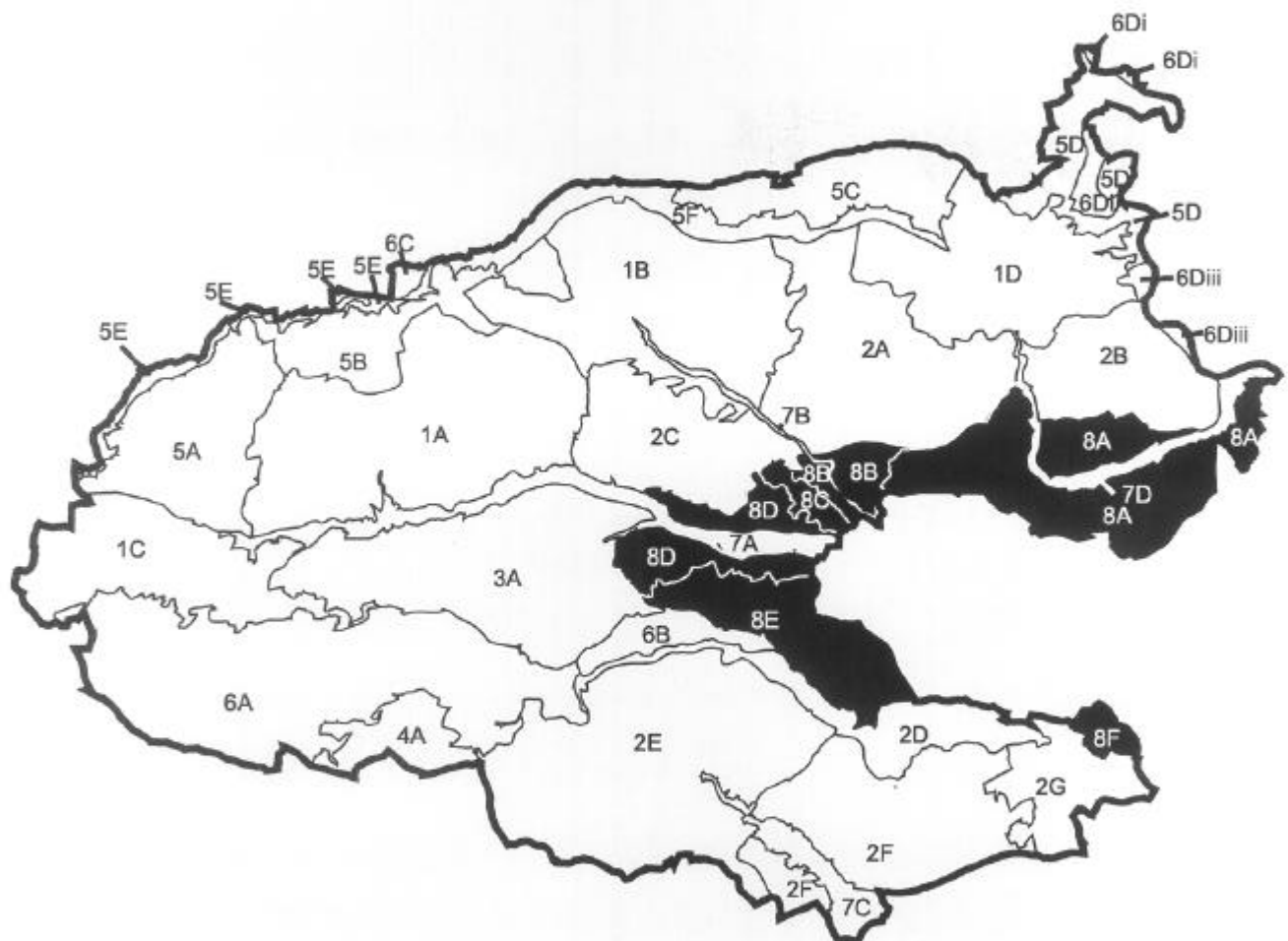


## Landscape Type 8 - Lowland Mosaic



## 15. LANDSCAPE TYPE 8: LOWLAND MOSAIC

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### Location and Boundaries

- 15.1. The landscape type comprises a lowland area in the eastern part of the AONB intervening between the two main chalk upland blocks to the north and south and lying to either side of the Kennet Valley (7A). The boundaries are essentially defined by geology with the change from the chalk to the Tertiary deposits of the Reading Beds, the Bagshot Beds and London Clay. In the north the chalk descends as a gradual dip slope (2A: Brightwalton Downs & 2B: Ashampstead Downs), while to the south it rises as a dramatic escarpment (2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Downs Scarp). The geological transition within this landscape type is clearly marked by the lower topography and the land cover of woodland and pasture.

### Overview

*The lowland mosaic is a distinct landscape in the eastern part of the North Wessex Downs occupying the low lying basin of gravel beds and clays which rise either side of the Kennet Valley. The area has a strong woodland character, with its origins as part of the medieval forests. In the early 17th century the forests were subject to gradual piecemeal enclosure, the legacy of which is reflected in numerous dispersed small settlements and farms. Today the area is characterised by irregular fields, cut out from the woodland during the medieval or post medieval period, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons. Although in some areas, a more open landscape dominated by large-scale arable farmland is found.*

*One of the most densely inhabited parts of the North Wessex Downs, this lowland area has a diverse range of settlements ranging from large manor houses associated with the many parklands to the network of hamlets, lines of houses and villages that occur along the lanes and roads. Many villages have a clear nucleus, typically associated with a village green or church whilst others follow a more dispersed pattern typical of post medieval 'squatter' settlement. Red brick and tile are the principal building materials.*

*It is generally a small-scale intimate landscape with the widespread settlements linked by an intricate network of narrow rural lanes, winding through ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations and more open farmland areas. The lanes are frequently overhung by deep grassy or woodland banks and contribute to the 'secluded' enclosed character. Small areas of heathland on the drier gravel ridges are a distinctive and important feature, although many formerly open areas have reverted to scrub or woodland. The network of ancient semi-natural woodland, connecting hedgerows, areas of parkland including wood pasture and veteran trees create considerable ecological interest. Former medieval deer parks are a particular feature, with a number of these being refashioned in the eighteenth century as formal designed parks and gardens.*

*Overall, this is a diverse and complex landscape, which despite its variety has a coherent and intact rural character, although in places it's 'ruralness' is diluted by roads and development.*

### Key Characteristics

- underlain by a geology of clays, silts, sands and gravel, in strong contrast to the chalk. The pattern essentially comprises clay on the lower land, separated by gravel ridges;
- a low lying undulating area enclosed by the chalk to the north, south and west and forming a part of the Thames Basin Heaths which extend to the east of the AONB;
- a mosaic of landcover including fragments of remnant heathland, extensive woodlands and pasture, as well as more open areas of arable land;
- ecologically important habitats including: ancient woodland, wood pasture, parkland, ancient hedgerows, neutral grassland, hay meadows, heathland, acid grassland, bogs, fens and open water;
- parklands, including many originating as medieval deer parks, with subsequent designed landscape schemes, are a particular feature of the area;
- varied field pattern with irregular fields, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons indicative of medieval and post medieval assarts. Fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries predominate and represent 'ladder' fields probably resulting from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18th century informal enclosure. Plus large regular fields of Parliamentary enclosure;
- one of the most densely settled landscape types, with a diverse range of settlements ranging from large manor houses, villages, numerous hamlets and lines of houses along the roads and lanes;
- varied settlements with villages often having a clear nucleus, typically associated with a village green or a church. A more dispersed pattern may derive from 'squatter' settlement of disafforested areas. The principal building material is red brick;
- an intricate network of wooded rural lanes, plus a large number of footpaths, bridleways, and byways form an excellent resource for informal recreation. Visitor attractions include a number of historic houses and parklands;
- well settled landscape with a rising population due to proximity and accessibility to centres such as Reading, Newbury and Basingstoke - manifest in pressures for residential development, commuter villages and an increase in traffic on the rural lanes.

## Physical Influences

- 15.2. **Geology and Soils:** The area is underlain by Tertiary deposits including clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds. The pattern essentially is of clay on the lower land separated by gravel ridges. This gives rise to nutrient poor acidic soils with a mainly light or slowly permeable character which are a major factor in the land use. Localised tracts of more fertile loamy soils support arable farmland within the predominant land use of woodland, pasture and heathland.
- 15.3. **Landform:** This area is a predominantly low-lying undulating area with elevations varying between 50-166m AOD north of the Kennet and between 100m-179m AOD south of the Kennet. The river valleys of the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn dissect the landscape type. These create visual and topographical diversity across the generally undulating lowland landscape. High points include Wickham Green at 166m AOD, just south of the M4, and a hill south of Whitway just east of Highclere Park at 179m AOD. At higher points the slopes of the surrounding higher chalklands are visible, but otherwise this is a low, visually enclosed landscape.

## Biodiversity

- 15.4. This landscape character type contains a number of ecologically important habitats including: ancient woodland, wood pasture, parkland, neutral grassland, hay meadows, heathland, acid grassland, bogs, fens and open water. It is characterised by the presence of areas of parkland (a UK BAP priority habitat), including permanent pasture and mature/veteran trees. Very small fragmented areas of dry and wet heathland are also a feature, on the gravel and sandy ridges. The most extensive ecological feature of this character type is the ancient semi-natural woodland. Ancient hedgerows are another feature of ecological importance of this landscape type lining the lanes, often in association with wide grassy verges. These hedgerows provide important habitats for animals and plant species as well as providing “green corridors” to aid the movement and dispersal of species across areas of farmland.

## Historic Environment

- 15.5. **Lowland Heathland:** The area contains some of the few remaining areas of lowland heath in England, much of which is the direct result of prehistoric human action. It was formed by clearance of deciduous woodland cover on the sandy soils leading to podzolisation and the resultant heath dominated vegetation.
- 15.6. **A Wooded Landscape:** Archaeological evidence suggests much of the area remained a wooded landscape. For example, Romano-British pottery kilns from Kintbury, which required substantial quantities of timber for fuel, indicate a wooded area at this time. During the Saxon period, the decreasing fertility of the downland soils suggests that the claylands were becoming increasingly attractive to farmers. Place-names provide further evidence of a wooded landscape. Berkshire owes its name to the forest of *Barroc* which is thought to have stretched from Enbourne to Hungerford, centred on Kintbury. The area was also partially covered by the medieval forests of Pamber and Freemantle, areas defined by boundaries and placed under the special code of Forest Law.
- 15.7. **Piecemeal Enclosure and Squatter Settlement:** The Medieval forests were deforested in the early seventeenth century, and would have been subjected to gradual piecemeal enclosure, the legacy of which is reflected in numerous small settlements and farms and names such as Hell Corner and Rotten Row, indicative of squatter's settlement. On steeper slopes and ridge tops, where arable farming was impractical, small woods and copses still survive today.
- 15.8. **Field Patterns:** The area is characterised by numerous irregular fields, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons, particularly in character areas 8E: Highclere Lowland and Heath and 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons. These represent medieval and post-medieval assarts or clearance of forest and waste to create small enclosed pasture or arable fields. Within the peripheral heath areas some of the assarts possibly reflect the enclosure of heathland rather than woodland.
- 15.9. In areas such as Winterbourne Farmland, fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries predominate and represent ‘ladder’ fields, probably resulting from seventeenth and eighteenth century informal enclosure. They would appear to link the Lambourn Valley floor enclosures to the higher downland, with the legs of the “ladders”

represented by tracks and paths linking the different resources. Elsewhere, a more open landscape is the result of formal Parliamentary enclosure.

- 15.10. **Parkland:** One of most the notable features of this area is the large number of parks, including former deer parks, for example, at Englefield (8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons), Highclere (8E: Highclere Lowlands and Heath), Hampstead deer park, the surviving park pale defining the AONB boundary (8D: Hungerford Farmland) and Wolverton (8F: Ewhurst Parklands).
- 15.11. **Medieval Period:** There are also numerous quarry pits, particularly in Hermitage Wooded Commons (8A), for chalk, clay and gravel, many of which may have medieval origins. Medieval moated sites are also located at West Woodhay, Balsdon Farm and Yattendon.

### Settlement and Building Character

- 15.12. This landscape type is one of the most densely settled areas within the AONB, with a diverse range of settlements, ranging from large manor style houses within and around the numerous parklands to the network of hamlets, lines of houses and villages that occur along or around roadways and the network of winding lanes. Villages may have a clear nucleus, typically associated with a village green or church or may follow a more dispersed settlement pattern typical of post-medieval 'squatter' settlement. Red brick is the principal building material within this landscape type.

### Recreation Character

- 15.13. An extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and byways pass through this landscape type, connecting the small settlements. In addition a large number of the woodlands and commons have open access. Promoted routes include a small section of a bridleway endorsed by the British Horse Society, sections of the Berkshire Circular Routes, and Walks from Pangbourne Station. Other attractions include several historic properties and parklands.

### Social and Economic Character

- 15.14. Unlike some of the other landscape types identified, this type is well settled with some urban influences, including larger settlement sizes and high accessibility via major roads and rail. The majority of the parishes within this area have increased in population since 1981, some quite considerably (by up to 50%). The location of this landscape type, i.e. on the periphery of the AONB, and near settlements such as Newbury and Reading, is likely to result in a high proportion of outbound commuting. The growth in population of this area may be attributed to those wishing to relocate to a more rural location yet still commute daily to urban workplaces. There are also pressures for rural diversification and conversion of farm buildings to new business uses within this area.
- 15.15. The parishes are far better serviced by local facilities than those in any other area of the North Wessex Downs. Although the tendency to provide a petrol station as opposed to a local shop or G.P. surgery suggests a high proportion of commuters within this area, indicating high car ownership, high traffic levels and poorly used local services where they do exist. The higher population and density of settlement has

resulted in a more developed road network linking villages and the surrounding urban centres. The landscape type thus has, in parts, a less remote rural character compared to other areas of the AONB.

## Key Issues

- intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly conversion of permanent pasture to arable;
- **decline in the extent of heathland vegetation** through conversion to forestry or lack of management with scrub invasion and development of woodland;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** with an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as **horse paddocks** - characterised by rank weedy grassland and poorly managed boundaries;
- **lack of appropriate management of woodlands** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly **mature hedgerow trees**, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows by flailing so that hedgerow trees are often no longer present. Also need for management of adjacent grass verges;
- **climate change** - potential impacts on habitats including drying out of wet heathland and increased fire risk on dry heaths. Requirement for irrigation of arable land - including construction of reservoirs and intrusive infrastructure. Potential impacts on woodland and parkland include an increase in non native species and tree loss (drought/windthrow);
- localised intrusion of **roads** (M4, A34 and A343), which have a high impact in this quiet, rural landscape;
- **increased traffic on the road network**, plus road improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places creates a more 'urban' character;
- potential future demand for **aggregate extraction** altering the form and character of the valleys;
- **development pressures**, particularly for new residential development including suburbanising influence of built development and roads (fencing, signing, lighting and planting);
- **decline in local services and facilities** with many villages becoming 'empty' commuter villages by day;
- **loss of tranquillity**, resulting from a combination of the above.

## Key Management Requirements

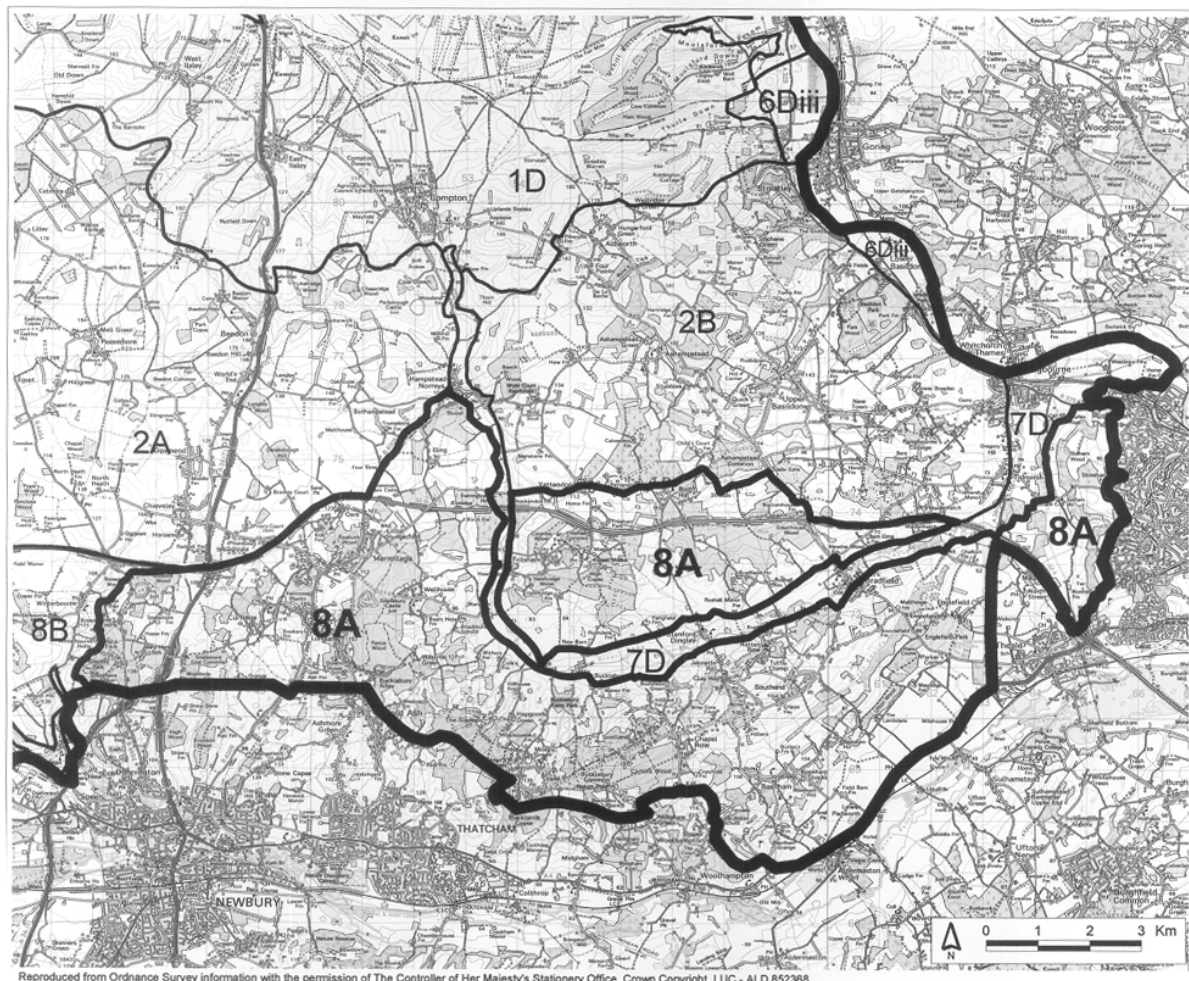
- 15.16. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the distinctive small-scale and enclosed landscape of the Lowland Mosaic with its secluded, rural and tranquil character. This includes conservation and enhancement of the key assets, namely:
- the ancient and semi-natural woodlands;
  - field patterns and hedgerows and particularly through ensuring appropriate management to allow regeneration of hedgerow trees;
  - the hedgerows and grass verges which line the rural lanes;
  - heathland;
  - historic parkland.
- 15.17. There are opportunities for restoration of the fragile lowland heathland resource, through management and habitat restoration to extend and link isolated areas.
- 15.18. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive patterns of settlement and prevent the gradual expansion, merging and coalescence that will result in a more suburban character. Consideration should be given to measures that could lessen the impact of the roads and reduce high traffic levels on the rural lanes.

## Character Areas

- 15.19. The Lowland Mosaic landscape type contains six component character areas. These comprise.
- 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons
  - 8B: Winterbourne Farmland
  - 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath
  - 8D: Hungerford Farmland
  - 8E: Highclere Lowlands and Heath
  - 8F: Ewhurst Parklands

# CHARACTER AREA 8A: HERMITAGE WOODED COMMONS

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## Location and Boundaries

- 4.20. The Hermitage Wooded Commons character area is located in the eastern part of the AONB on the lower lying gravels, sands and clays to the south of the wooded dip slope of Brightwalton Downs (2A) and the Ashampstead Downs (2B). The southern and eastern boundaries are marked by the AONB boundary. To the west is the more open character of the Winterbourne Farmland (8B).



## Landscape Character Description

- 15.21. The Hermitage Wooded Commons character area is distinctive for its varied geological pattern of clays, silts, sands and gravels, which result in the nutrient poor soils that dominate the area. The landform forms a broad lowland plateau dissected by the River Pang.
- 15.22. The landcover, reflecting the diverse geology, is highly variable with an intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland. More open areas of arable land can be found locally across the area, notably, on the slopes dropping towards the Pang Valley and to the south-east near Beenham. Elsewhere the large, inter-connected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees restrict views and create a very enclosed landscape. The sense of intimacy is enhanced by when travelling along the wooded rural lanes. Many of the woodlands are ancient/semi-natural in origin, with some larger plantation woodlands also present. Formerly heathland commons, now covered by regenerating wooded, such as Ashampstead Common, Bucklebury Common and Upper Common, are a particular feature of the area. Small remnant areas of heath can also be found, though these are often colonising with gorse, willow and birch. Woodlands frequently cap ridges across the area, such as Brickiln Wood and Ash Plantation and these create low wooded horizons adding further to the sense of enclosure and containment. The area contains many features of biodiversity interest with seven SSSI, including a unique rock sequence at Fognam Chalk Quarry, the heathland, dry and wet woodland and bog at Snelsmore Common, and areas of ancient woodland and wet meadow at Coombe Wood.
- 15.23. Hermitage Wooded Commons is a very well-populated landscape with settlements ranging from large nucleated villages such as Upper Bucklebury, linear villages such as Southend and Beenham to smaller lines of estate cottages at Englefield Village as well as many scattered farmsteads and residential country houses dispersed across the area along the intricate network of rural lanes. Red brick is the most common building material. Manor houses with associated parklands are a feature, many of which are now in institutional use.
- 15.24. The M4 runs east-west through the area, with a small section of the A34 running north-south. The road infrastructure, including the intersection at Chieveley has a significant local impact, severing the area. Generally, away from the road corridors the area retains a quiet rural character, apart from at the eastern edge where there are views to Reading and Theale.

### Key Characteristics

- lowland area at the base of the chalk dip slope, underlain by clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds and London Clay, giving rise to nutrient poor, often acidic, soils;
- a broad undulating plateau falling towards the Kennet Valley to the south east and dissected by River Pang;
- variable land cover forming an intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland. Some more open areas of arable land can be found on the slopes that drop to the Pang Valley and to the south east near Beenham;

- large, interconnected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees restrict views and create an enclosed and intimate character. Low wooded horizons are a feature;
- numerous semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin, with some large commercial plantations. Wooded commons and small areas of remnant heath are a distinctive element;
- many features of biodiversity interest including heathland, dry and wet woodland, bog and areas of wet meadow;
- dominated by small irregular fields of informal and piecemeal enclosures, of medieval and post-medieval date with some larger, more regular and straight edged, formal Parliamentary enclosure on flatter terrain in the south-east and west;
- dispersed pattern of settlement characteristic of encroachment into areas of common and woodland. Includes large nucleated villages, lines of estate cottages, loose roadside settlements as well as many dispersed farmsteads and residential country houses;
- intricate network of rural lanes, many sunken and overhung by woodland plus more intrusive road infrastructure;
- historic parkland based on medieval deer parks and manor houses with associated ornamental parklands with gardens, rides and plantings are a particular feature.

## Physical Influences

- 15.25. The Hermitage Wooded Commons form a broad undulating lowland plateau, underlain by the Tertiary deposits of clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds and London Clay. This geological pattern gives rise to nutrient poor, often acidic soils, which support the matrix of heathland, woodland and pasture. Localised areas of more fertile loamy soils support arable farming. The plateau is at a height of between 145m and 100m falling to the Kennet Valley to the south east. It is dissected by the River Pang, which enters in the north curving eastwards through the area and introducing localised variations in landscape character with more open arable sides.

## Historic Environment

- 15.26. **The Prehistoric Landscape:** Most of the evidence for prehistoric and Romano-British inhabitation in the area comes from cropmark or soil mark features visible on aerial photographs. Notable concentrations of features have been recorded south and south-east of Englefield Deer Park, between Field Barn Farm and Lower Padworth, Lamden's Farm, Beenham Grange and south of Sulham Wood. West of Lambden's Farm are ten circular features that may represent a group of late Neolithic or Bronze Age round barrows, of which only one survives as an earthwork. Other surviving earthwork remains include the Iron Age forts of Grimsbury Castle, located in woodland to the south of Hermitage and Bussock Camp in woodland near the western boundary of the area. Other possible Iron Age or Romano-British enclosure earthworks also survive in woodland to the north of Hermitage and in Robin's Copse east of Cold Ash.
- 15.27. **Quarries:** There are numerous quarry pits in the north and south-east of the area, the latter being mainly for gravel. Some may have originated in the post-medieval period.

- 15.28. **Gardens and Parkland:** Post-medieval and early modern 'polite' landscapes are represented by Englefield House and Englefield Deer Park, and by Yattendon Court and Yattendon Park. There are distinguished by their landscape gardens, rides and plantings.
- 15.29. **Settlement:** Present-day settlement is largely dispersed across the area and was probably formed by encroachment into areas of common and woodland, although dates and patterns of encroachment are not clearly understood and it is not sufficient to label all common-edge and roadside settlements as being post-medieval in origin - they may have much earlier origins.
- 15.30. **Field Patterns:** The area retains a considerable woodland cover. Many of the copses show evidence for assarting, probably representing post-medieval piecemeal intakes. Many of the fields and boundaries around Curridge, north of Upper Bucklebury, south of Frilsham and north-east of Cold Ash are irregular and sinuous. Some may represent medieval boundaries, but the small fields in particular may result from informal and piecemeal post-medieval enclosure, some of it between existing tracks and lanes. Elsewhere, especially in the south-east and west of the area, where the terrain is lower and flatter, the fields are larger, more regular and straight-edged. These are likely to be the result of formal Parliamentary enclosure during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## Biodiversity

- 15.31. The Hermitage Lowlands and Heath Character Area contains a high number of areas of nature conservation value, and has significant woodland cover. In total there are 7 SSSI and 110 sites with non-statutory designation, the majority are wooded habitats, with 101 of the 110 non-statutory sites being classified as woodland.
- 15.32. The SSSI sites within the Character Area are Cold Ash Quarry (SSSI), Briff Lane Meadows (SSSI), Old Copse, Beenham (SSSI), Snelsmore Common (SSSI), part of Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows (SSSI), Coomb Wood (SSSI) and King's Copse (SSSI).
- 15.33. An example of a nationally important woodland site is Old Copse, Beenham (SSSI), which is located on the north side of the Kennet Valley. This wood has been managed on a traditional coppice-with-standards system and this has resulted in a rich and varied ground flora. The site supports many species indicative of ancient woodland, including some relatively uncommon plants, for example wild daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*), thin-spiked wood sedge (*Carex strigosa*) and orphine (*Sedum telephium*).

## Key Issues

- **decline in the extent of heathland vegetation** through conversion to forestry or lack of management leading to scrub invasion and development of woodland;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** with an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as horse paddocks - characterised by rank weedy grassland and poorly managed boundaries;

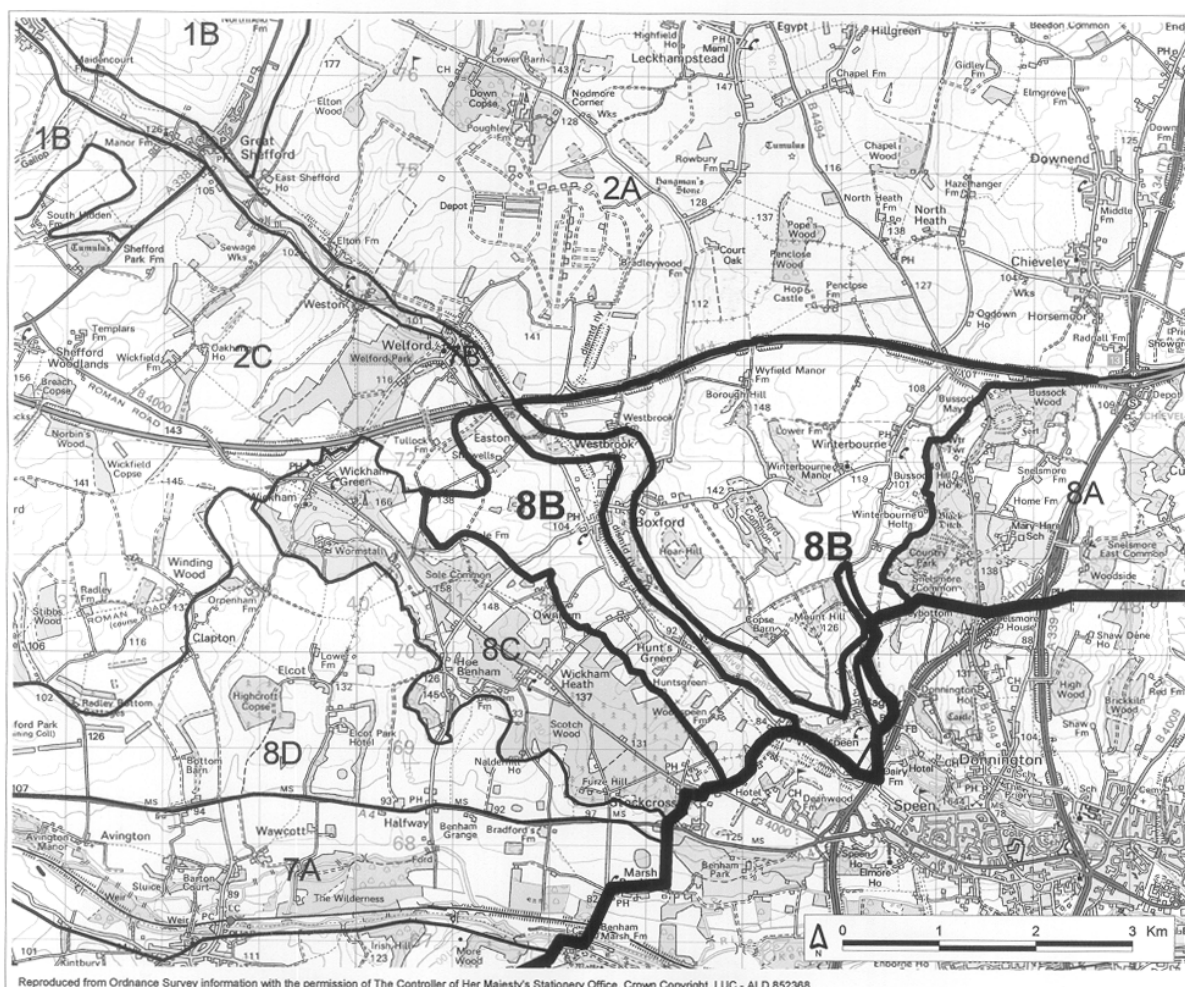
- lack of appropriate **management of woodlands** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture;
- loss of **hedgerows boundaries** and mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows;
- **localised intrusion of road infrastructure** with the M4 cutting through the area with visual and noise impacts;
- **increased traffic** on the lane network (rat runs from main routes) and improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places create a more 'urban' character and are particularly damaging to the character of the sunken lanes;
- comparative accessibility resulting in **development pressures**, particularly for new residential development including suburbanising influence of built development (e.g. fencing, lighting and paddocks);
- **loss of tranquillity.**

## Key Management Requirements

- 15.34. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, secluded character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons. This includes conservation and enhancement of the key assets, namely: ancient and semi-natural woodlands, pasture, field patterns and hedgerows, remnant heathland commons, historic parkland and the rural lane network. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and diversification of some of the plantations to include a broadleaved element. In the longer term, as part of a wider initiative, it may be appropriate to consider restoration of former areas of heathland to link existing sites.
- 15.35. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement with its small hamlets and loose linear settlements and prevent the gradual merging and coalescence that will result in a more suburban character. Consideration should be given to measures that could lessen the impact of the road infrastructure and reduce high traffic levels on the rural lanes.



# CHARACTER AREA 8B: WINTERBOURNE FARMLAND



- 4.36. **Location and Boundaries:** The Winterbourne Farmland character area comprises two small areas of open farmland on the slopes that rise to either side of the lower Lambourn Valley (7B). The Hermitage Wooded Commons (8A) and Wickham Wooded Heath (8C) character areas form the boundaries to the east and west respectively, with the southern edge formed by the AONB boundary. To the north the boundary follows the line of the M4, with the land beyond rising to form part of the wooded dipslope of the chalk downs.

## Landscape Character Description

- 15.37. The Winterbourne Farmland has an open character with the predominant land use being arable farmland. The undulating landform rises to a series of low hills but overall dips gently down to the Lambourn Valley. Woodlands are confined to the higher land, and include hill top woods such as at Winterbourne Wood, Boxford Common and Hoar Hill, and linear shelterbelt plantings. Field patterns are invariably large, with the pattern and structure of the landscape primarily resulting from the regular Parliamentary enclosures. Many field boundaries have been removed and those that remain are often thin, heavily flailed hawthorn hedges creating a very large scale and open character. Crops include cereals, oil seed rape, linseed and a number of free-range pig units.
- 15.38. Settlement is sparse, with a few isolated hamlets such as Winterbourne and scattered farms and larger farms and manors. There is some expansion of settlement associated with the river valley, e.g. Boxford. The road network is similarly sparse and limited to relative straight lanes rising out from the Lambourn Valley. There is however, extensive access into the area through the network of green lanes, byways and footpaths. The M4 is a major feature forming the northern boundary to the character area.
- 15.39. Overall this is a large scale, open landscape, contrasting markedly with the intimate landscapes of the wooded heaths and commons to the east and west and the intervening valley landscape surrounding the River Lambourn. It forms a transition with the higher wooded downs to the north. The absence of settlement and access makes this a more remote and isolated area.

### Key Characteristics

- the Winterbourne Farmland forms a broad lowland clay belt rising from either side of the lower part of the Lambourn Valley;
- predominantly arable, plus occasional free-range pig units set in large scale fields, with hedgerows often in poor condition, creating a more open landscape compared to the extensively wooded area to the east;
- mixed pattern of field enclosure with parallel and sinuous boundaries representing ladder fields from 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century informal enclosure. Mainly formal 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century Parliamentary enclosure;
- settlement includes scattered farms found along a series of farm tracks and rural lanes;
- an extensive network of rights of way passes through the area, which include the Lambourn Valley Way;
- linear belts of oak, beech and birch and occasionally Scot's Pine form small irregular copses on higher ground;
- an open large scale landscape.

## Physical Influences

- 15.40. The landform is predominantly low lying and gently undulating, forming a series of low hills with the overall gradient dipping to the River Lambourn. The geology is based on the chalk with overlying drift deposits of clay and gravel capped ridges.

## Historic Environment

- 15.41. **Field Patterns:** Some small woods and copses survive on steeper slopes and ridge tops. A small number of more irregular fields represent medieval and post-medieval assarts. Some of the fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries here represent 'ladder' fields, and probably result from seventeenth and eighteenth century informal enclosure. They often follow ridgelines or valley bottoms. Most fields are large and regular however, and the largely open landscape is the result of formal parliamentary enclosure and more recent removal of field boundaries to form very large, 'prairie' fields.
- 15.42. **Quarry Pits:** One of the characteristic features in this landscape are the numerous quarry pits. Dug for chalk, clay and gravel many may have their origins during the later medieval period and continued to be worked on a small-scale basis into the early modern period.

## Biodiversity

- 15.43. This Character Area has 6 SSSI's and 10 sites with non-statutory designation within its boundary. It supports a good mix of habitats ranging from the open water of the River Lambourn (SSSI), to wetlands such as Boxford Water Meadow (SSSI), together with 3 grassland sites, 6 woodland sites and 1 wetland site with non-statutory designation.
- 15.44. Other nationally important sites include Boxford Chalk Pit (SSSI), Winterbourne Chalk Pit (SSSI), Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain (SSSI), and Snelsmore Common (SSSI).

## Key Issues

- intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly conversion of permanent pasture to arable;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** with an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as **horse paddocks** - characterised by rank weedy grassland and poorly managed boundaries;
- **removal of woodlands** to create arable farmland;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows.

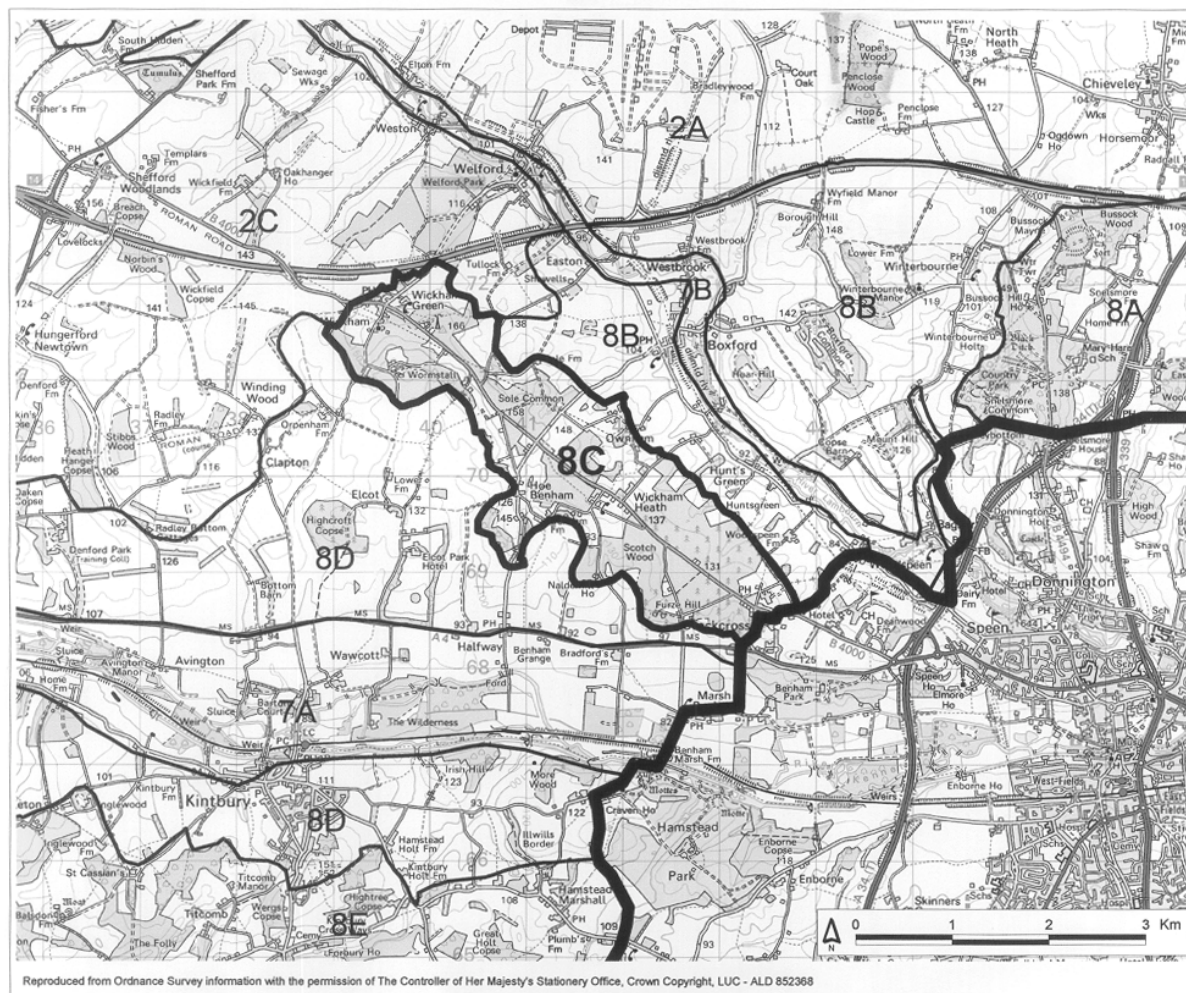
## Key Management Requirements

- 15.45. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, agricultural character of the Winterbourne Farmland. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and planting of new woodland blocks to provide enclosure and link isolated hilltop woodland blocks to the more wooded landscapes that occur to either side of the character area.





# CHARACTER AREA 8C: WICKHAM WOODED HEATH



- 4.46. **Location and Boundaries:** This is a very small, visually and geographically distinct character area formed by the wooded gravel ridge that separates the more open landscapes on the valley edges of the Winterbourne Farmland (8B) to the north and the Hungerford Farmland (8D) to the south.

## Landscape Character Description

- 15.47. Dense woodland cover predominates in this area and is the defining influence upon landscape character. Scots pine and other conifers form a monoculture of plantation woodland across the central part of the ridge. These are managed on a commercial scale, with large areas of clear fell evident in places. Elsewhere beech, birch, oak and sweet chestnut form important components. Within this wooded framework there are small areas of commons and remnant heathland adding texture and variety as well as providing habitats for wildlife. Agricultural land use includes pockets of pasture, usually within small, regular shaped, fields with fencing or hawthorn hedges or surrounded by woodland.
- 15.48. The settlement pattern is typically dispersed and linear along straight ridge top roads. The linear arrangement has been supplemented with recent development infilling between the dispersed houses. More nucleated villages occur at Stockcross in the south of the area and Wickham in the north of the area.

### Key Characteristics

- a small, visually and geographically distinct area underlain by a central gravel capped ridge forming a broad flat-topped plateau between the valleys of the Kennet and Lambourn;
- dense woodland cover is a defining influence upon landscape character. Coniferous plantation woodland, managed on a commercial basis, covers the central part of the ridge, with smaller semi-natural woods and copses on steeper slopes;
- small areas of commons and remnant heathland as well as pockets of pasture, typically set in regular shaped fields with fencing or hawthorn hedges, add texture and variety to the wooded backdrop;
- varied field pattern including some older enclosures but dominated by regular, straight-edged formal Parliamentary enclosures;
- settlement is typically dispersed and linear along roads, with some more recent infilling. Nucleated villages occur at Stockcross and Wickham;
- overall a quiet, intimate and secluded character.

## Physical Influences

- 15.49. The area comprises a central gravel ridge, forming a broad flat-topped plateau between the valleys of the River Kennet and River Lambourn. Either side of the plateau are short steep slopes that drop to the valleys.

## Historic Environment

- 15.50. **Heathland, Woodland and Field Patterns:** Historically, the poor free-draining acid soils of this area would have supported heathland. Although much of the woodland is modern plantation, many older woods and copses also occur especially on steeper slopes and valley sides. Some show signs of assarting. A few of the more irregular field boundaries may result from informal and piecemeal post-medieval enclosure. Most fields or land boundaries are regular and straight-sided, and are likely to be the result of formal eighteenth or nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure.

## Biodiversity

- 15.51. There are 4 non-statutory sites in the Wickham Wooded Heath Character Area, all of which are wooded to some extent, with Sole Common and Pond nature reserve having areas of both open-water and woodland. There are no sites with statutory designation in this Character Area.

## Key Issues

- extensive **plantation monoculture** - lack of woodland diversity, plus commercial forestry management including large areas of clear fell which can be visually intrusive;
- **decline in heathlands**, particularly through past losses to commercial forestry plus lack of management leading to scrub regeneration;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** with an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as **horse paddocks**;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows;
- **loss of tranquillity** with traffic on the main ridgetop road.

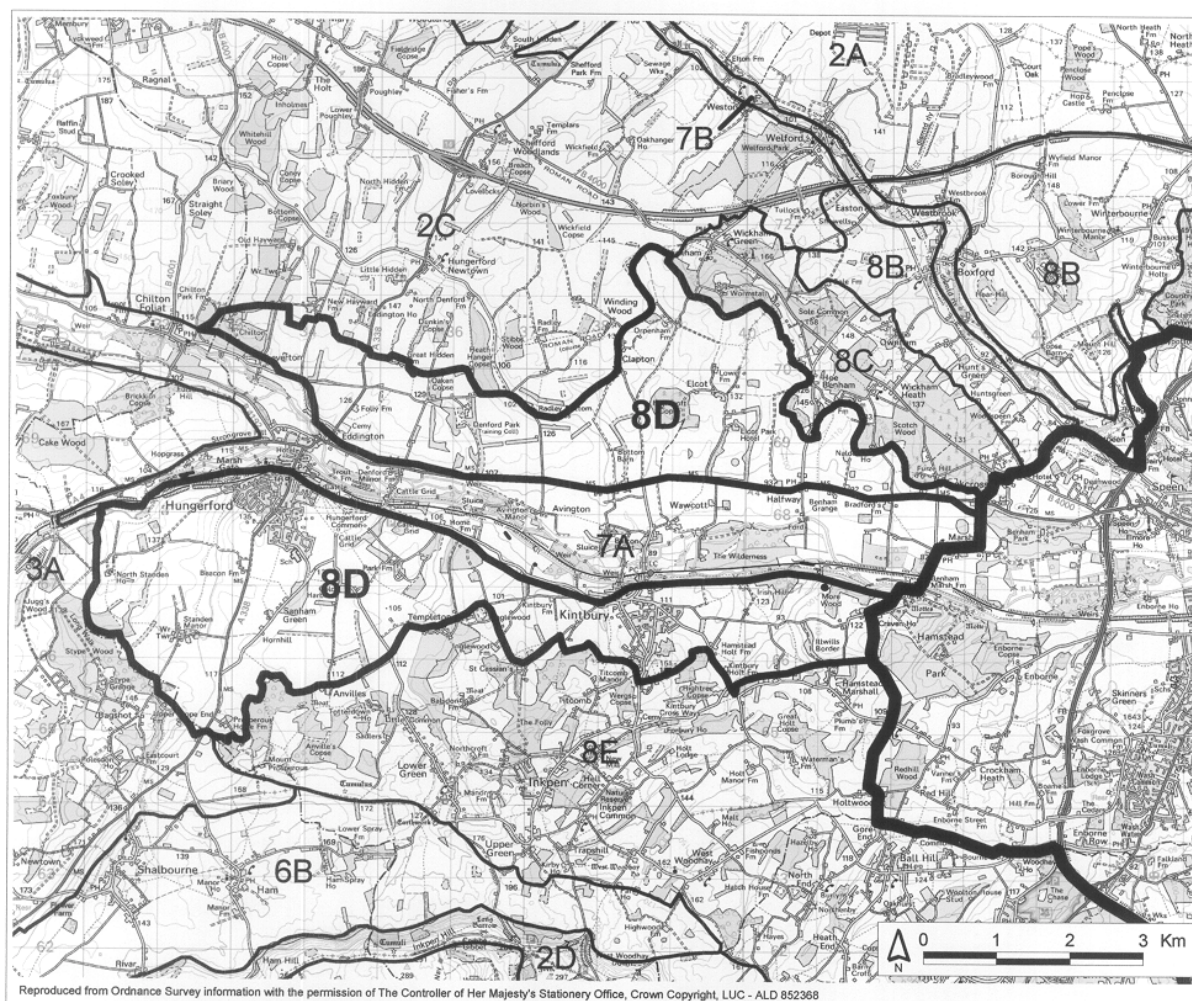
## Key Management Requirements

- 15.52. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the intimate and secluded character of the Wickham Wooded Heath, with its woodland cover, pockets of pasture, heathy commons and distinct dispersed linear settlement pattern. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and diversification of some of the plantations to include a broadleaved element. In the longer term, as part of a wider initiative, it may be appropriate to consider restoration of some of the ridge top forest areas to heathland.





# CHARACTER AREA 8D: HUNGERFORD FARMLAND



- 4.53. **Location and Boundaries:** The Hungerford Farmland character area comprises a distinct linear area of open arable farmland on the slopes to either side of the River Kennet (7A) in the eastern part of the AONB. It is visually distinct from the more enclosed mixed woodland and heathland mosaic landscapes which lie to the north - Wickham Wooded Heath (8C), and south - Highclere Lowlands and Heath (8E).

## Landscape Character Description

- 15.54. The Hungerford Farmland rises to either side of the Kennet Valley. It has a fairly open and undulating character with the predominant land use being arable farmland. Field patterns are invariably large and rectangular although around Kintbury they are smaller and the scale more intimate with a good hedgerow structure, plus numerous streams and waterbodies. This character is not reflected in the remainder of the area, where field boundaries are often post and wire or non-existent. In many areas the only definition between the lanes and fields are low grassy banks with considerably deteriorated hedgerows.
- 15.55. Woodland blocks occur throughout the area and predominantly feature on the more clay capped ridge tops. South of Hungerford numerous narrow, coniferous shelterbelts occur. Free-range pig units and occasional pastoral fields help to break up the monotony of fields of cereal crops.
- 15.56. There is a sparse pattern of settlement within this area, particularly to the north of the river, with only occasional isolated farms, manor houses and hamlets. The area south of the river contains two large settlements, Hungerford to the west and Kintbury in the east, both associated with the corridor of the River Kennet (7A), although extending out onto the slopes above the valley. The road network is constrained by the river, which designates the crossing points. There is a simple, dispersed pattern of lanes through the area.

### Key Characteristics

- an open and gently rolling landscape rising steadily from the Kennet Valley, underlain by clay and valley gravel deposits on chalk beds - forming a transitional lowland area between the valley and higher chalk downs;
- presence of water with many wells and numerous small streams influencing the landform;
- predominantly arable land use, with free-range pig units and occasional pastoral fields. Field boundaries are often post and wire fences or non-existent with the only definition, in many areas, between lanes and fields being low grassy banks;
- varied field pattern, but dominated by large regular fields of Parliamentary enclosure, with more recent removal of boundaries to create a very large scale open landscape in places;
- woodland blocks are a feature across the area and include small woods and copses on the clay capped ridgetops plus numerous narrow, coniferous shelterbelts south of Hungerford;
- earthworks include a deer park pale at Hamstead Park on the AONB boundary;
- sparsely settled, particularly to the north of the river, with occasional isolated farms, manor houses and hamlets connected by a fairly dispersed pattern of lanes throughout the area. To the south of the river are Hungerford and Kintbury, both associated with the river valley but extending out into this character area;
- a quiet, open rural character.

## Physical Influences

- 15.57. This typically open and gently rolling landscape, which rises steadily out of the Kennet River Valley, is underlain by clay and valley gravel deposits on the chalk beds. Where outcrops of Clay with Flint deposits overlay the chalk, such as at Hungerford Port Down, a more wooded character prevails and the landscape becomes more enclosed. Numerous small streams incise the southern area feeding into the Kennet and these influence the landform of the area as does the river Kennet itself.

## Historic Environment

- 15.58. **Medieval Settlement and Deer Parks:** Hungerford (main part included in character area 7A) was probably laid out between 1170-1296, and its High Street and the properties leading off it are typical of medieval burgrave plots, although no medieval buildings survive. Three mottes are recorded north of Hamstead Park, and deer park pales survive as earthworks around the park, on the boundary of the AONB.
- 15.59. **Field Patterns:** A small number of irregular fields represent medieval and post-medieval assarts, particularly in the area of Hampstead Marshall. Some small woods and copses survive, on steeper slopes and ridge tops. Some of the fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries here represent 'ladder' fields, and probably result from seventeenth and eighteenth century informal enclosure. They often follow ridgelines or valley bottoms. Most fields are large and regular however, and the largely open landscape is the result of formal parliamentary enclosure and more recent removal of field boundaries to form very large, 'prairie' fields.
- 15.60. **Post Medieval and Early Modern Landscape:** Many of the area's quarry pits for chalk, clay and gravel may have their origins during the later medieval period. These continued to be worked on a small-scale basis into the early modern period.

## Biodiversity

- 15.61. Within the Hungerford Farmland Character Area there are two nationally important SSSI's, together with 12 woodland and two grasslands sites with non-statutory designation.
- 15.62. The SSSI sites include one woodland, and one site notable for geological features. Irish Hill Copse (SSSI) for example is an ancient woodland site with a rich ground flora

## Key Issues

- intensification in farming leading to **loss of environmental assets** particularly conversion of permanent pasture to arable;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** (foot and mouth disease has already had an impact on open pig farming in this area);
- an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as **horse paddocks** - characterised by rank weedy grassland and poorly managed boundaries;

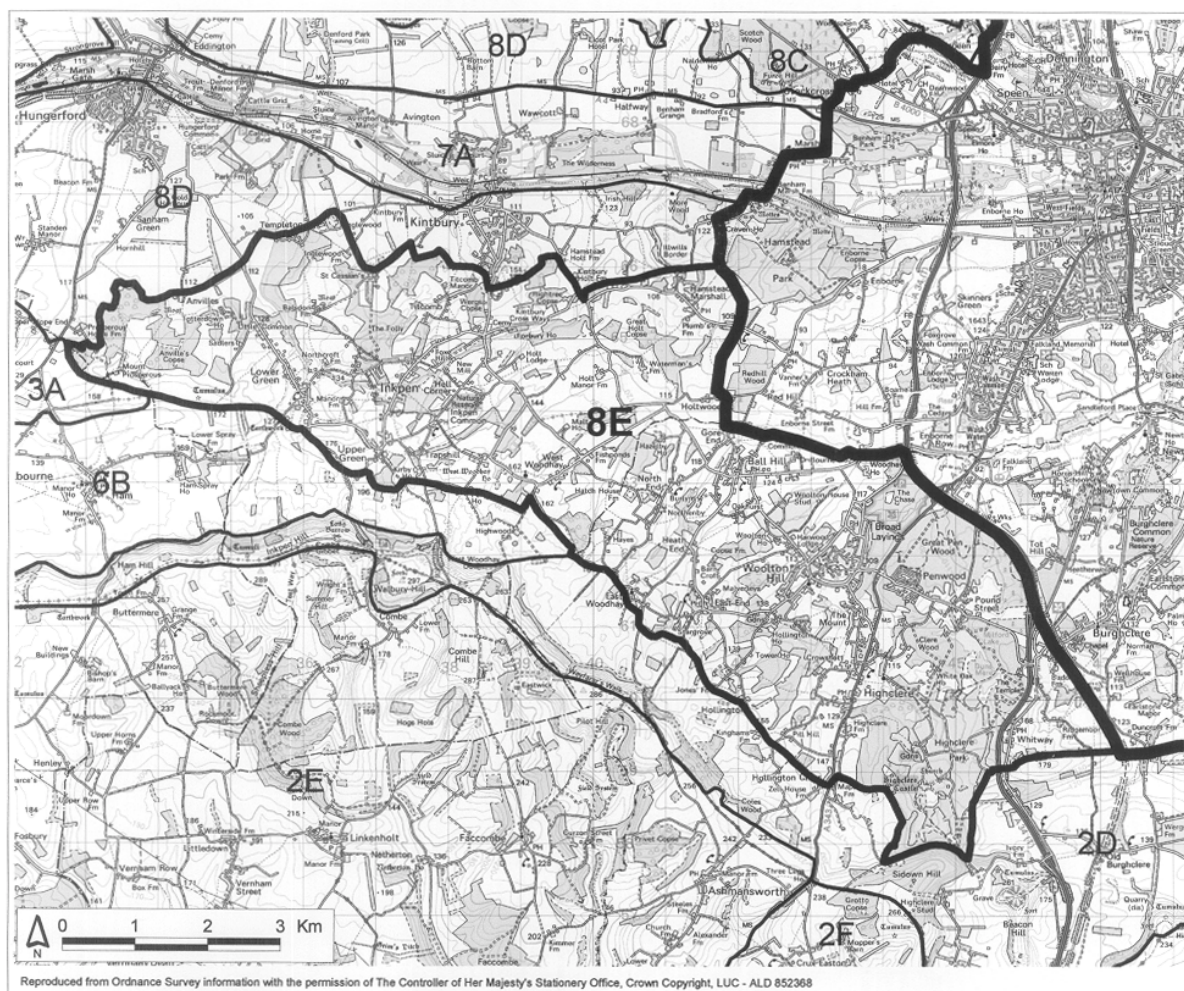


- **removal of woodlands** to create arable farmland and lack of management of remaining woodlands;
- **loss of hedgerows boundaries** and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus **poor management** of remaining hedgerows.

### **Key Management Requirements**

15.63. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural agricultural character of the Hungerford Farmland. There are particular opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and planting of new woodland blocks to provide enclosure and link isolated hilltop woodland blocks. Other opportunities relate to enhanced management of land managed as horse paddocks.

# CHARACTER AREA 8E: HIGHCLERE LOWLANDS AND HEATH



- 4.64. **Location and Boundaries:** The Highclere Lowlands and Heath character area is located in the eastern part of the AONB. It extends from the base of the abrupt scarp slope marking the edge of the southern block of chalk uplands (Walbury Hill/Watership Down Scarp 2D). To the north the boundary marks the transition to the less wooded landscape at Hungerford Farmland (8D) that flanks the Kennet Valley (8D). The eastern edge is created by the AONB boundary, although a landscape of very similar character extends further to the east, including areas such as Burghclere Common.

## Landscape Character Description

- 15.65. The Highclere Lowlands and Heath character area has a complex micro topography created by the geology of clays, gravel and sands and the influence of the numerous small streams flowing out from spring line where the chalk meets the clay, which cut across the area. The watercourses are frequently dammed so that standing water within small on-stream ponds is a visible element of the landscape.
- 15.66. The area is still extensively wooded, but has been progressively cleared through the processes of 'assarting' to form a mosaic of irregularly shaped fields with wooded margins or contained by thick hedges. The woodlands vary from large scale coniferous plantations, as for example at Great Pen Wood near Woolton Hill to smaller ancient woodland of oak standards over hazel coppice. The woods are frequently linked by linear belts and hedges and form a large connected wooded matrix across the whole area. Within this wooded framework there is considerable diversity with the light sands and gravels creating a 'heathy' character in places. This is illustrated by commons of birch and bracken, heathy rides through the woodlands, and areas of poorer acid pasture. There are also important small areas of remnant heath as for example at Inkpen Common where the damp heathland is designated as an SSSI. Parklands, many originating as medieval deer parks, are a distinctive element, as illustrated by Highclere Park, with its later Capability Brown landscape. The areas of unimproved pasture with mature parkland trees, pasture woodland and lakes create a diverse range of habitats and it is designated as an SSSI. Other smaller areas of parkland are found at Woolton House and Hollington House.
- 15.67. The area is crossed by a lattice of minor roads and tracks and is relatively densely settled. A number of loose linear settlements extend along the roads. These include the main settlements of Highclere and Woolton Hill as well a number of smaller linear settlements as for example at Inkpen and Lower Green. In addition there are many residential properties, small hamlets and farms/studs dispersed throughout the area.
- 15.68. Despite the complexity and variety of landform and landcover, the landscape has a coherent character, with a consistent framework provided by the strong structure of woodlands, hedgerows and trees. This creates a small scale enclosed and even 'secretive' character. The proximity of settlements to the main road network of the A343 and the A34 means that these areas are highly accessible and there is, in consequence, evidence of development pressures, particularly within the small villages with suburbanising elements in the form of fences, lighting and horse paddocks.

### Key Characteristics

- a lowland landscape, underlain by a mosaic of clays, gravels and sands, to the north of the abrupt scarp slope of the southern upland block of chalk;
- complex micro topography created by the diverse geology and the influence of the numerous small streams. Watercourses and ponds are a frequent feature;
- mosaic of small irregularly shaped fields of arable/pasture, often with wooded margins or contained by thick hedges - a pattern characteristic of piecemeal and informal medieval assarting and enclosure;

- extensive woodland cover, varying from large scale coniferous plantations to smaller ancient woodland coppices of oak standards over hazel coppice and wooded commons;
- parklands, which originated as medieval deer parks, are a distinctive element;
- remnant heathlands survive on the acidic sands and gravels, although these are frequently covered by woodland or scrub;
- formerly part of the medieval Forests of Pamber and Freemantle - reflected today in high woodland cover and 'squatter' settlement pattern resulting from piecemeal enclosure following disafforestation in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century;
- relatively densely settled with loose linear settlements extending along the intricate lattice of minor roads and tracks through the area. Many individual residential properties, small hamlets and farms/studs are also dispersed through the area;
- a coherent character formed by the strong structure of woodlands, hedgerows and trees - creating a small scale, enclosed and secretive landscape.

## Physical Influences

- 15.69. The area is underlain by a mosaic of clays, gravels, sands, with a mix of soil types varying from clay loams to acid sandy soils creating a very diverse landscape at the micro scale. The land is gently undulating with an overall slope down to the north to the River Enbourne (not in the AONB) or, in the east, to the River Kennet. It is cut by numerous small streams issuing from the base of the chalk so that the landform comprises a series of consecutive ridges and shallow valleys.

## Historic Environment

- 15.70. **Prehistoric Monuments:** In common with other character areas within this landscape type, there are few surviving prehistoric sites. One Bronze Age round barrow survives as an upstanding monument, west of Lower Green and the linear earthwork feature around Mount Prosperous may be late Bronze Age or Iron Age.
- 15.71. **Medieval Manors and Deer Parks:** There is a medieval moated site at Balsdon Farm, a motte at West Woodhay, and West Woodhay House itself was a medieval manor. In the medieval period Inkpen was a manor belonging to the Premonstratensian monastery of Titchfield, while Highclere manor was part of the bishopric of Winchester. A deer park is recorded by the thirteenth century, and some sections of the Park Pale earthwork still survive in Highclere Park. By the fourteenth century the Bishop of Winchester had an impressive manor house at Highclere, with an associated complex of ancillary buildings. The earthwork remains of a deserted medieval village within Highclere Park may have provided accommodation for servants and estate workers, or it may have been the original location of Highclere village itself.
- 15.72. **Parkland:** The estate at Highclere evolved into a 'polite' landscape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and gardens, follies, landscaped wood and lake features became established around a remodelled house. Capability Brown influenced some of this work. The largest mansion in Hampshire, Highclere Castle was virtually rebuilt by Sir Charles Barry for the Earl of Carnarvon between 1839-1842.

- 15.73. **Field Patterns:** There is a high proportion of woodland within the area, especially on valley sides or steeper slopes. Some woods show evidence for assarting and may be earlier. Highclere manor, for example, is documented as being involved with assarting and agricultural expansion during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Some of the more irregular or sinuous boundaries in the area may be following late medieval boundaries. Fields are often small and irregular, and may represent piecemeal and informal post-medieval assarting and enclosure. In some cases this may have taken place between existing tracks and lanes. Other small but regular, straight-sided fields are the result of formal eighteenth and nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure.

## Biodiversity

- 15.74. The Highclere Lowlands and Heath Character Area have retained a significant number of grassland and woodland sites with nature conservation value. In total there are 4 SSSI's and 75 sites with non-statutory designations. The majority of these sites are woodland, with nearly 50 of the 75 non-statutory sites falling within this habitat category.
- 15.75. Catmore and Winterly Copses (SSSI), is ancient woodland largely consisting of a hazel coppice under oak standards, and has a rich associated ground flora. Inkpen Crocus fields (SSSI) is a nationally important grassland and is a very important site for the Red Data Book spring crocus (*Crocus vernus*), which is an alien species known to have been present at this site since 1800. The remaining 2 nationally important sites are Inkpen Common (SSSI) and Highclere Park (SSSI).

## Key Issues

- **decline in the extent of heathland vegetation** through lack of management leading to scrub invasion or conversion to forestry;
- potential changes in farming practices may include further **loss of livestock** with an increase in areas managed as 'hobby farms' or as horse paddocks - characterised by rank weedy grassland and poorly managed boundaries;
- in some areas, extensive **plantation monoculture** - lack of woodland diversity and visual impacts, e.g. clearfell;
- lack of appropriate **management of woodlands** particularly ancient and semi-natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture;
- inappropriate **hedgerow management** and retention of hedgerow saplings;
- **localised intrusion of roads** with the A343 and A34 running through the area with visual and noise impacts;
- **increased traffic** on the lane network (rat runs from main routes) and improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places create a more 'urban' character and are particularly damaging to the character of the sunken lanes;

- comparative accessibility resulting in **development pressures**, particularly for new residential development including suburbanising influence of built development (e.g. fencing, lighting and paddocks);
- **loss of tranquillity**.

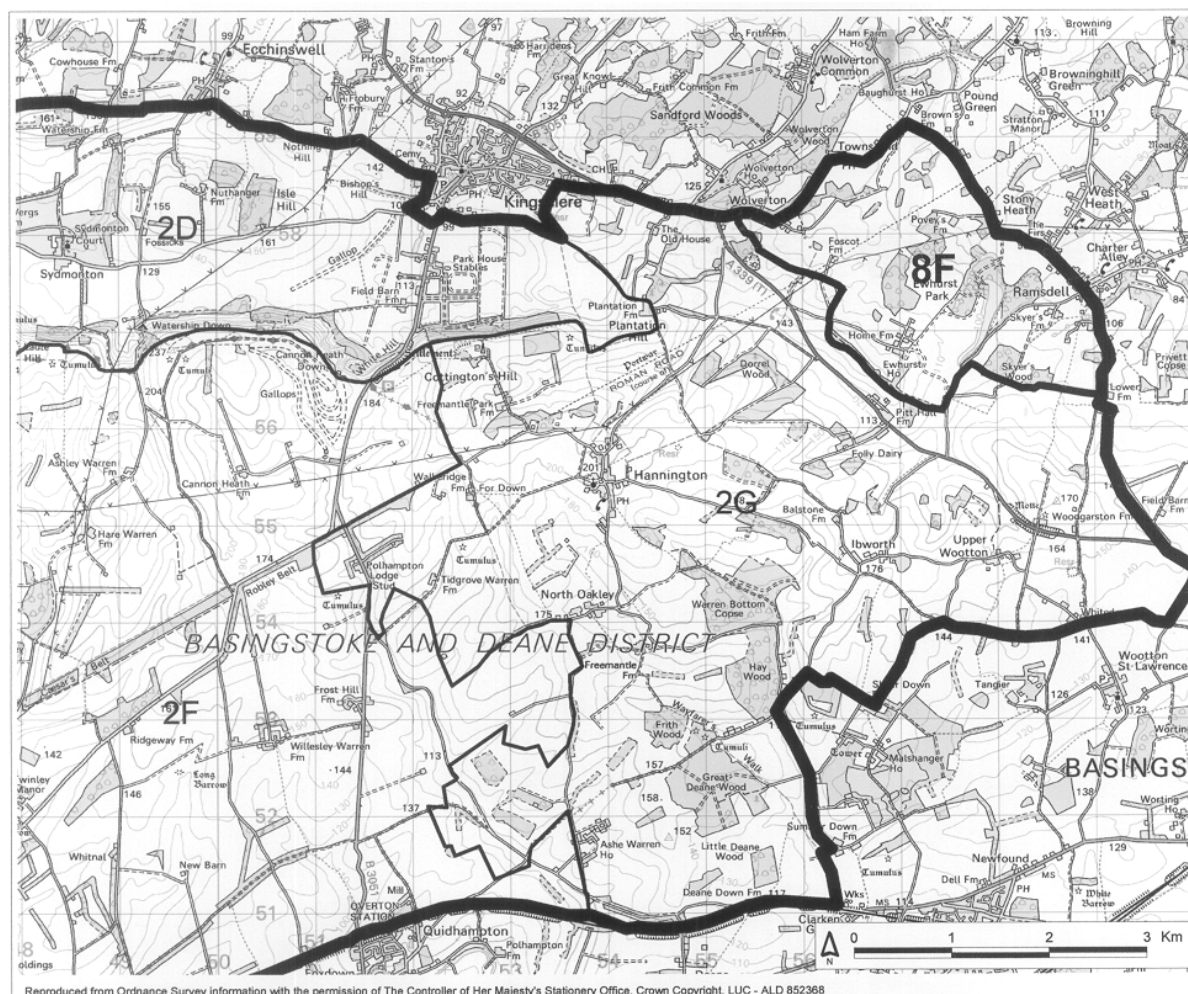
## Key Management Requirements

- 15.76. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, secluded character of the Highclere Lowlands and Heath. This includes conservation and enhancement of the key assets, namely: ancient and semi-natural woodlands, pasture, field patterns and hedgerows, remnant heathland commons, historic parkland and the rural lane network. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and diversification of some of the plantations to include a broadleaved element. In the longer term, as part of a wider initiative, it may be appropriate to consider restoration of former areas of heathland to link existing sites.
- 15.77. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement with its small hamlets and loose linear settlements and prevent gradual merging and coalescence that will result in a more suburban character. Consideration should be given to measures that could lessen the impact of the roads and reduce high traffic levels on the rural lanes.





## CHARACTER AREA 8F: EWHURST PARKLANDS



- 4.78. **Location and Boundaries:** The AONB includes a small part of this 'lowland' character area, which is located at the foot of the steep slopes that rise to the chalk uplands and clay plateau of Hannington Downs (2G). The character area is distinguished by its geology and lower relief and forms an integral part of a much wider character area extending out beyond the AONB boundary on the clays and sands and gravels of the Thames Basin.



## Landscape Character Description

- 4.79. The character of this small lowland area is derived largely from the underlying geology with gently undulating clay slopes extending from the base of higher chalk upland to the south west. Land cover comprises medium sized arable and grass fields contained within intact hedgerow boundaries. There is abundant woodland cover in a series of small irregular copses forming part of Ewhurst Park. These, together with the hedgerows provide a strong landscape structure and visual enclosure. The area includes several ponds and minor streams emerging onto the impermeable clay base and includes two designed lakes at Ewhurst Park, making water a particular feature compared to the dry chalk uplands. Ewhurst Park, located at the foot of the slopes, with its Home Farm, estate cottages, lakes, parkland planting and wooded copses, is the most prominent feature within the area. The well maintained estate landscape of intact hedgerows, uniform building style and local vernacular creates a strong unifying character.

### Key Characteristics

- a small character area at the base of the chalk downs, formed by the change in geology to heavier clays with sands and gravels. The character area extends beyond the AONB;
- water is a particular feature of the landscape with several ponds and minor streams and two designed lakes at Ewhurst Park;
- land cover comprises small-medium sized arable and grass fields contained within intact hedgerow boundaries. There is abundant woodland cover in a series of small irregular copses in Ewhurst Park;
- medieval deer parks are characteristic, with lengths of bank and ditch pales still evident in the landscape, for example at Wolverton Common (just outside the AONB);
- heathland commons (wooded) are characteristic of the wider area and were once managed as part of the Royal Forest of Pamber;
- Ewhurst Park, is the most prominent feature. The well maintained estate landscape of intact hedgerows, uniform building style and local vernacular creates a strong unifying character.

## Physical Influences

- 4.80. The distinct change in geology from chalk to heavy clays with sands and gravels is the dominant influence on landscape character, resulting in a gently undulating low-lying landform at the foot of the higher downs. Further to the east, beyond the AONB, boundary gravels become more dominant and the resulting landscape has a 'heathy' character, although this is not a feature of the small area within the AONB.

## Historic Environment

- 15.81. **Medieval Settlement:** The present day settlement comprises numerous hamlets and farmsteads scattered across the area, several of which may have early medieval origins. Ewhurst and Wolverton, for example, are mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086.
- 15.82. **Royal Forest:** The area was once part of the Royal Forest of Pamber, was utilised for hunting and also for managed production of wood, although much of the heathland was used as common land. Today, numerous small woodland copses, possibly vestiges of this earlier woodland landscape, characterise the area. Some of the copses, however, may be timber plantations established in the nineteenth century.
- 15.83. **Medieval Deer Parks:** Lengths of the bank and ditch pale which defined a medieval deer park at Wolverton can still be seen around Wolverton House and Wolverton Common.
- 15.84. **Field Patterns:** Some of the surviving irregular field boundaries are characteristic of assarts or intakes into woodland during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, in order to expand land for agriculture, grazing and settlement.

## Key Issues

- management of the **parkland landscape** with its lakes, pasture, woodlands and built features;
- **appropriate management of woodlands** particularly ancient and semi natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing;
- maintenance of the **hedgerow network**;
- **decline in heathland** in the wider landscape (not a feature within the AONB boundary).

## Biodiversity

- 15.85. There are no statutory or non-statutory sites in this Character Area.

## Key Management Requirements

- 15.86. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the parkland character, with its lakes, woodlands, buildings and permanent pasture. Within the wider landscape there are opportunities for restoration and management of the mosaic of heathland and woodland.

