

Character Area

110 - Chilterns

Landscape Character Zone

Z9 - River Valleys



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### Key Features

Strong associations of landscape features - Bradenham

- Deep steep-sided valleys with gently sloping or flat bottoms
- Woodland cover 8-17% predominantly on upper valley sides
- Major road and rail routes and development concentrated in valley bottom
- Hedgerows accentuate subtle folds in landform
- Remnant historic landscape patterns and orchards
- Designed parkland and country houses

Z9.1 The Wye, Misbourne and Chess are the largest valleys cut into the Chilterns dip slope. They share a very characteristic landform of steep sides with protruding spurs and a strong convex profile to the upper slopes. The valley bottoms are often gently sloping with little flood plain. Although scale varies and the valleys have their own features a strong sense of enclosure predominates often emphasised by "hanging" beech woodland on the steeper upper valley sides.

Z9.2 Un-wooded valley sides are largely in intensive arable production. Fields are typically medium to large, regular in shape, bounded by strong hedges highlighting the subtle folds in the landform and creating a cohesive pattern. Where hedges have been lost the landscape appears comparatively unstructured especially where the valley widens out or is less well defined and woodland cover is lower, for example the Misbourne valley below Amersham. Orchard remnants occur on western facing slopes in the Wye valley but most appear to have been abandoned. Woodland cover varies from 17% in the Misbourne and upper Wye valleys reducing to 13% in the Chess and 8% in the lower Wye.

Z9.3 The Wye and Misbourne valleys have long been man's major route through the Chilterns. Contour hugging road and rail routes concentrated in the valley bottoms are small scale and unimproved causing little visual intrusion. In contrast the M40 crosses

the Wye valley on pillars truncating views up and down the valley and creating a sense of confinement. The valley bottoms also contain the main settlements including the large town of High Wycombe, Great Missenden, Amersham and the Chalfonts and small areas of ribbon development and light industry. Access to the valley sides is generally limited to narrow winding, often sunken lanes with high hedgerows enclosed in woodland, the main exception being the A404 connecting High Wycombe and Amersham.

Z9.4 At High Wycombe significant areas of the upper slopes and side valleys remain undeveloped but the valley is dominated by the town. There is constant pressure for development however these areas of scrub, agricultural land, remnant parklands and woodlands provide significant green "fingers" into the town contributing to its setting.

Z9.5 Unlike the Wye and Misbourne the Chess valley does not extend through the escarpment to create a major transport route and has retained a comparatively secluded and enclosed character accentuated in a few places by woodlands extending down to the river. The river Chess has a wide flat flood plain which is largely pastoral with small fields and irregular boundaries providing detailed visual interest. There is a strong hedgerow pattern in the eastern part. The landscape pattern and the narrow winding lanes suggest that more of the ancient countryside remains than in most of the Chilterns. The valley has a rural

character except closer to Chesham where visually prominent suburban land uses extend along the valley bottom fragmenting character.

Z9.6 Historic houses and designed parklands including lakes make significant contributions to landscape character at West Wycombe Park, Bradenham Manor, Shardeloes and Latimer Park. The picturesque villages of Latimer and Chenies with their houses of red brick and flint are particularly harmonious in the landscape.

Z9.7 The rivers themselves are at best minor features in the landscape but associated features along their corridors significantly influence local character and distinctiveness. The Misbourne is the subject of a project to alleviate low flows.

#### Current Trends

- Fragmentation of valley landscape and deterioration of landscape character on the edge of settlements
- Agricultural intensification on valley sides
- Loss of orchards
- Reduced hedgerow quality and lack of woodland management
- Improvements to road and rail routes with potential to increase their impact

- Pressure for new development around High Wycombe
- Ancient countryside features vulnerable to change
- Reduced surface water flows in rivers

#### Zone Priorities

- Develop strategy to reduce impacts of existing and new development and limit impact of increasing recreation and transportation pressures
- Conserve features of ancient countryside
- Encourage less intensive farming especially in river corridors
- Encourage sensitive woodland management
- Ensure historic parkland features are not lost within the agricultural landscape
- Encourage conservation of remnant orchards and establish community orchards adjacent to settlements
- Promote and support conservation of chalk stream habitats and features and alleviate low flows
- Encourage a more natural river system in the Chess valley restoring sections which have become deepened, widened or canalised

