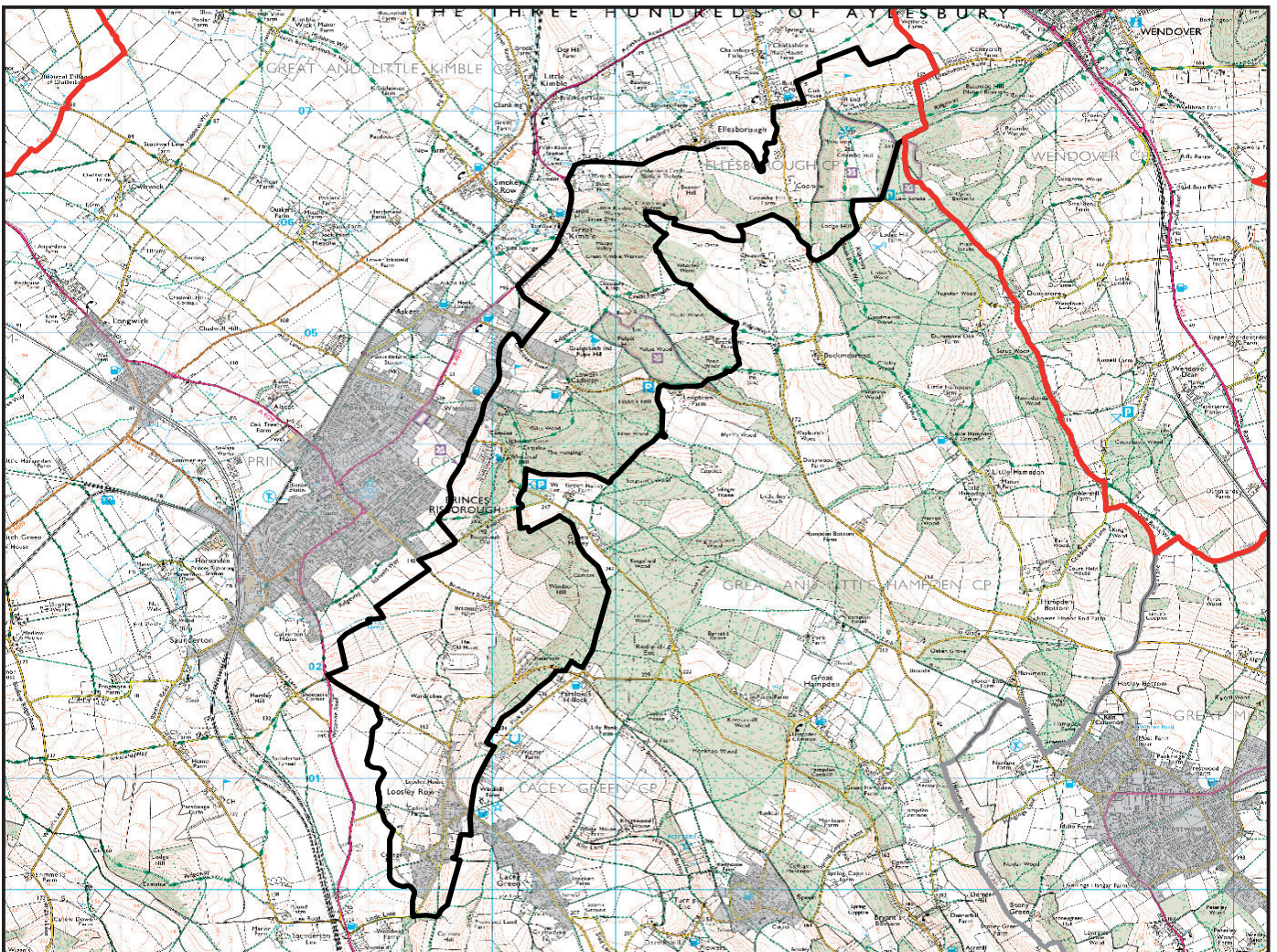
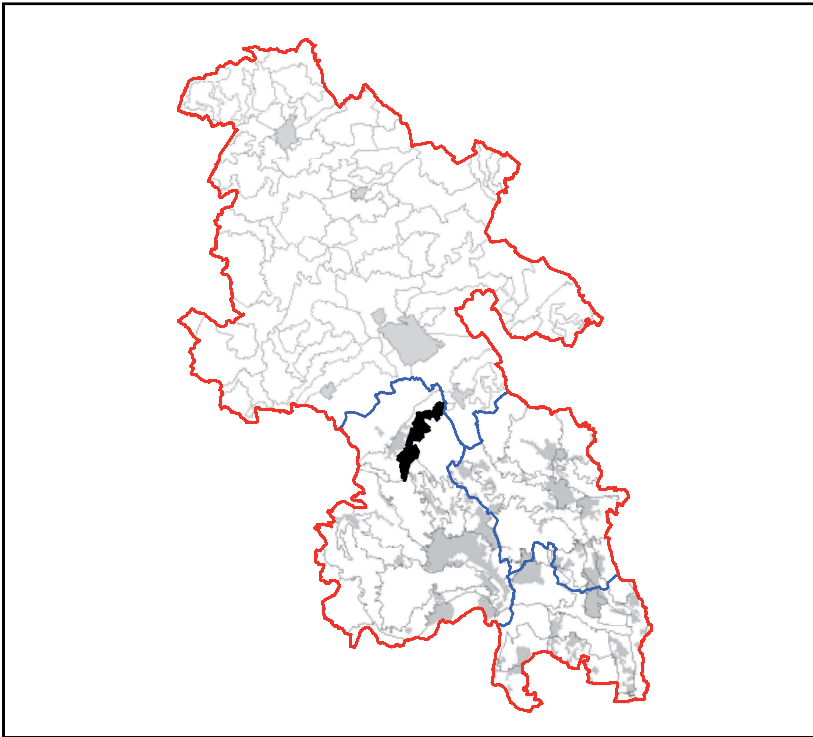


LCA 11.3 COOMBE HILL AND WHITELEAF CHALK ESCARPMENT



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KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Steep, north west facing chalk escarpment. A visible feature over long distances from lower lying areas in Aylesbury Vale.
- Lower slopes are highly undulating, comprising large open arable and pastoral fields, which contrast with the well wooded scarp tops. Field systems often have a strong geometric character, and are commonly 20th century enclosure.
- Densely wooded scarp, with the exception of the lower section. Mostly broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland, with some large areas of ancient woodland, including The Hangings, Giles Wood and Ninn Wood. Interspersed with open patches of calcareous grassland.
- An extremely low density of settlement, limited to lower slopes and comprising isolated properties and individual farmsteads. The small hamlet of Loosley Row lies in the south overlooking the Aylesbury Vale.
- Numerous ecological designations, including several SSSI's (broadleaved, mixed, lowland beech/yew woodland, acid grassland and lowland calcareous grassland), at Ellesborough and Kimble Warrens, Windor Hill, Bacombe and Coombe Hills, and Grangeland and Pulpit Hill.
- A good network of well managed hedgerows delineates field systems.
- Important local landmarks include, Whiteleaf Cross, a distinctive chalk hill monument, carved into the escarpment side. Coombe Hill, the highest view point in the Chilterns, with the Coombe Hill Monument located on its summit.
- A rich variety of archaeological remains, including Neolithic barrows, Roman and Iron Age finds, cropmark track way and enclosures, and cross dykes, with numerous scheduled monuments, such as Pulpit Hill Camp and Cymbeline's Castle, a Motte and Bailey Castle.
- Historic parkland (Grade II listed) at Chequers extends into the landscape, and is enclosed largely by woodland.
- A good rights of way network through the area, particularly through woodland. Including long distance footpaths; Ridgeway and Cradle Footpath. Small, narrow winding rural roads pass up and down the escarpment.
- Varying degrees of enclosure, contrasting between densely enclosed rural lanes and woodland blocks, with more open and rolling farmland fields on lower slopes.
- Extensive long views are achieved across the Vale of Aylesbury and south over the settled plateau from higher ground. However, dense woodland cover often restricts these views.
- An intimate and quiet landscape, with little movement and overt development, with a strong rural character.

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DESCRIPTION

Location and Boundaries: *Coombe Hill and Whiteleaf Chalk Escarpment* lies entirely within the Wycombe District, and forms part of the Chiltern chalk escarpment. The area is visually distinct, steeply rising and enclosed by the more gentle foothills to the north and west. To the east and south, the area is defined by plateau landscape. *Coombe Hill and Whiteleaf Chalk Escarpment* is a continuation of the Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Area 11.1 *Chiltern Scarp*.

Landscape Character: Steep, north west facing chalk escarpment, a prominent feature over long distances from Aylesbury Vale. The undulating lower slopes are dominated by open farmland which contrasts with the heavily wooded scarp tops. These comprise of extensive areas of broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland, and interspersed pockets of calcareous grassland. Long panoramic views are afforded, particularly across the lower lying Aylesbury Vale. An intimate and quiet landscape prevails, which results largely as a result of the dense tree cover and limited settlement. Isolated properties are scattered across the scarp, with the small hamlet of Loosley Row located in the south. Small winding rural lanes climb the landscape and connect settlement. The absence of traffic adds to the tranquil and often secluded character. A rich variety of archaeological artefacts and landmarks, including Whiteleaf Cross, Coombe Hill monument and Chequers historic parkland, some of which are visible features from lower lying areas of Aylesbury Vale. A dense network of footpaths, particularly through wooded areas, provides good access to the landscape.

Geology: Largely underlain with Middle Chalk, with West Marly Chalk formation, Zig Zig Chalk and Princes Risborough sand and gravel running along the lower slopes on the western edge. Linear patches of Upper Chalk emerge along the higher areas on the eastern border. The chalk gives rise to freely draining, lime-rich, loamy soils predominately overlay the character area.

Topography/Landform: A prominent, steep, north west facing chalk escarpment, with highly undulating lower slopes, becoming steeper in the upper reaches and rounder on top. The escarpment reaches a maximum height on Coombe Hill, of 260m, the highest point in the Chilterns. The escarpment is a distinctive landform, rising steeply above the Vale of Aylesbury.

Hydrology: The escarpment is relatively dry, with occasional springs emerging in the lower reaches, transitional with the foothills.

Land Use and Settlement: Lower slopes are predominately used for farmland, with a mix of arable and pasture fields. Field systems are often relatively large, open and geometric in form, which contrasts with the heavily wooded scarp tops. Woodland

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areas offer recreational opportunities, with a dense rights of way network, including local and long distance footpaths, namely, The Ridgeway, and Cradle Footpath.

An extremely low density of settlement, limited to the lower slopes, and consisting of small strings of properties and isolated properties/individual farmsteads. The small hamlet of Loosley Row is the largest settlement in the area, and sits in the far south, in an elevated position overlooking the Vale of Aylesbury. Buildings are aligned along the road and follow the relief of the scarp. Building types are varied, with small vernacular cottages, larger Edwardian buildings, and flint workers cottages. Narrow, incised, rural lanes wind up and across the scarp, often enclosed by trees and high hedgerows.

Tree Cover: Extensive tree cover, especially on the scarp tops. Large blocks of woodland include broadleaved woodland at Giles Wood and The Hangings; broadleaved mixed and yew woodland at Whiteleaf Hill and Great Kimble; lowland beech and yew woodland at The Coombes and Pulpit Hill and small areas of coniferous woodland interspersed throughout. Numerous woodlands in this area are ancient or semi natural. Trees are often scattered along hedgerows and enclose rural lanes.

Perceptual/ Experiential Landscape: Varying degrees of enclosure, with enclosed, rural lanes and dense woodland blocks, contrasting to open, undulating farmland on the lower slopes and open areas of calcareous grassland. Extensive long views north and west over Aylesbury Vale, and occasional glimpses south over plateau areas, from higher ground. Higher areas are often heavily wooded, which occasionally limits these views. The scarp is a highly visible and prominent feature in the landscape, and viewed from long distances across lower lying areas, such as Aylesbury Vale. Low levels of settlement and traffic, and extensive woodland cover, generates an intimate, quiet and often secluded landscape, with high levels of tranquillity.

Biodiversity: Large areas of broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland, and smaller interspersed areas of lowland beech/yew and coniferous woodland, provide valuable ecological benefits. Areas of lowland calcareous grassland are located within openings in the woodland, particularly on the scarp slopes. Hedgerows provide an important wildlife corridor, especially across farmland, connecting fragmented habitats.

The area contains a number of designated sites, including numerous priority BAP habitats, of lowland beech and yew woodland and lowland calcareous grassland, and a number of biological notification sites of broadleaved and mixed woodland and areas of basic grassland. Several large areas are designated as SSSIs, namely, Grangelands and Pulpit Hill, Bacombe and Coombe Hills, Windsor Hill and Ellesborough and Kimble Warrens. The latter of which is also an area of internationally important Chiltern's Beechwood Special Area of Conservation.

Historic Environment: Field systems are dominated by 20th century enclosures, however some areas of pre 18th century irregular and 19th century enclosures remain.

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On the scarp tops there is a mixture of ancient woodland and secondary woodland which has grown largely at the expense of grass downland.

The landscape is rich in historical landmarks; the most prominent are: Whiteleaf Cross, a distinctive chalk cross, carved into the escarpment side on Whiteleaf Hill that overlooks Aylesbury Vale; Coombe Hill Monument a war memorial located on summit of Coombe Hill, the highest view point in the Chilterns. The landscape contains many other nationally important archaeological sites; these include: a Neolithic bowl barrow on Whiteleaf Hill, Cymbeline's Castle, a Motte and Bailey Castle, below Beacons Hill, and overlooking Ellesborough and Little Kimble; the Iron Age hillfort on Pulpit Hill. Historic parkland is found at Chequers Park, a Grade II English Heritage registered park/garden, which extends into the adjacent character area to the east.

There are two ancient trackways which cross the landscape, the Ridgeway Path and the Icknield Way. The Ridgeway Path is believed to be one of the oldest tracks in Britain and thought to have been used since prehistoric times. The Icknield Way is a complex route made up of two parallel routes, the Upper and Lower Icknield Way.

Designations:

- Chilterns AONB
- Registered Parks/Gardens: Chequers.
- Scheduled Monuments: Bowl barrow on Beacon Hill; Bowl barrow, 200m N of Whiteleaf Cross; Bowl barrow, 90m N of Whiteleaf Cross; Cross dyke on Ragpit Hill; Cross dyke on Whiteleaf Hill; Cross dyke E of Gt Kimble Church; Cymbeline's Castle; Motte and Bailey Castle, moated site and Roman Villa, east of All Saints Church; Neolithic barrow, 50m E of Whiteleaf Cross; Pillow mound on Beacon Hill; Pulpit Hill Camp; Whiteleaf Cross.
- Archaeological Notification Sites: 18 No.
- Conservation Areas: Monks Risborough
- Priority BAP Habitats: 4 types
- Biological Notification Sites: 22 No.
- Local Nature reserve: 1 No.
- Local Wildlife Sites: 6 No.
- Local Geology Site: 4 No.
- SAC: Chilterns Beechwood
- SSSIs: 4 No. Bacombe and Coombe Hills; Ellesborough and Kimble Warrens; Grangelands and Pulpit Hill; Windsor Hill.

EVALUATION

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Potential landscape and visual sensitivities are:

- The extensive woodland cover which provides enclosure as well as valuable biodiversity interest.
- Pockets of calcareous grassland, which provide a distinctive landscape and ecological feature.
- The hedgerow network which links to woodland, providing wildlife corridors, and holds important biodiversity value.
- The narrow winding lanes enclosed by tall hedgerows and trees which contribute to the rural character.
- The intimate scale and enclosed character of the area, as a result of the extensive woodland cover, and a contrast with open panoramic views.
- Open and uninterrupted panoramic views, often from escarpment tops and particularly across Aylesbury Vale. The role of the escarpment as the uninterrupted and wooded skyline, and backdrop to Aylesbury Vale.
- The rich variety of archaeological sites, monuments and historic landmarks, such as Whiteleaf Cross and Coombe Hill monument, which add time depth and historic interest.
- Registered historic parkland of Chequers Park and its setting on the escarpment, which contribute to strength of character and time depth.
- The variety of ecological features, including extensive areas of SSSIs (often woodland and calcareous grassland).
- The small areas of early field enclosures which provide evidence of historic land use.
- Local rights of way network, which provides easy access to this landscape.
- The visual unity of the landscape, and organised, well balanced character.
- The intactness of the landscape and lack of intrusive features.

Strength of Character/Intactness: The strength of character and intactness of the *Coombe Hill and Whiteleaf Chalk Escarpment* is **strong**. Key characteristics are prominent within the landscape and the lack of intrusive features makes this a physically and visually intact landscape.

Strategy/ Vision: Conserve and manage *Coombe Hill and Whiteleaf Chalk Escarpment* as the distinctive scarp landscape forming a backdrop to Aylesbury Vale, with a mosaic of woodland, farmland and calcareous grassland. Maintain the peaceful and natural landscape, the intimate rural character, and visual unity of the landscape.

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Landscape Guidelines:

- Conserve and appropriately manage the woodland (including ancient woodland) and linking hedgerow network and woodland areas, which provide enclosure in the landscape and form a strong landscape pattern and important wildlife corridor.
- Conserve areas of calcareous grassland which are an important landscape and ecological feature on the scarp slopes. Seek opportunities to restore, link and manage these areas.
- Ensure views from the escarpment are considered in relation to new development in this landscape and adjacent landscapes, particularly those views to and from Aylesbury Vale.
- Maintain the rural character of roads and lanes; avoid road improvements which would alter their character.
- Conserve archaeological sites, monuments and their setting, which provide evidence of past use of the land and are important landmarks within this landscape.
- Conserve early field enclosures, which provide past evidence of the use of the landscape.
- Conserve the landscape setting of the registered parkland at Chequers Park.
- Conserve and enhance important ecological habitats, particularly SSSI habitats on the escarpment, the woodland and calcareous grasslands.
- Conserve the uninterrupted, rural and wooded skyline as a backdrop to views from lower ground (such as Aylesbury Vale).

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Lower slopes are undulating, comprising large open arable and pastoral fields, which contrast with the well wooded scarp tops.



Important local landmarks include, Whiteleaf Cross, a distinctive chalk hill figure, carved into the escarpment side.



Small hamlet of Loosley Row, with strong vernacular. Building materials include flint and brick.



Coombe Hill Monument, visible over long distances.



Extensive views from the scarp tops across lower lying vale landscape.



Chalk grasslands at Ellesborough and Kimble Warrens.