

LCA 9.3 Pitchcott-Whitchurch Ridge (LCT 9)

Key Characteristics

- Broad ridge eroded by network of small streams
- Gently rolling landform with distinctive local promontories
- Predominantly pastoral land use
- Small fields enclosed by mature hedges
- Extensive settlement along top of ridge
- Long distance views over surrounding landscape

Distinctive Features

- Church towers
- Large area of arable land north of Whitchurch adjacent to A413 corridor
- Historic earthworks of Bolbec castle
- Mature woodland around earthworks to west of Whitchurch
- Limestone walls and thatched properties
- Timber framed buildings
- Thatched roofs
- Ridge and Furrow
- Creslow

Intrusive Elements

- Traffic on A413
- Horse paddocks

Location The ridge is located to the north of Aylesbury and the LCA includes the three settlements of Pitchcott, Oving and Whitchurch. It is crossed by the A413. To the south the ridge defines the northern extent of the Northern Vale LCA.

Landscape character This is an extensive prominent ridge with rolling landform, predominantly in pastoral land use where the settlement is concentrated on the ridge tops. Earthworks support evidence of earlier historic settlement. The overgrown hedges contain mature trees and eroded valleys draining off the ridge are distinctive features. There are distant views in all directions and the church towers are local landmarks. Some settlements have stone walls and thatched roofs but buildings are predominantly of brick and tile construction. There has been some local development with intensive land use as horse paddocks.

Geology The Pitchcott to Whitchurch Ridge is made up of Kimmeridge clay capped by Purbeck and Portland stone and Whitchurch sand. There is also, on the lower eastern slopes, a capping of glacial till and other glacial deposits.

Topography The landform is a prominent ridge. The highest ground levels at 150 – 160m AOD cover the central section of the ridge and extend from the village of Oving to the western edge of Whitchurch. Pitchcott at the western edge of the ridge sits at an elevation of between 130 -150m AOD whilst to the east, the south eastern edge of Whitchurch is also lower at circa 130m AOD.

Hydrology The area is a local watershed with streams draining to the north into the Claydon Brook catchment which flows in the river Ouse. Streams that flow south from the ridge and east from Whitchurch collect together to flow into the river Thames catchment.

Land use and settlement The predominant land use is grazing land but with a large area of arable land north of Whitchurch.

Tree cover Several blocks of broadleaved woodland are present west of Whitchurch. Species are predominantly oak and ash with some pine.

Biodiversity The area is largely grassland, but it also contains significant areas of arable habitat. Most of the grassland forms a continuous block with grassland in adjacent LCAs. It is mainly improved, but also present are improved grasslands and an area of the broad habitat type neutral grassland to the west of Whitchurch and the subject of site BNS designation.

Other habitats are restricted to a very small amount of broadleaved woodland scattered throughout the Pitchcott-Whitchurch Ridge and concentrated in the central part, and to the streams and ponds – all broad habitat types. Further habitat interest and biodiversity potential is provided by the mature tree cover associated with the settlements and by the hedgerows again often with mature trees.

Historic environment A complex area with a multi-layered history of enclosure. The LCA is covered by a mosaic of pre 18th century enclosure and subsequent 19th century and parliamentary enclosure in varying sized parcels covering the whole area. This also includes a scattering of 20th century enclosure land principally around the edges of the settlement. There are also some prairie fields north of Whitchurch adjacent to the A413 corridor.

The settlement pattern comprises the nucleated linear village of Whitchurch,

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the village of Oving and the hamlets of Pitchcott & Creslow. Both Whitchurch and Oving are designated as conservation areas and contain a high concentration of listed buildings many of them timber framed. Whitchurch contains a number of fine medieval buildings including 'The Old House' and 'Priory hotel' and also the 13th century church of St John the Evangelist. Also of note is the prominent 14th century cruck built house at Creslow, which is one of the oldest vernacular buildings in the county. In addition to the older historic buildings, Whitchurch has a late nineteenth century country house called 'the Firs' that was used during the war for experimental development of munitions and known as 'Churchill's Toyshop'.

Apart from the richness of the built environment, the landscape also contains a good concentration of archaeological sites, some of which are designated as scheduled ancient monuments. The most outstanding are the earthworks of Bolbec castle at Whitchurch, this is a motte and bailey castle thought to date to the 12th century. At Creslow there are the remains of a deserted medieval settlement, while there are shrunken village earthworks at Pitchcott. To the north of Oving church there are the earthworks of a defensive ring work which is thought to be a part of a medieval manor. The landscape also has some good surviving ridge and furrow; particularly fine examples are to be found in the parish of North Marston and around the settlements of Creslow and Pitchcott. Although there is a bias towards medieval and post medieval archaeology, there is some evidence for Roman occupation south of Pitchcott while at Oving there is evidence for Iron Age site north of the village,

This area has good amenity value, the heritage of Whitchurch is visibly promoted with a number of walks and illustrated information boards placed at various points in the village; Oving also has signage promoting the settlement's past. The landscape is served by a number of Rights of Way. When considering the nature of the topography at Whitchurch the elevation makes the church towers visible from a distance either side of the ridge.

Designations

Conservation Areas at Whitchurch, Oving (2)

Scheduled Ancient Monuments: Deserted Village, Bolebec Castle (2)

Archaeological Notification Areas – 12 No.

BNS – 4 No.

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Pastoral fields north of Oving village.



Redundant church at Pitchcott now a private dwelling.

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Summary of Condition/Sensitivity Analysis

Condition	Good
Pattern of elements:	Unified
Visual detractors:	Few
Visual unity:	Strongly Unified
Cultural integrity:	Good
Ecological integrity:	Weak
Functional integrity:	Coherent

Sensitivity	High
Distinctiveness:	Distinct
Continuity:	Historic
Sense of place:	Moderate
Landform:	Dominant
Tree cover:	Intermittent
Visibility:	High

Guidelines	Conserve
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Condition

Overall the condition of the landscape is considered to be good. The ridge represents the boundary between the Vale landscape to the south and the rolling landscape of shallow valleys and eroded clay plateau to the north. The general pattern of elements is considered to be unified. There are few visual detractors, notably these are mainly associated with small pockets of horse paddocks enclosed by post and rail fencing concentrated around the fringes of the main settlements. Cultural integrity is good as disruption of field pattern is minimal. The landscape also contains several historic settlements and some significant archaeological sites. Ecological integrity is weak due to poor connectivity and a lack of designated sites and habitats of District significance. Overall the functional integrity is very coherent.

Sensitivity

The area has a distinctive character deriving from the relationship of the ridge to the surrounding landform. There is a perception of historic continuity and the sense of place is considered to be moderate. The degree of visibility increases with the elevation of the ridge above the lower slopes to the north and the Vale to the south. Tree covers is intermittent. Overall the degree of sensitivity is considered to be high.



Recent development at the southern end of the Pitchcott Ridge.

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Landscape Guidelines Conserve

The landscape guidelines for Pitchcott-Whitchurch Ridge are as follows:

- Conserve the extensive network of hedgerows and tree cover.
- Strengthen the field pattern around the arable areas to the north by planting up gaps in hedgerows and encouraging the development of hedgerow trees.
- Promote good woodland management to conserve the extent of woodland cover.
- Maintain and improve connectivity.
- Protect the integrity and vernacular character of the settlements.
- Encourage planting around suburban fringes in relation to new development.
- Conserve the sites and wider setting to the Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other Archaeological Notification Sites.
- Encourage the preservation of historic earthworks and ridge and furrow by maintaining a continuous grass sward.



Whitchurch - Garden walls in the local Shelley Purbeck limestone .