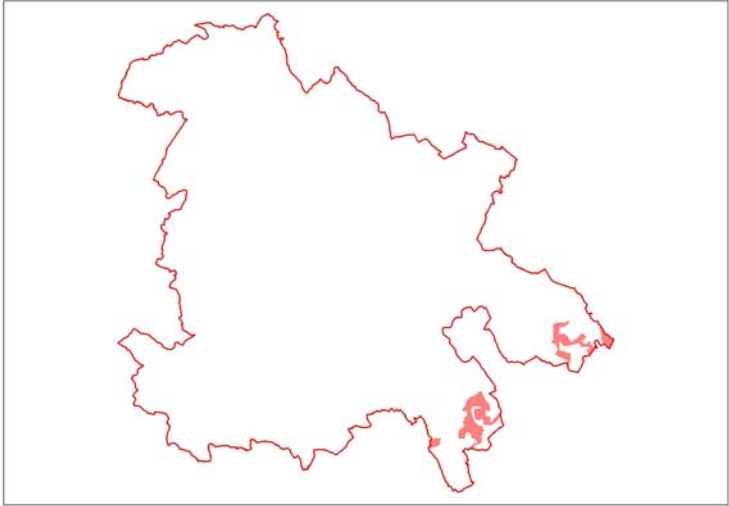


LCT 11 Chalk Escarpment

Constituent LCAs

LCA 11.1 Chiltern Scarp



Escarpment at Ivinghoe Beacon.

LCT 11 Chalk Escarpment

Key Characteristics

- Steeply sloping chalk escarpment eroded into a network of dry valleys and promontories
- Continuity interrupted by deep valleys
- Extensive woodland cover
- Open areas of grazing land
- Archaeologically important settlements and earthworks
- Ancient semi-natural woodland

Distinctive Features

- Chalk downland noted for its biodiversity
- Beech ‘hangers’
- Local ‘coombes’
- Narrow incised lanes climbing up the scarp face
- Beacon Hill viewpoint
- Bacombe Hill (Nature Reserve)
- Ridgeway long distance footpath
- Sparse settlement
- Irregular shaped field parcels
- Recreational use
- Golf course north of Aston Hill
- Fragment of Whipsnade Animal Park at Dagnell

General Description

Accords with CA 110 Chilterns, identified by the Character of England map and with LCT ULA identified by the National Landscape Typology. To the north the escarpment is enclosed by the Foothills which sit within LCT 10. Above the scarp and to the southeast lies the Chalk Dip Slope LCT 12. Geologically the scarp consists of Lower Chalk overlain by Middle Chalk.

There are four separate fragments of chalk scarp, the continuity of which has been interrupted by the Wendover Gap, the Tring Gap and the Hemel Hempstead Gap. The area is extensively covered by woodland, which is a mixture of ancient semi-natural woodland, secondary woodland and conifer plantation. Locally the steep sided dry valleys are referred to as ‘coombes’ and woodland cover on the steep sided slopes is referred to as “hanging”. The type has an important historic heritage and the chalk promontories were often developed as fortified settlements. Scheduled Monuments are recorded at a number of locations including Boddington Hill to the east of Wendover and at Ivinghoe Beacon. The chalk promontories were used for burial mounds as well as fortified settlements.

There are several SSSIs and an SAC within the area of the escarpment. The area covered by biodiversity designations is significant, only the eastern area does not include one. Aston Clinton Ragpit SSSI supports both Chiltern and autumn gentians, and a number of orchid species; including frog, bee, fly, fragrant, pyramid, common spotted, great and lesser butterfly orchids. The Bacombe and Coombe Hills SSSI includes an area of very species rich example of chalk grassland typical of this part of the Chilterns. Bacombe Hill, situated to the east of Coombe Hill, supports a mosaic of species-rich open chalk grassland, hawthorn and juniper scrub, woodland and hazel coppice. Also of special interest is the occurrence of rare insects associated with the juniper bushes.

Dancers End SSSI, east of Halton, sits in a fold of the scarp and includes unimproved chalk grassland, scrub, coppiced and regenerating woodland and plantations. Species include wood vetch (the only Bucks locality for this species). Amongst the 25 butterfly species recorded is the Duke of Burgundy. Clearings in the woodland are managed for sheep grazing or have been allowed to colonise with scrub.

The Pavis & Northill Woods SSSI includes ancient woodland with a very diverse ground flora and a varying species mix depending on location – poorly drained beech, oak, ash and birch grades to a beech hanger with ash and wych elm on the steepest part of the escarpment.

Farther to the north-east lies the Ivinghoe Hills SSSI. This area comprises one of the largest botanically rich areas of chalk downland in the Chiltern Hills and, together with areas of scrub in the deeper coombes, provides suitable habitat for a wide range of birds, invertebrates and plants. Additional interest includes the ancient woodlands of Clipper Down Wood and The Coombe that

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support a varied ground flora and bryophytes indicative of these older woodlands. A small area at Gallows Hill supports an interesting population of arable flora.

The Icknield Way/Ridgeway crosses this area, its status as a prehistoric trackway is now disputed. Wendover Woods are managed for public access by car with themed trails and picnic sites. Ivinghoe Beacon is popular with walkers of the long distance footpath network and by other recreational users.

An area of great sensitivity and a high quality landscape, reflected in its current status as lying within a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The area is also popular because it affords long distance views over the Vale landscape and to the fringes of Milton Keynes to the north.