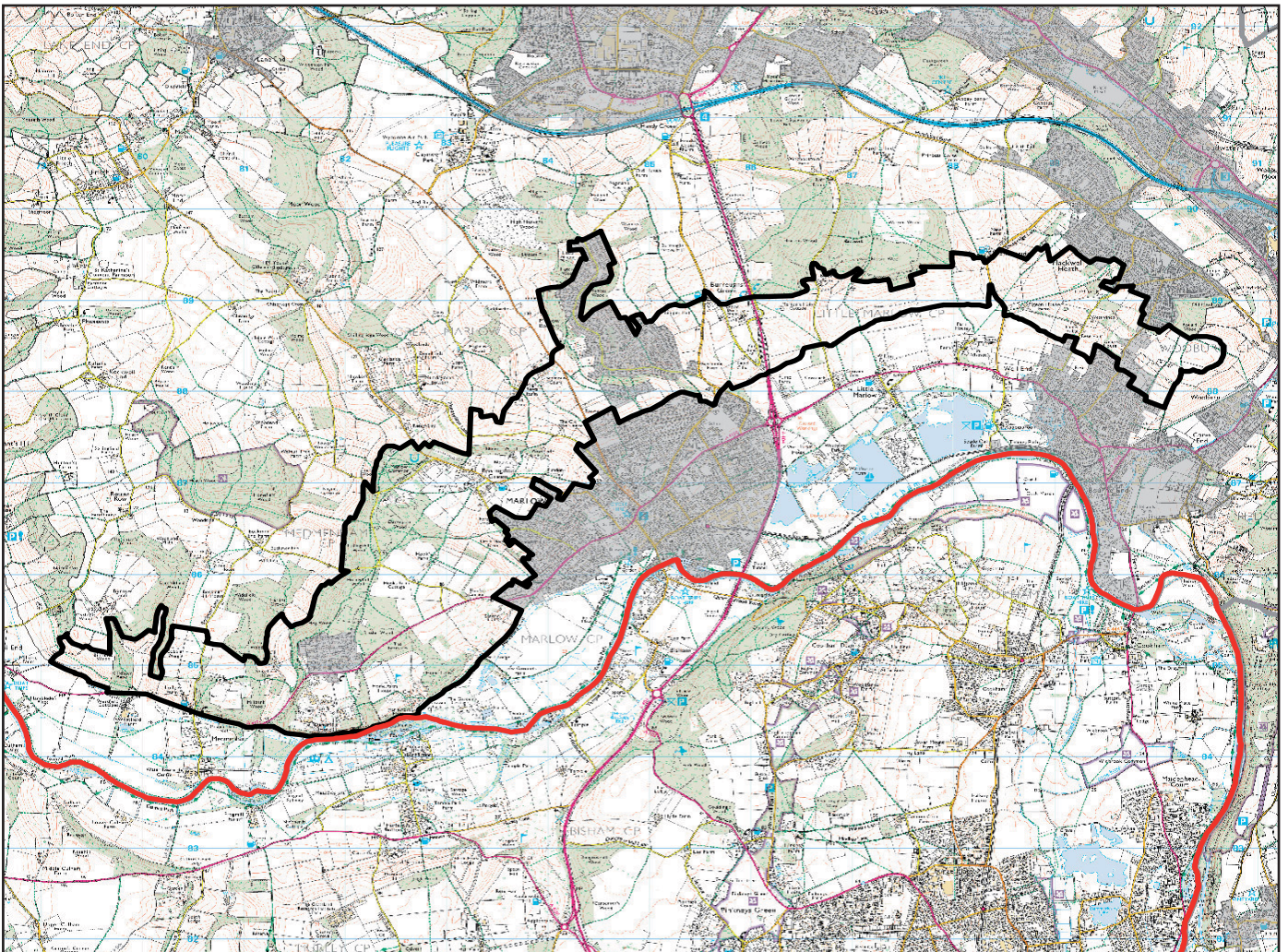
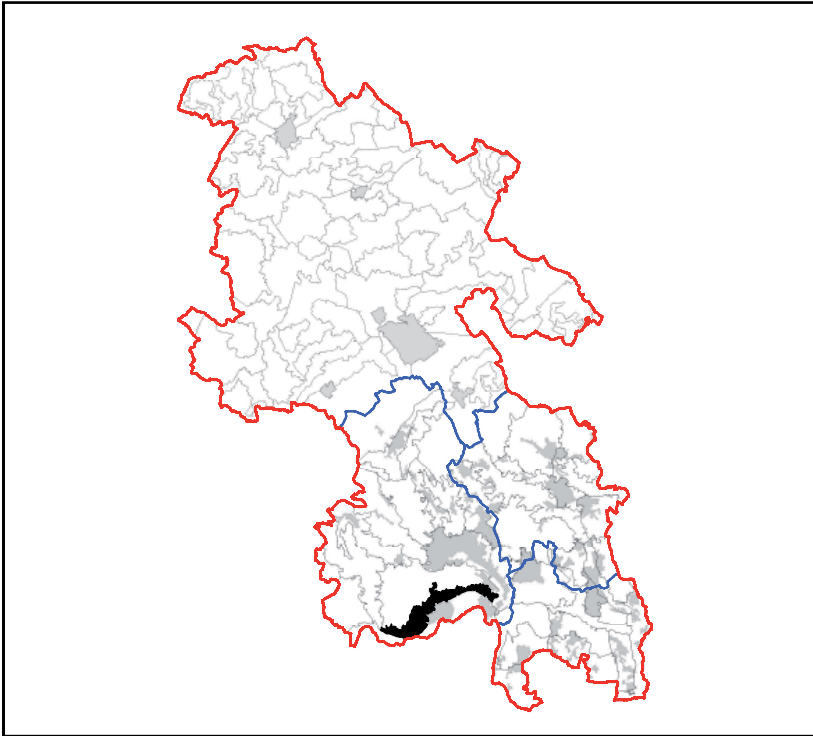


# LCA 21.1 THAMES VALLEY SLOPE



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### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Transitional, gently sloping valley side, gradually descending southwards from the higher rolling farmland to the Thames floodplain.
- Geology of exposed chalk combined with Thames River Terrace Deposits, gives rise to a sloping and gently rolling topography.
- Fields of arable cultivation, pasture and rough grazing delineated by a network of hedgerows and trees.
- Large blocks of woodland (commonly beech and yew) are located along the upper slopes, much of which is ancient woodland. Smaller areas of woodland are interlocked with farmland.
- As well as woodland, some isolated areas of calcareous grassland provide ecological value.
- The edges of Marlow, Marlow Bottom and Danesfield are suburban and modern in character contrasting with Bovingdon Green and scattered farmsteads which have a more historic character. Red brick is a common building material.
- Varying field enclosures with a significant amount of pre 18th century irregular and co-axial systems, interspersed with 20th century enclosure and extended areas with extensive field boundary loss.
- Historic parkland occurs at Harleyford Park and Gardens (Grade II), Danesfield and Wittington. Gates, lodges and walls along the A4155 provide evidence of these 'hidden' landscapes.
- Archaeological monuments include the hillforts of Danesfield Camp and Medmenham Camp (both scheduled monuments) and WWI practice trenches on Marlow Common.
- The area is cut by the Marlow Road (A4155) and the A404. Elsewhere, small rural roads and lanes, often enclosed by trees and hedgerows and sunken in places, cross the slopes.
- A network of footpaths cross farmland and provide access to woodland.
- The open, sloping landform allows long views out across the Thames Valley.
- Away from busy roads and settlement edges, enclosed lanes, farmland and woodland create a rural and peaceful character.

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### DESCRIPTION

**Location and Boundaries:** The *Thames Valley Slope* lies wholly within Wycombe District. It forms the sloping ground which is transitional between the higher rolling farmland to the north and Thames Floodplain to the south. It forms the northern side of the Thames Valley.

**Landscape Character:** A gently sloping and undulating valley landform cut down into the chalk, with Thames River Terrace deposits on the lower slopes. Fields of arable cultivation, pasture and rough grazing occur with large blocks of woodland on upper slopes and smaller areas interlocked with farmland. Some isolated areas of calcareous grassland occur. The area is influenced by the edges of Marlow and Marlow Bottom and Danesfield which have a suburban character and is cut by the A404 and A4155. Otherwise settlement density is relatively low with the hamlet of Bovingdon Green (brick properties around a village green), Marlow Common (properties enclosed in beech woodland) and individual farmsteads. Rural lanes cut across the slopes often enclosed by trees and hedgerows with the occasional sunken lane. There is a significant proportion of pre 18th century irregular and co-axial field systems. Otherwise historic and archaeological interest is concentrated in the west with gate piers, lodges and walls providing evidence of Harleyford Manor, Danesfield House and Wittington concealed within the wider landscape. The hillforts of Danesfield Camp and Medmenham Camp are both scheduled monuments, while the earthworks of WWI practice trenches are present within Pullingshill Wood. The sloping landform allows open views southwards across the Thames Valley with expansive views notable from the edge of Bloom Wood and from Danesfield Camp. Away from busy roads and settlement edge the landscape retains a peaceful and rural character.

**Geology:** Predominantly exposed Upper Chalk geology with Ancestral River Terrace Deposits laid down by the River Thames. Exposed Middle Chalk occurs on steeper incised slopes with some Taplow Gravel Formation. Freely draining slightly acid loamy soils dominate with some areas of shallow lime-rich soils over chalk and freely draining slightly acid but base-rich soils.

**Topography/Landform:** Transitional, gently sloping valley side landform, gradually descending southwards from the higher rolling chalk dipslope to the Thames floodplain. The slopes are incised by dry tributary chalk valleys which run north to south across the area creating localised undulations in the sloping landform.

**Hydrology:** There are no discernable watercourses. There are however occasional ponds scattered across the area associated with farms and villages.

**Land Use and Settlement:** Fields of arable cultivation, pasture and rough grazing are delineated by a network of hedgerows and trees. The east of the area is predominantly arable farmland with woodland more significant in the west interspersed with farmland. There are some large areas of lowland beech and yew woodland on the higher ground (Pullingshill Wood, Davenport Wood, Hollowhill



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Wood) with broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland occurring on both upper and lower slopes.

Rural roads, often enclosed by trees and high hedgerows, cut north to south across the sloping landform. There are some sunken lanes e.g. Chalkpit Lane. The busier Marlow Road (A4155) and the A404 cross the south and east of the area. The edges of Marlow, Bourne End and Flackwell Heath filter into this landscape with the smaller settlement of Bovingdon Green, Marlow Bottom and Danesfield occurring within it. Bovingdon Green is a small hamlet on the outskirts of Marlow, contained by tree and woodland cover with houses set around a village green. Marlow Common consists of properties concealed in beech woodland. The edges of Marlow, Marlow Bottom and Danesfield are more suburban in character. Elsewhere scattered individual properties and farmsteads occur. Red brick is a common building material with occasional brick and flint.

Local footpaths cross the farmed slopes and provide access to woodland (e.g. Hollowhill Wood and Davenport Wood). The Shakespeare's Way and Chiltern Way long distance paths pass through this area. There is a golf course to the south of Danesfield.

**Tree Cover:** Woodland occurs most prominently in the west of the area but also forms a backdrop to the arable slopes in the east of the area (Horton Wood and Bloom Wood). There are some large areas of ancient lowland beech and yew woodland on higher ground (e.g. Pullingshill Wood, Hollowhill Wood and Davenport Wood). Rassier Wood is dominated by coniferous plantation including larch and western red cedar species. Broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland occurs in smaller patches often on the slopes of incised valleys. Hedgerow trees also occur.

**Perceptual/ Experiential Landscape:** The open sloping landform allows for long views southwards over the Thames Valley, particularly from high ground on the edge of Bloom Wood where a large expanse of the Thames Valley can be seen. Woodland provides more enclosure in the west, containing views. This landscape can also be seen from the lower lying Thames floodplain where views up the farmed and wooded slopes are obtained. The busy A404 and A4155 cross the area and the edges of Marlow and Marlow Bottom contribute a suburban character. However enclosed lanes retain a rural character and woodland and open farmland provide areas of tranquillity. The occurrence of historic lodges, walls and gate houses along the A4155 provide evidence of historic houses and parkland (Harleyford, Danesfield and Wittington) hidden within the wider landscape. Marlow Common was colonized in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by artists and writers who built houses in the beech woodland.

**Biodiversity:** Woodland provides a valuable habitat throughout this area, including a local wildlife sites at Hog & Kings Hanging Woods. Hollowhill & Pullingshill Woods are designated SSSI and SAC comprising beech dominated woodland with oak, ash, field maple and yew. The adjoining Marlow Common formerly supported acid

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grassland and heather, but, after the decline in grazing, reverted to Oak, Birch and Rowan woodland.

The network of hedgerows also provides important corridors for wildlife, connecting agricultural land with areas of woodland. There are some small pockets of grassland of ecological interest including Happy Valley (north of Marlow) and a lowland calcareous grassland field at Mill End Farm. BAP priority habitats include lowland beech and yew woodland, lowland calcareous grassland and lowland mixed deciduous woodland. Medmenham Chalk Pit is a local geological site

**Historic Environment:** The historic landscape comprises a mixture of enclosure types, with a significant amount of pre 18th century irregular enclosures and co-axial fields. These older field systems are interspersed with 20th century enclosures and extended areas, with extensive field boundary loss.

Harleyford Manor, a Grade II registered historic parkland occurs partly in this area (the river frontage lies within the adjacent Thames floodplain). It is a mid-late 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape park and pleasure ground possibly laid out by Lancelot Brown, surrounding a 1755 Thames-side villa. Danesfield House (constructed in chalk with views out across the Thames) and Wittington part of the Medmenham Estate are also of historic interest.

The area possesses two notable ancient monuments, the prehistoric hillforts of Medmenham Camp and Danesfield Camp – both designated as scheduled monuments. Danesfield Camp is located on a broad chalk outcrop, a clear vantage point onto the River Thames, and affording wide views across the floodplain into Berkshire. Other archaeological sites of interest include the WWI practice trenches in Pullingshill Wood.

### **Designations:**

- Chilterns AONB
- Registered Parks and Gardens: Harleyford Manor
- Archaeological Notification Sites: 11 No.
- Priority Bap Habitats: 3 types
- Biological Notification Sites: 27 No.
- Local Geology Site: 1 No.
- Local Wildlife Sites: 9 No.
- Scheduled Monuments: Danesfield Camp hillfort and Medmenham Camp
- SAC: Chiltern Beechwoods
- SSSI: 1 No. Hollowhill & Pullingshill Woods

### EVALUATION

#### Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Potential landscape and visual sensitivities are:

- The woodland cover includes areas of ancient beech woodland and provides enclosure, a backdrop to views as well as biodiversity and recreational value.
- The hedgerow network which provides visual unity and ecological connectivity.
- The isolated grassland habitats including calcareous grassland.
- The open, expansive views from higher ground southwards across the Thames Valley.
- Views from the Thames floodplain up the wooded and farmed slopes of this landscape.
- The rural and peaceful character away from busy roads which is due to the mosaic of woodland and farmland, and small enclosed lanes.
- The open farmed slopes between settlements e.g. Marlow and Bovingdon Green and Bourne End and Flackwell Heath.
- Quiet rural lanes which cut the slopes, often enclosed by hedgerows and sunken in places.
- The variety of archaeological monuments including prehistoric hillforts and WWI trenches which reveal the different phases of history within the character area.
- The historic manor houses, gardens and parkland and their boundary features (gates, walls and lodge houses) which provide time depth and historic character.
- Pre 18<sup>th</sup> century co-axial and irregular field system which provide evidence of historic land use.

**Strength of Character/Intactness:** The strength of character and intactness of the *Thames Valley Slope* is **moderate**. Key characteristics are strongly conveyed but evidence of human impact including the suburban edges of settlement and road infrastructure, as well as gappy hedgerows in places, reduces the distinctiveness of character.

**Strategy/ Vision:** To conserve and enhance the mosaic of woodland and farmland, historic and archaeological features and quiet lanes which contribute to the rural, peaceful character of the *Thames Valley Slope* which is retained away from suburban settlement edges.

#### Landscape Guidelines:

- Conserve and appropriately manage areas of woodland for biodiversity and recreational benefits.

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- Conserve and manage the network of hedgerows, gap up hedgerows where necessary and seek to maintain connectivity.
- Promote appropriate management of farmland, to help generate a wildlife rich habitat, and visually attractive landscape.
- Conserve and appropriately manage isolated areas of calcareous grasslands. Support and promote expansion and connection of grassland areas.
- Conserve open, expansive views from higher ground southwards across the Thames Valley.
- Ensure that new buildings and development is sensitively integrated into the landscape through careful siting.
- Maintain undeveloped farmland between settlements and avoid infilling.
- Seek to improve integration of existing suburban edges of settlements through appropriate tree planting.
- Restrict development and avoid road improvements which would alter the character of rural roads.
- Conserve historic elements, such as historic parks and gardens including boundary features, early field enclosures, archaeological sites and monuments, which provide evidence of past use of the land.

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Rolling landform, arable fields interspersed with blocks of woodland.



Enclosed rural lanes cross slopes.



Red brick houses around village green at Bovingdon Green.



Smaller fields of rough grazing close to areas of settlement.



Danesfield House, set amongst formal gardens and overlooking the Thames.