



## Colne Valley Landscape Partnership

# Colne Valley Landscape Character Assessment

Final Report  
August 2017



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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Appointment

1.1.1 Alison Farmer Associates was appointed by Groundwork South<sup>1</sup> on behalf of the Colne Valley Landscape Partnership (CVLP) in April 2017 to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) of the Partnership's Project Area. The Project Area broadly comprises the Colne Valley Regional Park and extends across 127.5 square kilometres.

1.1.2 The Colne Valley Partnership successfully applied for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2016 for a Landscape Partnership Scheme which seeks to connect local communities with their landscape and improve understanding and enjoyment. The purpose of this LCA is to provide the CVLP with an evidence base to inform the Scheme and especially the development of a Landscape Conservation Action Plan (LCAP). This assessment will also have a longer term relevance to the management of the Regional Park enhancing landscape and amenity value as well as informing future change.

1.1.3 The CVLP has four key aims as follows:

1. To restore and strengthen the landscape character and its visibility, focusing on key habitats intrinsic to the landscape, providing resilience and the ability to sustain the landscape in the long term.
2. To reconnect local communities with the landscape's heritage, raising awareness of the Colne Valley to a wider range of people through learning activities, information and interpretation resources, cultural events and volunteering.
3. To invest in skills to enable the stewardship, at grass roots level, of the landscape based on a specialised and locally specific Volunteer and Training Plan.
4. To create a robust, active and effective partnership for managing the landscape beyond the life of the Landscape Partnership scheme.

### 1.2 Structure of the Report

1.2.1 This report is divided into five sections and appendices as follows:

- This introductory section sets the scene providing background information to the study.
- Section 2 provides an overview and context to the Colne Valley, looking specifically at the area's natural influences, cultural evolution and nature conservation value as well as generic forces for change.
- Section 3 provides detailed descriptions of the Landscape Character across the Project Area.

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<sup>1</sup> Groundwork South is an environmental and community regeneration charity.

- Section 4 links the assessment to the future LCAP and sets out the themes and initiatives which have already been identified.

### 1.3 The Colne Valley Regional Park

1.3.1 The Colne Valley Regional Park was established in 1967 to preserve areas suitable for leisure, recreation and conservation to the west of London, between Rickmansworth and Staines. The first meetings of the local authorities engaged in the Regional Park took place in 1965 and in January 1972, a strategic plan was published titled 'Colne Valley Park a new prospect'<sup>2</sup> which set out the broad concept for the park to provide rural, as opposed to urban recreation, set within a broad background of countryside much of which was considered to have a beauty of its own.

1.3.2 More recently in 2012 the Colne Valley Park governance and operations were reviewed to ensure that protection, management and enhancement could be sustainable for the next 50 years and beyond. As a result, the Colne Valley Park Community Interest Company (CIC) was created to deliver 6 objectives which include:

1. To maintain and enhance the landscape, historic environment and waterscape of the park in terms of their scenic and conservation value and their overall amenity.
2. To safeguard the countryside of the Park from inappropriate development. Where development is permissible, it will encourage the highest possible standards of design.
3. To conserve and enhance biodiversity within the Park through the protection and management of its species, habitats and geological features.
4. To provide opportunities for countryside recreation and ensure that facilities are accessible to all.
5. To achieve a vibrant and sustainable rural economy, including farming and forestry, underpinning the value of the countryside.
6. To encourage community participation including volunteering and environmental education. To promote the health and social well-being benefits that access to high quality green space brings.

1.3.3 The landscape character assessment set out in this document, whilst supporting and informing the work of the CVLP, is intended to be a useful evidence base for the future management of the Regional Park. As such the objectives set out above form a relevant and important backdrop to this work.

### 1.4 Project Area

1.4.1 The River Colne rises in the Vale of St Albans, is fed by tributaries flowing from The Chilterns and is a major tributary of the Thames.

1.4.2 The Colne Valley Regional Park includes a significant part of the Colne Valley to the west of Greater London, including its valley floor, sides, surrounding plateau landscape and alluvial fan between Rickmansworth in the north to Staines in the

<sup>2</sup> ColneValley - strategy for the Regional Park, 1972, Greater London Council



south. The area spans the boundaries of numerous local authorities<sup>3</sup> including: Hertfordshire and Three Rivers District; Buckinghamshire and Chiltern / South Bucks Districts; Slough; Windsor and Maidenhead; Surrey and Spelthorne District; and finally Hillingdon.



**Figure 1: Project Area and Administrative Boundaries**

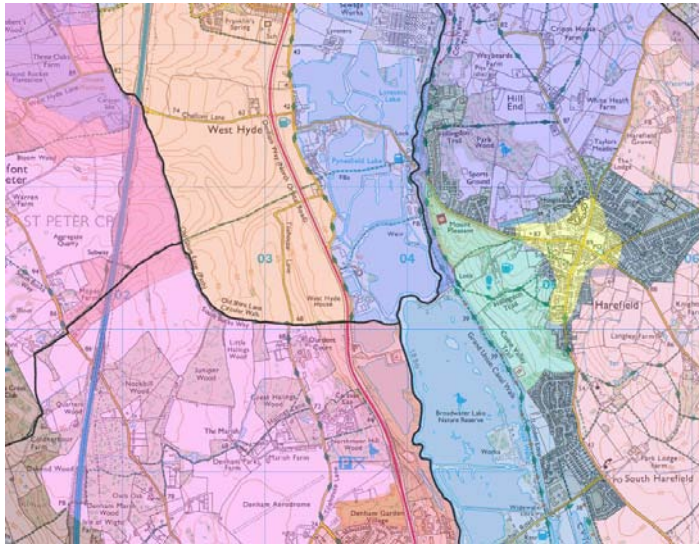


The initial Landscape Partnership Area, identified in the project brief, followed the Colne Valley Regional Park boundary with a couple of additional areas added which were considered relevant to the Partnership Scheme. The extent of this area was reviewed, in accordance with the brief, and several areas added (where there was a continuation of the Colne Valley landscape) and some areas deleted (where development had occurred or the landscape was deemed to be less connected to the Colne Valley). Proposed revisions to the Landscape Partnership Area are set out in appendix 1 of this report along with an explanation for the changes. A revised area was defined which is referred to throughout the rest of this report as the Project Area. Its extent in relation to the Colne Valley Regional Park boundary and Local Authority administrative boundaries can be seen in Figure 1.

<sup>3</sup> When the Colne Valley Regional Park was first established the historical counties involved in the area included Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Surrey and Middlesex.

## 1.5 Purpose of Study and Approach

- 1.5.1 The Colne Valley Regional Park is already covered by a range of landscape character assessments undertaken at a National Level (National Character Area 115 Thames Valley) and by local authorities. Local authority administrative areas often coincide with the River Colne such that the Colne Valley landscapes often lie at the periphery of assessments. This has led, in places, to the underplaying of the characteristics of the valley landscape in written descriptions and occasionally poor integration between one assessment and another.



There is therefore a need to provide a comprehensive understanding of landscape character across the Colne Valley, by bringing existing assessments together and preparing a public facing narrative which places the Colne Valley at the centre.

**Figure 2:** Extract from existing Landscape Character Assessments at the junction of Hertfordshire, Hillingdon, Chilterns and South Bucks, illustrating changes in character areas at administrative boundaries.

- 1.5.2 This assessment is based on national guidance as set out in *Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland*, 2002, Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage and in the more recent publication *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment*, Natural England October 2014.
- 1.5.3 Landscape Character Assessment is a useful tool, recognised by Government and promoted by Natural England, to identify the special character that gives a landscape its sense of place. Through this understanding the assessment helps inform planning and management of future change. Landscape Character Assessment recognises that all landscapes matter, not just those that are designated.
- 1.5.4 Landscape character is the distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements that makes one landscape different from another. Variations in geology, soils, landform, land use, vegetation, field boundaries, settlement patterns and building styles all help give rise to different landscapes. These differences are the product of both natural and human influences.
- 1.5.5 Landscape character assessment involves mapping, classifying and describing these variations in landscape character. It also involves making judgements about the character and condition of the landscape, and analysing forces for change, to help us



make informed decisions about how we should manage change in the future. In classifying the landscape, two categories may be identified:

1. *Landscape character types* - these are landscapes with broadly similar combinations of geology, landform, vegetation, land use, field and settlement patterns. They repeat across a landscape so that landscapes belonging to a particular type (for example valley floor or tributary valley), and may be found in different places.
2. *Landscape character areas* - these are unique areas that occur in only one place and are therefore geographically specific. They have their own individual character and identity. For example, the Black and Langley Parks or Colne Valley: Rickmansworth to Denham are each unique.

1.5.6 Landscape character assessment can be applied at different scales from the national to the local level. As noted above there is landscape character assessment coverage at a national level and also at a Local Authority level. However neither of these assessment scales reflect the character of the Colne Valley - the National Character Areas being too broad brush and the Local Authority assessments often disaggregating the Colne Valley into small parts which make it hard to understand the whole or perceive the valley as a unit.

1.5.7 The scale of assessment adopted in this study therefore seeks to find a middle ground between existing coverage, providing information on broad types and simplifying character areas in the Local Authority Assessments where necessary. As noted in current guidance<sup>4</sup> *'Where an assessment draws upon a more detailed landscape character assessment, landscape types and areas are amalgamated at the scale appropriate to the new classification (para 4 page 47) and that 'sometimes... the distinctiveness of individual areas will suggest that the use of types is not helpful and that the assessment should focus only on individual areas' (para 2 page 45-46).* For the purposes of this study a conscious decision was made to define broad character types to help explain the changes in landscape which occur through the Colne Valley, but then to focus the assessment on character areas describing locally recognisable areas which express common characteristics and express a distinctive sense of place. The definition and description of character areas draws heavily upon existing Local Authority assessments and presents a common picture of character throughout the study area at a scale which can be readily grasped and understood. The character areas defined in this study were consulted on with key stakeholders (refer to appendix 2) and adjustments made to boundaries, names and descriptions where necessary. This assessment should be used in conjunction with Local Authority assessments where an understanding of more detailed local variations in character is required.

1.5.8 This assessment has focused on the landscape of the Colne Valley and has not included the detailed analysis of built up areas as part of the descriptive work. Nevertheless, the smaller villages have been considered and form part of the description of landscape character, with particular emphasis on understanding settlement pattern and relationship to landscape setting. No specific townscape or urban character assessments have been undertaken. The assessment has also sought to capture experiential and perceptual aspects of the landscape and whilst

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<sup>4</sup> An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England 2014.

consideration has been given to factors which contribute to or detract from tranquillity, this assessment has not constituted a detailed tranquillity assessment.

1.5.9 Key sources of information used during this study have included:

- GIS datasets supplied by relevant local authorities
- National Character Area 115: Thames Valley
- East of England Regional Typology
- Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (2001)
- Hillingdon Landscape Character Assessment (2012)
- Buckinghamshire Landscape Character Assessment (2011)
- Surrey Landscape Character Assessment (2015)
- Windsor and Maidenhead Landscape Character Assessment (2004)
- Colne Valley Park a new prospect (Jan 1972)
- Colne Valley Park Historic Landscape Characterisation Project (2007)
- The Buckinghamshire Landscape, Michael Reed (1979)
- All London Green Grid, GI Strategy Area Framework (2012)
- Buckinghamshire Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2013)
- High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Environmental Documents

1.5.10 This assessment has included four broad stages:

1. Familiarisation stage including a site visit and gathering background data from the client team.
2. Desk study stage where digital data and background documents were reviewed and landscape character types and landscape character areas defined in draft.
3. Site assessment where the draft character types/areas were verified in the field and perceptual aspects of the landscape recorded.
4. Write-up phase where the written descriptions for landscape types and landscape areas were developed.

## 2.0 About the Landscape

The landscape of the Colne Valley has been shaped by the intricate interplay of physical influences (including geology, glaciation, landform, drainage and climate), with a range of human influences across the ages. This section examines the effects of these different factors on the evolution of the landscape that we see today and gives an overview of the land cover, habitats, fields, and settlements that characterise the modern landscape.

### 2.1 Geology, Soils and Topographic Variation

- 2.1.1 The bedrock geology of the Colne Valley is fairly uniform. The oldest rock is the Upper Cretaceous chalk found in the north (the southern margins of the Chilterns), followed by younger sedimentary rocks called the Lambeth Group and London Clay Group. The Lambeth Group comprises sands and mudstones and is closely associated with the fringes of the chalk. South of Denham the bedrock geology is dominated by the London Clay mudstones.
- 2.1.2 The chalk geology in the north gives rise to the highest topography in the Project Area (c. 115m AOD) and smooth rounded rolling landform. In places the chalk geology is at or near the surface, particularly along the valley sides of the Colne between Rickmansworth and Uxbridge. In the past some areas have been quarried and today the chalky soils support patches of important calcareous grassland.
- 2.1.3 South of Denham the chalk geology changes quickly to the younger London Clay mudstone and elevation drops giving rise to more low lying and uniform topography in the middle and southern parts of the Project Area.
- 2.1.4 The geology of the Project Area is made more complex by the influence of superficial deposits. Glacial meltwater gravels from ancestral rivers have been deposited within the floodplains of the current rivers but also on land above the river valleys which were former river terraces. Within the current valleys a further layer of alluvium or silt has been deposited on top of the gravels.
- 2.1.5 On the higher land above the valley, the superficial glacial river terrace sand and gravel deposits have been less worked. These deposits give rise to patches of sandy acidic soils which are free draining and historically were less valued for agriculture. Often these areas formed common or heath and latter, the creation of 18th century parkland and plantations - this pattern is particularly noticeable in terms of present day land use and vegetation west of Iver.
- 2.1.6 South of Harmondsworth the Colne is no longer a distinct valley as it broadens to become an extensive alluvial plain or fan. The river splits into distributaries (totalling 12 in number) which, as they approach the Thames, spread out across the ancient alluvial fan. Here broad deposits of gravel and sand were formed during the ice age and are somewhat higher than the ground to the east. This has allowed radial distributaries such as the River Ash to drain eastwards towards the Thames.
- 2.1.7 The sand and gravel deposits, within the northern valley floor, and alluvial fan to the south have resulted in the intense extraction industries which reached their peak of

activity in the first half of the 20th century (see the historic evolution of the landscape below) and the subsequent extensive development of open water and lakes throughout the Project Area.

## 2.2 The Cultural Landscape and Historic Evolution

- 2.2.1 The Colne Valley Project Area, on first glance, appears to be a landscape of significant 20th century development including large areas of flooded mineral extraction sites, reservoirs and early 20th century settlement zones. However, despite this high level of modern influence, historic parks and ancient woodland survive as public recreation areas whilst areas of significant 19th century and pre 18th century fields systems also survive. In addition, a history of gravel extraction and development has uncovered evidence of longstanding human occupation including hunter-gather butchery sites on gravel islands in the floor of the valley at Uxbridge and Staines, while one of the earliest settlements in the country was discovered at Kindsmead Quarry near Horton in 2013. Bronze Age and Iron Age finds include jewellery and weapons such as a bronze sword at Wraysbury, while a Roman settlement was discovered at the Lea Quarry, Denham.
- 2.2.2 Historically the Colne Valley was essentially an agricultural landscape from prehistoric times until the late 19th century. The floodplain was occupied by small mixed farms set in a characteristic "ditches-with-pollards" landscape.
- 2.2.3 The first written evidence comes from the Saxon period, the 'Chronicles of St Aethelweard', which refers to a house of Danes taking refuge on an island in the Colne after escaping King Alfred's army.
- 2.2.4 From the Medieval period to Victorian times water milling was an important industry along the River Colne. During King Henry VIII reign the Duke of Northumberland River was constructed to augment the flow of water supplying existing mills and to supply new mills along the River Crane and is an early example of water abstraction from the Colne and of the important role the Colne played in servicing the growth and prosperity of London.
- 2.2.5 Industrialisation began slowly in the late 18th century, with the construction of the Grand Junction Canal, and accelerated from the mid 19th century. This process led to extensive management of the rivers, the construction of canals and railways and the expansion of historic settlements. The demand for raw materials also added to the pressures of modernisation, as the river gravels common throughout the valley became an increasingly valuable asset. The mineral extraction industry impacted hugely on the landscape creating over 70 gravel pits many of which are now lakes as well as some chalk pits as seen at Northmoor Hill Wood.
- 2.2.6 Around the Grand Union Canal, many brickfields were dug from the 19th century. Bricks were transported by canal to help with the building and expansion of London. These areas were filled with London's rubbish brought back along the canal. During this time the area also became fashionable to build country houses and parkland due to its proximity to London, especially in the Mid Colne and west of Iver.
- 2.2.7 The early 20th century saw an increased demand for housing in the immediate areas of the valley, leading to the creation of suburban settlements. This was halted in the

late 1950's by the establishment of the Metropolitan Green Belt. Since then, the most significant changes the Project Area has experienced are associated with transport infrastructure e.g. M20, M40 and M4, as well as Heathrow and the construction of four large water reservoirs which supply London and the South East.

- 2.2.8 With the establishment of the Colne Valley Partnership in the mid 1960's, there has been a valley-wide emphasis on protecting the environment and enhancing its recreational value.
- 2.2.9 The landscape of the Colne Valley Regional Park has also inspired writers and artists over the years. In his book *The Unofficial Countryside* (1973) Richard Mabey was partly informed by his walks along the Colne Valley while Milton is known to have been inspired by the landscape surrounding his childhood home in Horton. In terms of artists Rupert Lee painted landscapes near Iver Heath as did Paul Nash capturing some of the qualities and patterns in the landscape which are still seen today.

### 2.3 Important Habitats and Species

- 2.3.1 The Colne Valley is the first significant area of countryside to the west of London. Its network of lakes, watercourses, canal, woodland, meadows and farmland, provide a haven for wildlife and important habitat corridors. Nationally significant populations of breeding and overwintering wetland birds, rare animals such as otters and water voles and regionally significant populations of Daubenton's bats depend on the valuable and sensitive habitats of the Colne Valley.
- 2.3.2 The Colne Valley's intricate mosaic of habitats with valued ecotones, where habitats grade from one type to another, is in part a reflection of its geology and in part a reflection of land management over many centuries. In the northern parts of the valley where the solid chalk geology is at the surface there are valuable chalk grasslands. In areas where glacial gravels have been laid down on the surrounding higher farmland there are patches of acidic heath vegetation. On the valley floors remnant areas of wet grassland and rush meadows can be found along with wet willow and alder carr woodland, while notable ancient woodlands flank the northern valley sides and plateau. Open pasture and hay meadows would once have been a common sight on the valley floor however their coverage is now much reduced, enhancing the value of those grassland sites that remain. In their place are now sizable waterbodies following gravel extraction and reservoir creation which in themselves have created new wildlife value, especially for overwintering wetland birds.
- 2.3.3 The biodiversity value of the wetland, woodland and grassland landscapes is recognised through many designations, including part of a Special Protection Area,<sup>5</sup> 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, over 20 nature reserves, and many county wildlife sites within the Project Area. In addition to these designations the Project Area is also a focus for the Wildlife Trust's Living Landscape Scheme. This scheme seeks to protect the landscape from fragmentation, through re-connecting isolated

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<sup>5</sup> The South-West London Water Bodies SPA comprises a series of embanked water supply reservoirs and former gravel pits that support a range of man-made and semi-natural open water habitats. The reservoirs and gravel pits function as important feeding and roosting sites for wintering wildfowl, which occur in numbers of European importance.



green spaces, to enable wildlife to move and thrive in response to pressures from habitat and climate change.

- 2.3.4 The Colne valley is also covered by Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs<sup>6</sup>) which aim to establish a strategic framework for conserving and enhancing biodiversity at a landscape-scale, making wildlife more robust to changing climate and socio-economic pressures. BOAs are those areas where targeted maintenance, restoration and creation of Priority Habitats will have the greatest benefit towards achieving this aim. There are many BOAs within the Colne Valley Project Area including the Colne Valley around Denham, Black Park which forms part of the South Bucks and Parklands BOA and the area to the southwest of Heathrow.

## 2.4 Factors Influencing Change

### Introduction

- 2.4.1 The landscape assets of the Project Area are constantly changing in response to natural processes and human activity. Throughout the area's long history, change in agriculture, industry, society and the environment have had a profound and lasting influence over the landscape. Change is driven by a diverse range of forces ranging from government policies, the relationship between UK and Europe as well as built and economic development pressures.

- 2.4.2 The vast majority of the Project Area is included in London's Metropolitan Green Belt the purposes of which are:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

- 2.4.3 The National Planning Policy Framework states in para 79 that:

"The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence"

- 2.4.4 Nevertheless the Colne Valley landscape continues to change and evolve and faces pressure from the potential expansion of Heathrow, Thames Flood Relief Channel and further infrastructure development including HS2, as well as housing/employment development. However, change is not just in the form of major development - often changes may be small-scale, subtle and piecemeal and can have a cumulative effect over time. Changes outside of the area may also have a profound effect such as increased abstraction upstream, as a consequence of HS2 construction rendering groundwater around the construction sites downstream unusable. The cumulative

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<sup>6</sup> Biodiversity Opportunity Areas reflect the most important areas for biodiversity in each Local Authority area and form a basis for developing resilient ecological networks

effects of these forces for change, when taken with the potential changes in the economy, human lifestyles and climate, may be considerable.

### **Administration and Vision**

- 2.4.2 The rich and diverse natural and cultural landscape heritage of the Colne Valley has long been recognised, through the creation of the Regional Park, as a major contributor to the quality of life of local residents and visitors. However, local authority boundaries do not mirror the Colne Valley as a landscape unit and the Project Area is split between ten local authorities (Districts and Counties). As such the Colne Valley is often at the periphery of strategic planning, management and funding and the area lacks a shared spatial vision between all parties. This can therefore hamper the creation and implementation of landscape scale initiatives across the area.

### **National Infrastructure**

- 2.4.3 The Colne Valley is traversed by major infrastructure including the M25, M40 and M4 and lies immediately to the west of Heathrow Airport. Through much of the Project Area the motorways are reasonably well accommodated such that their visual impact is contained by valley floor and valley side vegetation. However, in places traffic movement and noise can be intrusive affecting tranquillity particularly at major junctions. The valley also houses the Uxbridge Moor electricity sub-station just south of Denham which radiates a significant number of transmission lines - four to the north and three to the south. The pylon lines can individually and cumulatively have a significant effect on the character and appearance of the valley landscape.
- 2.4.4 In future the area is likely to experience further change as a result of nationally significant infrastructure projects including High Speed 2 Rail Link which will impact on the northern part of the Colne Valley Regional Park and the possible expansion of Heathrow Airport with a new third runway. Other development/infrastructure projects which may also affect the area include the Thames Flood Relief Channel. The effects of these major projects are significant in themselves and collectively may alter perceptions of the area as a whole and its valued character and appearance. Care will need to be taken to consider the landscape and visual effects of these developments on the varied character within the Project Area ensuring that positive environmental enhancement which reinforces the special character and values of the landscape are delivered as part of any scheme.

### **Changes in Agriculture and Land Management**

- 2.4.5 Over the last hundred years the agricultural base of the Colne Valley has seen enormous change due to gravel extraction and the creation of large expanses of open water, the fragmentation of landholding due to major transport infrastructure and also the decline in the viability of traditional agricultural management.
- 2.4.6 There is evidence that over time habitats such as chalk grassland on the valley sides and grazing marsh on the valley floor have become fragmented due to land use changes and lack of management. Historically, traditional grazing of grassland prevented it from becoming dominated by vigorous plants and succeeding to scrub and woodland. However, in the last half century, many farmers have opted out of livestock grazing such that grasslands are becoming dominated by coarse, vigorous

plants and scrub invasion resulting in a loss of diversity. As areas of grassland and heathland shrink, they also become more fragmented and the associated populations of invertebrates decrease too.

- 2.4.7 Wetland landscapes are often privately owned and there is often lack of knowledge or coordinated approaches to management of these habitats at a landscape scale. Occasionally wetlands are neglected and have the potential to be better managed.
- 2.4.8 Lack of woodland and vegetation management on the valley floor has resulted in these areas becoming more enclosed which in turn has led to a loss of views across and along the river valley particularly in the north of the area from the more pronounced valley sides. On the valley sides and surrounding river terraces evidence of lack of management of longer established and often ancient woodlands has resulted in a loss of woodland structure and biodiversity.
- 2.4.9 Invasive non-native species have also become a problem in the Colne Valley especially along the waterways and wetlands. Species such as Pennywort, Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Mink are problematic - for example in Denham pennywort has grown to the extent it forms a carpet across the river and severely impacts on native wildlife and flood risk capacity of the river channel. In addition American Signal Crayfish and Cormorants (*Carbo Sinensis*) are also presenting management issues such as loss of some species of fish and bank erosion. A co-ordinated programme to controlling these non-native species, in order to minimise negative impact on native animals and plants, flood risk, health risk, and recreation, is a priority. Furthermore, many of the rivers are being impacted by unfavourable flow conditions, man-made structures in the channel and rural and urban pollution. These factors may further impact on populations of invertebrates and fish.

### **Development Pressures**

- 2.4.10 There is substantial pressure for new housing in the Colne Valley area as Local Authorities seek to meet their projecting housing targets and to work collaboratively with adjoining Authorities which will not be able to meet requirements within their own areas. For example Chiltern District and South Bucks District Councils have identified several Green Belt Preferred Option sites for housing development and a number of these will fall within the Colne Valley Project Area around Denham, Iver Heath and Iver village. This landscape character assessment will form an important baseline dataset with which to assess landscape and visual sensitivities of each site and to seek opportunities for any development to positively reinforce and enhance local character or to create a new sense of place. Furthermore development pressure will increase water abstraction pressures and may raise issues regarding waste management within the Project Area.

### **Recreation and Enjoyment Pressures**

- 2.4.11 The Colne Valley Park has approximately 45,000 inhabitants and has in excess of three million within ten miles of the Park. With a significant population on the doorstep of the Colne Valley Project Area the landscape faces pressures of trespass, arson, fly tipping and other illegal uses, adding to the operational and insurance costs of local farmers.

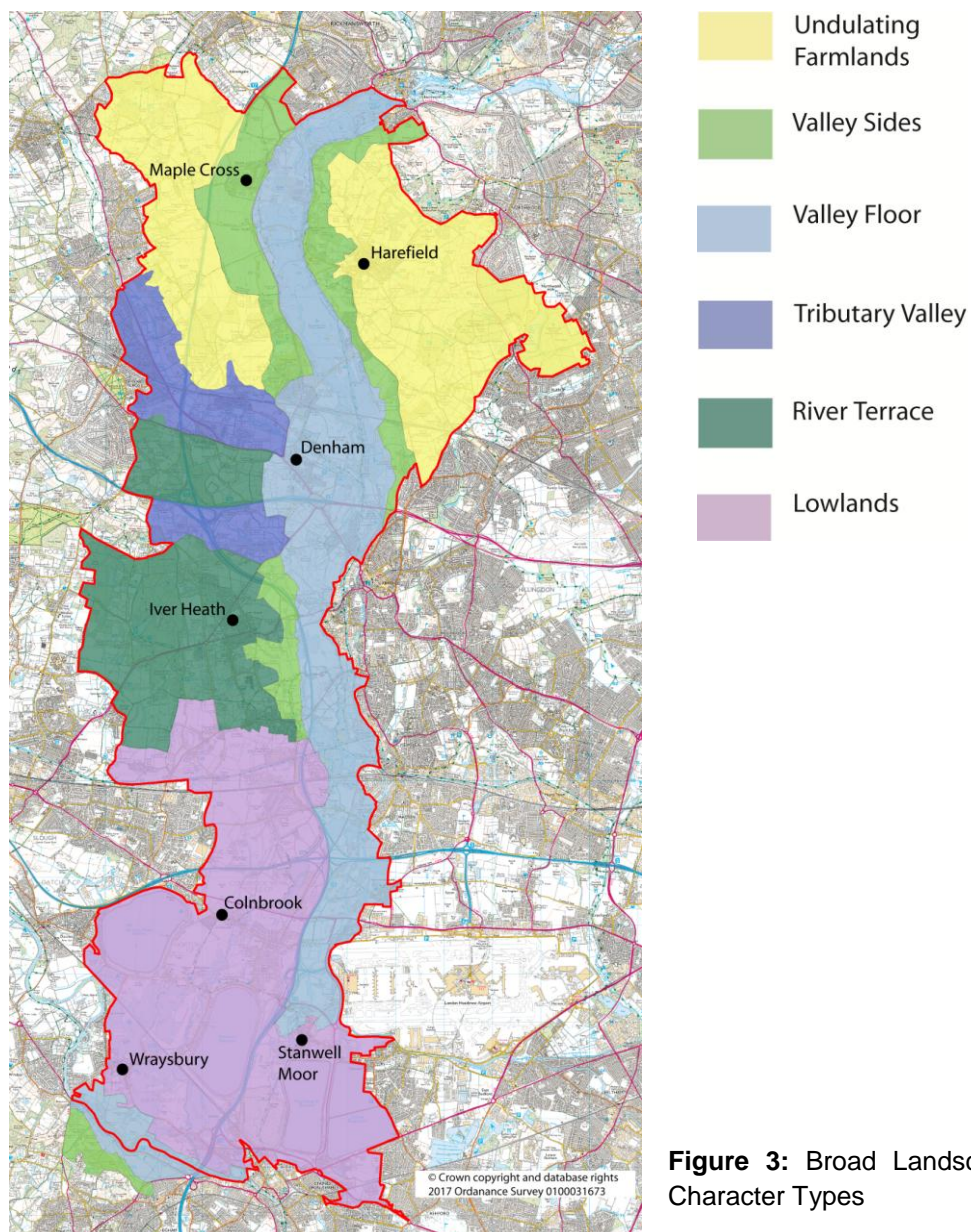
- 2.1.12 Many of the people who live locally are not aware of the Colne Valley as a coherent landscape. Whilst many people visit and enjoy specific attractions such as Rickmansworth Aquadrome or Langley Park there is limited recognition of the wider landscape and how specific sites link throughout the Valley. There is considerable scope to help reconnect communities with the landscape and to provide a greater understanding of the Colne Valley as a distinct landscape and through this increased awareness to engender greater appreciation and responsibility to cherish and protect it.

## 3.0 Landscape Character

### 3.1 Landscape Types Classification

3.1.1 The existing character assessments covering the Project Area identify a range of landscape character areas or types. All of these assessments have been referred to during this study and have assisted in informing written descriptions.

3.1.2 Reference to broad changes in geology, topography, soils and land use patterns, along with typologies within existing relevant assessments, were used to define six broad landscape types which make up the Project Area. These are illustrated in Figure 3 and described in Table 1.





**Table 1: Broad Landscape Types within the Project Area**

<p><b>Undulating Farmlands</b></p> <p>This is a varied and textured landscape type comprising elevated undulating landform, sometimes steep with notable patches of woodland (often ancient). Minor streams drain the landscape and there are also dry valleys forming smooth undulations where underlying chalk geology is close to the surface. Field patterns are varied comprising large open fields of arable on fertile soils and more intimate irregular early enclosures on heavier soils. Settlement is dispersed and includes nucleated villages and linear development along roads. This is a relatively tranquil landscape although close to major infrastructure tranquillity is reduced. This landscape may have an enclosed character with wooded horizons but at the junctions with river valleys there are longer distant views.</p>
<p><b>Valley Sides</b></p> <p>Sloping land forming the sides of distinctive valleys. Slopes are often undulating and sometimes steep supporting areas of woodland (some ancient), pasture and arable - often on upper slopes. Small scale early enclosures defined by dense hedgerows are common but in places patterns have become lost due to rationalisation of boundaries and predominance of arable. The interlocking pattern of woods often creates a well wooded, intimate character. Historic settlements with landmark churches occur on upper slopes or close to the valley floor. Major infrastructure and urban expansion sometimes affect this landscape type. There are elevated views across the valley floors and lowlands from this landscape type.</p>
<p><b>Valley Floor</b></p> <p>Flat, low lying valley floors supporting a predominately pastoral land use, associated with notable watercourses/rivers. Generally unsettled, with areas of carr woodland, gravel extraction lakes, and meadows. Dense scattering of trees, scrub, poplar and willow trees resulting in a sense of enclosure and limited views. A generally unsettled landscape although there are occasional mill buildings and features associated with canals. Some urban encroachment onto the valley floor occurs in places. The presence of water and limited settlement often creates a tranquil/rural landscape particularly where mineral extraction has ceased and landscape has been restored.</p>
<p><b>Tributary Valley</b></p> <p>Small scale valleys within which minor streams and watercourses flow through a narrow valley floor. Shallow valley sides which are well wooded, intimate and often with limited access. On the valley floor remnant meadows and pastures dominate while the valley sides may comprise a matrix of pasture and woodland with some pony paddocks. Settlement may occur on the valley sides and in places extend onto the valley floor. These landscapes are often significantly affected by major infrastructure which tends to reduce tranquillity and fragment the valley landscape.</p>
<p><b>River Terrace</b></p> <p>Elevated land above the main valley which is relatively flat or gently sloping and significantly influenced by glacial fluvial deposits from ancestral watercourses. Deposits include sand and gravel over a bedrock geology of London Clay. Ponds are a feature along with patches of former heath or common. Patches of acidic</p>

vegetation including bracken and birch as well as conifer plantations are common. Settlement is often dispersed and linear along minor lanes. Parklands and estate landscapes give rise to extensive woodland, veteran trees and designed parkland.

#### **Lowlands**

This is a low lying, relatively flat to gently sloping landscape comprising a large alluvial fan or floodplain. There are numerous water channels often comprising distributaries of a main river and evidence of former meads. Underlying gravel deposits result in extensive areas of lakes from former mineral extraction sites as well as landfill sites and areas of active extraction. This landscape varies in terms of woodland cover and sense of openness. Its proximity to major centres of population mean it has accommodated the needs of conurbation including construction of reservoirs and major transport hubs.

## **3.2 Landscape Areas Classification**

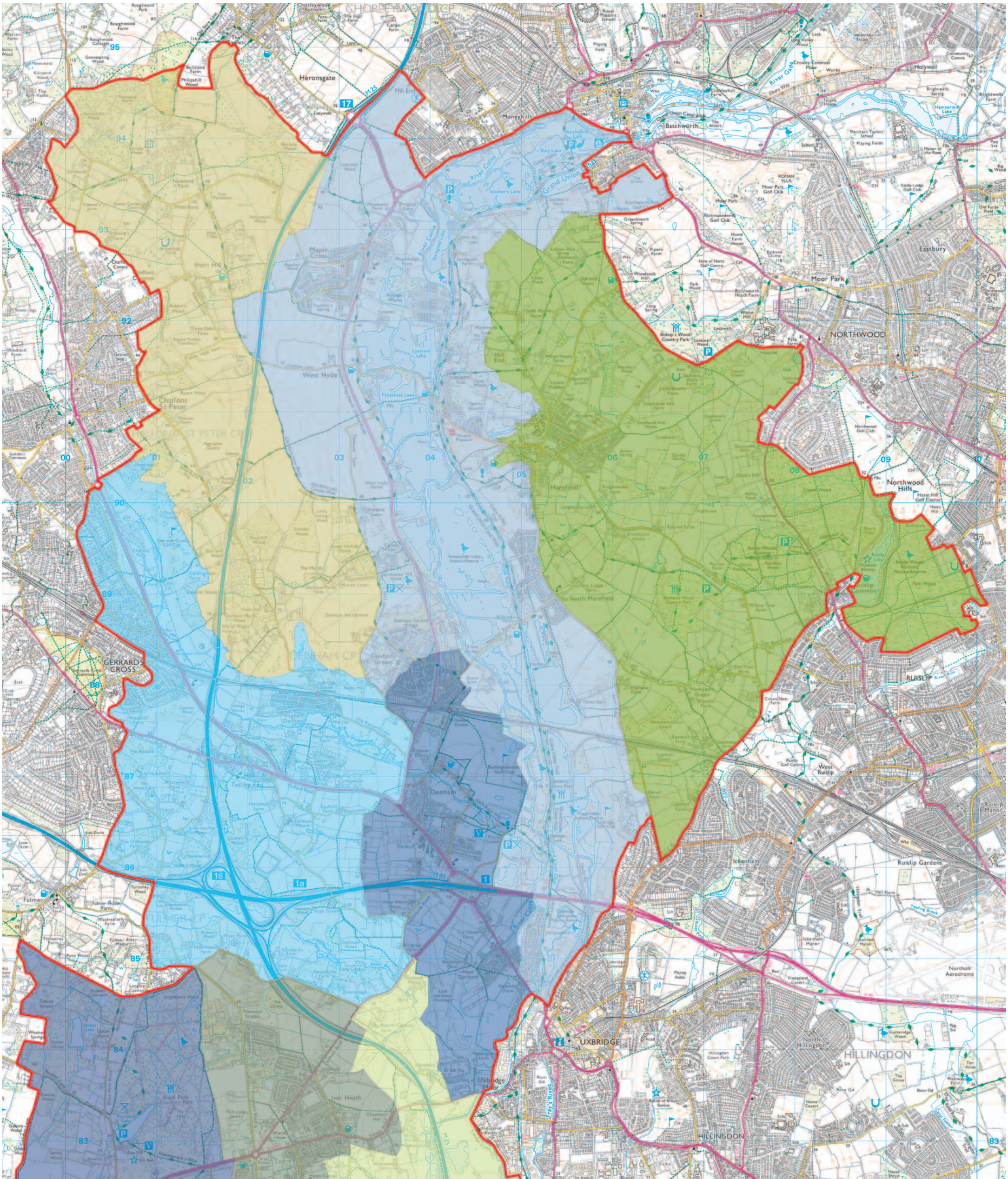
- 3.2.1 In defining landscape character areas there was a need to simplify the existing assessments and to define character areas which would be readily understood in the context of the Colne Valley. This also enabled the refinement of boundaries where existing assessments did not relate well across administrative boundaries. Thus, in places the character areas defined in this study do not exactly match those defined in local authority assessments, although there is a good degree of correlation in most instances. Fourteen landscape character areas were defined and are described in detail below.
- 3.2.2 Each character area description begins with a short summary and key characteristics. This is followed by a more detailed description of the key influences which have shaped the present day character and also perceptual and value aspects of the landscape. This then leads on to an evaluation section which considers the sensitivities of the landscape and the future changes likely to influence the area. Finally a series of landscape strategy objectives are set out under the headings of Plan, Manage and Protect, in line with the European Landscape Convention.
- 3.2.3 The relationship between the landscape character areas defined in this study and their relationship to existing landscape assessments for relevant Local Authorities is set out in the table below.

**Table 2: Colne Valley Character Areas in Association with Existing LCAs**

<b>Colne Valley Character Area</b>	<b>Corresponding LCAs in Local Authority Assessments</b>
Heronsgate/Chalfont Farmland	Herts: Heronsgate Heights Herts: Maple Cross Slopes Bucks: Chalfont St Peter
Colne Valley: Rickmansworth to Uxbridge	Herts: Moor Park Slopes Herts: Colne Valley Gravel Pits Herts: Maple Cross Slopes Bucks: Chalfont St Peter Bucks: Colne Valley

<b>Colne Valley Character Area</b>	<b>Corresponding LCAs in Local Authority Assessments</b>
	Hillingdon: Upper Colne - Stocker's Lake to Springwell Lake Hillingdon: Mid Colne - Broadwater Lake to Shire Ditch Hillingdon: Hill End Hillingdon: Harefield Hillingdon: South Harefield Hillingdon: Uxbridge
Rickmansworth to Uxbridge Wooded Farmland	Herts: Moor Park Slopes Hillingdon: Hill End Hillingdon: South Harefield Hillingdon: Newyears Green Hillingdon: Ruislip
Misbourne and Alder Bourne Tributaries	Bucks: Lower Misbourne Bucks: Colne Valley Bucks: Chalfont St Peter Bucks: Alder Bourne Bucks: Tatling End
Denham Valley Floor	Bucks: Colne Valley
Black and Langley Parks	Bucks: Farnham and Stoke Common Bucks: Stoke and Langley Park
Iver Heath Terrace	Bucks: Iver Heath
Colne Valley: A412 to Iver	Bucks: Iver Heath Bucks: Colne Valley Hillingdon: Mid Colne - Little Britain Hillingdon: Lower Colne
Richings Lowland	Bucks: Stoke and Langley Park Bucks: Iver Heath
Colne Valley: Cowley to West Drayton	Hillingdon: Lower Colne Surrey: Colne River Valley Floor
Heathrow Fringe	Bucks: Iver Heath M&W: Horton and Wraysbury
Horton and Wraysbury Lowlands	M&W: Horton and Wraysbury Surrey: Staines Moor Surrey: Thames Valley Reservoirs
Thames at Ankerwycke	M&W: Horton and Wraysbury M&W: Old Windsor Surrey: Thames River Floodplain Surrey: Cooper's Hill Settled and Wooded Sandy Farmland
River Ash Corridor - Staines	Surrey: Ash River Floodplain





**Key**



Project Area



Rickmansworth to Uxbridge Wooded Farmland



Black and Langley Parks



Heronsgate/Chalfont Farmland



Misbourne and Alder Broune Tributaries



Iver Heath Terrace



Colne Valley: Richmansworth to Uxbridge



Denham Valley Floor



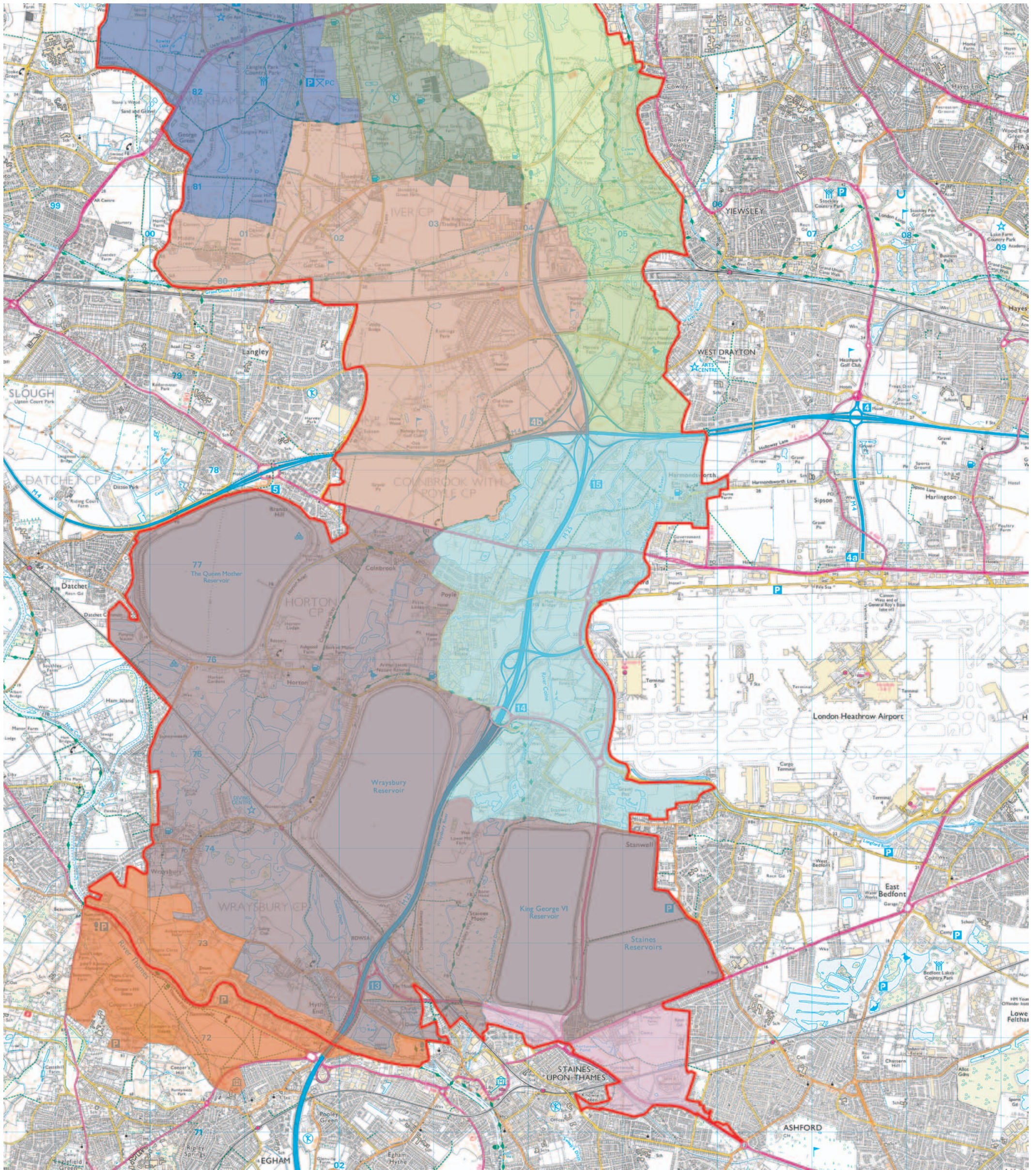
Colne Valley: A412 to Iver

**Drawing 1:**  
Landscape Character Areas - North



0 1km 2km






**Key**

- Project Area
- Richings Lowland
- Black and Langley Parks
- Colne Valley: Cowley to West Drayton
- Iver Heath Terrace
- Horton and Wraysbury Lowlands
- Colne Valley: Harmondsworth to Stanwell Moor
- Thames at Ankerwycke
- River Ash Corridor - Staines
- Colne Valley: A412 to Iver

**Drawing 2:**  
Landscape Character Areas - South



AEA

0 1km 2km

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### 3.3 Heronsgate/Chalfont Farmland

#### Summary Description:

This landscape character area comprises rolling farmland to the west of the Colne Valley within the Colne Valley Regional Park area. Its gently rolling landforms, open and simple character (typical of chalk landscape) as well as patches of beech woodland and small paddocks give it a deeply rural character.

#### Constituent Landscape Types: Undulating farmland



#### Key Characteristics

- Elevated, medium scale, rolling landscape west of the Colne Valley.
- Thames River Terrace Deposits over Upper Chalk with free draining, slightly acidic, loamy soils.
- Dry valleys give rise to smooth rounded landform.
- Geometric medium scale arable fields interspersed with small scale rough grazing.
- Field boundaries comprise well trimmed hedgerows, often gappy.
- Blocks of semi natural broadleaved woodland (some ancient) with bluebells in Spring.
- Notable veteran trees especially around Newland Park.
- Narrow lanes lined by hedgerows and trees link low density settlement.
- Chalfont St Peter sits to the west but is not widely visible from the character area.
- Views across interlocking folds of the landscape with blocks of woodland on skyline.
- Valleys to west and south are not readily apparent apart from the margins of the area.
- Dissected by M25 and pylons with visual and audible effects in places.
- Good network of footpaths, bridleways and rural lanes.

#### Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences

The rolling topography of this landscape is a defining feature over which the pattern of small pasture fields or larger more open arable fields is appreciated. Varied land use and enclosure pattern along with woodland blocks gives this area a visual diversity.

Much of the smaller scale fields have been lost over the last century, due to farming intensification and hedgerow removal especially to the east where the fields are now medium-large in scale and often lack any hedgerow boundaries.

Habitats include ancient woodland and areas of calcareous grassland. Ancient woodlands reflect former concentrations of wooded estates associated with parklands e.g. Newland Park in the north and Chalfont Park which was located to the west within the adjoining Misbourne Valley. Within the ancient woodlands common species are oak, beech and holly with some patches of yew and juniper. There is evidence of woodbanks and old hazel coppice stools while within areas of former parkland, there are concentrations of veteran infield trees which also provide time depth and interest. The ecological interest of this landscape is also reflected in the changing colours through the seasons with bluebell carpets in spring in ancient woods, undulating fields of red poppies in early summer and the russet colours of beech trees along lanes and in woods in Autumn.

Many of the lanes are also of historic value, in particular Old Shire Lane which continues to mark the country boundary. They are generally narrow and lack urbanising influences such as kerbs or signage. Along them are a scattering of historic farms, cottages and barns which are listed, while south of Chalfont St Peter there is a moated site which is scheduled (although there is no access).

There is a general absence of water in this landscape. Small ponds tend to associate with former parkland e.g. Newland Park and farmsteads e.g. Denham Park Farm. Historically this area has experienced some aggregate extraction and restoration of the landscape back to agricultural use e.g. east of Chalfont St Peter.

### **Perceptions and Value**

This landscape forms transitional slopes to the west of the Colne Valley but predominately feels separate from the Valley with only limited views towards the concentrations of poplar and willow vegetation in the valley floor, with rising valley sides beyond. Much of this area shows typical characteristics of chalk scenery with smooth rounded rolling landform forming interlocking spurs and wooded skylines. The ancient woodland to the east of Chalfont St Peter and in the south around Denham Green have a secretive and ancient character with remnant signs of past management including woodbanks and coppice stools and carpets of wild flowers in Spring. This coupled with ancient tracks and rural lanes which cross the area give this landscape a strong time depth.

This landscape is valued for the backdrop it provides in elevated views from the eastern slopes of the Colne Valley. Immediately to the north of this area is the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). There is a good network of footpaths, bridleways and rural lanes which connect urban areas in the west to the Colne Valley in the east including the South Bucks Way, Chiltern Way long distance routes and Old Shire Lane Circular Walk.

Whilst the M25 and pylons pass through this landscape. The M25 is in cutting for much of its length and the folds in landform help to integrate these features such that only small sections are visible at any one time, and views are often glimpsed.

### **Evaluation**

## Sensitivities

- Vulnerable ancient woodlands with associated flora and fauna and historic elements they contain can be subject to loss due to lack of management or development.
- Small scale pastures are susceptible to under / over grazing and lack of management of field boundaries resulting in a neglected character, disruption of visual patterns and fragmentation of ecological networks.
- Tranquillity and tangible time depth through much of the area is vulnerable to ad hoc change and growth of settlement with the risk of merging clusters of development e.g. Chalfont St Peter, Horn Hill and Maple Cross.
- Within the context of the Colne Valley Regional Park this landscape provides open views to the Colne Valley and acts as a backdrop to elevated views from the east.

## Future Change

- The proposed route for Hs2 will pass through this landscape, east of Chalfont St Peter. Elements of the route including the Chilterns tunnel entrance, and embankments will affect landscape patterns, topography and views.
- Continued loss of small paddocks due to lack of management and loss of hedgerows.
- Urbanisation of landscape due to linear development along lanes and increased use of lanes by traffic resulting in verge erosion and introduction of urbanising elements.

## Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the rural quiet character of lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvement or signage.</li> <li>• Protect and restore historic features particularly those relating to woodlands, parkland, enclosure patterns and lanes.</li> <li>• Protect unspoilt rural character of the area from solar park development where it may undermine the pattern of land use and be visually prominent.</li> <li>• Protect wooded skylines which provide enclosure and frame views, particularly from the eastern Colne Valley sides.</li> <li>• Protect rural views from elevated eastern slopes of the Colne Valley.</li> <li>• Protect the relatively low density of dispersed settlement and avoid infilling.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage areas of ancient semi-natural woodland and coppicing through appropriate woodland management regimes.</li> <li>• Record and survey veteran trees both in ancient woods and parkland seeking management which prolongs life and monitors gradual loss and identifies potential replacement by maturing trees in future.</li> <li>• Manage and encourage appropriate grazing regimes in small pastures and laying or planting up of hedges to gap-up breaks where necessary.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for the planting of additional woodland on the upper slopes of the Colne Valley and in areas affected by Hs2 ensuring new planting connects into existing woodland.</li> <li>• Plan to reinstate lost hedgerow boundaries where opportunities arise to strengthen the enclosure pattern where it has become weakened.</li> <li>• Plan for research into the historic features in this landscape and improved access and interpretation revealing past ways of life.</li> </ul>

### 3.4 Colne Valley: Rickmansworth to Uxbridge

#### Summary Description:

This character area comprises the valley floor and the sloping valley sides of the Colne Valley which stretches between Rickmansworth and Uxbridge with a north south orientation. Open water lakes surrounded by often dense regenerated tree cover fill much of the valley floor and the sloping valley sides offer elevated views along and across the valley. The combination of open water, tree cover, open farmed and wooded valley sides and variations in topography give rise to high scenic quality in places.

#### Constituent Landscape Types: Valley floor and valley sides



#### Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating valley slopes rising to approximately 80m AOD define the valley.
- London Clay on upper slopes with exposed chalk on lower slopes.
- Valley floor is covered by river alluvium over deposits of sand and gravel.
- Floodplain is flat, between 0.6 - 1km wide, containing extensive and numerous lakes following extensive restoration of sand and gravel workings, interspersed with wet meadow grassland and woodland.
- River Colne and Grand Union Canal form important waterways and corridors.
- Dense natural regenerated tree cover along waterways and around lakes creates a strong sense of containment and enclosure.
- Valley sides comprise a mixture of large scale arable fields in northwest with more wooded areas around Hill End and Northmoor Hill interspersed with medium to small pasture fields.
- Important areas of calcareous grassland/relic calcareous habitats on valley sides and herb rich meadows on valley floor.
- Settlement comprises dispersed farmsteads and nucleated settlement along break in slope connected by sunken lanes exposing areas underlying chalk geology in places.
- Larger settlements on opposite valley slopes at Maple Cross and Moneyhill are visually prominent from some elevated viewpoints.

- Memorable and often scenic views across the Colne Valley from upper slopes while within the valley floor views are restricted by vegetation except across expanses of water or along linear waterways.
- Strong sense of tranquillity resulting from general absence of settlement, dominance of water bodies and woodland and lack of major infrastructure.
- Undisturbed predominately rural character despite popularity for recreation including bird watching, fishing, walking, cycling, boating and water sports and many promoted recreational routes.

### **Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences**

The bedrock geology of this part of the Colne Valley is chalk which is overlain with gravel and alluvium on the valley floor and London Clay on upper valley sides.

The valley floor is broad and flat, and contains notable areas of open water, wet woodland (alder and willow), wetland meadow, paddocks and reedbed (associated with Maple Cross Sewage Works) which provide valuable wildlife habitats. Broadwater is one of the largest expanses of open water in the Colne Valley and is unusual with its scattering of small wooded islands. Around the pits and on the dividing causeways are remnants of the original alluvial grasslands and valley alderwoods. These grade into various types of beech and hornbeam woodland and mixed scrub on the western slopes, many of which are ancient (Park Wood at Hill End and Northmoor Hill Wood). There are also patches of unimproved chalk grassland on the lower valley slopes, a number of which are Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and Local Nature Reserves.

Dense tree cover on the valley floor provides a sense of enclosure and contains views although across open water there are glimpses of the rising valley sides above. From the more elevated valley sides there are views across and down the valley which are often scenic combining valley topography, a patchwork of fields and woodland and open water and with no evident man made built features in sight.

Besides the open water lakes this landscape also contains a plethora of other hydrological features including the River Colne (which crosses from one side of the valley to the other), Fray's River (in the southern half of the area) and the Grand Union Canal (which runs along the eastern side of the valley floor). Associated with the canal are many of the tangible historic elements including Springwell Lock Conservation Area which includes the old brick arch bridge, local and nearby farm cottages all of which lie within an attractive setting.

Valley floor meadows and pastures, which in the 18th century would have dominated this landscape, have since been largely lost due to the extraction industry of the 20th century. Nevertheless in places there are patches of wet meadow and paddocks which provide a window into this past landscape.

Settlement such as Moneyhill and Maple Cross extend up the valley sides and although screened in many views from the valley floor, are visible in places from surrounding valley sides. There are few roads which cross the valley floor which adds to its tranquillity.

### **Perceptions and Value**

This landscape has a largely undisturbed character forming one of the most rural areas of the Colne Valley Regional Park. The high woodland cover on the valley floor gives rise to a



sense of intimacy and enclosure which contrasts with the more open views from the valley sides where the topographic form of the valley, water and a patchwork of woodland and agricultural land gives rise to scenic qualities.

There is a sense that there is limited development within the valley and even where settlements flank the valley sides they are often not visually obvious due to vegetation cover. There is some noise intrusion from traffic on the M25 but overall the motorway is well integrated into the landscape and traffic is visible in only a few places. Similarly the A40 has a local impact on tranquillity in the south of this area.

Good footpath networks provide access to waterbodies and the wider rural valley landscape with recreational opportunities mostly focused on the valley floor and including canal barging, angling, bird watching and sailing on some of the lakes. The Colne Valley Trail, Grand Union Canal Walk, Hillingdon Trail and Old Shire Lane Circular Walk pass through this landscape.

## **Evaluation**

### **Sensitivities**

- High scenic quality and attractive views between the valley floor and valley sides reflecting a visually appealing combination of landscape elements.
- Rural unspoilt character where the naturalistic and farmed landscape remains dominant over built development and infrastructure and in many places there is an absence of built form.
- Rich biodiversity especially wetland sites which are well connected and valuable to overwintering birds.
- Remnant historic landscapes and features which provide small windows into the past valley floor landscape pre gravel extraction.
- Low density of settlement and absence of infrastructure coupled with the dominance of water give rise to high levels of tranquillity.
- Notable recreation opportunities and accessible landscape.
- In the context of the Colne Valley Regional Park this character area contains some of the most distinctive rural and scenic landscapes.

### **Future Change**

- Pressure for housing growth and release of land from greenbelt as local authorities seek to meet housing targets and need. Development which may lead to infilling of undeveloped areas and loss of current cohesiveness of a rural valley landscape.
- Lack of management of woodland and mitigation planting around lakes resulting in loss of biodiversity and continued loss of views and connection between valley floor and sides.
- Proposed route of Hs2 which will include a 18m high x 3km long viaduct across the valley floor/Broadwater Lake, construction sites and materials stockpiles resulting in physical fragmentation of the valley and visual and noise intrusion, but also potential opportunities for creating a local landmark.
- Impact of upstream pollution from misconnections and polluting outfalls into the river.

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the quiet, rural character of lanes, avoiding unnecessary signage, kerbing, widening, lighting or the introduction of roundabouts, all of which undermine the essential 'back-water' qualities of the area.</li> <li>• Protect scenic views across and down the valley where its scale and combination of water, vegetation and valley sides can be appreciated.</li> <li>• Protect and restore historic features within the valley, particularly those relating to the watercourses e.g. mills, bridges and locks.</li> <li>• Protect the valley landscape from visual intrusion of development in areas beyond this character area.</li> <li>• Protect important habitats and bird populations from disturbance through careful management of recreation, access and development.</li> <li>• Protect water quality particularly downstream of Maple Lodge sewage works.</li> <li>• Protect tranquil qualities from encroachment of built development, especially onto the valley floor and on visually sensitive valley sides.</li> <li>• Protect unspoilt rural valley character from solar park development where it may undermine the pattern of land use and be visually prominent.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage areas of ancient semi-natural woodland, including veteran oaks, through appropriate woodland management regimes.</li> <li>• Manage the distinction between vegetation on valley floor and valley sides e.g. poplar/alder/willow and beech/oak respectively.</li> <li>• Manage grassland, especially calcareous grasslands on the valley slopes and seek opportunities to connect sites.</li> <li>• Manage woodland and scrub areas fringing open water bodies.</li> <li>• Manage the string of former gravel pits running through the valley for biodiversity and recreation.</li> <li>• Manage recreation in this landscape and ensure the development of any new associated infrastructure is in keeping with the local rural character.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for the planting of additional woodland on the upper slopes of the Colne Valley especially areas where the landscape lacks visual structure following land fill and where it may be affected by Hs2.</li> <li>• Plan for the reversion of arable farmland to pasture on the valley sides where it extends down to the edge of the valley floor.</li> <li>• Plan for the improved interpretation of the historic character of this valley landscape and its changing face through time.</li> <li>• Plan for the opening up of views across the valley through woodland and scrub management.</li> <li>• Plan for the retention of valley floor pastures through appropriate management and grazing levels.</li> <li>• Plan for the increased informal recreational use of this area and ensure sufficient provision of low key parking and facilities, which reflect local vernacular and character.</li> <li>• Plan for improved water quality testing and riverfly monitoring to provide greater clarity on pollution issues and to inform future management.</li> </ul>

### 3.5 Rickmansworth to Uxbridge Wooded Farmland

#### Summary Description:

This character area comprises rolling wooded farmland to the east of the Colne Valley. Its gentle landform, high concentration of woodland and often intact small scale 18th and 19th enclosure pattern, give it an attractive rural and unspoilt character.

#### Constituent Landscape Types: Rolling farmland



#### Key Characteristics

- Elevated, gently rolling farmland east of the Colne Valley, dissected by small streams.
- Complex superficial geology of clays and gravels overlaying chalk bedrock.
- Mix of 18th and 19th century field enclosures, with areas of larger 20th/21st century fields defined by hedgerows and scattered trees (oak in south).
- Mixed farming but predominately pasture with some rough grazing and arable.
- Substantial ancient woodland including Ruislip National Nature Reserve.
- Settlement density is low comprising scattered farmsteads (many listed) and larger settlements on the edges of the area often with historic centres e.g. Harefield.
- Remnant parkland landscape and features e.g. Breakspear Park and Harefield Place.
- Open views across farmland to wooded skylines.
- Sparse network of rural lanes with extensive areas of agricultural land in between.
- Landfill in the Newyears area gives rise to verge erosion and litter.
- Hillingdon Trail passes through the northern and southern parts of this landscape.

#### Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences

This area is underlain by chalk solid geology with deposits of river terrace gravels in the north and west and also areas of London Clay giving rise to a mixture of soils. Land drops relatively sharply to the north and west into the adjacent character area of the Colne Valley.

The heavier clay soils have resulted in a high concentration of woodland much of which is ancient and comprises hornbeam coppice, oak, beech, aspen and sweet chestnut. Some woods are particularly large in extent and are valued for their nature conservation importance e.g. Bayhurst Wood, North Riding Wood, Mad Bess Wood, Young Wood, Copse Wood and Park Wood which form part of the Ruislip Woods National Nature Reserve and are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These woodlands contain a diverse range of habitats including acidic and neutral grassland, ponds and marshland. Between these areas of woodland is a pattern of small sinuous fields defined by a dense network of ancient hedgerows with mature trees. These field patterns are distinctive east of Harefield and in the area around Newyears Green and are thought to date primarily to the 18th and 19th centuries. This enclosure pattern is remarkably intact and significant in terms of historic landscape within the Colne Valley Park. The pattern has remained relatively intact due to the influence of a small number of landowners who controlled significant tracts of land in the area, resulting in a continuity of land use e.g. the Ashby family of Breakspear House (Grade I listed) and the Newdegate family of Harefield Place (Grade II listed) held significant acreage around Harefield for several hundred years until the mid twentieth century<sup>7</sup>.

Land use is predominately pasture although there are also smaller areas of arable land use throughout. Small tributary streams cut through the area increasing topographic variation and often connect to small ponds reflecting the patches of clay soil in the area. Some of these water features form part of parkland landscapes e.g. Breakspear House.

Settlement in this landscape is limited to Harefield which is a conservation area that includes not just the town but also landscape to the south including Breakwater Park, Langley Farm and the Church of St Mary. Beyond this the settlement pattern comprises a dispersed pattern of farmsteads many of which are listed and are connected by narrow winding lanes.

In the southwest of the area topography slopes more gently into the Colne Valley and the distinction between the two landscapes is not as sharp. The area around Harvil Road was once part of Harefield Moor, an area of open common which stretched onto the Colne valley floor. It was substantially worked for gravel in the first half of the 20th century but has since been restored to farmland. This area lacks the distinctive undulating topography and small enclosure pattern found elsewhere in the area. Here the junction between this landscape and the Colne Valley character area is relatively weakly defined.

### **Perceptions and Value**

Collectively the historic settlement pattern, enclosure pattern and high concentration of ancient woodland give this landscape a strong time depth.

This landscape expresses varying degrees of enclosure, with open fields contrasted with dense woodland areas. Views in this landscape are sometimes panoramic across a patchwork of farmland but woodland invariably forms the skyline and backdrop.

There is a high degree of visual uniformity, the high woodland cover and low settlement density giving rise to an intimate and tranquil landscape with a strong rural character.

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<sup>7</sup> Historic Landscape Characterisation Project, English Heritage and Buckinghamshire County Council, March 2007, Page 25.

## Evaluation

### Sensitivities

- Historic enclosure patterns, farmsteads and rural lanes collectively form a distinctive and relatively intact pattern and are vulnerable to ad hoc change.
- Ancient woodland and wildlife corridors between them are vulnerable to loss.
- In the context of the Colne Valley Regional Park, intact areas of pre 18th century enclosure patterns found in this landscape, are rare.

### Future Changes

- The southern part of this character area around Newyears Green is likely to be substantially affected by Hs2 with much of the land safeguarded for the development.
- This area has experienced some farm diversification with the development of modern small industries along rural lanes or development of stables and horse paddocks. This continuing trend may result in a suburbanisation of the rural countryside.

### Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the rural quiet character of lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvement, signage, effects of farm diversification or verge erosion.</li> <li>• Protect the rural setting of historic parkland landscapes and ancient veteran trees and listed buildings which add to local distinctiveness and sense of place.</li> <li>• Protect the historic enclosure pattern across this landscape particularly where it occurs in association with rural lanes, farmsteads and parkland.</li> <li>• Protect areas of ancient woodland and ensure appropriate management.</li> <li>• Protect area from inappropriately sited development where it may undermine the pattern of land use and be visually prominent.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain character of ancient semi-natural woodland through appropriate management.</li> <li>• Record and survey veteran trees seeking management which prolongs life and monitors gradual loss and potential replacement by maturing trees in future.</li> <li>• Manage recreation in this landscape and ensure the development of any new associated infrastructure is in keeping with the local rural character.</li> <li>• Manage the landscape's distinctive hedges along lanes and ensure appropriate management to ensure future survival.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for the replanting of veteran trees and lost designed features such as the avenue at Breakspear House and maturing trees in areas of former parkland.</li> <li>• Plan for the improved interpretation of the historic character of this landscape and possible connection of the Hillingdon Trail long distance route across the area taking in historic landscape features.</li> <li>• Plan for the sensitive creation of circular themed walks associated with ancient woodland and historic features.</li> <li>• Plan for the development of Hs2 in the southwestern part of the character area, avoiding unnecessary loss of historic field patterns and seek the improved structure of the landscape and junction between this area and the Colne Valley.</li> </ul>

### 3.6 Misbourne and Alder Bourne Tributaries

#### Summary Description

This landscape character area comprises the River Misbourne and the Alder Bourne valleys, and the higher river terrace between them. The valleys flow west east and are relatively narrow, defined by undulating valley sides. The River Misbourne and Alder Bourne stream are both tributaries to the River Colne.

**Constituent Landscape Types:** Tributary valley and river terrace



#### Key Characteristics

- Narrow and small scale valleys with gentle valley sides and narrow floodplain.
- London Clay on upper slopes, chalk on middle slopes and alluvium on valley floor.
- River deposits on higher land between the valleys gives rise to loamy/clayey soils.
- Small scale landscapes comprising a mosaic of woodland and farmland and some patches of acidic vegetation on the terrace between the valleys.
- Important areas of wet meadow and small water bodies on the floodplain reflecting the slowly permeable loamy/clayey soils.
- Farmed landscape comprising rough grazing, pasture and paddock with some arable.
- Notable areas of deciduous broadleaved woodland on the middle and upper slopes, sometimes ancient, and along watercourses.
- Extensive network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees delineate field boundaries.
- Settlement of Gerrards Cross, Higher Denham and Tattling End with some development extending onto the floodplain.
- Isolated farmsteads and villages occur along the valley sides.
- Area is dissected by major routes including M25, A428, M40 and A413.
- Rural lanes, field enclosures, woodland areas and remnant parkland give rise to a strong time depth in this landscape, despite modern infrastructure.
- Occasional long views from the valley sides and higher land between the valleys.
- Valleys are accessed primarily via public rights of way but are difficult to perceive due to development and road/rail infrastructure which disrupts the unity of the landscape.

#### Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences

The tributaries to the Colne are small scale with shallow valley landform rising to approximately 75m AOD. The watercourses meander through the respective valley floodplains but are generally well hidden, evident mainly by the line of waterside trees. These are flanked by wetland meadows, woodland and pasture.



Whilst in places there is a strong sense of a rural river valley, both valleys have been impacted by modern development. Of the two valleys, the Misbourne is the slightly larger. Development associated with Higher Denham and Gerrards Cross has extended down the valley sides and on to the valley floor. In the Alder Bourne valley, the junction of the M25 and M40 significantly interrupts the valley. However, away from development both valleys comprise a mosaic of small scale pasture fields and patches of arable and woodland. On the upper/middle valley slopes and elevated terrace between the valleys, the woodland frames views and creates wooded horizons. There are several small springs and tributary streams flowing from the terrace to the Alder Bourne and Colne. Small ponds occur throughout reflecting the high water table in the valleys and the clay soils on the terrace. Much of the woodland on the terrace is ancient. The woodlands stand alongside areas of heath vegetation, reflecting pockets of alluvial sand and gravel deposits and are particularly apparent around Alderbourne Manor. Ancient woodland also occurs in places within the valleys e.g. Gossams Wood in the Alder Bourne.

On the valley floors, the pastures can often have a rough and unmanaged appearance. These pastures provide valuable wildlife habitats and corridors. Old Rectory Meadows SSSI is a notable area of unimproved wet meadow and alder woodland. Its quality is currently declining due to changes in the composition and character of the vegetation. This is consistent with effects of regular flooding. Kingcup Meadows and Oldhouse Wood in the Alder Bourne Valley is a SSSI for its mosaic of habitats including woodland, unimproved pastures and semi and unimproved meadowland. The Misbourne Valley is included in the Central Chiltern Chalk Rivers Biodiversity Opportunity Area.

There are a few historic parklands in this character area including Dromenagh, on the western fringes of the Alder Bourne Valley, and St Huberts, Alderbourne Manor and Denham Mount on the terrace. Much is fragmented by transport infrastructure and changes in land use/ownership. However, there is still some evidence of former parkland character including veteran trees, specimen trees and perimeter woodland, with rhododendron and laurel.

Field sizes and enclosures vary. They are delineated with a strong network of hedgerows and wooden post/wire sub divisions (particularly on the fringes of settlement). The hedged fields are mainly pre 18th century enclosures and possibly some medieval assarted fields. In the more rural sections of the valleys, and on the terrace above, there are occasional scattered farms connected by rural single track lanes. In places, development of individual properties has occurred along the rural lane introducing a more urban character.

### **Perceptions and Value**

This is a varied landscape that can often lack unity because of road infrastructure and urban fringe land uses. Views along the valleys are limited and enclosed by topography, field boundaries and trees. Valley sides and the elevated terrace between the valleys does present occasional long distance views. Nevertheless, the tree cover and enclosed topography help to provide a sense of mystery and calmness, thus maintaining a level of rural naturalness, despite proximity to transport corridors and settlement.

The river valleys are not easily accessed with a few minor lanes and public right of ways crossing the valley floor or traversing valley sides and it can be difficult to appreciate valley qualities. On major roads that cross the valleys, the speed of travel and mitigation planting prevents views and often the valleys are passed over or through without recognition.

## Evaluation

### Sensitivities

- Network of intact pre 18th century hedgerows provide important ecological and visual connectivity, reinforce intimate small scale valley character and are vulnerable to loss.
- Small lanes accessing the landscapes and connecting isolated farms are vulnerable to ad hoc development of individual dwellings potentially undermining rural qualities.
- Ancient woodland and mature veteran trees associated with former parklands/estates add time depth to the landscape and add enclosure and biodiversity.
- In the context of the Wider Colne Valley Regional Park this landscape has a rare collection of surviving meadowland.

### Future Changes

- Lack of valley floor pasture management resulting in growth of scrub and woodland.
- Intensification of infrastructure through development of existing routes and junctions.
- Development on the valley floor or on prominent valley sides, either as expansion of existing settlement or isolated developments, with causes urbanisation of the valley.
- Linear ad hoc development along rural lanes resulting in changes to lane character.
- Changes in land use including conversion of pasture to arable and subdivision of pastures for pony paddocks.

### Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect rural river valley character from further urban development and influences.</li> <li>• Protect open views from upper valley slopes which provide context and sense of the river valley topography.</li> <li>• Protect the character of the rural lanes from inappropriate development, loss of hedgerow and grass verge, and introduction of concrete verges and signage.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage and conserve woodland areas, particularly ancient woodland and those woodlands that reinforce valley topography.</li> <li>• Manage hedgerow boundaries to retain small scale enclosure patterns and intimate character of the valleys away from major transport infrastructure.</li> <li>• Manage small ponds within the valleys and on the elevated terrace between them.</li> <li>• Manage landscape features, such as veteran trees and ponds associated with former parkland and manor houses, where they contribute to time depth and sense of place.</li> <li>• Manage wetland meadows which provide important wildlife value and create new meadows to help link sites.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan to increase physical access into the valleys and connection between them, creating new public rights of way offering opportunities to understand and enjoy.</li> <li>• Plan for management of groundwater levels to reduce flooding which adversely affects meadow species.</li> <li>• Plan to improve the setting of urban fringes reducing urbanisation and fragmentation.</li> </ul>

## 3.7 Denham Valley Floor

### Summary Description

This landscape character area lies between Denham Green and Uxbridge Moor substation. It comprises a broad lowland floodplain west of the River Colne, where the lower reaches of the River Misbourne and Alder Bourne enter the Colne Valley.

### Constituent Landscape Types: Valley floor



### Key Characteristics

- Open valley floor with little topographic variation.
- Alluvium and loamy/clayey floodplain soils overlying London Clay mudstone geology.
- Rough grazing and pasture is dominant interspersed with arable fields and paddocks.
- Geometric 18th and 20th century field patterns enclosed by low hedges.
- Tree cover is limited to field boundaries and small ancient woodland.
- Settlement comprises Denham Green (where it extends onto the floodplain), Denham village and New Denham.
- Linear development along the major roads including A4020, A142 and A40 coupled with signage and lighting give this area an urban fringe character.
- Denham village contains numerous listed buildings many comprising vernacular cottages faced in red brick.
- Grade II historic parkland, Denham Place, to the north of Denham village.
- Significant visual and audible disruption/fragmentation to the landscape from major infrastructure associated with M40 Junction 1, and pylons.
- Recreational land uses include Buckinghamshire Golf Course.

### Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences

This is an open flat and wide lowland landscape with very little topographic variation, on alluvium and loamy-clay floodplain soils. Land use is dominated by rough grazing and pasture interspersed with arable fields and paddocks. The field pattern is geometric, enclosed by low hedges. Tree cover is sparse and largely confined to field boundaries or close to settlement. Areas of greatest ecological interest focus around the watercourses of the Misbourne and Alder Bourne as they cross the floodplain from west to east.

Junction 1 of the M40 is located centrally in this area comprising a substantial roundabout and interchange with the A40, A4020, and A412 (majority are dual carriageway). These roads have a predominantly urban character due to their width, central grass verge in places, street lighting and signage. Along the A40 and A4020, linear development has occurred comprising garden centres and nurseries, petrol stations and sports clubs. This linear development has blurred the distinction between settlements and has given rise to either an urban or urban edge character. The northern part of this character area is also traversed by a railway line which runs on embankment.

There are three principle settlements within this area, Denham, New Denham and Denham Green. The historic village of Denham is located on the Misbourne and designated a conservation area with many listed buildings frequently faced in red brick. New Denham/Willowbank in the southeast, originated in the 18th century with the building of cottages to house workers in the mills which lined the River Colne. Denham Green, a more recent development, has expanded southwards onto the valley floor. This settlement includes large buildings associated with the world famous Denham Film Studios (currently being refurbished as apartments).

The original Denham Village survives as a peaceful and remarkably unspoilt area of historic buildings and possesses two fine houses and estates: Denham Court and, at the west end, Denham Place. The latter house was built for Sir Roger Hill at the end of the 17th century and the gardens were landscaped by 'Capability' Brown. Denham Court is close to the church and stands at the end of an avenue of lime trees. A significant part of its estate lies within the adjacent Colne Valley landscape character area on the banks of the River Colne to the east. Denham Court is now the home of the Colne Valley Park Centre and the Buckinghamshire Golf Club which sits alongside Denham Country Park.

The footpath network though this landscape is relatively sparse but does include the South Bucks Way long distance route. This route passes through Denham village along the Misbourne river and connects with the Colne Valley Trail.

### **Perceptions and Value**

This is an open and large scale landscape, dominated by rough textured farmland, which generates a simple, consistent land cover. The presence of built development, such as settlement, major road systems and pylons combine to fragment the landscape, and are visually and audibly intrusive generating a discordant and busy character. The vertical pylons (radiating out from Uxbridge Moor Sub Station to the south) are especially prominent in such a flat and open landscape as are the reflective qualities of large glass houses associated with garden centres.

Intermittent long views are afforded across open fields and across the Colne Valley, although views are often interrupted by roads. Nevertheless when travelling on the roads in and out of London eg M40, the views across this landscape are perceived as especially rural compared to the more urban areas adjacent and exhibit a strong sense of place. Away from the roads, pockets of tranquillity remain associated with water and woodland. In particular, along the watercourses of the Misbourne and Alder Bourne as they cross the floodplain to connect to the River Colne in the west.

## Evaluation

### Sensitivities

- Intact historic character of Denham and its landscape setting on the Misbourne which is susceptible to loss as a result of inappropriate expansion of the village.
- Relatively low biodiversity interest due to intensive agriculture, lack of management or fragmentation by infrastructure but significant potential to improve biodiversity networks associated with watercourses and field margins.
- Significant road infrastructure leaving the area vulnerable to linear development which intensifies/extends urban influences.
- Lack of hedgerow management and further loss of landscape structure.

### Future Changes

- Pressure for development associated with existing settlement and along major infrastructure routes. Thus, resulting in an alternation of traditional settlement pattern and urbanisation across the landscape.
- Enhancement of the structure and local identity of this area through landscape enhancement and appropriate development which strengthens sense of place.

### Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the compact nucleated form of the villages. Conserve the historic character of Denham and its setting on the Misbourne.</li> <li>• Protect the open character of this landscape from further fragmentation as a result of intrusive vertical elements or large scale buildings.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage existing hedgerow network through planting of gaps and planting of new trees.</li> <li>• Manage the proliferation of signage along transportation routes through this landscape and seek to open up and retain vistas to the wider landscape.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan to improve the public right of way provision across this landscape. In particular, between the River Colne, settlements and the Misbourne and Alder Bourne valleys.</li> <li>• Plan to enhance biodiversity networks through improved management of hedgerows and field margins and planting of woodland especially along river courses.</li> <li>• Plan to mitigate the effects of existing infrastructure through improved screening. Undertake sensitively located tree planting which, through choice of species, may also help to build sense of place.</li> <li>• Plan to strengthen the visual presence of the Misbourne and Alder Bourne rivers in this landscape through widening watercourse margins, planting riverside vegetation/trees and improving access.</li> <li>• Plan for the creation of local landmarks through the introduction of environmental art and sculpture to assist with orientation and the creation of distinctive places.</li> </ul>

## 3.8 Black and Langley Parks

### Summary Description

This landscape character area forms an elevated river terrace which sits west of Iver Heath and the Colne Valley. It is comprised of south facing slopes reaching 75m AOD in the north and dropping to around 40m AOD in the south. It is a well wooded landscape with occasional expansive views southwards across the Thames floodplain to Windsor Castle and Cooper's Hill. To the north lies the Alder Bourne Valley while to the south is Slough.

### Constituent Landscape Types: River Terrace



### Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating south facing slopes rising to 75m AOD in the north.
- River terrace glacial deposits overlay bedrock geology of London Clay.
- Mixture of acidic and slowly permeable soils influencing vegetation patterns.
- Former designed parkland and estate landscape giving rise to well woodland landscape, wooded common and plantations.
- Mixed farmland including rough grazing, pasture and orchards, between woods.
- Distinctive vegetation includes pine plantations, birch, gorse and bracken and rhododendron collections at Langley Park.
- Significant ecological importance due to areas of semi-natural vegetation.
- Settlement limited to isolated farmsteads connected by rural narrow lanes.
- Views contained by woodland but some notable long distance views southwards.
- Rural landscape with high level tranquillity and visual integrity but bisected by A412.
- Strong recreational focus with country parks and long distance footpaths.
- Tangible sense of time depth due to parkland, veteran trees and mature woodland.

### Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences

The character of this landscape reflects the underlying geology and historical land use of the area over many centuries. The glacial superficial deposits over London Clay give rise to a mix of soil types and conditions which in turn are reflected in the vegetation and land use of the area. Where superficial sandy deposits occur, they give rise to acidic loamy soils. Where London Clay is near the surface, areas of slowly permeable or seasonally wet soils occur



enabling the creation of ponds/lakes which are a feature e.g. Upton, Black Park and Rowley lakes as well as the lake within Langley designed parkland. Historically the sandy loamy soils gave rise to areas of common/heath (e.g. Fuller Common in the north) and woodland, parts of which were planted with pine plantations in the 20th century e.g. Black Park. This is a tree rich landscape with large woodland blocks and wooded commons giving rise to a predominately enclosed landscape contrasting with adjacent character areas. The woodland variation of mixed deciduous, coniferous plantation (predominately pine) broadleaved woodland (including species such as beech and birch) and the heathland of bracken and gorse, provide rich seasonally changing texture and colour.

Langley Park and its estate (which includes Langley Park, Rowley Farm and Black Park) covers much of this character area and is thought to have originated as a Deer Park being first mentioned as such in 1202. It wasn't until 1760 that the present Palladian mansion house was built. In 1758 Lancelot Brown (1716-83) was commissioned to landscape Langley Park during his time working at Blenheim. In the 19th century pleasure grounds and gardens were added. Today the parkland is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden comprising formal gardens, a kitchen garden, pleasure grounds and a wider parkland of woodland heath, pasture with parkland trees and clumps, a long sinuous lake, perimeter planting and the remains of an avenue running east west. Parkland character extends beyond the registered area to the south. Here significant numbers of veteran trees make a distinctive contribution to landscape character and support a nationally important assemblage of invertebrates associated with deadwood habitats although the parkland pasture has been converted to arable. The collection of rhododendrons at Langley Park are of national significance.

Due the dominance of the Estate, settlement in this landscape character area is relatively sparse comprising isolated farms connected by a network of rural lanes e.g. Rowley Farm and Upton Farm. These farms are associated with patches of pasture as well as areas of fruit growing in the south creating a patchwork of small scale fields between woodland blocks.

This landscape is ecologically important, with extensive woodland cover and heathland, semi-natural grassland and a network of hedgerows and scrubby field boundaries. The area contains areas of national importance e.g. Black Park SSSI valued for its lowland heath and notable areas of semi-natural ancient woodland e.g. Upton Wood and Walk Wood.

### **Perceptions and Value**

The Black and Langley Parks area has a strongly rural character with a high degree of intactness. This contrasts with more developed and busy landscapes surrounding it. The A412 dual carriageway bisects the area and creates local noise and visual intrusion, and restricts movement between Langley Park and Black Park. However, away from this road, the woodland/pasture and heathland mosaic provides high levels of rural naturalness and a strong sense of tranquillity, often bringing a degree of screening and containment.

The accessible and relatively permeable landscape offers many opportunities for high quality outdoor recreation both organised, e.g. Go Ape in Black Park Country Park, and informal, through the network of footpaths and bridleways. There are several car parks and visitor facilities associated with Black and Langley Parks. From the middle slopes and in Langley Park there are elevated open views southwards to Windsor Castle and Cooper's Hill beyond the Colne Valley Regional Park. This landscape offers rare opportunities to orientate and appreciate a wider landscape context.

## Evaluation

### Sensitivities

- Distinctive parkland character evident through landscape features such as perimeter planting, rhododendrons and veteran infield trees which are vulnerable to lack of management and changes in land use.
- Rural single track lanes vulnerable to erosion caused by traffic and verge parking as visitors seek to avoid pay and display parking areas.
- Rural tranquillity is vulnerable to loss through increasing popularity of country parks and potential pressures to manage and develop visitor offer.
- In the context of the wider Colne Valley Regional Park this landscape has a distinctive sense of place due to its wooded heath habitats and estate history.

### Future Changes

- Increasing recreation and leisure use i.e. hotel and spa at Langley House as.
- Ongoing conservation work to restore Langley Park and enhance enjoyment.
- Re-creation of heathland/acid grassland through select felling of pine plantations.

### Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and enhance wooded character of this landscape and valued heathland habitats from changes in land use.</li> <li>• Protect open elevated and long distance views which help to connect this landscape to the wider context of the Colne Valley.</li> <li>• Protect rural tranquillity and intactness especially areas of small pastures and rough grazing which play an important role in defining the rural character of the area - avoid development which will cause visual and physical fragmentation.</li> <li>• Protect the rural lane network and retain its rural character avoiding erosion as a result of parking and increased traffic.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage areas of heathland and seek opportunities to expand these areas and connect similar habitats beyond the project area e.g. Stoke Common.</li> <li>• Manage ancient woodland sites and plan for long term woodland regeneration.</li> <li>• Manage plantation woodland including the creation of woodland clearings and restoration of heathland and acidic grassland and replanting with broadleaves.</li> <li>• Manage veteran trees to increase longevity and retain parkland character.</li> <li>• Manage parkland built structures which contribute to the wider landscape character especially entrance gates and lodges on the fringes of Langley Park.</li> <li>• Manage the visual impact of extensive areas of fruit growing in this landscape.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for better recreational footpath and bridleway connections across the A412.</li> <li>• Plan for planting of new specimen parkland trees in areas of former parkland to replace lost veteran trees and ensure succession and habitat continuity.</li> <li>• Plan for the restoration of parkland landscape with the conversion of arable landscapes back to grazed pasture.</li> <li>• Plan for the interpretation of cultural and natural heritage interest.</li> </ul>

### 3.9 Iver Heath Terrace

#### Summary Description

This landscape lies immediately to the west of the Colne Valley and to the south of the Alder Bourne Valley. It is a transitional landscape of former river terrace which drops in elevation towards a lowland landscape in the south. The south facing slopes rise to 75m in the north and drop to around 40m AOD in the south. This landscape has experienced significant built development and growth of settlement over the last century. It is accessible via major roads A412 and A4007 as well as several minor roads. Subsequently, this landscape in places has a semi-urban character with a busy feel.

**Constituent Landscape Types:** River terrace



#### Key Characteristics

- Transitional landscape sitting above and immediately east of the Colne Valley generally above the 40m contour and sloping in a southerly direction.
- River terrace deposits of gravel and sand over London Clay give rise to acidic loamy soils with patches of slowly permeable seasonally wet clayey soils.
- Mixed land use, highly influenced by 20th century development and dominated by extensions to Iver village and Iver Heath as well as the small hamlets, Shreding Green and Love Green.
- Between settlements there are pastures and paddocks divided by a network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- 20th century enclosure pattern and long straight roads reflect the former open heath/common character of this landscape in the north. 18th century small scale sinuous enclosure dominates in the south.
- Place names reflect former heath land use e.g. Iver Heath, Warren House, Heatherden Hall, and Heath Lodge.
- Large scale buildings associated with Pinewood Studios are dominant in this landscape and from wider afield.
- Busy roads and settlement give rise to an active and populated character.

## Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences

Settlement, enclosure pattern and place names provide evidence of the historic evolution of this landscape. Iver Heath or Everheth was first documented about 1365 comprising a sparsely populated area criss-crossed with many tracks and footpaths. As the names suggests this area comprised open heath/common where residents of Iver could graze cattle and cut heather and furze and the highwayman Dick Turpin is reputed to have roamed the area. It is likely that the settlement of Iver Heath would have originally comprised just a dispersed pattern of common edge dwellings and cottages however with the enclosure of the heath following the Enclosure Act of 1801, large rectilinear fields were created and in the post war period the area saw significant housing growth with the building of more recent housing estates through the latter half of the 20th century. This later development has transformed much of the traditional settlement pattern. Nevertheless the former heath character is still reflected in straight roads which cross the area, rectilinear enclosures and place names. Iver Heath Fields remains a small area of acid grassland in the north of the area, managed for conservation, and accessible to the local community.

In the south of the character area the enclosure pattern is older reflecting sinuous 18th century fields. As in the north, the growth of housing development, (in this case the linear expansion of Iver Village westwards along the B470 towards Shreding Green), has resulted in a blurring of traditional land uses and enclosure patterns.

Within both the large scale rectilinear fields and smaller sinuous patterns land use comprises a mixture of arable and pasture. Small woodland and mature trees are often associated with villages such as Shreding Green and historic properties such as Heatherden Park (part of Pinewood Studios), The Brambles, Brightfield Parkland, Heath Lodge and Bangors Park. Relic parkland landscape and features remain extant e.g. The Clump tree group associated with Heatherden Park and veteran infield trees associated with Bangors Park.

Small woods, trees and hedgerows combine with parkland trees and linear woodlands along water courses (draining eastwards into the Colne Brook) to form an important network of habitats and wildlife corridors. This area falls within the South Bucks Heath and Parklands Biodiversity Opportunity Area.

Beyond residential development this area also contains other recent 20th century development. Pinewood Studios was established in 1936 and incorporated Heatherden House. In 2015 Pinewood Studios expanded to the north with the development of large scale white buildings which have a dominating influence on the immediate area as well as being visible in wider landscapes beyond, due to their scale and light colour. Alterations to the road network adjacent to the studios has also introduced a more urban character into this area. Other 20<sup>th</sup> century development includes sand and gravel extraction at Park Lodge Quarry and market gardening.

This landscape has historically been important for fruit production and was once littered with small orchards. Today only a few orchards remain e.g. west of Bangors Farm, nevertheless jam making is still prevalent within the local community.

Listed buildings in this landscape are not common and are limited to buildings such as Heatherden House (Grade II) and Church of St Margaret, Iver Heath (Grade II). Other sites of historic interest include the site of an anti-aircraft battery on Chandler's Hill at Iver Heath.

## Perceptions and Value

The varied land use and dominance of manmade features along roads creates a visually discordant landscape, which can have a busy and noisy character and a high sense of movement. Development fragments and limits views across the landscape. However away from the roads and along rights of way this area has a surprising rural character, the network of hedgerows and watercourses giving rise to a strong time depth and visual interest.

## Evaluation

### Sensitivities

- The hedgerow and woodland network which provides visual unity and a wildlife corridor, connecting fragmented habitats.
- Infield trees are associated with relic parkland and provide an important linking function with areas of biodiversity value.
- Undeveloped spaces/fields between areas of development which provide reminders of the former land use and origins of this landscape.

### Future Changes

- Further introduction of roundabouts, engineering improvements to roads and signage undermining rural character of the roads and lanes.
- Construction of buildings which are out of scale with the historic patterns of this landscape and are visually dominant.
- Pressure for housing development at Iver Heath and Iver.

## Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the rural quiet character of lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvement or signage.</li> <li>• Protect areas of open agricultural land along roads and areas which help maintain the separate identity of settlements e.g. Iver from Iver Heath or Iver from Sheding Green.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Record and survey veteran trees seeking management which prolongs life and monitors gradual loss and potential replacement by maturing trees in future.</li> <li>• Manage the landscape's distinctive pattern of hedgerow enclosures and avoid infilling of pattern with new housing development.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for the replanting of veteran trees and careful management of maturing trees particularly in areas of former parkland.</li> <li>• Plan for the planting of additional trees/woodland to contain and reduce visual and audible impact of modern development including roads, housing and employment.</li> <li>• Plan for the re-creation of areas of heath habitat especially where land is to be restored after mineral extraction.</li> <li>• Plan for the restoration of small orchards associated with the edges of settlement and develop markets for local jam produce.</li> <li>• Plan for improved interpretation of the historic character of this landscape improving understanding of the value of heath and acid grassland habitats.</li> </ul>

### 3.10 Colne Valley: A412 to Iver

#### Summary Description

This character area comprises the valley floor of the River Colne and its distinctive western valley sides between Uxbridge Moor substation and Huntsmoor Park. The eastern valley sides comprise the town of Uxbridge and lie beyond the Project Area. The M25 sits centrally within the valley and flanks the western side of the valley floor. This section of the Colne Valley has a strong historic character but is also affected by significant lines of pylons extending from the Uxbridge Moor substation.

**Constituent Landscape Types:** Valley floor and valley sides



#### Key Characteristics

- Narrow valley floodplain between rising valley sides - Uxbridge on eastern slopes and historic rural pastures on western slopes.
- Alluvial deposits over Thames Group comprising clay, silt, sand and gravel.
- Numerous waterways have developed in the valley - Colne Brook flows along western side of valley floor while the River Colne flows along eastern edge - other waterways (Grand Union Canal, Fray's River and Duke of Northumberland's River) flow through the Uxbridge built up area.
- Land use is dominated by pasture although there are some arable lands, active gravel extraction sites and small lakes.
- Veteran infield trees reflect remnant historic parkland e.g. Huntsmoor Park and Dromenagh.
- Historic villages of Iver (on valley slopes) and Thorney (on valley floor) with dispersed pattern of historic farmsteads.
- Mixed and broadleaved woodland occurs on valley sides while the valley floor is more open particularly in the east.
- Strong visual and physical connection between western valley sides and valley floor.
- M25 audible but visually well concealed due to vegetation.
- Lines of pylons are visually intrusive on valley floor along and south of Iver Lane.
- Long views eastwards and northwards across the Colne Valley floor.



## **Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences**

The Colne Valley between the A412 and Iver is relatively narrow and is defined by notable steep valley slopes to the west and the settlement of Uxbridge to the east. The valley floor has become narrow in part due to Uxbridge extending onto the valley floor, embracing Fray's River/Grand Union Canal which would otherwise be valley floor water courses.

Like other parts of the Colne Valley the underlying geology of sands and gravels attracted gravel extraction industry in the middle of the 20th century. A large site in the centre of this character area became landfill and has now been restored to rough pasture and a couple of small lakes. In places the landfill has created low mounds such that the area no longer reflects the low lying floodplain contours and former watercourses and hedgerows have been removed creating an open simple landscape when compared to other parts of the valley floor. Elsewhere traditional valley floor meadows and pastures remain intact. They are defined by hedgerows and hedgerow trees reflecting the 18th century enclosure pattern.

The western valley sides are gently undulating dissected by small streams which drain the Iver Heath area to the west. These streams are tree lined, adding visual interest. Land use is predominately pasture in small fields with woodland copses giving rise to an intact and small scale pattern with views eastwards across the valley.

This landscape character area includes the historic core of Iver (conservation area) which sits on the lower valley sides. Iver is Saxon in origin recorded first in 893 and is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 under its Saxon name of Evreham. The name means the settlement ("ham") on the slope ("evre") above the valley of the Colne Brook. The principle industry associated with Iver in the 18th and 19th centuries was brick making. Today the Parish Council still maintains mud wharves on the banks of the Colne Brook and the Colne, and residents still have a right to take mud from the wharves. Elsewhere settlement comprises a dispersed pattern of historic farmsteads many of which include listed buildings e.g. Mansfield Farm and Huntsmoor Park Farm. These historic farmsteads combine with remnant parkland areas of pasture and veteran trees (e.g. Huntsmoor Park, Delaford and Dromenagh) to add time depth and contribute to the unique character of this area.

Major infrastructure passes through this landscape including three parallel lines of pylons. The M25 passes centrally through this landscape and flanks the western valley floor. It is visually well concealed although noise intrusion is significant in places. The pylons are visually dominant throughout, particularly where they cut across the valley from east to west.

## **Perceptions and Value**

This landscape has a tangible historic character due to small scale pastures, remnant parkland and infield trees, historic farm complexes and valley floor meadows. The historic pattern of enclosures and pastoral land use along with strong visual links between valley floor and western valley slopes, give rise to a strong sense of place and time depth. Overlapping lines of vegetation as well as woodland copses occur along the M25, where it flanks the western valley floor, and help to screen views of the road and traffic. Nevertheless, the noise of traffic can be substantial in places. Access to this area is limited to two relatively minor roads - A 4007 and B470. Between these two roads the valley floor and sides are accessed via a network of paths and bridleways including the Colne Valley Trail.

## Evaluation

### Sensitivities

- Inter-visibility between valley floor and valley sides which is vulnerable to loss due to lack of woodland/hedgerow management or development.
- Mature hedgerows and trees and ditches defining small valley floor pastures are vulnerable to lack of management and mineral extraction activity.
- In the context of the wider Colne Valley Regional Park this part of the Colne Valley is unique in that it retains an historic pattern of valley floor meadows/parkland, farm complexes and small scale pastures on the valley sides.

### Future Changes

- Development of Uxbridge onto the valley floor and along roads across the valley.
- Loss of parkland character and valley floor / valley side pastures due to lack of management and changes in land uses.

### Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the special qualities of this part of the Colne Valley including the 18th century enclosure pattern, pasture, historic buildings and parkland.</li> <li>• Protect the indivisibility and unspoilt views between valley floor and valley sides.</li> <li>• Protect the character, fabric and appearance of historical buildings especially traditional farm complexes and associated valley floor pastures.</li> <li>• Protect the valley floor from encroachment by development, seek to retain its historical rural character.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage water quality in rivers, lake and ponds to reduce run off and water pollution from surrounding farmland and roads.</li> <li>• Manage existing water bodies, including ditches, to enhanced biodiversity and connectivity between sites.</li> <li>• Manage the compact nucleated villages to conserve their historic character and relationship with the wider landscape.</li> <li>• Manage veteran trees especially stage head oaks, to improve longevity.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan to minimise traffic noise, and consider further buffer planting of M25.</li> <li>• Plan to enhance areas of degraded landscape through positive restoration plans.</li> <li>• Plan to restore the former land fill areas reducing the visual effects of atypical contours and reintroduction of small scale hedgerow pattern and pastures.</li> <li>• Plan to restore and improve the biodiversity value of valley floor and valley side pastures through appropriate grazing management.</li> <li>• Plan to interpret the relationship of Iver village with Colne Brook and brick making.</li> <li>• Plan to improve connections between adjacent conurbations and valley floor landscapes through the use of river courses and creation of gateway sites.</li> </ul>

### 3.11 Richings Lowland

#### Summary Description

This landscape character area comprises low lying and gently sloping land between Langley Park and the Thames/Colne floodplain between 40-25m AOD. It is a predominately agricultural landscape, used for arable, orchards/market gardening and golf courses. There is a notable east west grain to the landscape due to the Grand Union Canal and railway line, pylons, M4 and A4.

#### Constituent Landscape Types: Lowland



#### Key Characteristics

- Lowland topography, gently sloping southwards between 40-25m AOD.
- London Clay geology overlain with river terrace deposits including Boyn Hill Gravel.
- Watercourses or waterbodies are scarce in this landscape except for the east/west arm of the Grand Union Canal and Horton Brook which feeds lakes in former Richings Parkland.
- Varied land use including paddocks close to settlement, large arable fields and horse grazing pastures (former landfill south of M4).
- Area of former orchards at the turn of the 20th century - still evident in land use today.
- Tree cover is sparse, scattered along field boundaries or roads or within former parkland areas giving rise to an open expansive character.
- Strong east west grain to this landscape reflected in transport routes e.g. railway, Grand Union Canal. pylons, M4, and A4.
- Distinctive Victorian architecture evidenced in bridges and workers' cottages associated with Grand Union Canal and railway.
- Encroachment of urban edge of Langley and Brands Hill with abrupt hard urban edge to east.
- Several golf courses including the Iver, Richings Park and Thorney Park.
- Pylons are visually prominent in this open landscape.
- Long extensive views across open fields or former landfill sites.

#### Physical, ecological and cultural influences

This landscape forms an area of lowland to the west of the Colne Valley: Cowley to West Drayton, and is gently sloping between 40-25m AOD. Where land has been restored from

former landfill to pasture and is grazed by horses, contours can appear slightly raised and atypical e.g. North of A4.

There is a mix of land use in this area with arable dominating within 20th century enclosures defined by well trimmed hedgerows and giving rise to expansive, open fields. Smaller field subdivisions are used as paddocks. Fields are often bounded by a network of hedgerows and some hedgerow trees. Tree cover is sparse with small pockets of mixed and broadleaved woodland close to settlement. Infield trees are associated with former parkland and golf courses e.g. Richings Park and Thorney Park Golf Clubs. Some pockets of intensively managed orchards are scattered across the north of this area, although historically there were many more 'edge of village' orchards which are now lost.

Arable cultivation and grassland areas have a limited biodiversity value in this landscape. Hedgerows and scrubby boundaries provide wildlife corridors and valuable ecological benefits, linking infield trees, associated with former parkland areas, to other areas of biological value. Water courses are sparse with narrow riparian corridors and, in places, are poorly managed.

Industrial and business areas such as The Ridgeway Trading Estate, Iver North Water Treatment Works and Court Lane Industrial Estate give rise to a semi-urban landscape. Industrial development has also concentrated between the Grand Union Canal and railway.

Settlement in this landscape is comprised of dispersed small historic villages such as Middle Green, Parsonage Farm and Thorney as well as the more substantial Richings Park - a planned residential settlement prior to World War II following the opening of a station for Iver on the main line railway. The original Main Drive leading to the mansion, that gave Richings Park its name, is still evident to the south of North Park.

### **Perceptions and Value**

This is a large scale landscape, with prominent development surrounded by large arable/pasture fields. The open fields and limited woodland cover give this landscape a simple structure. Long vistas are possible across fields, although existing urban edges and industrial areas can foreshorten views. Major road infrastructure (M25, M4 and A4) create a busy and noisy character locally. The roads, coupled with the Grand Union Canal and railway, cause physical fragmentation of the landscape and disorientation, although brick architecture of bridges and workers cottages associated with these transport routes are distinctive and add to sense of place.

This landscape contains many long distance routes including the Grand Union Canal tow path and Colne Valley Way/Trail and there are several golf courses. Otherwise this landscape retains a semi-rural character although development on its fringes can visually intrude and in places lack of watercourse management, derelict sites and fly tipping give rise to an unkempt and denuded feel. This landscape often lack a strong sense of place.

### **Evaluation**

#### **Sensitivities**

- Open long views over arable fields which contrasts with the more wooded landscape to the north and within the Colne Valley to the east.

- Landscape structure and sense of place is weak and highly sensitive to further infrastructure and built development which can cause visual and physical fragmentation as well as disorientation.
- The few watercourses in this area are susceptible to lack of management and water quality issues due to bank erosion caused by horses and runoff.

### Future Changes

- Further fragmentation of landscape as a result of increased infrastructure and development along major transport networks e.g. Hs2 safeguarded zone along railway between Slough and Richings Park.
- Expansion of urban edges into this area which may be highly visible.
- Proliferation of pony paddocks along the urban edge disrupting the large scale simple character of the landscape and creating areas with a stronger urban fringe character.
- Potential Western Tunnel Rail Link from Great Western mainline to Heathrow Terminal 5 which may emerge from tunnel near Richings Park.
- Heathrow expansion 3rd runway likely to effect the southern part of this character area.

### Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect hedgerow boundaries through good management to ensure they provide visual unity, intactness and increase biodiversity.</li> <li>• Protect open views to ensure visual interest whilst avoiding new vertical structures which can appear out of scale and have adverse effects.</li> <li>• Protect distinctive Victorian architecture evidenced in bridges and workers' cottages associated with Grand Union Canal and railway.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage arable/pasture land with the aim of generating a wildlife rich habitat and visually attractive landscape.</li> <li>• Manage golf clubs sensitively to conserve and enhance features reflecting former parkland character through preparation of conservation management plans and veteran tree surveys.</li> <li>• Manage watercourse corridors through the creation of wider riparian buffers, vegetation and bank management as well as removal of non-native invasive species.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan to plant trees and woodland to contain and reduce visual impact of existing and future housing and industry and to enhance the physical landscape structure of this landscape.</li> <li>• Plan appropriate and suitable mitigation/compensation measures for road widening schemes and major development which may physically affect this landscape.</li> <li>• Plan for the reintroduction of small scale village edge orchards to reinforce local character and seek to establish markets for local produce.</li> <li>• Plan to restore the area of former landfill site north of the A4 with planting of small copses and hedgerows and creation of wider buffer to Colne Brook.</li> <li>• Plan to enhance landscape character and landscape condition along the route of the Colne Valley Way/Trail.</li> <li>• Plan for the creation of local landmarks through the introduction of environmental art and sculpture to assist with orientation and the creation of distinctive places.</li> </ul>

### 3.12 Colne Valley: Cowley to West Drayton

#### Summary Description

This landscape character area forms the lower reaches of River Colne defined by Yiewsly and West Drayton to the east and M4 to the south. It comprises the valley floor of the River Colne which contains a complex network of different water channels including the River Colne, Grand Union Canal and Fray's River. There are numerous naturalistic lakes, post gravel extraction, which have a strong recreation focus. The area is well wooded giving rise to an enclosed and intimate character.

#### Constituent Landscape Types: Valley floor



#### Key Characteristics

- Low lying, flat, floodplain with little topographic variation.
- Mosaic of underlying gravel overlain with alluvial deposits.
- Frequent presence of water - including River Colne, Grand Union Canal, and Fray's River and chain of water bodies associated with former gravel extraction sites.
- Dense tree cover associated with the restored lakes and along watercourses, gives rise to a small scale and intimate landscape with limited views out.
- Occasional fields of pasture and grazing with scattered trees.
- Valuable wetland and riparian habitats which support a diverse fauna and flora.
- Settlement density is low comprising isolated properties, clusters of housing, occasional light industrial development and mobile home parks.
- Access into the area is by small rural east/west lanes and public rights of way.
- Area is traversed by mainline railway between West Drayton and Iver (part of Crossrail) and a line connecting West Drayton to Poyle.
- Pockets of tranquillity and intimacy created by vegetation and water.
- Extensive areas used for recreation often associated with waterways and lakes such as canal barging, angling and bird watching.

#### Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences

This low lying valley floor floodplain is dominated by water including the River Colne, Frays River, the Grand Union Canal (western arm to Slough and the London Loop) and lakes, formerly gravel pits, such as Little Britain Lakes. It is the presence of many water bodies and the lush riparian and wetland vegetation that distinguishes this area from those that surround

it. The waterbodies are interspersed with a mosaic of grassland, scrub, wasteland, wetland, woodland and meadows which provide a valuable network of wildlife habitats. Frays Island and Mabey's Meadow is a Nature Reserve alive with insect life, its flower filled meadow an array of colour in the summer. Little Britain, a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation, comprises a variety of habitats including lakes, canals, rivers, scrub, wet woodland and meadows. To the west, the banks of the Colne Brook are lined by willow, oak, ash and hawthorn. Small islands within the waterbodies providing important refuge for bird species and amphibians.

Tree cover provides a strong sense of enclosure and channels views along water courses with some expansive views across lakes. Vegetation is predominately willow and poplar reflecting the valley floor location and relatively high water table.

Associated with the Grand Union Canal are many industrial heritage features such as locks, weirs and old mills as well as an impressive viaduct which carries the western arm to Slough. Cowley Lock is a large Conservation Area including a lock, brick arch bridge, public house, cottages and Grade II listed Old Mill House. This landscape has a mixed historic character reflecting mainly a post 1885 industrial landscape significantly manipulated for gravel and subsequently used predominately for recreation. Recreational activities include boating, angling, canoeing and bird watching. There are also numerous footpaths and cycle routes including Grand Union Canal Walk, Colne Valley Trail, Beeches Way and London Loop.

Settlement density is relatively low, with isolated properties and small clusters of houses. A strong urban edge filters in along the east, from housing and industry associated with Cowley, Yiewsley, and West Drayton. In places, there are small patches of industry and caravan or mobile home parks. Where small pockets of development/industry occurs it often has a cluttered and unkempt appearance and may be associated with a proliferation of signage and leylandii hedging which is uncharacteristic of the valley floor vegetation.

### **Perceptions and Value**

A flat landscape with high woodland cover contributes to a sense of intimacy and enclosure. The mosaic of woodland and water bodies provides a variety of texture and colour. Views are often confined within the character area by the woodland, although there are some longer views across open water, such as Little Britain, and along waterways, such as the Grand Union Canal. Pockets of tranquillity exist away from settlement and industry, and a rural character prevails - major infrastructure lies at the margins of the area and the mainline railway and line to West Drayton to Poyle line have limited effect due to vegetation cover. The area is served by a good network of footpaths including the Colne Valley Trail, Beeches Way and Grand Union Canal tow path. The area is easily accessible to the public and provides many recreational opportunities.

### **Evaluation**

#### **Sensitivities**

- Water bodies and linear water channels with strong ecological and recreational importance which require management to maintain and enhance their interest.
- Low density of settlement, absence of roads and dominance of water and woodland contribute to a sense of tranquillity which is vulnerable to inappropriate recreational use or development.



- Proximity to a dense urban edge which may impact on this landscape if it expands.
- Strong river valley floor character reflected in native wetland tree species vulnerable to lack of management and changes in character due to inappropriate planting.
- Within the context of the Colne Valley this landscape comprises a valuable rural corridor inside the M25 and close to heavily built up areas.

### Future Changes

- Housing pressure and new development along eastern edge of this character area.
- Proliferation of non native tree species to screen development on the valley floor which undermines the wetland character and can be visually discordant.
- Proximity to urban areas resulting in fly-tipping, unauthorised motorbike access and lane erosion due to heavy lorry access.

### Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the strong sense of tranquillity, largely associated with the absence of settlement, dominance of woodland and water, and strong sense of containment.</li> <li>• Protect areas of river valley floor which form an attractive setting to conservation areas and listed buildings i.e. Cowley Lock and West Drayton.</li> <li>• Protect narrow lanes from urban fringe pressures, verge erosion and fly-tipping.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage the water quality in the rivers, lakes and ponds, seeking to reduce run off and water pollution from surrounding industry and roads.</li> <li>• Manage existing water bodies seeking to conserve and enhance habitats and ecological diversity.</li> <li>• Manage existing open views across expanses of water and create new vistas through control of waterside vegetation.</li> <li>• Manage the wider range of recreation within this landscape. Seek to achieve coordinated promotion under the Regional Park banner.</li> <li>• Manage and improve the quality of 'gateways' from urban areas into this valuable green corridor e.g. Trout Road and West Drayton.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan to extend and connect habitats and enhance biodiversity interest.</li> <li>• Plan for increased access and connection of footpaths and recreational routes across the area and the creation of links into adjoining urban areas.</li> <li>• Plan for the further screening and buffering of roads, industry and abrupt urban edges through sensitive tree planting.</li> <li>• Plan for the creation of local landmarks through the introduction of environmental art and sculpture to assist with orientation and the creation of distinctive places.</li> <li>• Plan for the removal of invasive species and non-native planting, especially the use of leylandii hedging around areas of industry e.g. Donkey Lane and Crickfield Road.</li> <li>• Plan for the improved management of light industry and mobile home parks within the valley floor and seek to reduce associated signage.</li> <li>• Plan to manage lanes which provide access into the area to retain and enhance rural character through discouraging fly tipping, management of grass verges and hedgerows, and rationalisation of signage.</li> </ul>

### 3.13 Colne Valley: Harmondsworth to Stanwell Moor

#### Summary Description

This landscape character area comprises the Colne Valley and associated historic villages adjacent to Heathrow Airport. It is a lowland landscape with limited variations in topography and is significantly affected by infrastructure serving the airport and or visual/audible intrusion of aircraft manoeuvres.

#### Constituent Landscape Types: Lowland



#### Key Characteristics

- Low lying floodplain associated with the lower reaches of River Colne.
- Alluvial deposits underlain by Thames Group comprising clay, silt, sand and gravel.
- Area dissected by numerous roads servicing airport - M25, A3044, A4 and A3113.
- Large scale industrial/commercial development west of M25 and around airport perimeter - including pavilion style commercial properties and distribution centres.
- Former areas of gravel extraction resulting in some small lakes and rough grazing.
- Extant mineral extraction activity in places.
- Historic villages of Stanwell Moor, Longford and Harmondsworth associated with the fringes of the River Colne.
- Area affected by aircraft flight paths and landing/take off manoeuvres with significant noise and visual intrusion.
- Heathrow air traffic control tower (beyond character area to east) and chimney of Grundon Lakeside Road Incinerator are local landmarks.

#### Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences

This character area comprises the landscape which fringes Heathrow Airport including the section of the Colne Valley between the M4 and Stanwell Moor Village. The area contains significant infrastructure include the M25, Heathrow Airport access road, A4, A3044 and A3113. These busy roads and road junctions are in contrast to the pattern of rural lanes extending from the historic villages although many of the historic routes have been severed by later road networks. Historically this landscape has been on the edge of four different local authorities and with administrative boundary changes during the late 20th century and pressure for development, the area has suffered from a lack of coherent planning.

The topography of the area is flat or gently undulating forming the start of the floodplain fan through which braided distributaries of the River Colne would have historically flowed. Woodland cover is sparse with views across rough ground/grazed farmland to road embankments or adjacent development. Trees line the River Colne and are concentrated on the fringes of gravel extraction lakes. Water channels include the River Colne, Duke of Northumberland's River, Colne Brook and Wraysbury River. These are important ecological corridors as are the lakes created from previous gravel workings, some supporting marginal vegetation such as fen. The River Colne and Stanwell Moor Site of Nature Conservation Importance forms a continuous meandering corridor between the A3113 and Stains Moor.

Parts of this area has been extensively worked for gravel as recently as the early 21st century. North of the A4 there is an area of former landfill restored to Harmondsworth Moor Country Park. The undulating topography in this created using the waste material from the construction of an underground car park associated with British Airways headquarters (Waterside), masks the former flat floodplain character. Further south, the land has been restored to small pasture fields and rough ground, defined by hedgerows and woodland copses. The wooded course of the River Colne has been retained as a landscape feature. South of the A3113, land is still being worked for gravel and other areas have been restored to form lakes which sit adjacent to small scale pastures and some arable land.

In the west, the landscape reflects the continuation of the flat open floodplain but is severed from the River Colne by the M25. Here the land has become extensively developed forming the Poyle Training Estate in part due to the proximity of the M25 and M4 but also in response to the railway between West Drayton and Staines which is used to service an aggregates depot and Heathrow. The area is dominated by large industrial sheds, distribution warehouses and commercial developments with distinctive 'pavilion' style architecture.

The historic villages, located on the fringes of the many waterways, give a unique quality to this landscape area. These settlements are thought to have their origins in Saxon times and grew in importance from the 17th-19th centuries. The ready supply of water enabled the development of many corn, paper and gunpowder mills. Today the villages of Stanwell Moor, Longford and Harmondsworth still contain some remnant built structures reflecting this period, including mill buildings, weirs and brick bridges while Harmondsworth also contains a much earlier 12th Century barn which is a key feature. Longford and Harmondsworth are both Conservation Areas and contain substantial numbers of listed buildings. The juxtaposition of these historic settlements with the river valley and valley floor vegetation is distinctive and makes a valuable contribution to the settlements and their settings.

### **Perceptions and Value**

This is a landscape of contrasts from the busy major road network and proximity of Heathrow Airport to the small scale Saxon villages located along the margins of the tributaries to the River Colne. The area is significantly affected by noise and visual intrusion from landing/take off manoeuvres, however areas of tranquillity can be found where there is evidence of traditional valley floor and river character in association with historic features and villages. Otherwise this landscape is busy and fragmented.

Through much of the area, except for Harmondsworth Country Park, there is limited accessibility via footpaths and bridleways. Recreational opportunity and experience is therefore constrained and often interrupted by development and transport routes such that the River Colne can be difficult to perceive or experience.

## Evaluation

### Sensitivities

- Historical links between Saxon settlements and the River Colne and importance of the rural floodplain pastures in providing a setting to the villages and listed buildings.
- Ecological networks along watercourses and meadows which are vulnerable to severance and fragmentation due to infrastructure and development.
- Pockets of relative tranquillity where cultural and natural heritage remain.

### Future Changes

- Expansion of Heathrow Airport with a new northwest runway would have a significant effect on perceptions of the River Colne floodplain and associated historic villages.
- Ad hoc development along rural roads disrupting historic settlement form.
- Standardisation of main roads resulting in a loss of local identity and disorientation.
- Continued sand and gravel extraction and restoration of sites to agriculture or lakes.
- Pressure for housing development and further commercial and industrial development associated with Heathrow Airport and major infrastructure routes.
- The relatively recent working and restoration of land adjacent to the waterways means that there is scope for the enhancement of the biodiversity of this landscape.

## Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect small lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvement or signage.</li> <li>• Protect and restore historic features within the valley, particularly those relating to the watercourses e.g. mills, bridges and sluices.</li> <li>• Protect the pattern of villages and their relationship to the River Colne landscape ensuring new development is sympathetic to these relationships.</li> <li>• Protect the ecological networks provided by watercourses which remain largely intact despite fragmentation of this landscape by infrastructure.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage recreation in this landscape and ensure the development of any new associated infrastructure is in keeping with the local rural character.</li> <li>• Manage and extend areas of wet grassland and meadow with appropriate grazing with livestock, particularly on areas of importance for wildlife and avoid bank erosion.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for the planting of new woodland within the valley floor improving structure and mitigating the effects of surrounding urban development.</li> <li>• Plan for the creation of new habitats and improved habitat networks, connecting existing sites and extending areas of pasture, woodland and wetland.</li> <li>• Plan for the increased informal recreational use of this area including improved rights of way connecting villages and across/under major infrastructure.</li> <li>• Plan for the improved understanding of the historic dimension of this landscape</li> <li>• Plan for the potential of Heathrow expansion ensuring appropriate mitigation which strengthens the positive characteristics of the area and contributes to place making.</li> <li>• Plan for the creation of local landmarks through the introduction of environmental art and sculpture to assist with orientation and increased awareness of the Colne.</li> </ul>

### 3.14 Horton and Wraysbury Lowlands

#### Summary Description

This landscape character area comprises part of the Thames floodplain and River Colne alluvial fan and has a flat low lying character. Much of the area has been altered by gravel extraction and the construction of reservoirs resulting in a repetitive pattern of large lakes and steep reservoir embankments. Between these waterbodies are braided channels of the Colne Brook, and Colne and Wraysbury Rivers, remnant meadows and historic villages.

#### Constituent Landscape Types: Lowland



#### Key Characteristics

- Flat, low lying alluvial fan/floodplain.
- Alluvial deposits underlain by London Clay Formation comprising clay, silt and sands.
- Area significantly altered by large reservoirs and lakes in former gravel pits.
- Course of Colne Brook, Colne and Wraysbury Rivers obscured by artificial lakes.
- Artificial reservoir embankments rise to 20m and contrast starkly with otherwise flat topography of the area and dominate adjoining settlement and road corridors.
- Land use is predominately lakes with remnant areas of pasture (including reservoir embankments) and some medium scaled arable fields in the north.
- Expansive naturalised and restored man-made wetland landscape of ecological importance particularly for over wintering birds.
- Expansive area of historical 'mead' at Staines Moor.
- Areas of active sand and gravel extraction in the north, visible from Cooper's Hill.
- Dissected by M25, railway and affected by flight paths to/from Heathrow.
- Some views across open expanses of water but most views are contained by vegetation around lakes, resulting in contrasting areas of openness and enclosure.
- Historic villages of Colnbrook, Horton and Wraysbury each with notable listed structures such as churches, windmill, mill buildings and coach houses.
- Significant water based activity and passive recreation although there is a relative lack of footpaths around Colnbrook, Horton and Wraysbury.

#### Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences

The geology of this area comprises alluvial deposits beneath which are layers of fluvial sand and gravel deposits. Historically, water channels were dominant landscape features but significant change over the last century due to the high value of gravel deposits for the

construction industry, resulted in extensive gravel extraction and the subsequent creation of vast areas of lakes. Furthermore, four large reservoirs have been constructed in the last century to provide potable water to London. These reservoirs have had a defining influence on the area due to their scale and steep sided grassed embankments which rise up to 20m above the surrounding flat landscape and are grazed by sheep and planted with trees on lower slopes. As such the water within the reservoirs is not visible from adjacent areas and the embankments also block views to wider urban areas beyond. Grassland on the embankments is managed by grazing and imparts a rural character.

Despite considerable change, this landscape still expresses elements of its historic character in the form of villages, rural lanes, historic buildings and remnant water channels. The villages of Colnbrook (Conservation Area), Horton and Wraysbury are thought to have originated in the Saxon period. They are located on sites close to water channels which traverse the flat plain associated with the lower reaches of the Colne. All three villages have churches with low squat towers which form local landmarks. The character of Colnbrook reflects its position on the main road between London and Bath and Bristol. It benefited from the coaching trade in the 18th and 19th centuries and many of the listed buildings in the Conservation Area reflect former coaching houses. Between these distinct villages, new development has extended along the historic roads such as Coopermill Road, which sits at the foot of Wraysbury Reservoir, and has subsequently connected Horton with Wraysbury.

Several Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are included in this landscape, such as Wraysbury Gravel Pit, Wraysbury Reservoir and Hythe End Gravel Pits, the latter consisting of a mosaic of open water, islands, grassland, scrub and woodland habitats. These areas support nationally important numbers of wintering waterfowl and breeding birds and are interesting for their flora and fauna. Thus, the reservoirs are designated Ramsar, Special Protection Area, SSSIs and Sites of Nature Conservation Importance. Between the Staines and Wraysbury Reservoirs lies a rare remnant of alluvial meadow (Staines Moor) which would, in the past, have been much more extensive. This is a wide open area contrasting with more intimate vegetated areas of the River Colne and gravel extraction lakes. Known to have been common land since 1065, it has not been subject to intensive agricultural use and this, combined with the size and the rich diversity of meadow, ensures its importance to wildlife.

The fertile soils of the river floodplain have supported mixed farming including significant areas of arable, apparent particularly between Colnbrook and Horton. Closer to the settlements, smaller scale fields occur defined by hedgerows and hedgerow trees along with remnant areas of parkland associated with manors e.g. Poyle Manor House and Berkin Manor, Horton. Between the naturalised vegetation surrounding the gravel extraction lakes small scale pasture fields remain, but often lack management forming rough grassland.

### **Perceptions and Value**

Gravel extraction and ground restoration have enabled waterborne recreation, however public footpaths have become severed or lost, while others such as the Colne Valley Way run on embankment between wetland areas. Although this landscape contains sizeable bodies of water it is often difficult to get a clear appreciation of this due to the elevated embankments of the reservoirs or the dense vegetation which surrounds many of the lakes. Nevertheless the public footpath across the Staines reservoir gives a surreal exposure to the vast expanses of water elevated views across the surrounding landscape.

Due to the proximity of Heathrow, planes are often seen and heard within the area. In places this area can reflect a lack of management and suffers from fly tipping, resulting in a pervading sense of scruffiness and unkempt character.

## Evaluation

### Sensitivities

- The individual identity and historic character of the villages which are vulnerable to unsympathetic development and linear expansion along roads.
- Wetland sites for nature conservation including the rarity of Staines Moor as an ancient alluvial meadow which are vulnerable to fragmentation and isolation.
- The remnant historic elements of the landscape including villages, lane network, remnant parkland associated with former manors, churches, windmills and mills etc.

### Future Changes

- Lack of management of small pasture fields resulting in areas of rough ground.
- Loss of views across the landscape due to maturing of lakeside vegetation.
- Possible route of air track between Stanwell Moor village and Staines.
- Expansion of Heathrow Airport resulting in increasing frequency of flights.
- Lower Thames Flood Alleviation - construction of a new flood relief channel just west of the M25, north of Wraysbury and then south of the Queen Mother Reservoir.

## Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and restore historic features along waterways, particularly those relating to the watercourses e.g. mills, bridges and sluices.</li> <li>• Protect historic character of individual villages and key views to church towers.</li> <li>• Protect areas of ancient pasture/common such as Staines Moor and Common in terms of wide expanse and extent and rich diversity of flora and fauna.</li> <li>• Protect the ecological value of the various reservoirs and lakes in this landscape.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage woodland and scrub areas fringing lakes. Seek opportunities to open up views across the water from the surrounding wider landscape.</li> <li>• Manage recreation in this landscape and ensure the development of any new associated infrastructure is in keeping with the local rural character.</li> <li>• Manage village edge small scale pastures through appropriate grazing regimes.</li> <li>• Manage small scale hedgerow pattern and mature hedgerow trees close to villages.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for the improved interpretation of historic character and features.</li> <li>• Plan to improve the footpath network in the vicinity of settlements such as Horton and Wraysbury in order to improve easy access to the wider landscape.</li> <li>• Plan to campaign against fly tipping in the area / encourage positive care for the area.</li> <li>• Plan to enhance the landscape context of the route of the Colne Valley Trail/Way and plan alternative routes or connections where development causes severance.</li> <li>• Plan for the creation of local landmarks through the introduction of environmental art and sculpture to assist with orientation and place making.</li> </ul>



### 3.15 Thames at Ankerwycke

#### Summary Description

This landscape character area focuses on the River Thames and lies predominately beyond the Colne Valley. It includes both sides of the River Thames and the distinctive Cooper's Hill which provides the landscape context to Runnymede and Ankerwycke within the Project Area. Cooper's Hill offers panoramic views across the character area and the wider project study area to the north.

**Constituent Landscape Types:** Valley floor and valley sides



#### Key Characteristics

- Flat, low lying floodplain of the Thames and distinctive rising slopes of Cooper's Hill.
- Silt and gravel superficial deposits over London Clay formation of clay, silt and sand on the valley floor with Bagshot Formation Sand forming the hills to the south.
- River Thames forms a broad channel, lined by trees or development fronting onto the water's edge.
- Notable areas of common land comprising species rich flower meadows and historic farmlands grazed by cattle.
- Distinctive southern wooded valley slopes of Cooper's Hill provide elevated views of the river and wider floodplain to the north and far reaching views to London and Windsor Great Park.
- Limited settlement restricted to the banks of the Thames to the east.
- Historically significant area of Runnymede, Ankerwycke and memorials on Cooper's Hill collectively reinforce meaning and sense of place.

#### Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences

This character area comprises the River Thames and its immediate landscape context between the edge of Wraysbury and the M25. The River Thames forms the central landscape feature of this area meandering through riverside meadows. Willows and alders line the banks and occasional river boats provide visual interest. The steep slopes of Cooper's Hill form a distinctive and dominant backdrop to the river rising to approximately 83m AOD at the Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial.

From the north facing slopes on Cooper's Hill and from the Memorial itself there are elevated panoramic views northwards across the alluvial fan of the River Colne and into the river

terrace landscapes of Langley. From here, it is possible to gain an overview of the Colne Valley landscape including River Thames, heavily vegetated lakes in the Wraysbury and Horton Lowlands, London reservoirs and Heathrow Airport as well occasional spoil heaps of existing gravel extraction sites and road infrastructure.

This landscape has a rich history in part due to its proximity to Windsor Castle. South of Wraysbury was the site of a 12th century Benedictine Ankerwyke Priory (scheduled monument) now managed by the National Trust. This site contains one of Britain's oldest and most culturally significant trees where, according to popular belief, King Henry VIII is said to have met Anne Boleyn. The grazed meadows or 'meads' associated with the site of the priory are open access or common land and form a sea of buttercups in early summer defined by thick hedgerows and hedgerow trees. They are highly valued for their rich biodiversity and scenic qualities.

The cultural significance of this area is tangible. The sealing of the Magna Carta by King John on 15th June 1215 is documented at Runnymede Meadows. Magna Carta established for the first time the principle that everybody, including the king, was subject to the law and trial by a jury of his peers. Although nearly a third of the text was deleted or substantially rewritten within ten years and almost all the clauses have been repealed in modern times, Magna Carta remains a cornerstone of over 17 constitutions worldwide.

Further historical significance is provided above the River on the slopes of Cooper's Hill, where the Air Force Memorial commemorating all those who lost their lives during the World War II defending our freedom, stands proud overlooking the Thames and wider Colne Valley.

Much of the area is managed by the National Trust employing traditional grazing for the riverside meadows and maintenance of the woodland which cloaks the slopes of Cooper's Hill. These woodlands comprise mainly native broadleaved trees and some areas being classified as ancient. In places, there are issues with the spread of rhododendron. At the foot of the slopes is Langham Pond, which is surrounded by alluvial meadows and represents a habitat of a type and quality unknown elsewhere in Southern England. The combination of alluvial soils and the calcareous influence of the chalk parent rock has led to the development of rich aquatic, marginal and meadow floras. The pond supports several nationally scarce invertebrates. Woodland on adjacent higher ground above the flood plain lies on London Clay and supports a rich community of breeding birds. Collectively the pond, meadows and woodland are designated a SSSI.

There is limited settlement in this area except for the eastern half of the Thames where development has occurred along the river banks - riverside houses to the north and commercial development to the south. Along this section of the river, there are a number of historical built structures dating to the Victorian period, including an old pumping station, weir and lock.

### **Perceptions and Value**

This landscape has a strong rural character and is visually and physically intact. It is an area in sharp contrast to many of the landscapes surrounding it, where development has occurred or the land has been substantially altered due to gravel extraction. Therefore, this area is a small oasis of natural and cultural significance which can be readily perceived.

Much of this area is open access land giving easy access to the rural, intimate and peaceful area. The Thames Path runs along the southern banks of the river connecting into urban areas of Windsor and Staines, while the Magna Carta Monument, John F Kenedy Memorial and Air Force Memorial are notable landmarks.

## Evaluation

### Sensitivities

- Intact rural tranquil character and tangible cultural and ecological significance is vulnerable to external visual and audible intrusions.
- Elevated views across the southern part of the Colne Valley Regional Park providing an opportunity to view the area within a wider context and get an appreciation of its scale, topography and land use.
- Intricate matrix of habitats requiring continued and traditional management techniques.

### Future Changes

- Pressure for linear development along the banks of the Thames.
- Recreational pressures on this ecologically sensitive landscape.
- River Thames Scheme - Lower Thames Flood Alleviation which may impact on this area around Hythe End.

## Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the areas tranquil and rural character as an oasis within an urbanised and heavily utilised landscape.</li> <li>• Protect elevated views across the Colne Valley Regional Park.</li> <li>• Protect natural riverside context of the River Thames restricting further bank side development or intensification of areas already developed.</li> <li>• Protect the open rural roads through this area minimising small-scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which would change their character.</li> <li>• Protect the wooded and undeveloped slopes of Cooper's Hill from development which may break the skyline and impact on this landscape.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage traditional riverside meadows, or meads and woodlands which contribute significantly to the sense of place in this landscape.</li> <li>• Manage woodlands to retain key views across the wider landscape to the north.</li> <li>• Manage woodlands and keep rhododendron invasion under control.</li> <li>• Manage wide hedgerows and hedgerow trees ensuring they continue to act as ecological corridors and connect to wider landscapes beyond the LCA.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan to improve interpretation of elevated panoramic views placing the Colne Valley Regional Park in context and linking to other sites within the Project Area where there are also elevated contextualising views e.g. Langley Park and Harefield.</li> </ul>

### 3.16 River Ash Corridor - Staines

#### Summary Description

This landscape character area focuses around the River Ash between the M25 and HMP Bronzefield, although the river course is often not apparent in the landscape. It is a disjointed area dissected by major roads and railways. There is a matrix of different urban fringe land uses from playing fields and allotments to wider areas of grazed common land.

**Constituent Landscape Types:** Valley floor



#### Key Characteristics

- Flat, low lying landscape associated with the River Ash and contained by settlement.
- Silt and gravel superficial deposits over London Clay formation of clay, silt and sand.
- The course of the river is often not apparent and in a few places culverted.
- Trees are associated with water bodies and the road/rail network.
- Notable areas of common land grazed by cattle and some remnant pasture fields.
- Other urban fringe land uses including school playing fields, pocket parks, lakes and earth works from past and current gravel extraction.
- Many open areas are fenced and there are strong perceptions of restricted access.
- Staines Aqueduct, roads, railways and pylons cut through the area creating a disjointed and disorientating character.
- Distant views are largely contained by roadside embankments/ vegetation and settlement although some long views to the control tower at Heathrow.
- Tranquillity and sense of remoteness are limited.

#### Physical, Ecological and Cultural Influences

This landscape character area comprises a series of open spaces broadly associated with the River Ash which is a small, shallow river and one of a number of River Colne distributaries. It originates just south of Staines Moor and flows eastwards through the borough of Spelthorne before meeting the River Thames.

Geologically, this area is typical of river floodplains comprising alluvial deposits which are underlain with London Clay formation of clay, silt and sand. The area is frequently crossed by infrastructure (often on embankment) or constrained by urban development. These characteristics reinforce the flat and low lying topography of the area and limit outward views.

Historic maps featuring the Ash highlight the significant manipulation of the watercourse over the centuries including straightening, introduction of sluices, dredging and hemming in sections. An important feature of this character area is the Staines Aqueduct. Built around the start of the 20th century, the aqueduct feeds the Staines Reservoirs to the north of this character area. Today, the aqueduct abstracts water from the River Thames at Bell Weir, feeds the reservoirs before continuing to the Kempton Park Water Treatment Works. It is a valued piece of architecture passing over and under rivers, railways and roads.

Land use in this character area is varied including alluvial meadow, remnant pasture fields/pony paddocks, former and current gravel extraction sites/lakes, amenity grassland as well as patches of woodland and scrub. Although these areas are associated with the River Ash floodplain the watercourse is often not apparent - due to culverting or low flows. As such, there is a sense that the river is often absent. Where water is evident, there are wetland trees including crack, weeping and white willow, as well as ash and alder although many lack management. Wet margins and emergent vegetation also occurs along the watercourse and in small ponds e.g. Shortwood Pond which is designated a SSSI. The patchwork of habitats in this character area is important for particular birds and invertebrates.

The value of linking areas of open land along the River Ash as a "green corridor" has long been recognised. However, there are notable areas where physical access is restricted (in part due to past gravel extraction or private ownership) where development has infringed on the river corridor and where use of 1.5m high metal fencing has constrained footpath corridors. This has a substantial urbanising effect on what could otherwise be a green oasis.

The watercourse is slow-flowing and not navigable to craft. Water quality is good despite the effluent treatment works along the Colne and river eutrophication (richness of nutrients) is moderate.

### **Perceptions and Value**

Vegetation within this character area is often at the margins of land parcels. It helps to screen urban development so that there is a feeling of openness and separation from settlement. In some locations, there are views to the air traffic control tower at Heathrow, a local landmark in a landscape that otherwise lacks distinction and can be disorientating.

### **Evaluation**

#### **Sensitivities**

- Balancing the 'naturalistic' character of watercourse with need for flood control.
- Perceptions of openness along the floodplain as a sequence of spaces despite urban context can easily be eroded by lack of management and land use changes.
- Encroachment of development close to the water channel eroding perceptions of the riparian landscape.

#### **Future Changes**

- Physical fragmentation of this landscape, inaccessibility and loss of perceptual connection to the River Ash.

- The route of the Air track connecting Heathrow with Staines is likely to pass through the western part of this character area, south of Staines Moor and the A30.
- Restricted flow volumes to prevent flooding.
- Invasion of non native species along watercourse and ponds.
- Build up of rubbish within the water channel and fly tipping in the area generally.

### Landscape Strategy

<b>Protect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect areas where the watercourse is evident in the landscape. Avoid manipulation and introduction of elements which undermines this.</li> <li>• Protect sense of open space created by the linking of the parcels of land along the watercourse/floodplain despite urban context.</li> </ul>
<b>Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage and increase the normal flow in the river and alleviate low flow problems.</li> <li>• Manage the open water channel through de-silting of channel and reinstatement of gravels.</li> <li>• Manage the water channel through the removal of rubbish and non-native species.</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan to enhance the margins of the watercourse through tree planting and creating shelves of emergent vegetation for water fowl.</li> <li>• Plan for a River Ash footpath connecting parcels of land together.</li> <li>• Plan for an arts project which seeks to increase people's perceptions of the presence of the river and enjoyment of its qualities.</li> <li>• Plan to rationalise and remove where possible unnecessary urban fencing which restrict views and physical access. Seek creative ways to prevent access, where necessary, whilst still allowing views into adjoining open landscapes.</li> </ul>

## 4.0 Looking Forward

### 4.1 Contributing to Landscape Partnership Initiatives

4.1.1 This section sets out how the findings of the character assessment can shape and direct initiatives currently being developed by the Colne Valley Partnership and can therefore add value to this process.

4.1.2 The Colne Valley Landscape Partnership has identified four broad themes as part of the emerging Landscape Conservation Action Plan or LCAP. These are set out in turn below. This is followed by Table 3 which highlights that within any character area a number of complementary projects may be accommodated at the same time. The table sets out which initiatives are likely to correspond to which character areas, though this table should not be taken as absolute or final.

### 4.2 Theme 1: A Landscape of Wetland, Woodland and Grassland

4.2.1 This theme aims to understand, improve and connect grassland, wetland and woodland habitats. It seeks to establish appropriate and complimentary habitats that will benefit wildlife and which will be enjoyed by people and/or introduce new management practices some of which address the impact of people on these habitats.

Specific projects include:

- Preventing Water Voles from Being Extinct Project
- Invasive Species Project
- River Floodplain and Connectivity Project
- Weir Today, Gone Tomorrow Project
- Angling & Nature Conservation Project
- Conservation Grazing Project

4.2.2 This theme focuses on valley landscapes and is therefore most relevant to the character areas that define the Colne Valley, its tributaries to the west and, in the south, the wider 'fan' of distributaries. These projects are therefore especially relevant to the following character areas:

- Colne River: Rickmansworth to Uxbridge
- Colne River: A412 to Iver
- Colne River: Cowley to West Drayton
- Colne River: Harmondsworth to Stanwell Moor
- Misbourne and Alder Bourne Tributaries
- Denham Valley Floor
- Horton to Wraysbury Lowlands
- Thames at Ankerwycke
- River Ash Corridor - Staines



### 4.3 Theme 2: A Landscape of People

4.3.1 This theme focuses on the 3 million people that live within 10 miles of the Park and aims to engage local people and communities with the countryside. It also seeks to support local communities to value their landscape and take steps towards managing aspects of the Colne Valley landscape.

Specific projects include:

- River Wardens Project
- Water Saving Project
- Your Town/Village in the Colne Valley Project
- Community Support Group Project
- River Signage Project
- Positive Management Project

4.3.2 This theme focuses on landscapes which lie adjacent or in close proximity to centres of population or local villages and communities and therefore applies across the whole Scheme Area. Nonetheless some of the specific projects listed are particularly relevant to certain character areas and this is set out in Table 3 below. For example the River Wardens Project is relevant to all river valley landscapes and the lowland landscapes in the south of the Project Area where as the Positive Management Project is particularly relevant to Colne Valley: Rickmansworth to Uxbridge, Rickmansworth to Uxbridge Wooded Farmland and Iver Heath Terrace.

### 4.4 Theme 3: A Landscape of Connections

4.4.1 This theme seeks to seamlessly connect the landscape to the surrounding settlements in ways that maximise benefits for people and the community.

Specific projects include:

- Improving the Interface between Town & Country Project
- A Bridge to the Country Project
- Completing the Missing Links Project
- Colne Valley Trail Project

4.4.2 This theme focuses on landscapes where physical connections aid access or promote a 'welcome' to the area or path networks and seeks to address impacts caused by anti-social behaviour. These projects are therefore especially relevant to the following character areas:

- Colne Valley: Rickmansworth to Uxbridge
- Colne Valley: A412 to Iver
- Colne Valley: Cowley to West Drayton
- Horton and Wraysbury Lowlands
- River Ash Corridor - Staines

## 4.5 Theme 4: A Landscape of Change

4.5.1 This theme seeks to highlight changes that, over decades, have shaped the Colne Valley landscape and uses this understanding to embrace the present day challenges, including national infrastructure and other developments, so as to minimise and manage the environmental and heritage impacts. It also celebrates views into the landscape and heritage through awareness-raising.

Specific projects include:

- Ancient Woodlands Interpretation Project
- Flowing Through the Colne Project
- Walks Through a Changing Landscape Project
- Windows to the Valley Project
- Spatial Vision Project

4.5.2 Whilst the Spatial Vision Project, Flowing Through the Colne Project and Windows to the Valley Project are relevant to all character areas, the Ancient Woodlands Project is most relevant to the following character areas:

- Heronsgate/Chalfont Farmland
- Colne Valley: Rickmansworth to Uxbridge
- Rickmansworth to Uxbridge Wooded Farmland
- Black and Langley Parks
- Thames at Ankerwycke

4.5.3 Similarly the Walks Through a Changing Landscape Project is most relevant to the following character areas:

- Colne Valley: Rickmansworth to Uxbridge
- Rickmansworth to Uxbridge Wooded Farmland
- Denham Valley Floor
- Iver Heath Terrace
- Horton and Wraysbury Lowlands

## 4.6 Making Connections and Adding Value

4.6.1 The table below demonstrates the link between the individual character areas and emerging themes and projects of the LCAP. It highlights that each character area is likely to have its own combination of projects. Wherever possible connections should be made between projects within a character area particularly where linking projects can add value. Projects should also seek to conserve and enhance the positive characteristics of reach of the character areas.

**Table 3: Landscape Character Areas and Projects**

	Heronsgate/Chalfont Farmland	Colne Valley: Rickmansworth to Uxbridge	Rickmansworth to Uxbridge Wooded Farmland	Misbourne and Alder Bourne Tributaries	Denham Valley Floor	Black and Langley Parks	Iver Heath Terrace	Colne Valley: A412 to Iver	Richings Lowland	Colne Valley: Cowley to West Drayton	Colne Valley: Harmondsworth to Stanwell Moor	Horton and Wraysbury Lowlands	Thames at Ankerwycke	River Ash Corridor - Staines
<b>Theme 1: A Landscape of Water, Meadows and Woods</b>														
Preventing Water Voles from Being Extinct Project		●		●	●			●		●	●	●	●	●
Invasive Species Project		●		●	●			●		●	●	●	●	●
River Floodplain and Connectivity Project		●		●	●			●		●	●	●	●	●
Weir Today, Gone Tomorrow Project		●		●	●			●		●	●	●	●	
Angling & Nature Conservation Project		●		●	●			●		●	●	●	●	●
Conservation Grazing Project		●		●	●			●		●	●	●	●	●

	Heronsgate/Chalfont Farmland	Colne Valley: Rickmansworth to Uxbridge	Rickmansworth to Uxbridge Wooded Farmland	Misbourne and Alder Bourne Tributaries	Denham Valley Floor	Black and Langley Parks	Iver Heath Terrace	Colne Valley: A412 to Iver	Richings Lowland	Colne Valley: Cowley to West Drayton	Colne Valley: Harmondsworth to Stanwell Moor	Horton and Wrybury Lowlands	Thames at Ankerwycke	River Ash Corridor - Staines
<b>Theme 2: A Landscape of People</b>														
River Wardens Project		●		●	●			●		●	●	●	●	●
Water Saving Project	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Your Town/Village in the Colne Valley Project	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●		●
Community Support Group Project	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
River Signage Project		●		●	●			●		●	●	●	●	●
Positive Management Project		●	●				●							

	Heronsgate/Chalfont Farmland	Colne Valley: Rickmansworth to Uxbridge	Rickmansworth to Uxbridge Wooded Farmland	Misbourne and Alder Bourne Tributaries	Denham Valley Floor	Black and Langley Parks	Iver Heath Terrace	Colne Valley: A412 to Iver	Richings Lowland	Colne Valley: Cowley to West Drayton	Colne Valley: Harmondsworth to Stanwell Moor	Horton and Wrybury Lowlands	Thames at Ankerwycke	River Ash Corridor - Staines
<b>Theme 3: A Landscape of Connections</b>														
Improving the Interface between Town & Country Project				●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●		●
A Bridge to the Country Project		●				●							●	●
Completing the Missing Links Project		●						●		●		●		
Colne Valley Trail Project		●				●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

	Heronsgate/Chalfont Farmland	Colne Valley: Rickmansworth to Uxbridge	Rickmansworth to Uxbridge Wooded Farmland	Misbourne and Alder Bourne Tributaries	Denham Valley Floor	Black and Langley Parks	Iver Heath Terrace	Colne Valley: A412 to Iver	Richings Lowland	Colne Valley: Cowley to West Drayton	Colne Valley: Harmondsworth to Stanwell Moor	Horton and Wrybury Lowlands	Thames at Ankerwycke	River Ash Corridor - Staines
<b>Theme 4: A Landscape of Change</b>														
Ancient Woodlands Interpretation Project	●	●	●			●							●	
Flowing Through the Colne Project	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Walks Through a Changing Landscape Project		●	●		●		●					●		
Windows to the Valley Project	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Spatial Vision Project	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

## Appendix 1:

### Explanation for Proposed Changes to Landscape Partnership Area

The Study Area boundary was reviewed as part of the fieldwork for the LCA and comments on proposed revisions were provided by consultees and the CIC.

The following text explains the final changes to the Project Area. They are numbered and the corresponding number can be found on drawing 3 and 4.

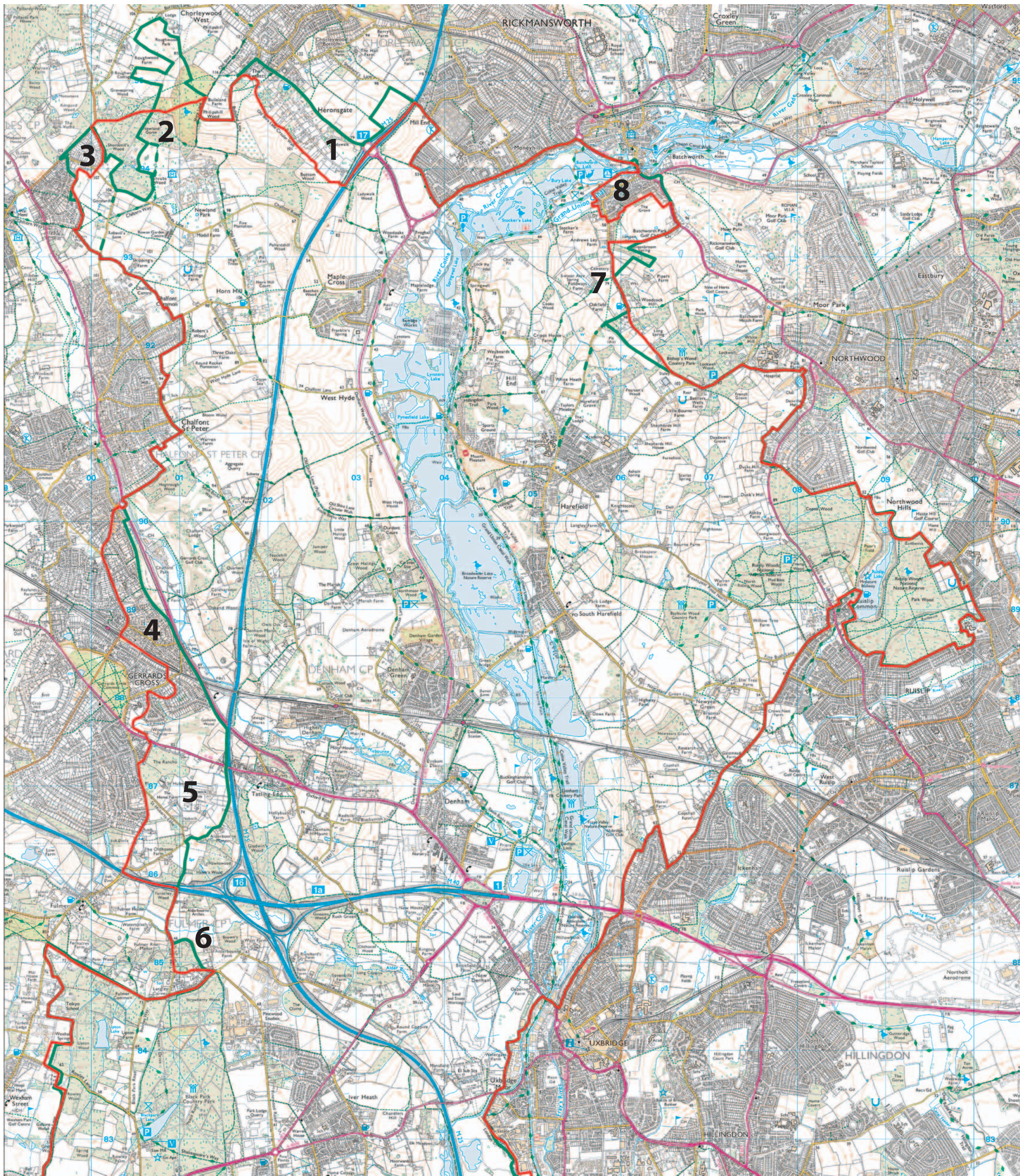
#### Drawing 3

1. Boundary drawn to exclude Herronsgate and land to the north beyond the settlement and M25 reflecting changes in landscape character.
2. Boundary amended to align with local landscape character area and to include woodland associated with Newland park.
3. Boundary drawn to exclude peripheral urban development.
4. Boundary drawn to include steep slopes and valley sides of the Misbourne Valley including development which has extended down the western valley sides and land between A40 and A413.
5. Boundary drawn to align more closely with local character area boundary including land west of M25.
6. Boundary drawn to include the valley slopes which form part of the river valley unit.
7. Boundary is simplify to follow the road.
8. Boundary has been drawn to exclude peripheral built development and roundabouts.



#### Drawing 4

9. Boundary has been drawn to exclude areas of peripheral urban development.
10. Boundary has been refined to include align more closely to the local character area and includes the historic village of Wraysbury which relates closely to the wider landscape whilst exclude more recent development and land to the west.
11. Minor changes have been made to the boundary in this area excluding peripheral development and infrastructure. East of HMP Bronzefield the boundary has been extended to include the narrow river corridor between the A30 and housing development. Land to the south forming Fordbridge Park has not been included due to its physical separation from the river by the A30 and its urban park character.
12. Boundary has been drawn to exclude peripheral development on the margins.
13. Boundary has been redrawn to include the villages of Longford and Harmondsworth as they closely relate to the River Colne.
14. Boundary has been redrawn to include open space on the fringes of Uxbridge which is contiguous with the Colne Valley.





**Key**

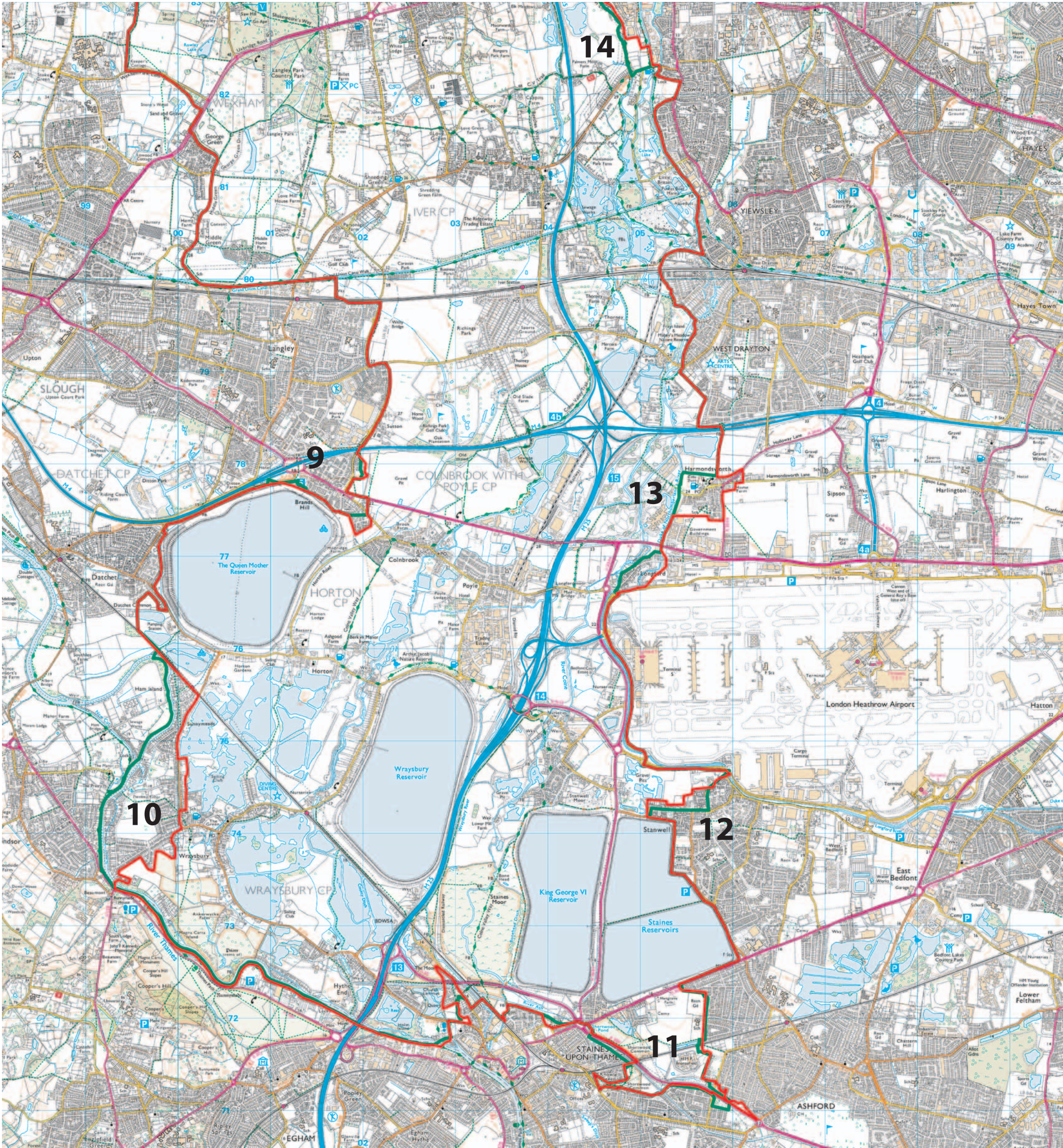
-  Final Project Area
-  Stage 1 Project Area (defined in project brief)

**Drawing 3:**  
Project Area Boundary Changes - North





0 1km 2km





**Key**

 Final Project Area

 Stage 1 Project Area (defined in project brief)

**Drawing 4:**  
Project Area Boundary Changes - South



0 1km 2km



## Appendix 2:

### List of Stakeholders Consulted

Groundwork Trust

Canal and Rivers Trust

Spelthorn District Council

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust

London Wildlife Trust

National Trust

Affinity Water

Spelthorne Natural History Society

Colne Valley Fisheries Consultative

Environment Agency

London Borough of Hillingdon

Hertfordshire County Council

Three Rivers District Council

Chilterns and South Bucks

Bucks County Council

Surrey County Council

Slough Borough Council

Windsor & Maidenhead

Heathrow Airport