

## Valued Landscapes

*'Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It provides the setting for our day-to-day lives. The term does not mean just special or designated landscapes and it does not only apply to the countryside. Landscape can mean a small patch of urban wasteland as much as a mountain range, and an urban park as much as an expanse of lowland plain. It results from the way that different components of our environment – both natural (the influences of geology, soils, climate, flora and fauna) and cultural (the historical and current impact of land use, settlement, enclosure and other human interventions) – interact together and are perceived by us. People's perceptions turn land into the concept of landscape.'* (Swanwick and Land Use Consultants, 2002: 2).

The Wokingham District Local Plan (2004) identified a number of local designations, including gaps and wedges, setting of settlements and 'areas of special landscape importance'. Six Areas of Special Landscape Importance (ASLI) were identified in the WDLP, either based on existing designations set out in the Berkshire Structure Plan or new designations. The areas were: the Blackwater Valley, Farley Hill, Bearwood, Swallowfield/Beech Hill and Wargrave to Cookham.

The objectives of the policy on ASLI were to:

- Protect the ASLI from development that would detract from its rural character and special landscape qualities
- Enhance the rural character and landscape qualities by encouraging appropriate management
- Have regard to the effect that any development on land surrounding an ASLI would have on its character and setting
- The criteria used to identify the ASLI was based on national guidance and best practice published by the former Countryside Commission's Landscape Assessment Guidance

*"Within the designated Areas of Special Landscape Importance, as defined on the Proposals Map; land uses or built development will not be permitted that would have a detrimental impact on the open, countryside character, or special landscape qualities of the area. This includes any development that results in the removal or erosion of landscape features, such as ponds, chalk outcrops, woodland, copses and hedgerows."*

*"Development will not be permitted within important open areas, defined as green wedges and gaps on the proposals map, that would threaten their essential function in the physical and visual separation of settlements that are close together."*

*"The local community and many representors are agreed that the protection of the local identity of the settlements in the Borough is a sound objective. Given the pattern of development that exists in the Borough, south of the green belt, where a number of settlements are close together, I recognise that some form of local designation to protect particularly sensitive area from development that leads to the coalescence of towns and villages may be appropriate. However, I share the concerns of*

some developers that the CS mechanism of a policy based on the detailed gaps as shown on the WDLP, carried forward into the new proposals map, is unduly restrictive”.

#### Box 5.1

### Range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes

- **Landscape quality (condition):** A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.
- **Scenic quality:** The term used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the senses (primarily but not wholly the visual senses).
- **Rarity:** The presence of rare elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a rare Landscape Character Type.
- **Representativeness:** Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements which are considered particularly important examples.
- **Conservation interests:** The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest can add to the value of the landscape as well as having value in their own right.
- **Recreation value:** Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important.
- **Perceptual aspects:** A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notably wildness and/or tranquillity.
- **Associations:** Some landscapes are associated with particular people, such as artists or writers, or events in history that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of the area.

Based on Swanwick and Land Use Consultants (2002)

There are several factors that are considered when assessing landscapes, and valued landscapes. This includes landscapes valued for their cultural and wildlife heritage, which further links to the historic environment. The NPPF sets out how the historic environment includes:

*‘All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora’*

In addition, sites of value for nature conservation have been included in the initial mapping of Valued Landscapes and build on the Wokingham Biodiversity Action Plan (2012-2024). The BAP outlines landscape-scale biodiversity and wildlife aspirations which are dependent on such landscape features as chalk soils that form chalk grassland or low-lying waterlogged land that creates wet woodland. It is these features of the landscape that are of particular note or rarity upon which wildlife and biodiversity depend.

The particular importance that local people place on the landscape and their affiliation to local areas is an important reason for carrying out a strategic valued landscape assessment of Wokingham Borough. Through this process, this assessment will help preserve and enhance the best of the borough’s landscapes, in a sustainable way for the benefit of all.

Where Sites of Accessible Natural Green Space (SANGS) fall on the edge of valued landscapes they have been included within them. Whilst SANGS are often newly created landscapes much planning and effort has been made to ensure they are attractive and have high recreational, aesthetic and guidance on SANGS creation states:

*“The effectiveness of SANGS as mitigation will depend upon the location and design. These must be such that the SANGS is more attractive than the SPA to users of the kind that currently visit the SPA”.*

<b>Table 1 – showing the amalgamation of VLA hot-spots into 11 Valued Landscape Areas</b>	
<b>Ranking</b>	<b>VLA, SULV or other</b>
1A	River Thames VL
2A	River Thames VL
11	River Thames VL
28	River Thames VL
1B	River Loddon VL
21	River Loddon VL
1C	Spencers Wood Southern Ridge VL
20	Spencers Wood Southern Ridge VL
1D	Forest and Rides VL
3	Forest and Rides VL

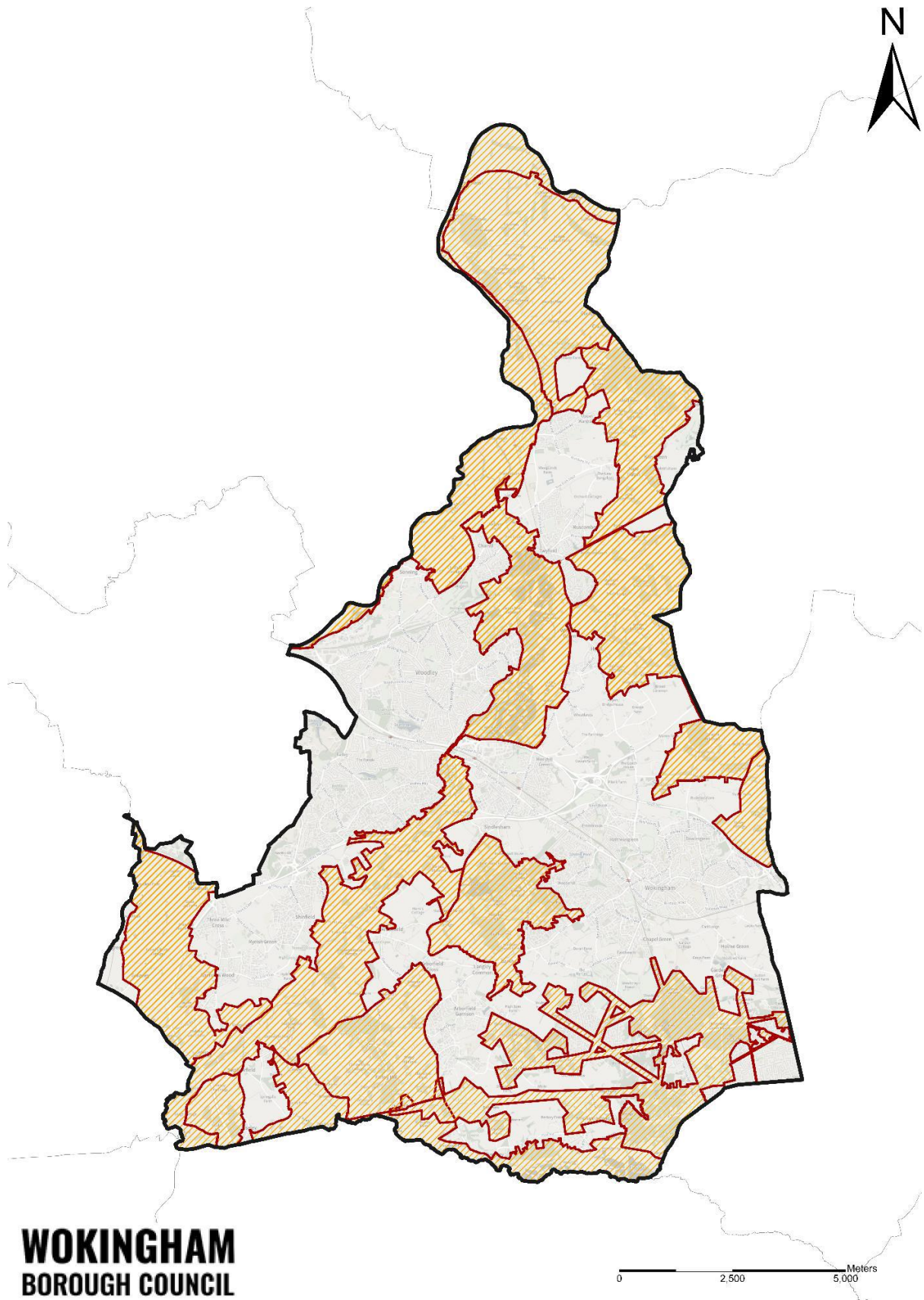
The **River Loddon Valued Landscape** runs the entire length of that part of the river within the borough. It mostly occupies the A2 ‘Loddon River Valley’ and B1 ‘Loddon River Valley with Open Water’ Landscape Character Areas (LCA) as identified in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA) (2019). The Valued Landscape occupies the generally flat alluvial floodplain of the river and parts of the river terraces, from where it enters the borough to the west of Risley, to where it joins the River Thames Valued Landscape upstream of Wargrave. The Valued Landscape has important landscape features along its’ entire length from the Roman Road on its south-western boundary to the Habitats of Principal Importance on the floodplain where it joins the River Thames Valued Landscape. Although bisected by the A329(M) and two railway crossings, it represents a significant green and blue infrastructure corridor running diagonally across the southern half of the borough. It is valued for its character and appearance, biodiversity, history, perceptual qualities, recreational value and associations. The southern half is more natural but the northern part above the A329(M) has been substantially modified, principally by gravel extraction and the development of housing and transport networks. Many of the existing minerals extraction sites have been developed for recreation, in many cases, mitigating for the loss of naturalness through restoration and further management for the public benefit.

The A2 ‘Loddon River Valley’ LCA landscape, containing the lower part of the Valued Landscape is not greatly affected by the disturbance from the M4 motorway and the settlements of Earley and Winnersh to the north. Although development pressure continues for housing and of busier and faster moving roads, the southern part of the LCA still demonstrates many characteristics of the natural river and floodplain.

**Conservation Interests** – In terms of **wildlife and biodiversity** the River Loddon Valued Landscape provides an important mix of wildlife sites and habitats:

There is a wide range of **Habitats of principal importance** including: lowland mixed deciduous woodland; wood pasture and parkland remaining in historic parks; wet woodland; lowland meadows; coastal and floodplain grazing marsh; ponds; and rivers.

**Map of Valued Landscapes across Wokingham Borough (below)**



**WOKINGHAM**  
**BOROUGH COUNCIL**

0 2,500 5,000 Meters

*The site is of interest particularly for nationally important populations of two rare plants: the fritillary *Fritillaria meleagris*, a native bulb of unimproved damp meadows now mainly confined to scattered localities in southern Britain, and the Loddon pondweed *Potamogeton nodosus*, a very rare aquatic species for which this length of the River Loddon is the national stronghold.*

Additionally the SSSI designation highlights the following: sparse oak, ash and alder trees giving only moderate shade (that encourages growth of water plants); numerous cricket-bat willows grown commercially; two rare pea-mussels *Pisidium moitessierianum* and *P. tenuilineatum* whose presence reflects the high water quality and base-rich conditions. Several uncommon species of mollusc in the meadows, including the snails *Vertigo antivertigo* and *V. moulinsiana* which are restricted to fens and marshes; a variety of coarse fish, water voles and nesting birds, including little grebe, moorhen, coot, mute swan and kingfisher.

Of particular interest in the Valued Landscape is the presence of the Loddon Lily which occurs in only 48 sites in England. The two sites of this SSSI are a stronghold for this species which derives its common name from the River Loddon.

There are a number of smaller **Ancient Woodlands** mostly on higher ground above the river floodplain.