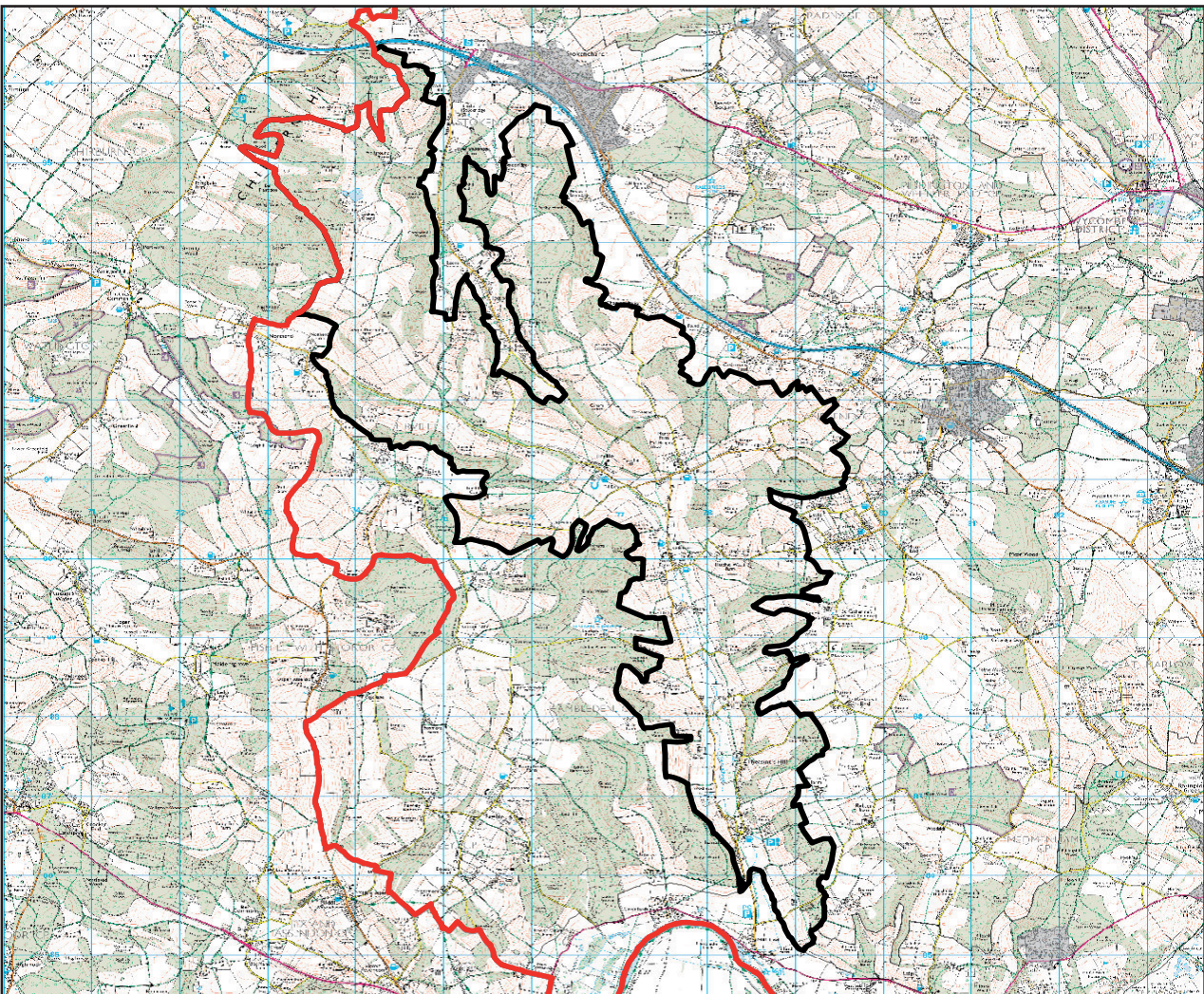
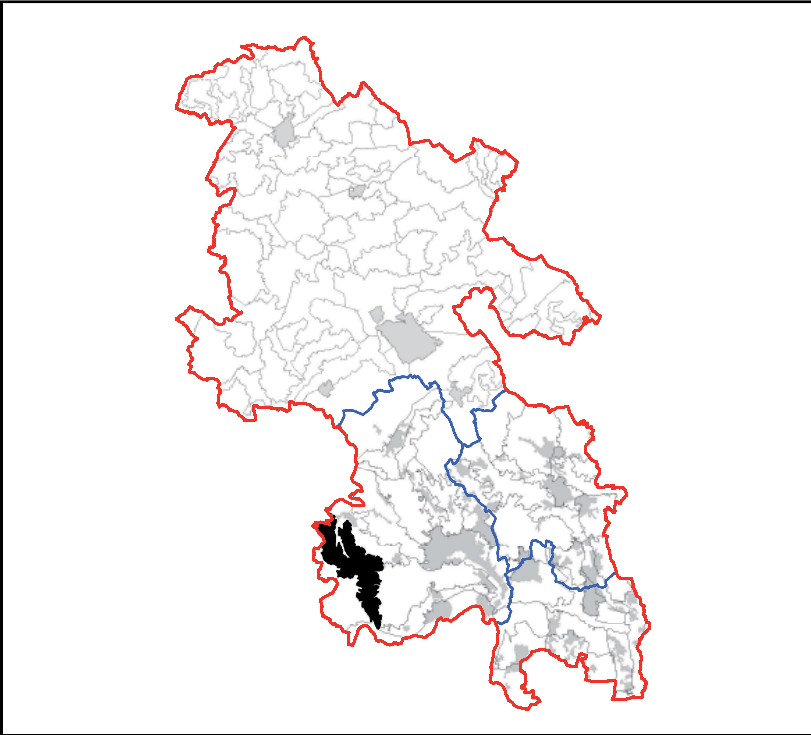


LCA 13.2 HAMBLEDEN CHALK RIVER VALLEY



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KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- The Hamble Brook, a chalk stream and winterbourne flows through a broad chalk valley with gently sloping lower valley slopes, becoming steeper in the upper reaches. Slopes are incised creating rolling valley sides.
- Two dry valleys feed into the main valley from the north, with noticeably steeper valley topography.
- A wide floodplain, largely supporting rough grazing and pasture and delineated by low hedgerows, wooden fencing and some estate rail.
- On the gently sloping valley sides the underlying chalk and predominately freely draining lime-rich soils supports pasture interspersed with arable cultivation.
- Dense woodland occupies the upper slopes, creating a physical and visual boundary to the valley. A significant proportion of this woodland is ancient and of ecological value.
- Pockets of SSSI calcareous grassland occur at Turville Hill, Wormsley Chalk Banks and Fayland Chalk Banks.
- Settlement density is low and largely confined to the valley floor, consisting of 'idyllic' English villages and hamlets, of Hambleton, Fingest Skirmett Turville.
- The predominance of traditional building materials including brick and flint and timber framing.
- Varying patterns of field enclosure, dominated by pre 18th century 'irregular' enclosure and 20th century enclosure with some pre 18th century co-axial fields and assarts.
- Wormsley Park in the north of the area comprises a parkland estate and 18th century country house. Archaeology includes a roman villa on the southern boundary of the area and ring ditch at Skirmett.
- Rural roads, lanes and local footpaths run along the valley floor connecting villages and farmsteads and up valley slopes.
- Views are largely contained within the valley, by woodland and topography. Extensive views exist down from the valley sides (e.g. from Turville Windmill).
- An intact, secluded and tranquil landscape with a strong rural character and time depth. This landscape has been much used in film and television to depict 'iconic' English countryside.

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DESCRIPTION

Location and Boundaries: The *Hambleden Chalk River Valley* lies within Wycombe District and cuts north to south through the chalk dip slope. The boundaries of the character area are defined by the distinctive valley topography and woodland on the valley tops which acts as a visual boundary when viewed from the valley floor.

Landscape Character: The *Hambleden Chalk River Valley* includes the main broad valley along which the Hamble Brook flows and two steeper dry tributary valleys. Fields of pasture are interspersed with arable fields, and divided by low hedgerows, which dominate the rolling valley slopes. Some rough grazing is located on the valley floor. Woodland, much of which is ancient, crowns the valley tops and fragments areas of retained calcareous grassland (recognised as SSSIs) along steeper valley sides. Historic villages (e.g. Hambleden and Turville) with distinctive traditional brick and flint building materials are located along the valley floor and connected by rural roads. Important views are channelled along the valley towards villages, and long views are afforded from Turville Windmill towards the Thames Valley. There is a network of local footpaths which run up the valley slopes and into areas of woodland. The valley is largely untouched by modern development and its visual containment (by landform and wooded tops), rolling farmland slopes and intact historic villages contribute to its secluded, tranquil and rural character.

Geology: Middle Chalk valley slopes with Upper Chalk valley tops. River Terrace Deposits occur on the main valley bottom following the course of the Hamble Brook with some pockets of Head (Undifferentiated). The floors of the two northern dry valleys are dominated by Head (Undifferentiated). The chalk valley slopes give rise to shallow freely draining lime-rich soils on higher ground with freely draining lime-rich loamy soils on lower slopes. Loamy and clayey floodplain soils with naturally high groundwater are found along the main valley bottom associated with course of the Hamble Brook.

Topography/Landform: The main valley through which the Hamble Brook flows is a broad chalk valley with a wide valley bottom and gently sloping lower valley slopes, which become steeper in the upper reaches. The northern valleys which join the main valley are dry and have steeper sides. The valley sides are incised creating a smooth, rolling topography.

Hydrology: The Hamble Brook is a chalk stream which flows through the lower reaches of the Hambleden Valley. The stream is fed from groundwater stored in the aquifer layers of chalk which emerges as a spring near Skirmett and flows southwards into the River Thames. The Hamble Brook is a winterbourne and dries up along parts of its course particularly in its upper reaches near Skirmett. It relies on heavy rainfall to top up the aquifer and maintain the flow.

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Land use and Settlement: The wide floodplain of the main valley largely supports rough grazing and pasture. Grazed grassland interspersed with arable fields dominates the sloping valley sides. Fields are divided by low hedgerows with scattered hedgerow trees, wooden post and rail fencing and some estate rail. Woodland occupies the upper slopes and also occurs along the valley bottom of the northern valley east of Turville. The clear chalk Hamble Brook meanders along the main valley bottom. Visually it is not prominent in the wide floodplain landscape but its course can be picked out by the dip in landform and trees along its edge.

The density of settlement is low with small villages located along the valley bottom at Hambleton, Skirmett, Turville and Fingest connected by rural roads. Dispersed individual farmsteads are located along the valley floor and on the valley sides. Hambleton is an intact rural historic village with brick and flint cottages. St Mary's church dates from the 14th century. Brick and flint and brick with timber frame are also distinctive building materials in the other villages.

Tree Cover: Woodland is predominately located along upper valley slopes and valley tops but east of Turville woodland extends along the valley bottom (Turville Wood). Broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland is dominant with pockets of lowland beech and yew woodland. Most of the woodland is semi natural or replanted ancient woodland including Hanger Wood, Gilham Copse, Turville Wood, Idlecombe Wood and North Cot Wood.

Perceptual/Experiential Landscape: The Hambleton valley is contained by its landform and wooded valley tops. It is a secluded landscape with views channelled up and down the valley bottom and valley sides including views to the villages in their landscape setting. From Turville Windmill long views are afforded towards the Thames Valley. The smooth and rolling valley sides contrast with the dense vertical woodland which crown the valley tops. Networks of local footpaths run along the main valley floor linking the villages and farmsteads. Footpaths up the valley slopes connect the valley bottom with the wooded tops. These are some of the most popular footpaths through the Chilterns. There are no main roads and this is a tranquil, rural landscape with intact villages and traditional building materials contributing to historic character. The landscape of the Hambleton Valley has been much used in film and television, idealised as 'iconic' English countryside.

Biodiversity: There are a number of calcareous grassland SSSIs on the valley sides near including Turville Hill, Wormsley Chalk Banks in proximity to Turville and Fayland Chalk Banks south of Skirmett. Aston Rowant on the northern edge of the area is a designated SAC and SSSI, and one of the best remaining examples in the UK of lowland juniper scrub on chalk. The woodlands contribute to biodiversity value with many designated as local wildlife sites. BAP priority habitats are chalk rivers and headwaters, lowland beech and yew woodland, lowland calcareous grassland lowland mixed deciduous woodland and scrub woodland.

Historic Environment: The Hambleton Valley has been a focus for human occupation since Roman times as evidenced by the Roman villa north of Yewden on the southern boundary of the area, a ring ditch at Skirmett, Fingest Historic Core /

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Roman Burial.

The historic landscape is comprised of a variety of enclosures predominantly of pre 18th century irregular fields and 20th century enclosure. Pre 18th century coaxial fields occur on the eastern slopes of the main valley and there is evidence of assart fields among the ancient woodland. There are also pockets of downland at Turville and parkland at Wormsley Park.

The historic settlement is characterised by nucleated villages and isolated farms; the majority contain a high concentration of historic buildings. Of particular note are the villages of Hambleden, Turville and Fingest which possess fine vernacular timber-framed, brick and flint buildings. Other distinctive buildings in the landscape are the village churches, including the 13th century church of St Bartholomew at Fingest, St Mary's Church at Hambleden and St Mary's Church at Turville. Wormsley Park in the north of the area comprises a parkland estate and 18th century country house.

Designations:

- Chilterns AONB
- Archaeological Notification Sites: 15No.
- Conservation Areas: Fingest, Hambleden, Pheasants Hill, Skirmett and Turville
- Priority BAP Habitats: 6 types
- Biological Notification Sites: 43 No.
- Local Geological Sites: 1No.
- Local Wildlife Sites: 25 No.
- English Heritage Scheduled Monuments: Roman Villa North of Yewden Lodge
- SAC: Aston Rowant
- SSSI: Aston Rowant, Fayland Chalk Bank, Swain's Wood, Turville Hill, Wormsley Chalk Bank

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EVALUATION

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Potential landscape and visual sensitivities are as follows:

- The remnant calcareous grassland/downland on the valley sides which represent a habitat which has declined greatly in the Chilterns. Also an area of juniper scrub. The importance of these habitats is recognised by their SSSI status.
- The ancient woodland on the upper valley slope which has biodiversity value and visually contains the valley.
- The Hamble Brook chalk stream and its reliance on the chalk aquifer to maintain its flow.
- Channelled views along the valley floor and up and down the valley slopes including to historic villages.
- The contrast in texture between the rough grassland and pasture of the valley floor, the smoother pastoral and arable valley sides and wooded tops.
- The variety of archaeological features and historic churches and field patterns (co-axial, assarts and pre 18th century irregular enclosure) which add time depth as visible reminders of the historic use of land.
- The archaeological sites and monuments along the valley.
- The intact historic villages along the valley bottom including Hambleden and Skirmett with distinctive traditional building materials of brick and flint and timber frame.
- A secluded, tranquil and rural landscape untouched by modern development.

Strength of Character/Intactness:

The strength of character and intactness of the *Hambleden Chalk River Valley* is **strong**. The key characteristics of the Chalk River Valley landscape types are strongly conveyed.

Strategy/Vision: The overall strategy for the Hambleden Valley is to conserve and enhance the character as a chalk valley with its chalk stream, interconnected chalk grassland along steeper valley slopes, intact historic villages in views and areas of interlocked woodland along ridge tops.

Landscape Guidelines:

- Conserve and appropriately manage chalk grassland/downland on the dry valley slopes to encourage chalk grassland species. Support and promote expansion and connection of chalk grassland areas.
- Conserve and appropriately manage juniper scrub habitats.

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- Conserve and manage tree and woodland, notably on higher ground to maintain visual containment and promote biodiversity value.
- Maintain connectivity of habitats.
- Conserve and enhance the water quality and flow of the Hamble Brook.
- Maintain views along the valley and up and down the valley sides including views to villages in their landscape setting.
- Conserve the mosaic of land use and land cover within the valley. Maintain the contrast between smoother farmed valley sides textured wooded tops. Promote appropriate management of farmland, to encourage and create more biodiverse habitats, as well as agriculturally productive landscapes.
- Conserve and enhance important ecological habitats, particularly Priority BAP habitats in the valley.
- Conserve archaeological sites and monuments and their setting, which provide evidence of past use of the land.
- Manage and gap up hedgerow boundaries to provide visual unity and biodiversity value. Coaxial fields, assarts and pre 18th century irregular enclosure are a priority for conservation, restoration and enhancement.
- Conserve the character, fabric and appearance of historic villages. Prevent inappropriate new development which would compromise the intactness of historic villages or further extend settlement into the rural landscape.
- Maintain the rural character of the roads which cut through the valley, avoiding over use and widening.

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Wooded upper valley slopes and tops with pasture and arable valley sides.



Rolling chalk valley sides, with large blocks of woodland interspersed with farmland.



Long views from high valley sides across the character area.



A wide floodplain, supporting rough grazing and pasture. Low settlement density, largely confined to the valley floor.



Small winding rural lanes run up and down valley sides, often enclosed by tall hedgerows and trees.



Traditional building materials include timber, red brick, slate roof tiles, and brick & flint.