



North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment

LCT 8

North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Final report
Prepared by LUC
August 2025

LCT 8 Lowland Mosaic

Figure 5.171: Winterbourne Holt looking north to Winterbourne



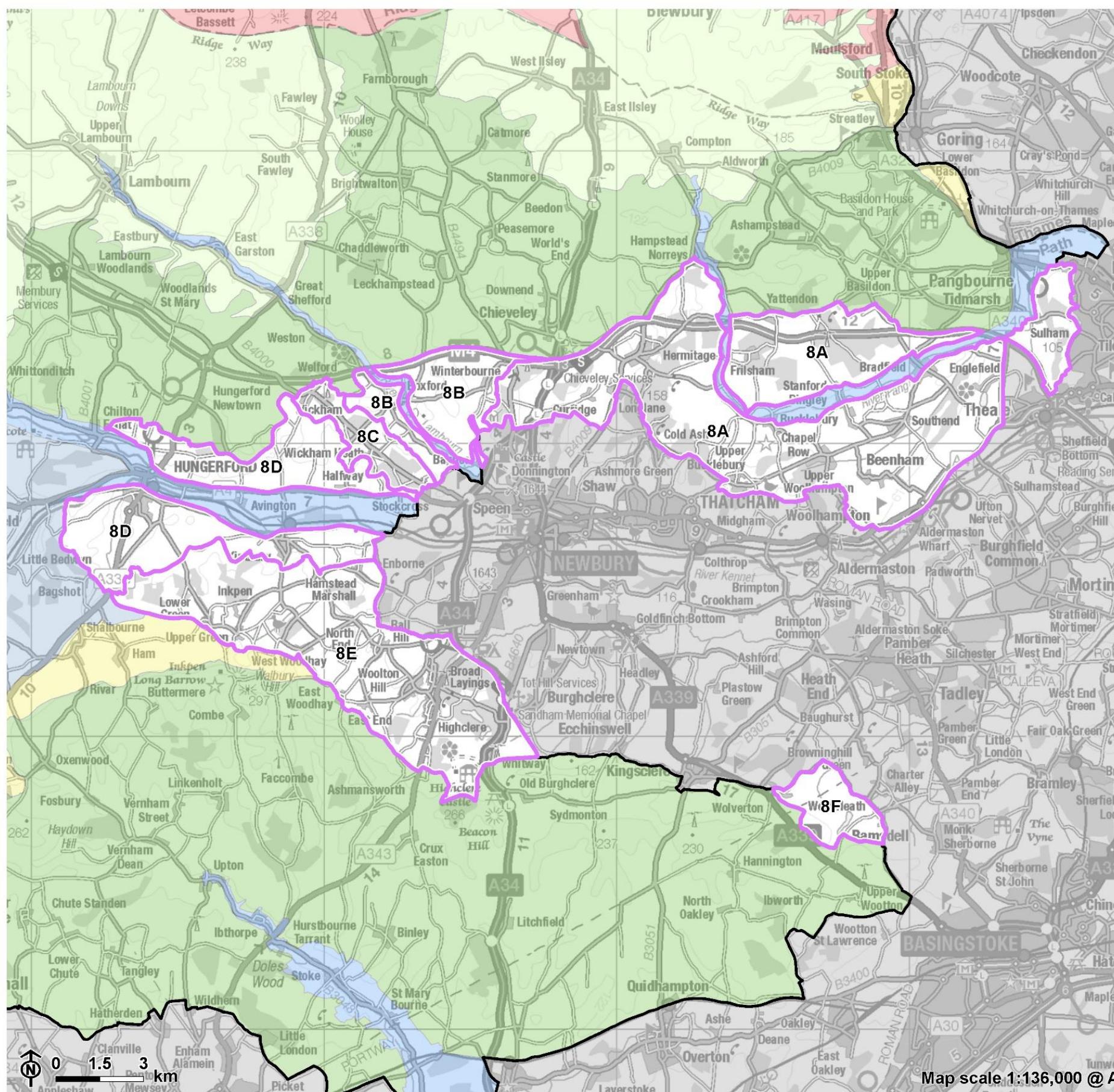
Location and overview

5.628 The Lowland Mosaic comprises a lowland area in the east of the National Landscape, located between the two main chalk upland blocks to the north and south and lying to either side of the Kennet Valley (LCA 7A). The boundaries are 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 dipslope (LCA 2A: Brightwalton Downs and LCA 2B: Ashampstead Downs), while to the south it rises as a dramatic escarpment (LCA 2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Downs Scarp). The geological transition within this landscape type is clearly marked by its lower topography and land cover of woodland and pasture.

5.629 The Lowland Mosaic landscape type is divided into six geographic 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

Figure 5.172: Location of LCT 8 Lowland Mosaic



North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape

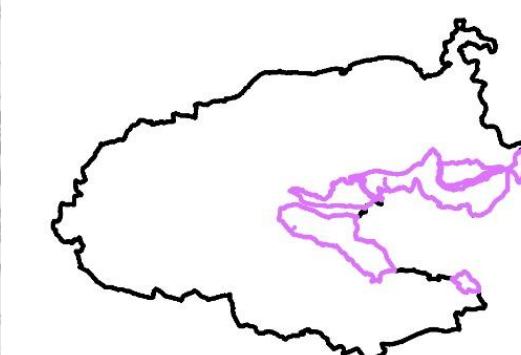


LCT 8 - Lowland Mosaic

North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Landscape Character Type

- 8: Lowland Mosaic
- 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons
- 8B: Winterbourne Farmland
- 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath
- 8D: Hungerford Farmland
- 8E: Highclere Parklands
- 8F: Ewhurst Parklands



5.630 The Lowland Mosaic occupies 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. In some areas, a more open landscape dominated by large-scale arable farmland is found.

5.631 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, and 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

5.632 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.

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

LCT 8 Lowland Mosaic: Key Characteristics

- Underlain by a geology of clays, silts, sands and gravel, in strong contrast to the surrounding 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 National Landscape.
- A mosaic of landcover including fragments of remnant heathland, extensive woodlands and pasture, as well as more open areas of arable farmland.
- 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 landscapes, 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.
- A densely settled landscape type, with a diverse range of dispersed settlements ranging from large manor houses, villages, numerous hamlets and lines of houses along the roads and lanes. 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.

LCT 8 Lowland Mosaic: Evaluation

Forces for change

5.634 The following are identified as forces for change common to the Lowland Mosaic as a whole:

- The succession of open habitats to woodland is an ongoing process affecting the internationally designated heathlands as well as other habitats. Birch, oak and Scots pine are all invasive species on the heathlands. Support for grazing and clearance determines whether open habitats are maintained and this is largely carried out by conservation organisations funded by agri-environment schemes.
- An increase in horse paddocks which has altered historic field boundary patterns and introduced weak boundary features including post and wire fencing.
- Pressure for solar farms, which could be visually intrusive, both from within the Lowland Mosaic landscapes and in views from the surrounding higher downlands.
- Increasing recreational use of the large number of footpaths, bridleways and commons may increase pressure for further visitor facilities and car parks.
- Increased traffic on the road network creates pressure for road 'improvements' including curbs, widening, and signage, which would create a more suburban character.
- Development pressure on the edges of Reading, Newbury, Thatcham and Basingstoke. These would affect the setting of the National Landscape, as well as its sense of enclosure, seclusion and tranquillity.
- The Lowland Mosaic landscapes are susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - More extreme weather events leading to a greater risk of wind-throw and loss of mature trees, which could affect the ancient woodlands.
 - Drier and hotter summers increase fire risk affecting grassland and heathland habitats and the recreational resource of the landscape.
 - Hotter temperatures could lead to a longer growing season, resulting in an increase in pine, gorse, bracken and scrub, which would change the colour and form of the landscape.

- Flooding and damage to buildings and structures, including heritage assets, could also increase in frequency and severity.
- Hotter temperatures may result in increased competition from invasive species and greater numbers of insect and mammal pests.

Landscape guidance

5.635 The following are identified as guidelines for protecting and enhancing valued characteristics of the Lowland Mosaic, taking into consideration the forces for change which are affecting, or which are expected to affect, this landscape:

- Where possible, restore historic extents of open heathland through clearance of encroaching scrub and felling of failing or redundant plantations and secondary woodland on former heathland. Target scrub and tree clearance on former heathland where this will most improve the habitat mosaic, and where historic extent of common land has been lost. There are opportunities to generate biomass from scrub and tree clearance from heathlands.
- Maintain the diversity of the landscape cover, by ensuring structural diversity in the habitat mosaic, including, where possible, bare ground, areas dominated by mosses and lichens, herbs, dwarf shrubs of diverse age classes, wet heath and mire, and scattered trees and shrubs.
- Manage and create corridors linking heathlands into a network that is resilient to climate change and wider environmental pressures, particularly taking into account the risks of fire.
- Maintain the wooded character of the area, recognising that conifers as well as native species can positively contribute to landscape character in some places. Connect existing broadleaved woodlands and enhance woodland cover, increasing extent of habitat connectivity where appropriate.
- Conserve historic hedgerows and protect veteran trees in any location in order to maintain the biodiversity and landscape value of these features. Plan for successors to veterans, particularly within the parklands.
- Adapt horse paddocks so that they better reflect historic boundary patterns and boundary types.

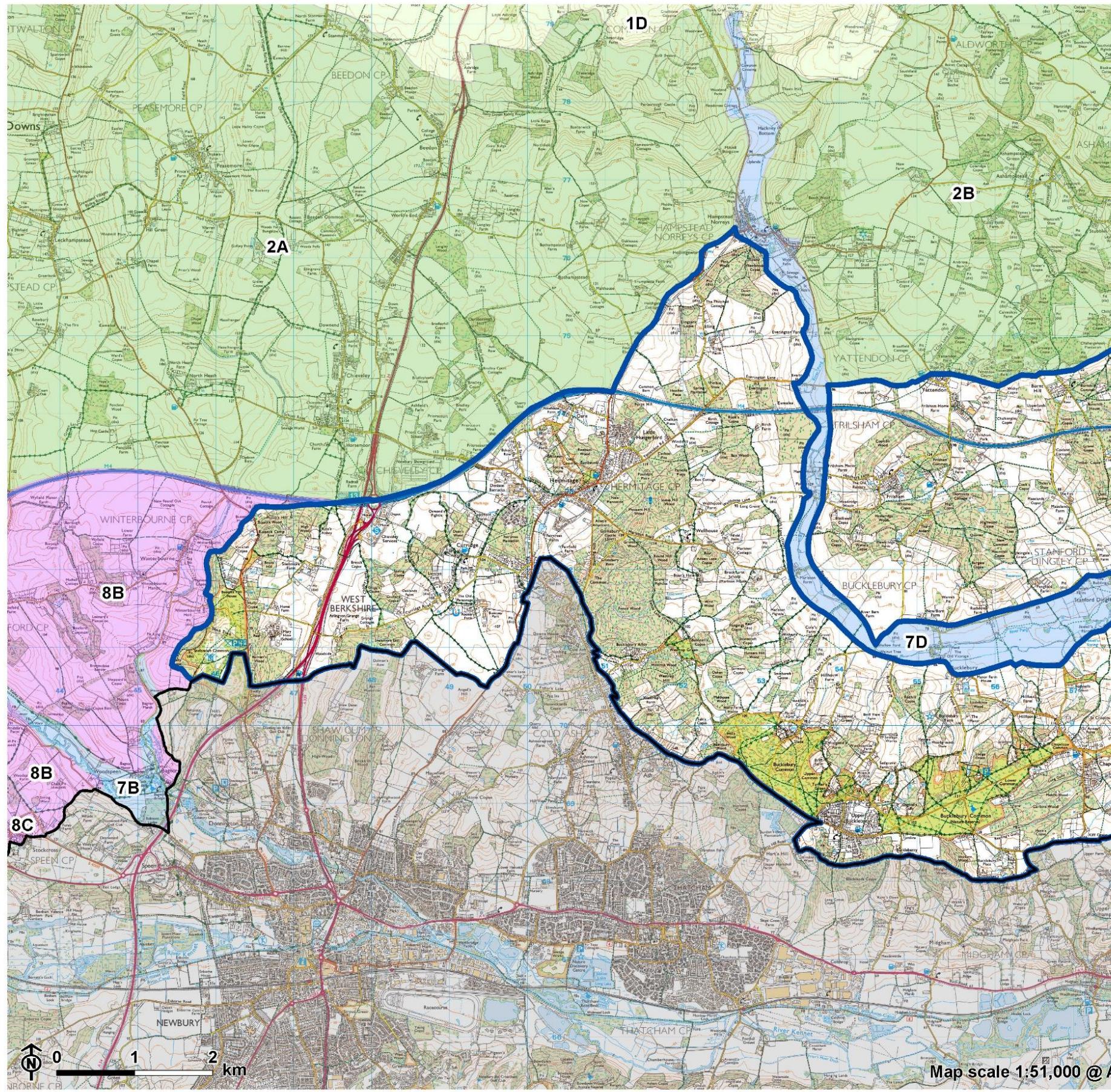
- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character and biodiversity, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through enhancement of biodiverse hedgerows, linear scrub and buffer strips.
- Conserve and enhance the characteristic and historic landscape patterns of woodland, grassland and pasture.
- Encourage sensitive management of historic parklands, including strategies for veteran parkland trees.
- Ensure new development does not alter the existing settlement pattern of nucleated villages and dispersed loose linear settlements.

LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons

Figure 5.173: Avenue of oaks at Chapel Row



Figure 5.174: LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons: Location (west)



North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons (west)

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons
- 1D: Blewbury Downs
- 2A: Brightwalton Downs
- 2B: Ashampstead Downs
- 7B: Lambourn Valley
- 7D: Pang Valley
- 8B: Winterbourne Farmland
- 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath

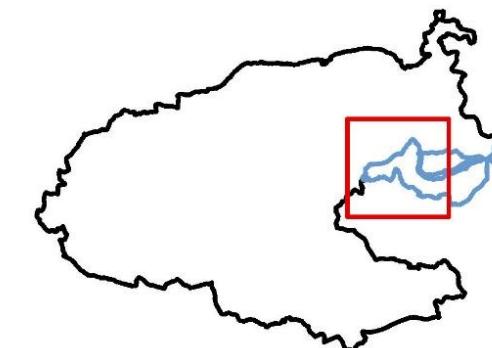
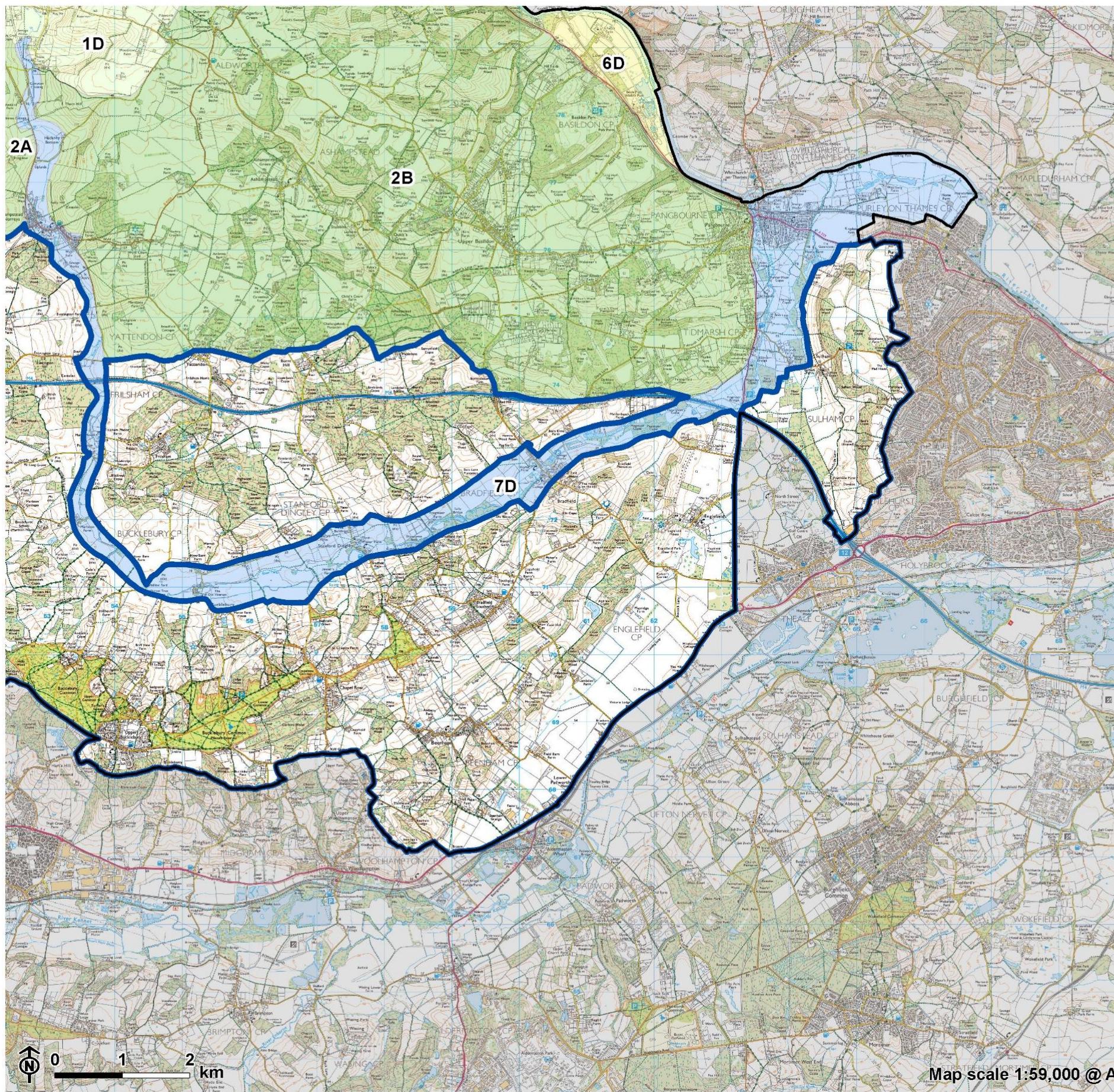


Figure 5.175: LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons: Location (east)



North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons (east)

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons
- 1D: Blewbury Downs
- 2A: Brightwalton Downs
- 2B: Ashampstead Downs
- 6D: Thames Floodplain
- 7D: Pang Valley

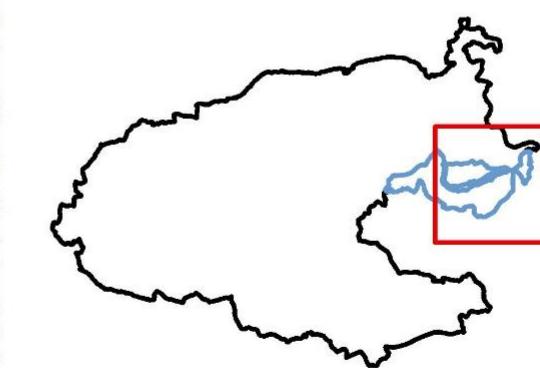


Figure 5.176: Heath character at Bucklebury Common



Figure 5.177: Hermitage Farm, Hermitage



LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons Description

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

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.637 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 distinctive and varied geological pattern of clays, silts, sands and gravels result in the nutrient poor soils that influence the land use of the area.

5.638 The undulating plateau falls from 145 metres AOD to 100 metres to the Kennet Valley to the south-east. The Hermitage Wooded Plateau is dissected by the River Pang, which enters in the north curving eastwards through the area.

Biodiversity

5.639 The intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland are ecologically important, with many nationally designated as SSSI. These include 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.

5.640 Many of the woodlands are ancient and 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 Bricklin Wood and Ash Plantation and these create low wooded horizons adding further to the sense of enclosure and containment.

5.641 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*).

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.642 The landcover, reflecting the diverse geology and soils, is highly variable with an intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland. Localised areas of more fertile loamy soils support arable farming, notably, on the slopes dropping towards the Pang Valley and to the south-east near Beenham. 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.

5.643 The area retains 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 18th and 19th centuries.

5.644 Present-day settlement is largely dispersed across the area and was probably formed by encroachment into areas of common and woodland. 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.

Historic features

5.645 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 two Iron Age forts at 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.

5.646 The Forest of Berkshire encompassed the areas north of the Enborne and Kennet, making this area subject to Forest Law. Even after extensive disafforestation in 1227, these gravel plateau areas retained a predominantly wooded and heathy character and their continued value as hunting grounds is evident in the large number of deer parks created in the medieval period. Many of these deer parks were refashioned in the 18th century as formal designed parks and gardens, distinguished by their landscape gardens, rides and plantings. Examples include Yattendon Court and Englefield House, the only Registered Park and Garden in the area.

Settlement pattern

5.647 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. Many of the villages have designated Conservation Areas. There are also 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.

Principal settlements

5.648 Hermitage sits at a fork in the road from Newbury that splits to Compton in the north and Pangbourne in the east, north-east of Newbury. The first mention of the village is from 1641, and it is likely it grew around the crossroads of two ancient trade routes, at what is now the junction of Marlston Road and Newbury Road. The current village is formed of the coalescence of two settlements, Hermitage and Little Hungerford to the north. The 1882 arrival of the now dismantled Didcot, Newbury, and Southampton Railway increased development within the village. It also increased production at the brickworks and led to the Pinewood Brickworks being developed on the northern edge of the village. The brickworks closed in 1967, and has now been redeveloped as the Forest Edge estate. During the World War II the railway was used for the transportation of locally extracted sand to London for sandbags as well as for

troop transportation to Southampton. The military is still present in Hermitage with Denison Barracks at the village's western edge.

Figure 5.178: Holy Trinity Church in Hermitage



Figure 5.179: Strong woodland boundary to the south of Hermitage



5.649 Bradfield Southend is a small village situated between Pangbourne to the north-east and Thatcham to the south-west. It is part of series of close-by hamlets of Bradfield, Southend and Tutts Clump, as was a hamlet until the opening of St Peters Church in 1965. The village is organised around a triangle of Heath Road, Cock Lane, and South End Road with a recreation ground at its centre. There is a limited historic character to the village, with only three listed buildings. Development in the mid 20th century was focussed on South End Road, which has created a more linear character to the settlement.

Figure 5.180: Brick and tile vernacular in Bradfield Southend



5.650 Bradfield Southend sits on a ridge of sand and gravel between the Rivers Pang and Bourne. The extensive woodland cover of the Hermitage Wooded Commons, and proximity to Bucklebury Common to the west provides a wooded, enclosed character to the village, with few long distance views.

Figure 5.181: Woodland seen along South End Road

Communications and infrastructure

5.651 An intricate network of rural lanes connects the small settlements. Many are sunken and overhung by woodland, creating a rural and enclosed character. These contrast with the M4 which runs east-west through the area, and a small section of the A34 running north-south. The road infrastructure, including the intersection at Chieveley has a significant local impact, including severing the lowland mosaic from the downland to the north.

5.652 The area is well served by public rights of way, and large areas of Open Access Land at Bucklebury Common, Snelsmore Common and Oare Common.

Perceptual Influences

5.653 Views within the landscape are often enclosed, with low wooded horizons common. Generally, the area retains a quiet rural character, apart from at the eastern edge where there are views to Reading and Theale. There is a good experience of dark night skies. However, this is impacted in the east by proximity to Theale, Reading and Pangbourne and in the south by proximity to Thatcham and Newbury. The Chieveley junction and services is also a major source of light pollution and impacts on tranquillity.

LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons: Evaluation

Hermitage Wooded Commons valued qualities

5.654 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons are:

- The mosaic of heathland, woodland, and pasture creates a distinctive sense of place, with contrasts of open and enclosed areas.
- Nationally important ancient woodlands, heathland, bog and wet meadow are found across the Hermitage Wooded Commons. They are designated as SSSI for their ecological value and contribute positively to the landscape.
- Considerable woodland coverage creates an intimate, enclosed character, with low, wooded horizons common.
- The dispersed settlement pattern has historic origins, with numerous designated Conservation Areas, which provide time-depth.
- Historic parklands have a strong connection with the Forest of Berkshire, having been refashioned from medieval hunting grounds, creating time-depth and a continuity of land use.
- Sunken rural lanes are a distinctive feature, providing access through the landscape and further add to the sense of enclosure.
- Open Access Land at Bucklebury Common, Snelsmore Common and Oare Common and public rights of way provide strong recreational access.

Hermitage Wooded Commons local forces for change/issues

5.655 In addition to the forces for change identified at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons are:

- A site at Chieveley services has been allocated for mineral extraction in the West Berkshire Minerals and Waste Plan. This may increase the light pollution and impact on tranquillity in an area already impacted by human influence.
- Pressure for commercial development, including large warehouses along the M4 corridor, particularly around Chieveley junction and services. This would be out of character within the dispersed settlement pattern, and associated lighting would further reduce dark night skies.

- Pressure from development on the edge of the National Landscape at Theale, Reading, Purley on Thames and Reading, which could impact tranquillity and dark night skies, as well as increase pressure on roads and recreational areas.

Hermitage Wooded Commons strategy and local guidelines

5.656 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Hermitage Wooded Commons:

- Ensure any additional recreational facilities are small-scale and in keeping with the rural character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons. Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes to car parks and minimise any lighting to retain the dark night skies.
- Ensure any applications for development in the setting of the National Landscape retain the rural, enclosed character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons. Any necessary lighting schemes should be designed to reduce light spill.

LCA 8B: Winterbourne Farmland

Figure 5.182: Large agricultural fields along Winterbourne Road



Figure 5.183: LCA 8B: Winterbourne Farmland: Location

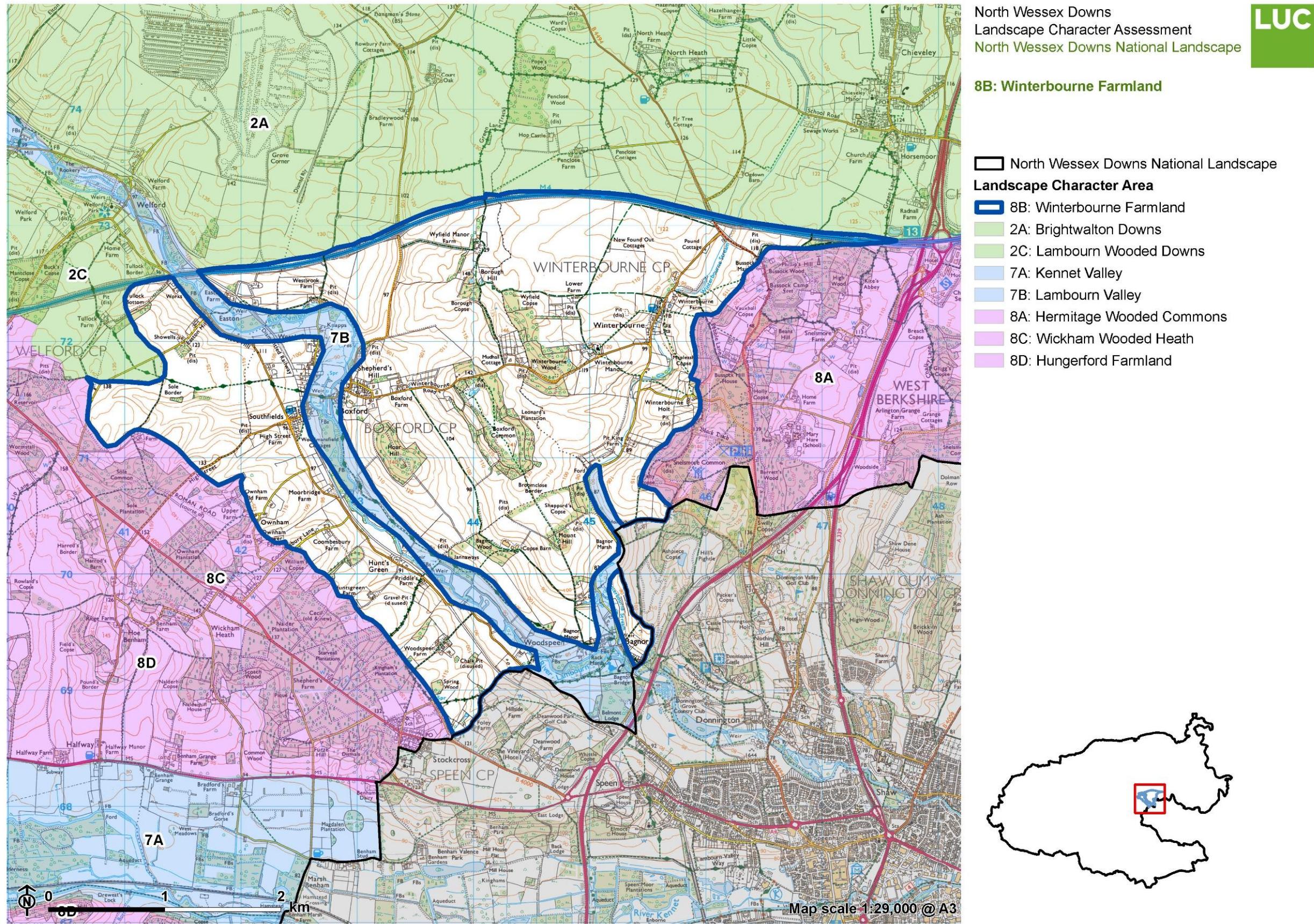
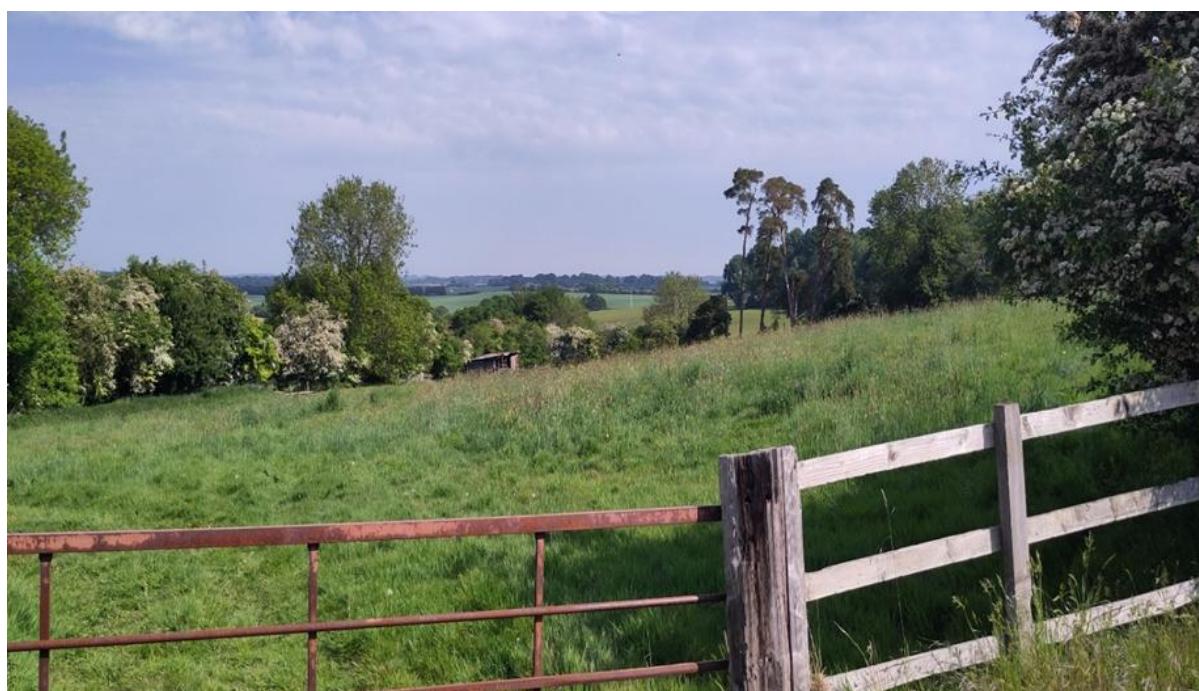


Figure 5.184: Rolling arable fields with a wooded backdrop



Figure 5.185: Paddock with mature tree lined boundary



LCA 8B: Winterbourne Farmland Description

5.657 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 (LCA 7B). Hermitage Wooded Commons (LCA 8A) and Wickam Wooded Heath (LCA 8C) form the boundaries to the east and west respectively, with the southern edge formed by the National Landscape 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.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.658 The landform is predominantly low lying and gently undulating, with the overall gradient dipping to the River Lambourn. A series of low hills such as Hoar Hill and Mount Hill provide topographic variety. The geology is based on the chalk with overlying drift deposits of clay and gravel capped ridges. Boxford Chalk Pit is designated as a geological SSSI for its late Cretaceous chalk sequence, which also contains fossils of a micro-fauna of sharks.

Biodiversity

5.659 Woodlands are confined to the higher land, and include hilltop woods such as Winterbourne Wood, Boxford Common and Hoar Hill. Bagnor Wood, Winterbourne Wood and Wyfield Copse are all recorded as ancient woodland. Linear shelterbelt plantings are also common.

5.660 The chalk stream River Lambourn runs through a small part of the Winterbourne Farmland and is designated as a SSSI and internationally as a SAC for supporting the Desmoulin's whorl snail. Areas of lowland meadows are recorded adjacent to the river and its tributaries.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.661 The Winterbourne Farmland has an open character with the predominant land use being arable farmland. Crops include cereals, oil seed rape, linseed and vines. 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.

5.662 The Winterbourne Farmlands have some small woods and copses which 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 17th and 18th century informal enclosure. They often follow ridgelines or valley bottoms. Most fields are large and regular, and the largely open landscape is the result of formal Parliamentary enclosure and more recent removal of field boundaries to form very large fields.

Historic features

5.663 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.

5.664 Community archaeological digs at Boxford between 2015 and 2017 uncovered a number of Roman buildings, indicating a significant early community. Finds included as spectacular Roman mosaic, one of only three known mosaics of its kind in the world.

Settlement pattern

5.665 The settlement pattern is sparse, concentrated at the isolated hamlet of Winterbourne, scattered farms and larger farms and manors. Boxford is covered by a Conservation Area and has a number of listed buildings. The village of Boxford and its nearby hamlet Southfields, on the western valley slopes, both extended up the Lambourn valley slopes in the 20th century.

Communications and infrastructure

5.666 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, including the promoted Lambourn Valley Way. The dismantled Lambourn Valley Railway which ran between Newbury and Didcot is still visible in the landscape, despite being decommissioned in the 1970s.

5.667 The M4 is a major feature forming the northern boundary to the Winterbourne Farmland, and restricting connectivity between the lowland landscape and the downs to the north.

Perceptual Influences

5.668 This is a large scale, open landscape, which contrasts 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 road access makes this a more remote and isolated area, with a good experience of tranquillity and dark night skies.

LCA 8B Winterbourne Farmland: Evaluation

Winterbourne Farmland valued qualities

5.669 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8B Winterbourne Farmland are:

- Open landscape which contrasts with the enclosed wooded heaths to the west and west and vegetated Lambourn Valley.
- Small hilltop woods provide a wooded horizon and are of ecological importance.
- Dispersed, sparse settlement pattern creates a rural character, and sense of time-depth.
- Extensive public rights of way provide recreational access to the landscape, including the Lambourn Valley Way.
- Quiet, rural landscape provides a sense of tranquillity and good experience of dark night skies.

Winterbourne Farmland local forces for change/issues

5.670 In addition to the forces for change identified at the LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8B Winterbourne Farmland are:

- Natural England have surveyed the Boxford Chalk Pit SSSI as in unfavourable-declining condition due to the poor exposure of the features of interest, including from thick vegetation at the base of the former pit.
- Changes in land use include the reduction in large-scale pig farming, increase in equine facilities and introduction of vineyards to the Winterbourne Farmland. The incremental associated infrastructure of equine facilities and vineyards can lead to a reduction in the rural character, for example through welfare buildings, large gates and outdoor lighting.

Winterbourne Farmland strategy and local guidelines

5.671 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Winterbourne Farmland:

- Where possible put in place vegetation management and clearance at Boxford Chalk Pit SSSI to enable the features of interest to be exposed.

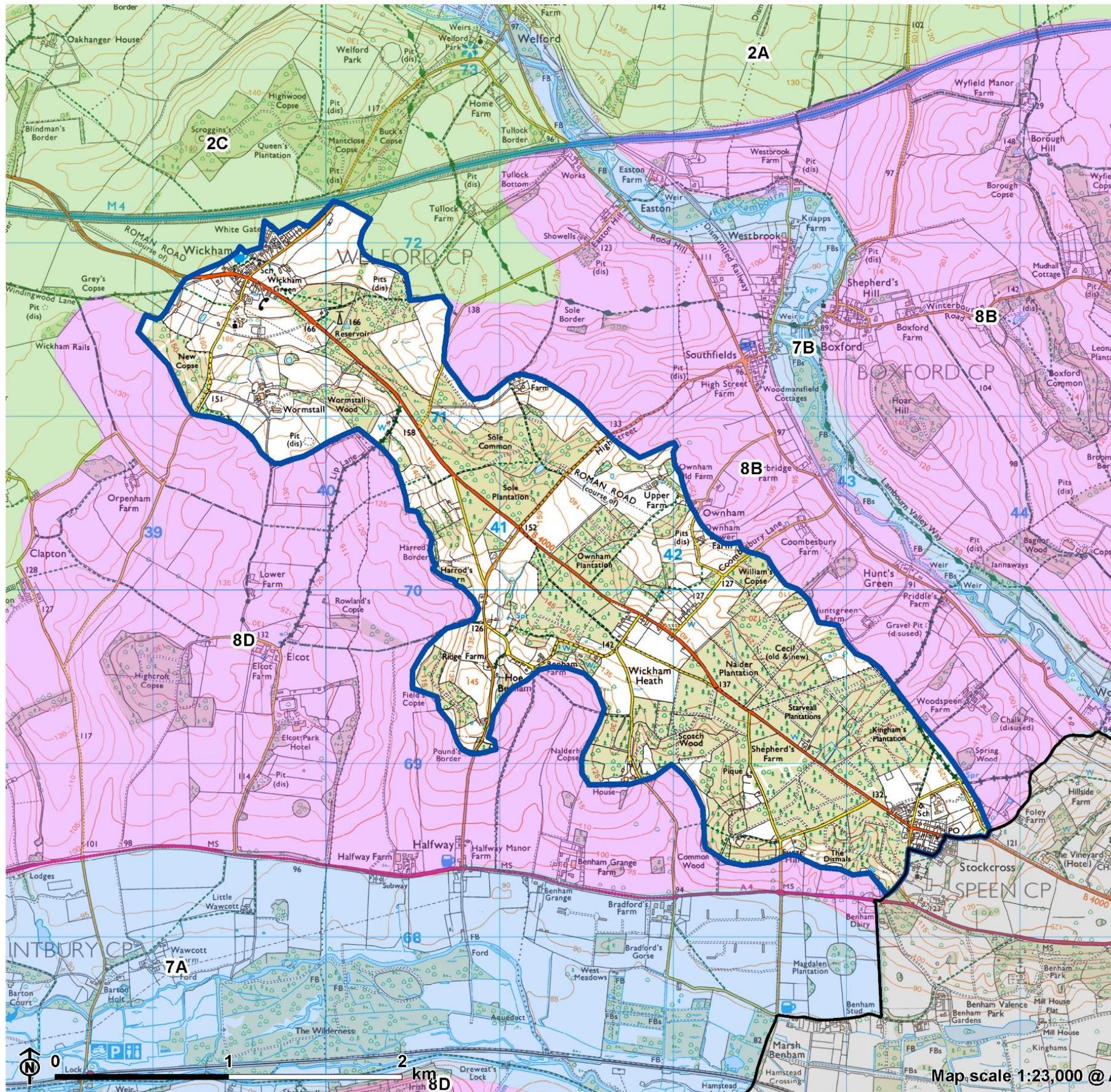
- Consider opportunities to replace lost hedgerows and hedgerow trees, while ensuring the open character of the area is not altered.
- Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes through the introduction of further equine facilities or vineyards, which may change the rural character of the Winterbourne Farmland.

LCA 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath

Figure 5.186: Enclosed, straight Roman road on Ermin Street



Figure 5.187: LCA 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath: Location



North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



8C: Wickham Wooded Heath

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area**
- 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath
- 2A: Brightwalton Downs
- 2C: Lambourn Wooded Downs
- 7A: Kennet Valley
- 7B: Lambourn Valley
- 8B: Winterbourne Farmland
- 8D: Hungerford Farmland

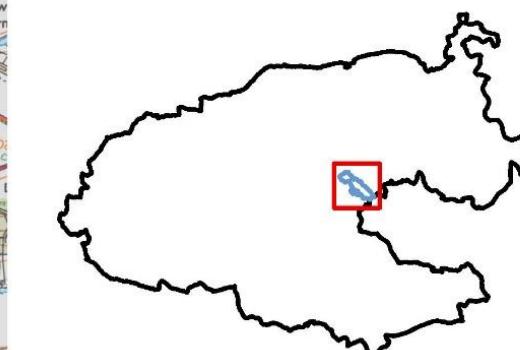


Figure 5.188: Conifers within Nalder Plantation



Figure 5.189: Broadleaf woodland of Scotch Wood



LCA 8C: Wickham Wooded Heath Description

5.672 Wickham Wooded Heath 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 (LCA 8B) to the north and the Hungerford Farmland (LCA 8D) to the south.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.673 The Wickham Wooded Heath 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.

Biodiversity

5.674 Dense woodland cover predominates in this area and is the defining influence on the landscape character. Scots pine and other conifers form a monoculture of plantation woodland across the central part of the ridge. Elsewhere beech, birch, oak and sweet chestnut form important components, with small areas of ancient woodland recorded. Within this wooded framework there are small areas of commons and remnant heathland adding texture and variety as well as providing habitats for wildlife.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.675 The woodlands are managed on a commercial scale, with large areas of clear fell evident in places. Agricultural land use includes pockets of pasture, usually within small, regular shaped, fields with fencing or hawthorn hedges or surrounded by woodland.

5.676 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 18th or 19th century Parliamentary enclosure.

Historic features

5.677 There is limited development within this area, which would have supported a heathland and woodland mosaic of habitats. Occasional scattered farm buildings are recorded as listed buildings.

Settlement pattern

5.678 The settlement pattern is typically dispersed and linear along the straight ridge top road. The linear arrangement has been supplemented with recent development infilling between the dispersed houses, such as on Coombesbury Lane. Nucleated villages occur at Stockcross in the south of the area and Wickham in the north of the area. Wickham village lies on the course of the Roman road that linked Silchester and Cirencester. The Church of St Swithin, with its 10th century Saxon tower, and the rectory, now Wickham House, are set apart from the main village, which expanded in the 20th century.

Communications and infrastructure

5.679 The ridgeway road (B4000) is the main route through the Wickham Wooded Heath and roughly follows the course of the Roman Ermine Street. Perpendicular smaller lanes branch off the B4000, linking to the small farmsteads and areas of settlement.

5.680 There is more limited access by foot, although some of the small lanes are also byways.

Perceptual Influences

5.681 The wooded character of this landscape creates an enclosed and occasionally intimate character. There is limited sense of remoteness due to the limited access by public rights of way.

5.682 There is a generally good sense of tranquillity and dark night skies, although this is impacted slightly by proximity to Newbury in the south and to the M4 to the north.

LCA 8C Wickham Wooded Heath: Evaluation

Wickham Wooded Heath Valued Qualities

5.683 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8C Wickham Wooded Heath are:

- The dense, extensive woodland cover provides a distinctive sense of place.
- Small areas of deciduous woodland on the steeper slopes, some recorded as ancient, create a rich ecological habitat and landscape feature.
- Dispersed linear settlement pattern provides a sense of time-depth, and contributes to the tranquil character.
- A sense of history through the ridgetop road, part of the Roman Ermine Street, with perpendicular small lanes branching off onto the steeper slopes.
- A quiet, rural and sometimes secluded character, due to the wooded character, with a good experience of dark night skies.

Wickham Wooded Heath local forces for change/issues

5.684 In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8C Wickham Wooded Heath are:

- The extensive plantation monoculture results in a lack of woodland diversity. Commercial forestry management including large areas of clear fell can be visually intrusive.
- There are no recorded priority habitat heathlands within the area, although there are some heathy areas in clearings.
- A planned woodland adventure facility will increase recreational interest in the area, and will potentially include a new permissive path to increase access on public rights of way. The new site may result in a loss of tranquillity with an increase in traffic on the main ridgetop road.

Wickham Wooded Heath strategy and local guidelines

5.685 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Wickham Wooded Heath:

- Plantation woodlands should be sympathetically managed to avoid intrusion on visual character. Selective felling should be adopted to utilise natural regeneration and reduce the landscape impact. Where new plantations are created, the use of single-species planting or exotic conifers should be minimised.
- Target scrub and tree clearance at former heathlands where this will most improve the habitat mosaic, where historic extent of common land has been lost.
- Ensure any new development has limited lighting to ensure the dark night skies and rural character of the landscape is maintained.

LCA 8D: Hungerford Farmland

Figure 5.190: Lowland pasture field near Kintbury



Figure 5.191: LCA 8D: Hungerford Farmland: Location

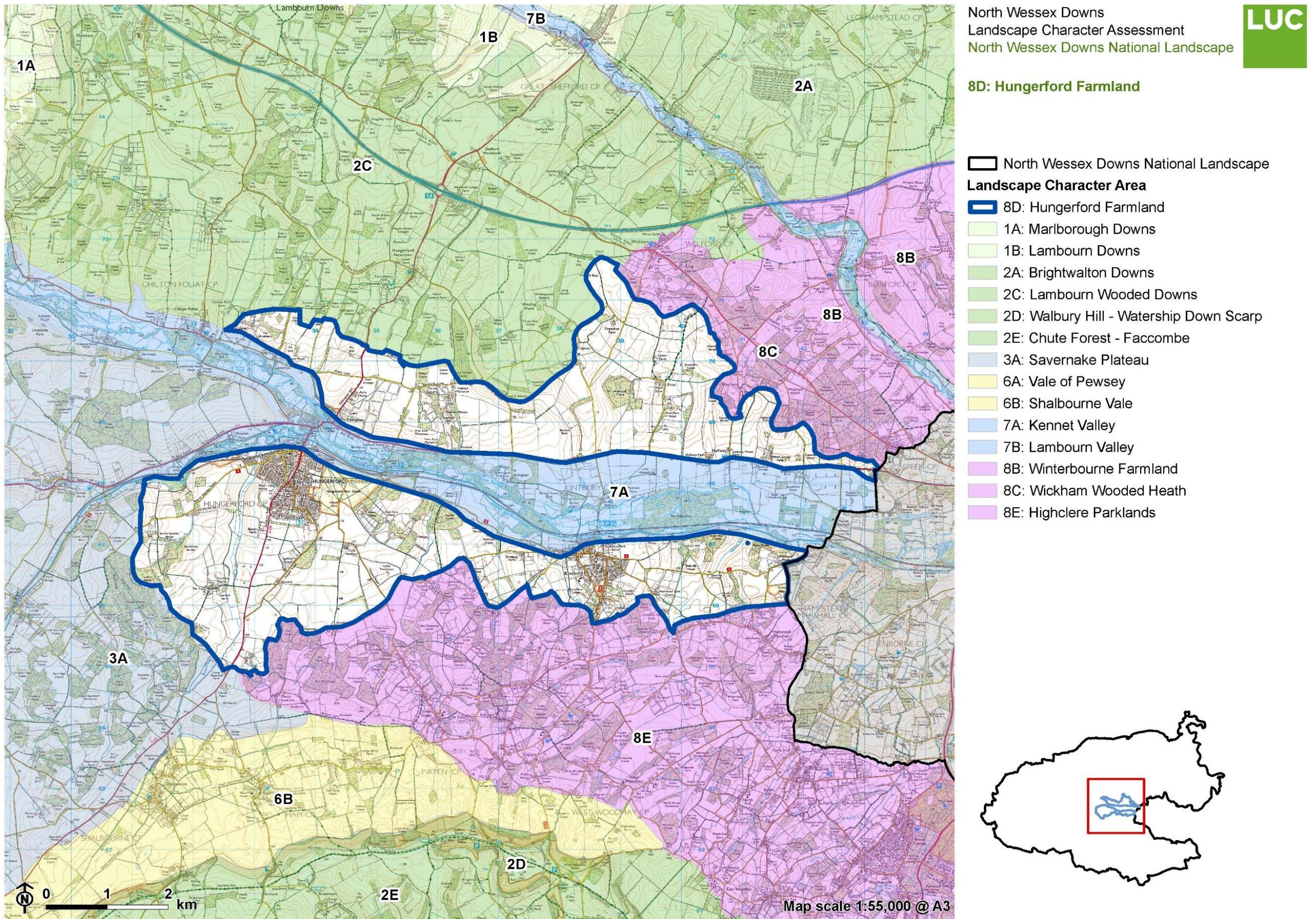


Figure 5.192: Arable field with woodland backdrop



Figure 5.193: Looking across the Kennet Valley to Eddington



LCA 8D: Hungerford Farmland Description

5.686 The Hungerford Farmland character area is split into two distinct linear areas of open arable farmland on the slopes north and south of the River Kennet (LCA 7A) in the eastern part of the National Landscape. It is visually distinct from the more enclosed mixed woodland and heathland mosaic landscapes which lie to the north and south – Wickham Wooded Heath (LCA 8C) and Highclere Lowlands and Heath (LCA 8E) respectively.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.687 A gently rolling landscape which rises steadily out of the Kennet River Valley. It forms a transitional lowland area between the Kennet valley and the higher chalk downs. Hamstead Marshall Pit is designated as a geological SSSI for its exposure of an important fluvial terrace.

5.688 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.

Biodiversity

5.689 Woodland blocks occur throughout the area and predominantly feature on the more clay capped ridge tops, such as at Hungerford Port Down. A few woodlands are of ancient origin, including Irish Hill Copse SSSI. Irish Hill Copse shows evidence of a long continuity of coppice management, and the plant communities reflect the change from acid soils on the gravel cap to the base-rich soils on the chalky lower slopes. South of Hungerford numerous narrow, coniferous shelterbelts occur.

5.690 The Kennet tributary streams in the southern area have recorded floodplain grazing marsh.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.691 The predominant land use is arable farmland. Occasional pastoral fields, grape vines and horse grazing help to break up the monotony of fields of cereal crops.

5.692 Field patterns are invariably large and rectangular, with field boundaries either delineated by post and wire fencing or removed entirely. In many areas the only definition between the lanes and fields are low grassy banks with considerably deteriorated hedgerows. Around Kintbury the field pattern is smaller, with a good hedgerow structure.

5.693 A small number of irregular fields represent medieval and post-medieval assarts, particularly in the area of Hampstead Marshall. Some small woods and coves survive, on steeper slopes and ridge tops. Some of the fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries here represent 'ladder' fields, and probably result from 17th and 18th 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 fields. 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.

Historic features

5.694 There are limited recorded historic features within this landscape. Hamstead Park, which largely lies outside of the National Landscape, extends into the east of this area, with a small area designated as part of the Registered Park and Garden. It was a medieval deer park which was then reimagined as a country park. A number of manor houses and associated parklands are still evident, including at Chilton Lodge, Denford House and Standen Manor. There is also a strong parkland feel at Hungerford Common (also known as Common Port Down) with long mature avenue of trees.

Settlement pattern

5.695 Outside of Hungerford and Kintbury, which both developed along the River Kennet, there is a sparse pattern of settlement, particularly to the north. Isolated farms, manor houses and hamlets are scattered north and south of the river.

Principal settlements

5.696 Hungerford is a historic market town between Marlborough and Newbury on the south side of the Kennet valley. It developed as a ford at the confluence of the Rivers Dun and Kennet and retained importance as a coaching town on the route between London and Bath. The town retains a strong sense of identity through its historic core centred on the north-south 13th century High Street,

which crosses the Kennet at Eddington Bridge. The village of Eddington on the north bank of the Kennet has now coalesced with Hungerford. The construction of the Kennet and Avon Canal and Great Western Railway in the late 18th and early 19th centuries increased the population size and expanded the town on the southern banks of the Dun. From the 1970s onwards housing has expanded on either side of the A338 to the south of the town. Hungerford Port Down to the east is a distinctive parkland grazing landscape of ancient and veteran trees with views north across the Kennet Valley. This large area of common land has created a strong barrier to development on the eastern edge of Hungerford.

Figure 5.194: Hungerford High Street



5.697 The landform north of Hungerford is lower and flatter as part of the Kennet valley floor, with views to the rolling downland beyond. The west of the town is highly visible from the rolling downland to the north as well as from the rising slopes to the south-west. Longer distance views towards Hungerford are often screened by intervening woodland associated with the Savernake Forest or the wooded downlands.

Figure 5.195: Western edge of Hungerford from the south-west

5.698 Kintbury lies on the southern bank of the River Kennett between Hungerford and Newbury. It was a Saxon Minster on the river and may have been a Royal estate. The medieval layout of a linear settlement has largely been retained in the Conservation Area along High Street, Church Street, and Newbury Street. Kintbury originally surpassed Hungerford in commercial importance holding a weekly market and was a centre for the silk industry during the 17th and 18th centuries. The architecture in this area is characterised by red and grey brick cottages with mostly tiled and occasional thatched roofs. The introduction of the Kennet and Avon Canal and the Great Western Railway had a more limited influence of settlement expansion than other settlements. The village has expanded to the south-east onto the valley sides, away from the river corridor.

Figure 5.196: Approach to historic core of Kintbury

5.699 The historic core of Kintbury lies within the Kennet valley, with the modern expansion to the south climbing into the Hungerford Farmland. Riparian vegetation and wetland habitats in the wider valley (part of the Kennet Valley Alderwood SAC and SSSI) provides a wooded backdrop to the village and largely screens the settlement from view from the north. The canal, river and associated towpaths provide a strong visual connection to the area's industrial heritage as well as to recreational links to the wider landscape. Land south of Kintbury is more agricultural, although the falling topography and areas of woodland to the south also provide screening of views to the village.

Figure 5.197: Fields with mature trees that surround Kintbury

Communications and infrastructure

5.700 There is a simple, dispersed pattern of small rural lanes bounded by overgrown hedgerows. The road network is constrained by the river, railway line and, in the north, the A4.

5.701 Recreational access is provided on footpaths, bridleways and byways, and at Open Access Land at Hungerford Common and Craven Keep.

Perceptual Influences

5.702 The landscape has an open character due to the limited field boundaries. Areas of higher woodland coverage, such as at Hungerford Port Down, creates a more enclosed and intimate landscape. The low rolling hills provide a rural backdrop to the River Kennet (LCA 7A).

5.703 This is a tranquil, rural landscape with a good experience of dark night skies away from Hungerford and Kintbury in the south.

LCA 8D Hungerford Farmland: Evaluation

Hungerford Farmland valued qualities

5.704 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8D Hungerford Farmland are:

- A gently rolling landscape which forms a clear transition between the Kennet valley and the chalk uplands, creating a strong sense of place.
- Wooded horizons provide visual enclosure and a wooded backdrop to, and from settlements, particularly at Hungerford.
- Estate and manor houses and their associated parkland provide time-depth.
- Public rights of way and Open Access Land provide important recreational access through the landscape.
- An open, tranquil and rural character, which provides a rural setting to the adjacent Kennet valley.

Hungerford Farmland local forces for change/issues

5.705 In addition to the forces for change identified at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8D Hungerford Farmland are:

- Natural England have surveyed the Hamstead Marshall Pit SSSI as in unfavourable–declining condition due to the poor exposure of the features of interest, including from thick woodland and a water-filled ditch at the base of the pit faces.
- Past loss of hedgerows boundaries and particularly mature hedgerow trees, with continued poor management of remaining hedgerows could result in the loss of the existing field pattern.
- An increase in equine facilities, where the incremental addition of associated infrastructure can lead to a reduction in the rural character, through, for example welfare buildings, large gates and outdoor lighting.
- Pressure for potential residential expansion of Hungerford and Kintbury, and also from Newbury outside of the National Landscape. This could impact tranquillity, dark night skies, as well as increase pressure on the local roads and recreational areas.

Hungerford Farmland strategy and local guidelines

5.706 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Hungerford Farmland:

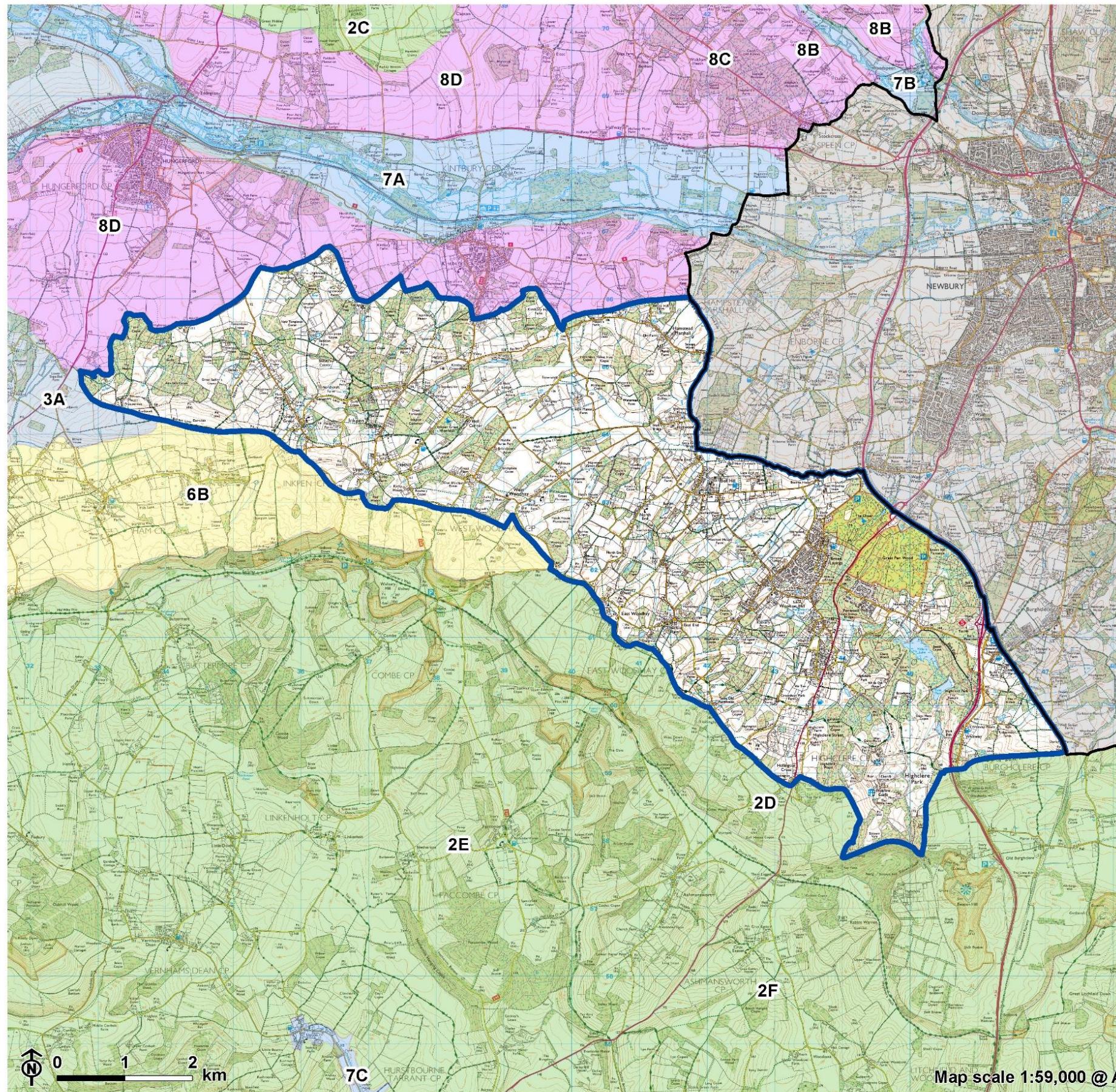
- Where possible put in place vegetation management and clearance at Hamstead Marshall Pit SSSI to enable the features of interest to be exposed.
- Consider opportunities to replace lost hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and replace post and wire fencing with native-species hedgerows, while ensuring the open character of the area is not altered.
- Ensure any applications for development in the setting of the National Landscape retain the rural, enclosed character of the Hungerford Farmland. Any necessary lighting schemes should be designed to reduce light spill.
- Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes through the introduction of further equine facilities, which may change the rural character of the Hungerford Farmland.

LCA 8E: Highclere Lowlands and Heath

Figure 5.198: West Woodhay Down providing a backdrop to arable fields



Figure 5.199: LCA 8E: Highclere Lowlands and Heath: Location



North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



8E: Highclere Parklands

- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Landscape Character Area
- 8E: Highclere Parklands
- 2C: Lambourn伍ded Downs
- 2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp
- 2E: Chute Forest - Facombe
- 2F: Litchfield Downs
- 3A: Savernake Plateau
- 6B: Shalbourne Vale
- 7A: Kennet Valley
- 7B: Lambourn Valley
- 7C: Bourne Valley
- 8B: Winterbourne Farmland
- 8C: Wickham伍ded Heath
- 8D: Hungerford Farmland

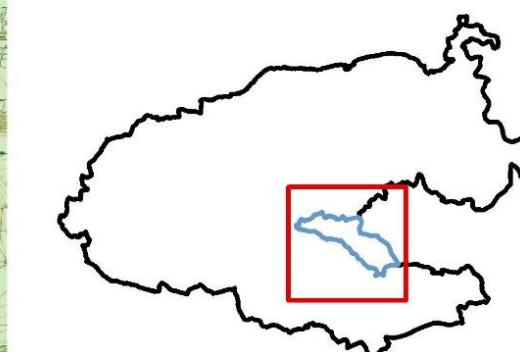


Figure 5.200: Woodland at Inkpen Common (SSSI)



Figure 5.201: Woodland providing enclosure to flat arable fields



LCA 8E: Highclere Lowlands and Heath Description

5.707 The Highclere Lowlands and Heath is located in the east of the National Landscape. 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 LCA 2D). To the north the boundary marks the transition to the less wooded landscape at Hungerford Farmland (LCA 8D) that flanks the Kennet Valley. The eastern edge is created by the National Landscape boundary, although a landscape of very similar character extends further to the east, including areas such as Burghclere Common.

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.708 A gently undulating landscape with an overall slope down to the north to the River Enbourne (outside the National Landscape) or, in the east, to the River Kennet. 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. It is cut by numerous small streams issuing from the base of the chalk in the south, so that the landform comprises a series of consecutive ridges and shallow valleys. The watercourses are frequently dammed so that standing water within small on-stream ponds is a visible element of the landscape.

Biodiversity

5.709 A highly wooded landscape, with a high proportion of ancient woodland. Catmore and Winterly Copses SSSI is an ancient woodland largely consisting of a hazel coppice under oak standards, and has a rich associated ground flora.

5.710 Within the 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. This is demonstrated at Highclere Park SSSI, where the mature parkland and wood pasture trees are linked by lakes, lowland grassland, rush pasture and lowland neutral grassland. There are also important small areas of remnant heath as for example at Inkpen Common where the damp heathland is designated as an SSSI.

5.711 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.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.712 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. Highclere Manor, for example, is documented as being involved with assarting and agricultural expansion during the 13th and 14th centuries. 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.

5.713 Outside of the woodlands, there is a mosaic of small arable and pasture fields with wooded margins or thick hedge boundaries.

5.714 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 18th and 19th century Parliamentary enclosure.

Historic features

5.715 In common with the rest of the Lowland Mosaic landscapes 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.

5.716 The Highclere Lowlands and Heath were formerly part of the medieval Forests of Pamber and Freemantle and managed under Forest law. Evidence of the medieval era are from a medieval moated site at Balsdon Farm, which originally surrounded the 13th century Balsdon manor house, and a motte at West Woodhay. The Inkpen manor belonged to the Premonstratensian monastery of Titchfield, while Highclere manor was part of the bishopric of Winchester. 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.

5.717 Parklands, many originating as medieval deer parks, are a distinctive element, with small areas of parkland at Woolton House and Hollington House.

The estate at Highclere, now a Grade I Registered Park and Garden, evolved into a 'polite' landscape during the 17th and 18th centuries. The 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.

Settlement pattern

5.718 The area is relatively densely settled in a number of loose linear settlements which extend along the roads. These would have formed from 'squatter' settlements resulting from piecemeal enclosure of the landscape after disafforestation in the early 17th century.

5.719 The main settlements of Highclere and Woolton Hill are very close to each other but do not give the appearance of coalescence due to the enclosed wooded character of the lanes which join the settlements. Smaller linear settlements are found at Inkpen and Lower Green. In addition, there are many residential properties, small hamlets and farms/studs dispersed throughout the area. Some 20th century developments are not in keeping with the loose linear settlement pattern, for example the 1960s and 1970s estates at Penwood. However, strong vegetation on the boundaries, screens many of these from view.

Communications and infrastructure

5.720 The area is crossed by a lattice of minor roads and tracks, which are often bounded by mature hedgerows or woodland. The A34 cuts through the east of the landscape, and with its large junctions and service station at Tot Hill is out of character with the wider road network.

5.721 There is good recreational access within the Highclere Lowlands and Heath, including on the promoted route, Brenda Parker Way. A number of the commons and woods are managed for both ecology and recreation, including Inkpen Common (Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust), Great Pen Wood (Forestry Commission) and The Chase (National Trust).

Perceptual Influences

5.722 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.

5.723 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.

LCA 8E Highclere Lowlands and Heath: Evaluation

Highclere Lowlands and Heath valued qualities

5.724 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8E Highclere Lowlands and Heath are:

- Location on the springline between the chalk downs and clay creates a number of watercourses and ponds, which are distinctive features.
- The ancient and semi-natural woodlands, some nationally designated as SSSIs, are of ecological importance and create a wooded, enclosed character.
- Remnant areas of heathland are of ecological importance and provide a distinct sense of place.
- Historic parklands, including Highclere Park, provide time-depth and continuity with medieval deer parks.
- A loose linear settlement pattern, linked by small rural lanes, with strong hedgerows and wooded boundaries.
- A coherent rural character formed by the strong structure of woodlands, hedgerows and trees, which provides a sense of place and a tranquil, enclosed landscape.

Highclere Lowlands and Heath local forces for change/issues

5.725 In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8E Highclere Lowlands and Heath are:

- The decline in the extent of heathland vegetation, through lack of management leading to scrub invasion or conversion to forestry.
- Changes in land use include an increase in equine facilities. The incremental associated infrastructure of equine facilities can lead to a reduction in the rural character, for example through welfare buildings, large gates and outdoor lighting.
- A slight increase in tourism and events related development including glamping and large-scale marques can result in incremental changes to the rural character through the introduction of large gates and outdoor lighting.

- Pressure from development on the edge of the National Landscape, particularly on the edge of Newbury, which could impact tranquillity and dark night skies, as well as increase pressure on roads and recreational areas.

Highclere Lowlands and Heath strategy and local guidelines

5.726 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Highclere Lowlands and Heath:

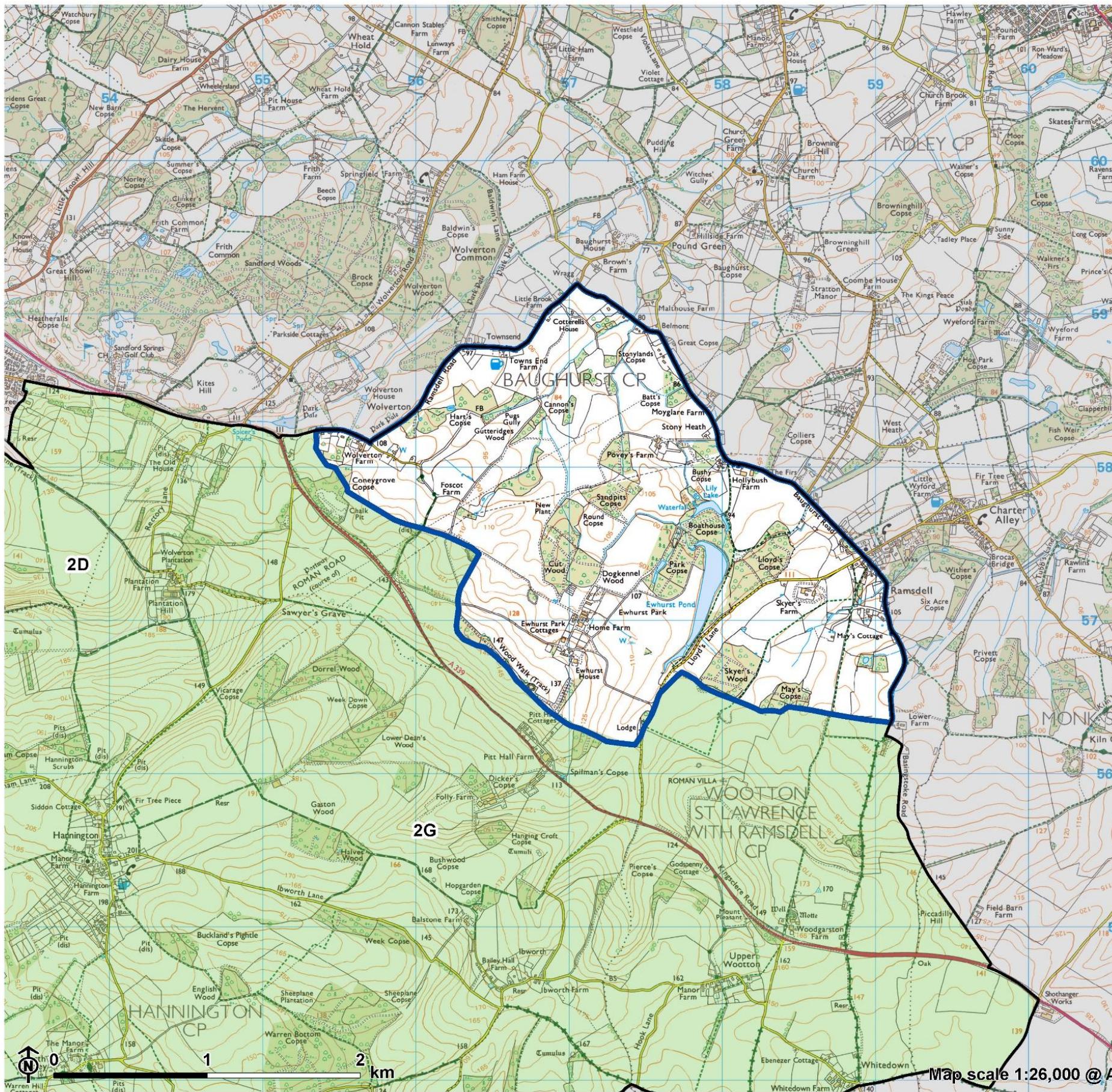
- Aim to enhance and restore areas of heathland, targeting scrub and tree clearance. Where possible plan to link remnant areas of heath.
- Ensure any additional recreational facilities are small-scale and in keeping with the rural character of the Highclere Lowlands and Heath. Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes to car parks and minimise any lighting to retain the dark night skies.
- Ensure any applications for development in the setting of the National Landscape retain the rural, enclosed character of the Highclere Lowlands and Heath. Any necessary lighting schemes should be designed to reduce light spill.

LCA 8F: Ewhurst Parklands

Figure 5.202: Open arable fields with wooded backdrop



Figure 5.203: LCA 8F: Ewhurst Parklands: Location



North Wessex Downs
Landscape Character Assessment
North Wessex Downs National Landscape



8F: Ewhurst Parklands

North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Landscape Character Area

8F: Ewhurst Parklands

2D: Walbury Hill - Watership Down Scarp

2F: Litchfield Downs

2G: Hannington Downs

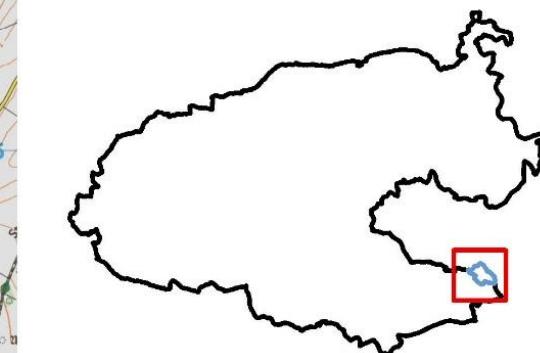


Figure 5.204: Parkland character at Ewhurst Park



Figure 5.205: Arable fields with bracken and wooded edges



LCA 8F: Ewhurst Parklands Description

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

Natural Influences

Landform, geology, water and soils

5.728 The distinct change in geology from chalk in the south-west to heavy clays with sands and gravels is the dominant influence on landscape character. This results in a gently undulating low-lying landform at the foot of the higher downs. Further to the east, beyond the National Landscape, 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 National Landscape.

5.729 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.

Biodiversity

5.730 There is abundant woodland cover in a series of small irregular copses forming part of Ewhurst Park. The majority of the copses are recorded as ancient woodland. There are some smaller areas of conifer plantation.

Cultural Influences

Land use and field patterns

5.731 Outside of the areas woodland land cover comprises medium sized arable and grass fields contained within intact hedgerow boundaries.

5.732 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.

5.733 Some of the surviving irregular field boundaries are characteristic of assarts or intakes into woodland during the 14th to 16th centuries, in order to expand land for agriculture, grazing and settlement.

Historic features

5.734 The area was once part of the Royal Forest of Pamber. It was utilised for hunting and for managed production of wood. Much of the heathland was used as common land. Today, numerous small woodland copes, possibly vestiges of this earlier woodland landscape, characterise the area. Some of the copes, however, may be timber plantations established in the nineteenth century.

5.735 It subsequently formed part of two deer parks belonging to Wolverton House (outside of the National Landscape) and Ewhurst. Ewhurst Estate was owned by the Dukes of Wellington from 1817 to 1943. The original manor house was reduced to a single wing in the 1950s, and replaced in the 21st century by a house more in keeping with the scale of the estate.

Settlement pattern

5.736 The present day settlement comprises hamlets and farmsteads scattered across the area, several of which may have early medieval origins. Many of the farmsteads are listed buildings. Ewhurst and Wolverton, for example, are mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086.

Communications and infrastructure

5.737 Road access is around the perimeter of the LCA. Only Lloyd's Lane provides access through the area. The area is relatively inaccessible, with no public access through Ewhurst Park. A handful of public rights of way provide links to the wooded chalk downs to the west and south. An electricity pylon line runs through the north of the area.

Perceptual Influences

5.738 The areas of woodland and hedgerows provide a strong landscape structure and visual enclosure. There are some views to the wooded chalk downs to the south and west, which provide a backdrop to the area.

5.739 The limited access and woodland create an enclosed character, with a good experience of tranquillity and dark night skies.

LCA 8F Ewhurst Parklands: Evaluation

Ewhurst Parklands valued qualities

5.740 The key valued qualities identified for LCA 8F Ewhurst Parklands are:

- The role the landscape plays in the transition from the chalk downs to the lowland clay areas.
- Extensive woodland copses, much of ancient origin, provides ecological importance.
- Ponds, designed lakes and minor streams create a water-filled landscape, and a strong sense of place.
- The parkland character creates a continuity of character, and links to the medieval deer parks and Royal Forest of Pamber.
- A rural, tranquil landscape with a sense of isolation through the limited access.

Ewhurst Parklands local forces for change/issues

5.741 In addition to the forces for change set out at LCT level, local forces for change and issues affecting LCA 8F Ewhurst Parklands are:

- Ewhurst Park has embarked on an estate-wide biodiversity project, with plans to introduce low numbers of cattle, horses and pigs to mimic natural grazing, river restoration and wetland creation, including the introduction of beaver.
- Increase in tourism infrastructure including holiday lets and glamping. This could lead to an associated increase in traffic and pressure for outdoor lighting, which would reduce the tranquillity and rural character of the landscape.

Ewhurst Parklands strategy and local guidelines

5.742 In addition to the guidelines set out for the Lowland Mosaic LCT, the following guidelines are of particular relevance to the Ewhurst Parklands:

- Continue to explore the rewilding of Ewhurst Park, balancing the nature improvements with increased recreational access to the area, to ensure the rural character of the area is maintained.

- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape on public rights of way. Consider opportunities to improve public right of way connections, infrastructure and signage.
- Ensure any additional recreational facilities are small-scale and in keeping with the rural character of the Ewhurst Parklands. Consider the cumulative impact of incremental changes to car parks and minimise any lighting to retain the dark night skies.