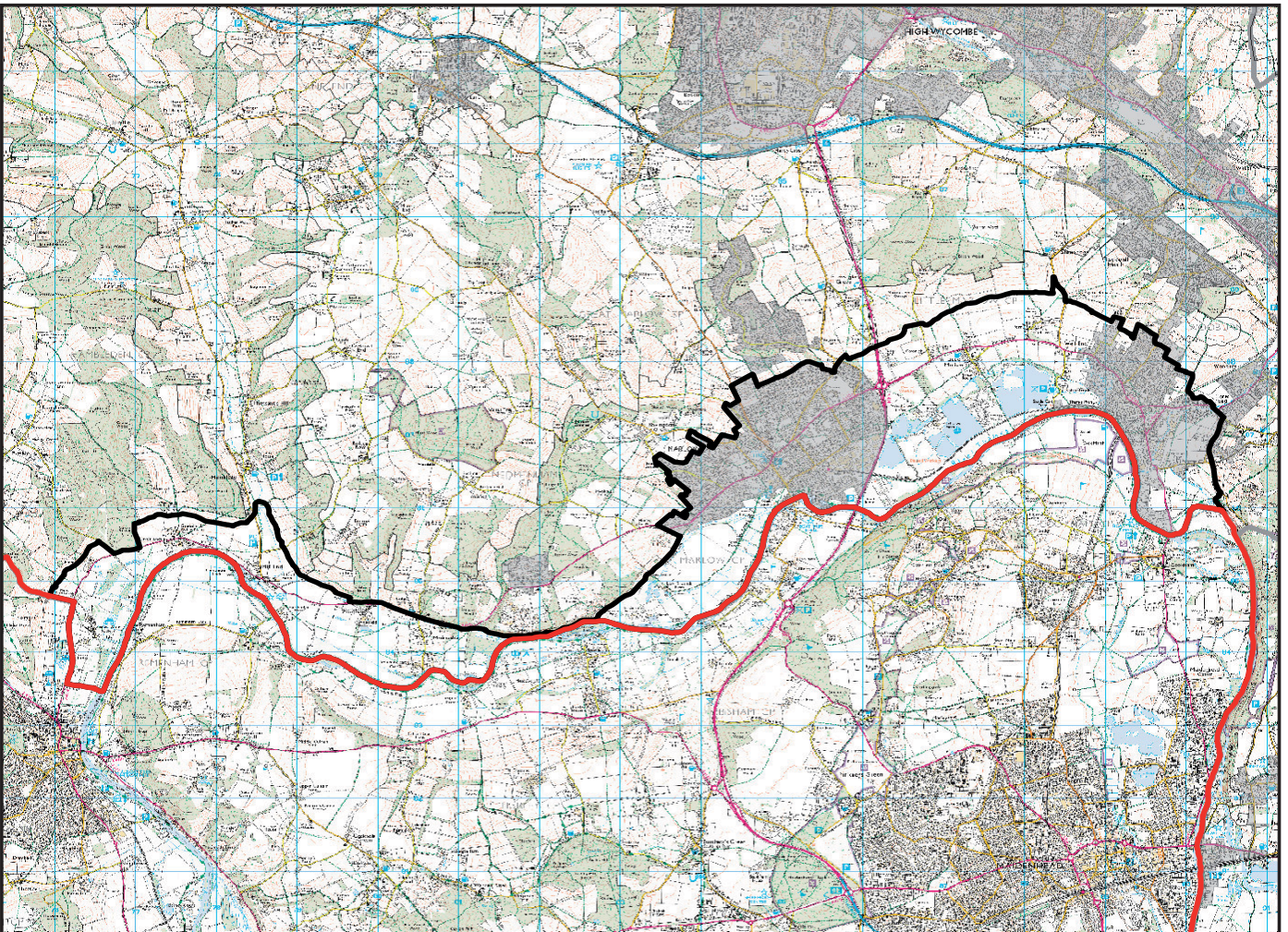
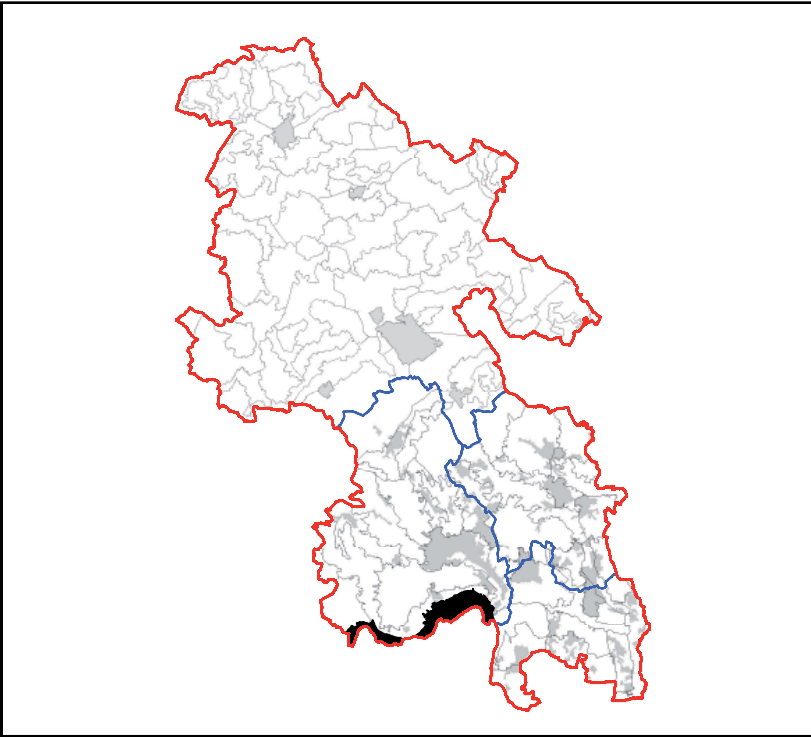


LCA 26.1 THAMES FLOODPLAIN



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KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- A flat, low lying floodplain, with very slight local topographic variation, underlain by a mix of alluvium, head and gravel formations, with free draining soils.
- Fields of arable farmland pasture and rough grazing are divided by wooden post and rail fencing and hedgerows.
- The River Thames runs along the southern boundary. Fields near the river are liable to flooding and there are areas of water meadow.
- Willow pollards along the Thames and scattered or clumped trees along field boundaries. Woodland cover is sparse.
- Varied ecology with gravel-pit lakes at Spade Oak/ Little Marlow and SSSIs including wet woodland and wet meadows.
- The town of Marlow has a historic core and small villages such as Little Marlow and Medmenham have a historic character. More recent residential development at Bourne End and on the edges of Marlow.
- A mixed field pattern with enclosures from irregular pre 18th century (regular, irregular and co-axial) though regular parliamentary enclosures to 20th century extended fields and horse paddocks.
- A range of historic and archaeological features, including parkland at Fawley Court and Harleyford Manor, Medmenham Manor, Neolithic and Bronze Age finds at Low Grounds and historic locks.
- Cut by the busy A4155 and the A404 with rural roads leading down to the Thames and up the valley sides to the north.
- The low-lying, flat and open landscape allows for some long views and panoramic vistas particularly north towards the higher sloping topography of the lower dip slope.
- Some pockets of tranquillity and calm associated with areas of water and parkland, away from roads and settlement.
- Recreational opportunities often associated with areas of water including the Thames Path National Trail, water sports and marinas, fishing and bird watching.

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DESCRIPTION

Location and Boundaries: The *Thames Floodplain* lies wholly within Wycombe District. It consists of the floodplain landscape to the north of the River Thames and the district boundary. The flat landscape of the *Thames Floodplain* is distinguished from the gently sloping landform of its valley side which rises to the north.

Landscape Character: A distinctive low lying, flat floodplain landform, with an open character. Fields of arable farmland and rough grazing are divided by hedgerows and wooden post and rail fencing. The River Thames runs along the southern boundary of the area and there are a number of water bodies including lakes and ponds associated with former gravel workings (Spade Oak/Little Marlow) and historic designed landscapes. Woodland is sparse, and trees typically occur along hedgerows and associated with water courses (including willow pollards along the River Thames). A number of important ecological habitats are designated SSSIs including wet woodland and wet meadows. The area has been worked for minerals, is cut by the busy A4155 and A404 and the suburban edges of Marlow and Bourne End are abrupt in places. However pockets of tranquillity are associated with areas of water and a historic, rural character is retained in small villages (e.g. Little Marlow and Medmenham) and parkland (Harleyford Manor and Fawley Court). The landscape provides a number of recreational opportunities including the Thames Path, watersports and bird watching. Views are afforded up to the lower chalk dip slope valley sides, across and along the Thames.

Geology: Alluvium occurs along the course of the River Thames with bands of Head and Taplow Gravel Formation lying to the north and some dispersed areas of River Terrace Deposits. Loamy and clayey floodplain soils with naturally high groundwater occur in relation to Alluvium with freely draining slightly acid but base-rich soils corresponding to areas of Head and Gravels.

Topography/Landform: A flat, low lying floodplain (30m AOD) with very slight local topographic variation.

Hydrology: The River Thames flows along the southern boundary. A network of open water bodies lying just north of the river, occupy former mineral extraction pits. Smaller scattered pond/lakes occur associated with farmland and historic parkland (e.g. Fawley Court and Harleyford Manor).

Land Use and Settlement: The Thames Valley including the floodplain was an early focus for settlement and agriculture due to the fertile soils, water supply and use of the Thames for transport. Along this part of the floodplain, fields of arable farmland, pasture and rough grazing are divided by wooden post and rail fencing and hedgerows. Fields near the river are liable to flooding and historically some were water meadows. Several large areas of open standing water occur at Spade Oak/Little Marlow which are flooded gravel workings. An aggregate supplier still operates in Little Marlow and a sewage works lies between two of the larger expanses of

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water. There is little woodland cover however small areas of broadleaved, mixed and yew and scrub woodland do occur.

The town of Marlow and Bourne End village lie in this area, stretching across the floodplain and along the River Thames. Marlow has a historic 18th century core with Georgian facades. 19th and 20th century suburban growth has occurred round the town filtering into the landscape with some abrupt built edges and others integrated by tree and hedgerows enclosing roads. Bourne End has grown up in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and has a suburban edge.

The smaller villages of Little Marlow, Medmenham and Mill End retain a rural and historic character. They occur across the floodplain, strung along rural roads off the A4155. Red brick and brick and flint are common building material with some timber framing and black weatherboard. A number of historic houses are built along the Thames.

The Bourne End to Marlow railway runs through the eastern part of the area providing a link to Maidenhead and then London. The area is cut by the busy A4155 and the A404 which crosses the Thames, as does the Marlow suspension bridge. The Thames Path National trail follows the river between footbridges at Temple (west of Marlow) and at Bourne End railway bridge. Otherwise local footpaths provide access to and along the Thames and up towards the chalk dip slope.

There are a number of marinas, locks and weirs along the course of the Thames. Recreational opportunities are often associated with water and include water sports, boat trips, bird watching, and fishing.

Tree Cover: Woodland cover is sparse with no areas of ancient woodland. Small areas of broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland occur along boundaries of water bodies and gravel workings around Little Marlow and associates with parkland at Fawley Court. Some scrub woodland occurs to the east of Medmenham. Pollarded willows are features along the Thames. Scattered or clumped trees occur along field boundaries with isolated trees and small pockets of trees dispersed occasionally across the area particularly along the smaller water courses.

Perceptual/ Experiential Landscape: The floodplain has a busy character, cut by the A4155 and A404, with recent residential and industrial development around Marlow and Bourne End and an aggregate supplier and sewage works in Little Marlow. However pockets of tranquillity and calm are associated with the River Thames particularly between Medmenham and Marlow and between Marlow and Bourne End including at Spade Oak.

Away from roads and settlement a historic, rural character is retained in small villages and parkland. The low-lying, flat and open landscape allows for some long views and panoramic vistas particularly north towards the higher sloping topography of the lower dip slope. Hedsor Priory and House are attractive eye catchers in views up to higher wooded ground.

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The River is locally a prominent feature but within the wider landscape is screened by bank side vegetation. Expansive views are obtained across lakes at Spade Oak/ Little Marlow and from Hambleden Mill and long views are afforded along and across the Thames Valley. Designed vistas within historic landscapes of Fawley Court and Harleyford Manor also provide key views to the Thames River.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, one of the major English Romantic poets and his wife, the novelist Mary Shelley, resided in Marlow in the 19th century. The children's author Enid Blyton lived at Old Thatch near Bourne End during the 1920s.

Biodiversity: A range of ecological habitats occur, associated with the geology and riverside location, and including the River Thames itself. Fern House Gravel Pit SSSI is the best available exposure of Taplow Terrace deposits in the Middle Thames, and therefore of considerable importance.

Roebed Wood SSSI is an area of Thames-side willow and alder woodland fed by a ditch draining water from adjacent water meadows. The diverse herbaceous flora, associated particularly with the wetter and more open parts of the wood, includes a large population of the nationally rare summer snowflake *Leucojum aestivum*, known locally as the Loddon lily.

Temple Island Meadows SSSI consist of a series of slightly improved, sheep grazed, wet meadows which have developed on soils over alluvium. Their location, adjacent to the River Thames, means they are subject to seasonal flooding and waterlogging. Marshy neutral grassland grades into tall fen vegetation with scattered wet alder carr woodland and scrub occurring in the west and south. Wetland habitats such as these have declined nationally due to agricultural improvement and drainage and few examples of these habitats are now known to exist in Buckinghamshire. The meadows support a diverse flora and fauna, and are probably some of the most species rich meadows remaining along the Thames.

Spade Oak / Little Marlow flooded gravel pits are now a haven for wildlife particularly birds.

Areas of grassland north of Spade Oak Meadows and Medmenham are local wildlife sites BAP Priority habitats include chalk rivers, neutral grassland, purple moor grass and rush pastures (*Molinia-Juncus*), reedbeds and wet woodland.

Historic Environment: The Thames has been a focus for human occupation since prehistoric times as evidenced by the concentration of archaeology beside the river. In fields to the east of Low Grounds farm, Neolithic/Bronze Age Barrows, Neolithic Mortuary enclosures, a Neolithic tannery and a large Neolithic ditch enclosure (possible house) have been discovered. Further prehistoric sites include cropmarks at Mill End and Medmenham, ring ditches east of Harleyford Park. There are two sites of Roman Villas at Mill End which are designated as scheduled monuments. This area is particularly rich for archaeological sites with many more likely to remain undiscovered beneath alluvium and meadow grassland.

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The area contains a number of prominent historic buildings including the white weather boarded Hambleden Mill and lock (built 1773) located to the Thames. Marlow lock was also originally built in 1773. Other important buildings include St Peter Church Medmenham, built in brick and flint, Medmenham Abbey, St John the Baptist's Church in Little Marlow and Westhorpe house.

The historic landscape is composed of 18th century irregular, regular and co-axial enclosure and 19th century enclosure, although a large proportion of these fields have been altered or changed in the 20th century. Also of prominence is the Grade II* registered historic park and garden of Fawley Court, which extends into South Oxfordshire. The principal house dates from 1684 and is built in red brick with stone dressings. The park was landscaped by Lancelot Brown and the temple on the island in the Thames is a principal vista. The east park of Harleyford Manor (Grade II registered and possibly laid out by Brown) extends into this area, sited on flood meadow with views to the river.

Designations:

- Chilterns AONB.
- Registered Parks and Gardens: Harleyford Manor; Fawley Court and Temple Island
- Scheduled Monuments: Roman Villa at Mill End; Roman Villa North of Yewden Lodge
- Conservation Areas: Abbotsbrook & Well End, Marlow, Little Marlow, Hedsor Road & Bourne End and Harleyford & Wittington.
- Archaeological Notification Sites: 24 No.
- Priority Bap Habitats: 5 types
- Biological Notification Sites: 22 No.
- Local Wildlife Sites: 3 No.
- SSSI: 3No. Fern House Gravel Pit; Rodbed Wood; Temple Island Meadows

EVALUATION

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Potential landscape and visual sensitivities are:

- River courses, ponds and lakes, and the associated habitat and wildlife value.
- The range of habitats associated with the geology and riverside location including SSSI wet woodland, gravel pits, and wet meadows.
- Pollard willows along the River Thames which are a historic landscape feature.
- Views across open expanses of water, along and across the River Thames and up the valley sides and to higher ground.
- Open, undeveloped meadow and farmland areas alongside the River Thames which offer tranquillity and calm.
- Hedgerow field boundaries and hedgerow trees which provide ecological connectivity and structure.
- The flat landscape and the limited woodland, accentuates the visual sensitivity of the landscape.
- The historic character of small villages on rural roads leading down to the Thames.
- Archaeological sites and monuments including a Roman Villa, Neolithic and Bronze Age sites at Low Grounds.
- Historic water meadows, pre 18th century irregular, regular and co-axial field enclosures which are reminder of the historic use of land.
- Historic parkland located at Harleyford Manor and Fawley Court with views to the River Thames.

Strength of Character/Intactness: The strength of character and intactness of the *Thames Floodplain* is **moderate**. Key characteristics are strongly conveyed but the suburban edges of settlement and road infrastructure, as well as gappy hedgerows in places, reduces the distinctiveness of character.

Strategy/ Vision: To conserve and enhance the character of the *Thames Floodplain* including water bodies and wetland habitats of important ecological value. To conserve historic parkland, villages and archaeological features and maintain pockets of tranquillity and rural character.

Landscape Guidelines:

- Monitor water quality in the rivers, lakes and ponds, seeking to reduce run off and water pollution from surrounding farmland and roads.

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- Encourage appropriate management and protection of water bodies and wetland habitats and seek opportunities to extend and connect habitats and enhance biodiversity interest.
- Resist further agricultural improvement and drainage which impacts on ecological habitats.
- Appropriately manage willow pollards along the River Thames.
- Encourage management and restoration of hedgerows, filling in gaps where necessary and seek opportunities to recreate and extend these habitats.
- Conserve open views across expanses of water, along the River Thames and up the valley side of the lower chalk dip slope.
- Conserve open undeveloped banks of river between Marlow and Medmenham and Marlow and Bourne End which provide tranquillity and contrast to the built up areas along the Thames.
- Conserve the historic character of small villages on rural roads leading down to the Thames.
- Avoid vertical development along the floodplain, which will impact greatly on the low lying, open character.
- Consider opportunities for further screening/buffering of roads and abrupt suburban edges through sensitive tree planting.
- Conserve historic elements, such as archaeological features, field enclosures, water meadows and parkland, which provide evidence of past use of the land.

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Gravel-pit lakes at Spade Oak, with wet woodland and wet meadows.



A flat, low lying floodplain with long views. Fields of arable farmland pasture and rough grazing are divided by wooden post and rail fencing and hedgerows.



A number of historic houses are built along the Thames. Red brick and brick and flint are common materials with some white render and timber.



St John the Baptist Church at Little Marlow, with a strong historic character.



Tranquil area of meadow and farmland adjacent to the River Thames.



Important views from the floodplain to higher wooded slopes and Hedsor Priory.