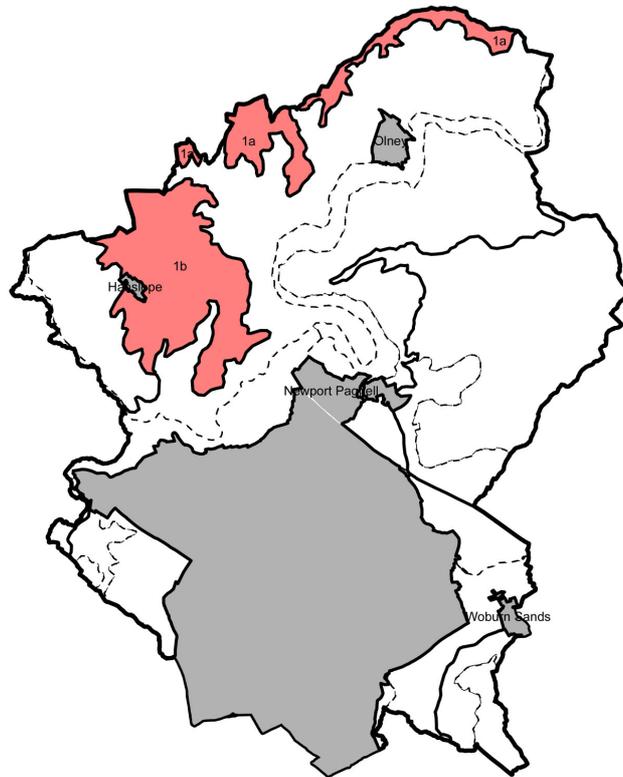


# 1. Yardley Ridge

## Summary Page

### Location

A southern extension of the Yardley Whittlewood Ridge that largely lies in neighbouring Northamptonshire, this area runs along the northern boundary of Milton Keynes Council's administrative area.



### Character Summary

This is a marked plateau landscape with Salcey Forest and Yardley Chase, both forming major wooded features on the skyline. The area can be divided into two sub areas:

- a. Yardley Chase Fringe – a narrow strip of land on the northern edge of the authority forming an apron of land and foreground to the heavily wooded Yardley Chase and Salcey Forest to the north which together provide the impression of continuous woodland cover on the skyline.
- b. Hanslope Plateau – a wider and more open plateau landscape containing a number of large but generally disconnected woods. The area contains arable, pasture and the village of Hanslope

### Key Characteristics

#### 1a Yardley Chase Fringe

- Gently undulating plateau landscape
- Large to medium scale mixed woodlands linking with the extensive woods of Yardley Chase and Salcey Forest
- Large arable fields and clipped hedges
- Extensive views to the south
- Minimal isolated settlement

#### 1b Hanslope Plateau

- Gently undulating plateau landscape
- Isolated large mixed woodlands
- Large arable fields and clipped hedges
- Areas of pasture and smaller fields closer to the settlements

- Extensive views towards Milton Keynes and the river valleys of the Ouse and Tove

**Distinctive features**

- Hanslope Park
- Hanslope church spire
- M1 corridor

## **Assessment**

### **Geology and Soils**

The underlying geology of this character area, which has helped to create the distinctive ridgeline and plateau present today, is Jurassic Oolitic limestone. This limestone is more porous than some of the surrounding geology and aquifers can be found under parts of the ridgeline. Glacial activity subsequently eroded and smoothed out the original limestone ridgeline and left behind substantial, irregular deposits of boulder clay on top of the base rock. These deposits are most substantial over the Hanslope Plateau sub area. The soils that overlay this geology can be variable but most have a high clay content. In parts of both sub areas, these clayey soils can be slowly permeable and subject to seasonal waterlogging, with a higher calcareous content on some of the slopes (Ragdale Association). Within much of the Hanslope Plateau sub area, soils tend to be more calcareous clayey soils with some risk of water erosion (Hanslope Association). Woodland clearance has been relatively limited within the character area as a result of the relatively poor soils combined with the topography outlined below.

### **Topography**

The character area comprises the edge of a much larger prominent ridgeline and plateau that continues over the County boundary in Northamptonshire running in a south-west, north-east direction. The ridgeline forms the watershed between the Rivers Ouse to the South and Nene to the north. The Hanslope Plateau sub area is a more obvious plateau landform within the Milton Keynes Council administrative area and forms the watershed between the Ouse and the Tove.

### **Degree of Slope**

Along Yardley Chase Fringe the ridge falls north to south towards the Ouse Valley at an average of c. 1 in 30 with localised steeper slopes of around 1 in 14. The Hanslope Plateau has gentler slopes of c. 1 in 50, falling from its centre towards its eastern, western and southern edges. There are more localised slopes of around 1 in 15 or steeper, particularly around streams and springs.

### **Altitude Range**

The Yardley Chase Fringe sub area maintains a height of between 90-115 m. The Hanslope Plateau sub area maintains a similar altitude range but has a higher point of approximately 122m near Long Street.

### **Hydrology**

The character area forms part of a major watershed between the River Ouse and the River Nene in Northamptonshire, to the north of Milton Keynes. Many streams and springs have their source at or close to the edge of the character area and flow down to the River Ouse to the south and east and to the Tove to the west. Throughout the character area there are many ponds and a number of small reservoirs associated with different farms.

### **Land cover and land use**

The majority of the land use is arable with both large to medium arable fields. There are smaller areas of pasture often near settlements or on remnant ridge and furrow e.g. Park Farm Tathall End. There is a relatively high proportion of woodlands in the area. Within the Yardley Chase Fringe these link with the extensive woodlands to the north however on the Hanslope Plateau, there is limited connectedness between them.

### **Biodiversity**

The woods are mainly ancient/semi-natural in origin e.g. Great Wood, Lindford Wood, Gayhurst Wood and Stokepark Wood however they contain a number of areas of replanted conifers. The local Wildlife Trust manages Linford Wood as a nature reserve and Yardley Chase, although predominantly in Northamptonshire, is designated as a SSSI for its wide variety of semi-natural habitats. Within the Yardley Chase Fringe the poorer calcareous soils support a number of species rich hedges including a high proportion of *Viburnum lantana*.

There has been an increase in number of birds of prey including Red Kite, Raven and Buzzard which is also related to the adjacent wooded areas to the north.

### **Historical and Cultural significance**

Yardley Chase in neighbouring Northamptonshire was once part of a much more extensive medieval royal hunting forest and at this time the woodland cover would have been more extensive over the whole plateau. The Domesday Book and archaeological excavations have shown that pig grazing for pannage i.e. eating acorns, in Hanslope parish was common in the area in the medieval period also indicating more extensive woodland cover at the time. A Royal Hunting Lodge was located at Grafton Regis in neighbouring Northamptonshire.

Hanslope Park, the only notable parkland in the area, was visited by Humphry Repton in 1791. Plans and sketches for the park were produced in one of his 'Red Books' in 1792 for the owner Edward Watts Esq although it is debatable how many of these ideas were implemented. The Park is now occupied by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (Technical Security Department of the Secret Intelligence Service). There are a number of ancillary office buildings, radio masts and security fencing, which disrupt the historic parkland, which is generally in a poor condition, although a few specimen trees, shelterbelts and copses remain.

### **Field Pattern**

The conversion of the woodland to arable through assarting was taking place by the between the 15<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> centuries including a number of areas between the remnant woodlands on the Hanslope Plateau .Other locally stoning patterns include areas of early pre 18<sup>th</sup> century irregular enclosure e.g. around Ravensden, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century parliamentary enclosures with straighter boundaries and private 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosures around Hanslope where the pattern is still relatively intact although 20<sup>th</sup> century amalgamations have created some prairie fields to the Yardley Chase Fringe. There are a number of large mature field oaks close to Yardley Chase and hedgerow oaks around Hanslope village. Hedges are variable being stronger to the minor roads but typically poorer within field boundaries.

### **Transport Pattern**

To the east the A428 between Northampton and Bedford and the B5388 to Olney cross the edge of the Yardley Chase Fringe, otherwise there are no public roads. The Hanslope Plateau is crossed by the M1 which creates a locally prominent visual and audible feature. Elsewhere there is a network of minor sinuous lanes that connect the villages and farms. The disused railway between Northampton and Bedford crosses the area near Great Wood.

### **Settlement and Built form**

Settlement within Yardley Chase Fringe is very sparse and consists of a few isolated traditional farms. This pattern is similar over much of the Hanslope Plateau with the exception of Hanslope village and the associated Long Street. This large village has a mixed character with an attractive village core including a number of vernacular buildings, but also a number of 20th century residential estates which detract from the local character. St James Parish church (Grade 1 listed) has a prominent tower and the tallest spire in Buckinghamshire, which creates a majestic landmark throughout the character area and further beyond. The small hamlet of Tathall End includes a number of limestone cottages with bridges that cross a contained stream that flows south to the River Ouse.

### **Useful links**

Hanslope and District Historical Society <http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/hdhs/frameset.html>

Repton at Hanslope Park <http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/hdhs/Repton/repton.html>

## **Evaluation Page**

### **Visual and Sensory perception**

The areas fringing the Yardley Chase have a remote character emphasized by the restricted public access and the sombre horizon of woodland. Much of the area is tranquil accessed only by a number of minor roads and lanes. The M1 however occupies a central swath on the Hanslope Plateau , bringing local visual, noise and lighting intrusion. There are some distant panoramic views to the south towards the built edge of Milton Keynes and Wolverton while to the east across the Ouse and the west across the Tove there are more open views over the rural valley landscapes. Recent and continuing built development at Hanslope Park is locally intrusive in the otherwise open landscape and the lighting of this development causes some additional visual intrusion at night.

### **Recreational Opportunities**

There are relatively few footpaths within the Yardley Chase Fringe and none which cross into Yardley Chase. Within the Hanslope Plateau there are a far greater number of rights of way with many local connections around Hanslope village. The Swans Way and the Midshires Way both cross the area providing some panoramic views. Most recreation is informal including walking, cycling and horse riding with stabling provided in a few locations. The neighbouring Salcey Forest including the Tree Top Trail represents a local attraction for visitors to the area.

### **Community Views**

## Evaluation Matrix

### 1a Yardley Chase Fringe

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
Impact of landform* Impact of landcover* Historic pattern* Visibility from outside Sense of enclosure Tranquillity Distinctiveness/rarity	Insignificant Insignificant Insignificant <b>Widely visible</b> Open/exposed Discordant Frequent	Apparent Apparent Apparent Locally visible <b>Partial</b> Moderate Unusual	<b>Prominent</b> <b>Prominent</b> <b>Prominent</b> Concealed Contained/confined <b>Tranquil</b> <b>Rare</b>
<b>Totals</b> * Prime condition categories if tie	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
CONDITION	POOR	MODERATE	GOOD
Landcover Change Age Structure of Tree Cover* Extent of semi-natural habitat survival* Management of semi-natural habitats Survival of cultural pattern (fields and hedges) Impact of built development* Visual unity <i>* Prime condition categories if tie</i>	Widespread Overmature Relic Poor Declining/Relic High Incoherent	<b>Localised</b> Mature Scattered <b>Not obvious</b> <b>Interrupted</b> Moderate Coherent	Insignificant <b>Mixed</b> <b>Widespread</b> Good Intact <b>Low</b> <b>Unified</b>
<b>Totals</b> * Prime robustness categories if tie		<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>MATRIX</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Strengthen and reinforce</b>	<b>Conserve and strengthen</b>
<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Improve and reinforce</b>	<b>Improve and conserve</b>	<b>Conserve and restore</b>
<b>Poor</b>	<b>Reconstruct</b>	<b>Improve and restore</b>	<b>Restore condition to maintain character</b>
	<b>Weak</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Strong</b>
	<b>Strength of Character</b>		

**Landscape Strategy = Safeguard and Manage**

#### Sensitivity

Ecological – High

Cultural – Moderate

Visual – Low

Tranquillity – Moderate

## Evaluation Matrix

### 1b Hanslope Plateau

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG	
Impact of landform* Impact of landcover* Historic pattern* Visibility from outside Sense of enclosure Tranquillity Distinctiveness/rarity	Insignificant Insignificant Insignificant Widely visible <b>Open</b> /exposed Discordant <b>Frequent</b>	Apparent <b>Apparent</b> <b>Apparent</b> <b>Locally visible</b> Partial <b>Moderate</b> Unusual	<b>Prominent</b> Prominent Prominent Concealed Contained/confined Tranquil Rare	
<b>Totals</b> * Prime condition categories if tie	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	
CONDITION	POOR	MODERATE	GOOD	
Landcover Change Age Structure of Tree Cover* Extent of semi-natural habitat survival* Management of semi-natural habitats Survival of cultural pattern (fields and hedges) Impact of built development* Visual unity <i>* Prime condition categories if tie</i>	<b>Widespread</b> Overmature Relic Poor <b>Declining/Relic</b> High Incoherent	Localised Mature <b>Scattered</b> <b>Not obvious</b> Interrupted <b>Moderate</b> <b>Coherent</b>	Insignificant <b>Mixed</b> Widespread Good Intact Low Unified	
<b>Totals</b> * Prime robustness categories if tie	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>MATRIX</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Strengthen and reinforce</b>	<b>Conserve and strengthen</b>	<b>Safeguard and manage</b>
<b>Condition</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Improve and reinforce</b>	<b>Improve and conserve</b>	<b>Conserve and restore</b>
	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Reconstruct</b>	<b>Improve and restore</b>	<b>Restore condition to maintain character</b>
		<b>Weak</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Strong</b>
		<b>Strength of Character</b>		

### Landscape Strategy = Improve and Conserve

#### Sensitivity

Ecological – Mainly High with some Very Low

Cultural – Mainly Moderate with some Low

Visual – Mainly Low with some Moderate

Tranquillity – Mainly Moderate with some Very Low

## **Guidelines**

### **Countryside Management**

#### **Generally**

- Encourage progressive conversion of conifer plantations within existing woodlands to indigenous native broadleaved tree and shrub species and local provenance stock
- Protect and seek to extend the network of medium to large scale woodlands in the arable landscape providing enhanced linkage of ancient woodland habitats utilizing ancient hedge and field boundaries to locate the most appropriate location for wood restoration and expansion. New woods should also frame important views and emphasise landform patterns
- Manage existing broadleaved woodland to maximise diversity and continuity through a range of measures including high forest, coppice, coppice with standards and wood pasture
- Encourage the protection and restoration of boundary hedges by coppicing, laying and gapping up to improve the network of linkages between habitats
- Promote the introduction of new hedges following either roads, rights of way, historic boundaries and/or routes that visually emphasise the character of the landscape
- Encourage the planting of individual hedgerow trees to provide replacement for mature and over mature stock
- Promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention / enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds
- Encourage the provision of uncropped or grass field margins to link areas of wildlife importance and /or existing and proposed rights of way
- Identify locations on more marginal arable land where reversion from arable to species rich grassland can be encouraged particularly where adjacent to similar existing habitats
- Promote the continued use of the area for quiet informal recreation
- Support initiatives by agencies in Northamptonshire e.g. River Nene Regional Park for the enhanced management and access to Yardley Chase and Salcey Forest
- Extend interpretation of the historic heritage of the area including Roman remains and medieval hunting forests
- Identify and retain key viewpoints from slopes into adjacent landscapes and protect from the impact of adverse development on these views

#### **1 a Yardley Chase Fringe**

- Identify improved public access arrangements by foot and horse into Yardley Chase to enable enhanced links and circular routes through the area. Ensure the routes provide a range of experiences including vistas, viewpoints and enclosure.

### **1 b Hanslope Plateau**

- Develop a strategy to visually integrate Hanslope Park into the plateau landscape. To include proposals for the conservation and restoration of the historic parkland in conjunction with and related to additional screening of the modern buildings and boundary features
- Develop a strategy to visually integrate the M1 into the landscape through additional woodland planting offsite and the management of the onsite highway planting
- Retain the identity of the villages and their vernacular character. Promote sympathetic improvement to village entrances and fringes screening local eyesores and framing local landmarks e.g. churches

### **Guidelines in relation to development**

- Generally restrict built development in the area retaining the primary use for agriculture and informal recreational
- Protect the historic setting and structure of the villages including views to the villages and the retained open spaces within them
- Where built development or restoration of buildings is considered appropriate indigenous materials should be used to maintain and enhance the character of both existing villages and individual farms and properties
- Prevent development that could detract from local landmarks including village churches
- Protect the plateau from development that would impinge on or disrupt the existing wooded skyline as seen from within or outside the area