

Section Three - Character Areas and Landscape Character Zones

Character Areas

67 The character areas are shown on Maps 1 and 2. Brief descriptions of each character area (accompanied by the Countryside Commission reference number) follow in relation to the landscape within Buckinghamshire. It should be noted that the Countryside Commission's names for the character areas have been retained for consistency even though some may at first seem confusing in the Buckinghamshire context. The names of the landscape character zones have been chosen to reflect a local identity in the context of a county-wide assessment.

Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands - 88

68 The heavy clay soils are underlain by chalk and limestone till which gives rise to calcareous clay soils.

69 The landscape is gently undulating, divided by broad shallow valleys and characterised by arable cultivation. Market gardening and horticulture are often found on the rich alluvial soils of the river valleys, along with pollarded willows and wet meadows. Sparse woodland cover and poor hedgerows create an open landscape of medium to large arable fields.

70 The majority of the arable claylands are sparsely populated. Small villages are found on the valley sides with hamlets and farmsteads widely dispersed.

Yardley - Whittlewood Ridge - 91

71 The underlying geology is dominated by glacial till with a high chalk content giving rise to fertile soils. The Ouse tributaries cut through the undulating ridge providing a contrast in the landscape.

72 The area is characterised by historic parklands such as Stowe Park and by broadleaved woodlands that were once used for deer hunting. Although remnants of the ancient Whittlewood Forest remain much has been replaced with conifer plantations. Arable farming takes place in medium to large fields often bound by sparse well trimmed hedgerows.

73 Small villages and hamlets are infrequent and mainly found clustered along road and rail routes. Silverstone Grand Prix circuit attracts large numbers of people into this rural area.

Bedfordshire and Greensand Ridge - 90

74 The outcrop of Greensand forms a ridge which contrasts with the surrounding undulating claylands and gives rise to sandy acidic soils which strongly influence vegetation type.

75 The ridge is a complex landform of a north west facing scarp slope and an undulating dip slope. The scarp slope horizon is dominated by conifers and deciduous woodland with pasture, arable and heathland habitats. Lower down these slopes the landform folds to create a small scale and intimate landscape.

76 Numerous estates and parklands create their own distinct character. Small limestone villages and hamlets are linked by narrow winding sunken lanes.

Upper Thames Clay Vales - 108

77 The area is underlain by Oxford Clay giving rise to slowly permeable clay soils.

78 Low lying agricultural land of arable and pasture forms an open landscape with degraded hedgerows and loss of hedgerow trees. Farming supports a largely rural population. Historically clay extraction for brick making has been important. Industry is concentrated in and around Aylesbury.

79 Settlement is focused on small villages spread throughout the area, served by large market towns. New road improvements have attracted built development, some of which has had a major effect on landscape character.

Midvale Ridge - 109

80 The underlying geology is limestone and sandstones giving rise to a wide range of soils. Parts of the ridge are prominent standing out in the surrounding low lying clay vales. Where the limestone and clay meet springlines are widespread. Many settlements and woodlands can be found along this junction.

81 An agricultural landscape dominates with isolated trees and small woodlands. Fields are characteristically large and defined by a regular pattern of hedgerow and trees.

82 Small villages built from local stone are found either on the ridge tops or just above the low lying ground of the vale.



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Looking north from Mentmore (Z2 from Z6)

Chilterns - 110

83 The Chilterns are formed from an outcrop of chalk and comprise a steep scarp south and east of Aylesbury and a gradual dip slope falling towards the Thames valley. The chalk strata of the dip slope is overlain by deposits of clay with flints and glacial drifts which give rise to acidic and calcareous soils. These deposits have been eroded away by a number of parallel rivers flowing south east, many of which are now dry or ephemeral leaving chalk soils in the valleys and on the valley sides and locally valley gravels.

84 Extensive areas of ancient woodland, secondary woodland and plantations make the Chilterns one of the most richly wooded lowland landscapes in England. Beech woodland is a strong characteristic. The woodlands contrast with open dip slope, steep escarpment and the enclosed valleys and agricultural landscapes which are all distinctive features within the Chilterns.

85 Ancient sunken lanes link the scattered villages, farmsteads and numerous archaeological sites in the area. Several country houses are located in prominent positions on the valley sides.

Thames Valley - 115

86 The Thames Valley comprises the stretch of the Thames floodplain to the south of the Chilterns. The underlying geology is mainly London clay overlaid by alluvium and gravel deposits.

87 Riverside towns, and suburbanisation are locally evident but elsewhere, the river and flood plain are a unifying feature and dominate the landscape character. Farming is generally limited adjacent to the river due to reservoirs, gravel pits and development associated with residential use. Horse keeping is fairly widespread.

88 Woodlands dominate the north of the area extending up to the southern edge of the Chilterns. This is most noticeable on the steep slopes immediately to the north of the river which are often clad with trees.

The Buckinghamshire Landscape Character Zones

89 The 13 landscape character zones identified by the landscape assessment (see Maps 1 and 2) each have an identifiable character although there are variations within zones and the edges in particular may be less characteristic. Landscape is usually a continuum which changes gradually in relation to the emphasis of one or more landscape components and rarely coincides with political boundaries or convenient features in the landscape such as rivers, roads and railways. This is particularly likely where there is no marked change in landform between zones, hence the division between one zone and another can rarely be defined as a precise line on the ground. Instead there is generally a transitional area where the character of one zone merges into



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Princes Risborough from Whiteleaf Hill (Z8)

another as the influence of individual factors such as land use, settlement and field patterns become more or less evident, but defining a transitional area can also be problematic. Thus boundaries of zones have been drawn as a line which rarely follows site features or boundaries and has the status of indicating the general location of the change in character between zones. Users of the assessment should take this into account and when considering locations towards the edges of the zones should consider also the character of adjacent zone(s) in determining which character description applies recognising that some areas will display characteristics of more than one zone.

90 Although the townscapes of urban areas have been excluded from the landscape character assessment the boundaries of the zones have not been drawn to exclude the urban areas as their impacts and influences have been taken into account in the character assessments and descriptions of the zones.

91 The distinctive character of each zone is illustrated and described on the A3 fold out sheets accompanied by identification in bullet point format of:

- Key Features
- Current Trends - current influences on landscape character
- Zone Priorities - for conservation, enhancement and management.

92 Emphasis is placed on trends which are particularly evident in a zone. Some trends such as poor hedgerow management apply throughout the county and appear to vary as much with land ownership as with zone. Others include broken skylines, cluttered roadside environments, "horsiculture" and insidious urbanisation. Zone Priorities are included as a pointer to key issues developed and addressed by Part 2 of the Landscape Plan, which concentrates on action and identifies key partners.