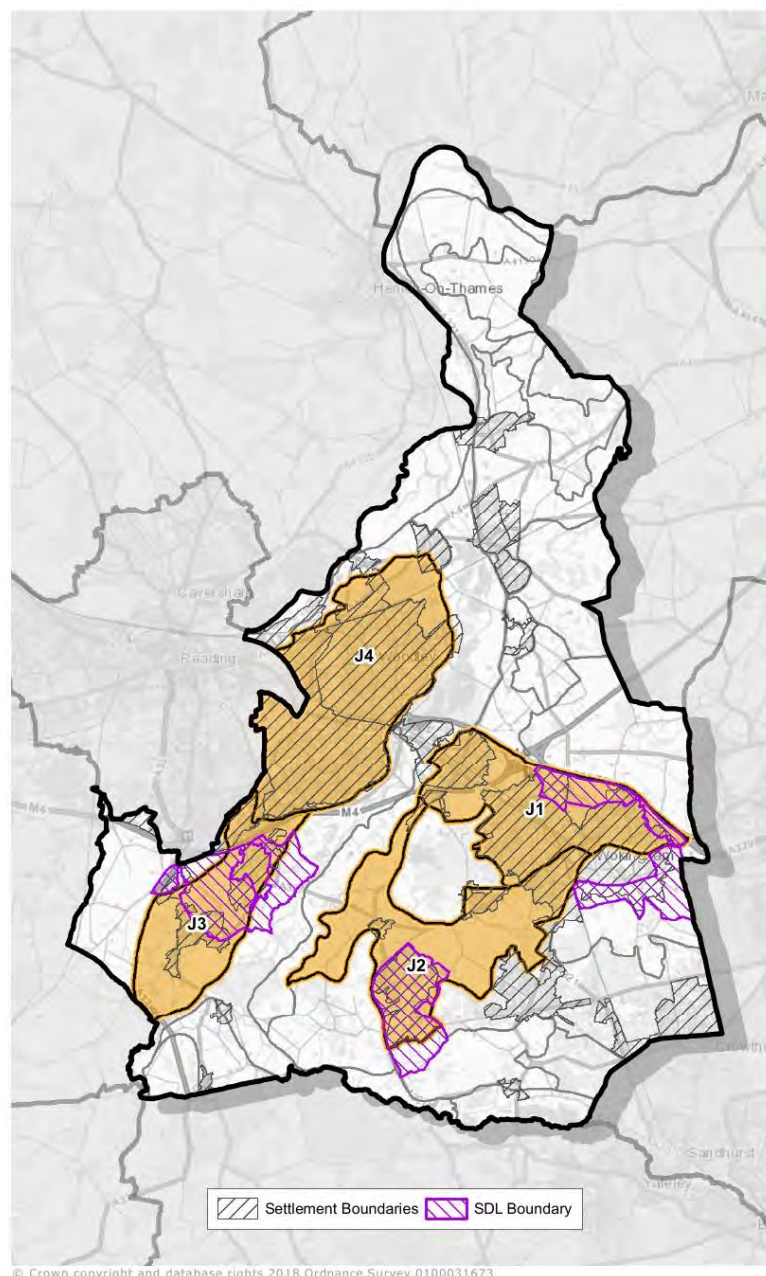


## J: Settled And Farmed Clay



### Description

The LCT is characterised by a shelving and undulating landform underlain by London Clay. There are large tracts of post-war settlement, connected by both major and minor roads cutting across the landscape. Areas of large arable fields remain, as well as tributaries draining towards the Loddon.

### Landscape Character Areas

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

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





## SUMMARY

The area encompasses large areas of urban development, including the northern half of Wokingham and residential areas of Winnersh (which do not form part of this assessment). Small areas of arable fields and open space between these larger urban areas separate the settlements. The area is fragmented by large transport corridors including the M4 and A329 (M).

The Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay stretches from the edge of the Winnersh Triangle east towards the borough boundary. The boundaries have largely been informed by land use patterns. The northern and eastern boundaries follow the A329 (M), and mark the edge of character area I1: Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland. The western boundaries are the transition to the wooded character of L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills and the river influences of C1: Arborfield River Terrace. The south-eastern boundary follows the line of the A329 and Barkham Road which separates the character area from J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay and N1: Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland.



## Key Characteristics

- Sloping landform with subtle valleys formed by the Emm Brook and associated tributary, ranging from 85m AOD in the east to 45m AOD although changes in landform are masked by built development. Underlain by London Clay with two corridors of alluvium which cross the area and river terrace deposits to the east and west.
- Emm Brook flows through the area and its floodplain creates a green core through the urban areas.
- Marginal agricultural landscape of medium sized arable fields lining transport corridors, bounded by post and wire and post and rail fencing. SANGS grasslands have been created along Old Forest Road and Warren House Road, and as a buffer between areas of new housing and the motorways. The narrow corridors of open fringe land are greatly influenced by urban development but prevent amalgamation of Winnersh and Wokingham.
- The ecological value of this area is limited to small areas of marshy grassland associated with the Emm Brook and very small remnant ancient woodland at Dowlesgreen.
- Historic market towns of Wokingham and Winnersh have extended from original cores with peripheral suburban estate development, including recent large scale development as part of the North Wokingham SDL. The new developments have further fragmented the remnant agricultural landscape in this area. Sindlesham, arranged around a village green, is designated as a Conservation Area and retains its village identity.
- Abrupt and often poorly designed rural-urban interface where open arable fields meet suburban style estates. There has been urbanisation of rural land including ornamental garden planting and municipal character of adjacent streets with roadside kerbing and street lighting.
- Transport corridors of the A329 (M), M4 and mainline railway line fragment the landscape and create a visual and audible disturbance.
- Pylons and posts carry overhead wires and are vertical elements across the remaining arable fields.

## Natural Landscape

- J1.1 The area is predominantly underlain by London Clay with two corridors of alluvium along the Emm Brook and its tributary. The geological strata give rise to badly draining clay soils.
- J1.2 A sloping landform with subtle valleys formed by the Emm Brook and the associated tributary. Elevation ranges from 85m AOD in the east of the area to 45m AOD on the floodplains of the brook and its tributary. The subtlety of the shallow valleys makes it visually indistinct and the landform is further masked by built development.
- J1.3 The Emm Brook flows through the heart of the area, rising south of Wokingham and skirting to the south-west and then around the northern edge of Winnersh. Open space lining its route provides an attractive green corridor connecting the rural environment with the urban core, and is in use as SANGS in the vicinity of Old Forest Road and Warren House Road.
- J1.4 A few geometric medium-sized fields remain along the transport corridors. These are under arable farming, or left unmanaged. The landscape has an open character as there is little woodland beyond two small deciduous and mixed blocks to the east, which contain BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland. Field boundaries are mostly post and rail fencing. Hedgerow boundaries remain, although these are often overgrown and seemingly unmanaged. There is a

small area of ancient woodland, connected to Pebblestone Copse (in I1: Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland) at Dowlesgreen, next to the A329 (M).

- J1.5 Community open spaces and SANGS have been created as part of new estate housing developments of the North Wokingham SDL. Along with their recreational use these have the function of separating the development from the visually and audibly intrusive road transport corridors. These are managed for use by local residents and to encourage biodiversity in the area.

## Cultural Landscape

- J1.6 There is little evidence for extensive prehistoric or Romano-British settlement of the clay soils, which may have remained predominantly wooded until Saxon times when settlement expanded onto previously marginal areas.
- J1.7 The Anglo-Saxon settlement of Wokingham is first recorded in 1146. It was the only medieval town in east Berkshire not sited along the Thames. It relied for its livelihood on the agricultural regions to its north and east, as well as looking to the heathland areas to the south. It was granted a market in 1219 and the streets and burghage plots of the new town were therefore probably laid out in the early 13th century. In the rural areas outside the town, settlement consisted primarily of farmsteads with few villages, the whole borough being part of the Royal Forest of Windsor. There was a 13th century settlement at Sindlesham, and a new model village was built there in the late 19th century as part of the Bearwood estate (L1).
- J1.8 The first edition OS map shows that much of the farmland around Wokingham consisted of an irregular field system indicating early enclosure. These areas have been almost completely built over by the 20th century residential development of green-field land at Wokingham and Winnersh (largely post-1950s). The early maps also show numerous brickworks around Wokingham. The brick industry exploited the clay soils, and fuel from heath and woodland, and provided the main building material from the late 17th century.
- J1.9 In 1759 the Windsor Forest Turnpike Trust created a new road through Wokingham. In the mid - 19th century the South Eastern Railway provided transport for the growing brick industry, and stimulated urban development. **By 1930, Wokingham was the county's fifth largest town, the** growth continuing in the post-war period with the construction of the A329 (M) motorway which bounds the area to the north.
- J1.10 The motorway transport corridors and secondary roads play a significant role in influencing landscape character. The A329 (M) and the M4 introduce noise and traffic flow and the proposed North Wokingham Distributor Road will further fragment the landscape. There are a number of scrubby roadside shelterbelts (some containing mature standard trees) that help mitigate the visual impacts of heavy traffic but the presence of the roads pervades the area undermining remaining rural character.
- J1.11 Settlement is characterised by the expanding towns of Wokingham and Winnersh. Wokingham has developed over the last twenty years as a centre for business and light industry and as a residential base for commuting to London, Reading and Bracknell. Despite rapid growth it has kept much of its traditional central layout in the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area and retains its market place and the five main roads of Peach Street, Denmark Street, Broad Street, Rose Street and Shute End. Much of the **town's** development has occurred by expansion from the centre chiefly following the lines of primary and secondary roads.
- J1.12 The urban edges of Wokingham and Winnersh influence the character of the landscape. Suburban planting, in particular lines of coniferous hedging, contrasts with the scrubby field margins and occasional mature, native, standard trees found within the countryside. Street lighting, kerbs and lay-bys are all urbanising influences on the agricultural land. Pylons crossing open fields evoke a semi-industrial fringe character. Wokingham is continuing to expand, particularly in relation to the North Wokingham SDL.
- J1.13 Winnersh is a smaller settlement with no obvious centre, which has seen much growth in the past thirty years, mainly along the A329 towards Reading and Wokingham and along the secondary road running north to south through the town towards Sindlesham village. The town has a predominantly modern residential character with many new executive style estates in the area.

The Winnersh Triangle – to the northwest is a high-tech business park bound by the A329 (M), the railway and the edge of Winnersh (see B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water). Like Wokingham, the urban edge of Winnersh has a low rise, suburban character with housing abutting the open agricultural landscape and lacking historic focus.

- J1.14 Sindlesham village, located to the south of Winnersh, retains an historic core with nationally listed and locally listed buildings arranged around a traditional village green. The village and its setting are designated as a Conservation Area which extends into the adjacent Bearwood College Registered Park and Garden (see LCA L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills). The village green is also the Bearwood Recreation Ground, valued locally as a recreational ground and home to the Winnersh Rangers Football Club.

## Perceptual Landscape

- J1.15 The Emm Brook provides both a small-scale visual and recreational connection between the agricultural and urban landscapes. The new SANGS provide recreational space on the urban edge, although there are few public rights of way in the remaining open agricultural land.
- J1.16 There is an overriding sense of urbanity throughout the character area and this is further emphasised by the presence of pylons and posts cutting across the farmland, carrying overhead cables and wires.
- J1.17 The dominance of the M4 and A329 (M) disturb any sense of rurality or tranquillity in the area, and provide an ever present noise. However, new roadside fencing in the SANGS screen the motorways from view, and new planting will provide further mitigation as it matures.

### Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Emm Brook and its floodplain provide open space within this urban area, also valued for its low-key recreation potential.
- Landscape buffer and sense of separation provided by the undeveloped agricultural land and open space between Wokingham and Winnersh, Wokingham and Bracknell, and Wokingham and Sindlesham.
- The historic village of Sindlesham, with listed buildings and traditional village green, which is recognised as a Conservation Area, and valued for recreation.

### Landscape Condition

A highly fragmented landscape often in poor condition, which apart from a few localised areas, such as Sindlesham village green, lacks a sense of unity and has no particularly distinctive characteristics to afford it with a strong sense of place. The dominant elements of the character area are the influences of the adjacent urban areas, and significant transport corridors. There is scope to soften the urban edge and encourage habitat creation and active management in areas of undeveloped/unmanaged 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 and tree loss due to the marginal character of the agricultural landscape and consequent lack of maintenance.
- Presence of marginal **agricultural land being kept in 'hope' value, particularly around settlement**



edges, which is of poor visual character. This is particularly relevant in the marginal wedge of land between Wokingham and Winnersh and in land along London Road between Wokingham and Bracknell.

- Drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats along the Emm Brook. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture.
- Pressure for large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure impacting landscape character. Rapid rate of change due to ongoing expansion of Wokingham as part of the North Wokingham strategic development as well as associated roads will impact the character of the area, and lead to further urbanisation of the landscape.
- Continuing pressure for new roads including the proposed North Wokingham Distributor Road will increase the fragmentation of the landscape, and visual intrusion and noise of transport corridors.
- Light pollution at night causing 'sky glow'.
- 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 *Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay* the following strategy is required: to conserve the open character of the landscape between settlements and to enhance the existing urban/rural interface.

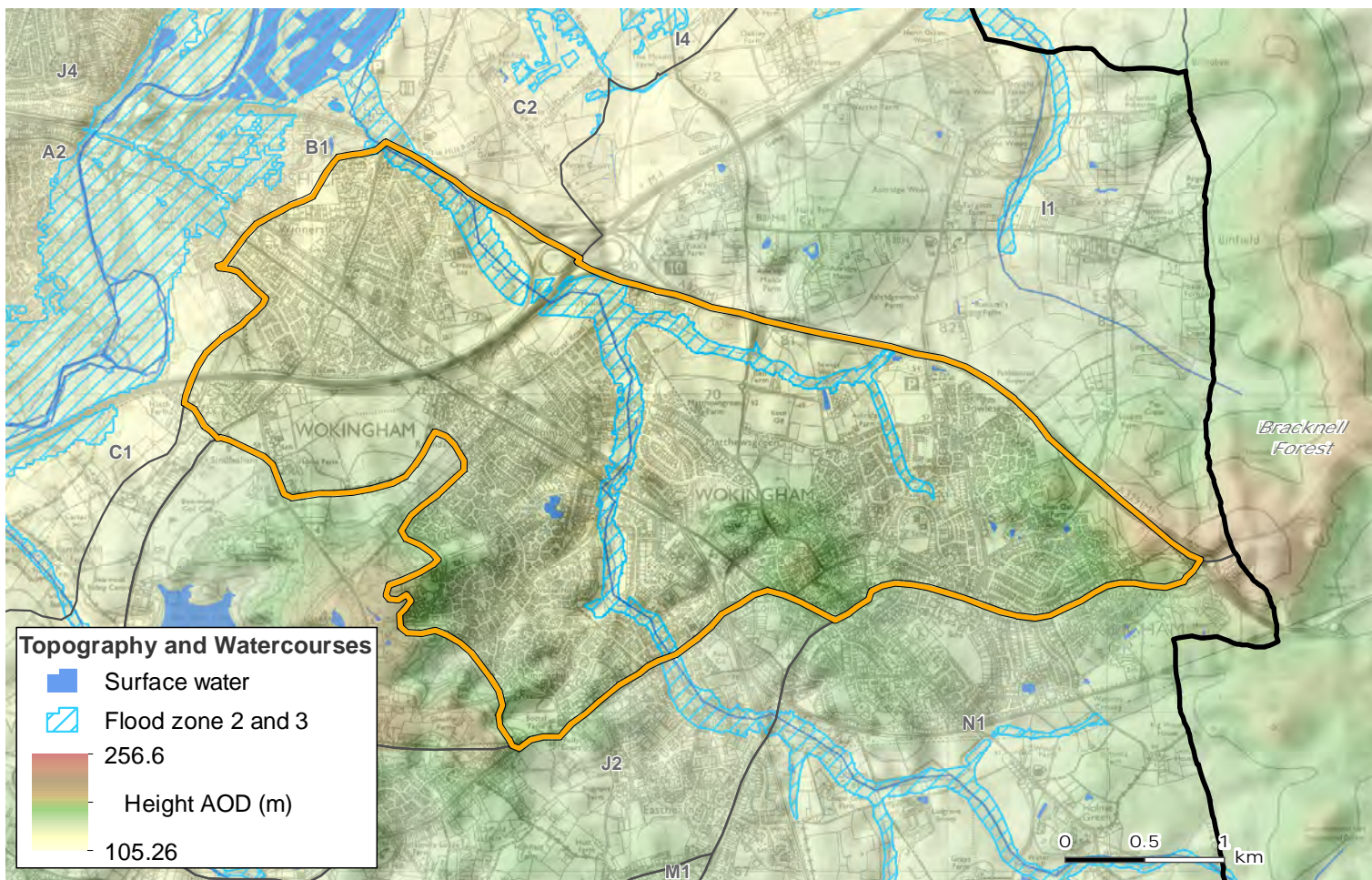
The key aspects to be enhanced are the landscape character of the remaining fields next to transport corridors, and the value and setting of the Emm Brook. There are opportunities for habitat creation, particularly along the stream corridors, and improved screening of the transport corridors.

### Landscape Guidelines

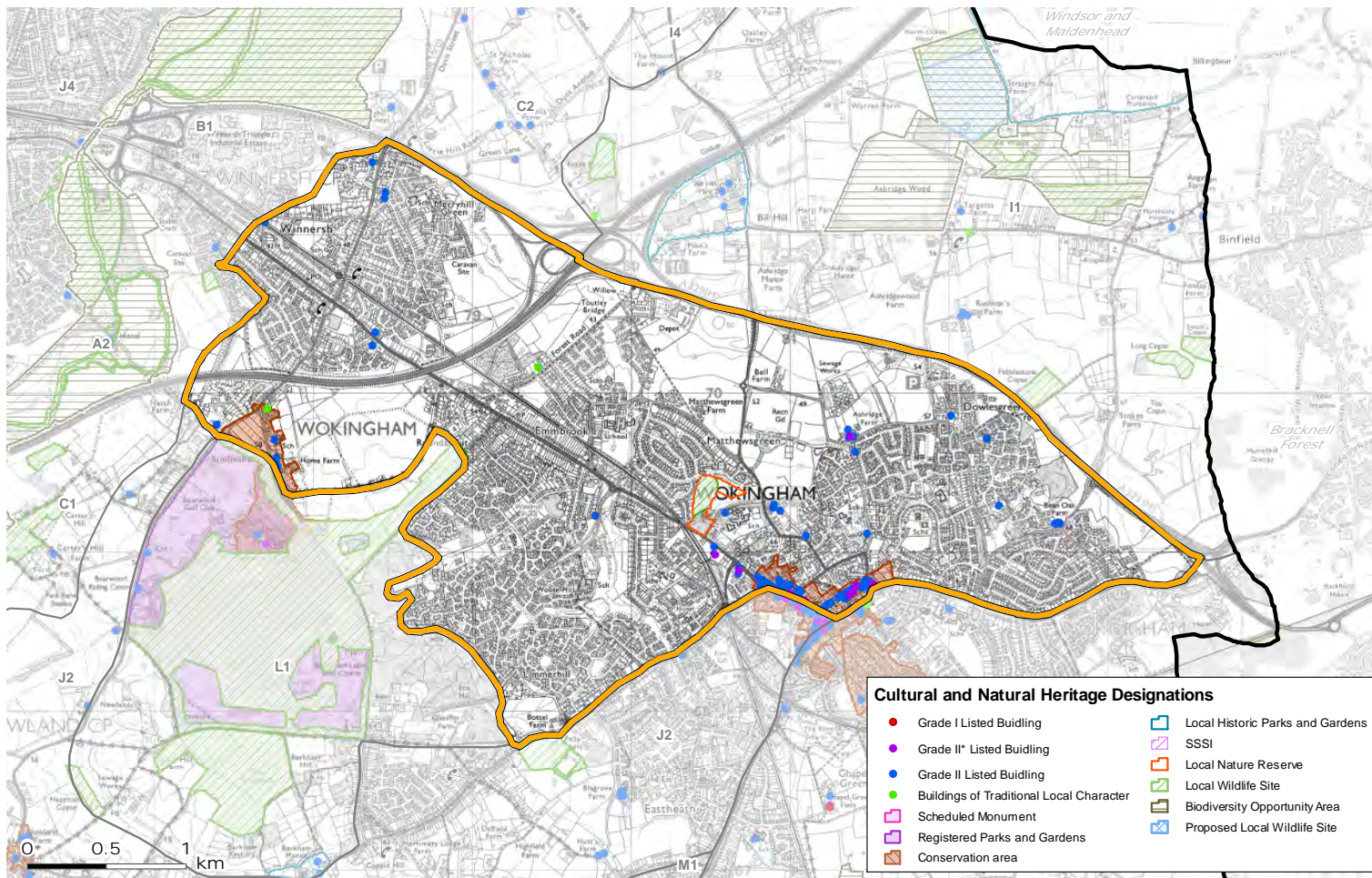
- Protect the remaining areas of open land separating Winnersh and Wokingham, Wokingham and Bracknell, and Wokingham and Sindleshams in order to provide a physical and visual separation or gap between settlements and as a setting for Sindleshams
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species in order to provide screening of roads, development and the urban fringe.
- Enhance wetland habitats associated with the Emm Brook through appropriate management. Seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland).
- Reinstate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so, as important wildlife habitats and landscape features.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries, hedgerows 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 and Winnersh.
- Increase recreational value of the area through creation of open space and public rights of way.
- 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 new development on valuable attributes.

- Resist proposals that introduce extensive or obtrusive elements e.g. pylons on the visually sensitive landscape.
- Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate roads in relation to proposed North Wokingham Distributor Road. Consider the use of bridges rather than embankments to allow permeability thereby reducing fragmentation of the landscape as a result of major road building.
- Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution through the sensitive siting of any new development, including infrastructure, especially any proposed night-time lighting.





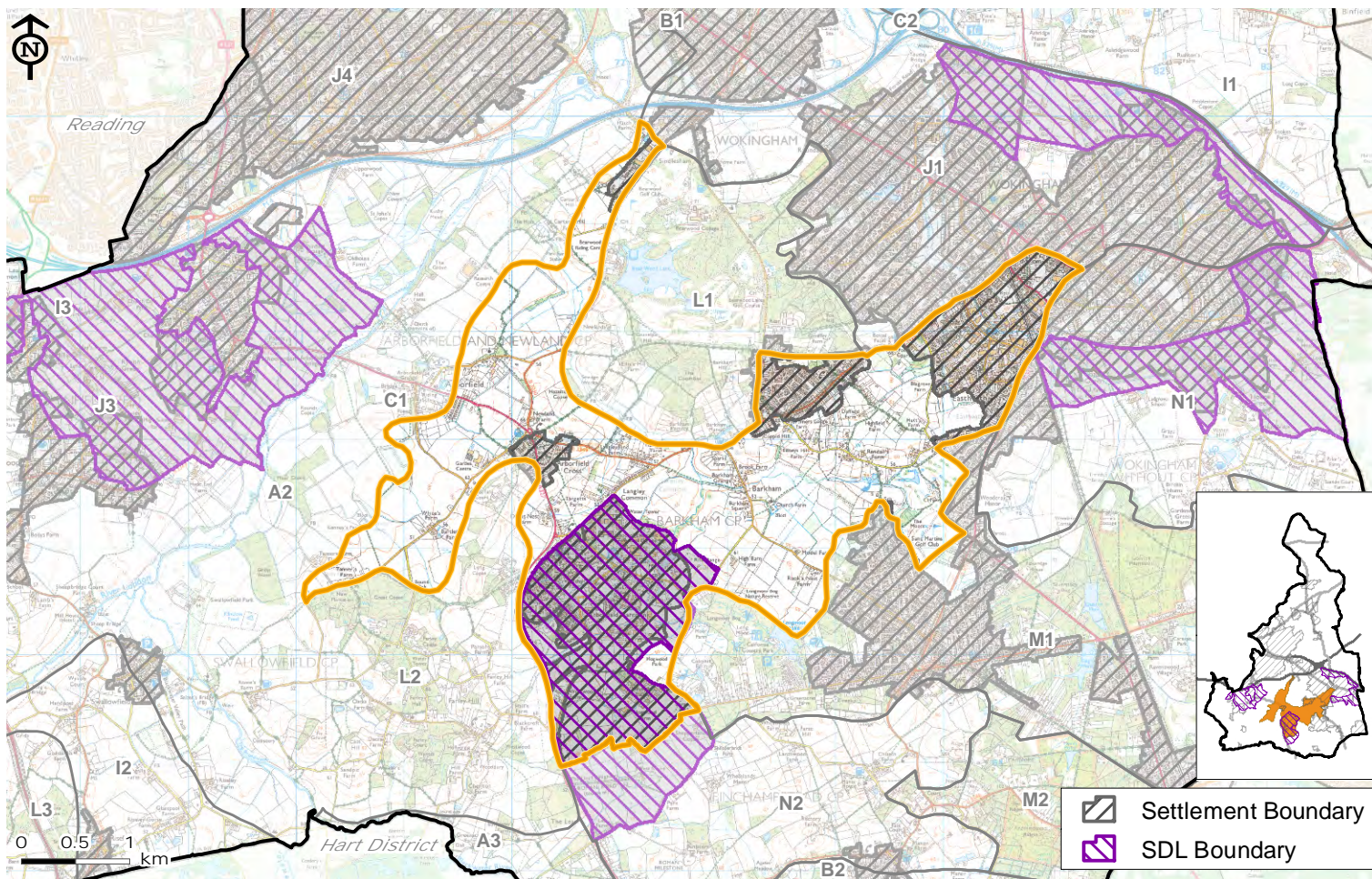














## SUMMARY

A gently undulating landscape, principally in agricultural use. Large arable fields bound by hedgerows dominate, with smaller fields of sheep pasture and horse paddocks close to settlements.

The western boundary abuts the lower lying C1: Arborfield River Terrace defined by the 50m AOD contour line. Higher areas of Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills (L1 and L2) confine the clay to the north and south and the boundary follows the base of the hill slope. The eastern boundary extends to Wokingham, while the south-eastern boundary is the well-defined edge of the forested area of M1: Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands.



## Key Characteristics

- A gently undulating landscape between 50m and 65m AOD, underlain by London Clay with localised areas of River Terrace Gravels. Shallow wooded valleys follow the course of the Barkham Brook, which is geologically marked by areas of alluvium.
- Consistent pattern of water bodies including streams, drainage channels, ditches and open water bodies of various sizes resulting from the clayey and loamy soils which impede drainage.
- Wooded context provided by characteristic mature hedgerow and in-field trees, combined with woodland belts, with BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland, and the wooded horizons of the surrounding hills. This creates a loose sense of enclosure.
- Arable farming dominates, with pasture on higher ground and horse paddocks near settlement. Fields are large and geometric, bound by fragmented hedgerows supported by post and wire. Fields used for paddocks are often subdivided with horse tape.
- Small-scale wet woodland and wetland habitats scattered on the edge of the area, often designated as LWS. BAP priority habitat wet woodland is found at Bottle Copse and The Moors, with wet meadow and wet grassland found at Brook Farm Meadow LWS.
- A dense settled character influenced by modern development including the new garden village on the site of Arborfield Garrison and the southern edge of Wokingham which incorporates an industrial estate. There is little consistent style or form.
- Older scattered settlement of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages at Barkham and Arborfield Cross. The buildings have traditional vernacular of timber framing and clay tiles, exemplified by the Conservation Area at Arborfield Cross. A number of farmhouses are listed, **including Grade II\* Barlett's Farmhouse.**
- A network of busy local roads cross the area. They tend to be rural in character, with ditches, hedges and hedgerow trees, sometimes opening directly onto the arable fields. The A327 adds noise and movement to the area.
- Public rights of way run between the settlements, and provide access for recreational use.
- A rural character away from development and roads, with views across to adjacent character areas including across the Loddon Valley.
- A historic road, now represented by footpaths, lanes and Victorian carriageways, that appears on Norden's map of 1607, connecting Swallowfield Park via Arborfield Cross and the Coombes (in LCA L1), with Wokingham.

## Natural Landscape

- J2.1 The area is gently undulating at between 50m and 65m AOD. In some areas it is more rolling with steeper slopes, for instance where it narrows between the two areas of hills to the west forming a shallow valley between Barkham and Arborfield. Locally these shallow valleys and the wooded area around them are known as **'The Coombes', which extends into L1.**
- J2.2 Predominately underlain by London Clay with the sand of the Bagshot Formation in the east and localised Fourth and Fifth River Terrace gravel deposits in the far northern tips. Small areas of Alluvium follow the courses of the network of streams associated with the Barkham Brook.



- J2.3 The soils tend to have impeded drainage or high groundwater and there is a consistent pattern through the area of drainage channels, streams, ditches and open water bodies of varying sizes. There are small-scale wetland characteristics around the water bodies, including wet meadow, wet grassland and BAP priority habitat wet woodland at Brook Farm Meadow and The Moors, both designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).
- J2.4 The principal land uses are settlement and agriculture. Arable cultivation dominates agricultural land use in large geometric fields with sheep pasture on higher ground. Post and wire fencing is a common replacement for gaps in the hedgerows. Smaller horse paddocks with post and rail fencing are associated with settled areas such as the fringes of Wokingham. The large-scale landscape acts as an important separation between settlements.
- J2.5 Trees are an important element in the landscape, including mature hedgerow trees and remnant hedgerow trees in fields. These combine with woodland belts and the wooded horizons of the surrounding hills to create a rural character to the area, which is influenced by modern development on the urban fringe. Shelterbelts and small farm woodlands are typical lowland oak woodland, some with hazel coppice. Pound Copse and Bottle Copse are both LWS, comprising BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland and ancient woodland of neglected coppice, dominated by oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*).

## Cultural Landscape

- J2.6 It is likely that the clay soils, being difficult to work, remained predominantly wooded until Saxon times and were not settled during the prehistoric or Romano-British periods. There was a Domesday settlement at Barkham, although the present village has shifted. Its original site is marked by the position of the church, and a late medieval/post-medieval moat manor at Church Farm. There is a second possible moat at the site of the former Biggs Farm, now within the Arborfield Garrison.
- J2.7 Wokingham (described more fully in J1) was first recorded in 1146, and was granted a market in 1219. Although the village of Arborfield Cross developed at a major junction of roads, the area as a whole contained few rural villages and settlement outside Wokingham consisted mainly of dispersed farms.
- J2.8 Parliamentary enclosures produced the regular, straight-edged field boundaries that are particularly prevalent in the areas of former commons, such as at Langley Common and Barkham Common, areas of which remain well-preserved. Across the rest of the area, however, the predominantly irregular field boundaries indicate the voluntary enclosure of earlier field systems.
- J2.9 Later developments have considerably changed the landscape. In particular the development of the Army Remount Depot during the First World War and later the headquarters of the Corps Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Training Establishment in World War II led to the formation of Arborfield Garrison. Second World War pillboxes are to be found secreted in the countryside. Apparently designed to defend the garrison and routes to London the most evident today is the one covering Barkham Bridge on the B3349. The military moved out of Arborfield Garrison in 2016 and the site, and land to the south which was not part of the former garrison, is being developed as part of the Arborfield Garrison SDL, which once completed will provide up to 3,500 homes.
- J2.10 **Modern estates of large 'executive style' homes** at Arborfield Garrison have little consistent character or form, although brick is the most common material. The suburbs of Wokingham extend into this character area at Eastheath, and there are industrial estates on the edge of Wokingham and near Hogwood Farm. The built edge of Arborfield Garrison SDL is currently abrupt, however SANGS to the south and east will integrate the settlement within the wider countryside as planting matures.
- J2.11 An older pattern of farmsteads and villages includes part of Arborfield, Arborfield Cross, and Barkham. The rural farmsteads and hamlets are largely traditional buildings, timber framed or brick with clay tiles, with weatherboarded barns, as shown by the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area. Many of the farmhouses are now listed buildings, including the Grade II\* 16th century **Barlett's Farmhouse**.

- J2.12 There is a regular network of roads throughout the area which tend to have a rural character with ditches, hedgerows and hedgerow trees, although increased traffic is having a negative impact. Rural tracks, bridleways and, less frequently, footpaths give access for recreational use, for instance to the ancient settlement of Barkham and to fishing ponds. Opportunities for formal recreation are provided by Greenfields Carp Fishing and the Sand Martins Golf Club, both on the edge of Finchampstead.
- J2.13 The A327 runs along much of the edge of the Arborfield Garrison SDL, and is much busier than other roads. New roads proposed as part of the Arborfield Garrison SDL will link the settlement to the A327 west of Arborfield, extend Nine Mile Ride from Finchampstead and upgrade the single lane Barkham Bridge.

## Perceptual Landscape

- J2.14 This landscape has a wooded context from hedgerow trees and wooded horizons outside of the area, which creates a loose sense of enclosure to the north and south. There are views across the adjacent character areas to the east and west, including across the Loddon Valley.
- J2.15 The A327 introduces noise and movement to the area, however as it is now bounded by the Arborfield Garrison SDL it is less disruptive to rural character. Away from the settlements there is generally a rural character, enhanced by hedgerows and the large fields which act as separation between settlements.

### Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Barkham Brook and associated wetland which provide important ecological habitats including wet meadow and BAP priority habitat wet woodland.
- Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provides a rural character away from settlement, and creates an important separation between settlements.
- Mature hedgerow trees and in-field trees which provide a wooded character and visual interest within the landscape.
- Historic Second World War pillboxes and other defence works, which are now a scenic part of the landscape.
- Rural settlement pattern of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages outside the urban area which provides a rural character and a link to the past.
- Recreational value of the network of rights of way between settlements.
- Views across the landscape to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and to the wooded hills to the north and south provides a loose sense of enclosure.

### Landscape Condition

The landscape is in overall moderate condition, due to the pattern of arable and pastoral fields, and remnant wetland influences associated with Barkham Brook. However, the hedgerow network is fragmented and the introduction of further development through the Arborfield Garrison SDL and associated infrastructure will further fragment the rural settlement pattern altering the character of the area.

### Key Issues

- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and wet woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change. Climate change is also likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows.
- Hedgerow loss and replacement with fencing associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Loss of structure and species diversity of the woodland belts has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- 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 more horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to an accumulation of shelters, vehicles and equipment.
- Pressure for large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure impacting landscape character. Rapid rate of change due to ongoing redevelopment and expansion of Arborfield Garrison including development of 3,500 homes as part of the Arborfield Garrison strategic development but includes two areas of SANG to the south and the east of the SDL.
- Continuing pressure for new roads including the proposed Arborfield Cross Relief Road, Nine Mile Ride Extension and upgrading the Barkham Bridge will increase the fragmentation of the landscape and visual intrusion of transport corridors.
- Increased traffic on rural roads due to expanding residential development in the area leading to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air pollution in rural areas.
- **Light pollution at night causing 'sky glow'.**
- High demands for recreation continue to threaten the tranquillity of the landscape. Recreational pressure can lead to erosion of special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features and is a continuing problem in this well-populated borough.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

### Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the remaining rural character of the landscape. The key aspects to be conserved and enhanced are the field pattern with mature hedgerow trees, wetland and woodland habitats, rural lanes and historic features.

In terms of development, the aim is to integrate new development into its landscape setting, and retain the open and rural character of the landscape between settlements.

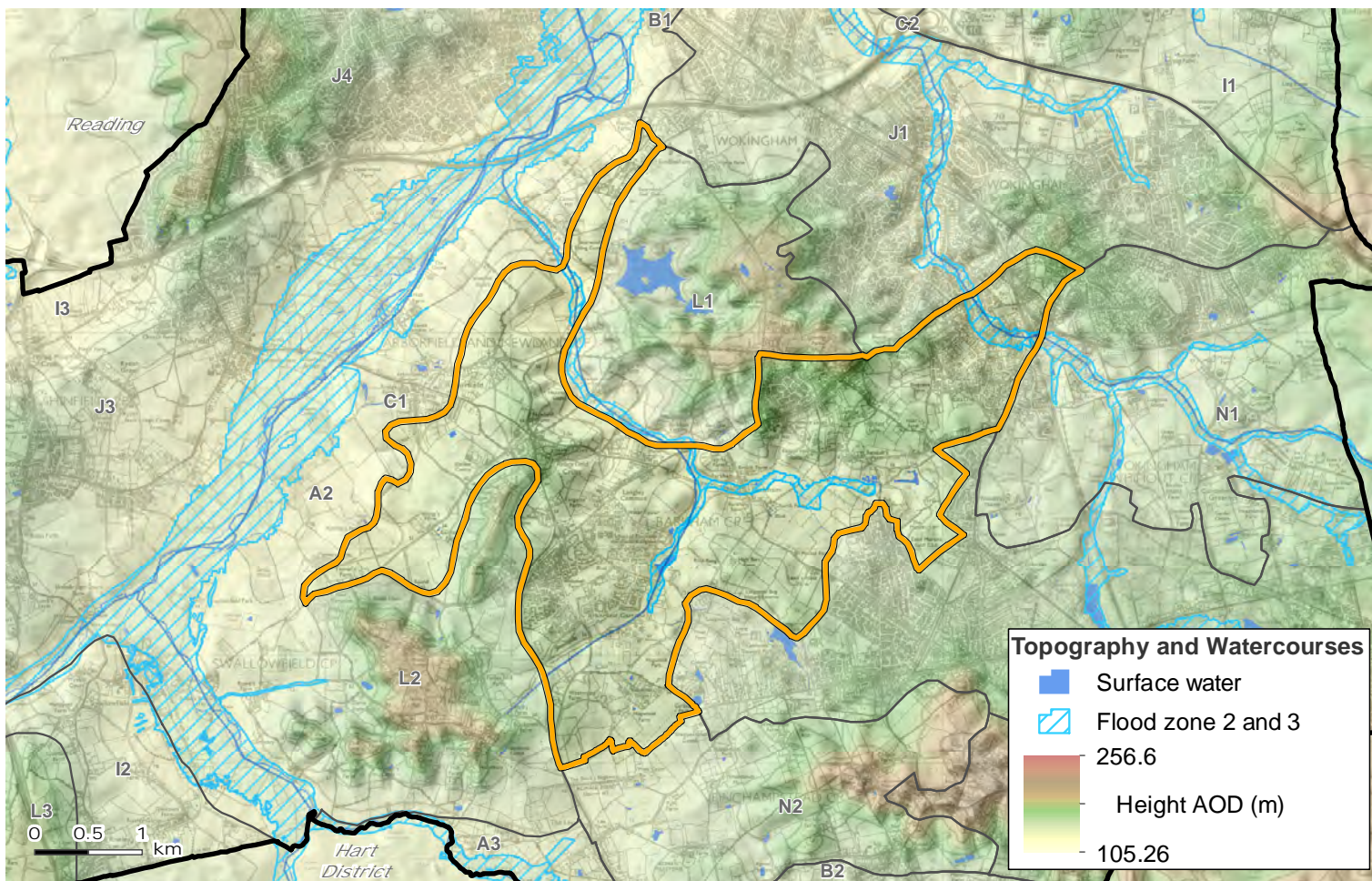
### Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve the scenic quality and naturalistic character of the Barkham Brook.

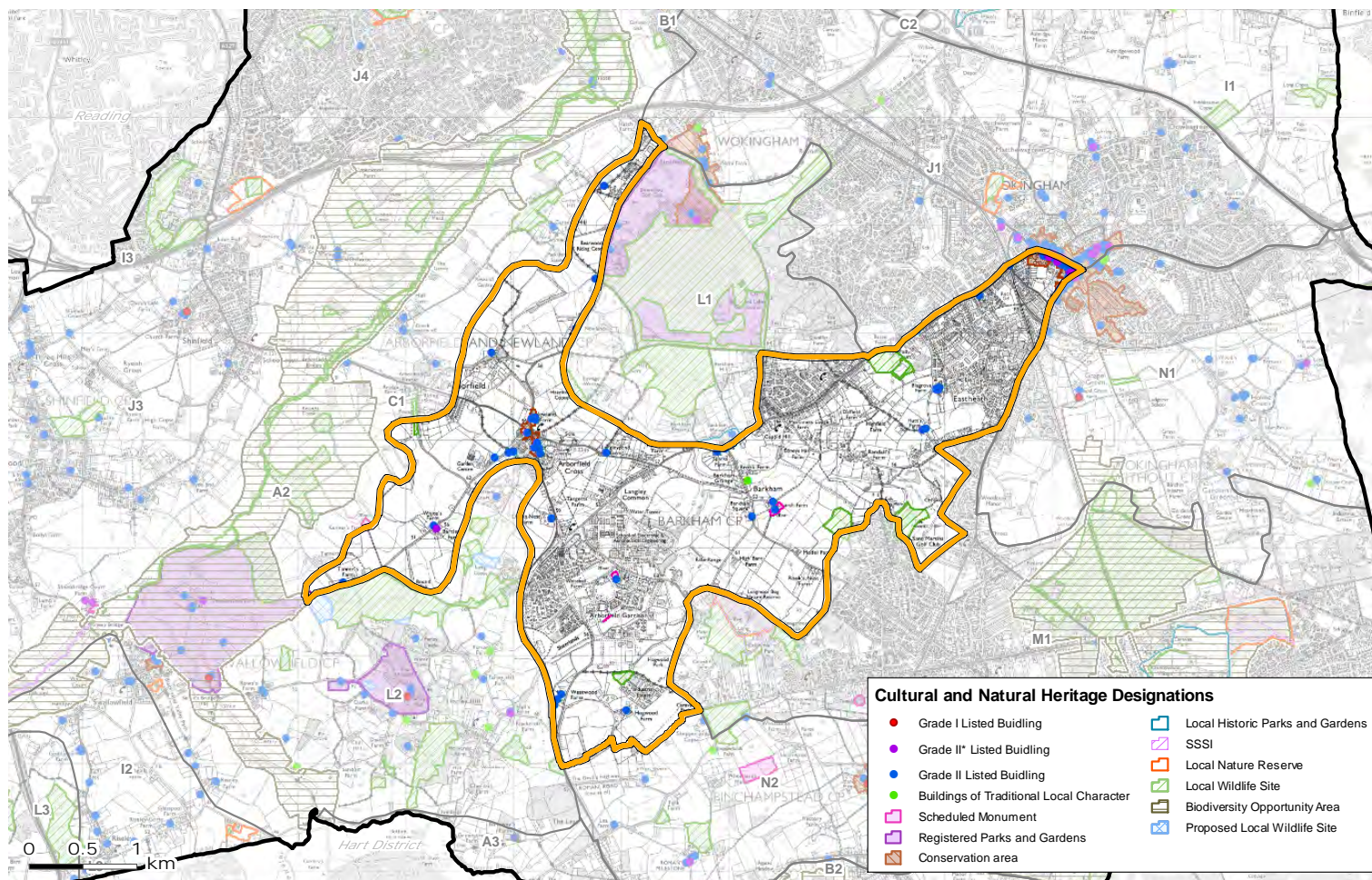


- Conserve woodlands, including ancient woodland, BAP priority habitats and remnant standard trees. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species in order to provide screening of roads and development and linking woodland habitats. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the farmed landscape which provides a physical and visual separation or gap between settlements. Protect the individual identity of towns and villages, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land between Arborfield Garrison and Barkham, and Barkham and Wokingham town, and Arborfield Garrison and Arborfield Cross.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows 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. Reinstate 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.
- 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 landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- Conserve, enhance and manage wetland and woodland habitats including within LWS. Protect the habitats from development, changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. An appropriate wetland and woodland management regime is critical.
- Consider undertaking character appraisals/village design statements of key settlements such as Arborfield and Barkham to identify distinctive features worthy of conservation such as local style and vernacular. Conserve the value of Arborfield Cross Conservation Area and the listed and historic buildings, including farmhouses, and non-designed heritage assets such as Second World War defences.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries and large-species trees to provide visual screening and create a positive interface between the built up and rural areas particularly around Wokingham town, Arborfield Garrison, and Finchampstead.
- 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 potential impacts of any new development on valuable attributes.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage particularly in the most rural areas.
- Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate new roads in relation to proposed Arborfield Cross Relief Road and the extension of Nine Mile Ride. Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.
- Conserve views to distinctive wooded horizons. 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 elevated landscape.

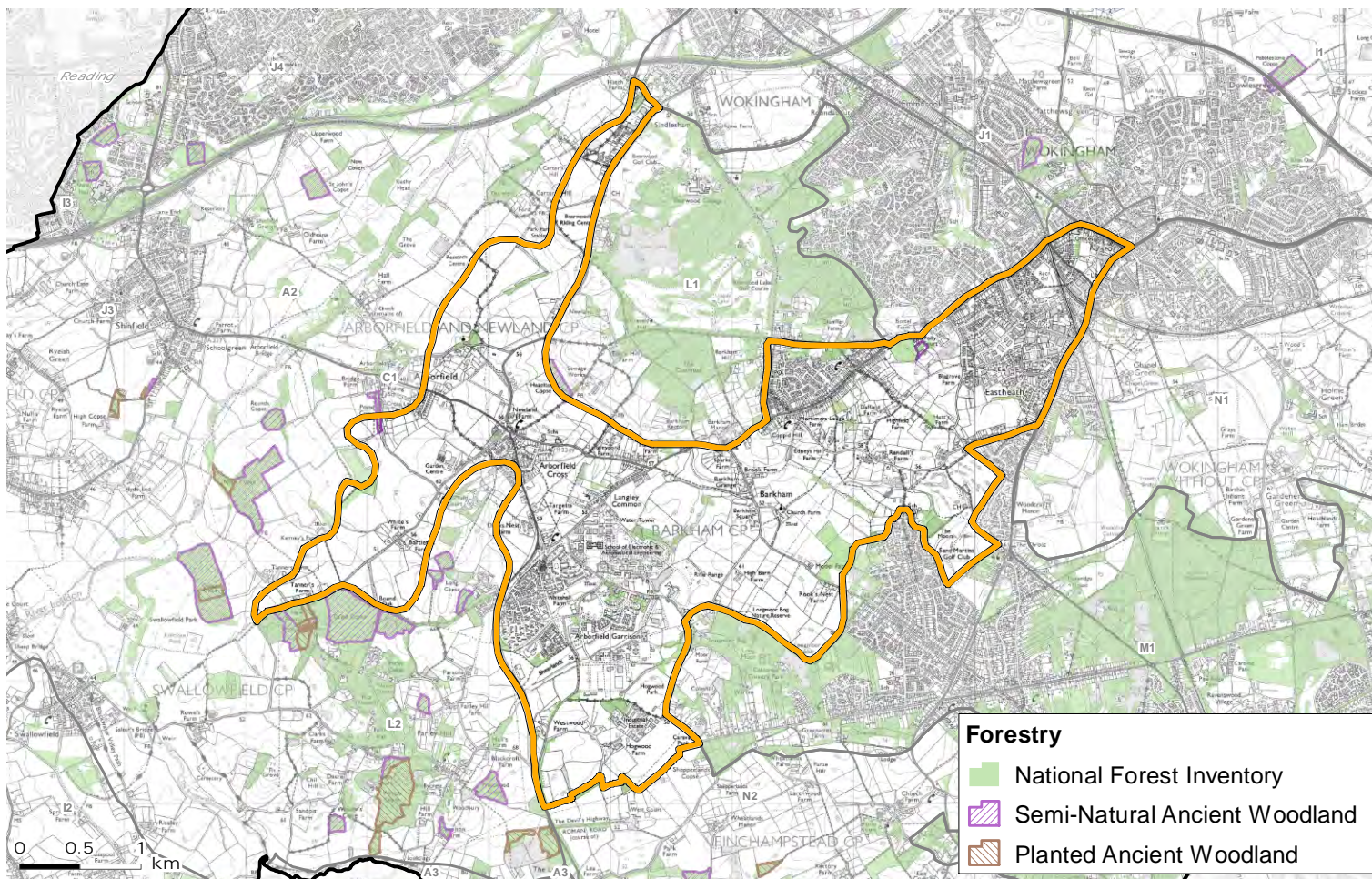
- Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution through the sensitive siting of any new development, including infrastructure, and especially any proposed night-time lighting.



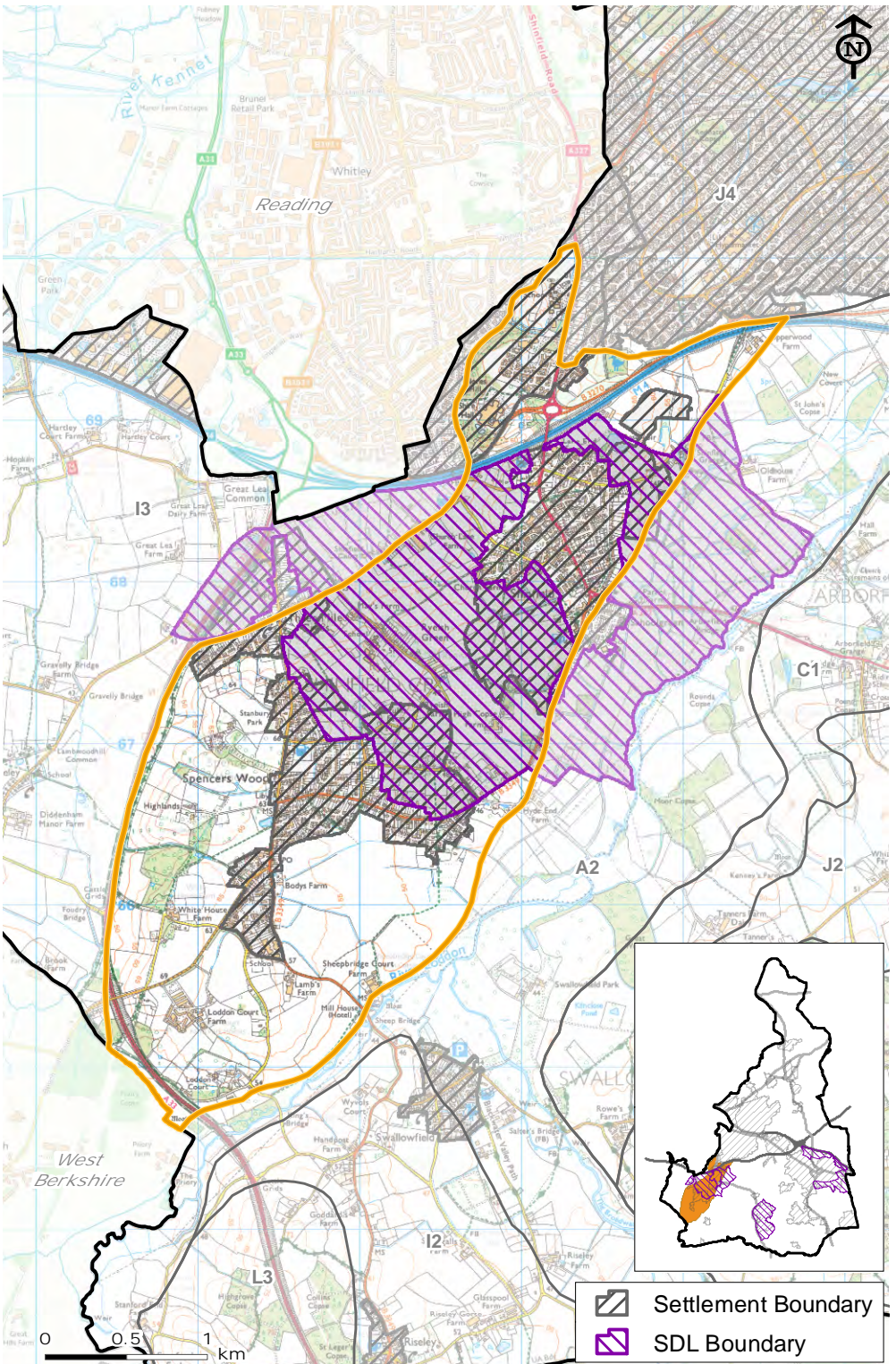














## SUMMARY

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

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





## Key Characteristics

- Rolling clay ridge above the Loddon Valley to the east and the lowlands to the west, rising to a flat sandy plateau at 66m AOD.
- Small scattered mixed deciduous woodland blocks and copses including some of ancient origin, many designated as LWS, most located on the steep west and south facing slopes of the ridge.
- Fragmented unimproved meadow habitats, with BAP priority habitat lowland meadow, are **found on lower slopes, for example Clare's Green Road LWS**.
- Large arable fields with some pasture, with an intact hedgerow network and hedgerow oaks. Horse paddocks feature on the edge of settlements or around large farmsteads e.g. Sheepridge Court and Loddon Court Farms. Smaller and irregular field boundaries around Three Mile Cross and Spencers Wood are still evident, indicating early enclosure.
- Remnant parkland at Shinfield Grange, Loddon Court, Shinfield Lodge, Stanbury Park and Highlands. A number of these are clustered along the top of the ridge overlooking the clay lowlands of Grazeley to the west. These parklands contain BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland and ancient woodland. Visually prominent parkland veteran trees include many Wellingtonias, there is a prominent avenue of these trees along the drive to Wellington Court, originally the Stanbury Park estate.
- The GHQ Stop Line and associated Second World War features built during the summer of 1940 to contain the threatened German invasion.
- Densely settled landscape, with new large-scale residential estate development around the substantially 20th century settlements of Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross, as part of South of the M4 SDL.
- To the south of the area, settlement is more scattered with traditional farmsteads many with a strong vernacular of polychromatic Reading brick and weatherboarding. A number of farmhouses are listed including Grade II\* Sheepridge Court. There is a permanent mobile home site at Loddon Court Farm and some agricultural buildings have been converted to other uses e.g. Lambs Farm Business Park.
- Network of rural lanes bordered by water-filled ditches connect the original settlement pattern. Some B roads have urbanised features including kerbs and pavements. The A33 form the western border and is very busy, while the M4 crosses the area north of Shinfield, and introduces noise and movement.
- Sense of elevation from the ridgeline and good views over surrounding lowlands including to the Loddon valley and over West Berkshire.

## Natural Landscape

- J3.1 The Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay is characterised by a prominent, undulating clay ridge between two lowland areas of A2: Loddon River Valley to the east and I3: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland to the west. The landscape rises to a flat, sandy plateau of 66m AOD at Stanbury Park, deposited as a fifth level terrace of a proto-Thames. The sandy soils of the plateau are acidic and give rise to distinctive vegetation and historic land use of common land around Spencers Wood. There are a number of River Terrace Gravel deposits throughout the area.

- J3.2 The flat plateau area was formerly Spencerswood Common but all common land has now been enclosed. The former common is now a network of fields, woodland and parkland and is characterised by acid-loving species such as Scots pine, birch, holly and rhododendron.
- J3.3 Elsewhere, the rolling agricultural landscape is characterised by a variety of field sizes divided by largely intact hedgerows and mature hedgerow oaks. Arable fields are most prominent, although there is pasture and horse grazing, particularly on the edge of settlements. Temporary planning permission was granted for a solar farm at Sheepridge Court.
- J3.4 There are a number of woodlands, mixed woodland belts and tree clumps associated with designed landscapes or remnant deciduous copses. Much of the woodland, including areas to the north of the M4, contain BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland and are designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). There are areas of ancient woodland, with a history of coppice with standard management. Often this traditional management has ceased, but at **Pearman's Copse** LWS and LNR this management system has been reintroduced. Old ash stools with field maple (*Acer campestre*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) **dominate Pearman's Copse, and it** supports a rich woodland flora with around 27 ancient woodland indicator species and a good range of woodland invertebrates.
- J3.5 There are small fragmented areas of unimproved neutral grassland, some recorded as BAP priority habitat lowland meadows. **Clare's Green** Road Grassland LWS is designated for its botanical interest.
- J3.6 The presence of parkland is a feature of the landscape, with remnant parklands around Loddon Court, Highlands and Shinfield Park at Nores Hill, some of which is BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland. Parkland trees stand out as features against the skyline including individual Wellingtonias and especially the avenue of *Wellingtonias* along the drive to Wellington Court, previously the Stanbury Park estate. The Highlands site is visually open and is a defining feature on the edge of Spencers Wood.
- J3.7 A small area between Loddon Court and Sheepbridge Court Farm is part of the Loddon Valley South BOA. This is mainly concentrated along the course of the River Loddon and Broadwater in A2: Loddon River Valley however the farmland bordering the Loddon is potentially important for farmland birds.
- J3.8 Residential development is a significant land use. Boundaries include rows of conifers and suburban fences that have eroded the rural character of the ridge in places and contrast with the native hedgerows and hedgerow trees of the surrounding farmland. Other features that have an urbanising influence on the landscape are street lighting, white lines and road signs, kerbs and pavements, lay-bys and municipal street furniture along with disturbance generated by road users.
- J3.9 The public open space and SANGS created as part of the South of the M4 SDL between the settlements of Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross is important in maintaining the separation and landscape setting of the three settlements. The southern settlement edge of Spencers Wood is defined by roadside and hedgerow trees.

## Cultural Landscape

- J3.10 In common with clay soils found elsewhere in the borough there is little evidence for extensive prehistoric or Romano-British settlement of this area at the edge of the Loddon river valley. By Saxon times it appears likely that settlement and agriculture expanded onto previously marginal areas - **the "-feld" element in the name of Shinfield, a Domesday settlement, suggesting a largely** open and cultivated landscape in the Saxon period.
- J3.11 In the medieval period in this area, **forest law protected the Crown's hunting, timber and other** rights over both private and common land in the face of pressure from assart incursions into the woodland for cultivation and pasture. The piecemeal clearance of woodland to form cultivable land by assarting, and later by agreement, continued until the 18th century.
- J3.12 The first edition OS map shows the area to contain numerous small irregular fields with wavy boundaries, indicative of early enclosure of former open fields, as well as of heath and common as

at Spencers Common. Some of the common still existed at the time the map was drawn. With adjoining landscapes of the Loddon (A2, C1) and Farley Hill (L2) these form the largest area of early enclosure landscape in the borough. Some fields around Three Mile Cross and Spencers Wood still show this early enclosure pattern, although much of this has been lost through expanding development or amalgamation of fields.

- J3.13 Spencers Wood takes its name from the Despencer family who owned Beaumys Castle (located on the River Loddon) an important medieval family. Beaumys was later held by Nicholas de la Beche (**Seneschal of Gascony and Governor of Edward III's heir the Black Prince**) after whom Beech Hill is named.
- J3.14 There was a loose network of winding country lanes, but few major roads until the 18th century. The road between Reading and Basingstoke (now the A33), was established in 1718 and was one of the earliest turnpike roads in Berkshire.
- J3.15 The traditional settlement pattern was of small agricultural settlements at Shinfield and Three Mile Cross, surrounded by quite closely spaced medieval/post medieval farmhouses. The rural farmsteads are often timber framed infilled with soft polychromatic Reading brick with half-hipped clay tiled roofs and brick walls as boundary features. A number of these farmhouses are now listed buildings including the Grade II\* Sheepridge Court. Weatherboarding is a distinctive feature. Some of these traditional agricultural buildings are now encapsulated within more recent suburban development where they form landmark buildings. Traces of areas of landscaped parkland associated with country houses are still evident to varying degrees around Shinfield Park (The Grove), Stanbury Park, Highlands and Loddon Court.
- J3.16 The area saw rapid expansion during the Victorian and post-Victorian periods resulting in developments of Victorian semi-detached properties at Spencers Wood, Three Mile Cross and Shinfield.
- J3.17 These settlements are now expanding, as part of the South of the M4 SDL, with estate-type developments with public open space and SANGS between the settlements. The modern built development shows a large range of different house styles and use of materials, with little consistent character of form, although brick is the most common material. The Thames Valley Science Park, in the north of the area between the M4 and Cutbush Lane East, is under development. This includes the Gateway building, which is clad in corten steel giving it a distinctive red appearance and making it highly visible across the landscape. The new Shinfield Relief Road was opened in 2017, connecting the Blackboy Roundabout north of the M4 with the A327 (in A2). This provides access to the Thames Valley Science Park and new development as part of the South of the M4 SDL.
- J3.18 Other significant 20th century additions are the Second World War pillboxes and buried tank ditch located on the southern end of the clay ridge and form part of the defensive GHQ Stop Line, built in 1940 and which extends east along the River Loddon and northwards along the Foudry Brook.
- J3.19 A network of footpaths and narrow tracks provide opportunities for informal recreation, and give the area beyond the settlement a rural character.

## Perceptual Landscape

- J3.20 The M4 in the north of the area and the A33 dual carriageway along the western boundary introduce noise and movement into the area although the A33 corridor is well-treed and in a cutting adjacent to the southern end of the clay ridge reducing impacts. Views to Reading and the built up areas north of the M4 introduce an urbanising element.
- J3.21 Away from these transport corridors and settlements, particularly south of Spencers Wood, the area retains a rural character, with views over the surrounding lowland landscapes of the Loddon valley and the arable fields around Grazeley. From the south of the area there are views across West Berkshire towards Stratfield Mortimer and other nearby villages. There are areas along the southern boundary of the area with high levels of tranquillity and dark night skies.
- J3.22 The slopes of the clay ridgeline provide physical and visual separation between the settlements of Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross.



J3.23 Mary Russell Mitford, author of **'Our Village'** often walked along **Woodcock Lane** (a footpath now running along the A33 Swallowfield bypass) of which she wrote:

*"In that very lane am I writing on this sultry June day, luxuriating in the shade, the verdure, the fragrance of hayfield and beanfield, and the absence of any noise except the song of birds and the whirl of a thousand forms of insect life so often heard among the general hush of a summer noon".*

#### Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Remnant historic parklands and visually prominent parkland trees, including many Wellingtonias, especially the avenue of this species which provide time-depth, visual diversity and a sense of orientation to the landscape.
- Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provide a rural character away from the urban areas and provide an important separation between settlements.
- Small-scale woodlands provide visual diversity in the landscape, as well as ecologically important habitats.
- Strong hedgerow network with standard oaks provides a wooded character and visual interest within the rural landscape.
- Network of rural lanes bordered by water-filled ditches provide evidence of the original settlement pattern.
- Views to the surrounding lowlands provide a sense of place and of orientation.
- Undeveloped slopes of the clay ridgeline which is visually prominent and provides separation between settlements.
- The GHQ Stop Line and associated Second World War features which follows the course of the Foudry Brook crossing the southern end of the clay ridge and along the River Loddon.
- Open area of former common land to the west of Basingstoke Road at 'Highlands'.
- Beaumys Castle, a rare example of a defensive moated site in medieval times and on the front line of the GHQ defence in the Second World War.
- Isolated traditional farmsteads and their associated buildings, particularly in the south of the LCA.

#### Landscape Condition

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

#### Key Issues

- Loss of deciduous woodland or changes in woodland structure due to loss of species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands have 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 heath or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and

climate change.

- Hedgerow and tree loss and soil erosion associated with settlement expansion 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
- Potential for agricultural land to be **kept in 'hope' value**, and therefore not well managed, 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 large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure, such as the South of the M4 Strategic Development, impacting landscape character and leading to further pressure to amalgamate the separate settlements
- Pressure to develop the undulating slopes of the clay ridgeline which are visually prominent.
- Pressure for new commercial premises, including the further major expansion of the Thames Valley Science Park, over a 20 year period.
- Increased traffic on rural roads due to expanding residential development leading to further loss of tranquillity, and erosion of road version and demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, associated with the South of the M4 SDL particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.
- Light pollution **at night causing 'sky glow'**.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.
- Decline or decay of historic features including those of the GHQ Stop Line.

### Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Spencers Wood Farmed and Settled Clay* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the rural character of the agricultural landscape. The key aspects to be enhanced and actively managed are the pattern of hedgerows, remnant parkland, trees and avenues, views to the Loddon Valley and west Berkshire, the rural character of the lanes, and the GHQ Stop Line. There are opportunities for woodland planting to integrate the M4, busy roads and expanding urban fringes of Reading, in particular around the expanding settlements of Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross as part of the South of the M4 SDL.

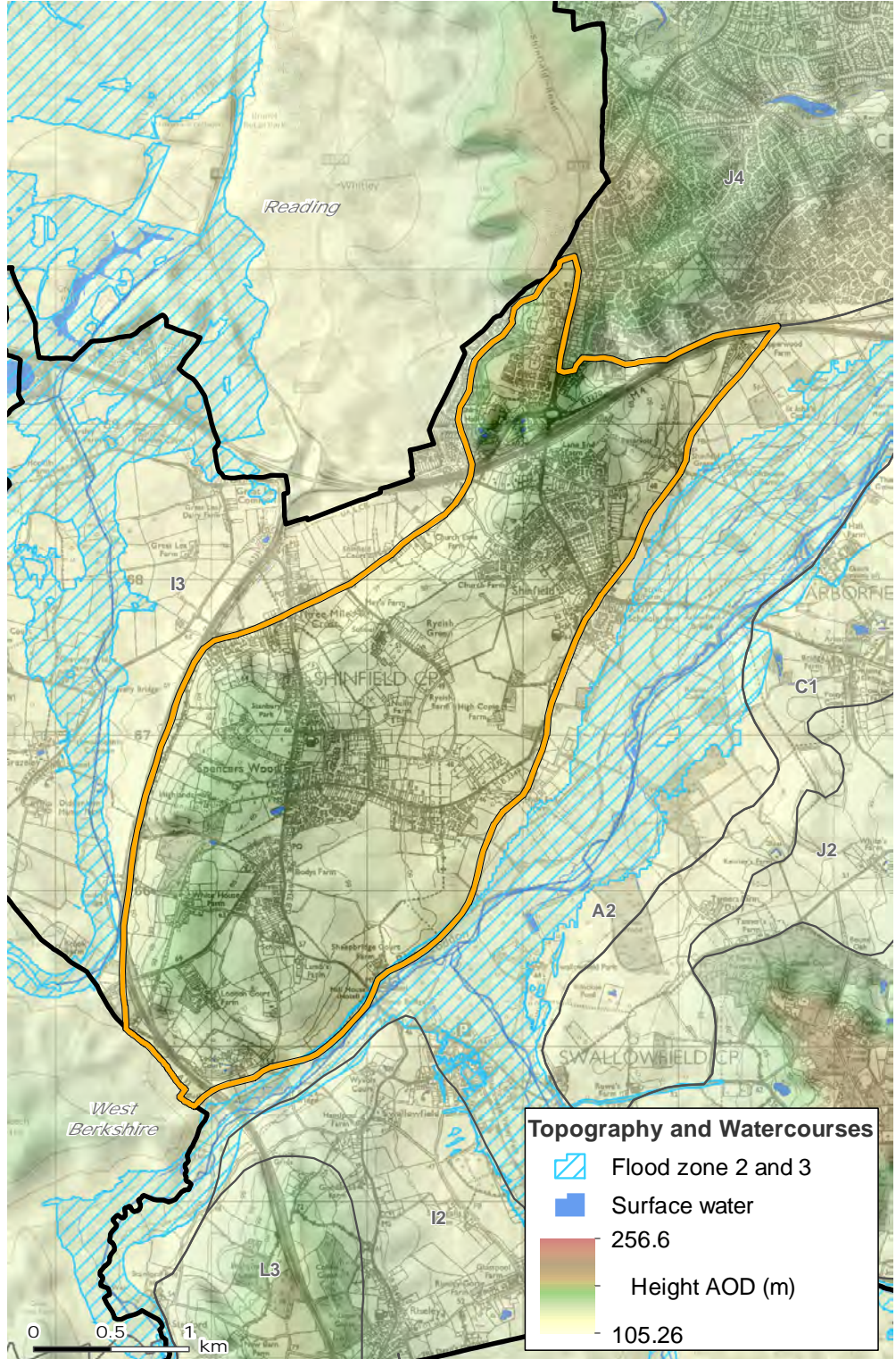
In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the rural character of the landscape and gaps between settlements while maintaining the integrity of settlement identity.

### Landscape Guidelines

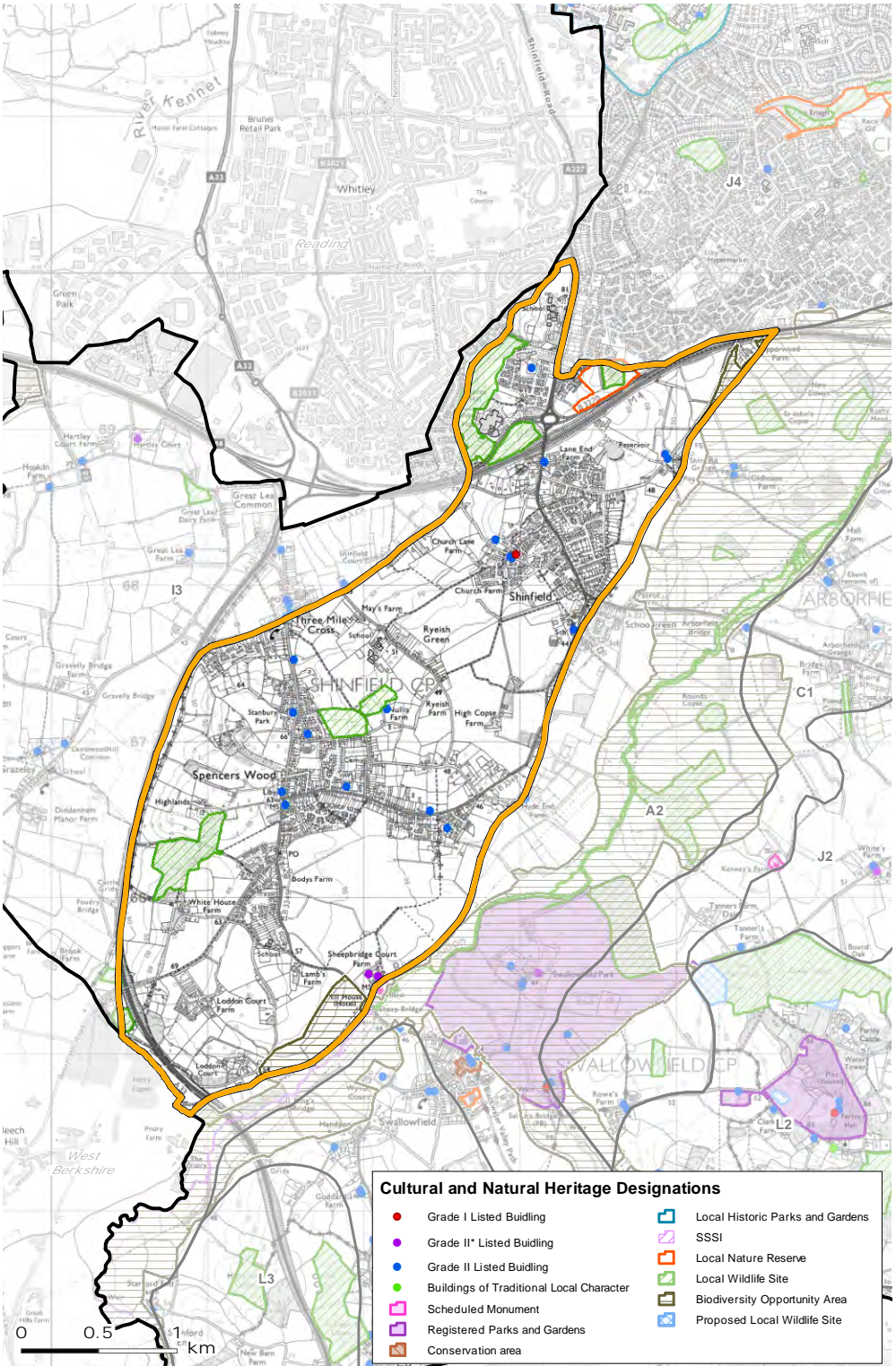
- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape. Conserve ancient woodlands and woodland copses. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows 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. Reinstate 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.
- Conserve and protect the landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- 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 parkland landscapes associated with former manor houses, particularly in areas of BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland. Plan for the next generation of parkland and avenue trees.
- Conserve features associated with the GHQ Stop Line.
- Conserve, enhance and manage woodland and meadow habitats, particularly BAP priority habitats and LWS, from development and changes in land use. An area of land between Sheepridge Court and Loddon Court Farm is part of the Loddon Valley South BOA. The farmland bordering the Loddon is potentially important for farmland birds such as Yellowhammer. An appropriate woodland and meadow management regime is critical.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries, hedgerows and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas.
- Conserve the open and rural character of the farmed landscape which provides a physical and visual separation or gaps between settlements. Protect the individual identity of towns and villages, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. Resist pressure for development on the slopes or the ridgeline which provides physical and visual separation between settlements, particularly Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage, particularly in the most rural areas.
- 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 woodland, hedgerow and tree planting to help integrate roads into the landscape including the Shinfield Eastern Relief Road. Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.



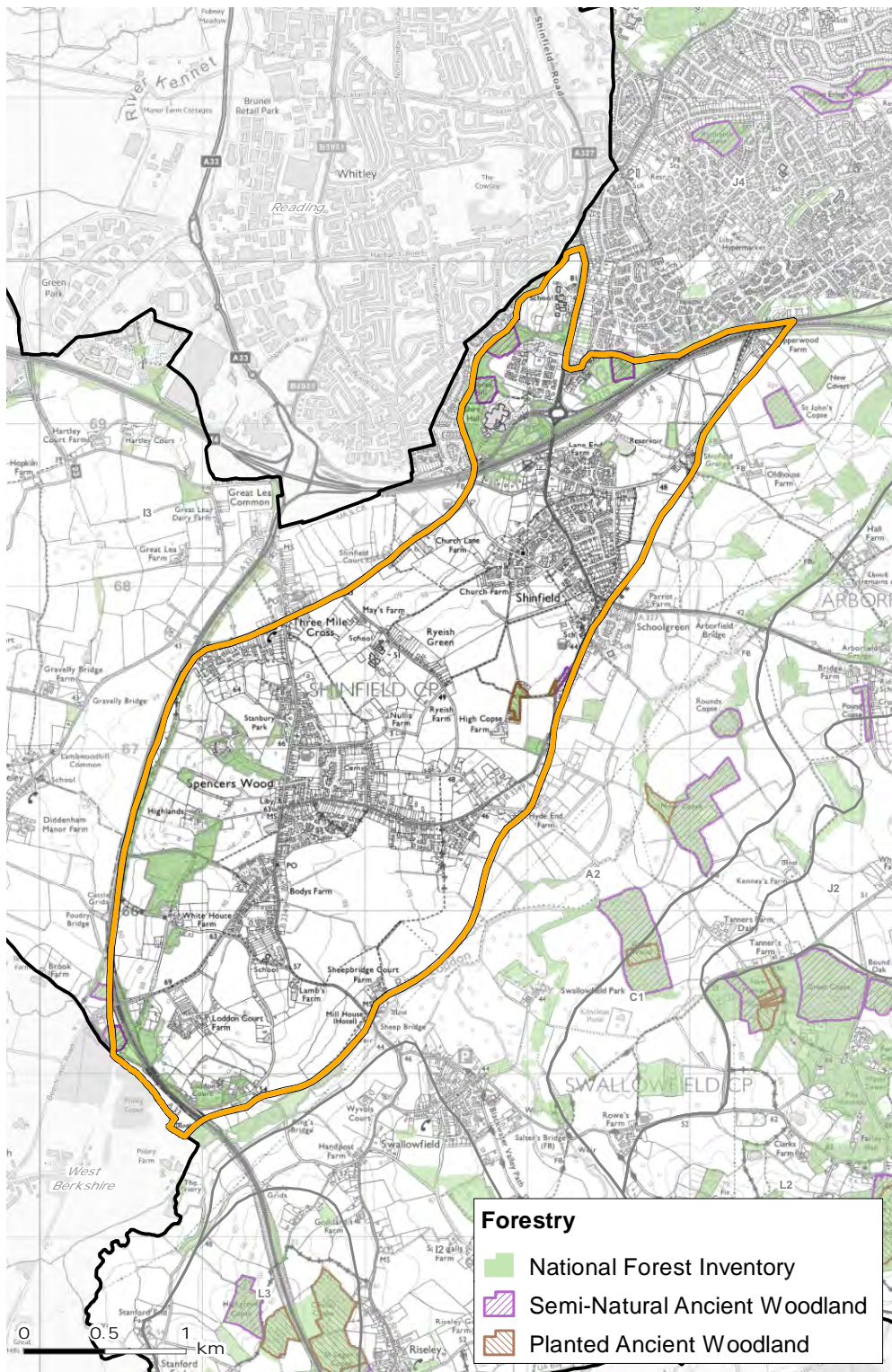
- Take care in the siting and design of vertical elements e.g. communication masts and the siting and design of large agricultural buildings so they do not impact on the valuable characteristics of this landscape.
- Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution through the sensitive siting of any new development, including infrastructure, and especially any proposed night-time lighting.



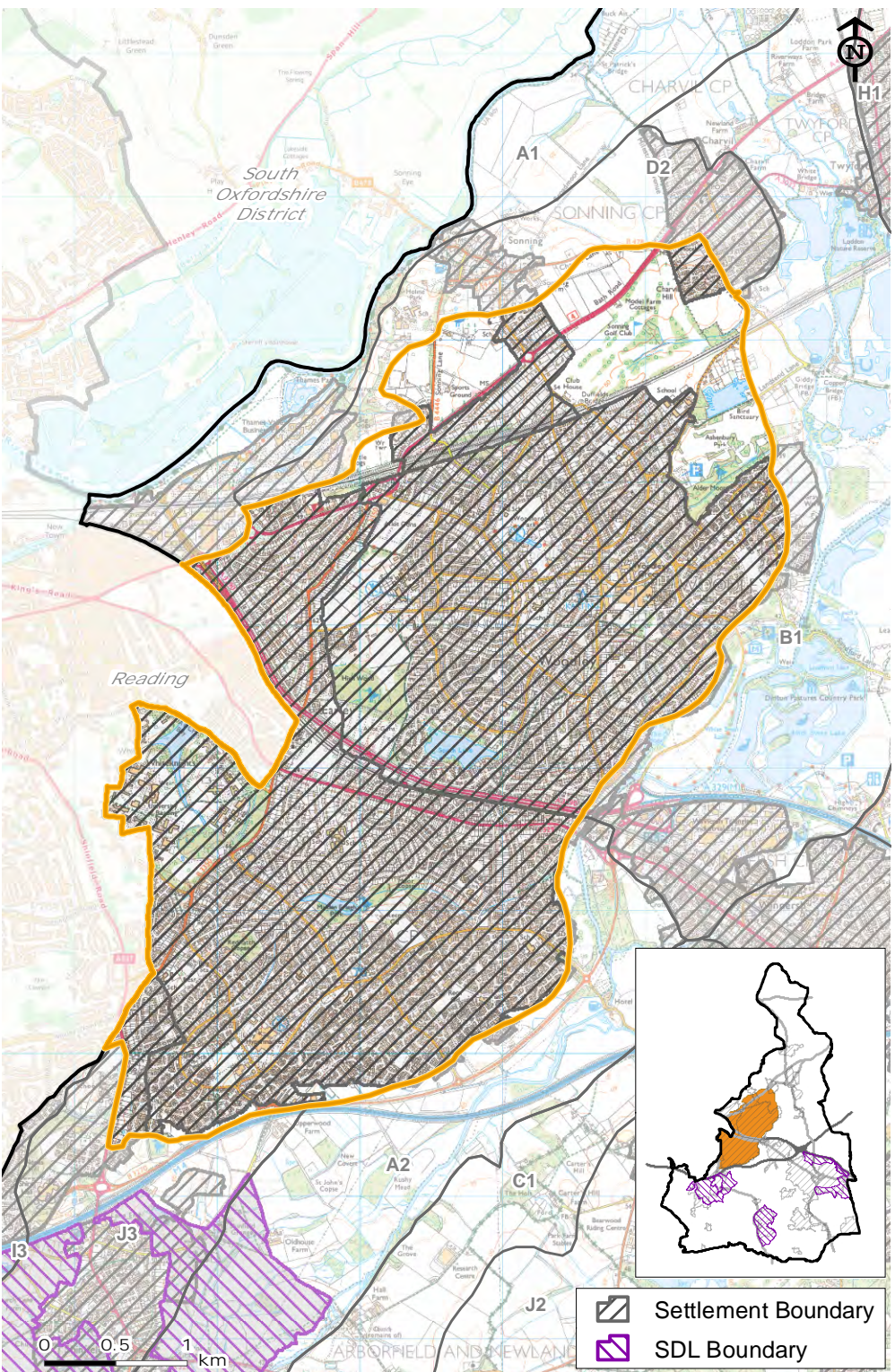














## SUMMARY

A densely settled area with a strong urban and suburban character. There are pockets of open space remaining which include public parks and sports grounds within the settled area.

Located in the west of the borough and to the east of the town of Reading, the area is bounded by the borough boundary, and the urban character extends into Reading. The northern boundary is defined by the transition to the floodplain of A1: Thames River Valley and the distinctive D2: Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes. The eastern boundary is the abrupt transition to the floodplain of B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water.





## Key Characteristics

- Gently rolling London Clay ridge between 40m to 80m, enclosing the Loddon Valley to the east, although the terrain is largely imperceptible due to the extent of built development.
- Small tributaries of the Loddon drain to the east to connect to the Old River. The lake at Ashenbury Park is part of flooded former gravel extraction works in the Loddon valley, and is now an LNR.
- Subtly wooded ridgeline created by wooded spaces on the urban fringe and within the urban area. Small BAP priority habitat wet woodland areas are found at Alder Moors, Sandpit Copse and **Norris' Copse Bird Sanctuary, which are designated as LWS.**
- Densely settled character associated with Reading, Woodley and Earley and extension of Sonning and Charvil with post-war and modern estates centred around earlier Victorian buildings and former country houses. There are few listed buildings outside the urban area, although two cropmarks are present north and south of the A4 between Sonning and Charvil.
- The small area of remaining open land is greatly influenced by the proximity of urban development and consists of a network of recreational spaces including public parks, sportsgrounds and a golf course, some of which are associated with areas of remnant historic parkland, such as Whiteknights Park (locally listed as a Historic Park and Garden).
- Very small areas of agricultural land remain between Woodley and the Thames Valley Business Park, and north of the A4 (Bath Road) associated with the University of Reading's Sonning Farm. These are all concentrated in the northern part of the character area, apart from the tiny area adjacent to the southern boundary.
- Well-developed major transport network, including the A329 (M), A4 Bath Road and two railway lines – the Great Western Main Line and the Reading-Waterloo line.
- Views over surrounding lowlands from the open areas at the edge of settlements. The residential areas are enhanced by the wooded ridgeline and stream corridors.

## Natural Landscape

- J4.1 The Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay character area is a gently rolling area underlain by London Clay which rises from around 40m AOD to a ridge of land at between 60 and 80m AOD. Located between the Thames and Loddon valleys, the area has been extensively overlain by a series of gravels relating to ancient river terraces. The soils produced are capable of supporting mixed farmland with woodland retained on the sandier and gravelly areas.
- J4.2 There are a number of small tributaries of the Loddon, which drain through this area in an easterly direction to connect with the Old River. There is also a lake relating to the flooded former gravel extraction near Ashenbury Park with links with B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water.
- J4.3 Within the settled area there are pockets of open space, some large, which are public parks or associated with the grounds of institutions such as the University of Reading, schools and colleges. Many of these are wooded and located in prominent elevated locations or occupying linear corridors associated with the small tributary streams that cross the settled area.
- J4.4 There is relatively little land in this character area **that could be considered 'rural'**. There are remnant fragments of relatively flat arable agricultural land located between Woodley and the Thames Valley Business Park and north of the Bath Road to the south of Sonning Farm – the

teaching farm of the University of Reading (which mainly sits in D2: Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes).

- J4.5 Outside of the settlement area, the land is used as public open space and typical urban fringe recreation spaces. This includes Sonning Golf Course which is large, but relatively well screened and infrequently visible. North of Bath Road there are a large number of sports pitches associated with Reading Cricket and Hockey Club, and Reading Rugby and Football Club. A number of the public parks or grounds of the large institutions have a natural character (including areas of important habitat) such as the bird sanctuary associated with the restored gravel workings at Ashenbury Park.
- J4.6 Although the Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay is dominated by urban development, it has retained a number of sites of nature conservation value within the settlement area. These include a variety of habitat types such as acid woodland, wet woodland, heathland and open water, many of which contain BAP priority habitats and are designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and LNR. Outside the settlement boundary there are areas of wet woodland, deciduous woodland and wet meadow, designated as Alder Moors, Sandpit Copse and Norris' **Copse Bird Sanctuary** LWS.

## Cultural Landscape

- J4.7 The modern settlement dominates this landscape. However, irregular boundaries of surviving areas of woodland, such as Alder Moor, suggest assart enclosures indicating earlier settlements. The small area of remaining undeveloped land to the north retains cropmarks designated as Scheduled Monuments, indicative of Roman agriculture set within predominantly 20th century enclosure patterns.
- J4.8 The first edition OS map shows Woodley and Earley as small rural communities within a mix of irregular and straight-sided fields, as well as extensive areas of parkland associated with large country houses such as Whiteknights Park (possibly the site of a medieval deer park at Earley, and now the campus of Reading University) which is locally listed, Bulmershe Court (now demolished), Maiden Erlegh and Shinfield Lodge.
- J4.9 The A4 Bath Road passes through the area, as does the Great Western Railway (GWR) main line railway and the Reading-Waterloo railway line. The Sonning Cutting was a major engineering feat, hand dug between 1838 and 1840. The London Road Bridge which spans the cutting is Grade II listed. Planned urban development after World War II was encouraged by the success of Reading and further stimulated by the A329 (M) motorway which connects the area to the M4 motorway. Woodley and Earley were both granted town status in 1974.
- J4.10 The Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay is one of the most densely settled areas of the borough with a strong urban and suburban character. Development is predominantly composed of a disaggregated grid of planned post-war housing estates with associated commercial and institutional uses with modern housing estates at the fringe of the area adjacent to the Loddon Valley. Settlement has expanded out from Reading and from the historic core of Woodley which is designated as a Conservation Area. Earley and Woodley are both settlements historically associated with the Loddon Valley.

## Perceptual Landscape

- J4.11 The presence of wooded and open space within the urban framework, particularly where they are associated with the more elevated areas is very important and provides a verdant counterpoint to the built fabric both from within and when viewed across the valley. The open spaces also permit occasional views out into the surrounding landscape, such as the views of the Loddon Valley from the reservoir site near Redhatch Copse.
- J4.12 Good views can be gained over the surrounding lowlands from the open areas at the edge of the settled area.

### Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Wooded ridgeline and small woodland copses provide a wooded backdrop to the urban development, and contain valuable habitats including BAP priority habitat wet woodland.
- Remaining agricultural land and Sonning Golf Club provide an important landscape buffer and sense of separation between Woodley and Sonning, and Woodley and Charvil.
- Recreational value from formal and informal recreation spaces including sports clubs, a golf course, and nature reserves - some of which are on areas of remnant historic parkland.
- Views over surrounding lowlands provide a sense of place and visual variety.

### Landscape Condition

The wildlife habitats and former historic parkland are in moderate condition. Outside the settled area the land is fragmented and heavily influenced by its urban setting, with no obvious landscape characteristics. There are opportunities to improve the urban interface and remaining wildlife habitats.

### 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 between Sonning and Woodley.
- High demands for recreation including recreational facilities.
- Demand for residential development is continuing to push towards the amalgamation of adjacent built areas including Sonning and Woodley and Charvil, and fragmentation of the remnant open rural landscape. Continuing expansion and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features.
- Demand for industrial buildings associated with transport corridors leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the landscape.
- **Light pollution at night causing 'sky glow'.**
- High demands for recreation continue to threaten the tranquillity of the landscape. Recreational pressure can lead to erosion of special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features and is a continuing problem in this well-populated borough
- 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 *Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the open areas within the urban conurbation; the character of the landscape between settlements; the rural interface and buffer to the more rural area of the Thames floodplain to the north, and the River Loddon to the east.

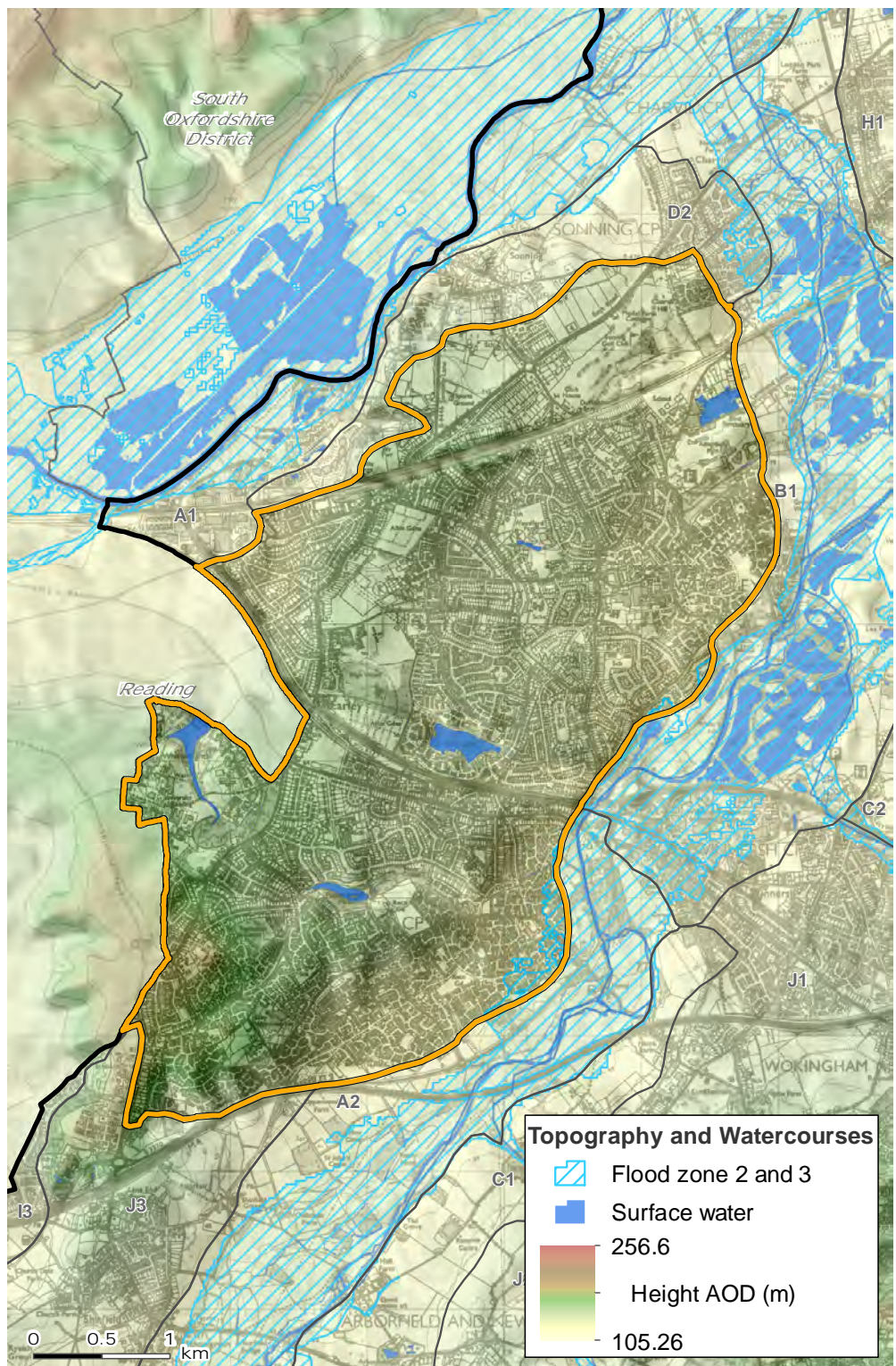
The key aspects to be enhanced and restored are the wildlife habitats and areas of remnant historic parkland. In particular there are opportunities for creation of woodland habitats to link and connect



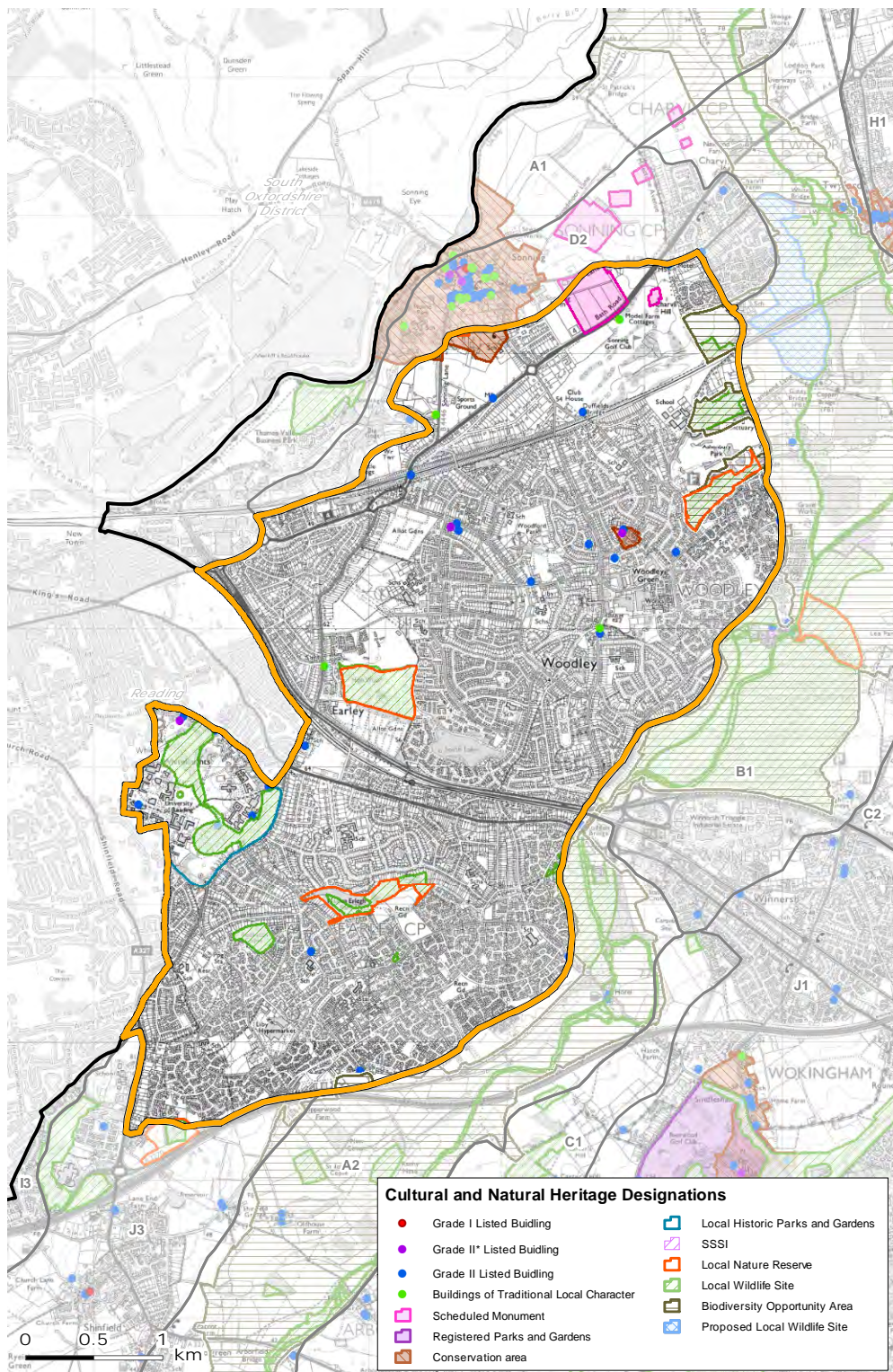
existing woodlands.

#### Landscape Guidelines

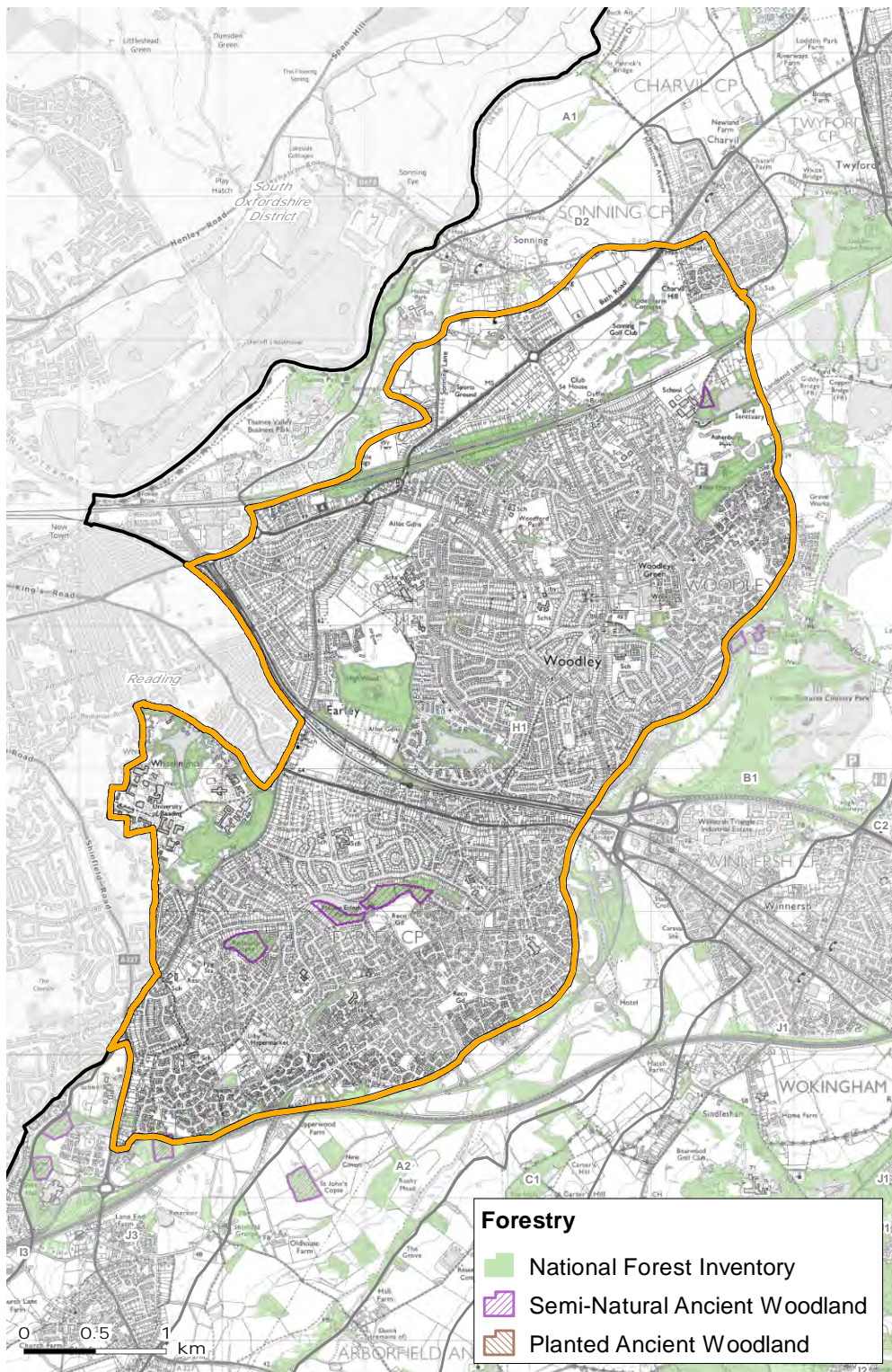
- Protect the remaining areas of open land separating Sonning, Woodley and Charvil in order to provide a physical and visual separation or gap between settlements.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, linking to current areas of BAP priority habitat, predominantly using locally occurring native species in order to provide screening of roads, development and the urban fringe.
- Reinststate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so, as important wildlife habitats and landscape features.
- 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 Woodley, Earley and Charvil.
- Increase recreational value of the area through creation of new public open space and public rights of way.
- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape; sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night; and ground modelling and other landscape works to help minimise disruption) to minimise the impacts of development on valuable attributes.
- Resist proposals that introduce extensive or obtrusive elements e.g. pylons on the visually sensitive open landscape.
- Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution through the sensitive siting of any new development, including infrastructure, and especially any proposed night-time lighting.











The map displays the M4 corridor region, showing settlement boundaries (hatched areas) and SDL boundaries (purple outlines). A specific area labeled 'K1' is highlighted in orange. The map includes labels for 'Henley-on-Thames', 'Reading', 'M4', and 'Sandhurst'. A legend at the bottom indicates 'Settlement Boundaries' (hatched area) and 'SDL Boundary' (purple outline).

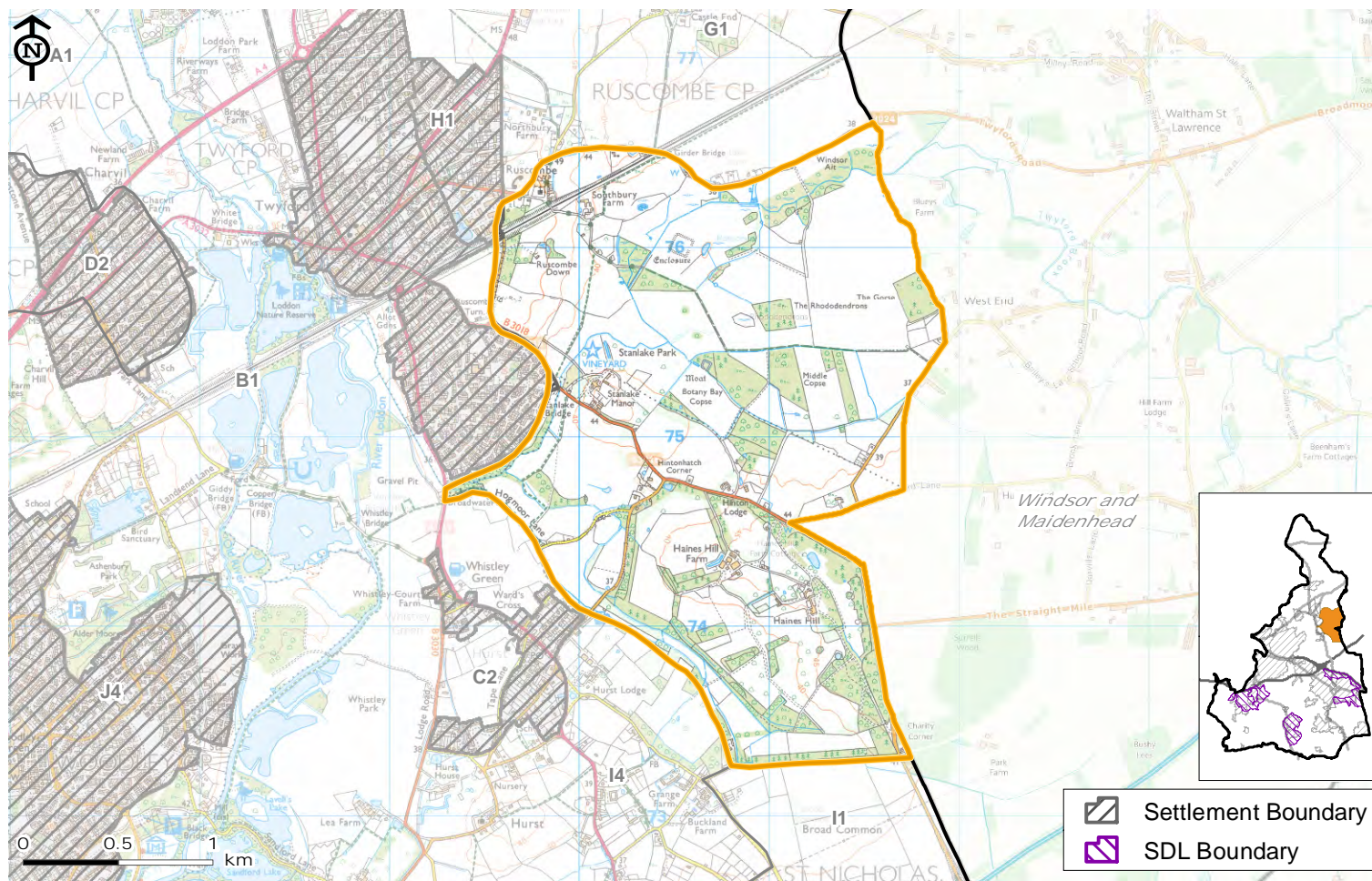
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The LCT is characterised by a mixed geology of alluvial drift, Lambeth Group and London Clay, producing a flat lowland area with gentle hills. Wetland and woodland habitats are found due to numerous small watercourses and ponds, with woodland blocks. Arable farmland and rough grassland dominates.

The Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland LCT has one Landscape Character Area:

- Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment







## SUMMARY

A lowland landscape with many unique and distinctive features not found elsewhere in the borough which provide a contrast to the wooded hills to the north and south. The area supports numerous small tributary streams and ponds set amongst the largely arable farmland. The area is characterised by its wooded character and a general absence of settlement resulting in a sense of relative remoteness.

Located south east of Twyford, the eastern boundary of this character area, Wokingham is defined by the borough boundary, yet the landscape character continues for a short distance into the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The landscape is delineated to the north by the obvious change to the large-scale H1: Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands, north of the B3024 and the settlement edge of Twyford to the north west. To the south and east the transition is more complex being represented by the river terrace and small-scale paddock landscapes around Hurst (Areas C2 and I4), and the open farmed clay (of I1) to the south. Field boundaries and roads have been used to define these boundaries.



## Key Characteristics

- A flat lowland landscape which lies at a low elevation of below 40m AOD, with low hills to the north west and south, underlain by a varied geology of sandy clays of the Lambeth Group, London Clay and alluvium, which influences a mixed land cover pattern.
- A damp and boggy landscape which supports a network of tributary streams, including the Twyford Brook, marked out by sinuous lines of trees and vegetation. Numerous small ponds and deep drainage channels are present across the landscape as the clayey alluvial soils are prone to flooding.
- A wooded context created by riparian woodlands associated with the tributaries, as well as numerous broadleaved woodland and planted mixed blocks and belts.
- A working farmed landscape dominated by expansive arable fields with few hedgerows but broken up by areas of rough pasture, wetland and woodland. There is also a vineyard at Stanlake Park and small-scale poultry farming.
- Rich semi-natural habitats associated with the damp and boggy landscape include lowland meadow, fen and wet woodland and ancient woodland and their ecological importance is recognised by designation as BAP priority habitats and LWs.
- Remnant parkland landscapes with veteran trees and moats related to the historic manor houses, often hidden from view including Stanlake Park and Haines Hill Park (a locally listed Historic Park and Garden).
- Settlement confined to the edge of the area, including Twyford and Ruscombe, is well integrated into the surrounding landscape owing to the mature trees and woodland on the settlement edge. Elsewhere settlement is limited to individual farmsteads, cottages and manors which provide a strong local vernacular of polychromatic Reading brick and timber frame with tiles or thatch.
- Remote and hidden character of the rural landscape despite the proximity of Twyford due to the sparse settlement pattern and access confined to footpaths and small roads running through the landscape. **The area is also a resource of 'dark skies'.**

## Natural Landscape

- K1.1 The Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland has a distinctive physical landscape. Once part of the London Basin, the underlying chalk in this area has been entirely capped by the clays and sandy-clays of the Lambeth Group and, in the south of the area, by later deposits of London Clay. The landform is a flat shallow basin over most of this area and at low elevation, below 40m AOD. However, there is a local hill around the clay landscape at Haines Hill in the south of the character area. Corresponding to these variations in geology and landform there are a variety of soil types in this area. The hilly clay landscapes are typically stagnogleys – loamy clayey soils but with impeded drainage at depth. In contrast, the flatter and sloping landscapes of the Lambeth Group are Argillic Gley soils associated with clayey alluvial soils and affected by high groundwater and short term flooding. This landscape corresponds to an area, which historically, was much wetter than it is currently and was once the site of Ruscombe Lake.
- K1.2 Today, the landscape still echoes its historic wetland character, with a network of tributary streams. The main tributary is the Twyford Brook which flows from Waltham St Lawrence in the east to join the River Loddon south of Twyford. The area has now been drained by a series of interconnected drainage channels and ditches and these are responsible for creating a lush

quality within this character area. There are also a high concentration of remnant small ponds and marshlands.

- K1.3 Much of the Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland character area has a natural appearance on account of the large areas of wet and damp ground that are unsuitable for farming and have been left to develop wetland communities. This natural character is accentuated by the woodland in the area, including deciduous woodland and planted mixed blocks with scrubby vegetation suggestive of game coverts.
- K1.4 Areas of farmland are dominated by very large arable fields with some pasture. The fields tend to be undivided but are interspersed with linear woodlands along the tributaries or mixed and coniferous blocks. The remaining hedgerows are often low and gappy flailed hawthorn with few remaining former hedgerow standards but are important in maintaining the medium-scale of the landscape. Within this context, there are vineyards around Stanlake exploiting the small areas of south-facing slopes and creating a notable and unusual feature within this landscape not found elsewhere in the borough.
- K1.5 Around Haines Hill to the south the landscape is much more wooded and of parkland character, containing BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland. The estate is surrounded by thick shelterbelts of mixed woodland bounded by fairly dense mixed hedgerows and deep water-filled ditches. Traces of the parkland and veteran trees are still evident at Stanlake Park although it is now largely an agricultural landscape.
- K1.6 The ecological importance of this area is connected to its cover of wetland and woodland including BAP priority habitat mixed lowland deciduous woodland with lines of poplars, ditches, and hummocky wet grassland around small ponds with marginal carr vegetation. The BAP priority habitat lowland meadow at Blackthorn Farm is recognised as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and is an important habitat for birds. Other LWS include wet woodland and fen at Windsor Ait and semi-natural broadleaved woodland at Hintonhatch Corner and Wingwood Copse.
- K1.7 The Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland is characterised by scattered secondary woodlands most of which are around 2ha in size and are often associated with small lowland streams. Middle Copse and Botany Bay Copse include woodland of ancient origin and comprises a partly wet site with species such as ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) dominating the canopy.
- K1.8 Much of the area, concentrated around Stanlake Park and Haines Hill and along the shallow streams is covered by the Waltham Woodlands and Parklands BOA, and is noted for the biodiversity value of the mixed deciduous woodland, wet woodland and fen, lowland meadow, as well as the historic parkland at Haines Hill Park and Stanlake Park both of which have veteran trees.

## Cultural Landscape

- K1.9 There is considerable evidence of early prehistoric activity in this area with Mesolithic and Neolithic finds being recorded close to the watercourses of the area, particularly around the former Ruscombe Lake, and the presence of cropmarks with possible prehistoric features. These activities probably resulted in small-scale woodland clearance. However, there is little evidence after that until the medieval period when a cluster of sites reveal evidence of settlement.
- K1.10 A quadrangular moat with an adjacent and probably contemporary fishpond (designated as a Scheduled Monument) in Botany Bay Copse on the edge of Stanlake Park is the site of the original manor house of the Hinton Pipard estate (renamed in the 15th century as Stanlake Park). A square enclosure at Ruscombe Lake is also shown on current maps. Ruscombe Lake may have still contained water in 1642, but has since been drained.
- K1.11 The first edition OS map shows largely rectangular fields indicative of Parliamentary enclosure in the east of the area, and smaller and less regular fields, possibly representing earlier enclosure, to the north and west. Many of these earlier field systems are well-preserved. However, the area is now largely characterised by large straight-sided fields, representing the 20th century amalgamation of these earlier field systems. There are also a number of 19th century plantations (copses) south of Stanlake Park.



- K1.12 There is a general absence of settlement throughout most of this area with the scattered farmsteads, houses and the hamlet of Ruscombe confined to the edge of the area and generally following the pattern of the few rural roads.
- K1.13 The presence of numerous manors as well as domestic architecture with a strong local vernacular results in a strong settlement character. There are a number of stately manorial buildings including Stanlake Manor, a late sixteenth century brick building and Haineshill – a large eighteenth and nineteenth century manor (of earlier origins) and surrounding parkland which is listed locally as a Historic Park and Garden. The gatehouse of Hinton Lodge is also a noteworthy Elizabethan brick building with ornate blue brick diaper-work and tall octagonal chimneys.
- K1.14 The hamlet of Ruscombe is located on the gentle hilly area to the north. It is cut off from the core of the area by a stretch of the Great Western Main Line railway line which runs across the north of the area. The Conservation Area is characterised by houses with brick walls, timber framing and plain tile roofs or thatch. These are clustered around the church of St James, which has a square brick tower and flint walling and is set within a churchyard with Scots Pine adjacent to the former village green.
- K1.15 The town of Twyford is located outside the area, with its settlement edge running along the north western boundary. The urban edge is well integrated into the surrounding landscape owing to mature trees and woodland and is well concealed in longer distance views.
- K1.16 There are a limited number of rights of way in the area, with popular footpaths and bridleways linking to the Loddon Valley. The area is actively used for shooting at certain times of the year and there are a number of strategically placed hides.

## Perceptual Landscape

- K1.17 The landscape has a remote and hidden quality due to the scarcity of settlement and access confined to footpaths and small roads running through the landscape. This results in a strong sense of tranquillity and 'dark skies' despite proximity to Twyford.
- K1.18 The frequency of natural riparian woodlands associated with the tributaries and mixed woodlands and wooded parklands results in an enclosed character with occasional long views to the elevated wooded hills to the north and south.

### Valuable Landscape Attributes

- A rural lowland landscape with wetland features that are uncommon in the borough and provide important ecological habitats, including BAP priority habitat lowland meadow, wet woodland and fen.
- Varied wooded character. The mosaic of plantation, mixed and broadleaved woodland including ancient woodland, which along with the natural riparian woodland provides scenic quality and a sense of seclusion as well as important ecological habitats.
- The pattern of open arable fields interspersed with woodland blocks and riparian corridors which provide visual diversity (a variety of colours and textures and changing seasonal interest) and a naturalistic sense of place.
- Lightly settled character and absence of unsympathetic development.
- The high number of historic buildings (many of them listed) have a strong local vernacular and contribute to the scenic quality of the area.
- Remnant parkland landscapes associated with historic manor houses, which provide a cultural record of the past and layers of history within the landscape.
- Remote and hidden landscape character due to the scarcity of settlement and inaccessibility by road which results in a strong sense of tranquility and 'dark skies' despite proximity to

## Twyford.

## Landscape Condition

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

## Key Issues

- Hedgerow loss associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Incremental loss of species rich grassland due to increasingly intensive grassland management. There is only one area of neutral grassland remaining in this area.
- Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity, although in more recent years there has been an improvement in water quality.
- Changes in deciduous woodland structure through loss of species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands have occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management resulting in a change of character. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Effects on tree heath or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- Drainage operations associated with new building works and agriculture altering ground water levels and affecting wetland habitats. This is likely to increase as a result of greater susceptibility to flooding due to climate change.
- Lack of 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 large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure, both inside and outside the area impacting landscape character and tranquillity.
- Pressure for new roads and rail crossings or widening of existing roads impacting tranquillity and fragmenting the landscape.
- Electrification of the Great Western Main Line which cuts through the area as part of the Crossrail service to Twyford Station leading to visual intrusion of this transport corridor in the landscape.
- Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.
- **This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies'. Light pollution is potentially a key issue affecting the night landscape.**



### Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowland* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance existing character. Management should seek to enhance the important features such as the sense of remoteness, natural character, tranquillity, and the woodlands, wetlands, and parklands and their characteristics. The key characteristics that need to be considered in relation to any future change are the settlement character (and general absence of development), landscape character, habitat value, and special perceptual qualities.

### Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve and manage existing woodland copses and belts including BAP priority habitats, ancient woodlands and poplar woodlands associated with wetland. 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 using natural regeneration or planting locally occurring native species. The aim should be to link existing woodlands without loss of significant views. Design areas of coppice sympathetic to landscape character and seek to integrate other uses such as recreation and nature conservation to enhance their value.
- Conserve the rural qualities of the farmed landscape. 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 and specifically habitat management for farmland birds.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features. Promote management of hedgerows, with predominantly oak standards to form future timber trees. Reinstate or repair hedgerows with native species, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides and other public rights of way.
- Restore and extend the remaining BAP priority habitat lowland meadows or permanent pasture to restore grassland habitats lost through agricultural intensification, for example the creation of grassland field margins.
- Conserve and enhance remaining wetland habitats through appropriate management. Seek to extend areas of wetland habitats through re-creation of wetlands (including fen management and the removal of some wet woodland). Avoid building in those areas which are subject to seasonal inundation.
- Conserve, enhance and manage parkland landscapes associated with historic manor houses, planning for the next generation of parkland trees with a programme of tree planting, including areas of BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland.
- Restore enhance and manage valued wildlife habitats. Much of the area is included within the Waltham Woodlands and Parklands BOA. This network of natural habitats has been identified as a target for woodland habitat restoration, the restoration and extension of the remaining lowland meadow habitats and the positive management of parkland and fens. An appropriate management regime for these habitats is critical.
- Conserve the rural character of the farmed and estate landscape to protect the individual identity of farmsteads and manors and conserve the scenic quality of Ruscombe Conservation Area through control of new development.
- Enhance the sense of place through careful design (including siting, scale and materials – and sensitive design to retain dark skies at night and limit impacts on tranquillity) to minimise the impact of any potential new development, accompanying infrastructure and vertical elements on

valuable attributes.

- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges, through planting native wooded boundaries, hedgerows, and large-species trees to provide visual screening.
- Use appropriate tree, hedgerow and woodland planting to integrate road and rail crossings. Encourage the retention and enhancement of wooded edges and hedgerows with standard trees along existing roads.
- Protect the long views to the wooded hills to the north and south of the area.
- Protect the remote and hidden character of the landscape and strong perceptions of tranquillity and experience of dark skies, through the management of development.





