National Character Area profile:

108. Upper Thames Clay Vales

NATURAL ENGLAND

www.naturalengland.org.uk

Key characteristics

- Low-lying clay-based flood plains encircle the Midvale Ridge. Superficial deposits, including alluvium and gravel terraces, spread over 40 per cent of the area, creating gently undulating topography. The Upper Jurassic and Cretaceous clays and the wet valley bottoms give rise to enclosed pasture, contrasting with the more settled, open, arable lands of the gravel.
- The large river system of the River Thames drains the Vales, their headwaters flowing off the Cotswolds to the north or emitting from the springline along the Chilterns and Downs escarpments. Where mineral extraction takes place, pits naturally fill with water, and limestone gravels from the Cotswolds give rise to marl formation. There are a high number of nationally important geological sites.
- Woodland cover is low at only about 3 per cent, but hedges, hedgerow trees and field trees are frequent. Watercourses are often marked by lines of willows and, particularly in the Aylesbury Vale and Cotswold Water Park, native black poplar.
- Wet ground conditions and heavy clay soils discourage cultivation in many places, giving rise to livestock farming. Fields are regular and hedged, except near the Cotswolds, where there can be stone walls. The Vale of White Horse is made distinct by large arable fields, and there are relict orchards on the Greensand.
- In the river corridors, grazed pasture dominates, with limited areas of historic wetland habitats including wet woodland, fen, reedbed and flood meadow. There are two areas of flood meadow designated for their importance at a European level as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). There are also rich and extensive ditch systems.
- Gravel extraction has left a legacy of geological exposures, numerous waterbodies and, at the Cotswold Water Park, a nationally important complex of marl lakes.
- Wetland habitat attracts regionally important numbers of birds including snipe, redshank, curlew and lapwing and wintering wildfowl such as pochard. Snake's head fritillary thrives in the internationally important meadows. The area also supports typical farmland wildlife such as brown hare, bats, barn owl, tree sparrow and skylark.
- Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, including its Capability Brown landscape, is the finest of many examples of historic parkland in this NCA. There are many heritage features, including nationally important survivals of ridge and furrow, Roman roads, deserted medieval villages and historic bridges.
- Brick and tile from local clays, timber and thatch are traditional building materials across the area, combined with limestone near the Cotswolds and occasional clunch and wichert near the Chilterns.
- Settlement is sparse on flood plains, apart from at river crossings, where there can be large towns, such as Abingdon. Aylesbury and Bicester are major urban centres, and the outer suburbs of Oxford and Swindon spread into this NCA. Market towns and villages are strung along the springlines of the Chilterns and Downs. Major routes include mainline rail, canals, a network of roads including the M40 and M4 and The Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails.

Statements of Environmental Opportunity

SEO 1: Along the Thames and its tributaries, promote sustainable farming and best practice mineral working in order to conserve and restore semi-natural habitats, historic features, geodiversity, soil quality and soil carbon stores and also to regulate water flow in this area and downstream. Ensure conservation of Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation and North Meadow and Clattinger Farm Special Area of Conservation. Engage the public in river heritage and maintain traditional land management practices where appropriate.

For example, by:

- Making reference to the Water Framework Directive, catchment management plans, local Landscape Character Assessments and other strategy documents. Draw on best practice developed by initiatives such as the Catchment Sensitive Farming Programme, the Nature After Minerals Programme and the Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) pilot developed in this National Character Area (NCA).
- Working across administrative and landownership boundaries to co-ordinate management along the length of watercourses and ditches. Co-ordination is relevant to ecological and physical processes, including the management of water levels. Restore and create habitats and corridors in order to improve resilience, ecosystem function and connectivity of the ecological network at a landscape scale.
- Where compatible with management of flood risk, continuing to restore or enhance as appropriate engineered watercourses to improve habitats, restore a more natural hydrological regime and re-connect watercourses with their flood plains.
- Identifying potential floodwater storage areas, including maximising opportunities around the restoration of mineral workings, and securing land uses that are flood compatible, including wet grassland.
- Considering and managing for climate change impacts on water levels. Identify those features that are sensitive to water level, including habitats, plant species and archaeology that are prone to drought or long-term submergence. Maintain and, where necessary, restore or create ditches and water level control structures.
- Managing improved and semi-natural grasslands and wetlands such as reedbed and wet woodland to slow run-off and filter pollutants. Also manage and create linear features such as hedgerows, ditches and grass strips to manage water flow and filter pollutants.
- Engaging communities in addressing sources of pollution and polluting practices in the rural and urban environment.
- Identifying areas of peat and deep soils that have higher carbon storage capacity. Manage these areas to minimise or avoid damage to soils, in some cases changing land use or restoring wetland habitat such as fen where appropriate.
- Conserving, restoring and creating wet grassland, reedbeds, ponds, species-rich ditches, lowland meadow and other semi-natural habitats. Focus creation and restoration around extending and linking existing areas of habitat in order to improve the function of ecological networks and secure management efficiencies.
- Identifying locations where arable farming is not sustainable in the

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

long term and where arable reversion would increase benefits for biodiversity, regulation of water flow, regulation of water quality and conservation of soils. Support arable reversion by exploring and supporting markets for products of grasslands, including sustainable energy as developed in this area by the PES pilot.

- Where possible, making use of green hay and seeds from species-rich grasslands in the NCA to create and restore additional areas of species-rich grassland. Draw on best practice developed in the meadows in the Special Areas of Conservation and elsewhere to inform management of other meadows in the area.
- Providing suitable habitat for wildlife, particularly the area's characteristic species and rare species, including breeding waders. Tackle problems associated with non-native species such as crassula and mink.
- Conserving veteran trees, including pollarded willow and black poplar. Conserve suckering elm as vestiges of a tree that was once widespread in this area. Ensure that there are successors to veteran trees and guard against pests and diseases. Draw on best practice developed in Aylesbury Vale and Cotswold Water Park around black poplar.
- Managing and restoring active extraction sites to benefit geodiversity, biodiversity, recreation and all the water ecosystem services where possible.
- Creating habitats through restoration schemes for mineral workings in a way that contributes to a coherent and resilient ecological network. Where environmental conditions allow, seek to realise more complex or ambitious restoration options such as reedbed. Ensure that the long-term, sustainable management of habitats is secured along with recreational benefits engaging the public in learning about local geodiversity and biodiversity.
- Maintaining traditional management where this conserves distinctive landscape characteristics, biodiversity and cultural heritage, for example lowland meadow and willow pollards. Engage the public in these traditions and associated heritage.
- Ensuring that recreation activities are appropriately managed across the NCA in order to avoid disturbance of breeding birds, poor experiences of tranquillity and potential conflict between user groups. Securing sustainable recreation is particularly important on ecologically fragile sites or where the negative impact would be significant.
- Conserving heritage assets along rivers, including Scheduled Monuments, historic buildings, bridges and historic watermeadows. Survey historic features and riverine landscapes to inform conservation and public engagement activities.
- Continuing to engage people in the cultural heritage of the Thames through events, interpretation and education. Secure an overview of the artistic and literary work associated with the Thames which contributes to sense of place.
- Engaging the public in the geodiversity of the River Thames, including fossils found in the river gravels. Ensure the conservation of such geodiversity, in particular geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and facilitate public access where possible.
- Along key sections of the Thames Path National Trail and associated key rights of way, seeking to maximise accessibility and to engage the public in the natural and cultural heritage. Review accessibility and interpretation of the Thames tributaries and make improvements where there is greatest opportunity.
- Conserving tranquillity as appropriate along the rivers and promoting rivers and lakes as places in which to experience tranquillity. People living in areas of low tranquillity will be target audiences for promoting river and lake recreation.

SEO 2: Manage farmland across the Upper Thames Clay Vales to produce food sustainably and maintain sense of place. Taking a catchment approach, improve filtration of pollutants and regulation of water flow by realising a farmland habitat mosaic that incorporates strategic areas of wet grassland, reedbed, wet woodland and ponds as well as ditches and hedgerows.

For example, by:

- Making reference to the Water Framework Directive, catchment management plans, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) management plans, local Landscape Character Assessments and other strategy documents. Draw on best practice developed by initiatives such as the Catchment Sensitive Farming Programme, the Nature After Minerals Programme and the PES pilot developed in this NCA.
- Identifying locations prone to run-off, including access routes, sloping land and cultivated land, and seeking to impede run-off. Convert strategic areas of arable to grassland where possible.
- Adopting efficient chemical application methods such as precision farming. Where compatible with food production, encourage minimal use of chemicals and enhance biodiversity.
- Where arable reversion is sought in order to secure improved or alternative ecosystem services, exploring and supporting markets for products of grasslands, including sustainable energy as developed in this area by the PES pilot.
- Along watercourses, ditches and waterbodies, maintaining buffers to filter pollutants from run-off, which affects water quality and aquatic biodiversity. Create wet grassland, wet woodlands and reedbeds to filter pollutants and secure additional biodiversity benefits.
- Conserving soils to maximise filtration, thereby reducing rapid run-off and loss of soil. It is important to avoid compaction. Soil conservation will benefit plant growth and consequently food provision.
- Creating short- and long-term water storage to secure improved water availability but also to manage water flow so as to avoid flash flooding, for example, reservoirs can secure water supply at any scale over any period, including at the farm scale and ditches with control structures can be restored or created for managing water levels in a flood meadow or fen. Short-term floodwater storage applies to seasonally flooded grasslands and seasonal ponds and scrapes.
- Maintaining and enhancing the farmland habitat mosaic, restoring habitats such as fen, reedbed, wet grassland, ponds and wet woodland in historic locations where possible.
- Avoiding creation or expansion of woodland where there are benefits in retaining an open landscape, particularly in relation to breeding waders and valued views. Use tree stock of local provenance to guard against pests and diseases and conserve local species such as native black poplar and small leaved lime. Manage deer pressure.
- Providing and managing sufficient habitat for wildlife across farmland that is characteristic of this area, including brown hare, tree sparrow, curlew, otter, water vole, brown hairstreak butterfly, and barn owl.
- Providing nectar-rich habitats adjacent to insect-pollinated crops. Manage these habitats to support local biodiversity.
- Managing the farmland mosaic to regulate pests and diseases that affect food production and to support biodiversity. Achieve this by maximising heterogeneity of land use, providing habitat for natural predators and seeking genetic diversity. Incorporate features such as beetle banks and uncultivated field corners and strips into arable fields.

SEO 3: Ensure that heritage assets, especially characteristic features such as ridge and furrow, abandoned medieval villages, Roman roads, canals and historic parkland, including Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, are maintained in good condition. Integrate conservation of these features with sustainable food production and provide public access to key examples. Seek opportunities to restore the wider historic setting of a feature, particularly in relation to the historic Royal Hunting Forests of Bernwood, Braydon and Wychwood.

For example, by:

- Using historic characterisation of the area's landscape and heritage features, improve understanding and management of historic features and their condition, significance and setting. Also draw on local Landscape Character Assessments and AONB management plans.
- Continuing to conserve and provide sustainable recreation in the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site to maintain sense of history, sense of place and recreation interests. Assist the World Heritage Site Committee in delivering the Management Plan in support of the site's Outstanding Universal Value.
- Improving the condition of heritage assets and features, including those on the Heritage at Risk register, and locally characteristic features such as ridge and furrow through appropriate measures and seeking to reduce conflicting or unsympathetic management regimes, while recognising the high potential in this landscape for undiscovered remains.
- Working with land managers to identify how to conserve historic features while also producing food in a sustainable way. Avoid ploughing damage to heritage assets, ideally by reversion to grass. Grassed monuments in the landscape can also conserve soils, filter pollutants from run-off and increase the heterogeneity of land use for the benefit of biodiversity.
- Engaging local communities and visitors in the historic landscape through a high-quality public access network, interpretation and education involving examples of key historic features. Draw on best practice visitor engagement and management developed at Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site. Further enhance people's engagement with the heritage of canals.
- Working at the appropriate landscape scale to restore the setting of key features, including the historic Royal Hunting Forest landscapes of Bernwood, Braydon and Wychwood. Draw on work already carried out in these areas.
- Seeking to restore the mosaic of land uses (or habitats) of the ancient Royal Hunting Forests where this will maintain sustainable food provision and boost biodiversity, sense of history and recreation. Protect parkland trees from plough damage and manage deer pressure in order to support conservation and creation of woodland.
- Restoring Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites, particularly in the ancient Royal Hunting Forest areas. Secure management of woodland by supporting markets for woodland products.
- Maintaining public access to woodlands within the historic boundaries of the ancient Royal Hunting Forests and improving the accessibility of key rights of way in the area.
- Managing canals to conserve important heritage features, maximising sustainable recreation opportunities and providing corridors and habitat for wildlife.

SEO 4: Realise sustainable development that contributes positively to sense of place and built heritage. Ensure adequate greenspace in association with all development and most importantly in growing settlements such as Aylesbury and Swindon. Create and manage greenspace to provide benefits for biodiversity, floodwater management, filtration of pollutants, tranquillity and recreation, and secure strategic access routes between town and country.

For example, by:

- Drawing on local Landscape Character Assessments, AONB management plans and historic landscape characterisation to define settlement pattern and local building materials and techniques.
- Ensuring that development outside urban and urban fringe settings is monitored and understood, as it is nationally significant in this NCA. Manage such development to avoid negative impacts – particularly impacts on the AONB, including their settings.
- Seeking to ensure that future development is designed to contribute positively to landscape character, focusing on local distinctiveness and being sensitive to setting. Ensure that design reflects an understanding of historic settlement pattern and traditional building materials and conserves significant heritage features. Reflect traditional building styles and incorporate traditional building materials into new development where possible. Identify the local sources of traditional building materials and establish sustainable extraction where possible. Conserve SSSI and Local Geological Sites through this work, including maintenance of access to exposures for research.
- Securing enhancements where possible, where existing development detracts from sense of place and other ecosystem services.
- Considering physical and functional links between settlements or development and the wider landscape, such as views and water flow. Manage the urban–rural fringe to contribute positively to landscape character.
- Incorporating new woodlands and tree screens into development as appropriate, taking care not to detract from the open landscape character of this NCA.
- Ensuring that there are green infrastructure links between town and country, providing access links for walkers, cyclists, less-able-bodied people and other user groups, particularly where greenspace is lacking and/or community health is poor.
- Managing canals in Aylesbury, Oxford and Swindon to provide sustainable recreation opportunities and habitat for wildlife. Integrating them into the wider network of access routes and green spaces and securing them as key corridors in the ecological network.
- Creating and managing green spaces so that they are accessible and tranquillity is maximised through for example, incorporating water features. Prioritise the creation and enhancement of greenspace where there is inadequate provision, for example in Aylesbury.
- Ensuring that development is water efficient and incorporates features such as sustainable urban drainage systems. Create and manage green spaces to store water, incorporating features such as seasonal ponds and reedbeds, which also have biodiversity interest and filter pollutants.
- Providing sufficient habitat in green spaces for local species, including nectar-rich habitat for pollinating insects. Manage these green spaces as part of an ecological network that links to gardens across a settlement.
- Engaging the public in settlement history, including guided walks to view historic buildings that use traditional building materials. Explore ideas with the public about how best to accommodate new development.

Landscape attributes

Landscape attribute	Justification for selection
Low-lying clay-based flood plains coursed by the River Thames and its dense network of tributaries and ditches, often lined by willow, reed and, in the Aylesbury Vale and Cotswold Water Park, native black poplar.	■ Lowest elevation is 39 m AOD. Rivers such as the Thame have shallow gradients.[11] ■ River Thames and its tributaries drain the Vales, their headwaters flowing off the Cotswolds to the north or emitting from the springline along the Chilterns and Downs escarpments. ■ Numerous upper tributaries of the Thames flow off the Cotswolds dipslope into a vale bounded by the Midvale Ridge. The Midvale Ridge constrains the river network within a narrow corridor, giving rise to a high density of watercourses and ditches. The Thames breaks through at Oxford to pass into a wider vale to the south where watercourses and ditches are at a lesser density than the northern vales. ■ Willows have historically been pollarded. Ditches full of reeds are particularly characteristic in the wetter areas north of the Midvale Ridge. ■ Native black poplars are distinctive of the Aylesbury Vale and Cotswold Water Park.
Long and wide views across open fields, small and occasional woods. High ground in adjacent NCAs provides a backdrop and there are strong linear features in the form of hedgerows, tree belts, ditches and roads.	■ Woodland cover is only 3 per cent of the NCA. Historically, the area was more wooded, with more extensive wet woodland and mature elm trees. ■ The Great Western Community Forest is a focus area for sustainable regeneration although not particularly well wooded. ■ The Chilterns, Berkshire and Marlborough Downs and Midvale Ridge rise up abruptly from the Vales in adjacent NCAs. The Midvale Ridge is a much smaller feature than the Chilterns and Downs. ■ Parliamentary enclosure determined much of the field pattern in this NCA. As a result, boundaries are straight and defined strongly by hedgerows and roads.
Superficial deposits create undulating topography across much of the area. Better drained land on higher ground is often settled and cultivated. A legacy of mineral extraction gives rise to geological exposures, numerous waterbodies supporting wildfowl and a nationally important complex of marl lakes.	■ Superficial deposits cover 40 per cent of the NCA including alluvium and gravel terraces. ■ Arable land is concentrated on higher ground, away from the wetter flood plain where soils are heavy to cultivate. ■ SSSI and Local Geological Sites aim to conserve important geological exposures in redundant quarries and small pits. ■ Where mineral extraction takes place, pits naturally fill with water. There are over 100 lakes comprising the Cotswold Water Park, creating a distinctive landscape and popular with bird-watchers. Limestone gravels from the Cotswolds give rise to marl formation.

[11] Thames Corridor Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy, Environment Agency (2004)

Landscape attribute	Justification for selection
In the river corridors, grazed pasture dominates with limited areas of historic wetland habitats including wet woodland, fen, reedbed and flood meadow. Wet grassland supports breeding birds. Snake's head fritillary flowers in internationally important meadows.	■ Wet ground conditions and heavy clay soils discourage cultivation in many places, giving rise to livestock farming. Most grassland is improved or semi-improved. ■ This NCA has around 7,200 ha of flood plain grazing marsh, 1,700 ha of wet woodland and 1,300 ha of lowland meadows and 600 ha of fens. There are also rich and extensive ditch systems around Otmoor, the upper River Ray, and the River Thames near Wallingford and in the Lower Windrush Valley. ■ Some river valley meadows and pastures are important for wading birds, including regionally important breeding numbers of lapwing, snipe, curlew and redshank, and large wintering numbers of lapwing and golden plover. Scrapes have been created in some areas to encourage such birds, as for example around the River Ray in Buckinghamshire. ■ Limited fields have retained their species-richness, including traditional flood meadows where soil fertility has been sustained by seasonal flooding. There are two areas of flood meadow designated for their importance at a European level as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). ■ North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC supports over 90 per cent of the country's fritillary population.
A mosaic of mixed agriculture, ponds and small woods. Relict orchards remain on the Greensand.	■ Supports typical farmland wildlife such as brown hare, bats, barn owl and skylark. ■ Fertile soils associated with the limited area of Greensand adjacent to the Chilterns and Berkshire and Marlborough Downs have historically been a focus for orchards. ■ The Aylesbury Vale was known for its plums known as Aylesbury prune.
A regular, planned field pattern defined by boundaries of thorn hedgerows, often with mature hedgerow trees, stone walls near the Cotswolds and straight roads. Smaller fields are found around villages while large arable fields are particular to the Vale of White Horse.	■ Field pattern was largely set out by Parliamentary enclosure and is well-ordered and defined by straight boundaries and roads. Earlier smaller, irregular fields persist around villages. ■ Large arable fields with a less dense hedgerow network characterise the Vale of White Horse. This field pattern resulted from the enclosure of medieval strip fields. ■ Mature hedgerow trees, including veterans, are found in many hedges. Elm was once a mature hedgerow tree characteristic of this area but now it is a shrub component only. ■ Blackthorn and hawthorn were the typical hedge species of Parliamentary enclosure. ■ Near the Cotswolds, the availability of Cotswold stone has led to stone walls in this locality.

Landscape attribute	Justification for selection
Relict features of ancient Royal Hunting Forests of Bernwood, Braydon and Wychwood include embankments, veteran trees and clusterings of small ancient woods. Designed parkland landscapes are sparsely scattered, including Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site.	■ Historic Royal Hunting Forests comprised a mosaic of open grassland and woodland. Small ancient woodlands, veteran trees and embankments are relict features of these Royal Hunting Forests. Mature field oaks are a feature south of the Midvale Ridge. Bernwood lay around Brill, Wychwood east of Witney and Braydon near Swindon. ■ Braydon Forest supports a patchwork of broad-leaved woodland blocks (often ancient semi-natural or replanted) and small fields delineated by mature, species-rich hedgerows. Woodland cover is locally high here compared with the wider NCA. ■ There are 38 Registered Parks and Gardens (many are associated with the Oxford Colleges). Buscot, Claydon and Hartwell are examples. These large estates most likely evolved from the ancient Royal Hunting Forests. ■ Part of Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site lies in this NCA. It was designated in 1987 in recognition of the international significance of the architecture of its buildings and the landscaped grounds. The famous landscape designer Lancelot 'Capability' Brown worked at Blenheim to create 'one of the greatest examples of naturalistic landscape design'.[12] Blenheim influenced designs elsewhere in England and abroad.
Pasture preserves historic earthworks, including ridge and furrow and, concentrated in the Aylesbury Vale, deserted medieval villages. Roman roads, castles and historic bridges are striking features.	■ Nationally important survivals of ridge and furrow include those at West Hanney, Denchworth, Lodgershall, Hogshaw and Creslow. ■ Deserted medieval villages include those at Quarrendon, Fleet Marston and Creslow. ■ There are 245 Scheduled Ancient Monuments. ■ Roman roads include Ermine Way and Akeman Street. ■ Castles include Shirburn and Wallingford. ■ River crossing points have long been a focus for settlement and there is a rich history around bridges in this NCA. Wallingford and Abingdon are noted for historic bridges.
Brick, tile, timber and thatch are traditional building materials across the area, combined with Cotswold stone near the Cotswolds and occasional clunch and wichert near the Chilterns.	■ Local clay enabled bricks and tiles to be made for local use. ■ Stone available from the Cotswolds was used to construct buildings and walls in that locality. Near the Chilterns, clunch (a chalk rock) was occasionally used. ■ Wichert was a plaster made by mixing chalky marl with straw or earth. It was often colour-washed, as seen at Haddenham and Cuddington. ■ Thatch is seen across the area and characteristic of many villages such as Stanton Harcourt and Sutton.
Historic settlement is found sparsely dispersed on higher ground and exceptionally at river crossing points such as Abingdon. Large urban areas comprise Aylesbury and outskirts of Oxford and Swindon, plus growing towns dispersed across the NCA such as Didcot, Bicester, Witney and Thame. A web of A roads connects major settlement, while the M4 and M40 pass through.	■ Settlement has mostly been avoided in areas liable to flooding, except at river crossing points such as Standlake. Large towns of Abingdon and Wallingford are historic crossing points. ■ Aylesbury and Swindon are major urban centres, having been a focus for recent growth. ■ Industrial uses include Didcot Power Station and car factories at Swindon and Oxford. ■ The dispersed nature of settlement means that there are A roads connecting large towns. Numerous A roads emanate from Oxford, Swindon and Aylesbury.

[12] Nominations to the World Heritage List (WHC-08/32.COM/8B.Add), UNESCO (2008)

Landscape opportunities

- Conserve historic features in the flood plains, including traditional flood meadow, pasture, pollarded willows, historic bridges and Scheduled Monuments.
- Conserve wetland habitat in the flood plains, from species-rich ditches to lowland meadow to wet grassland supporting breeding birds including waders.
- Restore and create wet grassland, ponds and fens in the flood plains. Create new woodlands in places where enclosure of the landscape does not negatively impact upon valued views and does not impinge upon open habitats such as wet grassland providing for breeding waders.
- Manage and restore extraction pits to avoid negative impacts upon the landscape. Create wetland habitat as hydrological conditions sustainably allow, providing for a range of wildlife and contributing positively to the wider mosaic of habitats in the landscape.
- Maintain hedgerows, hedgerow trees and stone walls as strong landscape features which also contribute to the ecological network. Maintain characteristic native black poplars in the Aylesbury Vale and Cotswold Water Park.
- Conserve veteran trees in fields, hedgerows and woods. Ensure there are successor trees and retain deadwood where possible.
- Conserve small woodlands, particularly ancient woodlands and semi-natural woodlands. Explore opportunities to restore woodland within the historic Royal Hunting Forests and consider new woodlands and tree screens as part of development. Avoid new woodlands and overgrowth of hedgerows where they will obstruct valued views or otherwise enclose an open landscape, including grasslands supporting waders.
- Maintain the mix of agriculture and the mosaic of farmland habitats. Consider ways to increase heterogeneity of the arable landscape of the Vale of White Horse, for example ponds, grass strips, beetle banks and non-cultivated field corners. Restore and create orchards and restore semi-natural habitats associated with historic Royal Hunting Forests in order to enhance the farmland habitat mosaic and conserve historic land use.
- Conserve the built and natural heritage of Registered Parks and Gardens, including Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site. Assess non-registered parklands to determine the need for conservation and designation.
- Encourage continued use of traditional building materials. Where possible, integrate with conservation of geological exposures at extraction sites.
- Conserve historic settlement pattern and historic buildings. Manage the expansion of settlements such as Swindon and Aylesbury.