



### LOCATION

The section of the north west facing Chiltern escarpment between the Bulbourne valley and the Gade valley. (NB the northern part of the area lies within Buckinghamshire).

### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A prominent and dramatic scarp slope that announces the arrival to the Chilterns. The escarpment folds and twists along its length and includes a distinctive extended finger at Aldbury Nowers. The landform is further articulated by a mix of contrasting vegetation and land uses. The north west facing slopes towards Aylesbury Vale comprise considerable species rich chalk downland mixed with areas of invading hawthorn scrub. From this part of the scarp there are extensive and dramatic elevated views to the west over the Aylesbury Vale. The scarp above Aldbury with its hanging woodlands provides enclosure and a contrasting character. The area has a feeling of isolation, history and drama.



### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- prominent and clearly defined chalk scarp slope with marked secondary folds
- high proportion of woodland cover within Ashridge Estate
- mixed chalk grassland and scrub to escarpment overlooking the Aylesbury Vale
- limited vehicular access up the scarp but a number of pedestrian routes
- fine panoramic views to the west over the Aylesbury Vale
- prominent archaeological features

### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Ridgeway footpath
- Grims ditch and Icknield Way
- Ivinghoe Beacon
- Pitstone Windmill- outside area but visible to north
- Mentmore House and Park - outside area but visible to north

- Aldbury Nowers (A. Tempany)

**PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

**Geology and soils.** The scarp slopes are formed mostly on Middle Chalk, with the crests of the slopes capped by chalk rock and overlain by clay-with-flints, which in places form slumping hill-wash deposits. Soils are shallow well drained calcareous silty soils over chalk, (Upton 1 association). There are some deeper silty calcareous soils in coombes and secondary dry valleys.

**Topography.** The topography is steeply sloping in character with much of the Chilterns scarp slope. Aldbury Nowers is a distinctive finger of the scarp that wraps around Aldbury Coombe, (see Area 115).

**Degree of slope.** Gradients are steep and typically vary between 1 in 3 and 1 in 5.

**Altitude range.** This ranges between 175m - 240m

**Hydrology.** None apparent owing to geology and landform.

**Land cover and land use.** The two dominant land covers are grassland and woodland. Sheep grazing is present on the chalk downland, however in areas a lack of grazing has resulted in scrub invasion. Important areas of chalk grassland restoration are being undertaken by the National Trust, who manage a large part of the area. There are also a number of locations where recreational uses are more prevalent e.g. Ivinghoe Beacon. Arable cropping locally creeps up the lower slopes to challenge the historic pastoral landuse. Most of the slopes east of Aldbury and those on Aldbury Nowers are wooded.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** The Hertfordshire sections of the area are dominated by hanging calcareous beech/ash woods and old hawthorn scrub on the steep slopes of Ashridge and at Turlhangers Wood on Aldbury Nowers. Acid oak/beech, with sycamore etc, dominates the crest of the ridge, and the cap of Aldbury Nowers, which also has an area of open bracken heath. Chalk grasslands in the Hertfordshire section are now limited to two scrubby slopes at Aldbury Nowers, but are very extensive and nationally important within Buckinghamshire, at Ivinghoe Beacon, Pitstone Hill and Clipper Down.

The scarp woodlands are important for some plants, including whitebeam, Fly Orchid, Wood Barley, White Helleborine etc., and for some fungi, such as the Magpie Fungus. The beeches in particular are also important for invertebrates, such as the Black-headed Cardinal Beetle. Chalk grassland in the area is very important for a range of specialised plant species, such as Wild and Large Thymes, Squinancywort, Rockrose, and Horseshoe Vetch, along with insects they support. The Buckinghamshire grasslands are even richer, with species such as Early and Chiltern Gentians, Chalkhill Blue and Duke of Burgundy butterflies.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

The distinctive earthwork of Grim's ditch follows the ridgeline through Aldbury Nowers and then northeastwards. Aldbury Nowers and Turlshanger Wood also contains the site of two bowl barrows. The ancient Icknield Way and the modern recreational route of the Ridgeway converge at Ivinghoe Beacon, which is the site of regionally important Iron Age hillfort and a number of prehistoric burial mounds.

**Field Patterns.** Most of the character area within Hertfordshire comprises woodland. Within Buckinghamshire there are some open areas of unenclosed chalk grassland.

**Transport pattern.** The scarp is locally crossed by minor roads including those at Ivinghoe Beacon, Stocks Road and between Aldbury and Ashridge, where there is a steep sunken lane through the hanging woodland.

**Settlements and built form.** The scarp is virtually unsettled apart from an occasional individual house either at the foot or the crest of the steep slopes.

**OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

English Nature : SSSI notifications

English Heritage: Schedule entries

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

As part of the elevated scarp slopes of the Chilterns the area is widely visible from the north and the west. There are some very open elevated locations on the scarp affording fine panoramic views e.g. from Ivinghoe Beacon and Pitstone Hill however, most of these are within Buckinghamshire. In contrast the folding character of the escarpment and the presence of extensive woodland cover above Aldbury and on Aldbury Nowers means that locally the area is contained and even confined in the summer months.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** This is an unusual landscape within the county.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

There are a number of local detractors in the views from the scarp e.g. the radio mast north of Ivinghoe Beacon, the former Pitstone cement works site, other chalk pits and some built development at Tring e.g. the space age style Leisure Centre. The A41 is locally visible from the wooded slopes in the distance.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Much of the Ashridge Estate is owned by the National Trust and is open to the public. There are numerous pedestrian and bridleway links along and up the scarp through the woodland linking with the plateau to the east. The Ridgeway footpath follows the scarp from Aldbury Nowers to Ivinghoe Beacon where it also meets the ancient Icknield Way.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

This and the associated Ashridge plateau are one of the most highly regarded areas of landscape in the county (A). "The ascent of the wooded slope towards the Bridgewater monument takes the visitor through one of the most beautiful districts in the county, and a noble prospect stretches before him as he looks back through the beeches towards the village in the valley beneath." HW Tompkins p.48 "Hertfordshire" Methuen 1903.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

AONB

SSSI: Aldbury Nowers

SSSI: Ashridge Commons and Woods (in part)

SM :Albury Nowers, Turlshanger Woodand and Ivinghoe Beacon

Area of Archaeological Significance:Albury Nowers  
(NB excludes some designations outside county)

**CONDITION**

<i>Land cover change:</i>	<b>localised</b>
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	<b>over mature</b>
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	<b>widespread</b>
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	<b>good</b>
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	<b>intact</b>
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	<b>moderate</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>prominent</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>coherent</b>
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	<b>rare</b>

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

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

- promote the appropriate management of woodland in order to maintain the visually significant hanging woodland cover to the scarp slopes. To encourage replanting with indigenous mixed broadleaves including beech, ash and cherry. To conserve and where absent re-establish a species rich ground flora
- develop and implement an integrated management plan for chalk downland. To include recording and monitoring of the condition of the grasslands
- conserve unimproved and semi-improved chalk grassland wherever possible by promoting traditional grazing patterns, scrub management and discouraging conversion to cropping or use of fertilizers
- promote the conversion of arable land uses on the scarp to species rich grassland
- develop a management strategy for recreation and public access and balance this with the conservation interests of the area. Quiet enjoyment of the landscape should be encouraged but should not be allowed to undermine the character and quality of the landscape
- encourage a co-ordinated approach to the provision of access and recreation opportunities, car parking land management, site interpretation etc should be encouraged between neighbouring opportunities, car parking, land management, site interpretation etc. should be encouraged between neighbouring key sites owned and managed by different agencies
- promote the retention of the character of local minor roads by the management of hedgerows and sunken lanes up the scarp. Where part of a hedge has been damaged or removed it should be replanted with a mix of indigenous species, unless it provides an important viewpoint
- special consideration should be given to the effects of car parking and traffic. Develop a strategy to make positive but sensitive provision for visitors and minimise the visual impact of parking
- provide for measures to control human and natural erosion on the sensitive chalk landscapes
- conserve and enhance the distinctive character of rural settings by promoting the conservation of important buildings and high standards of new building or alterations to existing properties, all with the consistent use of traditional materials and designed to reflect the traditional character of each area
- enhance the landscape by promoting the removal of existing eyesores, (including those outside the area but visible from it), repairing damage and mitigating the effects of existing intrusive developments
- encourage appropriate interpretation of significant archaeological and natural history features
- continued support should be given for the management and improvement of the Ridgeway national trail and the Icknield Way
- 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
- Towards Ivinghoe Hills (A.Tempany)

