



### LOCATION

To the north west of the Tring Reservoirs and the village of Long Marston. The area comprises an peninsular like extension of Hertfordshire into Buckinghamshire.

### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The area is part of the more extensive Vale of Aylesbury, that runs from north east to south west and drains through to the River Thames. The area is predominantly low lying and flat. Chalk outliers from the Chilterns can be seen within the vale but are outside Hertfordshire. There are panoramic views to the Chiltern escarpment and to the lower hills at Wingrave. The heavy clay soils support pasture in small to medium sized fields. The soils and topography combine to make the area distinctive by the relatively large number of open ditches, streams, moats and ponds. There is a pattern of good clipped hedgerows with many including native Black Poplars, which are rare at the national level. The area has a remote feel with isolated

settlement and few transport links.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- relatively flat pastoral landscape with small to medium fields
- views of the Chiltern escarpment to the south east
- black poplars a major feature along watercourses and ditches
- streams and ditches draining heavy clay soils
- ponds and moats
- very low percentage of woodland cover
- lack of roads and bridleways

### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- veteran black poplars
- deserted medieval villages
- disused airfield and camp
- occasional radio masts
- dismantled railway and former station- Marstongate Halt



- Lanes, verges and ditches (HCC Landscape Unit)

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** The area is located on poorly-drained Jurassic and Cretaceous clay and is therefore a sub-area of the wider Aylesbury Vale beyond the county boundary. Soils derived from the Gault Clays tend to be neutral, gleyed soils (Denchworth and Evesham 2 associations).

**Topography.** Largely flat with some gentle localised undulation.

**Degree of slope.** Negligible over most of the area, being less than 1 in 250 in places over 4km distance.

**Altitude range.** Maximum range between 80 - 95m.

**Hydrology.** The impermeable Gault Clay causes extensive areas of superficial winter flooding, and underpins the existence of numerous water courses and ditches. The principal watercourses in the area form the head-waters of the River Thame, which rises from Totternhoe Stone springs at Wilstone. The calcareous water from the Thame system creates moderately calcareous conditions in flushed areas along the course of the river. The distinctive hydrology is reflected in the vegetation, including many veteran black poplars. In addition the area has a high concentration of small ponds, particularly to the deserted villages to the north. Many of the older, larger properties and farms are moated.

**Land cover and land use.** The area supports mixed agriculture. To the east in particular large fields support arable crops e.g. on the disused airfield, while to the centre and the west grazing on the wet pasture is more frequent. Woodland cover is limited to isolated coverts.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** Due to the underlying geology and soils the area is almost unique in Hertfordshire, from an ecological point of view. The principal semi-natural plant communities in the area which have not been ploughed are damp neutral grasslands and wetlands. The limited stands of secondary woodland in the area suggest former ash/elm woodland on drier ground, with willow in wet areas, but very little remains except by watercourses and in association with old hedgerows. Semi-natural neutral grassland occurs reasonably extensively, especially at Astrope, Puttenham, and Boarscroft Farm to the extreme north west of the area. These often occur on former ridge and furrow ground, however few of the pastures are species-rich. Watercourses and associated wetlands have a diverse, fairly rich aquatic and fen flora, especially at Puttenham and near Folly Farm.

The most notable species in the area is the Black Poplar. The area, along with much of the Aylesbury Vale, supports one of the largest concentrations of the species in Britain, possibly up to 10% of the total numbers nationwide. Grassland plant species of note include Meadow Barley, Adders-tongue Fern, Quaking Grass and Brown Sedge. No fauna of special note are recorded, but the potential of the area for wetland species such as water vole or even otter is high. Curlews have been noted in the breeding season.

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The historic and cultural integrity of the character area is consistent and strongly evident through the enclosure and settlement pattern. The lost villages of Tiscott and Ardwick, with occasional moated dwellings and farms, demonstrate a long established pattern of settlement and are archaeologically significant. These deserted settlements are characteristic of the Vale of Aylesbury and are part of the 'midlands' tradition of medieval open fields that were enclosed in the post-medieval period.

**Field Patterns.** The main historic field pattern dates from the parliamentary enclosures. Field sizes are variable ranging from small to medium where the enclosure pattern is largely retained to some larger units where there has been more amalgamation in the 20th century. Hedges are medium height and generally in good condition containing hawthorn, elm and ash. It is thought that the concentration of Black Poplars in the area may be as a result of them being planted during the enclosure movement in the locality c. 1853/4 as boundary features within the heavy clay landscape.

**Transport pattern.** There is a sparse network of local roads in the area, being limited to two minor B roads. These are characterised by wet roadside ditches and wide verges. The dismantled Aylesbury arm from the main London to Glasgow railway line runs through the area. There is a former station at Marstongate.

**Settlements and built form.** Settlement is sparse being restricted to moated farms and isolated properties scattered sporadically throughout the area. The earthworks of the two lost villages, including associated areas of ridge and furrow, testify to the ancient settled pattern. The hamlet of Puttenham is the largest group of dwellings in the area. The parish church of St Mary's has a distinctive flint and stone chequer work tower.

## OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Heritage: Schedule entries

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The area can be seen from the Chiltern escarpment to the south, the low hills above Wingrave to the north and from some more local views near the Tring reservoirs. Within the landscape the level topography and network of hedges mean that views are often more restricted, apart from to the east where the larger scale fields create a more exposed and hostile character. Views from the vale to the Chilterns, Wingrave and the distinctive Mentmore Park, (to the north), are a distinctive feature. The area is generally quiet being detached from major transport routes.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** Although common in a number of counties, including Buckinghamshire, this area is unique within Hertfordshire.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

There are few intrusive features within the area. The former airfield at Marsworth is the only main detractor.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

There is a reasonable if sparse network of footpaths. These include part of the Aylesbury Ring and a section of the Grand Union Canal. There are surprisingly however no bridleways.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

There is little evidence that this area is widely valued for its distinctiveness although data on community views is limited for this area (E).

"a small gathering of houses set in good farmland. St Mary's (Puttenham) stone building of great charm" P. McConachie from "The County's only Thankful village" Hertfordshire Countryside V.41 No326 June 1986.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

SM's: settlement north of St Mary's, Puttenham and the medieval villages of Ardwick and Tiscott.

Areas of Archaeological Significance: (as above) and Long Marston

**CONDITION**

<i>Land cover change:</i>	<b>insignificant</b>
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	<b>over mature</b>
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	<b>scattered</b>
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	<b>not obvious</b>
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	<b>interrupted</b>
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	<b>low</b>
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	<b>low</b>

**STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	<b>prominent</b>
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	<b>apparent</b>
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	<b>prominent</b>
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	<b>widely visible</b>
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	<b>partial</b>
<i>Visual unity:</i>	<b>unified</b>
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	<b>rare</b>

CONDITION	GOOD	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	MODERATE	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	<b>Conserve and restore</b>
	POOR	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
		STRENGTH OF CHARACTER		

## STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE: CONSERVE AND RESTORE

- support conservation and development of the black poplar population, through survey, management of existing trees and new planting
- encourage the management of the local pattern of hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes, gapping up and new planting. Promote new hedgerows to provide more permanent boundaries within equestrian pasture using old field boundaries where possible. To include black poplar, willows and ash as main hedgerow trees
- encourage the management and retention of the local pattern of open ditches as a characteristic drainage feature and wildlife resource
- encourage the improvement and maintenance of existing ponds and the creation of new features
- support the investigation, conservation and interpretation of the historic patterns of deserted villages within the area
- promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats
- conserve unimproved and semi-improved grassland wherever possible avoiding agricultural improvements e.g. use of fertilizers and herbicides, in order to maintain their nature conservation value. Encourage traditional management by grazing
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/ arable farming where arable farming is dominant
- promote the provision of bridleways
- conserve and enhance the canal environment including interpretation and links to the wider countryside
- support a strategy to limit built development within the area or the impact of development that may affect the area from outside. Ensure that built development both in the area or adjacent is integrated through the use of native tree and shrub species and the creation of hedging and planting to the perimeter
- identify key public viewpoints to the Chilterns escarpment, Mentmore and Wingrave. Retain and enhance these views
- avoid ploughing ridge and furrow pasture
- promote awareness and consideration of the setting of the AONB, and views to and from it, when considering development and land use change proposals on sites adjacent to the AONB
- conserve and enhance the distinctive character of traditional settlements and individual buildings by promoting the conservation of important buildings and high standards of new building or alterations to existing properties, all with the consistent use of locally traditional materials and design to reflect the traditional character of the area
- Pollarding black poplars (CMS)

