

# the landscape plan

for buckinghamshire

part 1 | landscape character assessment



# Preface

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The Chilterns - Hampden Monument (Z9)

Part 1 is derived from the Consultation Draft of 'A Landscape Strategy for Buckinghamshire' prepared and issued in October 1996 by Buckinghamshire County Council. Changes between the current and the 1996 document relate to:

- Comments received via the 1996 consultation process, interim consultations with District Councils in Buckinghamshire and public consultation on Part 1 in April / May 2000
- Exclusion of the administrative area of Milton Keynes Council
- Updating for other changes which had occurred since October 1996
- Improvement to the text to assist understanding and for clarity

- Improved linkage and clarity of relationship to the Management Plan for the Chilterns AONB (The Framework for Action)
- Revision to running order and content including division into two parts
- The publication of Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance by the Countryside Agency in 1999

Part 1 comprises introductory, background and landscape character elements of the Landscape Plan. Part 2 will address landscape conservation and management.

Part 1 has been prepared by Hyder Consulting on the instructions of Buckinghamshire County Council.

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## Foreword

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We are fortunate in Buckinghamshire to enjoy a rich and diverse landscape. The Chiltern Hills are recognised as a nationally important landscape through their designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. To the north are the clay vale and gently rolling limestone hills, whilst to the south are the wooded Burnham plateau and the Thames and Colne valleys.

The landscape around us is important not only for attractive views. It also reflects our past and ecological diversity. Differences in landscape character convey a sense of place. The protection and conservation of this important resource implies a respect for both the past and the future, as well as for the needs of today.

The publication of the Landscape Plan is an important step in fulfilling a commitment made by the County Council in the Buckinghamshire County Structure Plan 1991-2011 to provide a comprehensive countywide framework for landscape renewal; the protection, development and interaction of historic landscapes; landscape enhancement; the promotion of public awareness; education; the co-ordination of policies and the prioritisation of resources.

Working with key partners involved in landscape conservation and management in Buckinghamshire, the decision was taken to progress this framework as a two part document.

The Landscape Plan Part 1 provides an assessment of the landscape and sets out a clear vision and aims for the Plan. This was achieved after undertaking a landscape character assessment and consulting widely. We received much advice and constructive comment which has greatly strengthened the document. We would like to express the County Council's gratitude for this help. Part 1 provides for the first time a comprehensive assessment of the landscapes within Buckinghamshire. It distinguishes the distinctive landscape characters of the county by looking at the interaction of factors such as geology, landform, land use, vegetation types and building styles.

The whole landscape is considered, not only those areas that are acknowledged as having special value and carry designations. By defining the distinctive features of each area it has been possible to identify the practical measures that can be taken to strengthen local landscape character. Also, the Landscape Plan Part 1 can be used as the initial step in guiding development to ensure its effects upon the landscape are no greater than they need to be. In some cases it may be used to link development to positive environmental improvements.

The County Council shares the aims of the Landscape Plan with a wide range of organisations, groups and individuals with whom the County Council will work towards achieving these aims. This will be through the Landscape Plan Part 2. This partnership document will outline and co-ordinate the practical measures the County Council and its partners can take to care for and strengthen the unique landscape character of our county.



**Mrs Margaret Dewar,**  
Cabinet Member for  
Community Services



**Mr Rodney Royston,**  
Cabinet Member for Planning  
and Transportation

## Executive Summary

Buckinghamshire is well known not only for the Chilterns and their woodlands but also for a diverse landscape which features wide vistas from ridges and escarpments across the patchwork of the vales below, for river valleys and more locally for heathland and limestone villages. This has always been so but recent generations have had the ability to alter the landscape much more fundamentally in shorter time periods than ever before.

Buckinghamshire is essentially rural. Yet it lies in the South East of England, close to London in an area which has undergone considerable and rapid change and where strong pressure remains for more development in and around the main settlements and for improvements to infrastructure. Change in the landscape is inevitable, in Buckinghamshire it typically results from the loss of countryside to new developments, changes in land management and the loss of trees due to over-maturity and disease, but change can be managed.

The Landscape Plan has been prepared as a catalyst and a framework for managing change and to provide background, context and focus for all public, private and voluntary interests whose operations, interests and responsibilities interact with the landscape either locally or across the county. Recognition is given to the importance of the whole landscape as a substantial and valuable resource worthy of conservation and enhancement. Emphasis is placed upon character and local distinctiveness.

The Landscape Plan comprises two documents:

Part 1 - Landscape Character Assessment

Part 2 - Landscape Conservation and Management

Central to the Landscape Plan is the assessment of the landscape character of Buckinghamshire contained in Part 1. Thirteen landscape character zones have been identified as distinct components of seven regional character areas occurring within Buckinghamshire on the Character of England map published by the Countryside Commission in 1996. Key features, current trends and priorities for landscape conservation and enhancement have been summarised for each zone. The Landscape Plan also for the first time brings together in Part 1 detail of all the designated landscape areas within the county.

The Landscape Plan assesses the complex issues of landscape conservation and enhancement against a dynamic and changing Buckinghamshire countryside. A simple vision has been defined for the twenty first century of

*"A productive and sustainable rural landscape retaining its essential character, local distinctiveness and quality."*

which it is hoped will be endorsed by a wide range of organisations working in partnership towards this common goal.

The vision is supported by seven aims as follows.

1. Conserve and manage existing landscape diversity to maintain landscape character and identity including the creation of new landscape features where appropriate.
2. Ensure landscape interests are a major consideration of all stages of the Town and Country planning process.
3. Promote the protection and enhancement of special landscapes.
4. Enhance degraded landscapes and reduce the impact of intrusive elements.
5. Promote wide public understanding and enjoyment of the landscape.
6. Promote a partnership approach to landscape conservation, enhancement and management.
7. Develop a geographical database of landscape information which enables landscape change to be monitored.

Part 2 of the Landscape Plan includes a framework of action points linked to the seven aims which will guide the work of partner organisations to protect and conserve the landscape and to manage and direct changes so as to enhance key elements which make individual landscapes special rather than allowing change to dilute them.

Part 1 of the Landscape Plan constitutes Supplementary Planning Guidance to the County Structure Plan. It complements existing policies to protect and enhance landscape character, and thus will contribute to informed decisions on planning policy formulation and applications for development.

## Abbreviations

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<b>AAL</b>	Area of Attractive Landscape
<b>AONB</b>	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<b>BBOWT</b>	Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust
<b>BTCV</b>	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
<b>CAP</b>	Common Agricultural Policy
<b>CPRE</b>	Council for the Protection of Rural England
<b>ERDP</b>	England Rural Development Plan
<b>LLA</b>	Local Landscape Area
<b>LNR</b>	Local Nature Reserve
<b>MAFF</b>	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
<b>PPG</b>	Planning Policy Guidance Note
<b>SAM</b>	Scheduled Ancient Monument
<b>SINC</b>	Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
<b>SSSI</b>	Site of Special Scientific Interest
<b>TPO</b>	Tree Preservation Order

# Section One - Introduction

## Concept

1. A commitment to the production of a "Buckinghamshire Landscape Strategy" was made in the 'Buckinghamshire County Structure Plan' (1) prepared by Buckinghamshire County Council (The County Council). The starting point for this initiative was a landscape character assessment of the whole of Buckinghamshire, which formed a key reference and component of 'A Landscape Strategy for Buckinghamshire, Consultation Draft' (2) published in 1996.
2. Consultation in 1996 and subsequently with a wide range of organisations and with the public has culminated in the production of the Landscape Plan for Buckinghamshire (The Landscape Plan), which comprises two parts.

### Part 1 - Landscape Character Assessment

- The landscape and its constituent elements are examined and the purpose of the Landscape Plan is identified and set in context with national, regional and local policy.
- Descriptions are given of the landscape characters which make up the Buckinghamshire landscape and the current influences upon them. Priorities are identified for each Landscape Character Zone.
- The overall vision and aims for the Buckinghamshire landscape are introduced.

### Part 2 - Landscape Conservation and Management

- A framework of action points are developed as a basis for an implementation programme identifying key partners, timescales and resourcing.

A full report of public consultation carried out on the revised draft in April 2000 is available as a separate volume.

3. It is intended that the Landscape Plan presents a vision for the twenty-first century of

*"A productive and sustainable, rural landscape retaining its essential character, local distinctiveness and quality."*

which will be implemented by a broad partnership via a wide variety of projects and initiatives. More detail of the vision and supporting aims are given in Section 4 and in Part 2.

4. The administrative boundary of Buckinghamshire was revised by local government re-organisation in April 1997 when the Borough of Milton Keynes became a unitary authority. The Landscape Plan applies to the "new" county administrative area, i.e. excluding Milton Keynes Council who intend to prepare their own Landscape Strategy. Most statistical information about the county which is relevant to this Landscape Plan relates to the "old" county area. It has not always been possible to update the information for the new area and in these instances information is stated as relating to the old county area.

## The Purpose of a Landscape Plan for Buckinghamshire

5. The purpose of the Landscape Plan is to act as a catalyst and a framework for managing change in the landscape and strengthening the recognition given to the importance of the whole landscape as a substantial and valuable resource. All parts of the Landscape Plan are universally applicable.
6. The purpose of Part 1 of the Landscape Plan is to set out a factual assessment of landscape character in zones covering all of Buckinghamshire. In particular this will assist with the implementation of policies in the County Structure Plan (1) and Local Plans (3).
7. The purpose of Part 2 of the Landscape Plan is to act as a key reference, a catalyst and a framework for the wide partnership of organisations involved in proactive work "on the ground" to conserve and enhance the Buckinghamshire landscape.
8. These purposes are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Purposes of the Landscape Plan (Parts 1 and 2)**

*Planning*

- To inform the preparation of Structure Plan and Local Plan policies
- A clear link between landscape character assessment and statutory and non-statutory policies
- A framework for the further development of landscape policies throughout Buckinghamshire
- Landscape context for the assessment and determination of planning applications
- Highlighting to developers the importance of taking into account landscape character
- Encouragement for the safeguarding and improvement of the Buckinghamshire landscape

*Countryside Management and Landscape Initiatives*

- A framework for management of the principal landscape characters in the county and, in particular, landscapes:
  - At risk due to over-maturity of trees, urban fringe pressures and recreation over-uses
  - From which pattern, structure and/or character has been lost or weakened
  - Marred by visual intrusion
- Guidance and reference for future initiatives for development of policies for broad geographic areas within the county
- Targeting for countryside management activity
- Context and justification to support applications for external funding including a basis for the targeting of existing grant aid programmes and a focus for sponsorship by the private sector
- Guidance for landowners and farmers
- A vehicle for increased public interest and support for landscape issues
- A reference for countryside recreation and tourism and for the sympathetic siting of related facilities
- A basis for identifying target areas for new woodland
- Monitoring of landscape change

*Special Landscapes*

- A catalyst for special provision and management of designated landscape areas
- Encouragement for the identification and promotion of historic parks and gardens and other historic landscape features and policies for their protection development and interpretation
- Guidance for Heritage Landscape schemes

**The Role of Part 1 of the Landscape Plan as Supplementary Planning Guidance**

- 9 Policies in the Structure Plan (1) seek to ensure that the countryside is protected from inappropriate development. In cases where development is considered appropriate, there are policies to ensure that any effects on scenic beauty and amenity value are minimised (Policy LS1). In certain designated areas additional emphasis is given to protecting and enhancing scenic beauty and amenity value (Policies LS2 and LS3). These policies are amplified at the local level in Local Plans (3) and are discussed in more detail in paras 21-22.
- 10 A comprehensive, factual assessment of landscape character at the strategic level, as set out in Part 1, will assist the implementation of these policies, particularly Policy LS1, although it is recognised that more detailed landscape assessments are needed at the local level to fully inform local decision making.
- 11 Having been prepared in consultation with the general public, businesses and other interested parties, Part 1 of the Landscape Plan has now been adopted as "Supplementary Planning Guidance" by the County Council. This means that, whilst not having the status of an adopted development plan, Part 1 should be taken into account in the determination of planning applications that relate to the Structure Plan policies listed above.
- 12 It should be emphasised that an additional layer of countryside protection or designation has not been created. Rather, the descriptive nature of Part 1 complements and enhances the interpretation of existing policies. This is consistent with Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG 7) on countryside matters issued by the Government in 1997 (4).
- 13 Character assessments at the local level should be carried out within the framework set by Part 1, with a view to these more detailed considerations being adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance to District Local Plans. This is explained further in paras 20 and 65.

## The Landscape Plan in Context

- 14 The landscape is an important reflection of the quality of our environment. Invariably, the landscapes we value the most are those in which there is harmony between human activity and nature. These are sustainable environments and may have been so for hundreds of years. Today, these valued landscapes may be under great pressure of change. Degraded landscapes are generally those where harmony and continuity has been lost, and human activity is at the expense of the natural features and associations which we value.
- 15 The principles of sustainable development are now established in national Government policy and are set out in 'A Better Quality of Life: A Strategy for Sustainable Development for the UK' (5), which builds upon earlier Government advice and recognises the important role of local government in carrying forward the objectives of sustainable development. In particular the strategy encourages local authorities to prepare Local Agenda 21 programmes directed to achieving a more sustainable pattern of development in order to protect the environment. Sustainable development is now also an integral part of the Government's policy guidance on planning for new development, and underpins the Structure and Local Plans in the County. The 2000 Rural White Paper emphasises the role of landscape character assessment in achieving an integrated holistic approach to decision making over development in the countryside (6).
- 16 In 1997 the County and District Councils in Buckinghamshire prepared a State of the Environment Report (7), which provides an important foundation for the preparation of Local Agenda 21 action plans in the county.
- 17 The importance of the environment is recognised in the corporate policies of the local authorities in the County. For example, the County Council's 'Council Plan 1997-2001' (8) where Strategic Aim 7 seeks "To improve the quality of life in Buckinghamshire by making the county an even better and safer place to live work and travel." Supporting policy (xiii) seeks to "Develop policies to enhance the Buckinghamshire environment and conserve its essentially rural nature."
- 18 The Landscape Plan has an important role to play in contributing to these policies and to a more sustainable pattern of development and land management. The overall approach is to foster ways in which human needs and activities can be accommodated whilst ensuring that the qualities and character of the countryside are conserved for future generations.
- 19 Whilst it is intended that the Landscape Plan will support Structure Plan and Local Plan policies it will also complement and reinforce countryside strategies produced for Buckinghamshire and strategies, management plans and design guides prepared for specific areas including:
- 'Buckinghamshire Tree and Woodland Strategy' (9)
  - 'The Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Action Plan 2000-2010' (10)
  - 'Buckinghamshire Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2000-2003' (11)
  - 'Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan' (12)
  - 'Management Plan for the Chilterns AONB - The Framework for Action' (13)
  - 'Environmental Guidelines for the Management of Roads in the Chilterns' (14)
  - 'Chilterns Buildings Design Guide' (15)
  - 'Colne Valley Regional Park Strategy' (16)
  - 'Action Plan' for the Greensand Project (17)
- The linkage between the county wide landscape assessment and the existing strategies and plans for specific areas of the county are set out in paras 58-64.
- 20 The Countryside Commission (now the Countryside Agency) and English Nature have jointly produced 'The Character of England - Landscape, Wildlife and Natural Features' (18). This map divides the whole of England into different character areas. These are tracts of countryside which have common characteristics, such as landform and vegetation patterns, which distinguish them from each other. The objective is to deliver a strategic framework, to inform future programmes for both agencies and to offer a context for decision making at a local level. Further information is given in Section 2. The Landscape Plan can be seen as a refinement at county level. There is an opportunity to refine further to a more local level via District Landscape Strategies, Management Plans, Design and Management Guidelines and Village Design Statements.

## Landscape Protection

- 21 Parts of the County are covered by formal landscape designations, see Map 1. Most notably, the Chilterns has been designated by the Government as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. This national status recognises the unique character and beauty of the area, and seeks its conservation and enhancement.
- 22 In 1979 (19) the County Council designated and adopted other areas outside the Chilterns AONB as being of countywide importance. These are known as Areas of Attractive Landscape (AAL) and are considered as having distinctive and particularly attractive landscape character. Whilst the selection of criteria to determine such particularly 'attractive' landscapes inevitably involved some subjective judgements, the integrity of the AALs has subsequently been tested and affirmed through Structure Plan and Local Plan reviews. The District Councils have also designated a number of Local Landscape Areas (LLA) to protect particularly valued areas of landscape character. Whereas the AALs are shown on the key diagram of the Structure Plan (1) the detailed boundaries of AALs and LLAs are defined in the Local Plans (3) prepared by the District Councils.
- 23 The Structure and Local Plans also provide additional protection through specific policies for identified areas, for example the Colne Valley Park in both and the River Thames setting in the South Bucks District Local Plan. Large areas of Southern Buckinghamshire are also designated as Green Belt, see Map 2. The Green Belt designation is not based on landscape character or quality (although this is a common misconception), however, its existence affords protection to a wide range of landscapes with or without formal landscape designations.
- 24 There are 34 English Heritage registered Historic Parks and Gardens in the county (see Appendix A). Although inclusion on the register does not give any statutory protection in the same way as Listed Buildings, it ensures proper consideration in the assessment of planning applications. There are also 166 Conservation Areas designated by the District Councils as areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.



Registered Historic Landscape at Hughenden Manor (Z10)

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- 25 A number of other landscapes gain protection by virtue of the stated aims of the landowner, such as those of the National Trust. Other areas are covered by management agreements which aim to conserve and enhance the landscape character. In addition, many sites of landscape value have some protection through other mechanisms, such as by virtue of being Listed Buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Local Nature Reserves (LNR).



Grangelands and Pulpit Hill SSSI (Z8)

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- 26 Trees are a vital element in the landscape and may be the subject of Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) administered by District Councils. Orders have an important role in the protection of trees of high amenity value which contribute to local character and may be placed on individual trees, on groups or on woodland. The Forestry Act 1967 requires a Tree Felling Licence to be obtained from the Forestry Authority for specified tree felling operations.
- 27 The introduction of the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 has brought protection to hedgerows which qualify as important against historic and archaeological or wildlife and landscape criteria but there is no accompanying obligation to carry out appropriate management.