

Kidmore End Local Valued Landscape Assessment



11 AUGUST 2020

The **terra firma** Consultancy Ltd

LOCAL VALUED LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

1. This Local Valued Landscape Assessment has been carried out in support of Kidmore End Neighbourhood Plan policy which identifies the Neighbourhood Plan area which lies to the south of the AONB as a Local Valued Landscape.
2. The Landscape Institute's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (Revision 3, 2013) provides a summary of the range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes set out in Box 5.1. These factors are widely used when considering the value that can be attached to landscapes, and are used for this assessment which draws on the Kidmore End Parish Landscape Sensitivity Study produced in 2018 and updated in 2020, also produced by The terra firma Consultancy Ltd.

a. Landscape quality (condition):

3. The Study Area lies in the LCA 10 Chilterns Plateau and Valleys, mostly made up of LCT Semi-enclosed dip slope. A number of guidelines relating to features within the Study Area indicate landscape quality:
 - Promote, where possible, the conservation of the surviving areas of permanent pasture;
 - Strengthen the field pattern by conserving species rich hedgerows and sympathetically maintaining all hedgerows.
 - Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns and villages with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area.
 - Maintain the vernacular character of settlements.
 - Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements.
 - There are a number of ancient semi-natural woodlands distributed throughout the landscape type and the priority must be to ensure that all these sites are in favourable condition and management.
 - Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as crack willow, oak and ash.
4. In the previous 2003 version, LCA 10 had a landscape strategy of 'Conserve'; a key indicator that the landscape is valued, defined in the SOLCA applying:

'where the landscape is of particularly high scenic quality, is unspoilt, retains a strong, intact landscape structure and sense of place, and often contains areas or features of ecological or cultural heritage significance. In these landscapes, conservation is an overwhelming priority in order to maintain landscape character and quality'.
5. A small area on the eastern side of the Study Area is classified as LCT Amenity Landscape with a former landscape strategy of 'Restore', despite only part of this small area comprising the Abbey Rugby Club grounds and with little evidence of structural decline. Most of this land is still under pasture or grassland with robust mature hedgerows and tree lines.

6. The dry valley and slopes within the area fall within Oxfordshire's Conservation Target Area: Chilterns Dipslope and Plateau CTA – Chalk grassland, woodland and arable land (for arable wildflowers and farmland birds) are noted as important for biodiversity.
7. The Study Area has strong landscape links with, and forms an important part of the landscape setting of the Chilterns AONB nearby to the north, with much of the Study Area indistinguishable from the landscape of the AONB. The Study Area shares many landscape characteristics and special qualities with the AONB:
 - The topography of the Study Area strongly relates to the topography of the AONB and is typical of the AONB special quality which describes how *'the folds of the landscape hide many small dry valleys'* and *'provide hidden 'secret' landscapes and unspoilt countryside'*
 - The Study Area shares the wooded characteristics of the AONB which is also noted as a special quality.
 - The 'special route' of the Chiltern Way runs along the Study Area's northern boundary.
 - Key characteristics shared with the wider landscape are the distinctive dry valley, hedgerow network, settlement pattern, winding narrow sunken lanes and mosaic of woodland, enclosed pasture and arable fields.
8. Until the early 2000s the Study Area was within SODC's local landscape designation; Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). The SODC Local Plan which designated AGLVs (adopted 1992, para 5.28) stated that the dipslope south from the AONB to the River Thames (including the Study Area) *'should have been included with[in] the AONB... and much of it is indistinguishable from the landscapes within the AONB'*.
9. The Study Area is largely made up of pasture and other grassland with some arable; also a key characteristic of the landscape character.

b. Scenic quality:

10. The Study Area forms a clear part of the visual setting of the AONB with long views to the AONB horizons. Intervisibility is somewhat limited by the undulating landform and layers of woodland and mature field and road hedgerows which are typical of the AONB but there is still a visual continuity with the surrounding open land particularly to the AONB to the north.
11. The Study Area contains a visually prominent dry valley which forms an irregular U shape sweeping up into the typical Chilterns plateau. The views across and down the valleys and to the wooded hillsides, which can be appreciated from the surrounding roads and public rights of way, create a highly attractive visual quality.
12. There are visual links across this distinctive topography to the designated landscape where it is indistinguishable where the Study Area stops and the AONB begins.
13. The area has an overriding strong rural character of good scenic value with a general absence of visually intrusive elements and no detracting urban fringe uses within the area or visible from the area. The area provides an attractive setting to the nearby settlements, sharing many characteristics with the adjacent AONB.
14. The historic sunken lanes and green and pond at Tokers Green are particularly distinctive landmark features of the area.

c. Rarity:

15. The Study Area represents an area similar in landscape and visual character and quality as the AONB within very close reach of the urban settlement of Reading. The town edge is strongly defined by the distinctive dry valley and is well contained by woodland and tree lines, with limited encroachment onto the valley sides. [this quality of unspoilt landscape is rarely found immediately adjoining a major urban area]
16. The character and features of the Study Area are contiguous with the adjacent AONB, particularly the distinctive dry valley and the hedgerow network, settlement pattern, winding narrow sunken lanes and mosaic of woodland, enclosed pasture and arable fields.

d. Representativeness:

17. The Study Area is largely representative of LCA 10 Chilterns Plateau and Valleys, LCT Semi-enclosed dip slope, and much of the Study Area is indistinguishable from the landscape of the Chilterns AONB nearby to the north. It shares many landscape characteristics and special qualities including topography, vegetation cover, historic landscape pattern, perceptual and experiential qualities and some visual links with the designated landscape.

e. Conservation interests:

18. In terms of wildlife and biodiversity as set out above the dry valley and slopes fall within Oxfordshire's Conservation Target Area: Chilterns Dipslope and Plateau CTA – Chalk grassland, woodland and arable land (for arable wildflowers and farmland birds) are noted as important for biodiversity. The valley forms the edge of parts of the urban edge of Reading and continues seamlessly north into the AONB.
19. Two Local Wildlife Sites and BAP Priority Habitat sites at Reading Golf Course and along Tokers Green Lane and Kidmore End Road fall within the Study Area, along with 3 other BAP Priority Habitats.
20. Cucumber Wood and Chambers Copse are 2 Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodlands in the south-east of the Study Area.
21. In terms of cultural heritage and built form, there is a strong sense of history with historic sunken lanes, historic drove road (Chalkhouse Green Lane); a significant area of remaining Ancient Enclosure and a number of listed buildings set within surrounding farmland including The Well House at Tokers Wood Farm and a cluster at Chalkhouse Green set within small scale pasture fields including Chalk House (Grade II*).
22. The Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Character (HLC) shows the fields within the Study Area are a mosaic of HLC types, similar to those found in the adjacent AONB to the north.

f. Recreation value:

23. The Study Area contains a number of recreation facilities: Reading Golf Course in the south, Rugby and Football Ground in the east and Rosehill/Palmers Riding Stables in the south-east. These are largely undeveloped and under pasture or grassland.
24. There is a good network of public footpaths, including the Chiltern Way regional recreational route, which provide opportunities for quiet recreation and enjoyment of a landscape with a strong rural character for a large number of people in close proximity in the built up area of Reading, the hamlets within the Study Area and the nearby villages of Kidmore End and Sonning Common.

g. Perceptual aspects:

25. The Study Area has a generally strong, complex and irregular landscape pattern of pasture, arable fields, woodland and hedgerows which reflects the AONB landscape.
26. A strongly rural character and generally tranquil landscape, with few detractors.

h. Associations:

27. No cultural associations with writers or artists are known. There is however evidence of long term historic occupation of the land at Chalkhouse Green Farm in the east of the area. [More information from Sarah Hall coming]