

LCA 13.3 HUGHENDEN CHALK RIVER VALLEY

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- The Hughenden stream flows through the broad, lower chalk valley. Three tributaries feed into the valley from the north, with narrower and steeper valley topography.
- The chalk stream rises at Hughenden Valley, flowing southwards through Hughenden Manor and into High Wycombe. It is spring fed with intermittent flow in summer months.
- Pastoral farmland occurs on the slopes of the steeper tributary valleys and is interspersed with arable farmland on the gentler slopes either side of the Hughenden Stream.
- Field boundaries defined by hedgerows and hedgerow tree lines with woodland boundaries on upper slopes providing more sinuous field boundaries.
- Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland occupies the valley tops and upper slopes creating a physical and visual boundary. Much of the woodland is ancient semi natural or replanted; its ecological value recognised by local wildlife site designations.
- Small areas of chalk grassland persist on upper valley slopes (e.g. Little Stocking Meadow).
- Hughenden Valley village is the dominant settlement with small linear villages (e.g. Lower and Upper North Dean) dispersed along the valley tributaries, Building materials are a mix of modern and traditional, with some brick and flint.
- Assart field systems, often interlocked with blocks of ancient woodland occur throughout. Pre 18th century regular and irregular enclosure and some 20th century enclosure are interspersed between.
- Hughenden Park is a Registered Historic Park, in the lower section of the valley. The open parkland with scattered trees allows views over the surrounding valley and back towards High Wycombe town, and contributes to the character of this area.
- The A4128 runs along the southern part of the valley into High Wycombe, Quieter local roads and lanes pass through the upper tributaries and up valley sides.
- Local footpaths run along the valley floor along and up valley slopes.
- Views are largely contained within the valley, by woodland, wooded field boundaries and topography. Occasional long views from the valley sides.
- Varying levels of enclosure with open valley sides, contrasting with dense wooded tops. The broad valley landform in the south of the area creates a more open landscape contrasting with the narrower, enclosed northern tributaries.
- A tranquil landscape with a rural character, away from busier roads.

DESCRIPTION

Location and Boundaries: The *Hughenden Chalk River Valley* lies within Wycombe District with a small area in Chiltern District. It cuts north to south through the chalk dip slope. The southern boundary is defined by the edge of High Wycombe. The boundaries of the character area are formed largely by the valley topography with the woodland on the valley tops creating a visual boundary when viewed from the valley floor.

Landscape Character: The *Hughenden Chalk River Valley* comprises the broad, gently sloping chalk valley through which the Hughenden Stream flows and its narrower more steeply sloping dry tributary valleys. Pasture dominates the valley floor and slopes particularly the steeper sides of the tributary valleys with arable farmland more common in the broader valley of the Hughenden Stream. Some chalk grassland persists on steeper valley sides. Field boundaries are defined by hedgerows and hedgerow tree lines or, on the upper slopes, defined by woodland which gives a more sinuous edge. Ancient woodland on the valley tops and pockets of chalk grassland on upper valley slopes contribute to biodiversity value. The parkland of Hughenden Manor is prominent on the western side of the Hughenden Stream extending southwards to the edge of High Wycombe and contributing to historic character. Assarted fields also add time depth. Settlement is dispersed along the valley floor with Hughenden Valley village (a modern village in a rural landscape) central in the area and smaller linear villages along the tributary valleys. The landscape to the south is more open contrasting with the steeper more enclosed tributary valleys. Despite proximity to the edge of High Wycombe this is a tranquil landscape with a rural character.

Geology: Upper Chalk on higher valley slopes with Middle Chalk the lower slopes. Alluvium marks the course of the Hughenden Stream between Hughenden Valley Village and High Wycombe with Head (Undifferentiated) continuing along the dry valley floors from Hughenden Valley Village northwards to Lower Warren Farm.

The chalk valley sides give rise to shallow lime-rich soils. Slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage occur on the valley tops marking the transition to the clay with flints geology of the adjacent plateau landscapes. Along the course of the Hughenden Stream floodplain soils are loamy and clayey with naturally high groundwater.

Topography/Landform: The southern part of valley is relatively broad, with gently sloping valley sides, through which the Hughenden Stream flows. In contrast the dry tributary valleys are much narrower with more steeply sloping sides. Valley sides are incised in places creating a gently rolling as well as sloping topography.

Hydrology: The Hughenden Stream emerges south of Hughenden Valley Village and flows southwards through Hughenden Park to High Wycombe where it joins the River Wye. Springs feed the chalk stream with groundwater levels in the chalk

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aquifer varying according to rainfall and season. This accounts for the intermittent flow of the Hughenden stream which can be dry in its upper reaches in the summer. Weirs and a small lake are located along the stream course where it flows alongside the eastern edge of Hughenden Park. The Hughenden Stream is not a prominent feature meandering along the valley bottom.

Land use and Settlement: Improved pasture dominates the valley bottom and sides particularly the steeper sides of the tributary valleys. Arable farmland is common either side of the Hughenden Stream interspersed with pasture in the south of the area. Fields are medium sized, predominantly with boundaries defined by hedgerows or on the upper slopes by woodland which gives a more sinuous edge. Hedgerow trees are characteristic along field boundaries particularly in the southern part of the valley. Broadleaved, mixed, beech and yew woodland occurs along the valley tops. Isolated pockets of lowland calcareous grassland and unimproved grassland are found on steeper valley slopes.

Hughenden Manor, a Grade II Registered Park and Garden is prominent on the western side of the Hughenden Stream, extending from Frogmore Wood on the valley top, along the valley side and bottom to the edge of High Wycombe. The distinctive parkland landscape is a dominant influence on the character of this area. The seasonal Hughenden Stream winds through the park at the bottom of the valley and is dammed in several places to widen it out and includes a small lake with an island.

Settlement is dispersed along the valley bottom. Hughenden Valley Village is the dominant settlement with small villages (e.g. Lower North Dean, Upper North Dean and Bryant's Bottom) occurring linearly along roads. Individual farmsteads occur along the valley floor and on the valley slopes. Hughenden Valley Village is a nucleated settlement comprising modern development, with brick and render building materials common. The smaller hamlets/villages in the north of the area have a more rural character with some use of traditional building materials (brick and flint).

The A4128 runs along the valley bottom, alongside the Hughenden Stream and into High Wycombe. Rural roads run along the bottom of the tributary valleys and occasionally up the valley slopes, connecting to settlements on the adjacent higher plateau land (e.g. Naphill and Great Kingshill). Local footpaths run along the valley floor (e.g. along the Hughenden Stream between Hughenden Manor and Hughenden Valley Village), along and up valley slopes.

Tree Cover: Woodland is located along valley tops and upper slopes. Much of the woodland is ancient semi natural or replanted woodland (e.g. Millfield Wood, Woodcock Wood and Longfield Wood). Broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland is dominant with some lowland beech and yew woodland. Small areas of beech and scrub woodland also occur on the uncultivated steeper tributary valley sides. Trees also occur in hedgerows noticeably on the eastern side of the Hughenden stream valley where they appear in layers up the valley slope. Parkland trees are prominent features in the landscape of Hughenden Manor. Some of the woodland is 'hanging'.

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Perceptual/Experiential Landscape: The southern part of the area through which the Hughenden Stream flows is a broad valley with a more open character than the steeper, narrower dry tributary valleys which are more enclosed by their topography. Open views are afforded from the Hughenden Valley sides down to the valley bottom and opposite valley side. Views out are restricted by the wooded valley tops. The built townscape of High Wycombe is not prominent in views from this area, and is integrated into the lowerlying land with tree cover.

The A4128, Valley Road is a busy road into High Wycombe which cuts along the valley bottom in the southern part of the area. However it is contained within the lowest part of the landscape by hedgerows and trees which help screen it in views e.g. from Hughenden Manor. Roads which run along the tributary valley bottoms are less busy. Although in close proximity to High Wycombe this landscape retains a rural character with the historic parkland of Hughenden Manor adding time depth to the more open southern part of the area. The narrower tributary valleys contributing a more enclosed and secluded character.

Biodiversity: Much of the biodiversity interest lies within the woodlands represented by their designation as local wildlife sites. Millfield Wood is a SSSI designated for its lowland broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland and lowland calcareous grassland. Small areas of chalk grassland local wildlife sites occur on upper valley slopes including at Little Stocking Meadow, Orchard Farm. Prestwood Picnic Site Local Nature Reserve is an area of accessible chalk grassland. BAP priority habitats in this area are lowland beech and yew woodland, lowland calcareous grassland, grassland probably improved, improved grassland, lowland mixed deciduous woodland, chalk headwaters, broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland, calcareous grassland and chalk rivers.

Historic Environment: The medieval park at Hughenden Manor is most notable in terms of archaeology. Other areas of interest include a medieval settlement, a deserted medieval settlement and field systems. Hughenden Manor is a grade II registered park and garden. It is a 19th century landscape park which was the country home for the Victorian Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli. The house is mock Jacobean brickwork contained by woodland. The brick and flint entrance lodge and the church of St Michaels and All Angels are more visible from the wider landscape.

Assarted fields are characteristic in the north and south of this area lying close to ancient woodland, irregular in shape some with curving woodland boundaries. 20th century enclosure and extended fields with extensive boundary loss are notable to the north and south of Hughenden Valley Village. Pre 18th century irregular and regular fields are also present.

Designations:

- Chilterns AONB
- Archaeological Notification Sites: 7No.

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- Conservation Areas; Hughenden, Upper North Dean.
- Priority BAP Habitats: 9 types
- Biological Notification Sites: 37No.
- Local Nature Reserves: 1No.
- Local Geological Sites: 1No.
- Local Wildlife Sites: 18No.
- English Heritage Registered Parks and Gardens: Hughenden Manor, Grade II
- SSSI: 1No. Millfield Wood

EVALUATION

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Potential landscape and visual sensitivities are as follows:

- The valley landform with broader, gently rolling slopes in the south of the area and narrower steeper slopes in the north.
- Views contained within the character area, to and from the valley sides and along the valley floor. A rural character with the townscape of High Wycombe not prominent in views.
- Areas of pasture, which characterise the valley floor and sides.
- Pockets of chalk grassland on upper valley slopes (including Millfield Wood SSSI and Little Stocking Meadow LWS).
- The narrow course of the Hughenden Stream River with its intermittent flow dependent on heavy rainfall to replenish the aquifer.
- The variety of historic and archaeological features, which reveal the different phases of history within the character area including assarts and pre 18th century irregular fields.
- The ancient and semi-natural woodland, with their strong ecological and visual significance.
- The linear settlement pattern within the northern tributary valleys that have a more rural character with some use of traditional building materials (brick and flint).
- The registered (Grade II) parkland of Hughenden Manor on the edge of High Wycombe which contributes to the historic and tranquil character of the area.
- Tranquil and rural landscape in proximity to High Wycombe.

Strength of Character/Intactness: The strength of character and intactness of the *Hughenden Chalk River Valley* is **strong**. The key characteristics of the Chalk River Valleys are strongly conveyed.

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

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Landscape Guidelines:

- Conserve the mosaic of land use and land cover within the valley. Maintain the contrast between the smooth valley side and wooded slopes/tops. Promote appropriate management of farmland, to encourage and create more biodiverse habitats, as well as agriculturally productive landscapes.
- Maintain views to and from valleys sides. Ensure the built townscape of High Wycombe continues to be integrated by managing tree cover.
- Appropriately manage pockets of chalk grassland on upper valley slopes to encourage chalk grassland species and prevent unwanted scrub encroachment. Seek to expand and connect areas of chalk grassland where possible.
- Conserve and seek to enhance flow of the gently meandering Hughenden Stream
- Conserve historic elements, such as archaeological features and field systems 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 and manage tree and woodland cover to ensure a diversity of species and maintain visual containment. Protect and manage ancient woodland.
- Conserve and enhance important ecological habitats notably chalk grassland and other Priority BAP habitats in the valley.
- Conserve the character, fabric and appearance of historic buildings, in villages and hamlets and individual farmsteads. Limit expansion of settlement into the rural landscape and maintain open green space along roads preventing coalescence of linear settlements.
- Seek to maintain the quiet rural character of the roads which cut through the valley, avoiding urbanisation and widening.
- Conserve the historic parkland and landscape setting of Hughenden Manor.

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Hughenden Valley village is nestled within the valley floor.



Arable and pastoral fields dominate valley sides, with long views up and down the valley sides.



The Hughenden Stream meanders through the broad, lower chalk valley, flowing through Hughenden Park.



Historic parkland, with scattered trees at Hughenden Manor.



Quiet rural roads wind up the valley sides, often contained or partly enclosed by woodland.



Traditional materials include brick, flint and red slate, such as at St Michael and All Angels Church at Hughenden Manor.