

Historic environment

Introduction

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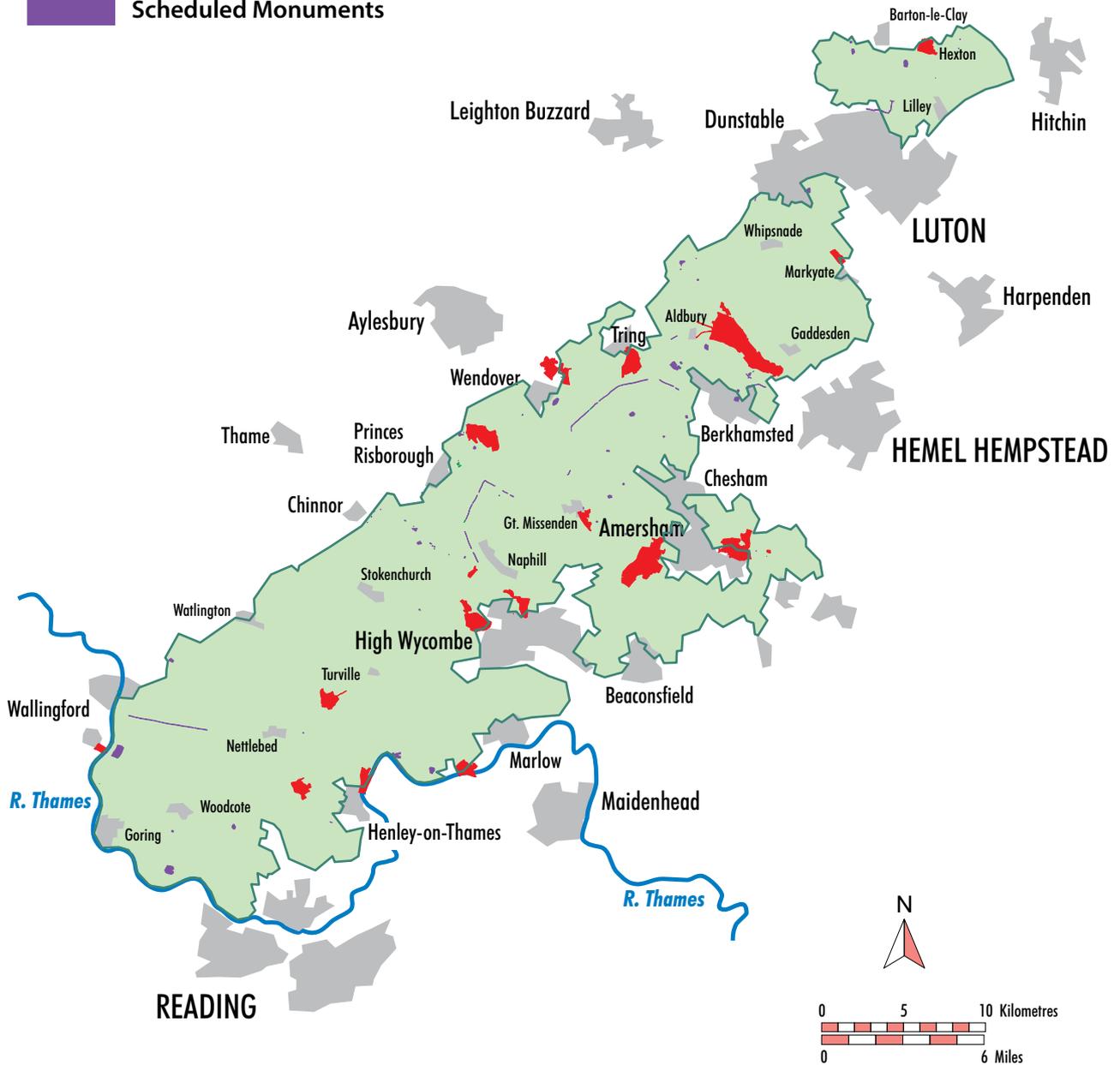
1. The landscape of the Chilterns is above all a 'cultural landscape', the product of a long legacy of human influence. Over 1,400 years ago the tribe that lived in what we now know as the Chilterns gave their name to the area. In the late 7th century a document known as the Tribal Hidage recorded the Ciltensætan, 'people of the Chilterns', as a distinct group possessing a nominal 4,000 hides (family units).
2. The Chilterns is an ancient landscape with traces of many eras and previous settlers. The historic environment they created over millennia helps define a sense of place and the strength of local landscape character. The area has many Bronze Age barrows and field systems, Iron Age forts, medieval churches and deer enclosures, 18th century sawyer pits and 20th century military trenches. All create layers of civilisation and settlement which provide a timeline for the evolution of the landscape and help define what is different and special about the Chilterns.
3. It is because relatively little of the Chilterns has been subject to intensive cultivation that so much survives. The downland and commons, rarely ploughed but grazed for centuries, have helped to conserve much of interest. The commons - mostly dating back to medieval times - and the manorial system are important in their own rights as part of the historic environment, but also for the features which survive on them, many of which are still to be surveyed and identified. The woodlands, so extensive and yet so little surveyed, hide a great deal that is still to be discovered. The farmsteads, churches and many old buildings are both part of the historic environment and a direct link with the modern day, still in every day use providing the core of much-loved villages and towns.

Historic Parks and Gardens and Scheduled Monuments

 Chilterns AONB boundary

 Registered Parks and Gardens

 Scheduled Monuments



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4. The concept of the historic environment is wide ranging and holistic, encompassing all physical manifestations of human activities from earliest prehistory to the present day. It includes buried archaeological remains and palaeo-environmental deposits, relict sites surviving as earthworks or ruins, historic buildings and villages, landscapes still in use such as farms and field boundaries, industrial and military structures, ancient woodlands and commons and country houses with their associated parks and gardens.
5. There are strong links between the historic and natural environments as the modern ecology of the Chilterns is determined to a considerable degree by historical patterns of land use. The historic environment helps define a sense of place, can provide a focus for community activities and contributes to the local economy. It also has important cultural associations with topics such as social history, folklore, arts and literature.
6. In many ways it is also an industrial landscape with relicts of early iron working, charcoal burning, wood working, furniture making, the railways and canals, brick and tile making, brewing, chalk quarrying and cement manufacture.
7. The list of artists and authors who lived and took inspiration from the Chilterns is also long. Milton, Nash, Piper, Disraeli, Blyton, Dahl and Greene are some of the better known.
8. Policy and advice on the historic environment is provided at a national level by English Heritage, although there is overlap with the landscape responsibilities of Natural England. Each county council or unitary authority has an archaeological service responsible for maintaining and developing its Historic Environment Record and the provision of planning and conservation advice. To aid understanding of the Chilterns' historic landscape the Chilterns Historic Landscape Characterisation Project

has been undertaken. Greater use should be made of the findings of this and advice can be obtained from the relevant archaeological service. Building conservation advice is the responsibility of conservation officers based in the district councils and unitary authorities. The National Trust is an important landowner in the Chilterns and employs its own conservation and archaeological staff.

9. There are many voluntary and community groups working in this field notably the Chiltern Woodlands Project, which undertakes surveys and training in woodland archaeology, and the Chiltern Open Air Museum which houses an important collection of relocated historic buildings.

Broad Aims

- **The historic environment of the AONB is conserved and enhanced for the benefit of current and future generations.**
- **The public have a greater appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment of the AONB.**
- **The public have good access to the historic environment.**

Special Qualities

Prehistory

1. The chalk ridge of the Chilterns contains many traces of prehistoric occupation and the majority of the monuments which survive as visible earthworks lie along the escarpment.
2. Prehistoric settlements, often indicated by scattered flint artefacts on the surface of fields, are common within the Chilterns, as are barrows (burial mounds).
3. Neolithic barrows are to be found at Halton, Whiteleaf and at sites around Dunstable, but Bronze Age barrows are

far more common and examples can be seen at Ivinghoe, Wendover and Dunstable.

4. The Ridgeway (the Icknield Way) is an important prehistoric trackway, and may have provided the basis of a major communications and trading network stretching from Wessex to East Anglia.
5. Amongst the earliest surviving elements of the Chilterns landscape are pre-Roman 'co-axial' patterns of parallel trackways and fields.
6. 20 Iron Age hill forts were constructed along the scarp ridge and along the Thames Valley.
7. The Iron Age linear dykes (evidence of extensive land divisions) of which Grim's Ditch is the best known and which stretches for more than 12 miles from Naphill to Berkhamsted.

Roman

8. The Romans roads of Watling Street (now the A5) and Akeman Street (now the A41) run through the Chilterns.
9. There is evidence of Roman iron-smelting in Chiltern woods and villa sites adjacent to Roman roads.

Saxon

10. Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and settlements have been found mainly around the periphery of the Chilterns – for example around Aylesbury, Dorchester, Luton and Dunstable.
11. The Saxon parish structure survives with its distinctive long, narrow strip-parishes running from the Vale up onto the Chiltern scarp to give each Vale settlement a share of the Hills' woodland and pasture resources. Some of these boundaries may have pre-Roman origins.

Medieval

12. A substantial number of buildings survive from this period including churches and chapels (typically built of flint) and timber-framed barns, manor houses and farmhouses.
13. Strip lynchets (cultivation terraces) were created in the late 12th and 13th centuries at a time of a great need for arable land.
14. Medieval field patterns with ancient hedges, boundaries and lanes are significant features. About 40% of hedged field patterns in the Chilterns are thought to have pre-18th century origins.

Post-medieval

15. Many of the archaeological earthworks found in Chiltern woods, such as wood banks and sawpits, reflect the woodland management in this period to supply timber for the furniture industry.
16. The construction of turnpike roads, canals and later railways created new landscape features as well as opening up access to the Chilterns and affecting its economy.
17. The spread of non conformism started early in the Chilterns and there is a particularly rich legacy of 18th and 19th century chapels.
18. The Chilterns is adorned with unusual buildings and structures, which some might think of as follies and others as monuments. Some notable examples include the Bridgewater Monument at Ashridge, the Maharajah's Well at Stoke Row in south Oxfordshire and the Dashwood Mausoleum atop West Wycombe Hill.

The twentieth century

19. The impact of the 20th century was greatest in the southern Chilterns where the London suburbs of Metroland grew up rapidly until the designation of the Metropolitan Greenbelt in 1959.

20. Some modern features, such as the First World War practice trenches at Whiteleaf Hill, Halton and on Marlow Common and relicts of activity from the Second World War and the Cold War are increasingly being recognised as important archaeological monuments.

Settlements and buildings

21. The historic settlement pattern is one of larger nucleated towns and villages along the river valleys and below the Chilterns escarpment, with more dispersed patterns of hamlets and farms on the higher ground with newer settlements on the edge of commons.
22. There are many dwellings, farmsteads and other buildings within the Chilterns which are of architectural or historic importance and which make an essential contribution individually, or in groups within settlements, to the character, and aesthetic qualities of the landscape.
23. The most common building material in the Chilterns is brick, the use of which dates back to the 15th century. During the 18th century it became the universal building material. Bricks were almost always made locally, the variations in quality and colour of local brick earth and clays giving a distinctive character to buildings in different parts of the AONB. Bricks are still being made in the Chilterns.
24. In most areas of the Chilterns flint is also widely used as a building material, commonly in combination with brick. It is particularly common in the central plateau areas of the Chilterns and can be found in farmhouses of the 17th century, cottages in the 18th century and universally in the late 19th century.
25. The local abundance of clay meant that clay tiles became the general roofing material from the 16th century onwards but thatch was still being used on humbler buildings at the end of 18th century. Welsh slate became commonplace in the 19th century, brought in by canals and railways.

Parks and gardens

26. The attraction of the Chilterns as a country retreat where the varied topography of the landscape allowed the location of grand houses in prominent positions and within a reasonable distance of London, led to the development of numerous grand country houses and parks, reaching a peak of around 600 parks in 1820, with examples of every period and style between the 17th and late 19th centuries. There are 15 historic parks and gardens on the English Heritage register.
27. The designed parkland landscapes of the 18th century are the best known and include examples of the work of some of the most famous landscape designers of the period, including Charles Bridgeman, 'Capability' Brown and Humphrey Repton.
28. In some places the owners of these estates rebuilt adjacent villages creating a distinctive estate architecture. Most of these country estates and parks have survived to the present day although only a few remain with their original families, many having been turned to other uses such as schools, conference centres and hotels.

Key Issues

Conserving the historic environment

1. In general, the conservation of the special historic, built and cultural heritage of the Chilterns will require greater weight to be attached to it. This is especially important to help protect and conserve those sites and features which do not enjoy legal protection, for example unregistered parks and gardens.
2. It is important that the problems identified by the Heritage at Risk register covering Grade I and II* buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks and Gardens and Conservation Areas are responded to.

The impact of development

3. A great deal of new development is taking place and is planned. There is a need to identify and take appropriate action to ensure new development does not profoundly alter settlement character or damage sites or their setting where that is important. Where development or land use change involves significant and unavoidable impacts, appropriate assessment, mitigation of the impacts by design solutions or recording should be undertaken.
4. The construction of High Speed 2 will result in considerable destruction of features of the historic environment, many of which are not yet known or surveyed. A key challenge will be, as far as is possible, to avoid and not just mitigate the damage to the historic environment. In many cases this will not be possible but restoration should be a primary aim, for example by reinstating the ancient lanes and restoration of earth banks and associated hedgerows. HS2 will also provide opportunities to identify, survey and record aspects of the historic environment which may otherwise have remained unidentified and unknown.
5. The importance of good design, taking account of local characteristics and materials, both in new buildings and extensions and the conversion of historic buildings, is vital to conserve the character of the built environment and its setting in the landscape.
6. Many buildings are being extended and renovated. In the process new materials are used to replace old and some do not match well the existing structure. Common examples are the installation of PVC windows to a brick and flint cottage, replacement of slate with concrete tiles or ill-matching bricks.

Utility blight

7. A wide range of utilities have permitted development rights relating, for example, to the installation of pipelines and cables, although larger schemes may require an Environmental Impact Assessment. Most of these organisations have a duty of care towards the historic environment and have published environmental policies, although their practical interpretation and application of these measures is variable.
8. Greater consideration needs to be given to the impact of street clutter including utility equipment and infrastructure which can blight the wider historic environment, conservation areas, and the setting of individual buildings and sites. Often this impact is cumulative due to the activities of several different utilities. A more coordinated and proactive approach is needed to both remove existing clutter and to prevent more of it appearing. The commitment by some of the electricity distribution companies to invest in undergrounding power lines is the sort of lead which other utilities should be following.

Knowledge and understanding

9. There is a need to promote a wider understanding of the historic environment to ensure its sustainable management. More use should be made of the Historic Environment Records (HERs) held by local authorities, which record the historic buildings, landscapes and archaeological sites of their area, and of the Chilterns Historic Landscape Characterisation Project.
10. The knowledge of the historic environment is partial and in some areas, such as archaeology in woodland, under-surveyed. Conservation of the Chilterns heritage in all its forms will need more knowledge, information sharing, better understanding and deeper and more widespread appreciation of what is special and what needs to be done to conserve it.

Recreational use of sites

11. The Chilterns is a popular area for informal recreation which attracts large numbers of visitors. On some sensitive sites there is always the problem of potential conflict between their recreational use and conservation of their special qualities. This is a particular issue along the ridge of the escarpment where there are many popular sites with good public access and which are also important for their historic environment. Examples include Whiteleaf Hill near Princes Risborough, Coombe Hill, Ivinghoe Beacon, Dunstable Downs and Warden and Galley Hills near Luton.

Site management

12. The conservation of the special qualities of the historic environment relies on good management and sustainable use by owners, managers and all users including the general public. There is a need for enhanced provision of information and advice for all these audiences as the long term stewards of this heritage.
13. The interests of nature conservation and the historic environment often coincide but there can sometimes be tensions - for example, burrowing animals or tree planting can damage archaeological remains.

Community involvement

14. Involving local communities in the identification, conservation, protection and celebration of local heritage is essential. The cultural associations of the historic environment should be recognised and local community interest fostered wherever practical.

Common land

15. There is a special need to survey, identify and manage historic environmental features on common land. The commons are often some of the least

disturbed sites, rarely, if ever, having been ploughed. There is also open access across these areas extending to over 2,000 hectares in total providing opportunities for public engagement and outdoor learning, but which also exposes them to potential damage.

Impact of agriculture

16. Intensive agriculture is a potentially serious threat to the historic environment through the loss of historic buildings and field patterns, ploughing up of archaeological sites and the removal of historic features such as ponds and trackways.
17. With gradual decline of grazing and increase of arable farming these trends are likely to continue. Several features such as hedges and ponds are more likely to gradually disappear due to neglect than deliberate removal as their farming function has been lost. In general, however the actual impact of these potential threats is relatively modest.

Woodland management

18. Many archaeological sites survive as earthworks within woodland including historic woodland management features (wood banks, sawpits etc) as well as earlier remains such as prehistoric barrows, hill forts and boundary ditches. The conservation and sustainable management of the Chilterns' woodlands is therefore a high priority from an historic environment perspective. From an archaeological perspective, there is a need to extend the coverage of survey (including laser surveying (LiDAR)) to identify and record features hidden within woodland.

Metal detecting

19. The Treasure Act 1997 requires the reporting of all suspected treasure items. Nevertheless, most 'portable antiquities' found by metal-detectorists fall outside the remit of the Act. A priority should



*Cholesbury Camp -
an Iron Age hillfort*

be to prevent 'treasure hunting' metal detecting on the most important and vulnerable sites.

20. It also needs to be noted that responsible and organised metal-detecting, most often by well organised clubs, has helped to unearth many interesting and important finds that would otherwise have gone undetected. This has helped improve understanding of many aspects of the historic environment significantly. The problem is when detecting is not well organised, responsible or is illegal.

Neglect of designed landscapes

21. Country houses and their associated parks, gardens and other designed landscapes are a particularly distinctive and important feature of the Chilterns' landscape within the AONB and are worthy of conservation. These buildings and landscapes can face particular pressures of neglect and unsympathetic change of use whilst they require sympathetic management and, in many cases, restoration.
22. There is a need to identify important unregistered historic parks and other designed landscapes and to develop

conservation plans for them (especially those which are 'at risk').

Climate change

23. At present the most serious direct impacts of climate change in the Chilterns will be on certain archaeological remains, historic buildings and the natural components of historic landscapes. Specific topics of concern are:
 - increased flood risk affecting historic buildings;
 - increased rainfall and water penetration affecting historic buildings;
 - changes in woodland composition and increased vulnerability to wind-blow (the latter is a particular concern on archaeological monuments);
 - inappropriate siting of renewable energy facilities including solar panels which can affect landscapes and roofscapes.

It is worth noting that the climate has changed before and an understanding of the historical and archaeological record could assist in planning a sustainable future.

Policies

HE1 Conservation plans for designated heritage assets should be encouraged.

The preparation of conservation plans should be encouraged because of the importance of so many sites. Such a plan is the best way of reinforcing the importance of sites, involving appropriate agencies, identifying appropriate action, providing a stimulus to take that action and to provide guidance for others undertaking work which may have an impact on those special areas and sites.

HE2 Where conservation plans are prepared for designated heritage assets the potential impact of climate change and extreme weather events should be addressed.

As the climate changes and extreme weather events become more common, some sites will be vulnerable to the potential impacts such as increased flash flooding and windblown trees. All conservation plans should take potential impacts into account and ensure appropriate management is implemented in response to the site's vulnerability.

HE3 Development, other land use changes and management practices which would harm the significance of nationally important designated and undesignated sites, and locally important historic assets and their settings will be resisted.

The historic environment is irreplaceable and damage must be avoided especially where the site's importance has been identified and protection conferred by some form of designation. Additionally, it is the setting of many sites which adds to their importance and the way they are appreciated. This facet of site management is not always taken into account fully.

HE4 The conservation of the historic environment (including the setting of important sites and features) should be based on best practice.

Relatively few land and buildings managers receive any formal training in conservation of the historic environment, and yet much of what they do has a direct bearing on it. A great deal of experience is available to provide advice and many good examples of best practice are available. Where appropriate historic environment services (usually local authorities or English Heritage but there are many expert trade and conservation bodies) should be consulted for information and advice. Often the most effective training and advice is in the form of learning from what others did successfully when faced with similar issues.

HE5 The design and location of all development should be sympathetic to the character of the historic environment, including the setting of historic assets.

The pressure for development in the Chilterns is high, with potential impacts on the existing settlements and the wider landscape where it is to be situated in more open countryside. Wherever it is to be located it is essential that the design and materials are sympathetic to the setting and historic character of that place. That does not necessarily require a slavish adherence to vernacular architecture but it should nonetheless complement and respect existing character.

HE6 There should be a high level of public understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment.

The Chilterns has an immensely rich and varied historic environment. In the long term its conservation and good stewardship will depend greatly upon public will and often public funds. That will only be forthcoming if they are aware of their historic environment and are able to understand, appreciate and enjoy it. Currently general awareness levels are low but there are many opportunities to improve public understanding and enjoyment.

HE7 The stewardship of the wider historic environment and individual sites and features (including their setting) should be supported by a high level of understanding of the character and management needs.

This is essential to ensure its conservation and appreciation. Currently knowledge levels are partial and, in key fields, less extensive than is desirable. This is particularly true amongst groups who have the capacity to approve or initiate change which may affect the historic environment.

HE8 Local communities should be involved in the conservation and interpretation of the historic environment.

The conservation and interpretation of the historic environment provide a wealth of opportunities for community involvement. In so doing all parts of a community can find a role including volunteers, schools, local businesses as well as local statutory bodies and experts. This type of involvement encourages social activity within the community, can strengthen the local economy and helps link it to its past. Increased understanding should also enhance their willingness to become involved in its care and stewardship.

HE9 The cultural heritage of the Chilterns should be celebrated and promoted to attract visitors and support the tourism economy.

The Chilterns has an extraordinary cultural heritage covering the historic environment and all that makes it special: a wealth of literary and military figures; the aristocracy; poets; religious leaders; politicians; innovators and notable business people all of whom have left their mark on the Chilterns. It is an essential ingredient of what makes a place different and is crucial to develop a sense of identity and local pride. It is also provides a plethora of opportunities to promote the area to attract visitors and tourists.

HE10 The availability of skills needed to conserve the historic environment should be enhanced.

A particular challenge is to ensure those who undertake conservation works of any kind, whether it be to a site, building or other structure, have the necessary knowledge and skills. In general there is a shortage of skilled people in nearly all conservation skills, which results in delays or worse, the work being done by unskilled people. A simplistic example is that repointing a knapped flint stone wall is not the same as laying bricks.

HE11 The historic environment could be used to support sustainable economic and social activity. Where there are irreconcilable differences between the two the conservation of the historic environment should take priority.

The public has a high level of interest in the historic environment, some of which is capable of sustaining social and economic activity. Examples are the development of tourism based on heritage and social activity founded on local culture and folklore, often linked to specific sites. Such activity helps both to strengthen the identity of local communities and foster sustainable economic activity.