

LCA 7.5 Bernwood Forest (LCT 7)

Key Characteristics

- Core of medieval hunting forest of Bernwood
- Low undulating landscape
- High density of woodland cover
- Ancient woodland
- Fine oak trees in hedgerows
- Strong hedgerows
- Meandering streams
- Patches of scrub and wet grassland
- Pre 18th century hedgerow pattern in majority of the area
- Dispersed settlement pattern

Distinctive Features

- Parkland around Wotton House and Dorton Park.
- Views up to Brill Hill and Chilton Ridge
- Remote wild areas
- Boarstall Tower
- Boarstall Decoy Pond
- Three Moated Sites
- Large blocks of ancient woodland
- Large area of parkland
- Multiple blocks of neutral grassland

Intrusive Elements

- M40 motorway
- Pylon lines
- Airfield
- Small industrial areas
- Railway line but predominantly in cutting

Location This area is located on the county's western boundary directly to the west of Aylesbury. The M40 motorway passes through the south of the area. The area is unusual in that it has another LCA within it. This is because Brill Hill rises from the centre of this undulating landscape.

Landscape character This area was once the core of the medieval hunting forest of Bernwood. This is reflected today in a generally dispersed settlement pattern and large areas of ancient woodland. The area has a gently undulating landform, which is predominantly pasture. The hedgerows pattern is generally strong and reflects pre 18th century enclosure. The hedges themselves are generally in good condition and often contain fine oak trees generally adding to the sense of a landscape with good tree cover. Much of the area has a tranquil character particularly in the north around Wotton House. The designed parkland and historic features around Boarstall are areas with strong historic landscape features and the sense of a landscape that has changed little for centuries. The intensity of management in places appears to be low with areas of rough, wet grass, scrub and scrubby woodland giving a wild character. However the M40, pylon lines, new golf course and the disused airfield at Wормinghall has disturbed this character on the western side. Views within the area are generally across fields of pasture with strong hedgerows with oak trees with woodland in the background. There are also views out particularly up to Brill and Muswell Hill LCA 9.5 and Chilton Ridge 9.8.

Geology The areas predominantly West Walton calcareous mudstones, with a fragmented and dispersed distribution of limestone marl outcrops. The area surrounds an outcrop of Kimmeridge clay the lower slopes of which fall within the area. In the northwest there is a concentration of Arngrove sandstone, which overlies the calcareous mudstone.

Topography This is an area of gently undulating low clay ground above the lower vale landscape. At the centre of the area is the higher ground of Brill and Muswell Hill LCA 9.5 the ground drops away from the higher ground around the hill. The most marked drop to the vale can be seen near Panshill on the western side. The undulations are created by a series of small stream valleys that drain the area. The elevation range is approximately 65m to 130m AOD.

Hydrology There are no major watercourses within the area but a series of small streams drain down from the high ground around Brill to the River Ray in the north and the river Thames in the south. The course of the streams is generally fairly meandering suggesting they have not been straightened. The parkland around Wotton House contains several large lakes with islands.

Land use and settlement The majority of the area is grassland with about a fifth of the area in arable use. Woodlands and parkland also take up a sizable part of the area. The parkland areas around Wooton and Dorton Park are in a quiet part of the north east of the area. The lakes within Wooton parkland are screened from the surrounding countryside by woodland.

Tree cover The woodland cover is about a fifth of the area. Tree cover within hedgerows is very variable but generally better than in lower vale areas. It is particularly good in areas close to the large woodlands and around Wooton House. Tree cover also tends to be good along streamlines and close to settlements. It is also strong on the railway embankments adjacent to Rushbeds Wood

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Biodiversity There are three priority habitat types within Bernwood Forest, arranged within three distinct areas. The first is a small patch of lowland meadow, part of the Shabbington Wood SSSI complex in the southwest; the second is an area of lowland mixed deciduous woodland around Boarstall Decoy; the third is a large area of lowland meadow, lowland mixed deciduous woodland and wood pasture parkland around Wotton.

Broad habitats of district significance within the area include neutral and calcareous grassland, broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland, and standing open water (including a lake west of Wotton Underwood).

The remainder of the LCA is largely arable and grassland. The arable land tends to be distributed mainly in the south, whereas grassland is more prevalent in the north. Grassland is mainly improved, but neutral and unimproved grassland is also present. There are also large amounts of woodland throughout the area, both broadleaved and coniferous.

Bernwood Forest contains an exceptionally large area of designated sites and broad habitats of district significance compared to the rest of the District.

Historic landscape This area is within the core of the medieval hunting forest of Bernwood which originated in the 10th century and lasted until disafforestation in the 17th century. The majority of the area retains the pattern of pre 18th century enclosure but there are also large areas of ancient woodland including, Shabbington, Rushbeds and Boarstall Woods, assarted fields, meadows, fossilised strips. There is also the nationally important 18th century designed landscape of Wotton House and another designed landscape at Dorton Park.

The settlement pattern reflects the wooded nature of the landscape, largely composed of dispersed forms including farm clusters such as Ixhill and isolated farmsteads. However, notable exception to this pattern are the more nucleated villages of Dorton and Oakley. The area is also archaeologically rich; the hamlet of Boarstall contains a rare surviving medieval tower and the earthworks of the former village. Boarstall was an important medieval pottery production centre linked to Brill, the seat of the chief forester of Bernwood and the site of a sequence of sieges during the English Civil War. Earthworks of a deserted medieval village can be seen within the grounds of Wotton Park, while across the character area there are several earthworks of former medieval moated sites. Another notable feature is the exceptional preserved duck decoy pond at Boarstall, under custodianship of the National Trust. This landscape also possesses some industrial history; the disused 19th century line of the Brill Tramway runs along the southern boundary of Rushbeds Wood, while the later Risborough to Bicester railway line opened in 1906, bisects the landscape south of Wotton Park. The last significant episode in landscape history was the construction of Oakley airfield during the Second World War, this was opened as a training airfield in 1942 but returned to agricultural use during the 1950s however, the runway and perimeter track still survives.

This landscape has a high amenity value, containing many prominent historic attractions; the most significant sites are in private management (Wotton Park) or managed by the National Trust. The landscape is actively promoted containing a number of rights of in the Bernwood Jubilee Way guide books.

Designations

Conservation Area at Wotton Underwood

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EHRHP&G at Wotton House
Scheduled Ancient Monuments: Medieval Village
Archaeological Notification Areas – 33 No.
SSSI: Rushbeds Woods & Railway Cuttings
CWS – 13 No.
BNS – 10 No.

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View from looking up to the northern slopes of Brill Hill.



The woodland cover in the area is generally good and the areas of scrub and less intensively managed ground enhance the sense of historic continuity.

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Summary of Condition/Sensitivity Analysis

Condition	Very Good
Pattern of elements:	Coherent
Visual detractors:	Few
Visual unity:	Unified
Cultural integrity:	Good
Ecological integrity:	Strong
Functional integrity:	Very strong

Sensitivity	Moderate
Distinctiveness:	Distinct
Continuity:	Historic
Sense of place:	Moderate
Landform:	Apparent
Tree cover:	Intermittent
Visibility:	Moderate

Guidelines	Conserve and Reinforce
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Condition

The condition of this landscape is very good. This relates to the fact that the landscape pattern of elements and in particular the hedgerows and woodland create a coherent landscape pattern. The area as a whole is considered to have few visual detractors although there is an area in the south where the M40, pylon lines and a disused airfield have a significant impact. The area is considered to be visually unified. The cultural integrity is good this relates to the strong hedgerow pattern and wide range of feature including parkland and Boarstall Tower and Decoy with strong historic associations. Ecological integrity is strong because of the large areas of designated sites and broad habitats of District significance, and strong connectivity. The good cultural integrity and the strong ecological integrity combine to give a very strong functional integrity.

Sensitivity

This landscape has a distinct landscape character and a good sense of historic continuity particularly with relation to the medieval hunting forest of Bernwood. This gives it a moderate sense of place. The landform is apparent. The tree cover is considered to be intermittent because although it is generally higher than in much of the area hedgerows are not generally tree lined. The visibility of the area is considered to be moderate. The moderate sense of place and moderate visibility combine to give an area of moderate sensitivity.



Strong hedgerows, areas of scrub and fine oak trees are distinctive features of the landscape character of this area.

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Landscape Guideline Conserve and Reinforce

The landscape guidelines for Bernwood Forest are as follows:

- Encourage the retention and strengthening of the existing historic hedgerow pattern with new hedgerow trees, predominantly oak.
- Maintain and improve the condition of existing hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes.
- Encourage the survey and preservation of veteran trees.
- Maintain the condition and extent of woodland, particularly ancient broadleaved woodland, using traditional techniques to create and manage a wide diversity of habitats.
- Maintain extent of neutral grassland and parkland.
- Promote information and understanding about the historic importance and appropriate management of historic woodland features such as irregular edges, assarts, banks and ditches.
- Maintain the sparsely settled and slightly remote character of the landscape.
- Retain and enhance views from publicly accessible land to surrounding higher ground.
- Consider encouraging the establishment of new woodland reflecting the historic pattern to reduce the visual impact of intrusive elements such as pylon lines and motorway.
- Retain and promote areas of less intensive agricultural production and wet grassland for habitat and biodiversity benefit.
- Encourage the interpretation of the areas rich historic environment including that of the medieval hunting forest of Bernwood.
- Maintain dispersed settlement pattern.
- Encourage conservation, survey and restoration of historic parkland.
- Maintain the setting of the historic parklands of Dorton and Wotton.
- Ensure the preservation of archaeological earthworks by maintaining grassland.



The character of the area is weakened close to the M40 where the motorway, pylon line and new golf course fragments the traditional landscape pattern and character.