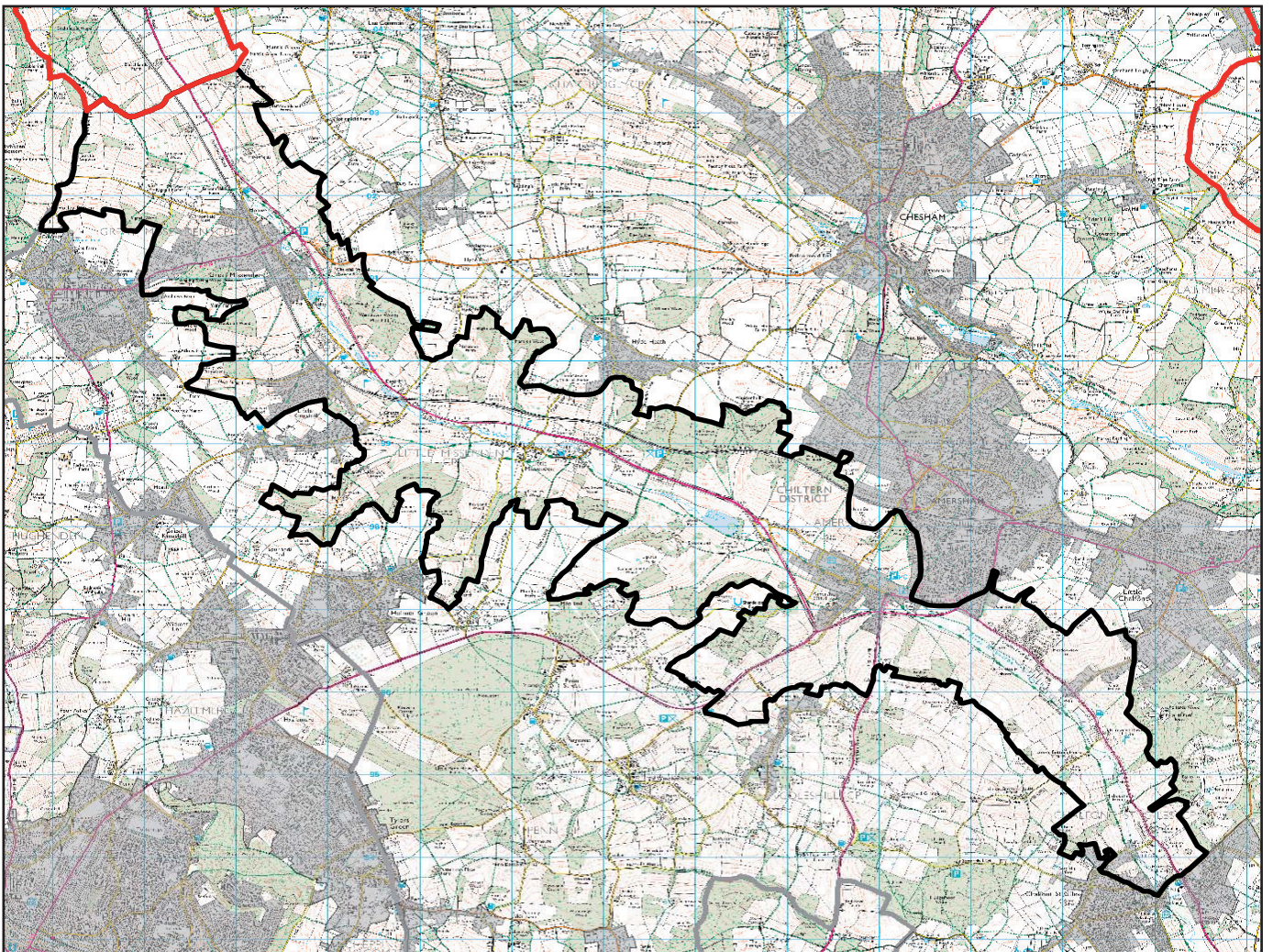
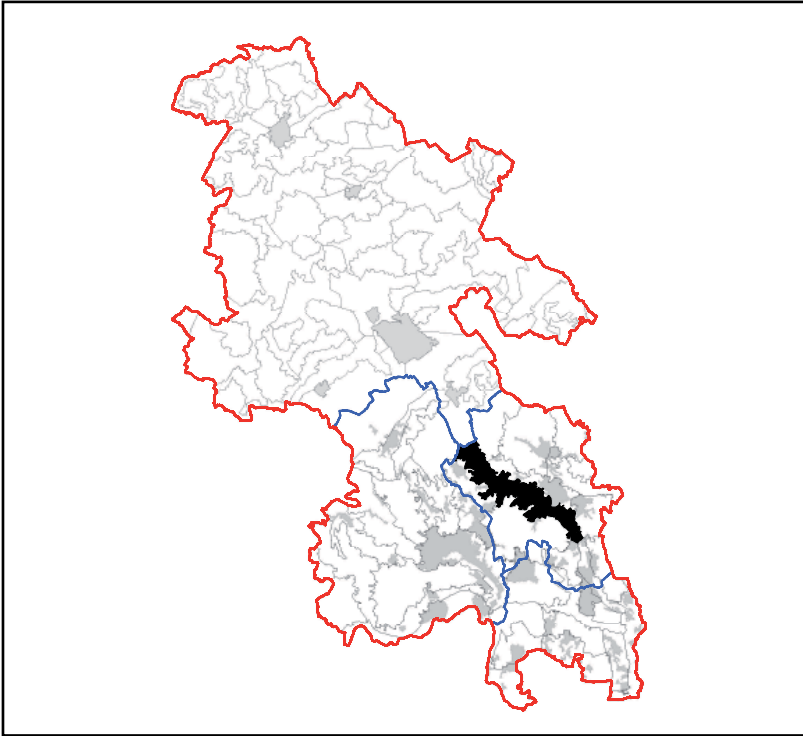


LCA 13.5 MISBOURNE UPPER CHALK RIVER VALLEY



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KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Shallow chalk valley, gently sloping and indented by smaller dry valleys to produce smoothly rolling valley sides, with a relatively wide, flat bottomed floodplain. Valley sides steepening in the upper reaches.
- On the valley sides the underlying chalk, and free draining lime-rich soils predominately support arable cultivation, with some calcareous grassland and woodland on higher slopes.
- Ancient and semi-natural woodland associated with higher slopes and dry valleys, creating a visual boundary of the area, including mixed, broadleaved and coniferous woodland, which possess significant biodiversity and ecological value.
- The valley floor is characterised by rough grassland, permanent pasture and paddocks, and divided into smaller scale fields, by low hedges and wooden post and wire fencing.
- The narrow and gently flowing Misbourne River, meanders down the valley, with occasional ponds often located near farmsteads or small villages. The river often runs unnoticeably through this lower landscape.
- A string of hamlets and farmsteads exist along the valley floor, with nucleated rows of larger settlements focused along roads. The larger village of Great Missenden is situated in the northern part of the area. Distinctive churches are often a feature of villages.
- Post medieval parkland at Shardeloes and Missenden Abbey. Shardeloes House is a visually prominent feature on the valley side.
- Varying patterns of field enclosure, with a mix of regular and irregular field boundaries. Large scale fields dominate the valley sides, with smaller scale field divisions along the valley floor.
- Archaeological and historical features are scattered along the valley and within small villages, including Roman villas, earthworks, such as Grims Ditch and flint scatter.
- The valley acts as a transport corridor, with the A413 following the valley floor. This is visible from many parts of the landscape. Smaller rural roads cut across the valley, connecting rural villages and farmsteads. A railway line also runs along the valley length.
- Views are largely contained along the valley, often broken up or fragmented by field boundaries, hedgerows and trees. There are some extensive views from upper slopes across the character area.
- The valley retains a tranquil, unspoilt and 'rural' character, despite accessibility of public roads (A413) and railway. A still and calm environment.
- A good rights of way network, including the South Bucks Way, which passes through numerous villages throughout the valley.

DESCRIPTION

Location and Boundaries: The *Misbourne Upper Chalk River Valley* lies entirely within the Chiltern District. It cuts through the chalk dip slope, and runs north west to south east. The boundaries of the character area are formed largely by the valley topography and the wooded valley ridge line. The woodland running along the valley ridge acts as a visual boundary, when viewed from the valley floor.

Landscape Character: The *Misbourne Upper Chalk River Valley* is a wide, shallow valley, characterised by gentle rolling valley sides, which predominately support arable cultivation and are often bounded by ancient woodland along the upper slopes. The valley floor is largely comprised of rough grassland, pasture and paddocks, which has been divided into smaller scale field systems, and is dissected by the River Misbourne, which winds through the landscape. Settlement is distributed along the valley floor, including from individual farmsteads and larger villages, and frequently displaying a strong historical form and fabric. The valley acts as a communication corridor, dominated by the A413, which follows the valley floor. This is a varied landscape, with a mix of land uses and land cover. There is a marked contrast between the higher levels of movement and noise associated with the road and other forms of human activity, and the sense of tranquillity which still exists throughout the valley floor and valley sides. A number of important registered parks and gardens, and archaeological remnants are present, such as Roman Villas, earthworks and flint scatter, displaying the historical context of the river valley.

Geology: In the north of the character area, the valley is cut into the Middle Chalk, with Upper Chalk underlying the higher slopes. Upper Chalk predominates throughout the rest of the area, with alluvium following the valley floor and floodplain. The chalk geology gives rise to free draining lime-rich, loamy soils, with more base-rich loamy soils furthest north. Along the floodplain, loamy and clayey soils prevail, with a naturally high groundwater level.

Topography/Landform: The valley is relatively shallow, with gentle inclining lower slopes, gradually becoming steeper along the upper valley sides. Smaller, dry tributary valleys feed into the Misbourne Valley, which have indented the landscape to generate smooth, rolling valley sides. The valley drains from north west to south east. The valley bottom is relatively broad and flat, with villages tending to settle where the valley widens.

Hydrology: The valley is typically characterised by low flow, however characteristically of chalk landscapes, the groundwater level is high. Some localised water logging is evident at low points. The narrow Misbourne River slowly meanders down the valley, flowing gently through the landscape, with intermittent small ponds scattered along its course. It is a characteristically clear and gentle chalk valley river. However, the River Misbourne is winterbourne, and therefore flows vary throughout the year. At times of high rainfall localised flooding occurs whereby

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lakes and ponds are also recharged e.g. Missenden Abbey Parkland. When these events occur the river becomes considerably more apparent in the landscape.

A large lake located centrally within the character area, is associated with Shardeloes Park. Water mills are also a feature associated with the River Misbourne, with several disused water mills along its course, such as Chalfont Mill, Chalfont St Giles.

Land use and Settlement: The land is principally arable production on the valley slopes, with some calcareous grassland on the higher slopes, interspersed with woodland belts. The valley floor is predominately managed grassland, for both agricultural and recreational use, with a mix of improved pastures, rough grazing and paddocks.

The valley is an important communication corridor connecting the surrounding region and London. The A413 London Road and railway line follow the valley floor, and are visually and audibly noticeable in the landscape. A high voltage pylon line also transects the landscape centrally. Smaller enclosed rural roads pass up and down the valley sides, connecting settlements.

Small hamlets and farmsteads are dotted along the valley floor, following road networks and the Misbourne River. Larger villages are nucleated in rows along roads, and some have become important tourist attractions, such as Great Missenden, which is situated in the north of the area, and Amersham Old Town in the south. The settlements possess a strong rural and picturesque character, with important historical buildings and churches, which have become distinctive features, such as the Church of St Peter and Paul, Great Missenden, and Church of St John the Baptist, Little Missenden. More modern settlement edges from larger towns, such as Amersham on the Hill, also spread into the character area.

There is a high density of public rights of way through this character area, climbing the valley sides, and following the valley floor. The South Bucks Way passes through the entire length of the area, largely following the line of the River Misbourne and crosses many settlements.

Tree Cover: Woodland is predominately located along upper valley slopes, and within tributary valleys, and it is a mix of broadleaved, coniferous woodland and mixed woodland. Broadleaved woodland contributes to the seasonal variations in colour, evident in this landscape, and coniferous woodland provides a contrast. A large number of the woodlands in this character area are ancient and semi-natural, or are re-planted ancient woodland. Some Yew woodland is found in the north of the area, as a result of the base-rich soils. Concentrations of parkland trees are associated with Missenden Abbey and Shardeloes.

Perceptual/Experiential Landscape: The valley has both an enclosed and an open character, with views contained to the valley character area. Along the valley floor, views are fragmented by field enclosures and settlements, however valley sides allow for extensive vistas. Views to wooded skylines along valley ridgelines.

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The landscape is diverse and textured; resulting from the mixed land uses and land cover, which vary across the character area, in particular, between the valley floor and valley sides. A variety of woodland types, field enclosures and settlements create a mosaic landscape, which is at times fragmented and discontinuous.

The busy and noisy A413 passes through the landscape, however, away from this tranquil and serene character prevails along the valley floor, within villages and hamlets, and on the valley sides.

Biodiversity: The habitat mix of the area comprises predominantly improved grasslands along the valley floor and floodplain, and often surrounding villages. Further north and south the grassland habitat extends, widening out across the valley. Elsewhere, valley sides are largely covered by arable and horticulture cultivation, with some calcareous grassland on higher slopes, and woodland belts extending along the valley ridges. Woodlands are broadleaved, mixed and coniferous, with yew woodland in the north, and many of these woodlands are ancient and semi-natural, or re-planted ancient woodland.

During the last decade increased flows on the River Misbourne have restored a variety of habitat features including open pools and clean gravel runs. This has aided recovery of the river's biological interest, bringing benefits for wetland birds, invertebrates and aquatic plants, notably the re-appearance of characteristic floating rafts of vegetation along some sections of the watercourse.

BAP Priority Habitats in this area are improved grassland; lowland mixed deciduous woodland and chalk rivers. The Chiltern chalk rivers are also recognised as a South East Biodiversity Opportunity Area. Local Wildlife Sites include: Shardeloes Lake; Beamond Wood; Angling Spring Wood and Langley's Wood.

Historic Environment: The historic landscape character of this area has remained largely unchanged since the 19th century, a landscape containing ancient woodland on the tops and upper sides of the valley with enclosures found on the valley side and bottoms. There are a variety of different field types, which include historic river meadows found along the Misbourne, these are well preserved south of Amersham and Chalfont St Giles. There are also dispersed areas of pre 18th century irregular enclosure, such as south of Coleman's Farm which could have originated as medieval assarts. However in the last 50 years the landscape is changing to accommodate an increasing number of smaller pony paddocks.

Another dominant landscape are the parklands of Shardeloes and Great Missenden Abbey. Shardeloes, was laid out in the late 18th century by Humphrey Repton, and is a remarkably well preserved parkland landscape which remains a prominent landscape feature, visible on the valley side. The park and gardens at Missenden Abbey are built upon the former site of a 12th century medieval monastery. Much of this landscape dates to the early 19th century when the owner, John Ayton, redesigned the house and grounds. The building of the A413 bypass has bisected the park. Missenden Abbey has been recently been restored, and is currently used as an

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education and conference centre. The historical and cultural significance of both Great Missenden Abbey Park and Shardeloes Park is reflected in English Heritage's designation as Registered Parks and Gardens and both parklands are also designated as conservation areas.

There are several significant historic settlements including the market town of Amersham and the villages of Great and Little Missenden. The historic cores of these settlements are designated as conservation areas, containing a high concentration of listed buildings, many constructed in a vernacular tradition of timber framing, handmade brick and roof tile. Among the more significant buildings are the Grade I churches of St Mary's Amersham, St Peter & St Paul, at Great Missenden and St John the Baptist, Little Missenden.

In terms of the archaeological interest the area has a number of sites, most notably, the prehistoric earthworks of Grims Ditch, Roman settlements alongside the Misbourne (including at least one villa at Amersham), and the medieval moated sites at Chalkdell Wood and The Castle. The towns and villages are themselves also of archaeological interest.

Designations:

- Chilterns AONB
- English Heritage Scheduled Monuments: Moated sites in Chalkdell Wood, The Castle, and a section of Grim's Ditch 350m NE from Cottage Farm.
- English Heritage Registered Parks and Gardens: Shardeloes Park, Grade II*; Missenden Abbey, Grade II.
- Conservation Areas: Amersham, Great Missenden, Great Missenden Abbey Park Little Missenden and Shardeloes Park
- Listed Buildings: 319 (5 Grade I, and 11 Grade II*)
- Archaeological Notification Sites: 29 No.
- Biological Notification Sites: 25 No.
- Priority Bap Habitats: 5 types.
- Local Wildlife Sites: 20 No.

EVALUATION

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Potential landscape and visual sensitivities are as follows:

- The valley landform and the gently rolling form of the valley sides. Steeper upper valley sides.
- Contained views within the valley and along valley sides and panoramic views from the surrounding valley slopes across the character area.
- Areas of rough grassland, permanent pasture, which characterise the valley floor.
- The openness and views from and to the valley sides
- The narrow course of the Misbourne River, and the characteristic clear and gentle chalk valley nature.
- The variety of archaeological features, such as Grims Ditch, Roman settlements alongside the Misbourne, and medieval moated sites, which reveal the different phases of history within the character area.
- The ancient and semi-natural woodland, with their strong ecological and visual significance, in particular on the upper valley sides.
- The historical settlement pattern and surviving historic buildings in villages and hamlets.
- The registered historic parks and gardens, such as Shardeloes Park and estate land, which have become distinctive elements in the landscape.
- Areas of tranquillity and limited overt human impact, away from busy roads

Strength of Character/Intactness: The strength of character and intactness of the *Misbourne Upper Chalk River Valley* is **moderate**. Despite the strong sense of key characteristics, the presence of the busy and noisy A413 reduces the intactness of the landscape character.

Strategy/Vision: The overall management for the Upper Misbourne Valley is to conserve and enhance the mosaic of land use and land cover, of mixed farmland, settlement and ancient woodland, which are reflective of the valley nature and respond to the topography and geology of the character area. To protect the historical identity of the landscape, the villages, hamlets and individual farmsteads, as well as important archaeological and ecologically recognised features within the landscape.

Landscape Guidelines:

- Conserve the mosaic of land use and land cover within the valley. Maintain the contrast between the valley floor and the valley sides.
- Conserve and enhance the distinctive linear rural river valley character

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- Conserve the character, fabric, appearance and setting of historic buildings, in villages and hamlets and individual farmsteads.
- Conserve and manage tree and woodland cover, particularly along the valley ridge, to ensure a diverse species. Protect ancient woodland cover.
- Promote appropriate management of farmland, to encourage and create more biodiverse habitats, as well as agriculturally productive landscapes.
- Maintain the rural character of the roads which cut through the valley, avoiding over use and widening, in particular sunken lanes and their associated banks and vegetation.
- Conserve and enhance the small, gentle nature of the Misbourne River and the associated wildlife habitats.
- Conserve historic elements, such as churches and archaeological features, which provide evidence of past use of the land.
- Conserve and maintain opportunities for panoramic views across the valley and the rural quality of these views. Maintain wooded skylines.
- Consider opportunities to reduce the impacts of traffic along the A413.
- Conserve and enhance important ecological habitats, particularly Priority BAP habitats in the valley.
- Conserve any historical or conservational parks, such as Shardeloes, and Missenden Abbey Park, their settings and historic landscape features.
- Avoid further deterioration in levels of tranquillity and seek opportunities to mitigate existing noise and visual intrusion
- Avoid large scale development which is out of keeping with the existing scale of built form

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Rough grazing, pasture and paddocks on the valley floor, with arable fields dominating the smoothly rolling valley sides. Woodland blocks situated on higher ground.



Strong settlement character, with some traditional and historic buildings, such as brick and flint, black wooded cladding and black and white Tudor.



Shardeloes Park and Manor, set amongst park estate land and woodland. A visually prominent landmark on the valley side.



Narrow, gently flowing Misbourne River runs along the valley bottom.



Heavily wooded valley tops contrasting with open fields.



Extensive views from valley sides.