



### LOCATION

Located to the west of the town of Tring, incorporating the medieval village of Aldbury and contained by the Chilterns scarp slopes of Aldbury Nowers and Ashridge. (NB the northern part of the area lies within Buckinghamshire).

### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

This relatively small area nestles under the shelter of the Chiltern escarpment which provides a strong sense of containment and identity. The area also possesses a rare, near medieval landscape character with narrow hedged lanes and fragments of broadleaf semi natural woodland. The current route of the Icknield Way runs through the medieval village of Aldbury, which has a range of good vernacular Tudor houses surrounding the village green and pond. The village is a popular destination for visitors and there are also a variety of recreational activities including; equestrian uses and a golf course and country club at Stocks.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- strong visual enclosure by the Chilterns scarp slope
- mixed open farmland
- equestrian uses near settlement
- streams and ditches draining heavy clay soils
- focus for recreational visits and activities
- Aldbury Village - vernacular architecture and village pond
- medieval field system

Aldbury village pond  
(J.Billingsley)

### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Stocks - Georgian stucco country house and parkland
- Aldbury Church
- Bridgewater Monument - visible on escarpment



## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** The underlying rock is Middle Chalk, which is overlain by calcareous flinty, gravels and sands to varying depths, derived from the Pleistocene ice, except on steeper slopes towards the south west where the soils are shallow, (Charity 2 association).

**Topography.** This broad bowl shaped coombe feature is derived from glacial erosion of the chalk. It is essentially a gently undulating re-entrant from the Bulbourne valley and largely contained by the steep scarp slopes of Aldbury Nowers and the escarpment slopes below Ashridge.

**Degree of slope.** Slopes typically vary between 1 in 40 and 1 in 60 with some steeper at the foot of the escarpment.

**Altitude range.** Levels range from 185 m to 140m.

**Hydrology.** There is no natural surface water in the area apart from small ponds at Barley End.

**Land cover and land use.** There is a mixed land use pattern. Around Aldbury village equestrian pasture is common. There are gallops and rails south west of the village. Stocks golf course to the west and the small parkland around the country club are distinctive. Further from the village there are more open and extensive areas of arable. This is reflected in some of the local place names e.g. Barley End.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** Habitats of note consist of neutral and calcareous grasslands and remnant semi-natural woodland. Almost all the neutral grasslands in the area which have not been ploughed have been improved for agriculture, or are recently re-sown secondary grasslands. Unimproved chalk/calcareous grassland survives in small areas below the Ashridge scarp at Aldbury village, with vestiges in Stocks golf course near Aldbury Nowers, at Aldbury churchyard and by some roadsides.

Some semi-natural former coppice woodland occurs at Golding's Spring and near Stocks, and is dominated by ash, oak, hazel and elm. There is also a network remaining in some areas of old hedgerows, dominated by hazel, blackthorn etc.

The most important plant species are of chalk grassland below Ashridge, especially Juniper, Chiltern Gentian and Chalk Eyebright, although these are threatened by scrub growth. Walk Wood and neighbouring woodlands are noted for colonies of Toothwort.

The area is an important feeding area for birds and mammals from the adjoining Ashridge and Aldbury Nowers woodlands, such as Fallow Deer and various bat species. Dormouse is also present in the area.

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The estate and parkland of Stocks, the Georgian stucco mansion are also influential in the cultural character of the area. The house was once the home of the writer Mrs. Humphrey Ward (1851-1920) and visited by George Bernard Shaw. The picturesque qualities of the village has led to its use as a location for films and television including episodes of 'The Avengers', 'The Saint' and 'Inspector Morse'.

**Field Patterns.** As no Enclosure Acts were passed for Aldbury parish the area is noteworthy in that it has largely retained its pre 18th century organic enclosure pattern, although some of this is now relic. Field sizes are medium to large but are enclosed by a good network of mixed hedges.

**Transport pattern.** The roads in the area are minor, infrequent and generally sinuous in character. The road that runs north from the village takes the name of the Icknield Way but does not follow the ancient alignment. Roads are narrow in character with hedges and narrow verges.

**Settlements and built form.** The only real area of settlement is Aldbury, a small picturesque village centred around a traditional green with duck pond, stocks and a half timbered manor house. St John the Baptist is built in Totternhoe stone in the early english and decorated style with an embattled west tower. There are several good examples of vernacular building, with interesting brick bonds, whitewash and some thatch. Subsequent development has been controlled and low key, although there are some inappropriate mid to late 20th century houses at the fringe of the settlement. With the exception of Stocks and the 'Walled Garden', most other houses, of which there are few, are isolated traditional buildings e.g. Duncombe Farm.

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The area has a strong sense of containment created by the folding and extended finger of the scarp slope to the majority of the perimeter. From these elevated slopes the area appears sheltered and protected. The village of Aldbury has a fine setting matched by the wide range of vernacular buildings within the village core. Even though there are some more open field units within the area there is always a sense of containment by the encircling chalk scarp.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** This is a rare landscape within the county, mainly due to the setting provided by the enclosing Aldbury Scarp Slopes.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

There are few visual detractors, however to the fringes of Aldbury there is some poor 20th century housing on the village outskirts which spoils the setting from the west. Within the village the central car park detracts from the appearance of the historic village core.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

There is a tight network of local footpaths close to the village of Aldbury. There are also a number of links up the scarp slopes in many directions. The waymarked Icknield Way passes through the village from south to north. There are a few bridleways but not many links apart from via the minor roads, which is unfortunate due to the considerable amount of equestrian pasture and stables in the locality.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

Data on community views of this area is limited, however the Aldbury village scene is a valued feature in this area (C);

"the beautiful village of Aldbury" (2051).

"nestled in a beautiful valley close to Ashridge Park...as a village of the Old English type Aldbury has perhaps no equal in the county." HW Tompkins p.48 "Hertfordshire" Methuen 1903.

"Film-set village..... A cheerful old inn, a bakehouse with a striking chimney, thatched and timber-framed cottages along the Stocks road make for a harmony of brick and whitewash and gleaming paintwork....[The mansion] is handsomely screened by trees....Tudor cottages and its long barn of gridiron timbers make a picturesque group." RM Healey, Shell Guide to Hertfordshire 1982.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

AONB

Aldbury Conservation Area

Area of Archaeological Significance: Albury

**CONDITION**

<i>Land cover change:</i>	<b>localised</b>
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	<b>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>intact</b>
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	<b>low</b>
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	<b>moderate</b>

**STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	<b>apparent</b>
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	<b>apparent</b>
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	<b>apparent</b>
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	<b>locally visible</b>
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	<b>contained</b>
<i>Visual unity:</i>	<b>coherent</b>
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	<b>rare</b>

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

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING****CHANGE: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE**

- support a strategy to limit built development within the area or the impact of development that may affect the area from outside
- develop a strategy for enhancing the setting of Aldbury village and the screening of unsightly development to the fringes. Ensure that development both in the area or adjacent to it are integrated through the use of native tree and shrub species and the creation of hedging and/or planting to the perimeter
- encourage the retention of the existing historic pattern of hedges and to create new features, along the line of lost field boundaries to further enhance landscape and ecological links between woodlands. To include the promotion of hedgerows to provide more permanent boundaries within equestrian pasture
- promote the appropriate management of woodland in order to conserve and where absent to re-establish a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest and coppice with standards. To encourage replanting plantations with indigenous mixed broadleaves
- 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 chalk grassland wherever possible avoiding agricultural improvements in order to maintain their nature conservation value. Encourage traditional management by grazing
- explore options to enhance the setting of the Aldbury village core by providing reasonable alternatives for visitor parking
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming where possible
- promote the implementation of a management plan for Stocks golf course to restore the historic landscape structure of the grounds/fields and develop the wildlife potential through habitat creation
- promote the retention of the character of local minor roads by the management of hedgerows and verges. Where part of a hedge has been damaged or removed it should be replanted with a mix of indigenous species
- conserve and enhance the distinctive character of 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 designed to reflect the traditional character of the area

- Towards Pitstone Hill  
(J.Billingsley)

