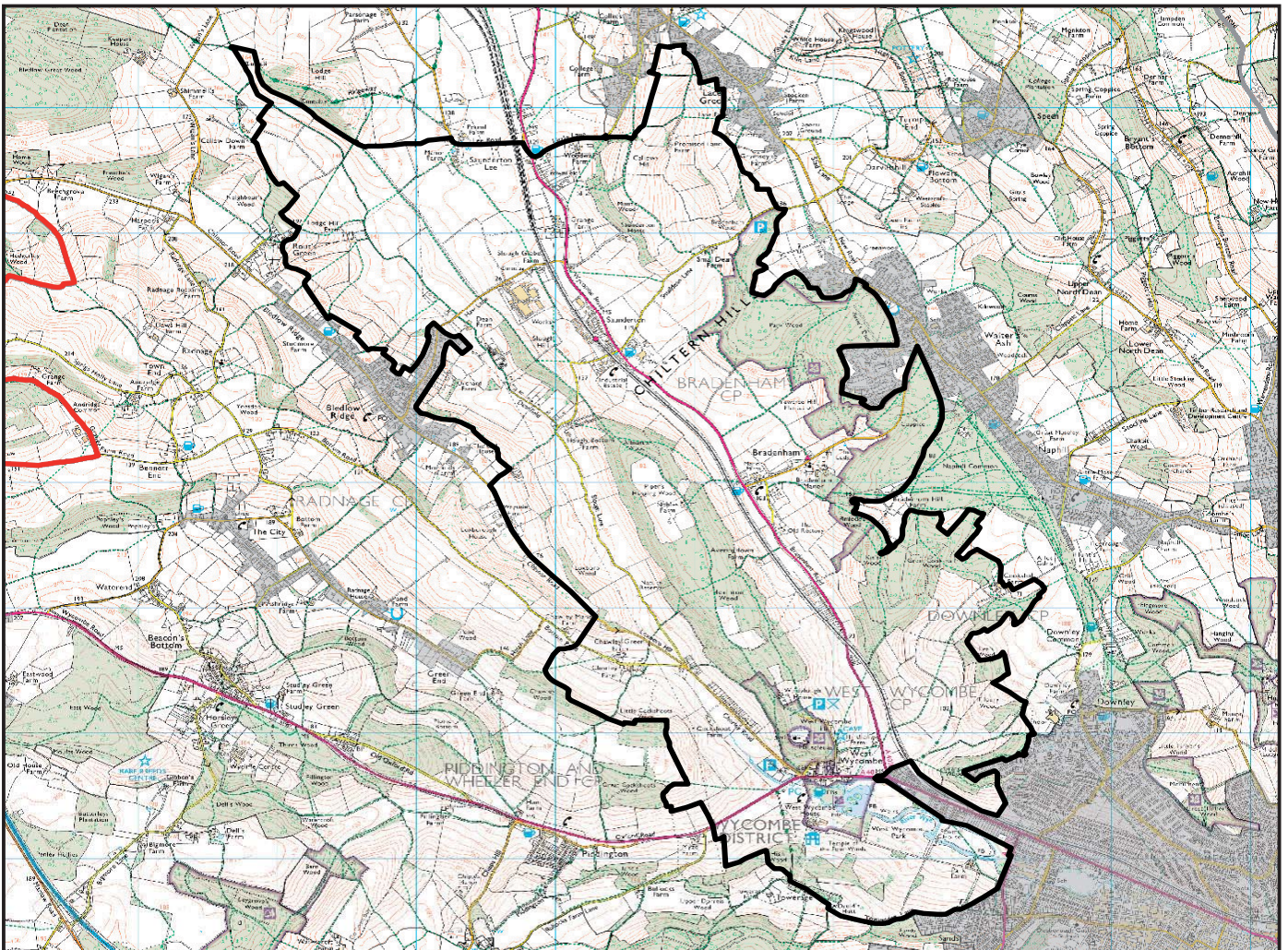
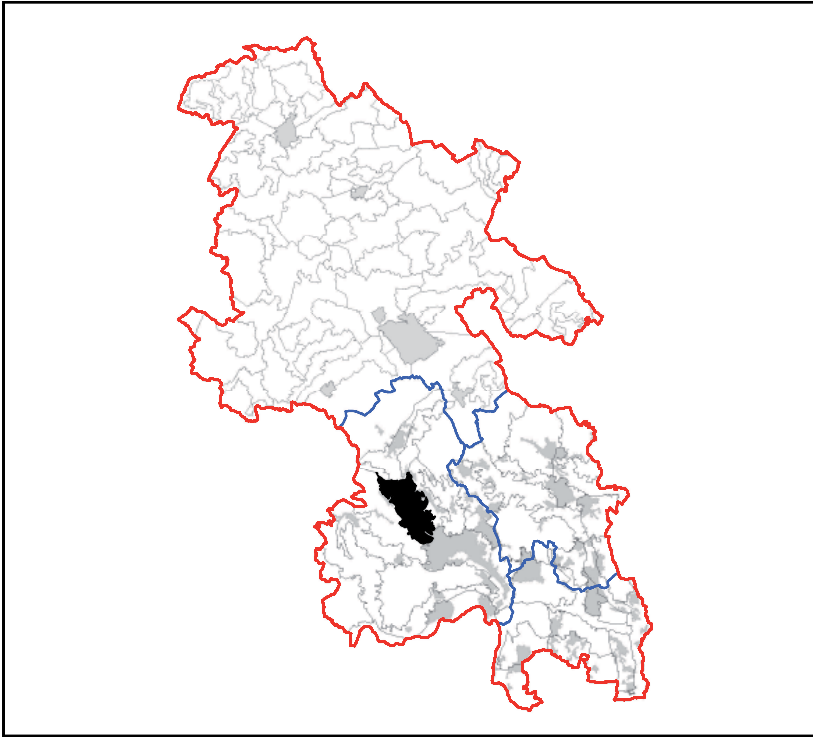


# LCA 13.4 WYE CHALK RIVER VALLEY



## LCA 13.4 WYE CHALK RIVER VALLEY

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- The River Wye flows in the south of the area with the valley landform extending northwards either side of West Wycombe/Slough Hill to create two broad dry chalk valleys which run parallel to each other before merging in the north of the area.
- Underlying geology of chalk with predominantly freely draining lime-rich soils. Notable presence of Bradenham Puddingstones at Bradenham Sarsens, a local geological site.
- The River Wye rises at West Wycombe and flows through west Wycombe Park to High Wycombe, unnoticed in the wider landscape.
- Arable farmland dominates the valley slopes and often extends down into the valley bottoms with some pastoral grassland. Fields are medium sized bound by hedgerows with hedgerow trees frequent.
- Woodland is located on higher ground, along valley tops and upper slopes in the east of the area and across the ridge in the centre of the area. Much of the woodland is ancient semi natural or replanted woodland (e.g. Hearnton Wood which comprises both).
- Areas of beech woodland and chalk grassland contribute significantly to biodiversity value including Bradenham Woods, Park Wood and The Coppice SAC and SSSI of international importance.
- Settlement is dispersed comprising small linear settlements and isolated farmsteads. Bradenham and West Wycombe are historic villages with brick and flint buildings. Modern houses are notable on the edges of Saunderton.
- A large area of pre 18th century co-axial fields enclosure in the west, and two areas of assart systems in the north and south, are interspersed within ancient woodland. Areas of pre 18th century irregular enclosure and 20th century fields are scattered throughout.
- Historic parkland and manor houses at West Wycombe and Bradenham and a number of scheduled monuments (including a hill fort on West Wycombe Hill, Grim's ditch and a range of barrows).
- The A4010 runs along the bottom of the eastern valley, running parallel to the London to Birmingham railway line. Smaller local roads run along the western valley floor and up valley sides. Local footpaths run up the valley slopes and through woodland.
- Extensive views along the valley and from valley sides. The striking church and mausoleum on West Wycombe Hill and the escarpment are prominent features in views.
- A simple, uniform and legible landscape, with varying levels of enclosure. Open valley floor and rolling valley sides contrast with dense woodland areas along higher valley sides. Beyond the edge of High Wycombe the landscape retains a rural character.

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### DESCRIPTION

**Location and Boundaries:** The *Wye Chalk River Valley* lies within Wycombe District. It cuts north to south through the chalk dip slope with higher plateaus and ridges to the east and west. To the north the valley sides meet the chalk escarpment and there is a transition between the valley floor to the scarp foothills which form the flat land at the base of the escarpment. The southern boundary is defined by the edge of High Wycombe. The boundaries of the character area are formed largely by the valley topography however West Wycombe Hill occurs in the centre of the area, splitting the valley into two in the south of the area.

**Landscape Character:** The *Wye Chalk River Valley* comprises two parallel dry chalk valleys which converge in the south of the area below West Wycombe Hill where the River Wye rises and flows eastwards through West Wycombe Park into High Wycombe. The valleys lie either side of the predominantly wooded ridgeline which extends from West Wycombe Hill to Slough Hill, beyond here they merge again to form a broad valley landform transitional with the escarpment foothills. Valley slopes are predominantly arable farmland which extends down into the valley bottoms, interspersed in places by pasture grassland. Ancient woodland on the valley tops and central ridgeline, with pockets of chalk grassland on upper valley slopes (including Bradenham Woods, Park Wood and The Coppice SAC and SSSI) contribute to biodiversity value. The church and mausoleum of the Grade I registered West Wycombe Park landscape are prominent features in views including from Bradenham Manor, with views to the escarpment afforded from the north of the area. A strong time depth is evident within the landscape, with dispersed historic brick and flint villages, such as West Wycombe and Bradenham, associated manor houses and historic parkland, a number of scheduled monuments (e.g. the hillfort on West Wycombe Hill, Grim's Ditch and barrows), and ancient field systems (pre 18<sup>th</sup> century co-axial and assarts). Considering proximity to the edge of High Wycombe the landscape retains a rural character.

**Geology:** Dominated by Middle Chalk, with a capping of Clay with Flint on the upper valley side, tops and central West Wycombe Hill. Alluvium occurs along the course of the Wye River in the south of the area with Head (undifferentiated) on the lowest ground within the dry valleys either side of West Wycombe Hill. Bradenham Sarsens, a local geological site lies on the valley sides at Bradenham. The sarsens represent an ancient river deposit, known as Bradenham Puddingstone, their presence in abundance here is due to the field having never been ploughed.

The underlying geology gives rise to a range of soil types. On higher ground slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage dominate, reflecting the presence of clay with flints. Shallow lime-rich soils occur across the Middle Chalk valley sides with more freely draining lime-rich loamy soils on flatter, lower ground. Loamy and clayey floodplain soils with naturally high groundwater occur

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along the course of the River Wye.

**Topography/Landform:** The elevated ground of Slough Hill, Hearnton Wood and West Wycombe Hill (155m -180m AOD) are centrally located, creating two chalk valley landforms either side, which run parallel to each other. The valleys intersect to the south of West Wycombe Hill and The River Wye flows along the valley bottom. In the north of the area, beyond Slough Hill, the parallel valleys merge to create a broader and wider landform, transitional with the scarp foothills.

Generally the valley sides are gently sloping becoming steeper in their upper reaches. They are incised by small dry valleys which generates a smoothly rolling topography.

**Hydrology:** The River Wye rises at West Wycombe and flows through High Wycombe to the Thames at Bourne End. The lake in West Wycombe Park was created by damming the River Wye and is a dominant feature of the pleasure grounds. From West Wycombe Park the river flows through grassland before entering High Wycombe on its north eastern edge. Fed by groundwater from the chalk aquifer, the Wye relies on heavy rainfall to maintain the flow.

**Land use and Settlement:** Arable farmland dominates the valley slopes and often extends down in to the valley bottoms. Fields of pasture also occur along the valley slopes, more noticeably in the east of the area. Areas of calcareous grassland occur on upper slopes including at West Wycombe Hill. Broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland and lowland beech and yew occur on the highest ground interspersed with pockets of coniferous woodland. Fields are medium sized and bound by hedgerows with hedgerow trees.

The landscape of the National Trust owned West Wycombe Park with pleasure grounds, parkland and woodland, lies in the south of the area. The park extends up to West Wycombe Hill and lies either side of the A40 and village of West Wycombe which is also owned by the National Trust. West Wycombe Village is closely associated with the 18<sup>th</sup> century creation of the Park and House by the Dashwood family. It is an intact historic village with buildings dating from the 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century. Red brick and brick and flint are common building materials. Saunderton and Bradenham are linear villages and isolated rows of houses occur along Chorley Road and Bradenham Road. Farmsteads are also scattered through the area. Bradenham is a picturesque village with red brick cottages clustered around a village green, with a 17<sup>th</sup> century red brick manor house and grey flint church. At Saunderton there is evidence of early settlement (St Mary and St Nicholas Church) but also modern red brick properties.

The suburban edge of High Wycombe extends into this area along the A40. The A4010 and railway line connecting High Wycombe to Princes Risborough run north- south through this landscape with the A40 cutting westwards across the area. Local footpaths run up and down the valley slopes and through woodland.

**Tree Cover:** Woodland is located on higher ground, along valley tops and upper

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slopes in the east of the area and across the ridge in the centre of the area. Much of the woodland is ancient semi natural or replanted woodland (e.g. Hearnton Wood, Allnuts Wood and Great Cookshall Wood). Some large areas of lowland beech and yew woodland are National Trust owned (e.g. at Park Wood and The Coppice). Broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland dominates the central ridge of land.

**Perceptual/Experiential Landscape:** The tower of St Laurence's Church and the hexagonal mausoleum on West Wycombe Hill are prominent in views within this landscape including from the A40 and A4010. From Bradenham Manor views extend 2km south to the church on West Wycombe Hill. Views are typically up and down the valleys and to wooded tops and ridges. In the north views of the chalk escarpment are obtained.

The River Wye is contained within the parkland landscape of West Wycombe Park in the south of the area and its presence is not noticeable in the wider landscape. This is a uniform and legible landscape, with varying levels of enclosure. Open valley floor and rolling valley sides contrast with dense woodland areas along higher valley sides. The suburban edge of High Wycombe and the junction of the A1010 and A40 with associated road signage are confined to the south east edge of the area. Beyond this edge the landscape retains a rural character dominated by farmed valley slopes and wooded tops. The presence of historic parkland and villages (Bradenham and West Wycombe) adds time depth and visual interest.

**Biodiversity:** Bradenham Woods, Park Wood and The Coppice SAC and SSSI are large areas of mainly beech, ash, cherry, oak with occasional whitebeam on the edges and scattered yew and calcareous grassland. The woodland is an important part of a grassland-scrub-woodland mosaic. A distinctive feature in the woodland flora is the occurrence of the rare coralroot *Cardamine bulbifera*. Buttlar's Hangings is a small area of species rich chalk grassland on the upper slopes in the west of the area which is designated a SSSI. Other areas of woodland and chalk grassland are local wildlife sites e.g. woodland at Hearnton Wood, Kit's & Great Cookshall Woods and grassland on Slough Hill and Kit's grassland. The River Wye flows through lowland wood pasture and parkland at West Wycombe Park which is a BAP priority habitat. Lowland beech and yew woodland, lowland calcareous grassland and chalk headwaters are also BAP habitats in this area.

**Historic Environment:** The most prominent historic landscape is West Wycombe Park, an 18<sup>th</sup> century designed landscape which is recognised as one of Britain's finest Historic Parks and Gardens. Built originally for Sir Francis Dashwood (1735-1739) the landscape grounds consist of a park and pleasure grounds around an 18<sup>th</sup> century Palladian Villa. The park extends across the floodplain of the River Wye; up the valley sides to the south, while to the north is West Wycombe Hill, the location of the medieval stone church of St Laurence and the Dashwood's flint mausoleum (built 1763-4). Positioned between the hill and the village are the 18<sup>th</sup> century excavated caves, used by the infamous Hellfire Club. Bradenham Manor lies between the village of Bradenham and The Coppice. It is a Grade II registered historic landscape with red brick manor house within a

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late 17<sup>th</sup> century /early 18<sup>th</sup> century terraced garden and park.

Pre 18<sup>th</sup> century co-axial enclosure dominates the western valley with areas of extended fields with extensive boundary loss. Pre 18<sup>th</sup> century irregular enclosure and assarts lying within and alongside woodland are more characteristic of the western valley.

The area contains a number of important archaeological monuments, including the circular hillfort on West Wycombe Hill which contains the church, mausoleum and graveyard. In the north of the area there are a series of bell, bowl and round barrows around Saunderton, a Roman Villa east of Lodge Hill Farm, earthworks in Park Wood and Grim's Ditch crosses the top of Park Wood.

### **Designations:**

- Chilterns AONB
- Archaeological Notification Sites: 28No.
- Priority BAP Habitats: 10 types
- Biological Notification Sites: 21 No.
- Local Geological Sites: 1 No.
- Local Wildlife Sites: 13 No.
- Registered Parks and Gardens: West Wycombe Park, Grade I and Bradenham Manor, Grade II
- Scheduled Monuments: Bell barrow, 260m. WNW. of Slough Glebe Farm, Bowl barrow at Molin's works. Bowl barrow, 350m. ENE. of Saunderton station. Bowl barrows, 450m. NW. of Slough Glebe Farm, Camp on Church Hill, Earthworks in Park Wood, Grim's Ditch - 660m to W of Walter's Ash, Roman Villa East of Lodge Hill Farm, Round Barrow, NW. of Slough Glebe Farm
- Conservation Area: Bradenham
- SAC: 1 No. Chilterns Beechwoods
- SSSI: 3 No. Bradenham Woods, Park Wood & The Coppice, Buttler's Hangings and Naphill Common

### EVALUATION

#### Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Potential landscape and visual sensitivities are as follows:

- Remnant chalk grassland on the dry valley slopes which support chalk grassland species but are under threat from scrub encroachment.
- Woodland cover, including ancient woodland, notably on higher ground which provides visual containment and biodiversity value. The presence of beech woodland which in the past was important for the furniture making in and around the High Wycombe area.
- Hedgerow boundaries which are visually prominent on the open valley sides and provide ecological connectivity.
- The mosaic of land use and land cover within the valley with contrasting smooth valley sides and wooded slopes/tops.
- The well preserved historic villages of Bradenham and West Wycombe with traditional building materials of timber framing, brick and flint.
- The presence of Bradenham Sarsens, an undisturbed collection of Bradenham Puddingstone distinctive to the area and used in the building of the church on West Wycombe Hill.
- The rural character of roads away from the A40 and A4010.
- The River Wye which is largely hidden within the wider landscape, flowing through West Wycombe Park parkland landscape before entering High Wycombe.
- Historic elements, such as field patterns (co-axial, assarts and pre 18<sup>th</sup> century irregular enclosure) and archaeological features, which are visible reminder of the historic use of land.
- The archaeological monuments, including the prehistoric earthworks of Grims Ditch, the prehistoric round barrow cemetery at Glebe farm, and the Roman Villa site at Lodge Hill
- The historic gardens, parks and manor houses at West Wycombe Park and Bradenham Manor.
- Striking views to the mausoleum and church on West Wycombe Hill and to the chalk escarpment which provide a strong sense of place.
- The strong rural character which persists in close proximity to the suburban edge of High Wycombe and the presence of the busy A4010 and A40.

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

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**Strategy/Vision:** The overall strategy for the Wye 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 with built features prominent in views and areas of interlocked woodland along ridge tops.

### Landscape Guidelines:

- Conserve and appropriately manage chalk grassland on the dry valley slopes to encourage chalk grassland species. Support and promote expansion and connection of chalk grassland areas.
- Conserve and manage tree and woodland cover, notably on higher ground to maintain visual containment and promote biodiversity value.
- Manage and gap up hedgerow boundaries to provide visual unity and biodiversity value. Coaxial fields, assarts and pre 18<sup>th</sup> century irregular enclosure are a priority for conservation, restoration and enhancement.
- Conserve the mosaic of land use and land cover within the valley. Maintain the contrast between the smooth valley sides and wooded slopes/tops. Promote appropriate management of farmland, to encourage and create more biodiverse habitats, as well as agriculturally productive landscapes.
- Conserve the character, fabric and appearance of historic buildings, in villages and hamlets and individual farmsteads. Prevent inappropriate new development which would compromise the intactness of historic villages such as Bradenham and West Wycombe or further extend settlement into the rural landscape.
- Conserve Bradenham Sarsens, which exhibits an undisturbed collection of Bradenham Puddingstone.
- Maintain the rural character of the roads which cut through the western valley, and up valley sides avoiding widening and suburbanisation.
- Conserve and enhance the water quality and flow of the gently meandering River Wye which flows through West Wycombe Park.
- Conserve historic elements, such as field patterns (coaxial fields, assarts and pre 18<sup>th</sup> century irregular enclosure).
- Conserve archaeological sites/monuments and their setting, which provide evidence of past use of the land.
- Conserve the parkland and landscape setting of West Wycombe Park and Bradenham Manor.
- Maintain key views in the landscape to the mausoleum and church on West Wycombe Hill and to the chalk escarpment to the north.
- Seek to limit further encroachment of the suburban edge of High Wycombe including signage along the A4010 and A40. Seek to de-clutter the junction between the A40 and A410 where appropriate.



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Important views to the Church and Mausoleum at West Wycombe.



Settlement occurs linearly along the valley floor.



Rolling chalk valley sides, dominated by arable farmland often extending down in to the valley bottom. Wooded tops create a strong visual boundary.



Wide floodplain and gently sloping valley side, becoming progressively steeper. Pylon line passing through the landscape.



Extensive view from West Wycombe Hill.



West Wycombe House and surrounding parkland landscape.