings, expansion of agricultural polytunnels and Solar Photovoltaic (PV) panels on the open landscape through careful siting and design. These developments and associated shelterbelts have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.
- Closely manage linear development along the A4 Bath Road, enhancing the built character whilst maintaining settlement gaps and the space required for green infrastructure.
- Protect open views to adjacent areas. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements which may obscure views.
- Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution through the sensitive siting of any new development, especially any proposed night-time lighting.





I: Farm Clay Lowland



Description

The LCT is characterised by a lowland vale landscape underlain by clay with alluvium or river terraces. This has given rise to sparsely settled landscape dominated by large-scale arable fields with some pasture, which is semi-enclosed within wooded horizons.

Landscape Character Areas

The Farmed Clay Lowlands LCT is subdivided into four Landscape Character Areas:

- I1: Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowlands
- I2: Riseley Farmed Clay Lowlands
- I3: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowlands
- I4: Hurst Farmed Clay Lowlands

SUMMARY

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.

The Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland is located in the centre east of Wokingham Borough. The A329 (M) motorway marks the southern boundary which represents the urban edge of J1: Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay. The borough boundary marks the eastern extent, although the character extends into Bracknell Forest and Windsor and Maidenhead. The northern and western boundaries are more complex and are related to the distinctive flat landscape of C2: Hurst River Terrace, the wetland character of K1: Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland and the related but distinct landscape of I4: Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland with its smaller field system and greater proportion of paddocks.



Key Characteristics

- Large scale rolling to gently undulating landform between 40m AOD and 75m AOD, rising to a subtle ridgeline. The area is underlain by London Clay with localised river terrace gravel deposits in more elevated locations.
- Waterlogged clay soils have resulted in numerous farm ponds, drainage channel and small watercourses although these are often hidden from view. A network of small streams relate to the Emm Brook, a tributary of the River Loddon.
- Large geometric blocks of deciduous woodland, often BAP priority habitat and some of ancient origin, create wooded horizons. Many are designated as LWS (Furze Covert, Pond Wood, **Tippen's Wood, North Ockett Wood, Swain's** Copse and Long Copse). Pebblestone Copse adjacent to the A329 (M) has BAP priority habitat wet woodland.
- Agricultural landscape defined by large, open, geometric arable fields of irregular shape. Hedgerows are largely lost or denuded, although mature oak standards remain a common feature of fields and along roadsides.
- Pastoral farming associated with the manors along the ridge (e.g. Ashridge Manor and Bill Hill) and a number of stud farms, gallops, particularly adjacent to the A329 (M) and M4.
- Sparse settlement comprising ribbon settlement along the ridgeline and scattered manor houses and farmsteads, the latter typically built with traditional brick, weatherboard and clay tile, although there is no overriding local vernacular. There are clusters of Grade II **listed buildings at Bill Hill Park and Ruston's Farmhouse.**
- Historic parks and gardens at Billingbear and Bill Hill Park, Hurst which are locally listed.
- Straight and narrow roads with banks and ditches, lined by woodland and rhododendron in the east. This grid pattern reflects post-medieval routes through the former forest landscape, which once fell within The Royal Forest of Windsor.
- Rural and peaceful character, although this is eroded locally by noise and movement along the A329 (M) and M4 motorways.
- The open landscape allows framed and distant views over the surrounding area including to the northern edge of Wokingham town, with its prominent church spire and east to the woodland in neighbouring Bracknell Forest. The wide horizons are affected by pylons and poles.

Natural Landscape

- I1.1 The landform is transitional occurring at between 40m and 75m AOD and has a broadly undulating to rolling character rising from the flatter areas located in the north around Broad Common to a gentle ridgeline crossing west-east from the subtle hill at Bill Hill towards Binfield. The area is underlain by a broad belt of stiff blue London Clay, which has given rise to impeded drainage and occasionally waterlogged conditions.
- I1.2 Numerous small watercourses and drainage channels cross the landscape, although they are generally hidden from view. South of Ashridge Wood there are small southerly draining reaches of Emm Brook, a tributary of the River Loddon. North of the ridge the branching network of tiny streams relates to the upper reaches of Billingbear Brook, which flows into the River Loddon.

Along the course of these streams a number of small ponds have been created. Ponds have also been formed associated with the farmsteads and manors.

- 11.3 This lowland clay vale landscape is suited to arable farming and there are numerous large arable fields that have been continuously amalgamated resulting in the loss of hedgerows. Remnant oak standards mark many of these former hedge-lines and are a feature of the landscape. Permanent and improved pasture, which is dominated by sheep grazing, tends to be associated with manors along the ridgeline. These areas also display a more heathy character, including birch (*Betula*) and bracken with gorse (*Ulex*). Stud farms and equestrian centres with associated gallops also occur, particularly along the motorways. These are uncommon within Wokingham Borough, and are less formal than those of the Berkshire Downs.
- 11.4 Wooded horizons are characteristic of this area. These are created by woodland within this landscape and in the adjoining areas, such as the wooded boundaries on the edge of Wokingham. The area includes a large proportion of woodland arranged in straight-edged blocks or more irregular large copses. The woodland is often associated with the ridgeline, such as the linear shelterbelts of Ashridge Wood, or located adjacent to the tributary streams, as at Pond Wood. These woodlands are often BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland, and ancient and are designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). Pebblestone Copse contains BAP priority habitat wet woodland. The area around Ashridge Wood, Beech Wood, Pond Wood and **Tippen's Wood** is part of the Waltham to Binfield Woodlands and Parklands BOA and has been identified as a target for habitat restoration and positive management of woodland and creation of lowland meadow habitats.
- 11.5 Mixed woodlands including ornamental conifers and small areas of parkland are found particularly adjacent to the manor houses. Coniferous trees and hedges define the boundaries of many of the smaller properties.

Cultural Landscape

- 11.6 Although Mesolithic and Neolithic finds indicate exploitation of the woodland, there is no evidence of settlement until the Romano-British period.
- 11.7 This area fell within The Royal Forest of Windsor. There was a medieval deer park at Billingbear, first mentioned in 1208. The parkland around Billingbear Park is now cultivated land, although two fishponds remain. The **'Bear' name** is possibly indicative of the presence of **'bare' or swine** pasture. It has also been suggested locally that it could relate to the ancient practice of bear baiting within the borough. There was also a park at Ashridge in 1319, which originated as an assart in The Royal Forest of Windsor and reverted to the Crown in the 15th century. Large areas **of woodland survive, such as Tippen's Wood, but Ashridge Wood** survives only around the margins of its former extent.
- 11.8 The large rectangular fields on Broad Common represent the amalgamation of a regular grid of earlier fields, themselves the product of the Parliamentary enclosure of the former common. There is a similar pattern extending south to Forest Road, one of a grid of predominantly straight roads that cross the area, representing the post-medieval opening up of the woodland.
- 11.9 The former forest landscape is reflected in the generally low level of settlement, there being no villages and only widely dispersed farmsteads. The pattern of narrow land-parcels associated with individual dwellings strung out along Forest Road, for instance at Kingscote, represents late 19th and 20th century development. Bill Hill house, listed at Grade II, is an early Georgian country house altered in the 19th century, and also had a landscaped park, which partially survives and is locally listed as a Historic Park and Garden. Billingbear Park, now in use as a golf club, is also locally listed and was originally a much larger medieval deer park. It was associated with a Tudor mansion of the same name, which burned down in 1924 and the extent of the original park can be reconstructed from maps and surviving field patterns and extends across the district boundary.
- 11.10 To the south of Forest Road, and east of Ashridgewood Farm, there is a pattern of medium to large field with wavy boundaries. The first edition OS map shows a pattern of smaller irregular fields interspersed with areas of surviving woodland, indicating early assart incursions of the forest. However, there has been a considerable degree of boundary loss since then, resulting in

medium to large, but still irregular fields. A brick kiln and brickfield, shown on the first edition OS map south of Billingbear Park, indicates the exploitation of the London Clay for brick making.

- 11.11 Despite the proximity of the area to the major urban centres of Wokingham and Bracknell, the area retains a rural character. It is mostly unaffected by potential suburbanising influences despite the extension of Wokingham town along the area boundary south of the A329 (M) as part of the North Wokingham SDL, although views are changing towards Wokingham when travelling south out of the LCA due to this development. There are no villages and hamlets and the most concentrated settlement is located along the ridgeline where there is a ribbon of small, detached houses. Generally the settlement pattern is very low density, dominated by farmsteads and manor houses that occur across the area at regular intervals, the drives of which lead down from the ridge. There is no overriding local vernacular although traditional brick and clay tile are present and dark weatherboarding is also used on residences and agricultural buildings.
- 11.12 Throughout this area most of the roads are straight, small scale and rural in character without kerbing or intrusive signage and include wide verges, banks and/or water-filled ditches. Forest Road, Maidenhead Road and Straight Mile in the east are wooded and tree-lined, with some rhododendron planting. There are few footpaths and little access across the large arable fields.
- 11.13 The junction between the M4 and A329 (M) sits in the southwest corner of this area, and these motorways have an urbanising influence on character. The motorways introduce noise and movement, and there are dense screening coniferous belts in some sections. The A321 is a busy road which passes north-south through this landscape crossing both motorways and severs a triangle of land around Pikes Farm and Bill Hill at the extreme west of the ridgeline.

Perceptual Landscape

- 11.14 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 except where directly adjacent to the new development on the northern edges of Wokingham.
- 11.15 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.
- 11.16 Much of **Alexander Pope's poetry was inspired by** The Royal Forest of Windsor, which extended into this character area. Between 1701 and 1716, Pope resided at Whitehill House, Binfield (now **Pope's Manor**). And although his residence was outside of the Wokingham boundary in Bracknell Forest District to the east, his work was inspired by the countryside around him. In 1704, Pope started working on his poem Windsor Forest and although of ill-health at the time, produced a piece of work regarded as one of his finest. The opening lines read:

Thy forests, Windsor! And thy green retreats,

At once the Monarch's and the Muse's seats,

Invite my lays. Be present, sylvan maids!

Unlock your springs, and open all your shades.

Granville commands; your aid O Muses bring!

What muse for Granville can refuse to sing?

The groves of Eden, vanish'd now so long,

Live in description, and look green in song:

These, were my breast inspir'd with equal flame,

*Like them in beauty, should be like in fame.
Here hills and vales, the woodland and the plain,
Here earth and water, seem to strive again;
**Not Chaos like together crush'd and bruis'd;
But as the world, harmoniously confus'd.***

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- 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.
- 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.
- Association with Alexander Pope who was inspired by this landscape.
- Distant framed views over the surrounding landscape, including to Wokingham town and wooded horizons outside the borough which provides a sense of place and orientation.

Landscape Condition

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.

Key Issues

- Loss of deciduous woodland or changes in woodland structure through loss of species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management, leading to a change in character. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- Hedgerow loss associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.

- 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.
- Demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- Demand for residential or commercial development resulting in linear development along the straight roads.
- Pressure for large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure extending north of the A329 (M) from Wokingham town and impacting on local landscape character. Ongoing development along the southern boundary of the area, as part of the North Wokingham strategic development, south of the A329 (M) could potentially impact the rural character of the area.
- Pressure for built development on the skyline leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham landscape.
- Increasing transport pressures on rural roads as a result of traffic taking diversions to avoid delays in adjacent urban areas leading to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air pollution in rural areas. This also leads to demands to upgrade the network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening, threatening the rural character of the lanes.
- This character area contains localised areas of '**dark skies**' but light pollution is a key issue affecting the night 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 *Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowlands* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing rural character.

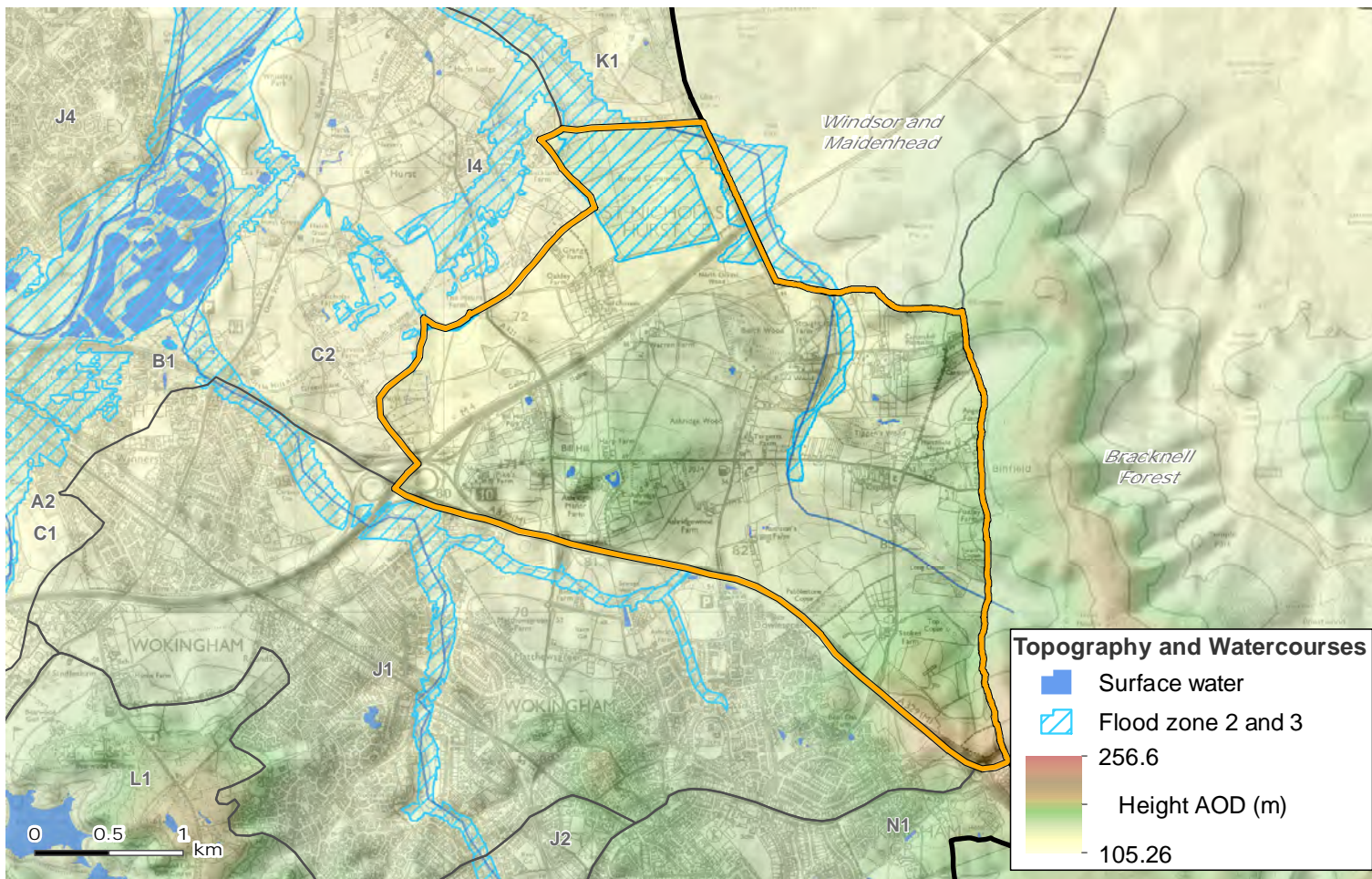
The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the characteristic wooded ridges and woodland, including ancient woodland. In particular there are opportunities to restore coppice management, and reinstate and repair key hedgerows with hedgerow standards.

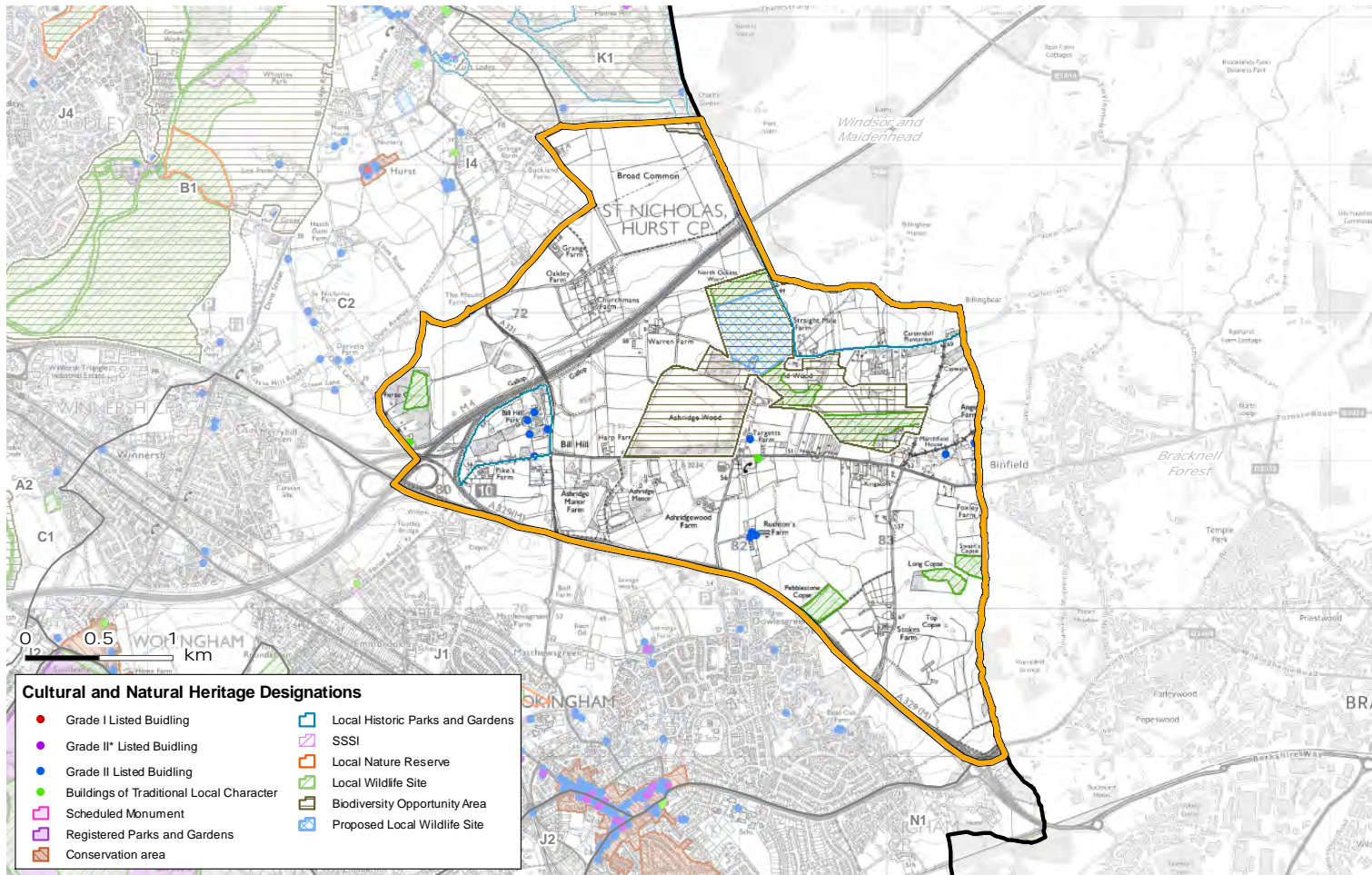
In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern through controlling development.

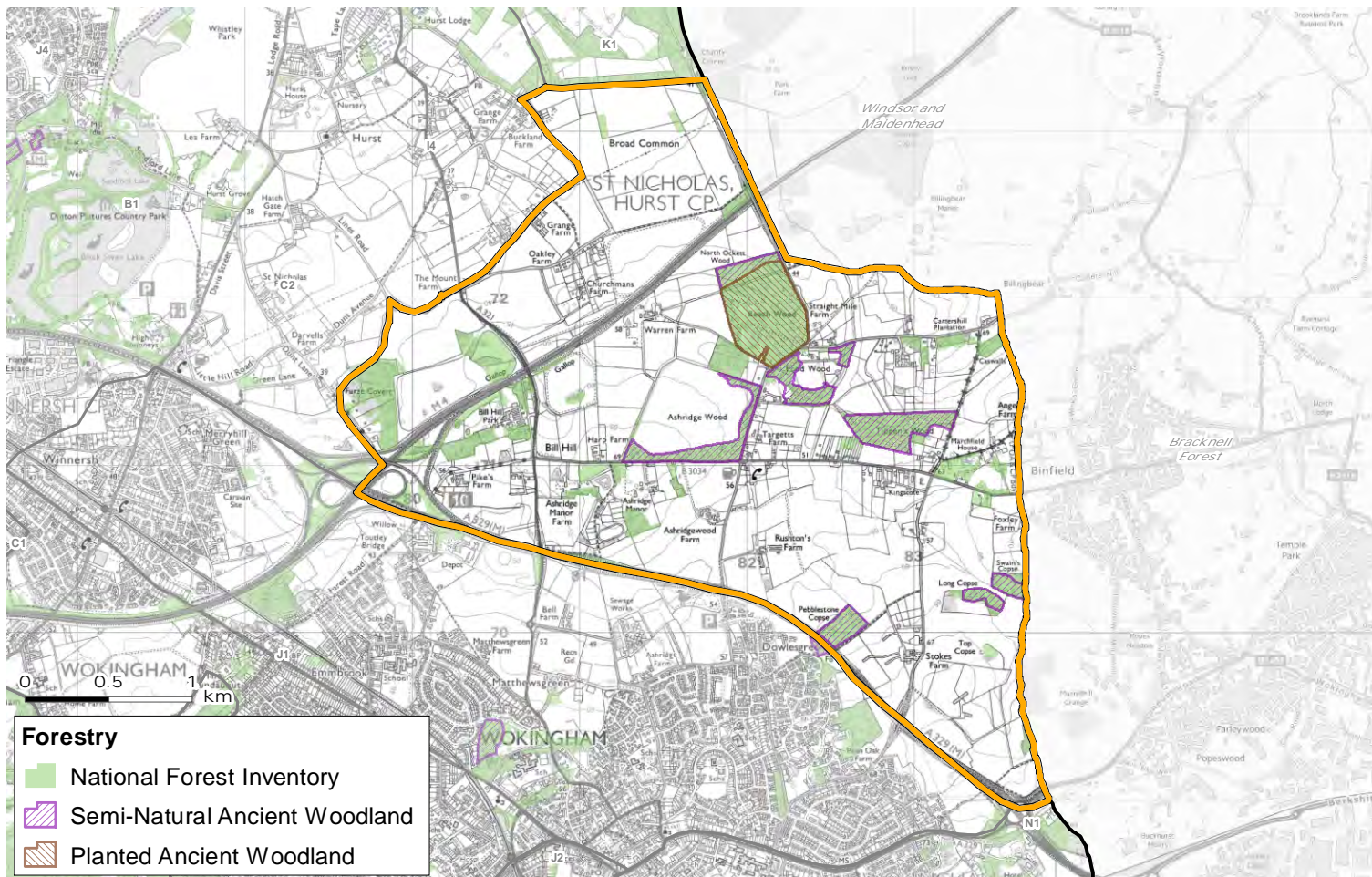
Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve and manage existing woodland blocks including BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape by increasing the extent of native deciduous woodland, in order link to other woodland habitats. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the landscape away from the motorways. 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.
- Reinstall or repair hedgerows with native species and reconnect remnant standard oak trees with restored historic hedgelines where there are opportunities to do so. Plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting.

- Conserve and protect the rural landscape pattern of mixed arable and pasture fields, and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing. Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around both pasture and arable land.
- Conserve, enhance and manage woodland habitats, also protect particularly from changes in land use. An area of land around Ashridge Wood is part of the Waltham to Binfield Woodlands and Parklands BOA. This network of natural habitats, which extend into Bracknell Forest, has been identified as a target for habitat restoration and positive management of woodland and creation of lowland meadow habitats. An appropriate woodland management regime is critical.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for Wokingham town.
- Maintain the sparse settlement pattern of dispersed farms through control of new development, avoiding linear spread of development, and the extension of urban areas north of the A329 (M).
- 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 likely impacts of any new development on valuable attributes.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage. Consider the use of traffic calming and access restrictions to maintain the tranquillity of the most rural areas. This would also make the use of rural roads more attractive for cyclists and recreational users.
- Conserve, enhance and manage the parkland landscape associated with Billingbear and Bill Hill Parks.
- Enhance the integration of the motorways and A321 through appropriate woodland, tree and hedgerow planting. Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along all roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.
- Conserve wooded character of undeveloped skylines. Consider the impact of any development on skylines, particularly where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas including Wokingham town. Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive skylines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements, which have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape.
- Protect distant views to wooded hills across the open landscape. Particular care should be taken in the siting and design of pylons or other vertical elements, which have the potential to be highly visible in the open landscape.
- Protect the perceptions of rural tranquillity in the landscape, through the management of development.







SUMMARY

A rural lowland area dominated by intensive arable farming in large open fields bounded by hedgerows and fences. Rural roads are lined with ditches, banks and mature oak trees. Settlement is confined to scattered farmsteads, Riseley village and part of Swallowfield.

The Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland is a small area to the south west of the borough, bound to the north and east by the valleys of the Loddon and Broadwater (A2), and to the west by the ridge of L3: Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills. The southern boundary is defined by the borough boundary, although the character extends into Hart District. The boundaries are defined loosely following the 45m contour line on the edge of the valley floor, and the 65m contour line in the southwest at the foot of the ridge.



Key Characteristics

- Gently shelving landform from 45m to 65m AOD, underlain by London Clay bounded by alluvium from the river valleys to the north and river terrace gravels to the south east.
- Historic deep water filled ditches due to the water-logged soils often lined with pollarded willows.
- Limited woodland with only small blocks of BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland **east of Charlton/Trowe's Lane** and a **small area of** BAP priority habitat wet woodland (The Marshes, Riseley LWS and LNR).
- Arable farming in large irregular fields dominates, with open pasture and horse and pony paddocks on settlement edges. Fields are bound by gappy overgrown hawthorn hedgerows with veteran trees, often oaks, with some post and rail and post and wire fencing.
- The GHQ Stop Line (General Headquarters Line), a defensive zone built during the summer of 1940 to contain the threatened German invasion ran east from Bristol to the Thames Estuary.
- Small scale settlement concentrated in the villages of Riseley and outskirts of Swallowfield. Elsewhere scattered farmsteads, some Grade II listed, are linked by rural lanes. Victorian and modern buildings have a predominately polychromatic Reading brick character, with occasional traditional timber framing and traditional barge board detailing.
- Rural lanes bounded by wide grassy verges, banks with wildflowers and overgrown mixed hedgerows. The busy A33 cuts through the northwest of the area, bringing noise and movement to the area.
- Lack of woodland and hedgerows results in an open landscape where there are views across the flat fields to distant wooded horizons. Pylons and wires, large agricultural buildings and shelter belts are visually dominant within the character area.
- Simple and unvaried agricultural landscape, with an isolated character due to its location between the Loddon and Broadwater valleys, and relative inaccessibility by public rights of way, which results in a strong sense of **tranquility and an experience of 'dark skies'**.

Natural Landscape

- 12.1 The underlying geology of the area is London Clay bounded by the Alluvium of the river valleys to the north and with gravel of the Third River Terrace to the south east. The ground shelves gently from west to east, from 65m AOD down to 45m AOD. The soils are liable to short-term flooding, which has resulted in the pattern of drainage ditches through the area with very wide and deep ditches by the side of many roads, lined by pollarded willow and poplar. There are no tributaries within the area, although there is a cluster of ponds south of Glasspool Farm, possibly caused by extraction of the underlying river terrace gravel.
- 12.2 The fertile soils support arable farming as the principal land use of the area, in large irregular fields. It is a simple landscape with little variety. Hedgerows bound the fields but these are overgrown and have frequent gaps. Hedgerow trees are sparse and often ancient. In places the hedgerows have been replaced with post and rail or post and wire fences. By the roads the hedgerows include a wide variety of trees: holly, poplars, oak and ash.
- 12.3 Large agricultural buildings, pylons and small shelter belts dominate the views over the open fields. Shelter belts vary from small plantations of conifers or deciduous trees to lines of poplar,

which are highly visible in the almost flat landform. There is limited BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland within this area. Wooded horizons and a sense of semi-enclosure is provided by the adjacent character area L3: Stanford End Wooded Gravel and Sand Hills and more distant L2: Farley Hill Wooded Gravel and Sand Hills.

- 12.4 The Marshes, Riseley, near to School Road and Riseley Farm is the only Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and LNR in the area, designated for its BAP priority habitat wet woodland. Along Bull Lane, west of Riseley, **a small section of St Leger's Copse/Collin's Copse** LWS lies within this area, however the vast majority is in L3: Stanford End Wooded Gravel and Sand Hills. The Loddon Valley South BOA extends north of Handpost Farm. This is mainly concentrated on A2: Loddon River Valley, however the farmland bordering the Loddon is potentially important for farmland birds such as Yellowhammer.
- 12.5 Elsewhere the most important wildlife habitats are likely to be the deep permanently water-filled ditches, which have stands of aquatic vegetation, and areas of improved grassland.

Cultural Landscape

- 12.6 There is evidence of small Iron Age settlements at Riseley with later Romano-British settlement located close to the line of the Roman road between London and Calleva (Silchester), known **locally as the Devil's Highway**.
- 12.7 The established pattern of medium to large irregular fields indicates early enclosure, with recent amalgamation of fields resulting in boundary loss and loss of much of the former historic field system. The pattern of small rectangular fields north of the Roman road, indicates more recent enclosure at the edge of the former Riseley Common which is also fringed by a number of 16th and 17th timber-framed farms.
- 12.8 A more recent historic feature of the Loddon Valley is the GHQ Stop Line, a defensive zone built during the summer of 1940 to contain the threatened German invasion. The line ran east from Bristol to the Thames Estuary and included a section through the borough. This swathe of World War II defences consists of pillboxes (concrete defensive bunkers often hexagonal in shape) and the fortified natural defences of the rivers Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater (including in-built chambers for demolition charges in the local bridges).
- 12.9 The Reading to Basingstoke turnpike, established in 1718, (now B3349) passes through the village of Riseley, with its adjacent network of lanes serving the farms. This road is increasingly busy with traffic, which has resulted in the erosion of verges. The area has a network of rural roads, often with wide deep ditches and sometimes banks topped by hedgerows with hedgerow trees (often mature oaks) or with lines of poplar. The ditches and banks, with native vegetation such as primroses beneath mature oak trees, contribute to the rural character. There are few rights of way within the area.
- 12.10 Settlement is composed of a regular pattern of farmsteads with the village of Riseley to the south and the outskirts of Swallowfield to the north. Buildings are predominately brick, some with traditional detailing including barge boards and polychromatic Reading brick. A number are Grade II listed, both within Riseley and the farmhouses and associated buildings in the surrounding countryside. Riseley also has 20th century and modern houses, often with an estate feel or linear development of bungalows along the roads, e.g. Bull Lane. Large farm buildings are prominent in the open landscape because of their scale. There are derelict agricultural buildings on the outskirts of Riseley.

Perceptual Landscape

- 12.11 The working agricultural landscape, crossed by a network of rural roads has a tranquil character with an experience of dark skies. The area is isolated by its location between the valleys of the Loddon and Broadwater and semi-enclosed by distant wooded horizons in adjacent character areas at Stanford End and Farley Hill.

- 12.12 The landscape is simple and unvaried but can appear disjointed when large agricultural buildings, shelter belts and pylons dominate views over the flat open fields. Derelict agricultural buildings and unmanaged hedgerows introduce a neglected character to the area.
- 12.13 The writer Mary Russell Mitford (1787-1855) moved to Swallowfield in 1851 due to the number of repairs required to her cottage at Three Mile Cross (see 13: Grazeley Open Clay Lowland). The area has changed considerably since she wrote of her move:

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

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Rural character of the working agricultural landscape with its homogenous land use in large arable fields.
- Lightly settled character with rural villages and scattered farms, some Grade II listed.
- Roadside verges and water-filled ditches lined by overgrown hedgerows and trees along the rural lanes which provide scenic quality, as well as ecological interest.
- Views across the open arable landscape to wooded horizons in surrounding character areas, which provide a degree of distant visual enclosure.
- Remote character due to the scarcity of settlement and relative isolation between the river valleys of the Loddon and Blackwater which results in a strong sense of rural tranquility and 'dark skies'.

Landscape Condition

The rural land use with arable and some pasture set in large open fields and small-scale local features such as drainage ditches and roadside banks and verges are in moderate condition.

Non-native shelter belts, both derelict and large agricultural buildings and pylons disturb the openness and scale of the landscape. Elements to improve include the scrubby hedgerow boundaries and intensively farmed arable land.

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 and soil erosion associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity within the water filled ditches.
- 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.
- Introduction of non-native shelter belts which are visually dominant in the flat landscape.

- Potential pressure for horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- Demand for housing resulting in dereliction and loss of traditional dwellings, dilution of vernacular character and loss of distinct architectural style.
- Pressure for expansion within existing settlements, leading to the linear spread of development leading to the loss of individual settlement identity and potential amalgamation of adjacent settlements.
- Decline or decay of historic features including the GHQ Stop Line.
- Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- The A33 brings noise and movement to the area, disturbing the tranquillity. There has been an increase in traffic on the B3349, which may lead to demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening. This will threaten the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- **This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark' skies.** Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night 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 *Riseley Open Clay Lowland* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing remote rural character of the agricultural landscape.

There are opportunities to improve the condition, intactness and presentation of the farmed landscape without affecting the sense of openness which is central to the character of the landscape. In particular there is an opportunity to strengthen the hedgerow network and consider restoration of pollarded willows and native, rather than coniferous, shelterbelt planting.

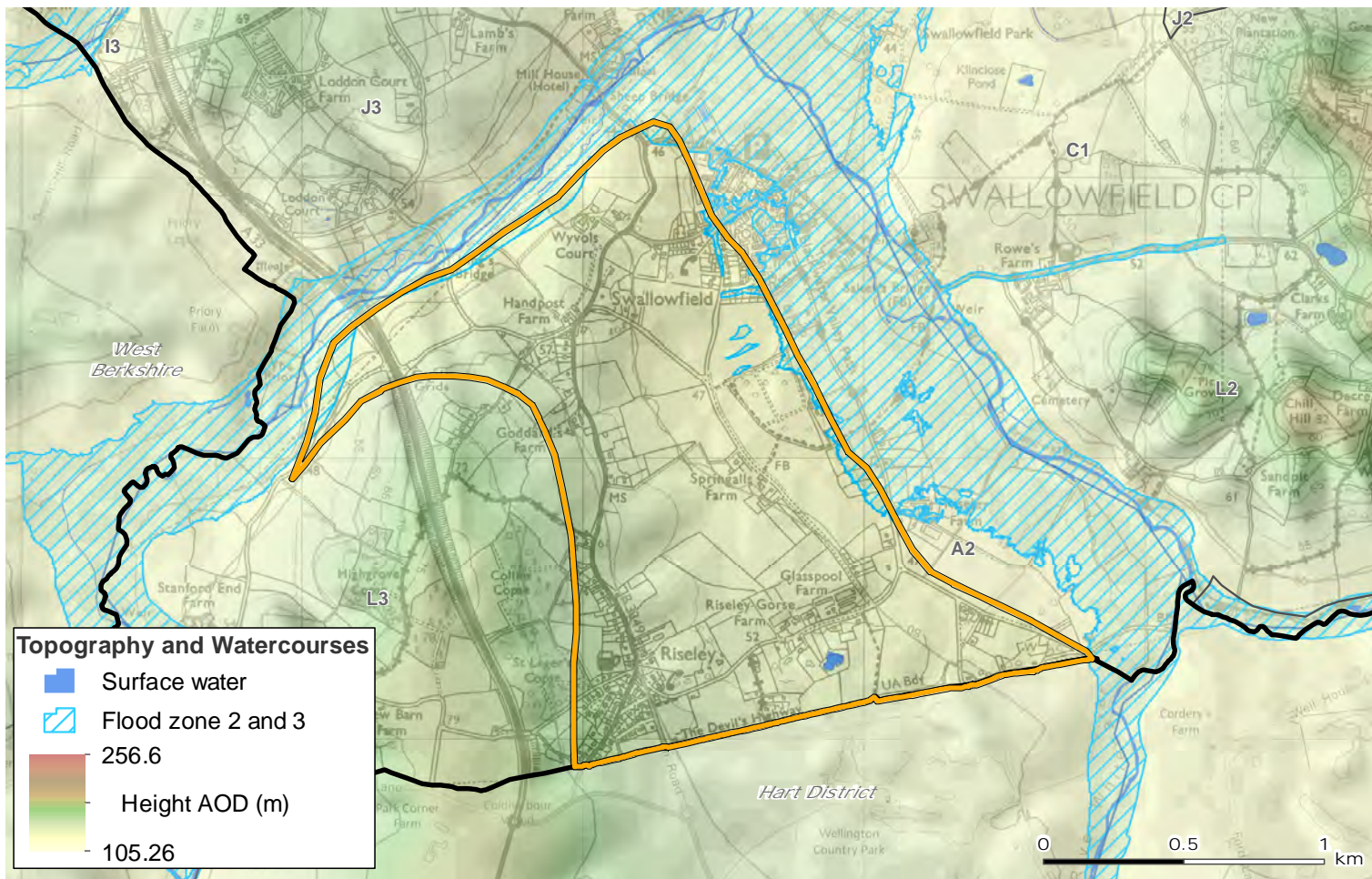
In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the rural settlement pattern.

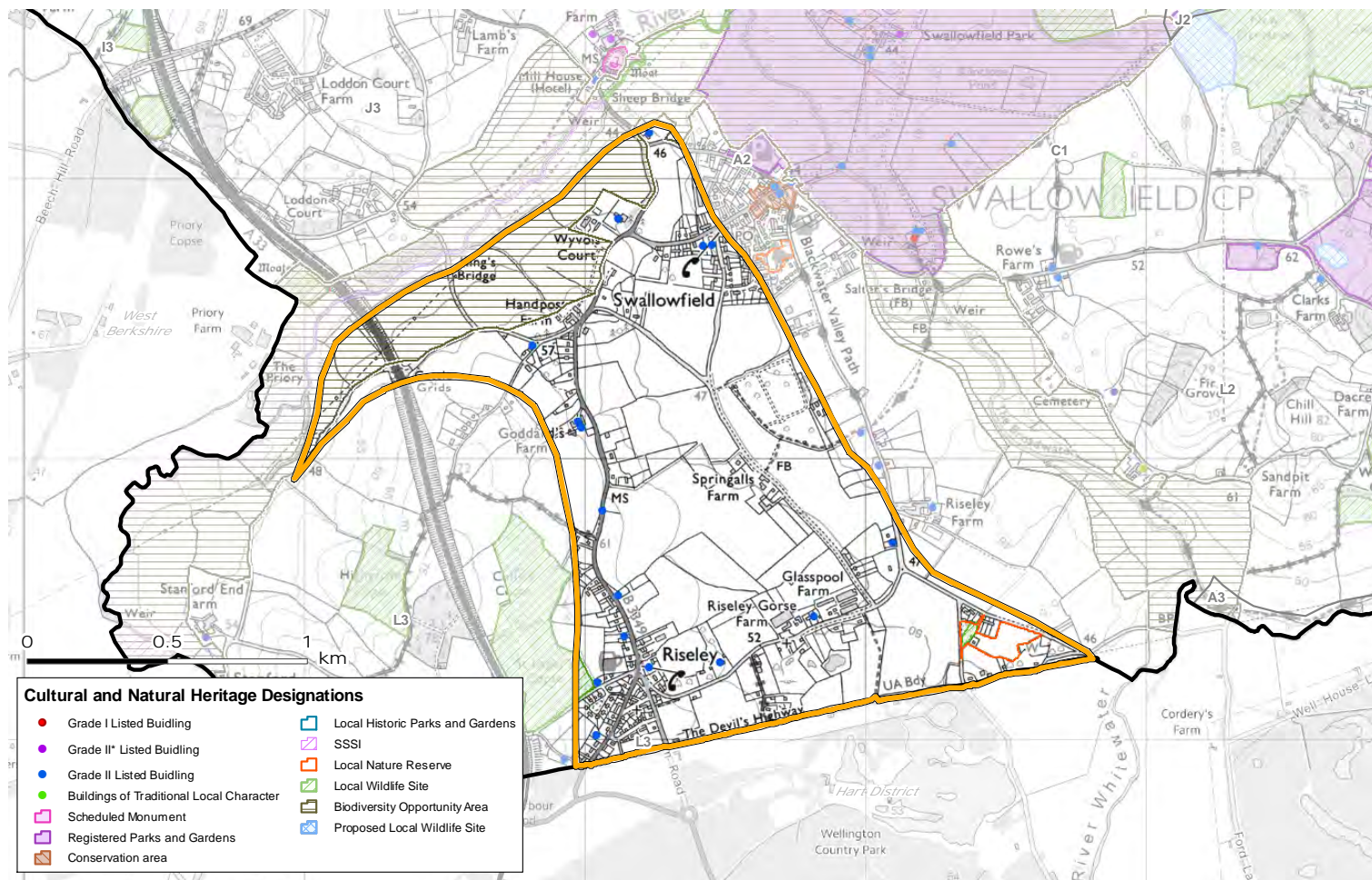
Landscape Guidelines

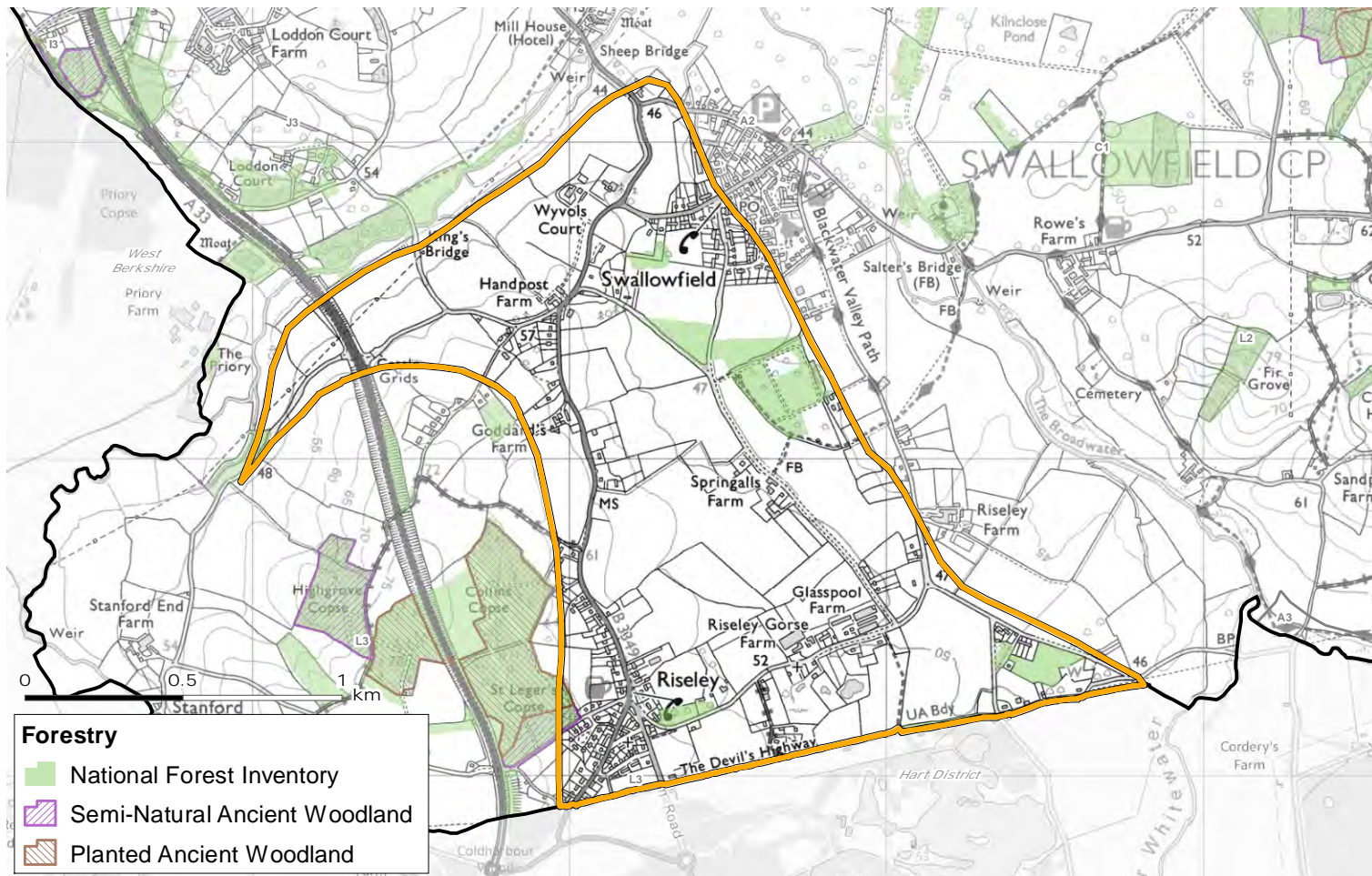
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the farmed landscape. Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed arable fields.
- Reinststate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so. Plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting.
- Increase the limited extent of BAP priority habitat deciduous shelterbelts and woodland using locally occurring native species linking to existing woodland sites in adjacent character areas in particular, encourage restoration of pollarded willows, which are an important feature in the landscape.
- 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, enhance and manage farmland and woodland habitats particularly protect from changes in land use. A strip of land in the north of the character area is part of the Loddon Valley

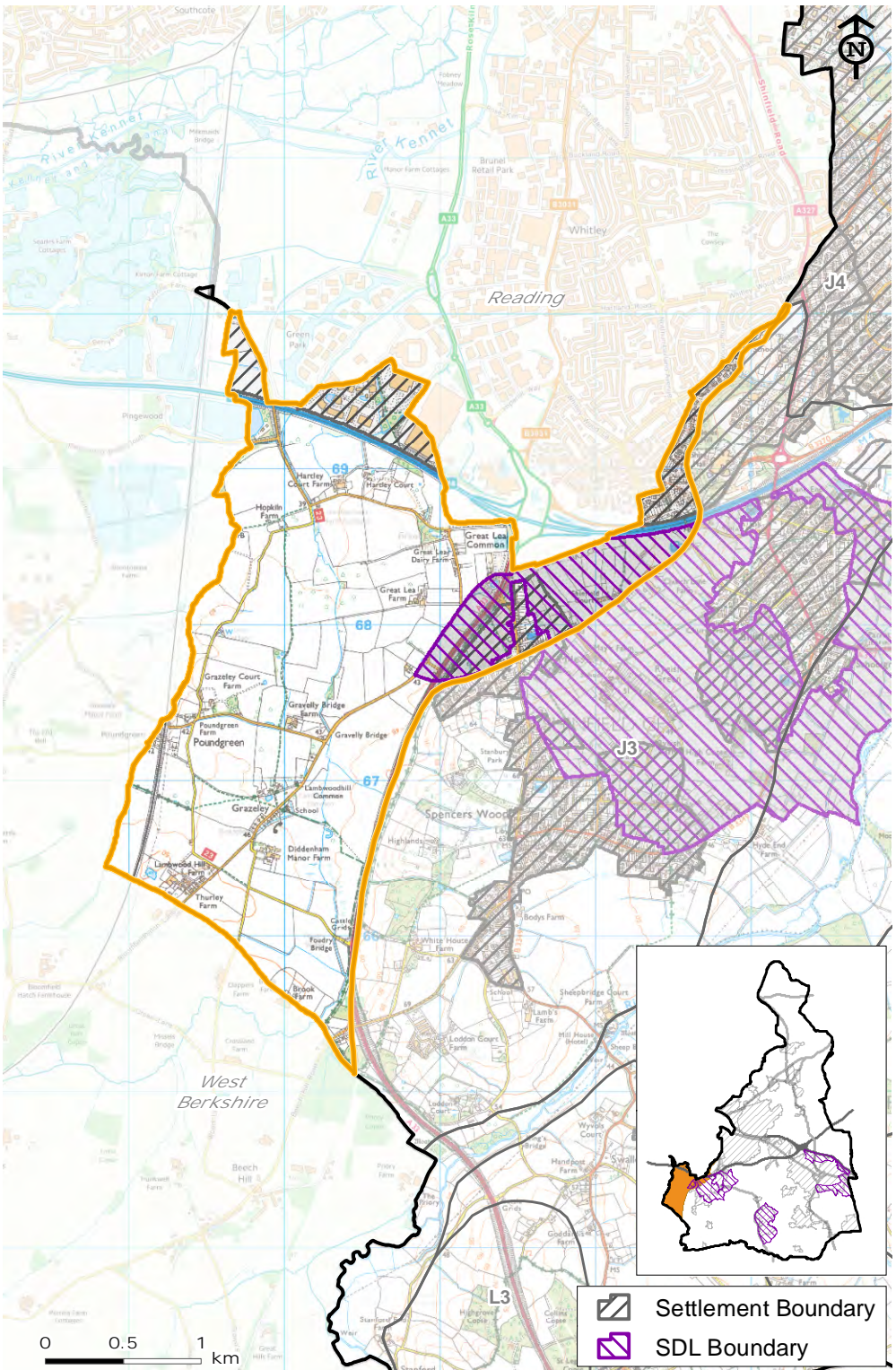
South BOA. This network of natural habitats has been identified as a target for habitat creation and restoration and positive management of lowland meadow and wet woodland. There are opportunities for meadow and woodland creation in this area along the Loddon.

- Conserve the rural character of the open farmed landscape between adjacent village centres, to protect the individual identity and rural character as well as retaining their sense of physical and visual separation, resisting the spread of linear development.
- Conserve the features associated with the GHQ Stop Line.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes with their roadside verges and water-filled ditches resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage.
- Use appropriate tree and hedgerow planting to help integrate new or existing roads, such as the A33 into the landscape. Encourage the retention and reinstatement of native roadside trees.
- Protect open views to adjacent areas. Particular care should be taken in the siting and design of large agricultural buildings, pylons and wires or other vertical elements, which have the potential to be highly visible in the open landscape.
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity and remoteness in the landscape, through the careful and strategic management of development.









SUMMARY

A flat agricultural landscape of predominantly large arable fields with occasional sheep grazing. The area is drained by numerous streams and ditches including the tranquil course of the Foudry Brook, overhung by mature trees. A highly rural, even remote, landscape characterised by low density dispersed settlement, connected by sunken lanes with hedge banks. The north of the area is disturbed by modern development on the edge of Reading and the M4.

The Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland character area lies in the far west of the borough and forms part of the wider landscape of the Thames Basin. The southern and western boundaries are marked by the borough boundary, although the character extends into West Berkshire. The eastern boundary is defined by a change in topography where the prominent clay ridge of J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay separates this area from the Loddon Valley. The A33 runs along the foot of this ridge and is used as a pragmatic boundary. The northern boundary is also marked by the borough boundary and the built up area of Reading.



Key Characteristics

- Flat vale landscape lying at 40 to 50m AOD, enclosed to the east by the prominent clay ridge of **Spencer's Wood**. Underlain by London Clay and alluvium associated with the River Kennet and its tributaries – part of the wider Thames Basin.
- Wetland character in parts due to drainage ditches and small streams which flow north towards the Kennet, including the Foundry Brook, a medium sized stream only visible at close range. Field ponds are also a feature of this area, including Great Lea Pond LWS.
- Largely devoid of woodland with only shelterbelts and small mixed farm woods, with BAP priority habitat mixed lowland deciduous woodland. **Norman's Shaw and Wood North of Beech Hill Coverts/Clayhill** are of ancient origin and are designated as LWS.
- Large-scale irregular arable fields in the open vale contrast with small scale sheep pasture fields on the edge of settlements some of which now support horse paddocks. The area includes intact 19th century field patterns in the south and small areas of ancient field systems adjacent to the M4.
- Low thorn hedgerows and hedgebanks enclose the fields, with post and wire fences where hedgerows are discontinuous. Hedgerow oaks are a feature of field boundaries with remnant lines marking former field boundaries.
- Remnant parkland around the 18th and 19th century country houses at Grazeley Court Farm and Hartley Court (Grade II* listed).
- Low density scattered rural farmsteads and nucleated hamlets e.g. Grazeley and Poundgreen. The built form is characterised by timber frame, polychromatic Reading brick and thatch with weatherboarding. Many of the farmhouses are Grade II listed. There are a number of Victorian houses in polychromatic Reading brick, including at Three Mile Cross, in the north of the area, which has been extended as part of the South of the M4 SDL.
- The GHQ Stop Line (General Headquarters Line), a defensive zone built during the summer of 1940 to contain the threatened German invasion included a section along the Foundry Brook.
- A network of sinuous single-lane tracks shaded by hedgerows and hedgerow trees link the settlements. Drainage ditches and remnant wayside commons, now only visible as wide grass verges, line the lanes.
- Transport corridors including the A33, M4 and Great Western Railway on the periphery of the area introduce noise and movement.
- Urban fringe land uses close to Reading and the M4 include paddocks and MereOak Park and Ride with larger scale development north of the M4, including Green Park business park. Some agricultural buildings have been converted into small rural business parks e.g. Gravelley Bridge Farm.
- Glimpsed views of Reading urban fringe including Green Park Business Park and a wind turbine north of the M4 contrast with enclosed views along lanes and roads created by mature trees and thick hedgerows.
- Strongly rural agricultural landscape, which is tranquil away from the urban fringe and major transport corridors. The M4 and Reading urban fringe negatively impact on the tranquility. The urban glare makes Reading particularly prominent at night but limited development in the south results in dark night skies.

Natural Landscape

- 13.1 The Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland character area is a lowland landscape, gently shelving towards the River Kennet (near to its confluence with the Thames in Reading) from 50m AOD in the south to 40m AOD, in the north. The area is underlain by London Clay and alluvial deposits associated with the River Kennet and its tributaries. It is drained by a number of streams and drainage ditches that flow north towards the Kennet. Foudry Brook is the main watercourse, and is a medium sized stream that is only visible at close range. Field ponds are a characteristic feature of these clay lowlands.
- 13.2 Great Lea Pond, just south of Reading, contains BAP priority habitat ponds and is a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). Siltation and progressive vegetation colonisation has resulted in little remaining open water at this site. This has led to a decline of notable aquatic species such as water violet (*Hottonia palustris*) and bladderwort (*Utricularia spp.*) and the area is now in need of sensitive management to restore open water communities.
- 13.3 The better drained soils are used as arable land whereas the more waterlogged areas typically associated with the watercourses are characterised by pasture, leading to a mixed agricultural landscape.
- 13.4 The field pattern is irregular with extremely large fields in the open vale and small-scale fields close to settlements such as Three Mile Cross. Fields are divided by low, neatly clipped thorn hedgerows and hedgebanks indicating an ancient enclosed landscape. Where hedgerows are discontinuous post and wire fences act as stock proof barriers. Hedgerow oaks are features of the field boundaries and remain standing even where hedgerows have been lost.
- 13.5 The clay plains were once thickly wooded, but today the landscape is largely devoid of woodland. Small mixed farm woods and shelterbelts are all that remain of the once extensive woodland, although much of the remaining woodland is BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland. Two small areas of ancient woodland in the far southeast of the area are designated as LWS: Wood North of Beech Hill Coverts/Clay Hill and Norman's Shaw. These contain ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) coppice.

Cultural Landscape

- 13.6 This area has considerable evidence of very early agricultural exploitation. A concentration of cropmarks found across this area indicates possible clearance, cultivation and settlement through the prehistoric and Romano-British periods, probably focussed on the Foudry Brook. There are also a number of known small Mesolithic and Neolithic sites and a small Roman settlement.
- 13.7 The settlement names of Grazeley, Thurley and Hartley contain the Anglo-Saxon place name element "-leah" (Old English) 'forest, wood, glade, clearing', and later 'pasture meadow', and the settlement at Hartley is mentioned in Domesday. Notwithstanding that this was once part of the Royal Forest of Windsor, the pattern of medieval and post-medieval settlement is characterised primarily by the dispersed pattern of farmsteads and the lack of any villages, the small agricultural settlement at Grazeley being a late-19th century development.
- 13.8 The presence of former common land is indicated by the names of Lambwoodhill Common, Hartley Common, and Great Lea Common, and a small ovate arrangement of fields at Grazeley may indicate the preservation of a small area of common within the enclosed fields. Traces of former parkland, established around 18th and 19th century country houses, are still evident at Grazeley Court Farm and Hartley Court, which is now Grade II* listed.
- 13.9 Many of the fields in the northern part of the area, as shown on the first edition OS map, were small and irregular in form, frequently with wavy boundaries, suggesting early enclosure of the former open fields and commons. Many of these boundaries have since been lost in the recent amalgamation of fields although a small area of land immediately to the south of the M4 in the eastern part of the character area still has a relatively intact field system with associated hedgerows indicative of an ancient field system. To the south there is a pattern of larger rectangular fields characteristic of early 19th century Parliamentary enclosure which has been retained relatively intact.

- 13.10 This is a highly rural landscape characterised by low density, dispersed settlement of scattered farmsteads, many of which are Grade II listed, and hamlets at Grazeley and Poundgreen. These hamlets are typically nucleated and have retained their rural character. The traditional built form is distinctive for historic timber framed buildings, half-hipped roofs and use of traditional polychromatic Reading brick with weatherboarding on agricultural buildings. The use of clay tiles, along with the soft red brick, also adds warmth to the landscape. Thatch is also a feature of this area, reflecting its association with the Kennet and proximity to reed beds.
- 13.11 Modern development has extended Three Mile Cross further into this character area as part of the South of the M4 SDL (predominantly within J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay). There is no modern vernacular, although brick is the most common material.
- 13.12 Farmsteads and hamlets are linked by a network of ancient winding sunken lanes, lined by hedgebanks and shaded by oaks. Drainage ditches are often located either side of these rural lanes and the remnant wayside commons are visible as wide grass verges with mature oaks.
- 13.13 There is increasing traffic on the minor roads, in part due to the construction of Mere oak Park and Ride south of Great Lea Common. This has led to the creation of informal passing points and the erosion of traditional grass verges.
- 13.14 The pattern of small lanes linking the farmsteads has been overlain by more recent communication routes such as the mid-19th century Great Western Railway line between Reading and Basingstoke, the A33 trunk road west of Spencers Wood (forming the eastern boundary of the area), and the M4 motorway. However, there are no junctions or access from the railway line or M4 within this area. During the Second World War, a series of pillboxes were built to support defences all along the Foudry Brook as part of the defensive GHQ Stop Line, designed to hold up armoured German invasion forces, which ran from Bristol to Maidstone and thence from Maidstone to the Wash.
- 13.15 There are limited rights of way in this landscape, and the area remains a working agricultural landscape with little recreational activity. Closer to the M4 plots become fragmented, urban fringe land uses such as factory sites and paddocks increase, and fly tipping is evident. There has been farm diversification with agricultural buildings converted into small business parks e.g. Gravelly Bridge Farm.

Perceptual Landscape

- 13.16 The A33 dual carriageway runs along the eastern boundary of the area and the M4 crosses east to west with a major road junction located just beyond Wokingham's administrative boundary introducing noise and movement into the character area. There are glimpsed views of the Reading urban fringe, including the Green Park business park and wind turbine on the northern fringe of the area.
- 13.17 Away from these major transport corridors the area retains a rural and enclosed character, with views contained by hedgerows and mature standard oaks along the rural lanes. The area is tranquil with dark night skies. Despite busy transport corridors, there is little accessibility into and within the area, leading to a sense of remoteness.
- 13.18 Mary Russell Mitford (1787-1855), perhaps the most famous of Wokingham's writers, once resided at Three Mile Cross (before moving to Swallowfield). From a tiny labourer's cottage Mitford provided an account of country life and character in her book 'Our Village' (1824-1832) revelling in the intimacy which her rural life afforded. Her 'indigenous' accounts provide such vivid pictures of a seemingly idyllic country life which may well apply to the rural landscape around her home:

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

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

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Rural character of the working agricultural landscape with its mix of large arable fields and smaller areas of pasture bound by thorn hedges and banks with characteristic hedgerow oaks.
- Hidden wetland character of the network of drainage ditches, ponds and small streams, including the Foudry Brook adds visual diversity and important ecological habitats.
- Remnant historic field patterns, both in the south of the area (19th century regular enclosure) and to the east of Three Mile Cross (ancient field system defined by hedgerows and hedgerow oaks).
- Scattered settlement pattern of farm and rural hamlets. Time-depth is provided by the Grade II listed farm buildings.
- The Second World War GHQ Stop Line which follows the course of the Foudry Brook.
- Winding sunken lanes enclosed by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees and historic grassy verges provide a sense of enclosure and scenic quality.
- Strongly rural and remote landscape character due to scarcity of settlement and relative inaccessibility which results in a sense of tranquility and dark night skies.

Landscape Condition

The distinctive flat landform, mixed working farmland with neatly clipped hedges and rural settlement pattern linked by winding rural lanes are in a good condition.

The presence of major transport corridors on the periphery of the area disturbs the rural and tranquil character of the landscape. The proximity of Reading and the development of the South of the M4 SDL have introduced adjoining marginal land uses. The rural roads are increasingly busy, and informal passing points have been created eroding roadside verges. The remnant wayside commons and wetland and woodland habitats would benefit from enhanced management.

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 and soil erosion associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.
- Presence of marginal agricultural land, which is of poor visual character, being kept in 'hope' value, particularly around settlement edges and on the urban fringe.
- Pressure for horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- Drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture.

- 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.
- Pressure for expansion, infill and densification within existing settlements, including expansion of Three Mile Cross into the area as part of the South of the M4 SDL impacting the rural character of the area. There may also be pressure from planned strategic scale development in the area south of the M4 and west of the A33, in the area around Grazeley.
- Pressure for new industrial developments, sewage treatment works and commercial premises, particularly associated with the major transport corridors and Reading fringes.
- Demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- Increasing transport pressures on rural roads as a result of traffic taking diversions to avoid delays in the urban areas leading to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air pollution in rural areas. Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening threatens the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, particularly due to the proximity to Reading, leading to further visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.
- This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies' to the south of the area. Light pollution, particularly along transport corridors and on settlement edges is a key issue affecting the night landscape.
- Decline or decay of the historic and archaeological features of the GHQ Stop Line.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the ***Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland*** the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the strong rural character of the open agricultural landscape with its dispersed settlement pattern of historic farmsteads and hamlets linked by winding lanes.

The key aspects to be enhanced and actively managed are the pattern of hedgerows, ancient or mature oaks, wayside commons and rural lanes. The GHQ Stop Line is also a key attribute to be conserved and enhanced. There is an opportunity for woodland planting to integrate the motorway, busy A roads and urban fringes of Reading and Shinfield.

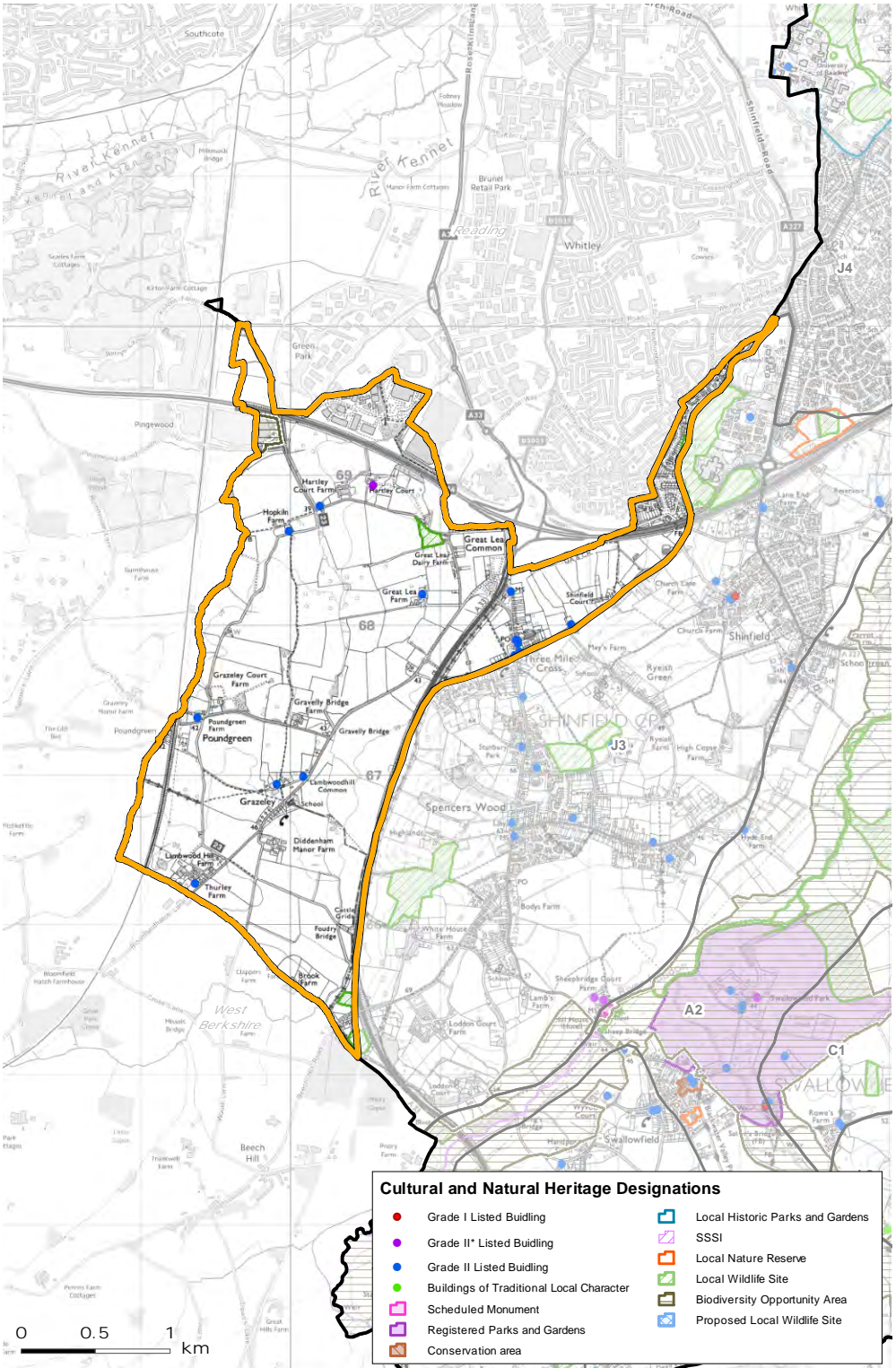
In terms of development, the aim is conserve the rural setting and gaps between settlements and maintain the integrity of settlement identity.

Landscape Guidelines

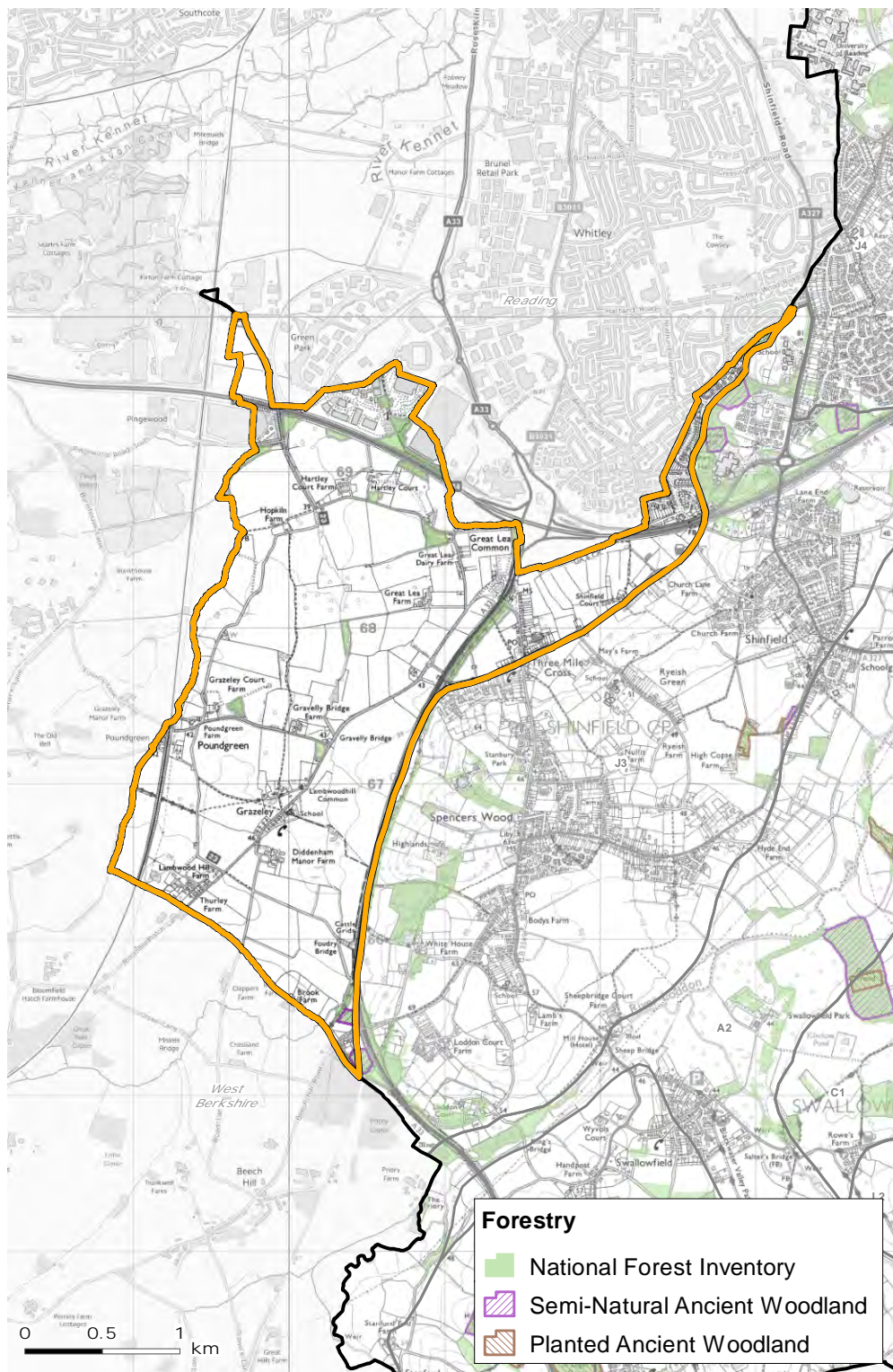
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the farmed landscape. Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed arable fields.
- Conserve, enhance and manage hedgerows with standard trees as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinstatement or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so. Plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting.
- Increase the limited extent of native deciduous woodland copses, using locally occurring native species linking to existing BAP priority woodland sites. Conserve remnant ancient

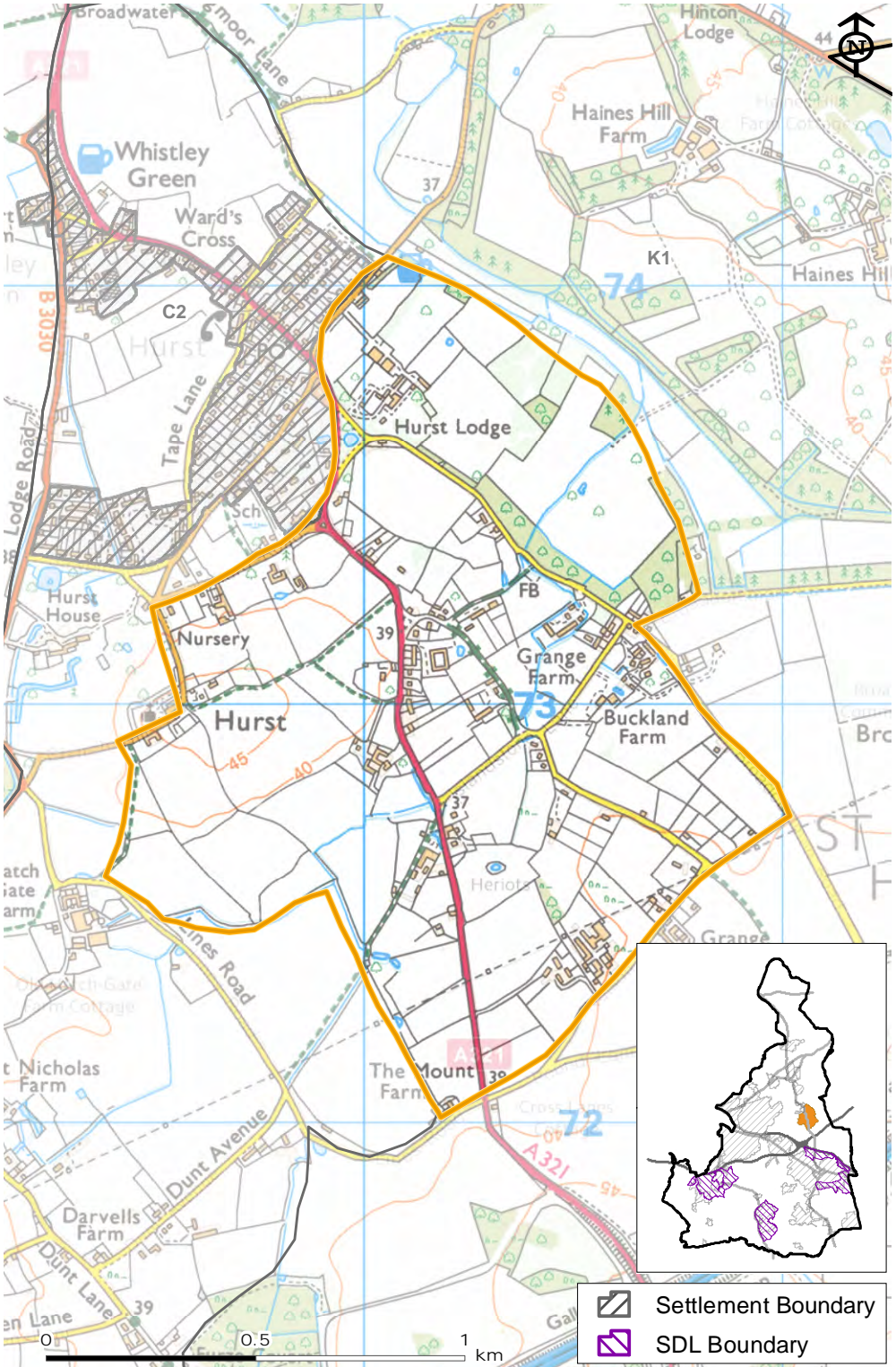
woodlands, woodland copses and remnant standard trees, particularly where they provide screening to the urban fringe. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.

- Conserve and protect the landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields, including historic field patterns (e.g. to the east of Three Mile Cross). Encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- Conserve, enhance and manage the remnant wetland and woodland habitats including LWS particularly from development, changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. Great Lea Pond requires sensitive management to restore open water communities. An appropriate wetland and woodland management regime is critical.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for Reading and Shinfield. Protect undeveloped areas which provide a setting for the clay ridgeline, such as the open countryside on southern edge of Reading (south of the M4 corridor). Integrate any 'set aside' land to enhance its visual character.
- Conserve the rural character of the farmed landscape between hamlets, to protect the individual identity of settlements, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation.
- Conserve features associated with the GHQ Stop Line.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage. Consider the use of traffic calming and access restrictions to maintain the tranquillity of the most rural areas. This would also make the use of rural roads more attractive for cyclists and recreational users.
- Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate new or existing roads into the landscape.
- 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.
- Minimise visual impact of commercial farm enterprises through careful siting and design. Minimise visual clutter including signage.
- Protect the perceptions of rural tranquillity and remoteness, including the experience of dark skies in the landscape, through the management of development.



13: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland





SUMMARY

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.

The Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland is located south of Twyford and east of Hurst. The boundaries are defined by field boundaries that mark the transition from an intimate to more open landscape. The north-eastern boundary is defined by the transition to K1: Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland. The north-western and south-western boundaries are defined by the transition to the flat and open pastoral landscape of C2: Hurst River Terrace and the south eastern boundaries are represented by field boundaries to the more open and large-scale I1: Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland.



Key Characteristics

- A flat to gently rising landform, at a low elevation of around 40m AOD. The area is underlain by London Clay with small pockets of alluvium and river gravels. Soils are affected by high groundwater and short term flooding which historically limited their suitability for arable farming.
- Watercourses permeate the landscape including small tributaries of Billingbear Brook, ponds, deep drainage ditches and wetland vegetation including rushes and pollarded willow.
- Wooded context provided by dense, overgrown rough hedgerows with hedgerow trees aligning winding rural roads, which creates an enclosed character.
- Small-scale regular and irregular fields, divided by overgrown hedgerows and post and wire fencing.
- Predominantly a pastoral landscape dominated by horse grazing and exercising paddocks, with areas of sheep grazing. There are also some larger areas of arable farmland.
- Low density settlement pattern of closely spaced farmsteads, although many are post-war bungalow style and many are hidden behind vegetation. There are clusters of listed buildings around Hurst, which has a Conservation Area, and the Grade II* 17th century Hurst Lodge. Large agricultural buildings and pylons are visible in this open landscape.
- Peaceful rural landscape with an intimate character with localised experience of dark night skies. The A321 runs north-south through the area and introduces noise and movement.

Natural Landscape

- 14.1 The Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland is predominantly underlain by London Clay, which was formed in the Thames Basin. In the north of the area there are localised deposits of alluvium associated with the small tributaries of Billingbear Brook, while in the west river terrace deposits have extended from C2: Hurst River Terrace. These conditions have created a landscape of loamy soils affected by high groundwater and short-term flooding, historically limiting their suitability for arable farming. The high groundwater has resulted in the creation of deep drainage ditches beside many of the roads and the formation of numerous ponds, which are filled with rushes and lined by pollarded willows.
- 14.2 The landform appears flat but in fact gently undulates and slopes to form a subtly elevated area at around 45m AOD at Hurst and the Church of St Nicholas Hurst (located on the boundary of this area).
- 14.3 In contrast to other areas within the landscape type the field system is much smaller, and is dominated by pony paddocks (particularly east of the A321). The pastures are set within small and geometric enclosures, which are divided by overgrown hedgerows and shelterbelts with a variety of species and include standard trees. The hedgerows are often reinforced by post and wire fences. The overgrown hedgerows continue along the rural lanes creating an enclosed character. Within this pastoral context there are areas of arable farmland.
- 14.4 There are no sites with statutory or non-statutory ecological designations within this character area. Biodiversity interest relates to the areas of pasture, hedgerows and notably the network of drainage ditches and associated small scale wetland habitats. The Waltham to Binfield Woodlands and Parklands BOA covers the wooded area east of Hurst Lodge, and promotes management and restoration of woodland and additional woodland planting, as there are few other habitats in the area.

Cultural Landscape

- 14.5 There is little evidence of settlement until the medieval period. The parish of St Nicholas Hurst was originally known as Whistley, where there was a Domesday settlement – both “-leah” and ‘Hurst’, from the Old English for ‘forest, wood, glade, clearing’ and also ‘wooded hill’ indicate the wooded hill around the old church.
- 14.6 The settlement pattern is one of closely spaced farmsteads linked by a tight network of country lanes. The present pattern of fields includes rectangular straight-sided fields characteristic of early-19th century Parliamentary enclosure and many of irregular shape with wavy boundaries possibly indicating early assart enclosure of areas of woodland. Although some of these patterns survive intact, they have been modified by recent subdivision by fences.
- 14.7 The area is very sparsely settled. There are no large settlements, although the small hamlet of Hurst, including part of the conservation area around St Nicholas church, falls within this area. Elsewhere detached houses are associated with farmsteads. There are a number of listed buildings including Grade II* listed 17th century Hurst Lodge, and associated wall and gardeners cottage. However, the vernacular character of the area is for the most part hidden and diluted by the presence of later bungalow and chalet-style buildings and the industrial character of many of the newer farmstead groups.
- 14.8 The built character of the landscape is affected by the presence of prefabricated and temporary structures within the fields such as caravans and feeding troughs. Large agricultural buildings and pylons are also a prominent feature. Some farms have diversified into small business parks or for semi-industrial use e.g. Orchard Nursery and Broadcommon Farm.
- 14.9 The presence of paddocks coupled with footpaths and bridleways make this area important for low-key recreational use.

Perceptual Landscape

- 14.10 This is small-scale and intimate rural area with sparse settlement and localised experience of dark skies. Despite the lack of woodlands, the dense and overgrown rough hedges create a wooded and enclosed character, particularly along the lanes and roads.
- 14.11 Localised disturbance is caused by the A321 which runs north-south through the area and has more traffic than the surrounding more rural lanes.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Watercourses and vegetated drainage ditches create visual interest and are important for flora and fauna.
- Rough hedgerows and hedgerow trees create an enclosed landscape, as well as providing important ecological habitats.
- The intimate character of the small-scale pasture fields provides a distinctive sense of place.
- 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.
- Informal recreation provided by the footpaths west of the A321.

Landscape Condition

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.

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 and soil erosion associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.
- Conversion of traditional sheep pasture to arable land uses or equestrian activities is changing the scale of the landscape and leading to loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Demand for horse or pony paddocks is leading to the further subdivision of fields and introduction of temporary structures resulting in a decrease in rural intactness.
- Drainage operations associated with new building works and agriculture have resulted in loss of wetland habitats.
- Unmanaged hedgerows and over-mature hedgerow trees are an ongoing threat to the character of the landscape.
- Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings and vertical development e.g. pylons leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- Demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the rural pastoral intimate character.

The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the small watercourse, ponds and drainage ditches, small scale pastoral fields, and wooded rural lanes. There is an opportunity to restore wetland features, reinstate hedgerow boundaries and improve grassland management, particularly in horse paddocks.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the low density settlement pattern of farmsteads along rural lanes and the small village of Hurst.

Landscape Guidelines

- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species in order to create a more mixed woodland character. Conserve the area of woodland east of Hurst Lodge and create green links to this and other woodland habitats outside the area. An area of land east of Hurst Lodge is part of the Waltham to Binfield Woodlands and Parklands BOA. This network of natural habitats has been identified as a target for habitat creation and restoration and

positive management of woodland habitats. An appropriate woodland management regime is critical.

- Conserve remnant standard trees within hedgerows and plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinststate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so.
- 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 small-scale pasture fields, and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- Conserve, enhance and manage the small scale wetland habitats particularly from changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. An appropriate wetland management regime is critical.
- Maintain the rural settlement pattern of farmsteads and small villages through control of new development, avoiding linear spread of development.
- Maintain and enhance the character of enclosed rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage.
- 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, avoiding the introduction of visually prominent large-scale or vertical structures into this intimate scale landscape.
- Minimise visual impact of commercial farm enterprises through careful siting and design. Minimise visual clutter including signage.
- Protect the perceptions of rural tranquillity in the landscape, through the management of development.

