

Arborfield & Barkham Parishes
Neighbourhood Plan
2018-36

Annex V. Landscape and Important Views

October 2019

A plan for the community by the community

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Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Landscapes and Important Views

Introduction

Both Village Design Statements stress the rural nature of the parishes and how the attractive landscapes comprising farmlands, woodlands, water courses and flood plains, are punctuated by settlement areas of varying size and styles ranging from historic dwellings and small hamlets to large modern housing estates. This landscape contributes to and defines the overall character of the two parishes.

The response to the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire, reported elsewhere, highlighted how residents rate the contribution to the quality of life in the area made by the countryside and separation between settlements – not only within the two Parishes but to the surrounding area where urbanisation continues to spread as shown in Appendix I.

To address the above, this paper builds on the Natural Environment Paper (Annex VI) with reference to the 2019 Landscape Character Assessment to demonstrate the importance of these landscapes and hence views in Arborfield and Barkham.

Background

A commonly quoted definition of 'landscape' is an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors (European Landscape Convention).

Landscapes are characterised by the dynamic interaction of many factors which may be grouped under three headings:

1. ***Underlying Geology and Geography*** provide the basis for how a landscape has developed over the centuries. The varying terrain gives rise to key features such as rocky outcrops, open plains and the topography provides vantage points. The nature and richness of the soil dictates land use and what vegetation will thrive. The rivers and streams are not only attractive features in their own right but influence land use by their impact on irrigation, drainage and flood plains.
2. ***Natural Vegetation and Land Use*** contribute so much to the landscape, either as wooded areas or farmed areas with hedge-lined fields. It provides biodiversity – both animal and plant – encouraging different species to live alongside each other by creating distinctly different habitats and allowing animals to roam through natural corridors. It adds colour and, in temperate climates, allows for dramatic change in how a landscape appears through the different seasons as the light changes from the bright sunlight of summer to the cold greys of a wet, cloudy winter's day.
3. ***Man Made Features*** can both enhance or detract from the quality of the landscape. Small settlements with dwellings and farm buildings of different size, age and style nestling in the fields and beside copses are the classic expectation of an English landscape. Historic buildings provide exciting and interesting focal points. Large, slab-sided buildings, incongruous shapes and colours with views blocked

by buildings or visible on skylines destroy the views of once wonderful landscapes. It is rare that development will enhance a landscape and all focus is on minimising the negative impacts of such development. The one clear exception is the use of brownfield sites in a more sympathetic way.

Arborfield and Barkham Landscape and Main Settlement Areas

Arborfield and Barkham have many distinctive landscapes, habitats and biodiversity which contribute to the ambience of the area and provide a tranquil haven from the increasing urbanisation of the surrounding parishes.

Whereas there is much support to build suitable and affordable homes for the younger generation and others, there must be equal emphasis to ensure that these younger generations and their children will be able to enjoy the countryside, landscapes and views that the current generation enjoy today but which are under threat.

The 2019 Landscape Character Assessment identified five landscape areas within the two parishes and the brief summaries below are taken from that report. The location of these areas is shown in Appendix II

A2 Loddon River Valley

'This area occupies the flat alluvial floodplain of the River Loddon and its tributaries, the Broadwater and the Blackwater. An agricultural landscape of irregular fields, with large scale arable fields on better

drained areas and small wet meadows on frequently flooded land adjacent to the river. A largely peaceful area.'

Most of this area lies across Arborfield's parish boundary to the west but there is there is a narrow strip in Arborfield that closely follows the River Loddon and opens out in the SW corner of the parish. There is little settlement.

C1 Arborfield River Terrace

'A large scale, open agricultural landscape slightly elevated above the Loddon floodplain. The area is crossed by a network of small lanes and tracks while a few larger roads run east-west providing access to the river. Areas of historic parkland at Swallowfield and Arborfield contrast with the intensively farmed character of the landscape.'

This is a relatively narrow strip of gravel terraces that stretches from Swallowfield to Winnersh and lies between the Loddon River Valley (A2) to the west and Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay (J2) to the east. The subsurface is a combination of London Clay and gravel beds, allowing drainage into the nearby flood plains of the Loddon Valley. There is some, relatively isolated, settlement.

J2 Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay

'A gently undulating landscape which is principally in agricultural use. Large arable fields bound by hedgerows dominate, with smaller fields of sheep and horse paddocks close to the settlements.'

This is the largest landscape area in the two parishes and it is where most of the settlement areas and the open countryside between those settlements are located.

Much of the Parishes of Arborfield and Barkham fall into this area and it is where most of the residential housing is found. The intensively farmed areas are interspersed with housing of varying age, style and scale which ranges from the older housing around the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area and the Area of Special Character along Barkham Street, ribbon development along Langley Common and School Road to sizeable housing estates built towards the end of the 20th Century such as Elizabeth Park in Barkham, Penrose Park to the south of Arborfield Cross and the developments that span both parishes near to the site of the former Garrison. These latter developments tend to be on the margins of the parishes and are screened so do not overtly impact the key landscape views of today. The topography of the area is also helpful in this respect.

The next major development, the Strategic Development Location on and around the former Garrison site, is transforming a brownfield area by replacing tired army buildings with, at least in part, a garden village style development. This includes 50% greening which is a significant contribution to mitigating the impact of such a large development.

L1 Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills

'The north of the area contains undulating hills, characterised by dense woodland, which forms part of the historic Bearwood Estate. The south of the area is more intricate, with coombe woodland valleys and contrasting

grazed pasture. Largely unsettled, the area has few rights of way except in The Coombes in the south which is popular for recreation.'

Most of this area lies within the northern boundaries of the two parishes where sand and gravel deposits overlie London Clay and the stratification justifies the area being classed as an Area of Geological Interest. There is some settlement which is mostly associated with the Bearwood Estate, farming and ribbon development on the edge of the area. It contributes markedly to the landscape diversity of the two parishes and forms a useful barrier from the more intensive settlement to the north.

L2 Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills

'A discrete elevated landscape of small hills and knolls. The higher areas are wooded, with a distinctive coniferous element and interspersed with pastures with arable farming on the lower slopes. Timber framed farmhouse and brick built cottages are linking with a network of winding rural roads and lanes.'

The majority of this character area lies to the south of the two parishes but a 'finger' stretches towards the Penrose Park area south of Arborfield Cross and the eastern boundary is defined by the Arborfield SDL.

Arborfield and Barkham Views.

In addition to Bearwood Park and The Coombes, there are many other wooded areas and copses across the two Parishes that are fragments and

reminders of earlier times when the area was more heavily wooded before being cleared for cultivation.

What really makes the landscape of Arborfield and Barkham so distinctive is the diversity that occurs in such a small area of just 1,800 Ha – riverside wetlands, trees and hedgerows, small copses, open fields and heavily wooded areas with many public rights of way – all offering great opportunities to those who want to enjoy rambling, cycling, photography, riding and the wildlife.

Key to maintaining the rural nature of the area, the quality of the environment and many of the views, is to retain the separation areas around the individual settlements within the two parishes and other neighbouring parishes. Those outside the current development limits are protected by Core Policy CP11 but are under threat.

The Landscape Strategy for the Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay (J2) area recognises the importance of these areas between settlements where it is stated that ‘... the aim is to integrate new development into its landscape setting, and retain the open and rural character of the landscape between settlements’.

The views shown in Appendix III have been grouped to broadly follow the landscape types shown in Appendix II.

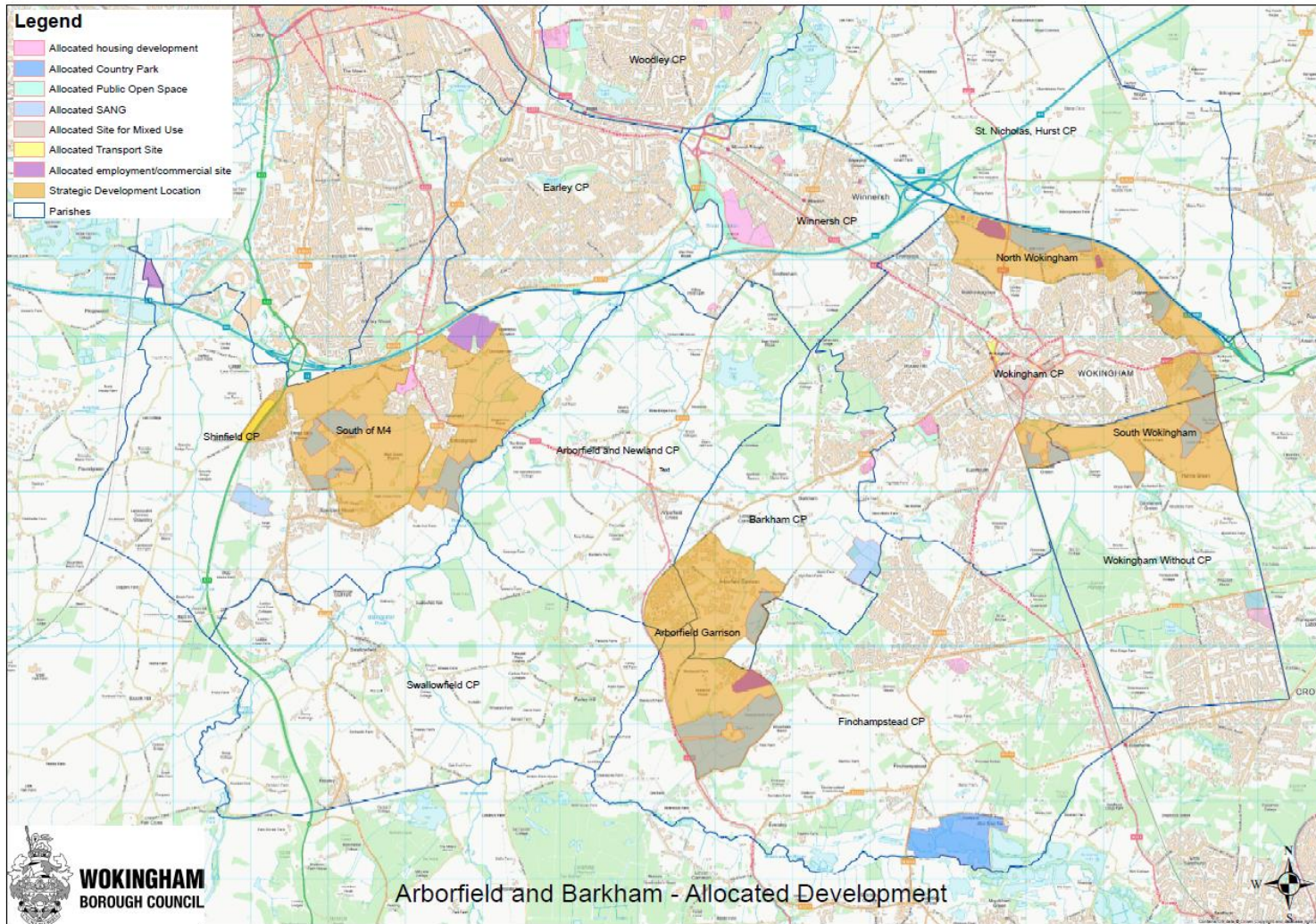
They have been selected from over 70 submitted by local residents as being significantly important and representative, thereby:

1. Capturing the diversity and ambience of this landscape as described in the 2019 Landscape Character Assessment.
2. Emphasising the importance of maintaining settlement separation.
3. Defining the character of the area.
4. Highlighting those designated and undesignated areas of natural and historical interest.

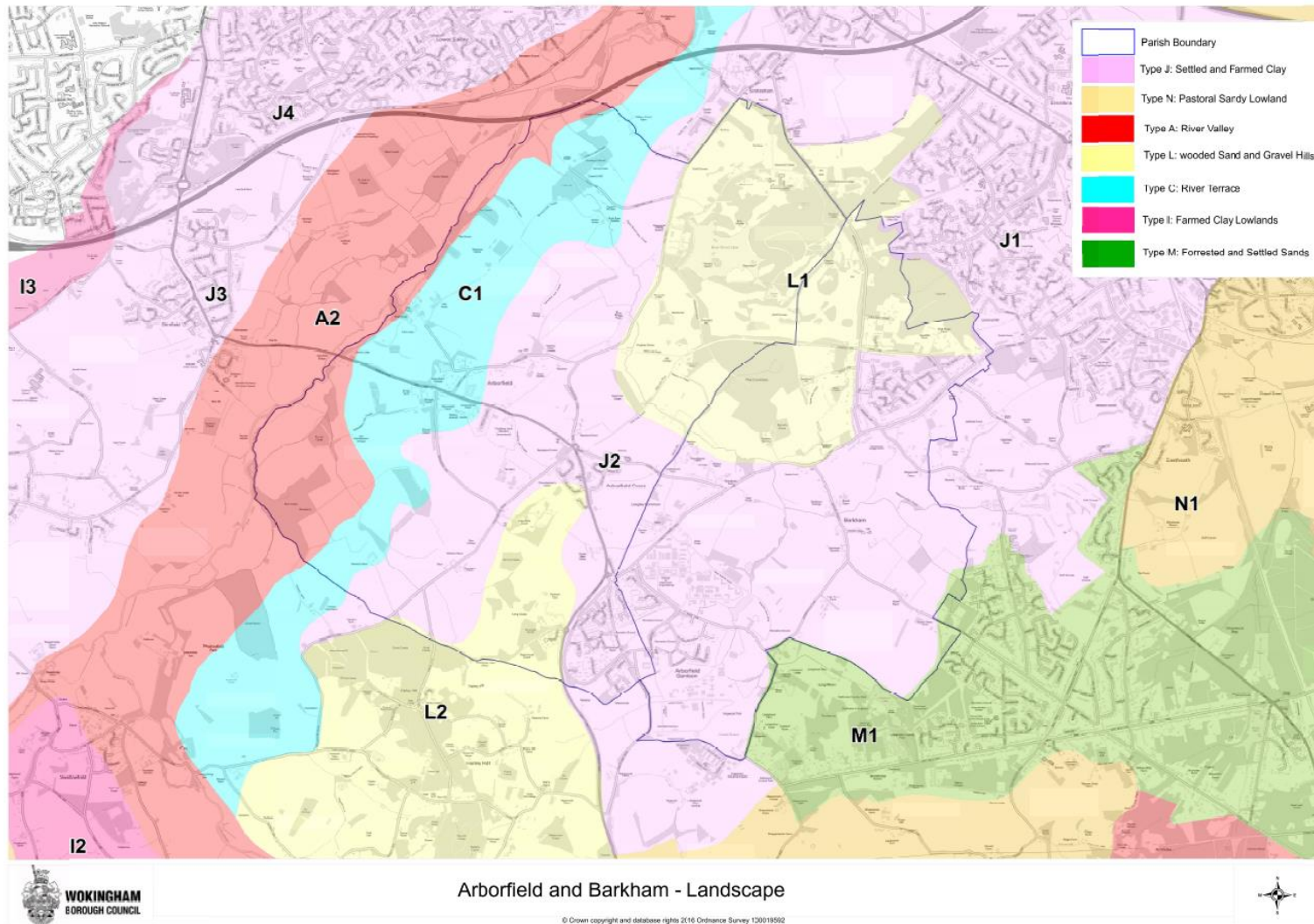
Where possible, reference is made to the 2019 Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and the Village Design Statement for Arborfield and Newlands 2015 (AVDS) and Barkham 2009 (BVDS).

All these views can be seen from public vantage points.

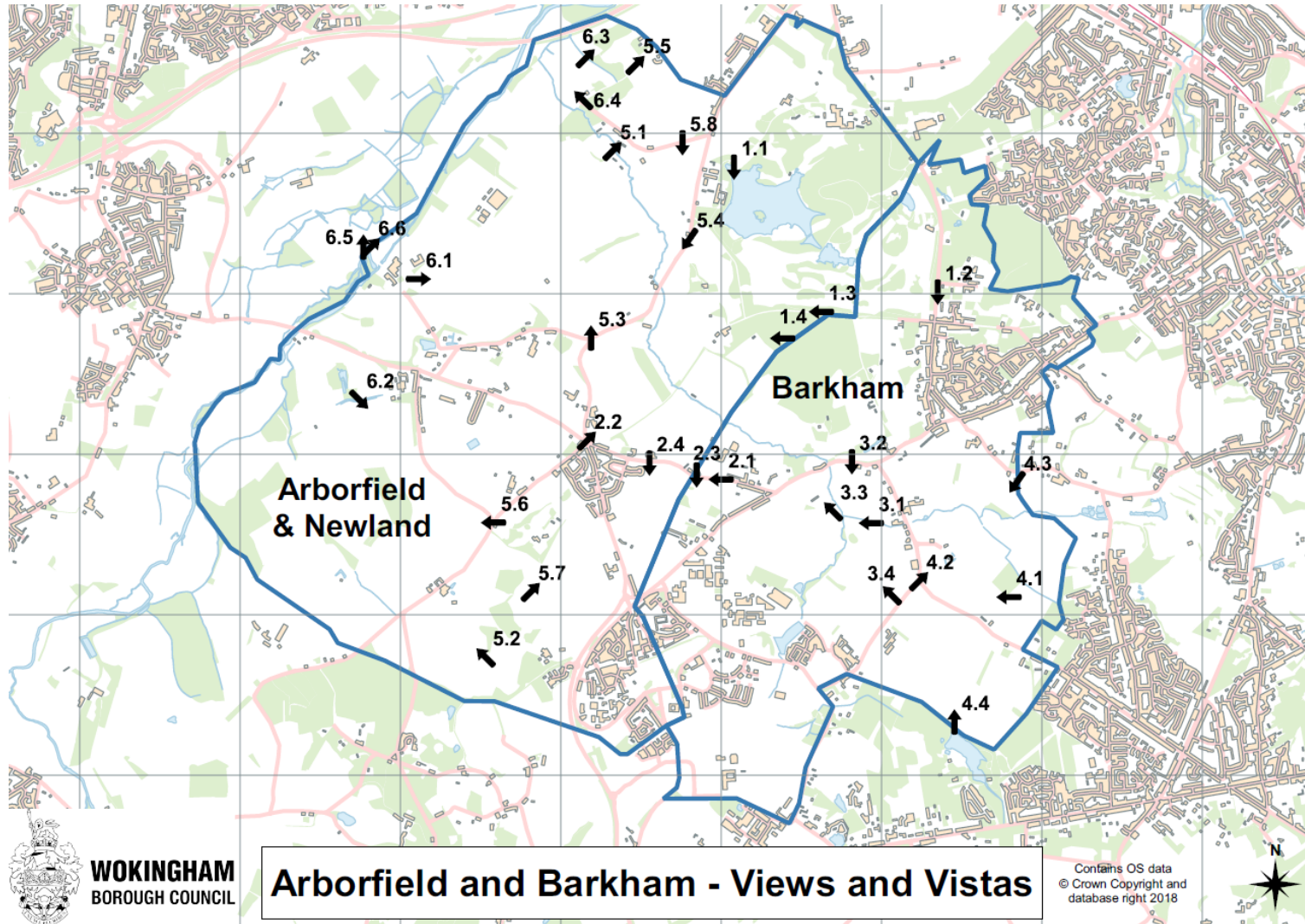
Appendix I



Appendix II



Appendix III



Appendix III, Group 1

Arborfield & Barkham - Bearwood Park and The Coombes

Landscape Character Area L1

This landscape is described in the LCA as ‘secluded’¹ and the views are ‘mostly enclosed by the extensive woodland’². There are two distinct areas.

To the north the Grade II* Registered Park and Gardens, laid out in 1820³, provide the ornate setting for Bearwood House, now Reddam School, that was built later between 1865 and 1874⁴. The area reflects how both natural and human intervention can work well together to shape the landscape.

The 40 acre Bearwood Lake shown in View 1.1 was initially formed from the clay workings which supplied the local brick industry and was then re-landscaped to be incorporated into the ornamental gardens. Nearby, the spectacular display of rhododendrons lining Bearwood Road, another example of man’s intervention, forms a distinctive landscape feature⁵ and is a ‘unique part of the character of Barkham’⁶ – View 1.2.

In marked contrast, the land falls away to the south as you enter The Coombes. With its natural tree-lined trails and the seasonal variation expected of predominantly deciduous woodlands, it is deemed to be an ‘area of landscape importance’⁷. The trails range from the more formal Coombes Lane - View 1.3 - to rambling wooded areas such as that represented by View 1.4.

The area provides superb leisure opportunities⁸ in this attractive location with pleasant vistas. The bluebell dells attract springtime visitors from outside the parishes and The Coombes Circular Walk has recently been signposted to further encourage use and enjoyment of the views.

References:

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. LCA page 279 | 4. AVDS page 21 | 7. AVDS page 32 |
| 2. LCA page 279 | 5. LCA page 280 | 8. LCA page 279. |
| 3. LCA page 280 | 6. BVDS page 19 | |

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|----------------------------------|---|
| View 1.1 Bearwood Lake | View 1.2 Rhododendron Display in Bearwood Road |
| View 1.3 Coombes Lane | View 1.4 Rambling Wooded Areas in The Coombes |



Appendix III, Group 2

Arborfield & Barkham – Around School Road

Landscape Character Area J2

School Road lies in the ‘valley’ between the Bearwood (L1) and Farley Hill (L2) Sand and Gravel Hills landscape types and stretches from Arborfield Cross to Langley Common Road in Barkham.

It is part-residential, part-rural and provides an important separation area between Arborfield Cross and the rest of Barkham¹. It features an impressive oak tree arch along a significant stretch of the road which further marks the separation of the two parishes² - View 2.1.

The views to the north enjoy the backdrop of The Coombes^{3&4} - of which View 2.2 is typical.

To the south lies a bucolic landscape - View 2.3 - and fine views over open countryside⁵ - View 2.4 - thereby creating an important separation between Arborfield Green, Arborfield Cross and Barkham¹.

References:

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|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. LCA page 239 | 3. LCA page 279 | 5. BVDS page 10 |
| 2. BVDS page 6 | 4. BVDS page 9 | |

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| View 2.1 Tree Arch in School Road | View 2.2 Arborfield Cross towards The Coombes |
| View 2.3 Fields to the south of School Road | View 2.4 Looking south from School Road towards Arborfield Green |



Appendix III, Group 3
Central Barkham
Landscape Character Area J2

This undulating area can be seen from many vantage points around the Parish. It is crossed by what is probably an old Drovers’ Trail that led from Arborfield Cross along School Road towards Barkham Church and on to Wokingham, a good example of an historic public right of way between settlements¹ - View 3.1.

Barkham Brook with its important ecological habitat² flows under Barkham Bridge across the area³ and has been known to cause flooding in recent years. The brook, with its scenic quality and naturalistic character⁴ is an important factor in shaping the appearance of this area.

The area abuts The Barkham Street Area of Special Interest⁵ which comprises i) The site of the original medieval village centre including the church and an extant moated manor site, ii) Listed buildings along Barkham Street including Barkham Square and Spark’s Farm and iii) The modern Barkham Manor which dates from the late 1700s.

The views from Barkham Road near Barkham Bridge represented by View 3.2 are particularly impressive. The old WWII Pill Box was constructed to protect Barkham Bridge and occupies a commanding position on the route linking Reading, via Barkham, with Wokingham.

The scenes selected - Views 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 - across this central area are typical of the open spaces that contribute to the expansive and rural

character of the landscape between settlements as referred to in the LCA⁶ - in this is case between Arborfield Green and much of Barkham.

References:

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|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. LCA page 237 | 3. BVDS page 6 | 5. BVDS page 4 |
| 2. LCA page 238 | 4. LCA page 239 | 6. LCA page 239 |

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| View 3.1 Possible Drovers’ Trail (BA7) on north boundary of Barkham Square | View 3.2 From Barkham Road near Barkham Bridge towards Barkham Square |
| View 3.3 From the trail (BA7) towards Barkham Bridge | View 3.4 Commonfield Lane towards Langley Common Road |



Appendix III, Group 4
South East Barkham
Landscape Character Area J2

The land drops away from The Coombes to the historic farmlands which separate the settlements of Barkham, Finchampstead and Arborfield Green. To the north the fields flank the Barkham Street Area of Special Interest¹ and in particular a scheduled Moated Site – View 4.1. The foreground also shows red iron-rich soil and the area is designated an Area of Geological Interest.

The area features well defined fields bound by fragmented hedgerows.² In bygone times, the area formed the estate of the original medieval Barkham Manor and many of the original field boundaries seen in maps of the day can be traced today – eg the field originally called ‘Home Close’ or ‘The Pins’ (1755 Sales Particulars) and ‘Pins Close’ (1831 Enclosures)³ as shown in view 4.2.

From Edneys Hill there are views across the landscape to adjacent character areas⁴ such as Barkham Church - View 4.3 - and The Finchampstead Ridges⁵. A footpath⁶ that crosses the area from Barkham Road via Barkham Church to Rooks Nest SANG has been named the Barkham Way. In the south, the boundary is formed by California Country Park and a Site of Special Scientific Interest – View 4.4.

References:

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|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. BVDS page 4 | 3. LCA page 237 | 5. BVDS page 6 |
| 2. LCA page 236 | 4. LCA page 236 | 6. BVDS page 6 |

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| View 4.1 Rooks Nest SANG towards Barkham Square | View 4.2 Commonfield Lane overlooking ‘The Pins’ to Barkham Church |
| View 4.3 Edneys Hill towards Barkham Church | View 4.4 California Country Park looking north |



Appendix III, Group 5

East Arborfield

Landscape Character Area J2 including L2

This area includes the Conservation Area of Arborfield Cross¹ and an Area of Special Interest centred on Chamberlains Farm² and extends east from School Road (Group 2) and Central Barkham (Group 3). A grade I listed Building - Carters Hill House - lies on the edge of the area³. Together with the Arborfield Terrace (C1) and Loddon Valley (A2) landscape areas, this open area of land provides an important buffer⁴ from the rapidly developing areas east of Reading and around the newly created Science Park.

It is characterised by arable farming and large geometric fields bounded by fragmented hedgerows⁵. Older scattered settlements and listed farmhouses⁶ are important features which provide a focal point for many views such as that shown in 5.1. These long and open views reflect the gently undulating landscape between 50 and 65m AOD⁷ and look across to adjacent character areas⁸. For example, those looking north west toward Bartlett's farm - View 5.2 - and north to Carters Hill - View 5.3.

The area is wooded with mature hedgerows that combine with woodland belts on the surrounding hills⁹. These provide distinctive habitats as well as important wildlife corridors, particularly evident in View 5.4 with Bearwood Lane Copse in the distance. There are many other copses which are either wildlife sites or contain ancient woodlands - or both, such as Pound and Bottle Copses¹⁰ - and Gravel Pit Wood, just outside the area is such an example - View 5.5.

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Many other views look in direction of the Loddon Valley¹¹ such as those represented by 5.6. Once again, The Coombes provides an impressive, but now distant, backdrop¹², as shown in View 5.7. Strong southerly views include View 5.8.

References:

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|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. AVDS page 23 | 5. LCA page 236 | 9. LCA page 236 |
| 2. AVDS Page 25 | 6. LCA page 236 | 10. LCA page 236 |
| 3. AVDS page 17 | 7. LCA page 236 | 11. LCA page 238 |
| 4. LCA page 239 | 8. LCA page 236 | 12. BVDS page 9 |

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| View 5.1 Carters Hill House from Barretts Lane | View 5.2 AN17 towards Bartletts Farm |
| View 5.3 Junction of Sindlesham and Mole Roads towards Carters Hill | View 5.4 Mole Road towards Monk Cottage |



Appendix III, Group 5 Contd.
East Arborfield
Landscape Character Area J2 including L2

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| View 5.5 Gravel Pit Lane from Loaders Lane towards Betty Grove Lane | View 5.6 West from junction of Greensward Lane and Swallowfield Road |
| View 5.7 Chamberlains Farm towards The Coombes | View 5.8 Park Corner Lane towards Mole Road |



Appendix III, Group 6

West Arborfield

Landscape Character Area C1 and A2

This area is dominated by the Arborfield River Terraces (C1) and a narrow strip along the River Loddon Valley (A2) which continues across the western Parish border. It includes a Scheduled Monument - the original parish church located towards the river which is part the original medieval centre of Arborfield¹. This also features the site of the watermill which created the prosperity² of the area and succession of Arborfield Halls now lost apart from the remnant associated parkland.³

The area is characterised by intensive arable farming³ - View 6.1 - low density farming settlements⁴ with numerous small woodlands and copses, many of which are also Wildlife Sites^{5&6}, which break up the agricultural plain - View 6.2 - and clear long distance views across to the adjacent flood plains towards the Loddon Valley⁷ - Views 6.3 and 6.4.

The River Loddon - View 6.5 - has great importance for the area in terms of identity, heritage and leisure and the many tree-lined public rights of way allow much-valued recreational access to the River Loddon floodplain⁸ - View 6.6 - and fishing and shooting rights. Wildlife abounds.

Along the catchment area there are a number of wildlife sites, the area is designated a 'biodiversity opportunity area' and a 4km stretch is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest⁹. This provides the opportunity for ecological research of different habitats by TVERC and

The Loddon Observatory of Reading University. The riverbanks are included in WBC's proposed River Loddon Pathway.

References:

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. AVDS page 35 | 4. LCA page 98 | 7. LCA page 98 |
| 2. AVDS page 30 | 5. LCA page 98 | 8. LCA page 100 |
| 3. LCA Page 98 | 6. AVDS page 34 | 9. LCA page 54 |

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| View 6.1 Hall Farm from Footpath No. 2 | View 6.2 Pound Copse from AN22 |
| View 6.3 Fields to the north east of Loader's Lane | View 6.4 Julkes Lane towards River Loddon |



Appendix III, Group 6 Contd
West Arborfield
Landscape Character Area C1 and A2

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| View 6.5 River Loddon from Footpath 1 | View 6.6 Loddon River Flood Plain |
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