

Supp Ev D – ES&BG NP Landscape Character Report

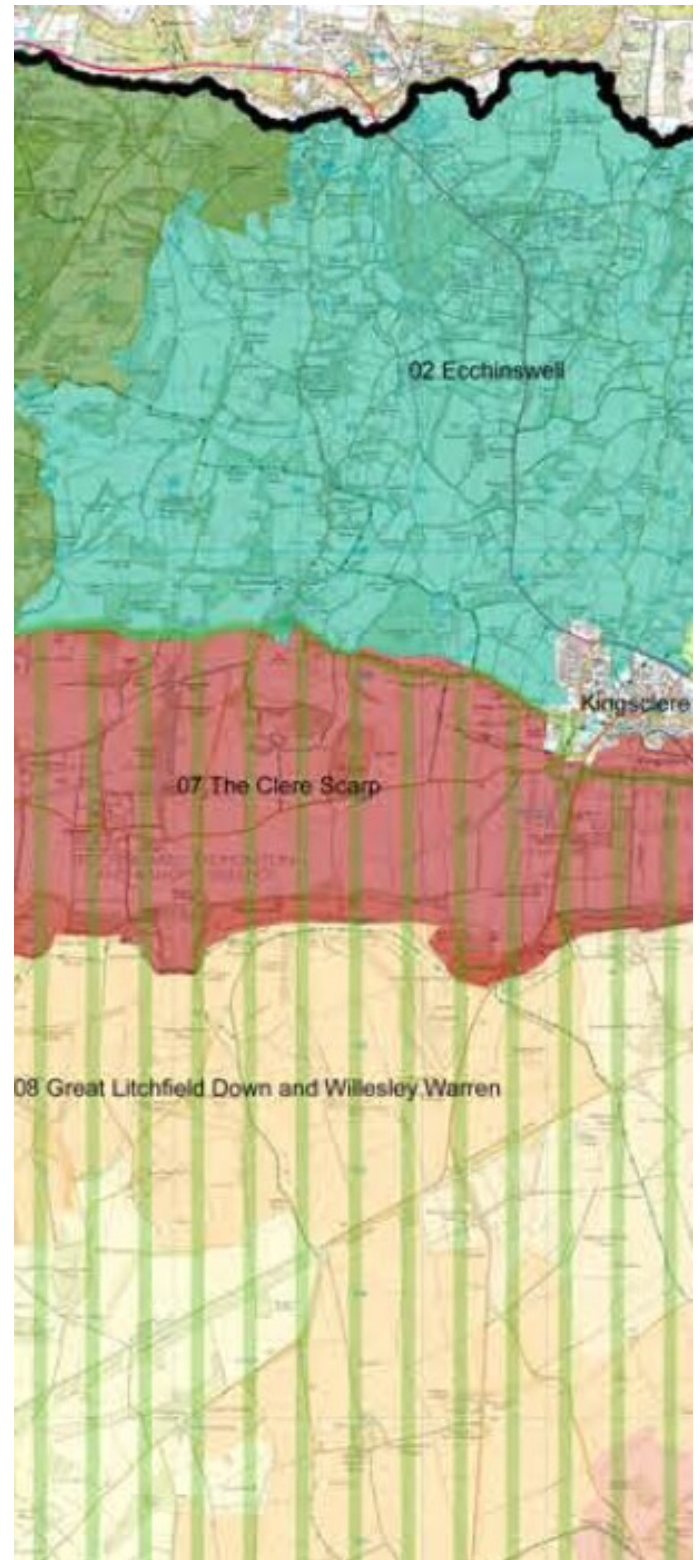
For full details see the B&D BC Landscape Character Assessment report published in May 2021 at <https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/content/doclib/3246.pdf>. This report is an extract covering the assessment and policies applicable to the parish of Ecchinswell Sydmonton & Bishops Green.

The majority of the parish spans 3 areas of distinct landscape character as seen in the map. A couple of small areas are part of neighbouring character areas. The green striped area indicates that the southern half of the parish lies in the North Wessex AONB. The varying character arises from the specific geology/geography/ecology of the region alongside the historic usage and changes to the landscape over many centuries. This summary pulls out common themes for the parish with some specifics for each of the 3 areas.

Overview of the 3 main Contrasting Character Areas:

CA 02 Ecchinswell

This area is characterised by a medium-scale mosaic of mixed farmland and relatively small, but numerous, copses and areas of woodland. These small, irregular-shaped woodlands are predominantly broadleaved, although larger, less-frequent areas of mixed conifer and broadleaf are evident. Fields are under a mix of pasture and arable, and bounded by a strong structure of hedgerows and trees. Added diversity is created by areas of more open farmland on higher ground and smaller, more enclosed fields, under pasture, within the minor stream valleys. The landform is gently undulating and the landscape has an intimate, relatively secluded character. Numerous small villages, hamlets and individual farmsteads and properties are scattered throughout the area accessed through a fairly dense network of narrow lanes, often enclosed within high hedgerows. Some parts in the west and south-west have a feeling of remoteness and, overall, the Character Area has retained a rural character.



CA 07 The Clere Scarp

This is an area dominated by the dramatic escarpment, an example of a distinctive and scarce chalk landscape type. Its strongly linear form brings a unifying and cohesive character to the scarp foot-slopes and offers long views from various locations. Both the scarp and its foot-slopes display localised variations in landcover and use. The escarpment is characterised by calcareous grassland with small areas of encroaching scrub and blocks of infrequent woodland. A slightly higher proportion of woodland exists on the scarp and foot-slopes to the west of the area, creating a rather more enclosed landscape than that in the east. Oak woodland is dominant within the western part of the area, giving way to predominantly beech woodlands within the coombes. Racehorse gallops and stud farms characterise the bottom of the scarp, south of Kingsclere, whilst at Sydmonton, parkland provides a more ornamental and managed element. Settlement density within this area is limited with only a small scattering of farm buildings. As a result, a sense of remoteness and tranquillity pervades the landscape. Roads are relatively straight and direct.

CA 08 Great Litchfield Down and Willesley Warren

Landscape character within this area is comparatively uniform, with coherence and unity provided by the area's scale and openness. Large, open arable fields, with a weak hedgerow and woodland structure, separate it from the surrounding, more enclosed, chalkland landscapes. Occasional small areas of pasture are distributed throughout the area. A regular, formal, wooded element within the open landscape is formed by Robley Belt, part of a series of linear plantations marking the route of the straight Roman road that traverses the area. The north of the landscape is notable for the 'gallops' for racehorse training, which take advantage of well-drained springy turf. The landscape is sparsely populated, with infrequent farmsteads dispersed across the area. Due to the low density of settlement, roads are also few and, where they are present, generally follow a straight and direct route. The area is remote from major urban influences, ensuring that the landscape has retained a quiet, rural character, apart from the detracting feature of a major pylon line across the north.

Two Minor Areas

Sydmonton Common

This area (a small part of the parish) lies within the CA 01 Landscape area of Highclere and Burghclere which has landscape character broadly similar to CA 02 Ecchinswell albeit with a greater proportion of woodland and more closed in-fields.

Southern Tip of the parish

This area (a small part of the parish) actually lies within the CA10 Litchfield Down Landscape Area although the character of this part of CA 10 is little different to CA 08

Landscape Character Issues Concerning ES&BG

- Woodland
 - past loss of broadleaf woodland
 - under-management woodlands including hazel coppice woods
 - some areas of poor species and structural diversity and poor ecological value.
- Hedgerows & Verges
 - past removal of hedgerows and weakening of landscape structure
 - management of hedgerows and field patterns of historic importance,
 - retention of hedgerow tree saplings
 - the simplicity of the landscape, created by the limited number of hedgerows, woodland or other landscape elements, reduces ecological diversity
 - management of road verges and hedge-banks plus damage from scrub encroachment, road improvements and legacy of agrochemical use on adjacent farmland
- Environment
 - Loss and fragmentation of chalk grassland and sheep pasture, through scrub encroachment and agricultural improvement, particularly conversion to arable farmland, reducing biological diversity;
 - Lack of permanent grass field margins, including uncultivated buffer strips next to rivers, streams and other sensitive wildlife habitats;
 - Reduction in biodiversity levels through intensive agricultural practices;
 - Some adverse impacts of widespread horse grazing (e.g. rank grassland with weeds or inappropriate styles of fencing etc.);
 - Maintenance of important views both of the scarp and downland in the centre and south of the parish but also the pattern of woodland and field to the north
 - Visual intrusion from pylon line at Watership Down, other electricity distribution as well as Hannington mast.
 - Pressure for housing development especially in the north and centre of the parish

Landscape Character Aims Applicable to ES&BG

In the north of the parish, conserve the overall rural mosaic of farmland and woodland with small scale settlement, whilst limiting increases in urbanisation through incongruous development.

In the centre, maintain the wide ranging views from viewpoints along the scarp and preserve the sparsely settled nature of the area. The pattern of hedgerows along field boundaries should be conserved and enhanced, invasion of scrub resisted, and the remnant areas of chalk grassland should be conserved and extended where possible.

In the south of the parish, conserve the open character of the area, retaining the sparsely settled ambiance, remaining hedgerow boundaries and remnant chalk grassland.

Throughout the parish, enhance the management and maintenance of woodland and of the hedgerow network enhancing diversity of habitats and species.

The part of the parish in the North Wessex AONB should be considered with regard to the landscape, land management and development key issues and policies set out in the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan notably:

- The Vision for the North Wessex Downs: Vast, dramatic, undeveloped and distinct chalk downlands with nationally significant areas of semi-natural chalk grassland, contrasting with well-wooded plateaux, arable lands and intimate and secluded valleys, all rich in wildlife and cultural heritage; a high quality landscape of national and international significance which persists in increasingly urbanised surroundings; where people live, work and relax; where visitors are welcomed and contribute to a vibrant rural economy; and access to which supports the health and wellbeing of local residents and visitors alike.
- Maintenance and, where possible, extension of chalk grassland habitat;
- Conserving and enhancing the remoteness and expansive open scale of the downland landscape;
- Scope for more and better management of woodland, especially smaller woods, to improve habitat for wildlife and provide an economic return.

Land Management Guidance Applicable for ES&BG Sustaining/Enhancing Landscape Character

- Protect important views and maintain areas of open, undeveloped skyline.
- Encourage responsible management of watercourses which flow north through the Character Area towards the River Enborne, and adjacent meadows and damp woodland, including enhancements for wildlife;
- Conserve and enhance the areas of chalk grassland and find opportunities to extend and link fragmented sites
- Conserve, enhance and restore woodlands , through effective long term management and replanting with locally appropriate species (especially oak and beech as well as replacements for ash) to retain their varied character and their ecological value.
- Ensure consistent management and restocking of hedgerows across the parish, and in particular within more open farmland areas;
- Restore grass field margins wherever possible, particularly next to sensitive habitats such as the streams which flow north into the River Enborne
- Improved management of road verges and roadside hedge banks along the network of narrow roads
- Raise awareness of the historic dimension and underlying archaeology of the landscape including the assarted (converted from woods/forest) field patterns and encourage conservation of the those elements;
- Resist the loss of rural character through the inappropriate spread of urbanising features;

- Encourage appropriate surfacing, materials and signage for footpaths and car parks to retain the rural, unsettled character of the landscape. Encourage the use of suitable fence styles, in keeping with the local style or material.

Built Development Guidance Applicable for ES&BG Sustaining/Enhancing Landscape Character

- Conserve the sense of a truly rural area with visible development limited to the two main settlements and to a few small hamlets and traditional farmsteads;
- New development should be rural in character, associated with existing settlements and take into account long views especially from higher ground. Use appropriate species for potential planting and boundary treatments to integrate development into the adjoining rural landscape;
- Retain the rural character along lanes with appropriate management of verges, hedgerows and signage.
- Conserve the sense of an open unsettled landscape, and maintain open views across uninterrupted rolling landform, with development located to minimise visual impact on the landscape. Avoid development which encroaches on or reduces existing views of the scarp
- Encourage the use of locally characteristic building forms, layouts and appearance that feel rural rather than (sub)urban and include sympathetic contemporary architecture, through high quality detailing, architectural features, and use of natural building materials;
- Retain woodland that screens development and consider opportunities for further tree planting sympathetic to the landscape character of the area
- Conserve the rural roads and lanes across the area.
- Within the North Wessex AONB, take account of the key policies set out in the Management Plan, including those concerning:
 - New large free-standing dwellings as replacement dwellings in the open countryside;
 - Good design of new development, sited within, or on the edge of, existing settlements and avoiding exposed locations;
 - Impact on dark skies and tranquillity of high-powered external lighting, especially where poorly directed or in an exposed location (not usually subject to planning control);
 - Potential for certain forms of development to intrude on the wider landscape, including masts, pylons, wind turbine developments, photovoltaic schemes, and minerals and waste schemes, threatening the senses of remoteness and tranquillity, and landscape quality and heritage assets;
 - Impact from equestrian activity, facilities and structures where new development is expansive in area, in greenfield locations, poorly designed and/or located on exposed sites;
 - Development that results in a material loss of tranquillity and/or impact on the dark night skies within the North Wessex Downs or its setting;
 - Impact of “urbanising” road signage, street lighting and other highway clutter on landscape character, including within settlements.