

2 Method Statement

- 2.1 The study follows the accepted method for landscape character assessment as set out in '*Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland*' published by The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage in 2002.
- 2.2 The District-wide assessment has been prepared within the framework of the 'Character of England Landscape, Wildlife and Cultural Features Map' produced in 2005 by The Countryside Agency with support from English Heritage (refer to **Figure 2.1**). It is also undertaken with in the context of and with reference to:
- The Chiltern Landscape – A landscape assessment (1992) by Land Use Consultants for the Countryside Commission.
 - The Landscape Plan for Buckinghamshire – part I landscape character assessment (2000) by Hyder Consulting for Buckinghamshire County Council.
 - The Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment (2008) by Jacobs Babbie for Aylesbury Vale District Council and Buckinghamshire County Council.
 - South Bucks Landscape Character Assessment (2003) by Atkins for South Bucks District Council.
- 2.3 The method aims to be transparent, objective, robust and consistent with that used in the existing Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment. It has involved five main stages, described below:
- Data Collation
 - Characterisation
 - Field Survey
 - Evaluation
 - Consultation
- 2.4 Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was used throughout the study as the tool for collating, manipulating and presenting data.

DATA COLLATION

- 2.5 **Baseline Data:** This stage involved the collation and mapping of a wide range of existing information on the characteristics of South Bucks principally from the BLIS GIS dataset including baseline maps of landform, geology, hydrology, historic landscape, biodiversity, land use, settlement and archaeology (refer to **Appendix I**). It also included collation of information relating to the 'perceptual' characteristics of the landscape, such as literary references or as a source of artistic inspiration.

CHARACTERISATION

- 2.6 The process of characterisation draws together all the information outlined above, to develop a draft classification of the landscape character of South Bucks. The approach follows best practice as promoted by the Countryside Agency in the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) in maintaining a distinction between landscape types and character areas, and developing a hierarchical approach as follows:
- **Landscape Types** - which are generic and share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences, e.g. 'Wooded Terrace and 'Floodplain'.
 - **Landscape Character Areas** - which are single and unique, discrete geographical areas of the landscape type, e.g. 'Burnham Beeches Wooded Terrace' or 'Dorney Floodplain.'
- 2.7 For the purposes of this District-wide assessment emphasis has been placed upon the definition and subdivision of the landscape at a scale of 1:25 000 and at the Landscape Character Area scale i.e. the identification of particular geographical areas of distinctive landscape.

FIELD SURVEY











- 2.8 A field survey was undertaken to validate the draft characterisation. This specifically focussed on:
- Verification and fine-tuning of the classification of the landscape character areas (and types) identified.
 - Making refinements to landscape character area (and type) boundaries and names.
 - Recording landscape character.
 - Assessing sensitivities and strength of character/ intactness to inform the landscape strategy and guidelines.
- 2.9 A systematic and rigorous approach was adopted for the survey, with information recorded on 1:25,000 scale maps and a Field Survey Sheet (see **Appendix 2**). A comprehensive photo record was also made.

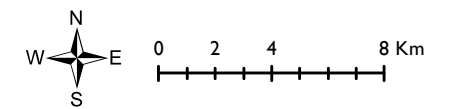
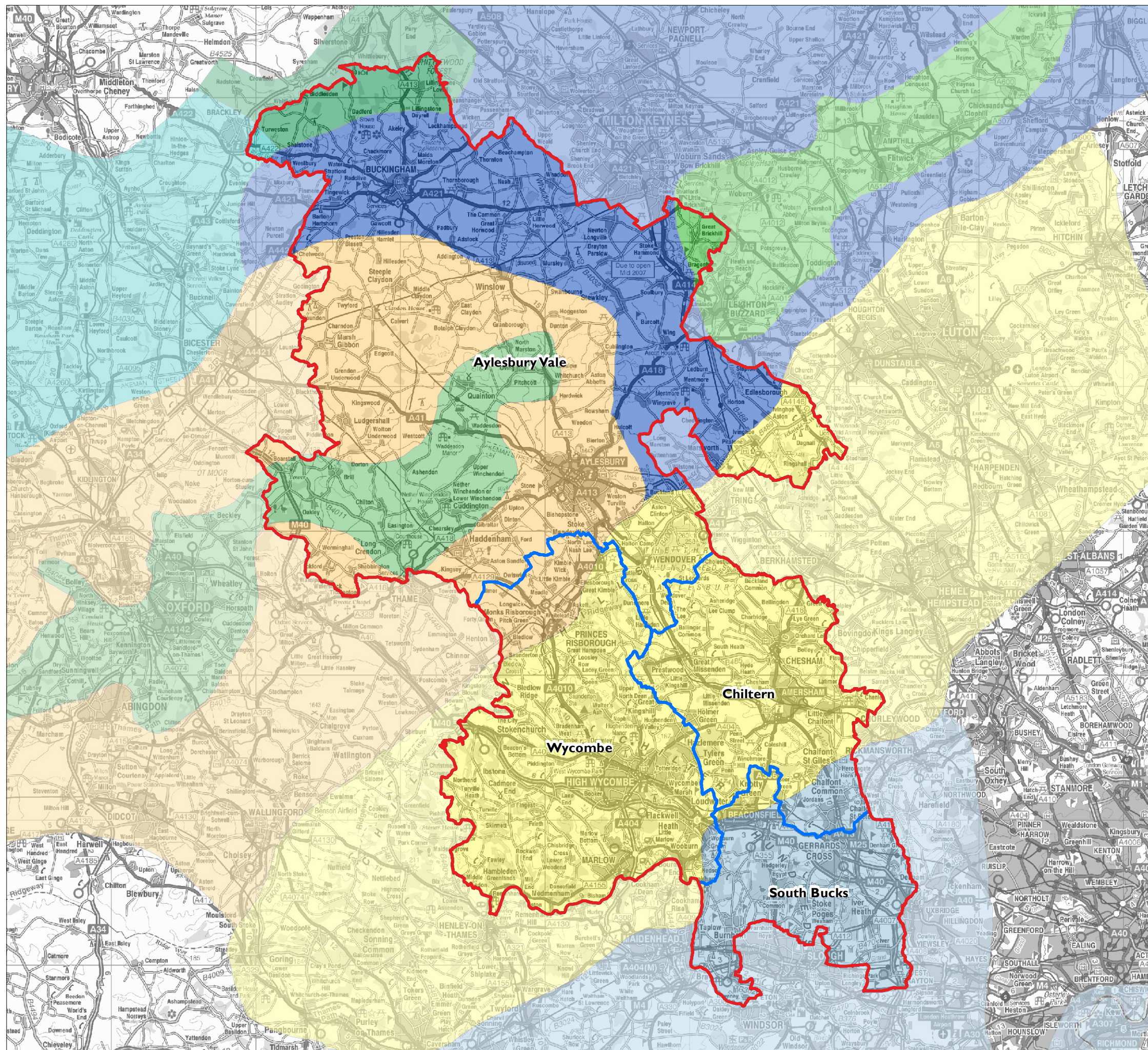
NOTES ON THE CHARACTERISATION

- 2.10 **A note on boundary lines:** The precision of boundaries drawn around landscape character areas and types varies with the scale and level of detail of the assessment. This assessment has been mapped at a scale of 1:25,000 which means that it is suitable for use at this scale only.
- 2.11 In reality landscape character rarely changes abruptly and the boundaries indicated in The South Bucks Landscape Character Assessment therefore sometimes represent zones of transition in character relating to changes in topography, geology, soils, cultural patterns, land use etc. rather than marked changes on the ground. In practice boundaries of this nature have frequently been drawn to follow physical or mappable features such as roads, lanes or field boundaries which provide 'best fit'.

Figure 2.1: National Character Areas

Key

-  Buckinghamshire County boundary
-  District boundaries
- National Character Areas**
-  Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge
-  Bedfordshire & Cambridgeshire Claylands
-  Chilterns
-  Cotswolds
-  Midvale Ridge
-  Thames Valley
-  Upper Thames Clay Vales
-  Yardley-whittlewood Ridge



Date: 17/08/2011



- 2.12 **A note on built areas:** This is an assessment of the rural landscape. The land within the development limits of villages and settlements was not studied in detail as part of the LCA. The smaller villages have been considered and form part of the description on landscape character, with a particular emphasis on understanding settlement pattern and the relationship of settlements to their landscape setting. However, no specific townscape or urban character assessments were undertaken of the more built-up areas such as Beaconsfield. Where these occur within the boundaries of Character Areas it is the undeveloped area surrounding the settlement to which the description refers.

EVALUATION

- 2.13 The approach for the evaluation undertaken as part of the South Bucks LCA aims to follow current best practice and make judgements on the landscape highlighting potential sensitivities and identifying future management needs. More detailed is provided in the following 'Format of the Assessment' section.

CONSULTATION

- 2.14 A stakeholder workshop was held in February 2011 with an invited audience of c.40 participants including representatives of National Agencies (e.g. National Trust, English Heritage, Natural England and the Environment Agency) local interest groups (wildlife groups, local history, local societies etc) plus County and District councillors. The objectives of the workshop were to:
- Explain the process and purpose of Landscape Character Assessment and relevance to Buckinghamshire.
 - Validate the characterisation map including boundaries, names and key characteristics.
 - Understand what people value as important/special about the Districts of Chiltern, Wycombe and South Bucks and the reasons why.
- 2.15 The views and comments of participants were recorded and integrated into the relevant character area descriptions to validate the report. A summary of the workshop is provided at **Appendix 3**. Values recorded at the stakeholder workshop are shown organised by character area in **Appendix 4**.

FORMAT OF THE ASSESSMENT

- 2.16 An overview of each landscape type is provided, with more detailed information provided for each landscape character area within the type.

Landscape Types

- 2.17 Each section is initiated by a summary map illustrating the location of the landscape type in relation to the District as a whole, and identifying constituent character areas. An integrated summary of key characteristics of the landscape type and a general description is provided.

Landscape Character Areas

- 2.18 The majority of information is provided at the detailed character area level. Each character area has a summary map illustrating its location in relation to the District as a whole and a more detailed map (not to scale) of the character area. A sheet of illustrative photographs is also provided. Information is presented as follows (note headings and content are consistent with the Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment produced in May 2008):

Key Characteristics: an integrated bullet point summary of key characteristics of the character area.

Description

Location and Boundaries: a brief description of where the area lies within the District. It includes information about how the boundaries of the area were defined and its relationship with adjacent areas.

Landscape Character: a broad summary drawing together the character that defines the area as set out in the following more detailed descriptions.

Geology, topography/landform and hydrology: background information on the geology landform and hydrological features which contribute to character is provided. Above Ordnance Datum is referred to throughout the report as AOD. Refer to Figures a, b and c in **Appendix I**.

Land Use and Settlement: the pattern of land use, settlement and building materials as well as the road and footpath network is described. The information has been obtained from 1:25,000 OS map, the Integrated Habitat Survey (IHS) (refer to Figure i in **Appendix I**) and field observations.

Tree Cover: the extent, location and type of tree and woodland cover is described. The information has been obtained from IHS and field observations.

Perceptual/Experiential Landscape: This section covers perceptual characteristics, tranquillity (refer to Figure j in **Appendix I**), countryside access, and artistic and literary perceptions as follows:

Perceptual characteristics include those defined in the landscape character assessment guidance i.e. scale, enclosure, diversity texture, form, line colour, balance, movement, pattern, etc. focussing on how specific elements contribute to the aesthetic characteristics.

Tranquillity is defined by analysis of noise levels, perceived naturalness, visible overt human impact and density of settlement/ diffusion of people. These criteria have been drawn from the University of Northumbria's method for defining tranquillity¹.

Literary perceptions and cultural associations are drawn from existing published AONB assessment. Perceptions recorded through descriptive writings, visual arts and music can indicate how the landscape has changed over time, and communicate the special perceptual qualities of the landscape.

Biodiversity: a summary of the key biodiversity features using information from IHS, distribution of designated sites, and information contained in the designated site citations. Refer to Figure g, h and i in **Appendix I**.

Historic Environment: a summary of the key historic processes and features and their contribution to character using information from the historic landscape classification, and distribution of designated sites. Refer to Figure d and e in **Appendix I**.

Designations: a list of designations specific to each character area is provided.

Evaluation

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities: These are the key positive landscape and visual attributes that, if lost or altered, would change the character of the landscape.

Strength of Character/ Intactness: Relates to the condition of the landscape and how strongly key characteristics are conveyed.

Landscape Strategy: Drawing on the information on landscape character and an understanding of the key sensitivities an overall strategy for the landscape is developed. Within the high quality landscape of the District the main strategy is for conservation of existing character with some enhancement.

Landscape Guidelines: For each character area a set of guidelines has been developed, covering landscape management considerations and development considerations. The guidelines indicate the actions required, with reference to the overall landscape strategy in order to ensure that distinctive character is maintained.

¹ Mapping Tranquillity: Defining and Assessing a Valuable Resource', co-commissioned by the Campaign to Protection Rural England and the Countryside Agency.

