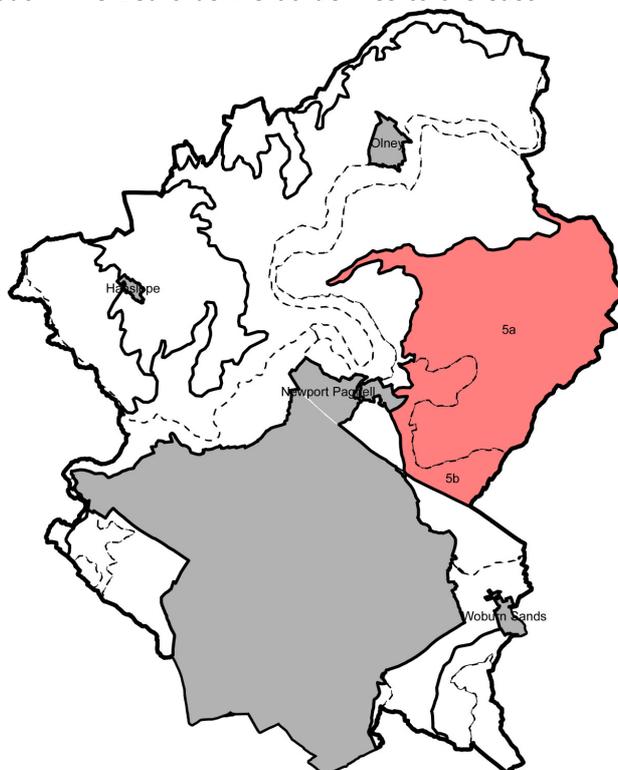


5. Chicheley/Crawley Claylands

Summary Page

Location

The area occupies the undulating claylands between the Ouse valley to the north and west and the M1 to the south. The Bedfordshire border lies to the east.



Character Summary

The area comprises two sub areas as follows:

- a) Undulating Clay Plateau – a relatively isolated area of largely open arable landscapes with a number of compact villages with good hedgerow patterns and smaller areas of pasture small
- b) Plateau Fringes – an open arable landscape with strong links to the clay plateau and containing parts of the main estates and farms but where settlement is more limited to individual farms.

Key Characteristics

Chicheley /Crawley Undulating Clay Plateau

- Undulating elevated claylands
- Long distance and panoramic views from a number of locations including towards Milton Keynes, Newport Pagnell and the Greensand Ridge
- Areas of large scale field amalgamations locally create a remote empty feel
- Small scale traditional villages located on higher ground
- Some small scale 'Ends'
- Ancient fields patterns with mixed species hedges
- Scattered pattern of woodlands locally prominent
- Pastoral land use frequent closer to settlements
- Localised tributary valleys provide some enclosure and intimacy

Chicheley /Crawley Plateau Fringes

- Typically large scale arable fields with clipped hedges and limited tree cover

Distinctive features

Chicheley /Crawley Undulating Clay plateau

- Chicheley Hall and dovecote
- Towered village Churches, inc Moulsoe, Astwood, Hardmead and Chicheley
- HV power cables prominent on plateau landform

Chicheley /Crawley Plateau Fringes

- Sand and gravel workings

Assessment

Geology and Soils

The majority of this clay plateau is formed over an underlying chalky till. The soils over this geology are generally slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils of the Hanslope Association. Pockets of land also occur that are based on a Jurassic or Cretaceous Clay geology. These are usually in the vicinity of rivers or streams and the soils also tend to be calcareous clayey soils, although there may also be a loam or silt content in the clayey soil (Evesham 2 Association). At the southern edge of the area, close to the River Ouzel, the underlying geology becomes river alluvium with stoneless clay soils (Fladbury 1 Association) or river terrace drift with fine loamy soils that are sometimes over a layer of clay (Bishampton 2 Association).

Topography

The Chicheley/Crawley Claylands landscape character area is essentially a large undulating plateau, which slopes gently towards the west. The area is elevated above much of the surrounding landscape. There are a number of small watercourses flowing through the area and these have created shallow valleys, which make the undulation in the landscape more pronounced. There is also a narrow ridge of land that protrudes out from the north west of the area into the adjacent Ouse Valley character area, giving views across the valley. The plateau fringes run down to the edge of Milton Keynes and the M1.

Degree of Slope

The top of the plateau area has average slopes that vary between approximately 1 in 40 and 1 in 80. There are also more localised slopes that can attain 1 in 20 around some of the brooks and streams that cross the plateau and on the slopes to the M1.

Altitude Range

The highest point within the Chicheley/Crawley Claylands occurs on the boundary with Bedfordshire, at Wharley End, close to Cranfield University. Here the altitude is 108m AOD. The plateau falls towards the River Ouse and reaches 68m AOD at the edge of the undulating plateau west of North Crawley and then falls down to the 60m contour along the A509 and the M1.

Hydrology

Chicheley Brook is the main watercourse within this area, and is a tributary of the River Ouse. It flows across the county boundary from Cranfield before meandering around the edge of North Crawley and Chicheley. The brook eventually reaches the Ouse after flowing through the adjacent Clayland Fringes and Ouse Valley character areas. There are also a number of smaller streams and brooks that flow into the Chicheley Brook, most of which rise up from the top of the plateau and run the short distance into the Brook off the west facing Plateau Fringe. Improved drainage of agricultural land has led to a more pronounced seasonal variation in the flow of water in the ditches and streams.

Land cover and land use

The majority of the landscape is under arable cropping producing a combination of wheat barley and oil seed rape with some beans. There are some areas of grazing mainly sheep. There is one remaining dairy farmer at Lodge Farm North Crawley that supplies a local source of milk. There are a few large woods and a number of smaller woods and copses however there is generally limited connectivity between the woodlands.

Biodiversity

The loss of elm trees in the 1970's and 1980's had a major impact on the local landscape since elm was by far in a way the most significant hedgerow tree. Subsequent replanting has taken place including distinctive plantations of hybrid poplars seen from the A422 and areas of cricket bat willow within the Chicheley estate but overall replacement in the character area have been at a modest scale. In any event the loss of substantial numbers of 200 years old

elms will take many years to offset. There is a good population of farm birds in the area. In the areas of earlier enclosure the hedgerows are generally more species rich.

Historical and Cultural significance

The area contains a number of moated sites on the heavy clays some of which are still occupied e.g. Moat Farm at North Crawley but most are abandoned. The area contains three major estates and landowners namely; Chicheley Estate, North Crawley and Moulsoe.

Field Pattern

The various dates of enclosure on the estates have created a contrasting landscape pattern. Chicheley was one of the first villages to be enclosed in 17th century and as a result the field boundaries are more organic and curved. In contrast at North Crawley parish was a later enclosure in the 18th century and a more geometric pattern of field boundaries was created. Since 1950 there has been a considerable number of 20th century prairie fields created e.g. around Hardmead hamlet and on a number of the west facing slopes on the Plateau Fringes sub area.

This has led to a locally degraded landscape of with extensive fields, intermittent hedges and wide distant views to all directions. There are some remnant areas of ridge and furrow including some within woodland sites e.g. Newfield Spinney.

Transport Pattern

The busy A422 and A509 pass through the area. Otherwise the road network consists of a number of minor lanes which are mainly quiet however those leading to Cranfield are locally busy at peak hours.

Settlement and Built form

There are few villages in the area the most central and largest being North Crawley. Others include Chicheley, Moulsoe and Astwood and in addition there are a few 'Ends' a settlement pattern more typical of north Bedfordshire. There is limited 20th century development in the area. The location on the claylands means that the local vernacular comprises brick and timber frame rather than the limestone of the Ouse Valley and there are number of fine buildings in the villages. The largest House is Chicheley Hall was built in 1720-25 by Francis Smith of Warwick. In accordance with his practice Smith created brickworks nearby the site of the new house at Brickyard Cottage. The bricks were manufactured by local labour and after completion of the house further bricks were then fired for use in local properties. The gardens (Grade II*) are in an early 18th formal style and include a geometric three side canal possibly based on former fishponds. The village church at Moulsoe is a prominent landmark on the elevated claylands.

Evaluation Page

Visual and Sensory perception

Away from the main roads the area is generally quiet, remote and peaceful with few visual detractors. This is an empty landscape with limited settlement and urban influences. Exceptions are the increasing intermittent noise from jets, light aircraft and helicopters using Cranfield airfield while visually the HV overhead power lines cross the area to the east close to Bedfordshire create visual impact. From the western edge of the plateau and on the Plateau Fringes slopes the M1 creates persistent visual and audible intrusion. There are extensive views from the edge of the plateau including to the north over the Ouse Valley and to the west over Milton Keynes and the south to the wooded Greensand Ridge

Recreational Opportunities

There is generally a good network of rights of way although they are more limited around Astwood. The area is used by equestrians, walkers and cyclist however the heavy clays restrict access in the winter months.

Community Views

Time depth perspective

Evaluation Matrix

5a Chicheley/Crawley Claylands Undulating Clay Plateau

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG	
Impact of landform*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/Prominent	
Impact of landcover*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/ Prominent	
Historic pattern*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/Prominent	
Visibility from outside	Widely visible	Locally visible	Concealed	
Sense of enclosure	Open/exposed	Partial	Contained/confined	
Tranquillity	Discordant	Moderate	Tranquil	
Distinctiveness/rarity	Frequent	Unusual	Unique/rare	
Totals * Prime condition categories if tie	0	5	2	
CONDITION	POOR	MODERATE	GOOD	
Landcover Change	Widespread	Localised	Insignificant	
Age Structure of Tree Cover*	Overmature	Mature/Young	Mixed	
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival*	Relic	Scattered	Widespread/Linked	
Management of semi-natural habitats	Poor	Not obvious	Good	
Survival of cultural pattern (fields and hedges)	Declining/Relic	Interrupted	Intact	
Impact of built development*	High	Moderate	Low	
Visual unity	Incoherent	Coherent	Unified	
Totals * Prime robustness categories if tie	0	5	2	
MATRIX	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore	
Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character	
Condition	Weak	Moderate	Strong	
	Strength of Character			

Landscape Strategy = Improve and Conserve

Sensitivity

Ecological – Mainly Low with some Moderate

Cultural – Mainly Moderate with some High

Visual – Moderate

Tranquillity – Mainly High with some Very High

5b Chicheley/Crawley Claylands Plateau Fringes

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 Open/exposed Discordant Frequent	Apparent Apparent Apparent Locally visible Partial Moderate Unusual	Dominant/Prominent Dominant/ Prominent Dominant/Prominent Concealed Contained/confined Tranquil Unique/rare
Totals * Prime condition categories if tie	4	2	1
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	Localised Mature/Young Scattered Not obvious Interrupted Moderate Coherent	Insignificant Mixed Widespread/Linked Good Intact Low Unified
Totals * Prime robustness categories if tie	1	6	0
MATRIX			
	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen
	Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve
	Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore
Condition			
		Weak	Strong
		Strength of Character	

Landscape Strategy = Improve and Conserve

Sensitivity

Ecological – Very Low

Cultural – Moderate

Visual – Low

Tranquillity – Very Low

Guidelines

Generally

Countryside Management

- Promote the extended use of the area for informal recreation
- Promote indigenous plant species and use of local provenance wherever possible
- Ensure right of way signage is clear but appropriate to the location using local materials where possible
- Develop a strategy to visually integrate the M1 into the landscape through additional offsite woodland planting and the management of the onsite highway planting
- Encourage progressive conversion of conifer plantations within existing woodlands to indigenous native broadleaved tree and shrub species and local provenance stock
- Promote the creation of new woodland blocks and copses throughout the area to strengthen the character of the area providing visual relief from extensive arable fields and providing additional screening of Cranfield and Milton Keynes
- Promote hedgerow restoration and improvements throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links between existing and proposed woodland
- Encourage appropriate management of all drainage ditches to improve wildlife value, by improving water quality and establishing grass 'verges'
- Encourage the provision of uncropped or grass field margins to link areas of wildlife importance and /or existing and proposed rights of way
- Encourage progressive removal of conifer hedgerows and shelter belts and where appropriate and /or necessary for screening replacement with native species
- Retain key views to local landmarks such as Moulsoe church

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 e.g. Moulsoe
- Where mineral extraction is proven to be essential restoration to benefit biodiversity targets appropriate to the character area.