

Assessment of the Landscape Setting of Wootton St Lawrence village to identify the extent of land for inclusion in a Local Gap



Supporting document to the Wootton St Lawrence Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2029



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In preparing the Wootton St Lawrence Parish Neighbourhood Plan, a series of consultations were undertaken with residents of the parish to discover what were seen as important issues. From the first such consultation in the autumn of 2014, it was evident that the key issue for those living in and around the village of Wootton St Lawrence was the potential impact on the village from the allocation of some 320 hectares of land for development on the western edge of Basingstoke. This would result in up to 3250 new homes with associated development extending Basingstoke to within 0.5 km of the village. The Local Plan proposed a buffer between the village and the new development in the form of a Country Park, the supporting text to the relevant Plan Policy SS3.10 stating that this *'will become a major green infrastructure asset of approximately 100 hectares serving Basingstoke town and the borough as a whole. It will be a multifunctional space for informal recreation, play, nature conservation, education and land management, with ancillary uses including visitor parking and facilities.'*
- 1.2 The proposed Country Park was not seen by residents as something which would necessarily protect the setting of the village of Wootton St Lawrence and it would not preclude recreational facilities, buildings and car parks being provided. It was also noted that Local Plan Policy EM2 proposed a number of Strategic Gaps which had the specific purpose of preventing the coalescence of built up areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, the generally open and undeveloped Strategic Gap between the nearby village of Oakley and the Manydown allocated site. The supporting text to Policy EM2 states the purpose of these Strategic Gaps is to supplement Policy EM1 (Landscape). Given this and the concerns of residents of Wootton St Lawrence village over the impacts of the Manydown allocation, it was decided that the option of introducing a Local Gap policy for the village be explored. Subsequent consultations including at pre submission stage found strong support for such an approach, which was covered by Policy WSL1. Following consideration of representations on the pre-submission plan the policy has been revised:

Policy WSL1: Local Gap

Proposals for development within the Local Gap, will be acceptable provided it:

- 1. relates to the use of the land for informal recreation purposes*
- 2. would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation of the village from the Manydown development area*
- 3. would not compromise the integrity of the Local Gap, either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development.*



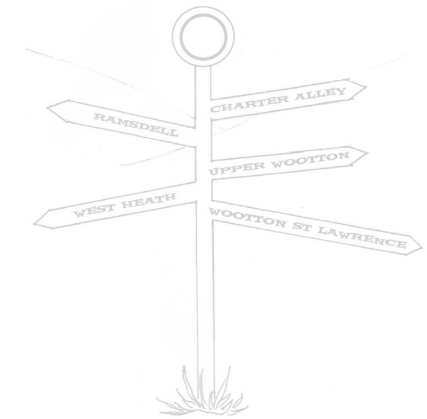
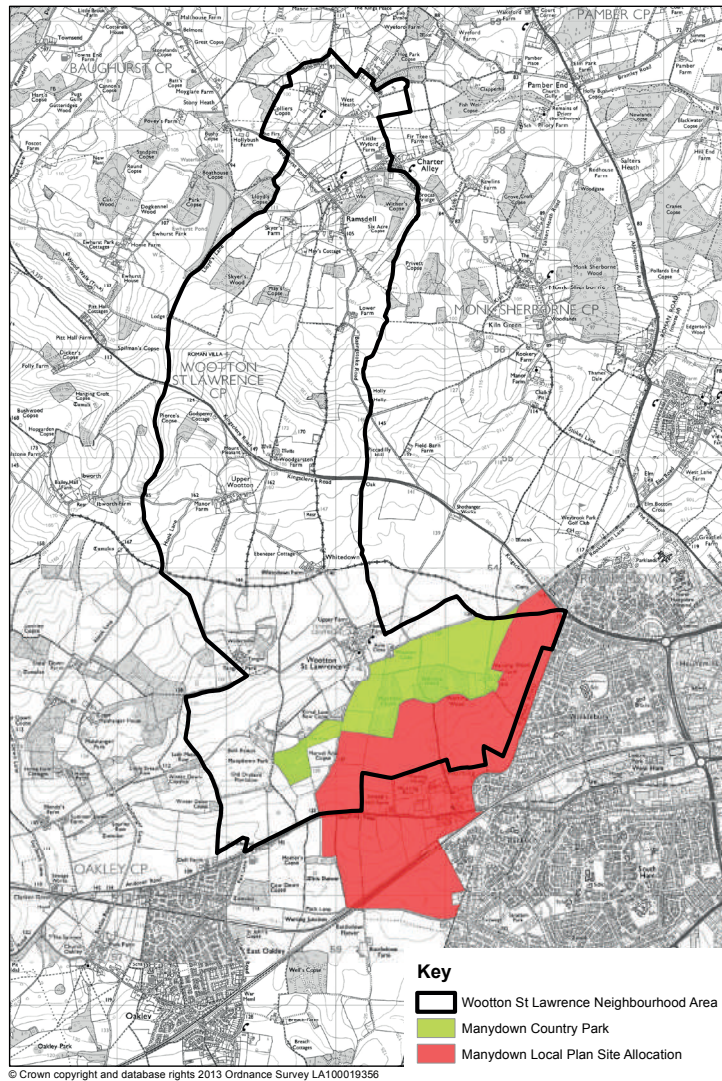


Fig 1: *Wootton St Lawrence Parish, the Country Park and the Manydown Development area*

1.3 The purposes of this report are:

- To explain the character and landscape setting of Wootton St Lawrence village
- Consider the potential impact on the setting of the village of the Manydown Development and Country Park
- Consider how the Neighbourhood Plan through the use of a Local Gap policy could mitigate any impacts from the Garden Town and country park on the village
- Establish what would be the appropriate extent of the area to be covered by a Local Gap policy WSL1.

2. Assessment of the Landscape Setting of the village of Wootton St Lawrence

- 2.1 Wootton St. Lawrence is a tranquil small village located in chalk downland some 2km to the west of Basingstoke and accessed along narrow country lanes. Older properties and Manor Farm located along the north/south village street and centred on the church dedicated to St Lawrence. As well as the church, which is Grade 2* listed and of Norman origins, there are several other buildings within the village street which are listed, namely Manor Farmhouse and a house on the opposite side of the road to the church. To the northwest of the church and on a lane leading west from the village street are a number of modern dwellings. One of the proposed actions in the neighbourhood plan is to seek the designation of the core of the village around the Church as a Conservation Area.
- 2.2 Reference has been made to a Landscape Character Study commissioned by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council in 2001. This study identifies Wootton St Lawrence village being within what is termed the Hannington Down Character Area and the area to the immediate east of the village being described as the Basingstoke Down Character Area (relevant extracts of the study are contained in Appendix 1 of this report). This study was used to inform the Strategic Gaps Topic Paper (2014) which supported the use of a Gaps policy in the Local Plan. This document states that the Borough Council considered that there were five strategic gaps that needed to be designated but does not explain the basis why only these were selected. There is no reference in the Topic Paper to Wootton St Lawrence. The Topic Paper states:

'The council considers that other strategic gaps to those listed in policy EM2 do not need to be identified as the threat of coalescence, as a result of allocated sites in the Local Plan, between other town and villages is not considered to be significant. However, the impact of any development in the future may need to be reviewed in a subsequent Local Plan.'

Thus it was acknowledged that the need for further Gaps to be considered could arise.





Fig 2: *Wootton St Lawrence's main street*

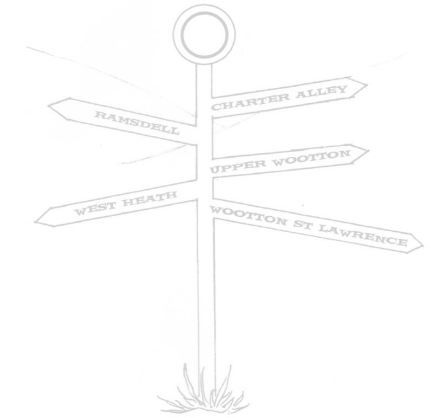


2.3 Key characteristics of the Hannington Down Character area around the village include:

- pattern of open and semi-enclosed farmland with woodland blocks, hedgerows, trees and well-managed formal parkland
- generally possesses an unspoilt, rural character, with a sense of remoteness and limited intrusion from people, traffic and noise
- generally small woodland blocks
- scattered small villages (of which Wootton St Lawrence is one), hamlets and farmsteads linked by a network of narrow, often winding lanes.



Fig 3: *The view west from village over Hannington Down Character area*



2.4 The Basingstoke Down Character Area to the east of the village is described in the study as including the following key features:

- Predominantly large-scale farmland, lacking a distinctive sense of place
- open character formed by large arable fields
- provides landscape setting for the western and southern parts of Basingstoke
- significant noise intrusion from the A339
- Various Scheduled Ancient Monuments, including Woodgarston ring motte, and a Roman site north-west of Woodgarston Farm (both within the Neighbourhood Plan Area).



Fig 4: *View over the Basingstoke Down Character area*



- 2.5 The land gently rises up to the south and east of the village, and this together with established copses and new tree planting will limit views of the Manydown Garden Town from the village (see Figure 5 on page 9). The proposed Country Park encompasses the wooded areas and the arable fields between them and the village. At the time that this report was prepared no proposals had been tabled for the Country Park. The Neighbourhood Plan Policy WSL1 proposes that any change in the use of the land included within the Local Gap shall be limited to informal recreation:

Policy WSL1: Local Gap

Proposals for development within the Local Gap, will be acceptable provided it:

- 1. relates to the use of the land for informal recreation purposes*
- 2. would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation of the village from the Manydown development area*
- 3. would not compromise the integrity of the Local Gap, either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development*

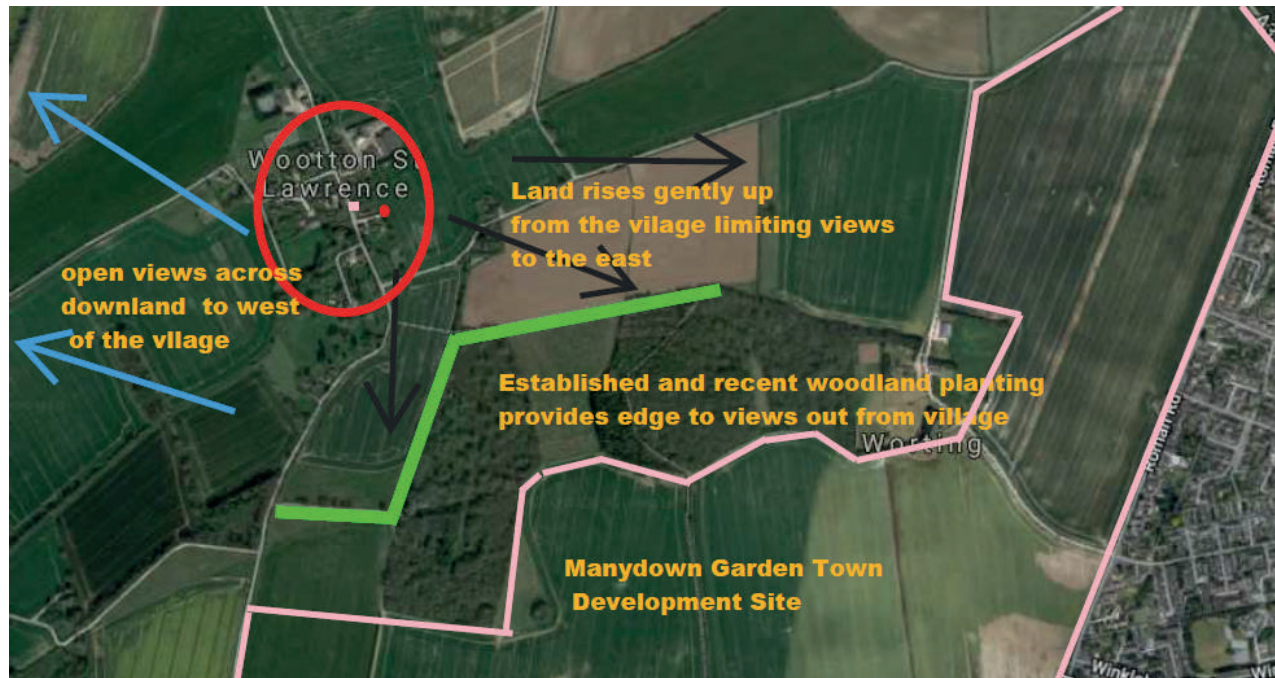


Fig 5: Landscape Features around Wootton St Lawrence village

- 2.6 With land rising away to the east and south of the village and the existence of several copses to the villages south east, the proximity of Basingstoke is not apparent other than the background hum of road traffic and glow in the night sky. There are more extensive views to the north and west of the village over what the landscape character assessment referred to as Hannington Down towards the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. As can be seen from the photographs (in appendix B to this report) the landscape is characterised by large arable fields interspersed with copses and a few hedgerows. The intensive arable farming has resulted in loss of most of the chalk grassland which would have once been the dominant feature of this landscape. Chalk grassland would have dominated the landscape for many centuries and resulted from sheep grazing. These chalk grasslands were rich in a very special diversity of wildflowers and butterflies.

3. The potential impact on the setting of the village of the Manydown Garden Town and Country Park

- 3.1 In allocating the development area, now referred to as the Garden Town, consideration has been given to the inclusion of existing copses in the Country Park. These copses have been further reinforced with additional woodland being planted in recent years (see photograph below). With the woodland to the south east of the village and a low ridge to the east of the village any visual intrusion from Garden Town will be limited.



Fig 6: Recent woodland planting – Wootton Woods

- 3.2 The principle impact on the setting of the village will be the manner in which the proposed Country Park is laid out and used. If the Country Park is to be accessible for informal recreation then there would need to be effective management of the woodlands and the existing arable farming on the open fields would no longer be practical. The areas of the Country Park immediately adjacent to the village would impact on the villages setting if used to provide facilities and parking. The Country Park, however, is extensive covering some 100 hectares, providing scope for any facilities, vehicular access and parking to be located well away from land which adjoins the village.



Fig 7: *Arable land to the south of the village which is within the proposed Country Park*

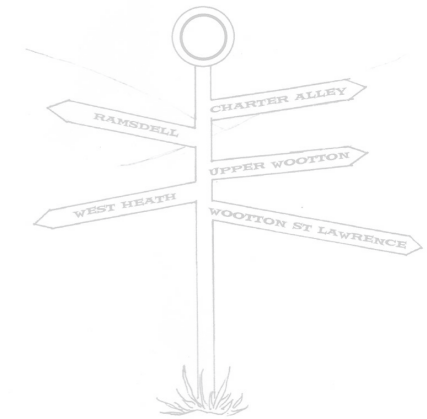


4. How the Local Gap can protect the setting of the village

- 4.1 The Strategic Gap between the neighbouring village of Oakley and the Manydown Garden Town encompasses land which is predominantly in agricultural use. Consideration has been given to whether the Country Park will provide an effective means of securing sufficient protection of the village's landscape setting. It is concluded that additional protection from potential uses and developments associated with informal recreational uses are appropriate in those parts of the park which provide the landscape backdrop to the village and given the extent of the park this should not undermine its purpose. In this area of the Country Park consideration to the reintroduction of chalk grassland should be given, such a project would take place over many years and will require managed grazing of the land by sheep. Such projects are taking place elsewhere on the downlands of southern England.



Fig 8: *Sheep on chalk grassland*



5. Extent of the Local Gap

- 5.1 It is considered that the land included within the Local Gap should not only focus on the Country Park but adjoining agricultural land to the south and east of the village. There are three areas separated by country lanes which have been assessed for inclusion in the Local gap. These areas together wrap around the southern and eastern flanks of the village:

Area 1: to the immediate south of the village and outside the Country Park

Area 2: to the village's south east and included within the Country Park

Area 3: to the east of the village and outside of the Country Park

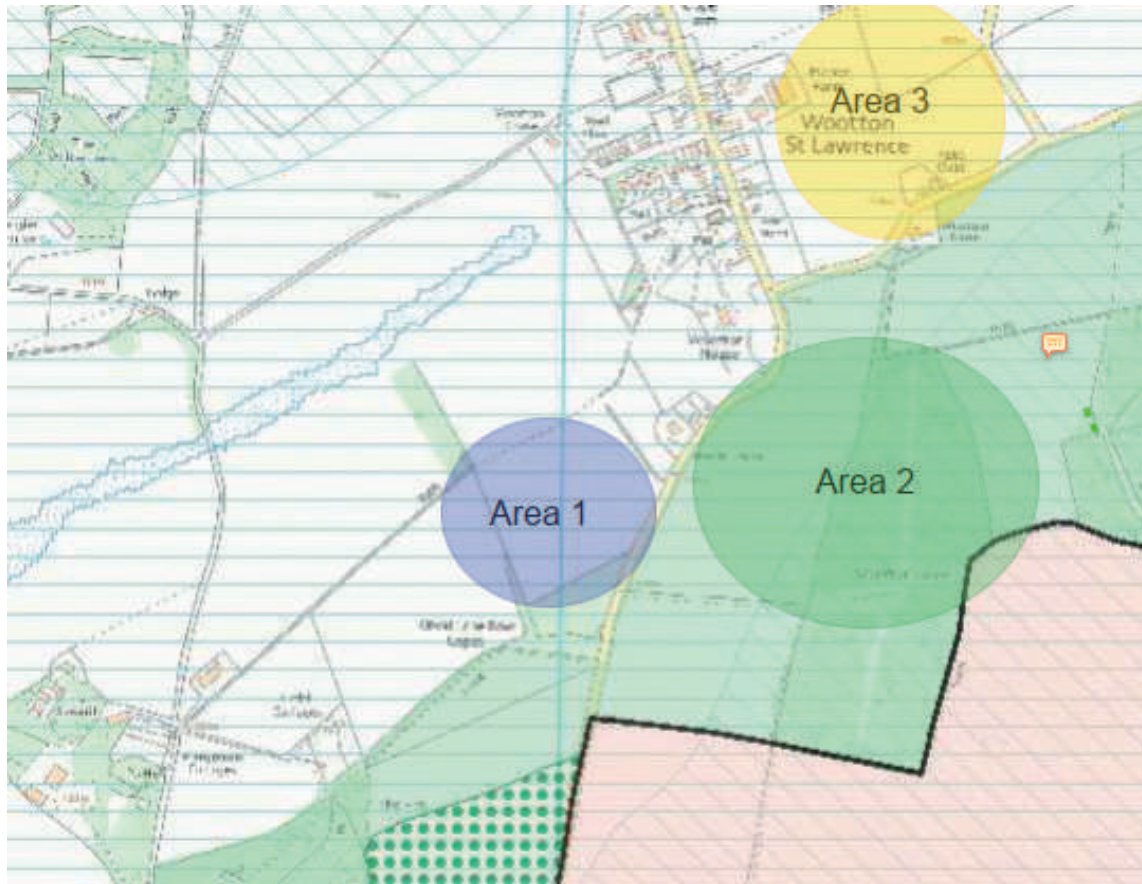


Fig 9: Areas assessed for inclusion in the Local gap



5.2 **Area 1:** This area between the southern edge of the village and proposed Country Park contains one of the few grassland fields in the village's vicinity. It is considered that this field provides an important foil to the southern edge of the village and its visual importance to the setting of the village warrants its inclusion in the Local Gap.



Fig 10: View north towards the village – Area 1 is on the left of photograph



Fig 11: View west from public footpath into Area 1



5.3 **Area 2:** This area is all within the Country Park, it includes new and established woodland to its southern half and rises gently away from the village. Narrow country lanes form its western and northern edges, there is no clear point for the demarcation of its eastern edge which extends across open arable fields to the Manydown site allocation some 0.5kms east of the village. Within this area there is a pair semi-detached cottages enclosed by mature trees (see photograph below).



Fig 12: Cottages within area 2 (note land falls towards the village)



Fig 13: View from Basingstoke road south east across Area 2, note low ridge limits views towards Basingstoke and the proposed Garden Town.



The field and copse seen in the photograph (foot of page 15) are within the Country Park. A public footpath traverses north/south across this field half way between the hedgerow visible on the eastern side of the field and the point from where the photograph is taken. The public footpath is considered to represent an appropriate feature to form the edge to the Local Gap.



Fig 14: View south across the western side of Area 2, this field is within the proposed Country Park



Fig 15: View from the western side of the proposed Country Park (Area 2) towards Area 3; trees on the right are around the dwellings which front the Basingstoke road.



5.4 **Area 3:** This lies to the immediate east of the village and extends up to the road leading to the A339 and Monk Sherborne. As can be seen from the photographs below this is an open field given over to arable crops.



Fig 16: View west across Area 3 from Monk Sherborne road towards Wootton St Lawrence village



6. Recommendation

- 6.1 Whilst Local Plan Policy EM1 states ‘development proposals must respect, enhance and not be detrimental to the character or visual amenity of the landscape likely to be affected’ that policy does not address the purpose of gap policies, namely to ensure settlements maintain their unique and separate identity. The assessment undertaken has demonstrated that Wootton St Lawrence whilst in close proximity to Basingstoke, still retains a feeling of remoteness. It is a small village and even quite modest changes associated with the Country Park could have a significant impact on its character and setting within the landscape. This assessment has therefore identified a modest area for inclusion within a Local Gap which would ensure that any change of the land from agricultural use would not undermine the distinctiveness of the village. This report has also drawn attention to the opportunity that the establishment of the Country Park could create for reintroducing chalk grassland grazed by sheep. A project to bring about such a change in the agricultural use of some of the land within the Local Gap could bring with it an enhancement of the landscape and its ecological value. The recommended extent of the area to be included within the Local Gap is shown on Figure 17 below.

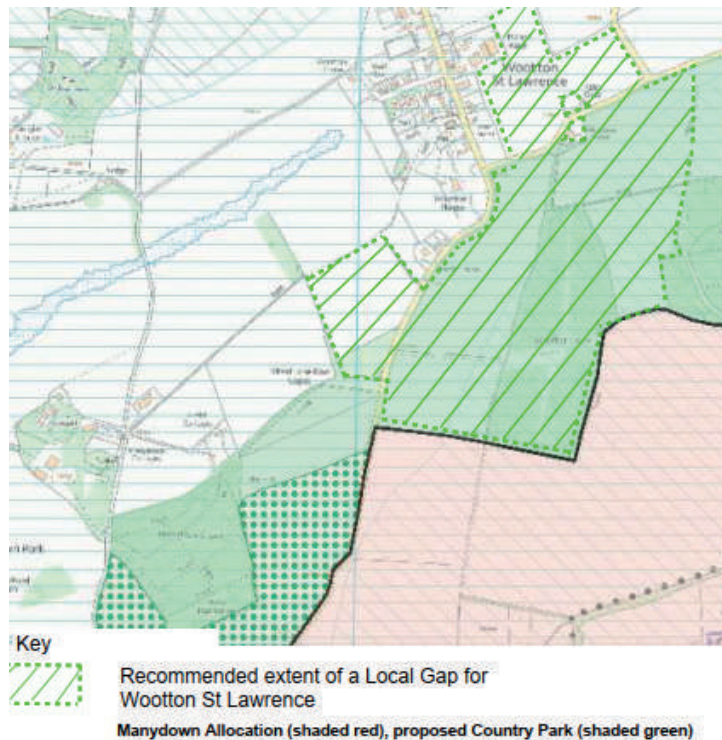
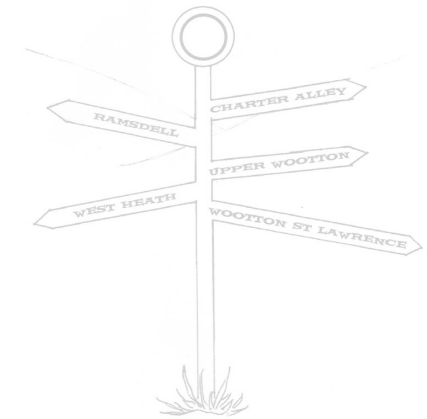


Fig 17: Proposed Extent of Local Gap

7. Appendices

Appendix A: Extracts from the BASINGSTOKE AND DEANE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT JUNE 2001 undertaken by Landscape Design Associates for Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

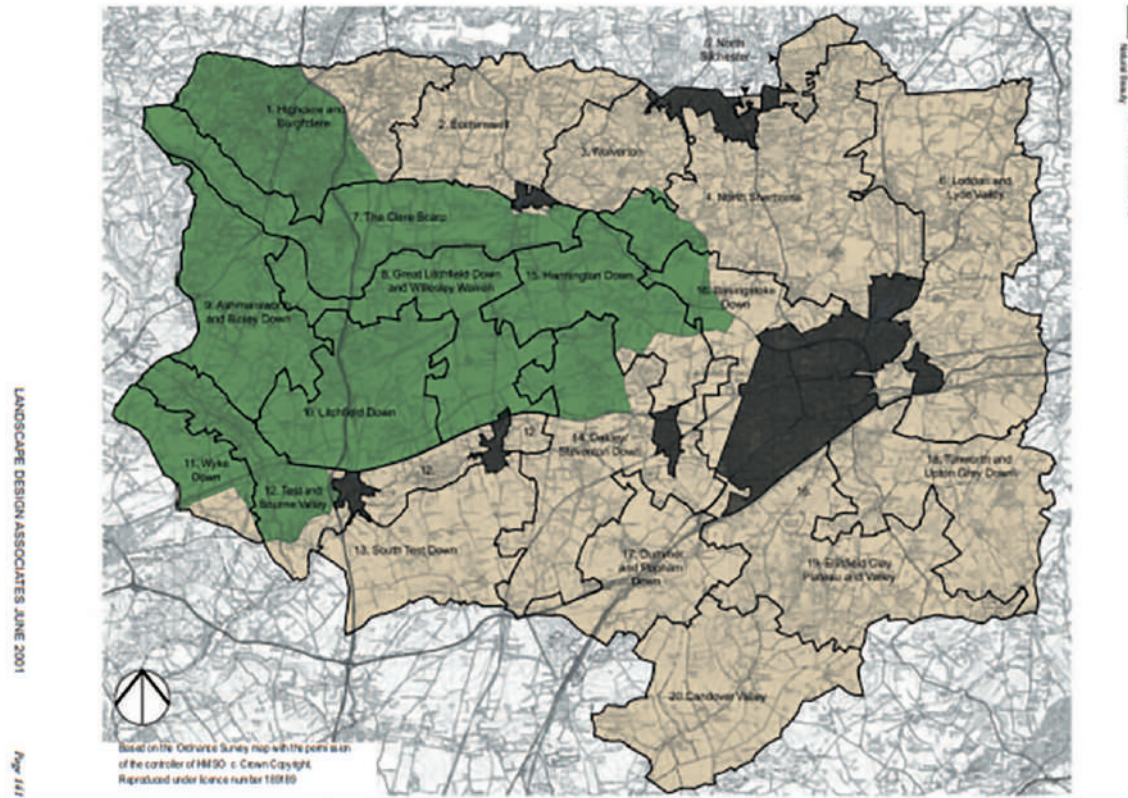


Fig 18: Landscape Character Areas

15. Hannington Down



Key Characteristics

- high open plateau in the north, from which surrounding landform slopes quite steeply, becoming gentler to the south-east;
- pattern of open and semi-enclosed farmland with woodland blocks, hedgerows, trees and well-managed formal parkland;
- lies within the North Wessex Downs AONB (except for south-eastern corner), generally possessing an unspoilt, rural character, with a sense of remoteness and limited intrusion from people, traffic and noise;
- large, open arable fields bound by low hedgerows and infrequent woodland blocks to the north and east of Hannington and south of Ibworth, reflecting both 17th and 18th century informal enclosure and late 18th and 19th century parliamentary enclosure. Slightly greater enclosure on chalklands to the east, where hedgerow structure is stronger;
- generally small woodland blocks, a limited amount assarted, varying in frequency between the two landscape types that this area encompasses;
- examples of valuable habitat types, especially several blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland and small remnants of unimproved calcareous grassland;
- two parklands, adding an ornamental and managed character to the surrounding farmland landscape;
- intervisibility varying with location, with long, panoramic views from the open plateau at Hannington, but significantly reduced views in lower, more enclosed areas;
- scattered small villages, hamlets and farmsteads linked by a network of narrow, often winding roads.

Location and boundaries

This undulating area of large-scale arable fields lies within the centre of the Borough. Its northern boundary is defined by the distinct change in geology and relief between the chalklands and the clay to the north. The western boundary marks a transition to the more open and exposed character of the Great Litchfield Down and

Willesley Warren area and, to the east, the open arable landscapes of the Basingstoke Down character area. The southern boundary defines the more enclosed mosaic of woodland and farmland that distinguishes the Oakley/Steventon Down character area.

Formative influences

The geology within this area consists of chalk beds covered with deposits of clay and flint. One large area of clay deposit to the north of the area has formed a high plateau from which the surrounding landform slopes. This creates a distinct and fairly steep landscape, becoming gentler to the south-east of the area.

Formation of the present landscape was probably initiated as long ago as the earlier prehistoric period (Neolithic and Bronze Age), when the original forest cover was largely cleared for arable agriculture and grazing, although some patches of woodland survived or regenerated. The settlements of Hannington and Wootton St Lawrence are among settlements mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086, and a probable medieval settlement with fishponds exists at Cottington's Hill, north-west of Hannington. Medieval open field systems and downland were largely replaced by enclosure by informal means during the 17th-18th centuries, and later by parliamentary enclosure.

Overall landscape character

This area is characterised by a mix of open and semi-enclosed farmland, woodland and parkland, unified by the distinct topography created by the high, open clay plateau at Hannington. Large-scale, arable fields predominate, bounded in the more open areas by low, weak hedgerows which become slightly stronger and denser in the semi-enclosed areas. The fields are interspersed with typically small woodland blocks, varying in frequency between the more open northern and western part of the area and the semi-enclosed eastern section. Well-managed and mature planting is characteristic within the parklands.

Small villages, hamlets and scattered farmsteads are spread through the area, linked by a network of narrow, often winding roads. The area retains a quiet, rural character, unspoilt by major development or road corridors.

Key Issues

- under-management of ancient semi-natural woodlands;
- weaker landscape structure in the more open landscape types to the west of the area, and resulting need to encourage hedgerow planting;
- management of hedgerows (particularly in large-scale open areas) and field patterns of historic importance, and retention of tree saplings;
- decline in extent of unimproved chalk grassland and sheep pasture, through scrub encroachment and agricultural improvement, particularly conversion to arable farmland;
- management of road verges and hedge banks, and damage from scrub encroachment, road improvements and legacy of agrochemical use on adjacent farmland;
- areas of intensive farming leading to a lowering of the biodiversity level;
- lack of permanent grass field margins, including uncultivated buffer strips adjacent to sensitive wildlife areas;
- some intrusion of roads on rural qualities of the landscape, such as the A339. Further intrusion from a major pylon line on very high ground north of Hannington, and landmark of radio mast at Cottington's Hill.



16. Basingstoke Down



Key characteristics

- rolling landform to the north, becoming more undulating and northward sloping to the south;
- predominantly large-scale farmland, lacking a distinctive sense of place;
- provides landscape setting for the western and southern parts of Basingstoke, whilst the western third of the area lies within the North Wessex Downs AONB. Urban influences affect much of the area, with hospital and golf course development north of Basingstoke, further golf courses south-west of Basingstoke, and significant noise intrusion from M3 and A-roads;
- open character formed by large-scale, arable fields, the mix of track-bound fields, large wavy-edged fields and parliamentary fields reflecting enclosure from post-medieval to 19th century times;
- low, well-cut hedgerows and very few woodland blocks, although shelter belt planting exists north of Basingstoke, and very occasional remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland exists, especially concentrated in the south of the area;
- high intervisibility within the area due to the lack of woodland or strong hedgerow structure, enabling views of Basingstoke from many parts of the character area;
- limited settlement outside Basingstoke, with scattered isolated farmsteads and small villages/hamlets, linked by relatively small, narrow roads, contrasting with effective but intrusive road network linking Basingstoke with surrounding areas via the M3 and A-roads. Roman road defines the abrupt, straight, western built edge to Basingstoke, and the M3 corridor marks a similar sharp edge on the southern side;
- various Scheduled Ancient Monuments, including Woodgarston ring motte, and a Roman site north-west of Woodgarston Farm.

Location and boundaries

This irregularly-shaped area lies in the centre of the Borough, taking its form from the settlement of Basingstoke, which defines its eastern boundary and, for a part to the south, its northern edge. Most of its northern boundary is defined by the distinct change in geology, relief and vegetation characteristics between chalkland and lowland mosaic landscapes. The western and southern boundaries mark a transition to a more enclosed mosaic of farmland and woodland characteristic to the surrounding character areas.

Formative influences

This area is underlain predominantly by chalk layers with occasional deposits of clay and flint. Erosion of the chalklands to the north of Basingstoke gives rise to a characteristic rolling landscape. This landform merges into a gentle rising slope to the south, which becomes steeper to the south of Basingstoke, rising to a high clay plateau at Farleigh Wallop.

The present landscape was probably initiated as long ago as the earlier prehistoric period (Neolithic and Bronze Age), when the original forest cover was largely cleared for arable agriculture and grazing. A few patches of woodland survived or regenerated in the north of the character area. The settlement of Worting is amongst those mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086. Medieval open field systems and downland were largely replaced by enclosure by informal means during the 17th-18th centuries, and later by parliamentary enclosure.

Overall landscape character

This is an area of relatively consistent landscape character, the urban form of Basingstoke creating a unifying element within a landscape of varying landform. The area is characterised by a large-scale pattern of arable fields with low, well-trimmed hedges that have become weak and broken in places. These elements, together with the fact that

woodland blocks are infrequent and very small-scale, bring a feeling of openness to the area. Urban influences, such as golf courses and main roads/motorway development, affect the character of parts of the landscape.

The major settlement of Basingstoke, and its associated infrastructure, exerts a strong influence on the character of the immediate surrounding landscape, affecting its original rural character. In terms of settlement pattern, however, development outside Basingstoke is limited to a scattering of isolated farmsteads and small villages/hamlets.

Key issues

- under-management of some ancient semi-natural woodlands;
- weakened hedgerow structure across the more extensive, open landscape types, resulting from previous hedgerow removal;
- inappropriate general over-management of hedgerows (including 'gapping up') and field patterns of historic importance;
- decline in extent of unimproved chalk grassland and sheep pasture through scrub encroachment and agricultural improvement, particularly conversion to arable farmland;
- areas of intensive farming with low biodiversity levels;
- management of grass field margins, road verges, hedgebanks, and uncultivated buffer strips adjacent to sensitive wildlife habitats to maintain or increase biodiversity;
- intrusion of built development, urban land uses and major roads on the landscape.



Appendix B: Extract from the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan 2011 – 2029 relating to Strategic Gaps

Policy EM2 – Strategic Gaps

In order to prevent coalescence of built up areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, the generally open and undeveloped nature of the following gaps will be protected:

- Basingstoke - Oakley
- Basingstoke - Sherborne St John
- Basingstoke - Old Basing
- Basingstoke/Chineham - Bramley/Sherfield on Loddon
- Tadley-Baughurst

Development in gaps will only be permitted where:

- a) It would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation; and
- b) It would not compromise the integrity of the gap either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development; or
- c) it is proposed through a Neighbourhood Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order, including Community Right to Build Orders.

- 6.14 In parts of Basingstoke the towns and villages are located relatively close to one another and the land allocations within this plan will in some instances reduce the distance between settlements further. The gaps have not been defined to protect the countryside or landscape (policy EM1), they are essentially a planning tool to prevent the coalescence of settlements and maintain the separate identity of settlements.
- 6.15 A clear gap between settlements helps maintain a sense of place for both residents of, and visitors to, the settlements on either side of the gaps. When travelling through a strategic gap (by all modes of transport) a traveller should have a clear sense of having left the first settlement, having travelled through an undeveloped area and then entered the second settlement.
- 6.16 Small scale development that is in keeping with the rural nature of the gaps will not be prevented, provided that it is appropriately sited and designed to minimise the impact on the openness of the gap and subject to other policies of this plan.
- 6.17 The precise boundaries for the gaps are set out in the Policies Maps. An assessment of the strategic gaps has been prepared to support the Local Plan.

