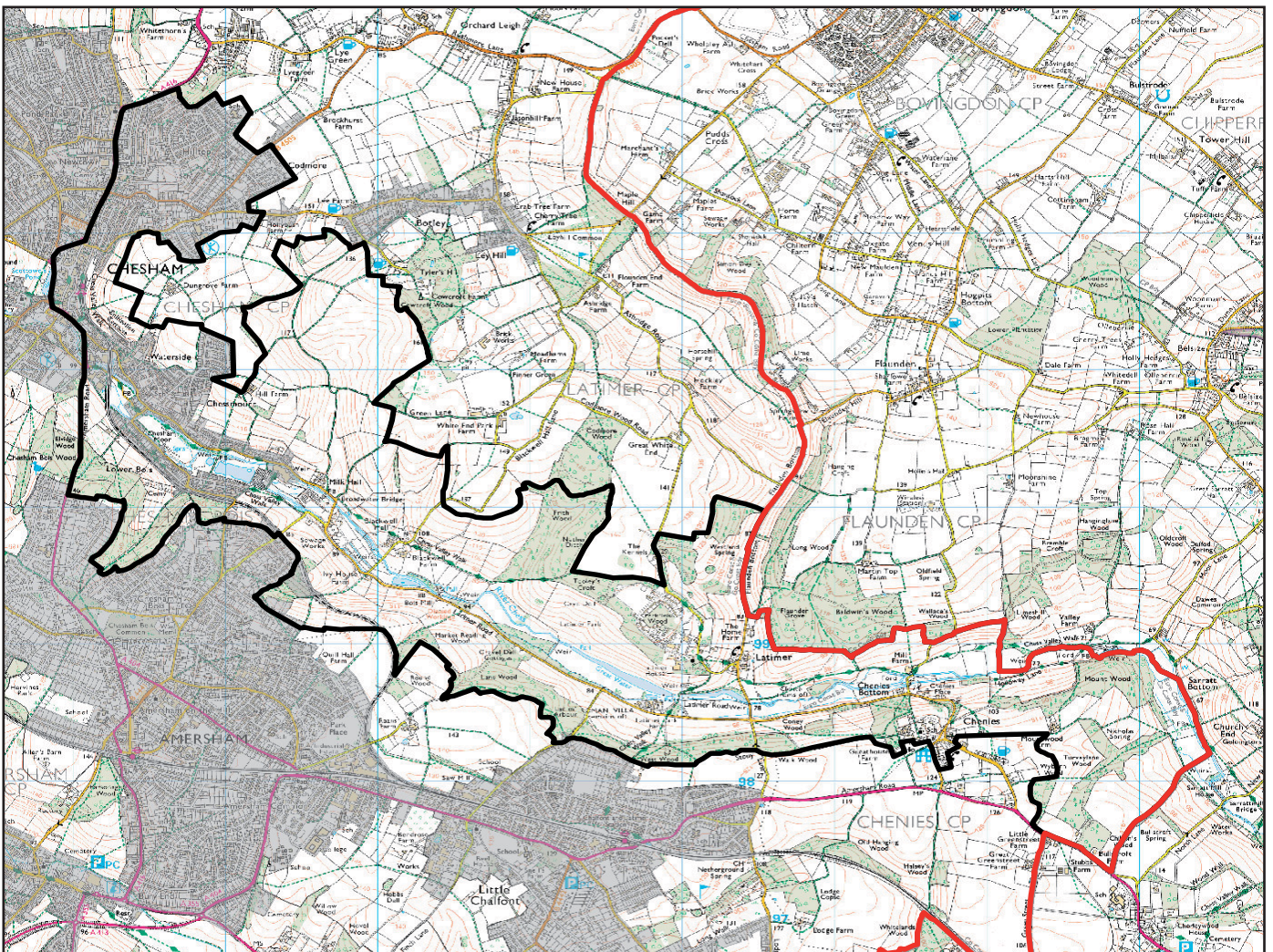
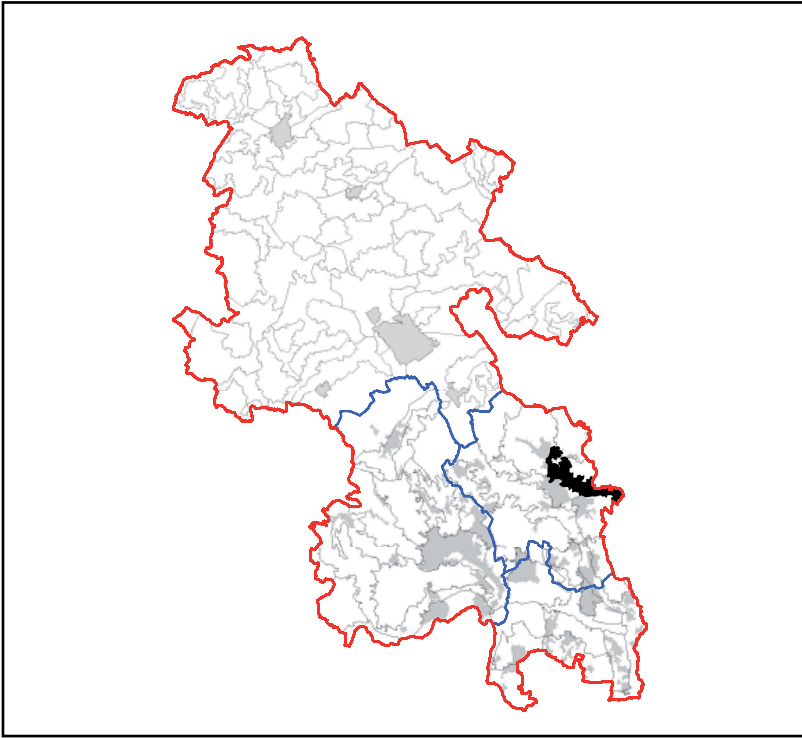


LCA 13.6 CHESS CHALK RIVER VALLEY



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- A broad chalk valley with a wide, flat bottomed floodplain. Rolling valley sides to the north of the river with sides rising more steeply to the south.
- The River Chess is a relatively wide chalk stream which meanders gently through the valley forming the main focus of the landscape. The river is dammed at Great Water to form a lake within the parkland of Latimer House. The line of river picked out by occasional alders and other trees.
- On the valley sides the underlying chalk, and free draining lime-rich soils support arable cultivation and pasture. Woodland is present on the valley tops and in places reaches down the valley slopes.
- The valley floor is characterised by pasture with some rough grassland and scrub woodland. Field boundaries are defined by low hedges, tree lines and fencing associated with Latimer Park.
- The valley is not a main transport corridor or through valley. The Latimer Road, a local road, runs parallel to the River course.
- The historic picturesque villages of Chenies and Latimer nestle on the valley slopes. These settlements are characterised by the vernacular buildings constructed of handmade brick, flint, with some timber framing and render. Individual farmsteads are located along the valley floor and on the lower valley slopes.
- Views are largely contained along the valley and up the valley slopes. There are some extensive views from upper slopes across the character area.
- Woodland is located along upper valley slopes but extends down to the valley floor in places (e.g. Coney Wood). Ancient and semi-natural woodland occurs particularly on the southern valley side (e.g. Chesham Bois Wood). Woodland creates a visual boundary to the area and contributes biodiversity and ecological value.
- The river itself is an important habitat with biodiversity interest also in SSSI wetland habitats along the valley floor including water meadows at Frogmore Meadows and water cress beds at Sarratt Bottom.
- Registered parkland occurs at Latimer Park which lies centrally within the landscape, straddling the River Chess and contributing to the character of the area. Chenies Place is also a registered landscape lying to the east.
- Archaeological features are concentrated in the east of the area including medieval flooded water meadows and an Iron Age/ Roman settlement at Frogmore and Latimer Villa.
- A comprehensive rights of way network, including the Chess Valley Way which allows distinctive elements of the landscape to be experienced by foot.
- A contained and hidden landscape with a historic, rural and peaceful character.

DESCRIPTION

Location and Boundaries: The *Chess Chalk River Valley* lies entirely within 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. Chesham reaches into the River Valley on its northern boundary and Amersham lies on the flatter, high ground to the south of the River Valley.

Landscape Character: The *Chess Chalk River Valley* has a wide, flat valley floor with valley sides rising steeply to the south and more rolling to the north. The River is a large chalk stream (in the context of the Chilterns) and a visible feature within the landscape. While the valley floor is dominated by pasture, rough grazing and some scrub woodland, the valley sides are smoother fields of pasture and arable crops. Woodland, some ancient, crowns the valley tops and in places reaches down the valley sides. The registered parkland at Latimer Park lies centrally within the area and has a strong influence on the character. Chenies Place (also registered parkland) and the picturesque villages of Latimer and Chenies add time depth and historic character. The valley is contained by its landform with no main transport routes and is a sheltered and hidden landscape with a rural, peaceful and historic character. Water meadows and water cress beds are features which relate to the chalk river. The Chess Valley Walk runs along the river course allowing many elements of the landscape to be experienced on foot.

Geology: The valley bottom and floodplain is alluvium. The lower slopes of the river valley are underlain with Middle Chalk with a transition to Upper Chalk which underlies the higher slopes. The chalk geology of the valley slopes gives rise to freely draining lime-rich loamy soils with areas of slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage on the highest slopes where the geology chalk geology abuts clay with flints. Loamy and clayey floodplain soils with naturally high groundwater level dominate the floodplain.

Topography/Landform: The valley is broad with a wide and flat floodplain. The valley sides to the south of the river rise quite steeply. To the north the valley sides are more rolling due to the presence of spurs and coombes.

Hydrology: The River Chess emerges at Chesham (from a deep chalk aquifer) and flows north-west to south-east down to The River Colne near Rickmansworth. Regular winter rainfall is needed to refill the aquifer and maintain the River's flow. The River Chess is of sufficient size to be a feature within the landscape. There are a number of weirs along its meandering course and the river widens at Great Water where it has been dammed to form a lake and provide a feature in Latimer Park. On the edge of Chesham is an island known as 'The Moor' which was created in the 10th century when the Chess was diverted and a mill built.

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Land use and Settlement: The River Chess is the main focus of the valley with water often visible or the course of the river defined by occasional alders and other trees. The valley floor and lower valley slopes are improved grassland. There are some areas of unimproved and neutral grassland on the valley floor and some small pockets of scrub woodland. Pasture and rough grazing area the principal land uses here. Field boundaries are defined by low hedges, tree lines and estate rail fencing associated with Latimer Park.

Arable fields are more dominant on the upper valley slopes as well as some pasture grassland and woodland on the valley tops (mixed woodland with some small pockets of coniferous).

The Latimer Road follows the course of the River to the south linking Chesham with the village of Chenies. The historic nucleated villages of Chenies and Latimer lie on the valley slopes to the north and south of the river respectively and are both associated with historic landscapes (Chenies Place and Latimer Park). The picturesque village of Latimer lies adjacent to the registered park set around a village green and pump. Building materials in both the villages are notably brick and brick and flint with some white plaster and timber framing. A number of farmsteads occur on the valley bottom and lower valley slopes (e.g. Ivy House Farm, Blackwell Farm and Latimer Park Farm)

Chesham lies at the northern end of the valley where the River Chess rises and the edge of Amersham lies on the valley top to the south. The Chess Valley Walk passes through this area and there are a number of footpaths notably crossing through wooded areas (e.g. West Wood and Coney Wood).

Tree Cover: Woodland is predominately located along upper valley slopes but in places extends down to the valley floor (e.g. Lane Wood, Coney Wood and Mount Wood). The southern valley sides are more wooded with broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland and lowland beech and yew woodland with some small blocks of coniferous woodland. The woodland on the northern valley side is mixed woodland associated with Latimer House and mixed woodland with areas of coniferous at the adjacent Frith Wood. Ancient woodland including Chesham Bois Wood, Lane Wood, Ladies Arbour, West Wood and Mount Wood occurs on the southern valley sides. Small patches of scrub woodland and broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland occur along the valley floor.

Perceptual/Experiential Landscape: The Chess valley is contained by its landform and wooded edges. Views are up and down the valley floor and across the valley (notably between Latimer House and Chenies). Some views into the valley are afforded from the higher ground of the chalk dip slope to the north (where woodland permits). The river is prominent through the area; the rough grazing, grassland and scrub woodland on the valley floor provide a rougher texture which contrast with the smoother pastoral and arable valley sides. Woodland crowns the valley tops extending down the sides in places.

Although the Latimer Road is relatively busy it is a local road and does not dominate

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the landscape as the main roads in other river valleys do. The absence of railways and major road, the prominence of Latimer park and the villages of Latimer and Chenies contribute to a rural, peaceful and historic character.

Biodiversity: The river itself is an important habitat. Biodiversity interest also occurs in wetland habitats along the valley floor and in woodlands on the valley sides. Frogmore Meadows is designated as a SSSI; it is a rare unimproved water meadow supporting plants such as ragged robin and meadowsweet. Part of Sarratt Bottom supporting neutral grassland is SSSI with active watercressbeds found in this location. Marshy grassland at Blackwell Farm, meadow adjacent to Lower Water at Latimer and woodland on the southern valley slopes are local wildlife sites. BAP priority habitats are chalk rivers, fens, lowland beech and yew woodland and lowland mixed deciduous woodland.

Historic Environment: The historic landscape is a mixture of fields, parkland and woodland. There are number of different types of fields including, historic meadows and watermeadows along the river Chess. Pre 18th century irregular enclosures occur along the valley sides; while on the valley sides to the south of the river pre 18th century co-axial fields are present. The 20th century has seen the subdivision of these older fields into pony paddocks enclosure.

Historic parklands are prominent in this area. The landscape contains Latimer Park, an 18th century grade II landscape and house, while to the south of the Chess is Chenies Place, a grade II* landscape and Chenies Manor, a 15/16th century manor house with 19th century gardens. Latimer Park is particularly visible in the centre of the character area straddling the River Chess and occupying 213ha of the valley floor and sides. Lancelot 'Capability' Brown reputedly advised on the landscape design of Latimer Park, while Chenies Place was designed by Edward Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll.

The archaeological record shows that the river Chess has been a focus for activity and settlement since the prehistoric times. Of particular note are the number of Iron Age/Roman settlements, including a site at Frogmore and a Roman villa excavated at Latimer. Another important monument is the earthworks of the deserted hamlet of Flaunden, which was believed to have been abandoned in the 19th century.

Designations:

- Chilterns AONB
- Registered Parks and Gardens: Chenies Park (Grade II*) and Latimer Park (Grade II).
- Scheduled Monuments: St. Mary Magdalen's Church; Medieval undercroft.
- Conservation Area: Chenies.
- Archaeological Notification Sites: 16 No.
- Priority Bap Habitats: 4 types.

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- Biological Notification Sites: 11 No.
- Local Wildlife Sites: 13 No.
- SSSI: 2 No. Frogmore Meadows, Sarratt Bottom.

EVALUATION

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Potential landscape and visual sensitivities are as follows:

- The flowing chalk stream of the River Chess which is large by Chiltern standards.
- Areas of rough grassland, pasture and scrub woodland which characterise the valley floor. The smoother pastoral and arable valley sides and wooded tops.
- Views along the valley floor and up the valley slopes and panoramic views from the valley slopes across the character area.
- The variety of ecological and historical features some of which are connected to the river environment and its management (water meadow SSSI and watercress beds).
- A concentration of archaeological sites along the river valley, particular relating to the prehistoric and Roman periods.
- Pre 18th century irregular and co axial enclosures which provide evidence of historic land use.
- Ancient and semi-natural woodland, with strong ecological and visual significance providing containment of this landscape.
- The historic villages of Latimer and Chenies located on the valley slopes with traditional building materials of brick and white plaster and timber frame.
- Registered parks and gardens of Latimer Park and Chenies Place and their setting in the River Valley, which contribute to strength of character and time depth.

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

Strategy/Vision: The overall strategy for the *Chess Chalk River Valley* is to conserve and enhance the character as a chalk valley with its chalk stream, watercress beds and water meadows, intact historic villages, parkland and areas of interlocked woodland along ridge tops.

Landscape Guidelines:

- Conserve and maintain the water flow and quality of the River Chess which is a principle focus in the landscape.
- Conserve the mosaic of land use and land cover within the valley. Maintain the contrast between the rougher texture of the valley floor and the smoother valley sides.

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- Promote appropriate management of farmland, to encourage and create more biodiverse habitats, as well as agriculturally productive landscapes. Prevent run-off from agricultural land. Maintain hedgerows for biodiversity and ecological connectivity.
- Conserve and maintain opportunities for panoramic views across the valley.
- Conserve historic elements and archaeological features, including pre 18th century irregular and co axial field enclosures.
- Encourage the restoration of the historic hedgerow pattern where it has been lost. To enhance the landscape character and strengthen the ecological diversity. Where necessary use historic maps to identify where hedgerows have been lost.
- Conserve and enhance important ecological habitats, particularly Priority BAP habitats in the valley, the chalk stream habitat and associated wetland habitats.
- Conserve and manage tree and woodland cover, particularly along the valley ridge, to ensure a diverse species and provide visual containment. Protect ancient woodland cover.
- Conserve and management of historic meadows and pastures.
- Conserve the character, fabric and appearance of historic buildings, in villages.
- Maintain the rural character of the roads which cut through the valley, avoiding over use and widening.
- Conserve the landscape setting of the registered parks and gardens. Latimer Park and its setting are key to the character of the area.

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A broad chalk valley with a wide, flat bottomed floodplain. The River Chess meanders gently and forms the main focus of the landscape.



Estate rail sometimes defines field boundaries (associated with Latimer historic parkland).



Woodland is located along upper valley slopes extending down to the valley floor in places. Woodland creates a visual boundary to the area.



The historic village of Latimer. Brick and white render and timber are characteristic building materials



Rough grazing, pasture and rough grassland on the valley floor. Smoother fields on the valley sides and wooded tops. Field boundaries are often defined by low hedges