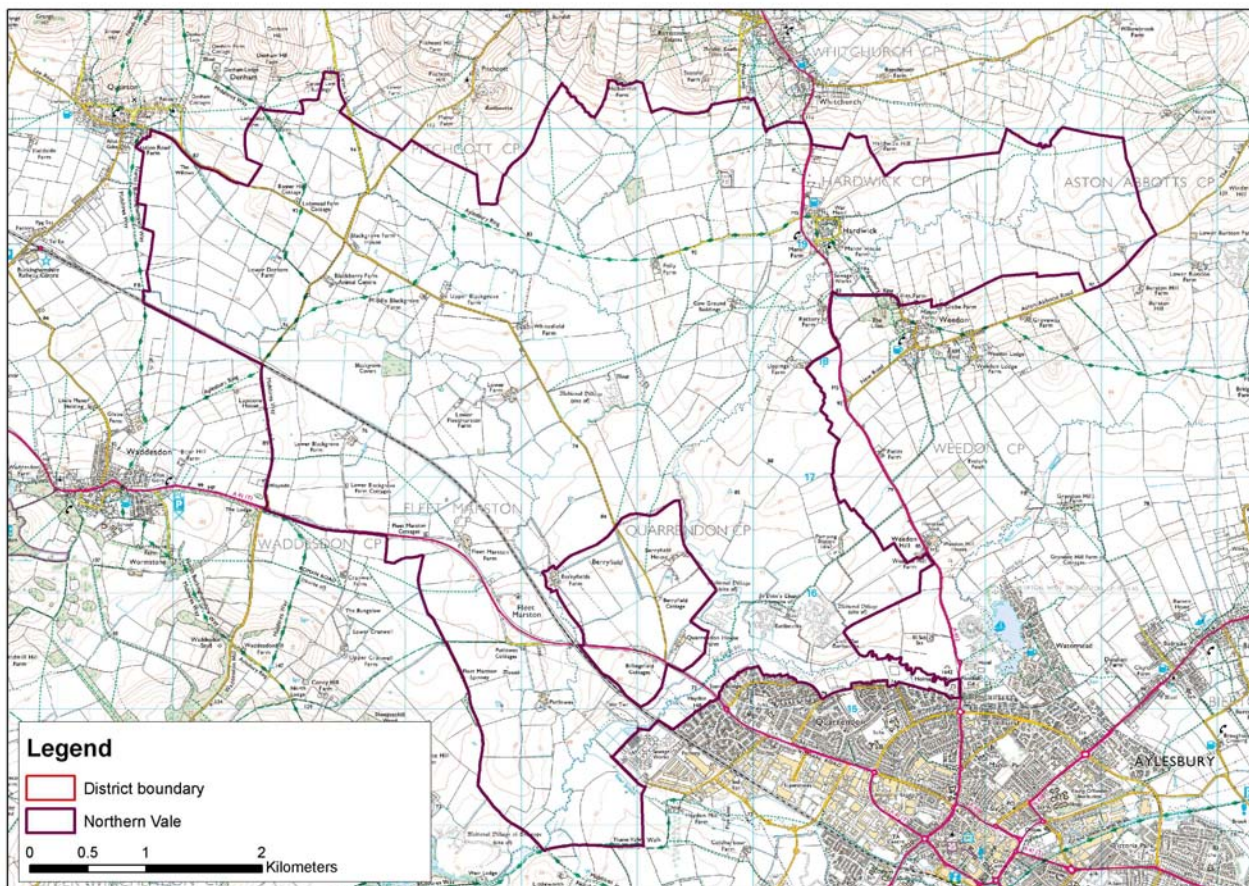
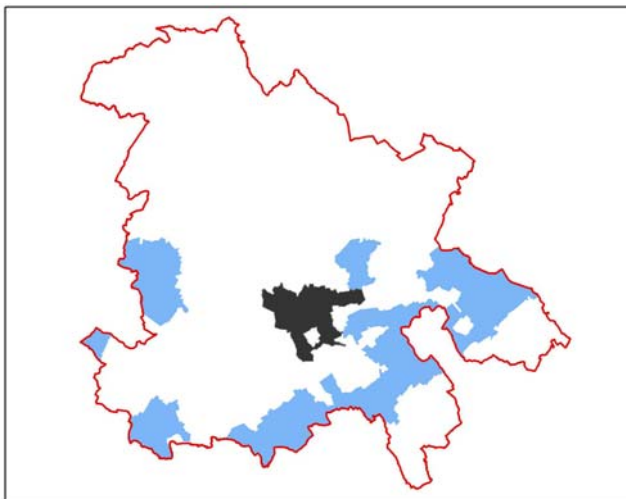


LCA 8.5 Northern Vale

Landscape Character Type: LCT 8 Vale



## LCA 8.5 Northern Vale (LCT 8)

### Key Characteristics

- Virtually flat landform
- Network of meandering streams feeding into the River Thames
- Large open arable fields
- Recreational and amenity landscape on the northern fringe of Aylesbury
- Historic meadows

### Distinctive Features

- Deserted medieval settlements
- Site of Quarrendon Tudor mansion and gardens
- Roman roads and settlements
- Hardwick church
- Fleet Marston church
- River Thames
- Large areas of neutral grassland in northeast

### Intrusive Elements

- Western fringe of area crossed by pylons
- Disused pumping station west of Weedon Hill Farm
- Railway line (occasional use only)
- Traffic on A41 and A413

**Location** The area lies immediately northwest of Aylesbury. The western extent is defined by the Waddesdon – Eythrope ridge whilst the eastern boundary is broadly the A413 corridor including a small valley north of Weedon that feeds into the Vale. The northern boundary merges gradually into the rising land that forms the Quainton – Wing Hills.

**Landscape character** Open vale landscape emphasised by very low level of settlement, limited topography, large scale landscape pattern and the hills lying to the north and south which define the visual horizon in most views. Despite the proximity of Aylesbury often clearly visible, there is a sense of isolation away from the A41 and A413.

**Geology** Ampthill Clay Formation - grey mudstone overlain locally with alluvium and Head deposits.

**Topography** Low lying vale crossed by a network of shallow valleys. The higher ground at the northern end lies at approximately 85m AOD. The land falls gently from 100m AOD at the head of the valley north of the Weedon Ridge to the river Thames which lies at a level of approximately 70m AOD. Immediately north of Quarrendon historic earthworks rise above the level of the vale landscape. Most notable are remains of the medieval settlement and Civil War earthworks.

**Hydrology** Feeder streams running from the higher ground to the north towards the river Thames meander across the flat vale landscape but often are not marked by vegetation.

**Land use and settlement** The dominant land use is arable. The fields are large scale, open with well trimmed hedges. The fields are often irregular in shape with notable loss of hedgerows due to field amalgamation. Land use on the northern and southern fringes changes to mixed arable and pastoral use. Grazing land is often found adjacent to water courses. The area of flood plain immediately between the River Thames and the northern edge of Aylesbury is laid out as recreational land with sports pitches connected by footpaths and parkland planting.

The area is sparsely populated, the settlement of Hardwick on the northern edge of the area being the exception. Elsewhere settlement comprises occasional farmsteads dispersed over the area with associated barns and notably some with taller structures such as silage storage facilities.

There are a number of deserted medieval village sites - one site lies to the north of Berryfield and there is a complex of sites to the east of Quarrendon House Farm comprising several earthworks including a ruined church and the site of a Tudor moated mansion and gardens. These are locally visible but do not feature strongly in the wider landscape. The south western corner of the area is crossed by Akeman Street, a Roman road. The church tower of St Mary's Church at Hardwick is a distinctive local feature.

**Tree cover** There are no large blocks of woodland, there are however, small groups of trees associated with farmsteads, following streams and grouped around ponds. Oak and ash are the dominant species on drier ground, whilst mature black poplar are often found along watercourses and ditches either as individuals or in groups. Mature pollarded willows are also common along wet ditches.

## LCA 8.5 Northern Vale (LCT 8)

**Biodiversity** The terrestrial habitat is dominated by an uneven mix of arable and grasslands peppered with small areas of broadleaved woodland within a framework of hedges and streams.

In the northwest of the area there is a high density of unimproved grassland and of neutral grassland, a broad habitat type. This is reflected in the designations of CWS and BNS in this locality. The CWS include the botanical interest of the previous Waddesdon Station and adjoining railway embankments, and of the seven species rich meadows at Waddesdon Common which include areas of ridge and furrow and ponds.

Aquatic habitat is provided by the river Thame and its tributaries. Adjacent to the Thame at Aylesbury Sewage Works a CWS has been designated in recognition of the importance of the marshy grassland and scrub for birds, riparian mammals and botanic interest.

**Historic environment** To the north of Aylesbury lies an extensive area of pre 18<sup>th</sup> century irregular enclosure land extending north from the flood meadows of the River Thame up to the Pitchcott - Whitchurch Ridge. These are large irregular fields that were probably established in the late 15<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> century following the depopulation of the medieval villages and the change over from arable to pastoral agriculture. The area also has a wide expanse of meadows with relict water channels on the outskirts of Aylesbury which are some of the best examples in Buckinghamshire. Dispersed over the area are moderate sized groups of fields which are 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosure land. Parliamentary enclosure land is concentrated over two areas around Hardwick, in two major groups to the southwest and southeast of the village and covering the fields to the northwest where they run up to the boundary at Quainton. There are large 20<sup>th</sup> century prairie fields stretching in a belt between Fleet Marston, northwest of Aylesbury and the Pitchcott to Whitchurch Ridge to the north.

The area also contains a number of nationally important archaeological site at Quarrendon; this comprises several earthworks including deserted medieval settlements, a ruined church and the site of a Tudor moated mansion and gardens built by Sir Henry Lee, Queen's Champion to Elizabeth I and founder of Aylesbury Grammar School. At Fleet Marston there is a substantial archaeological site of a 'Roman Small Town' along Akeman Street and a minor Roman Road leading to Thornborough. Across the rest of the area there is a dense scatter of Roman farmsteads and a few prehistoric sites. To the north of the Roman town is the deserted medieval village of Fleet Marston. The only tangible remains of the settlement is the grade II\* redundant parish church of St Mary's dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. There is also another small deserted medieval settlement known as Quarrendon III and some ridge and furrow. Other listed buildings, including a prominent church, are concentrated in the conservation area at Hardwick.

This area has a high amenity potential as the site of Quarrendon is focus of current conservation and access proposals.

### **Designations**

Conservation Area at Hardwick

Scheduled Ancient Monuments: Deserted Village & Earthworks

Archaeological Notification Areas – 30 No.

CWS – 5 No.

BNS – 8 No.

**LCA 8.5 Northern Vale (LCT 8)**



Open vale landscapes with scattered farmsteads, large fields, well clipped low hedges and occasional trees.



**LCA 8.5 Northern Vale (LCT 8)**

**Summary of Condition/Sensitivity Analysis**

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Good</b>
Pattern of elements:	Coherent
Visual Detractors:	Some
Visual unity:	Coherent
Cultural integrity:	Good
Ecological integrity:	Strong
Functional integrity:	Very strong
<b>Sensitivity</b>	<b>High</b>
Distinctiveness:	Distinct
Continuity:	Historic
Sense of place:	Moderate
Landform:	Apparent
Tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High
<b>Guidelines</b>	<b>Conserve</b>

**Condition**

Generally the condition of the landscape is considered to be good. The pattern of hedgerows has been eroded by the process of field amalgamation within the core of the area. It often remains only where boundaries are defined by ditches and drains. There are, however, better preserved field patterns and hedgerows on the northern fringe of the area. The general pattern of elements is considered to be coherent and there are few detracting features over this large area. The cultural integrity is good, the area contains a rich concentration of archaeological sites and monuments including the nationally important earthworks of Quarrendon as well as historic meadows and fields. Ecological integrity is strong as a result of good connectivity and a relatively large area of designated sites and

habitats of District significance. Overall the functional integrity is very strong.

**Sensitivity**

The area has a distinctive character and the historic associations are present in the various medieval and later earthworks but are being diluted by erosion of field pattern. Around the Quarrendon scheduled ancient monument the historic site has unique/rare distinctiveness. Overall the sense of place is moderate. The flat landform and sparse nature of tree cover provides for a high degree of visibility over the core of the area but this is reduced to moderate in the vicinity of the River Thames at Quarrendon due to the higher degree of tree cover. The overall degree of sensitivity is high.



Fleet Marston church.

## LCA 8.5 Northern Vale (LCT 8)

### Landscape Guidelines Conserve

Guidelines for the Northern Vale are as follows:

- Restore and enhance the original field pattern, where practical, including support for initiatives for management and replanting of hedgerows and infilling of gaps.
- Maintain and improve condition of existing hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes.
- Encourage the establishment of new hedgerow trees.
- Encourage planting of new woodlands and hedgerow trees particularly to reduce the visual impact of intrusive elements.
- Encourage the development of native vegetation including black poplar, along streams and other watercourses.
- Encourage traditional management of historic meadows.
- Maintain strong connectivity between habitats.
- Maintain extent and condition of neutral grassland.
- Where arable farming occurs next to watercourses encourage the creation of buffer strips of grassland and bank side vegetation to provide more diverse habitats enhance the landscape and reduce impact of run off of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers.
- Encourage improved access, conservation and interpretation of the area's rich historic environment, especially the Quarrendon scheduled ancient monument site in response to proposed development.
- Encourage the establishment of non-car based recreational routes into the countryside from the northern edge of Aylesbury. The routes should aim to be accessible to the less mobile.
- Encourage arable reversion or minimum cultivation to protect buried archaeological remains
- 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.
- Preserve or enhance the setting of key heritage features.
- Seek opportunities to bring the redundant church at Fleet Marston back into appropriate beneficial use.

