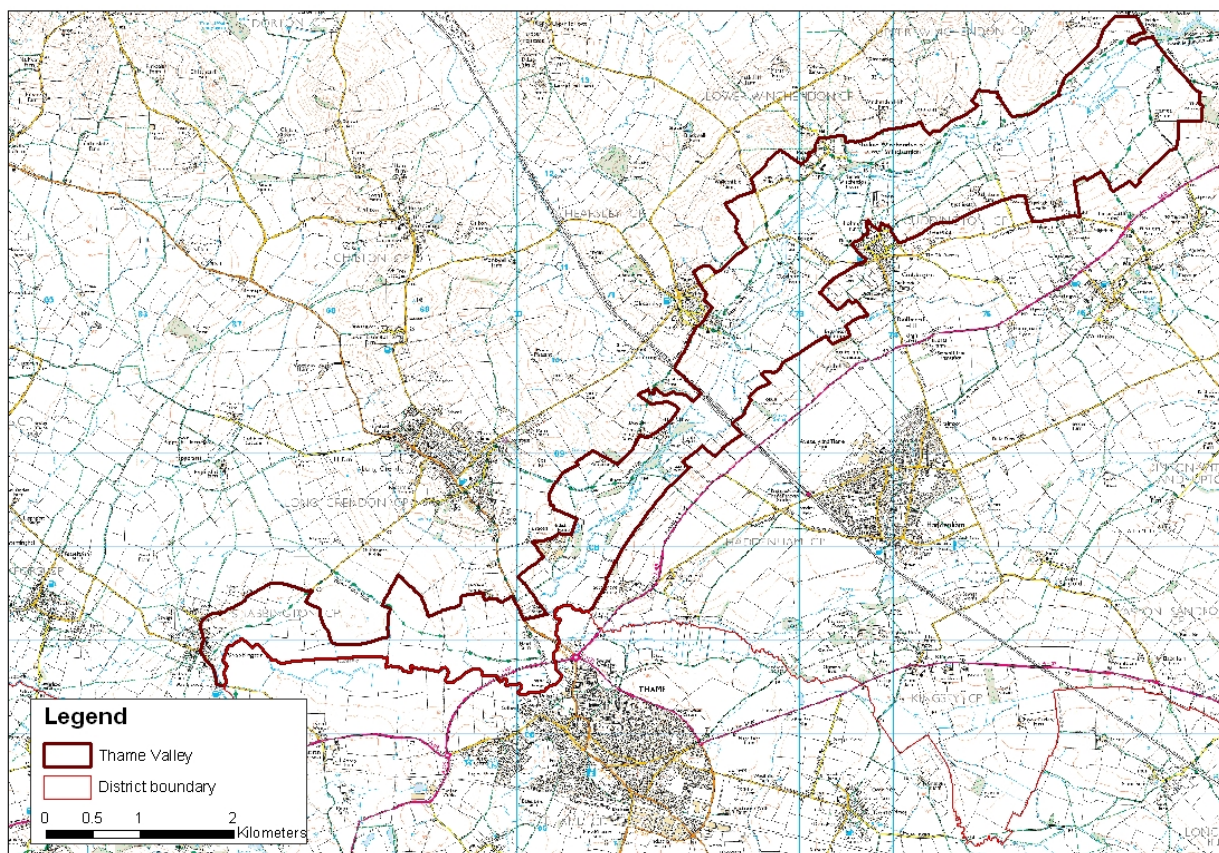
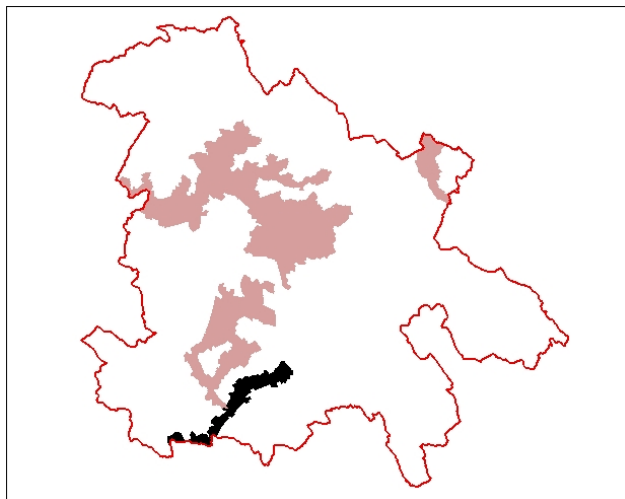


LCA 5.11 Thame Valley

Landscape Character Type: LCT 5 Shallow Valleys



## LCA 5.11 Thame Valley (LCT 5)

### Key Characteristics

- Shallow valley landform
- Meandering river
- Meadows
- Predominantly pastoral
- Low density of woodland cover
- Small scattered woodlands

### Distinctive Features

- Pollarded willows adjacent to the Thame
- Pre 18<sup>th</sup> century meadows adjacent to river
- Views to historic village edges
- Lower Winchendon village
- Old mill buildings
- Railway viaduct
- Moated sites
- Notley Abbey and grounds
- Divided river
- Emergent vegetation adjacent to the river
- Neutral and unimproved grassland

### Intrusive Elements

- Crendon Industrial Estate
- Roads and traffic between Long Crendon and Thame

**Location** The Thame Valley is a narrow valley to the west of Aylesbury, divided from the town by LCA 9.4 Waddesdon-Eythrope. It runs roughly from northeast to southwest.

**Landscape character** This is a small river valley with gently sloping ground where the landscape is contained by the surrounding higher ground of ridges. The landscape is predominantly pastoral with a scattering of small woodlands. There are some areas of prairie farming on the edges of the area but the historic pre 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape pattern has been retained in most of the area and the meadows adjacent to the river are of particular note.

The area of greatest visual appeal is generally close to the meandering river where the bank side vegetation, historic buildings such as mills and bridges, and a range of habitats create a rich and lively landscape. Mature pollarded willows are a consistent landscape feature along most of the river. Away from the river the landscape quality is more varied.

The villages which border the area have retained the link between the historic settlement and the river valley. The churches are a focal point of views within the valley. Much of the valley is inaccessible by road. The Thame Valley Walk and other footpaths give access to tranquil areas, which feel slightly remote, but farms or village edges are generally visible.

Hedgerows are sometimes in a poor condition or have been lost or replaced with post and wire fencing. This is however, generally an intact landscape with an enclosed intimate character and great visual interest. However, in the area between Long Crendon and Thame the industrial estate and the road junction disrupt the landscape pattern and are visually intrusive.

**Geology** The Thame valley lies at the transition between the Kimmeridge clay deposits to the northwest and the Purbeck and Portland limestone ridge to the southeast. The valley contains deposits of alluvium, head and river terrace materials.

**Topography** This area represents the lower slopes and flood plain of the Thame Valley. The upper slopes are steep and considered to be part of the adjacent ridges. The elevation range is from about 60m to 100m AOD.

**Hydrology** The river meanders along the small floodplain and is joined by several tributary streams the most notable being from the Crawley Narrow Valley LCA 5.10. In several areas the river is divided to create straighter shorter sections probably for former millruns. For the majority of its course the river meanders significantly. There are several springs on the sloping ground on the valley sides particularly on the eastern side.

**Land use and settlement** This is predominantly a grassland area often in small fields. The area of arable amounts to only about a tenth of the area but the majority of this is within prairie fields usually on the sloping valley sides rather than the valley floor. There is little road access. Roads tend to cross the valley or run along higher valley sides but there is a good network of footpaths both along the valley and connecting villages on opposite sides. There is very little settlement within the valley itself, but villages are spread along the adjacent higher ground. The historic edges of Shabbington, Chearsley, Cuddington and the majority of the small village of Nether Winchendon lie within the area. These settlements have retained their historic character and their vernacular buildings and churches lie close to the edge of this area and are a feature in views from paths along the valley. The

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valley has a number of other historic buildings and grounds including Notley Abbey and Nether Winchendon House. There are also a number of other features including weirs, footbridges, mill houses and scheduled ancient monuments creating a landscape with much visual interest. The railway crosses the valley on a brick viaduct, which is not widely visible. Many of the hedgerows have become fragmented or totally replaced by post and wire fencing. There are longer distance views up to the surrounding ridge tops.

**Tree cover** Small woodland blocks are scattered though the area, some of these look like wet woodlands adjacent to the river. The tree cover within hedgerows is notably better around the settlements of Chearsley, Cuddington and Notley Abbey than in the rest of the area. It is also generally good along the course of the River Thame itself. The trees along the Thame are predominantly pollarded willows and a significant landscape feature throughout the area. A number have recently collapsed or been blown over.

**Biodiversity** The dominant habitat types are grassland and arable although a few small areas of broadleaved woodland – a broad habitat type, and of coniferous woodland are present throughout. Most of the grassland is improved, but unimproved pasture can be found in the northern and central thirds, and neutral grassland, a further broad habitat type is present in several fields the north, and also in the far south. The only CWS is also grassland occurs close to Cuddington comprising an area of ridge and furrow and including a wetter area having some very notable flora for the area.

The river Thame is a significant aquatic habitat and a broad habitat type. The more interesting terrestrial habitats generally occur along or close to the stream but there are no known priority habitat types. This pattern suggests high biodiversity interest locally and provides good habitat connectivity, which is enhanced by the connecting tributary streams and hedgerows.

**Historic environment** North of the River Thame, this area was part of the medieval hunting forest of Bernwood, although the landscape was devoid of woodland since medieval times and was once a mixture of arable open fields and some isolated patches of woodland. The landscape is dominated by the River Thame, following the river's course are the well preserved pre 18<sup>th</sup> century meadows. The majority of the area retains the hedgerow pattern of pre 18<sup>th</sup> century enclosure both regular and irregular, although there is also some parliamentary enclosure. There are also small areas of modern and prairie fields.

The settlement pattern is dominated by the two nucleated villages of Chearsley and Nether Winchendon. The latter contains a number of distinctive historic buildings, including the Grade I listed buildings of St Nicholas parish church and the 15<sup>th</sup> century of Nether Winchendon House, which is set in its own distinctive grounds. There are also more dispersed settlement forms in this area, isolated farmsteads such as Ridgebarn Farm, and Notley Abbey. Notley Abbey house is also a Grade I listed building, the current building fabric has origins dating the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the remnant of the former medieval Augustinian priory which was dissolved in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Notley was in the ownership of the actors Lawrence Olivier and Vivian Leigh, who lived there from 1945 to 1959.

There are a number of notable archaeological sites in this area. The former Abbey at Notley contains the earthwork remains of the monastery and is designated as a scheduled ancient monument. There are also several deserted settlement earthworks; at Chearsley the remains of fishponds and a moated site while at Nether Winchendon there are earthwork remains of

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medieval house platforms, hollow-ways to the south of the village. Prehistoric and Roman remains would also be expected along the valley, although the lack of investigation along this stretch has led to few actual discoveries as yet.

This area has a high amenity value for the historic environment with a number of promoted routes for the Bernwood Jubilee Way.

### ***Designations***

Conservation Areas at Chearsley, Nether Winchenden, Cuddington  
Scheduled Ancient Monuments: Notley Abbey & Dovecote, Moated site east of St Nicholas Church, Moated site south of Beachendon Farm  
Archaeological Notification Areas – 20 No.  
CWS – 1 No.  
BNS – 6 No.

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Pollarded willows mark the course of the river to the south of Chearsley.



The village of Nether Winchendon has a strong historic identity and good footpath links to the Thame and across the valley to Cuddington.

## LCA 5.11 Thame Valley (LCT 5)

### Summary of Condition/Sensitivity Analysis

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Very Good</b>
Pattern of elements:	Unified
Visual detractors:	Few
Visual unity:	Strongly unified
Cultural integrity:	Good
Ecological integrity:	Moderate
Functional integrity:	Strong
<b>Sensitivity</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
Distinctiveness:	Distinct
Continuity:	Historic
Sense of place:	Moderate
Landform:	Apparent
Tree cover:	Intermittent
Visibility:	Moderate
<b>Guidelines</b>	<b>Conserve and Reinforce</b>

### Condition

A landscape that is generally in very good condition. The hedgerow pattern is predominantly intact particularly close to the river. There are few visual detractors and the landscape is strongly unified. The cultural integrity is good the area has good surviving meadows and contains some nationally important sites such as Notley Abbey and the attractive villages of Chearsley and Nether Winchendon. Some of the landscape features are in decline, many of the pollarded willow is poor and some have collapsed and some of the hedgerows are weak. Ecological integrity is moderate due to good connectivity and the areas of designated sites and habitats of District significance. The functional integrity of the landscape is strong although this has been weakened in places by more intensive arable farming.

### Sensitivity

The landscape is of distinctive character and good quality. Overall there is a good sense of historic continuity, which is strongest within and around the settlements and close to the river. The landform within the area is apparent and the surrounding higher ground gives a sense of enclosure. The sense of place is variable but generally considered to be moderate. The tree cover is intermittent, but a notable feature of the area is the pollarded willows along the riverbanks. The visibility is variable depending on location and is rated as moderate. Overall the moderate sense of place combined with the moderate visibility gives the landscape a moderate degree of sensitivity



Pollarded willows are a feature along most of the banks of the river Thame - these young trees are unusual many of the trees were overmature and some had collapsed.

## LCA 5.11 Thame Valley (LCT 5)

### Landscape Guidelines Conserve and Reinforce

The landscape guidelines for the Thame Valley are as follows:

- Encourage the retention and strengthening of the historic hedgerow pattern by infilling gaps and establishing new hedgerow trees.
- 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.
- Encourage the management of hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes.
- Promote the management and conservation of vegetation adjacent to the meandering watercourses including the pollarding of willows.
- Maintain the condition and extent of woodland using traditional techniques to create and manage a wide diversity of habitats.
- Maintain the condition and extent of neutral, unimproved and semi-improved grassland wherever possible. Encourage good management practices.
- Maintain connectivity of habitats.
- Improve the management of historic meadows and pastures.
- Close to watercourses promote the use of permanent pasture, with low stocking density and flooding regimes to promote biodiversity and landscape enhancement.
- New housing and alterations to existing housing should be designed to reflect the traditional character of the area and use locally traditional materials.
- Promote the survey, retention and restoration of historic parkland.
- Promote conservation, management and interpretation of the rich historic environment.
- South of Long Crendon investigate opportunities to promote new woodland planting on valley sides to enhance valley character and reduce visual impact of main roads and industrial estate.
- Identify key views to surrounding ridges from publicly accessible land and promote the preservation and enhancement of these views.
- Encourage the preservation of historic earthworks and ridge and furrow by maintaining a continuous grass sward and do not allow bare patches of soil to develop.



Chearsley church and tower is an important feature in views along the valley.