

Waverley Borough Council

Local Landscape Designation Review



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AMEC Environment & Infrastructure UK Limited

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Executive Summary

Purpose of this Report

This report has been produced for the purpose of producing a high level strategic review of the non statutory landscape designations in the Waverley Borough Council (WBC) area. This follows the landscape capacity and sensitivity studies previously undertaken for the settlements of Cranleigh, Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere and Hindhead, Milford, Elstead, Witley, Chiddingfold and Bramley, and uses the site information gathered for these reports as a basis for the report.

WBC asked for a review on whether the local landscape designations they identified in Rev03 of their brief still served a purpose; *“There are a number of local landscape designations within the Local Plan 2002. Some information is set out below explaining why they were designated. Do you agree that they still serve a function?”*

The report has looked at these designations and evaluated at a high level whether they still serve a purpose, but was not briefed to consider detailed boundary changes.

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1. Background, Study Remit and Approach

1.1 Background and Study Remit

This Report has been produced as part of the Local Plan evidence base for Waverley Borough Council (WBC) to review the various local landscape designations associated with some of the settlements reviewed in Part 1 and 2 of the landscape study undertaken for WBC.

The study has been undertaken as a high level strategic review of non statutory landscape designation purposes (this document) and should be read in conjunction with the Part 1 and 2 reports looking at capacity and landscape sensitivity. The Review offers a professional, objective judgement on the role of non statutory designations in Waverley Borough as measured against the purposes set out in the Local Plans.

1.1.1 Overall Approach to Strategic Review

Overall, and in light of the above, the following characteristics define the study:

- Separation of strategic and local reviews, with this report considering the strategic purposes of Landscape Designations against purposes set out in the Waverley Local Plan, with a detailed site assessment as separate studies which combine other aspects of the evidence base, notably landscape character and sensitivity to change;
- Definition of terms found within the designations to help guide the review process and form the basis for criteria-led appraisal against the purposes of the various designations; and
- Clear boundary definition using the criteria defined in the client brief.

2. Policy Context

2.1 National Policy

2.1.1 National Planning Policy Framework

Policy towards local designations and landscape is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹ which states that:

58. Local and neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Such policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics.

Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:

- *respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;*

1. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

109. The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;*

115. Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important

- *planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss; and*

Local Plans

*156. Local planning authorities should set out the **strategic priorities** for the area in the Local Plan. This should include strategic policies to deliver:*

- *climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape.*

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

2.2 Local Landscape Designations in Waverley Borough

2.2.1 Local Context and Policy

As a context for consideration of local landscape designations across the Borough, the following profile is taken from the Spatial Portrait section of the withdrawn Core Strategy Pre-Submission (August 2012) (paragraphs 2.11-2.12):

“Approximately 92% of the Borough is rural; made up from 61% (21,000 hectares) within the Metropolitan Green Belt and 31% (10,624 hectares) designated as Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. 80% of the countryside is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and/or an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV).

There are also significant ecological assets within and close to the Borough, and numerous areas which have one or more local, national or international policies to protect them. These include Special Areas of Conservation, a Ramsar Site, National and Local Nature reserves, Sites of Nature Conservation Importance. Waverley contains all or part of some 15 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). There are also three Special Protection Areas designated under the European Birds Directive as being of European importance for its populations of wild birds; Thursley, Hankley and Frensham Commons (also known as Wealden Heaths Phase I), part of Wealden Heaths Phase II and a small part of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. Only 80 hectares of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA lies within Waverley, to the north of Farnham.

Waverley’s landscape has a distinctive wooded character, at 31% of it’s (sic) total area. 11.5% of this woodland is classified as Ancient Woodland, and this is the highest amount of this type in Surrey. Rivers flowing through the Borough include the River Wey (Alton to Farnham reach, Liphook to Tilford reach, Tilford to Godalming reach) and Cranleigh Water.”

As noted above, there are significant areas of the Borough which are designated as AONB, have various local landscape designations applied (Area of Great Landscape Value, Area of Historic Landscape Value and Areas of Strategic Visual Importance) and are identified as open countryside. These are separate from, but related to, Green Belt designation, in so far as they reflect landscape character which can be a key determinant of openness, and have been used to reinforce the separation of urban areas. The NPPF makes no mention of their use in local policy, preferring a generic approach to policy which recognises “*the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it*” (paragraph 17).

The report is produced at a time when there is a landscape character assessment of Surrey being currently undertaken, and a review of the Surrey Hills AONB boundaries.

The report covers 4 local designations in the Waverley Borough, associated with the settlements covered in the Parts 1 and 2 of the Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity study. Their key points are covered in the tables in section 3, with the figures in Appendix A, but the designations considered are:

2.2.2 Areas of Strategic Visual Importance

This is a local designation, and was developed during the Local Plan Brief of 1981 and Local Plan 1984. The main issues and values the designation seeks to address are:

- Where land is vulnerable to development pressure
- Protection is essential due to strategic visual importance
- Strong environmental reasons
- Preservation of the character of the locality
- Preventing coalescence

The areas identified for this protection in this report cover Cranleigh, Farnham, Godalming, and Haslemere.

2.2.3 Areas of Historic Landscape Value

For this study there were two areas that were requested by WBC to be accessed, both in the Farnham area:

- Farnham Park
- Frensham Common

2.2.4 Farnham Aldershot Strategic Gap

This was introduced in the 1990 Local Plan and was to promote a 'Green Wedge' between Farnham and Aldershot to halt coalescence between the settlements.

2.2.5 Godalming Hillsides

This was developed in the 1984 Plan to recognise the unique topography of the wooded hillsides of Godalming.

3. Assessment Methodology

3.1 Assessment Methodology

3.1.1 Overview

A summary of the stages in the study methodology is as follows:

- A mapping exercise to identify key constraints;
- Identification of initial designation segments using OS maps, aerial photos and site visits, with strong boundaries being used to define boundaries of the segments;
- Assessment of the contribution of each segment against the purposes laid out in the designations;
- Record the results of the assessment using a table to identify designation and area of the Borough; and
- Summary of the results of the above through identifying the areas within the relevant designations, and analysis of whether they fulfil the purpose of the designation.

3.2 Assessment Task

3.2.1 Analysis

The results of this exercise are recorded in a matrix which sets out comments on how each area meets or does not meet the relevant designation purposes. This was briefed as a high level assessment, based on the site survey and work undertaken in the capacity and sensitivity studies of the settlements, and was not a detailed assessment of every part of the designation.

The tables below consider each designation and the areas they cover or are adjacent to as appropriate. They give a brief description of the area and its characteristics, and then assess whether the designation is fulfilling its remit as per the goals set out in the local plans.

Table 3.1 Areas of Strategic Visual Importance (ASVI)

Designation	Definition of Purpose	Area	Definition of Area and Analysis
Areas of Strategic Visual Importance	<p>"Local Plan Brief 1981 stated that in addition to the 'broad areas of search' identified in the SSP, there were other areas in the District which could be vulnerable to pressure from development but where it was essential , because of their strategic visual importance or for strong environmental reasons that they should be preserved. They may or may not be GB or AONB or AGLV."²</p> <p>"They are areas of predominantly open land, usually adjacent to urban areas and perhaps relatively small, whose importance lies in the crucial role they play in preserving the character of the locality. The District Plan set out to identify such areas with policies for protection."³</p> <p>First defined in the 1984 Local Plan. The plan refers to their 'crucial role in establishing the character of a locality and preventing the coalescence of developed areas'.</p> <p>As well as the areas of landscape quality, there are other areas which need protection because of the crucial role they play in preventing the coalescence of settlements or because they are an area of open land that penetrates into the urban area like a green "lung". They are strategic areas because of the part they play in retaining the character of Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere and Cranleigh. In some areas, the urban fringe is vulnerable to deterioration and in a number of instances neglected areas of land can appear degraded. The ASVI policy highlights the importance of these fringe areas and the need to protect them.</p>	Cranleigh Area1	<p>This ASVI is either side of the Downs Link path in Cranleigh, covering a small park and playing fields to the south of Cranleigh Leisure Centre.</p> <p>The fields provide open land but as playing fields they do not preserve character, as they are more obviously man made than the rural land to the west.</p>

² From Waverley Council Consultant Brief

³ Source data: Waverley District Plan Local Plan Brief and Topic Papers, February 1981

Table 3.1 (continued) ASVI

Designation	Definition of Purpose	Area	Definition of Area and Analysis
		Farnham Area 1, Sewage Treatment Works and land adjacent to the A31	<p>This is north east of the A325 and the industrial estate: This covers an area of land currently utilised as a sewage treatment works, with tree cover to the perimeter, and some open land between the works and the industrial estate and Water Lane to the south.</p> <p>Although there is some green space, it does not completely fulfil criteria in the terms that it is not true open space with the structures of the sewage works and its infrastructure. The trees to its boundaries do provide a green break between the industrial estate and other developed areas, and therefore aid towards stopping coalescence of the developed areas.</p> <p>The area to the south of the A31 and roundabout is lined with trees and comprises agricultural fields. This is important in keeping a green character to the roads in this area, and stopping coalescence between Farnham and the bypass. This complies with the ASVI policy.</p>
		Farnham Area 2, between Castle Hill and Three Stiles Road	An open area currently used for fields, providing open green space to the northern area of the town. It fulfils criteria, apart from the far western part and southern parts, which are bordered by housing.
		Farnham Area 3 Land between West Street and the A31	<p>The area is a open land with a mix of uses including agriculture, a cemetery and allotments to the north of the A31, and to the south of the road it is a mix of fields adjoining the River Wey.</p> <p>It fulfils the criteria for the designation, in that it is a setting for Farnham and its historic core, and the suburbs to the south.</p> <p>It is helping to prevent coalescence between the A31 and residential area to the west of the town.</p>
		Farnham Area 4 Land between Rowledge and Wrecclesham	<p>The area is south of the A325, stretching across Manley Bridge Road and to the western edge of the residential area. The land use is farming, with small to medium fields, bounded by hedges and trees, with Manley Bridge Road running through the sector.</p> <p>The area complies with the designation: Keeping the character of the rural edge to Farnham Stops Wrecclesham and Rowledge coalescing.</p>

Table 3.1 (continued) ASVI

Designation	Definition of Purpose	Area	Definition of Area and Analysis
		Godalming Area 1 The Lammas Lands and land at the Burys	<p>This area is north and south of the River Wey and comprises meadow land which regularly floods, and formal recreational land. Its appearance is of classic low lying riparian type landscape, with trees and lush green fields, with limited crossing points across it.</p> <p>The area complies with the designation:</p> <p>The area strengthens the landscape character of the river valley</p> <p>The area provides a green gap between the main part of Godalming and the northern part of the town.</p>
		Godalming Area 2 Land west of Ockford Road	<p>This land is either side of the railway to the south of the station, with a section between the housing on the A3100 Ockford Road and to the west of the railway, covering the route of the River Ock, and a small section north-west of the railway, between the line and a residential road called the Horseshoe. The ASVI in this section is covered with dense mixed woodland, some of which is Ancient Semi Natural woodland.. The area complies in terms of preventing coalescence and contributes to the wooded character of Godalming.</p>
		Haslemere Area 1 Land between Weydown Road and Bunch Lane	<p>This ASVI is to the north of the town, to the west of the residential area on Weydown Road and Bunch Lane. The area is steep and densely planted with a mix of mature woodland trees, including some Ancient Semi Natural woodland to the back of the residential properties which mainly sit within large plots, i.e. are low density in nature. There is low visibility into the area, but the trees do preserve the character of the area with mixed woodland within the steep valleys .It is not necessarily preventing coalescence, as there is already scattered development in the area but keeps the character.</p>
		Haslemere Area 2 Land south of Holy Cross Hospital	<p>This area is between Buffbeards Lane and Vicarage Lane, south of Holy Cross specialist hospital, bordered by Hindhead Road in the south. The area is densely clothed in deciduous trees. It does not comply with the requisites of ASVI, namely:</p> <p>The area is among a more developed part of Haslemere/Shottermill with housing, the hospital, and busy road surrounding it.</p> <p>It is not stopping coalescence as the area is already part of the developed suburb of Shottermill.</p>

Table 3.2 Area of Historic Landscape Value (AHLV)

Designation	Definition of Purpose	Area	Definition of Area and Analysis
Areas of Historic Landscape Value	<p>There are two AHLVs – Farnham Park and Frensham Common.</p> <p>Farnham Park is owned by Waverley Borough Council. It is also an SNCI (Policy C10) and an Historic Park and Garden (Policy HE9).</p> <p>Frensham Common lies with the Green Belt, AONB and is partly within Wealden Heaths SPA.⁴</p>	Farnham Park	<p>Farnham Park is a semi wild medieval deer park to the north of Farnham, covering around 130 hectares.</p> <p>It has an impressive tree avenue over 1km long and is managed partly for its wildlife and partly for its amenity value.</p> <p>Its historic nature and current condition fits the designation.</p>
		Frensham Common	<p>Frensham Common covers roughly 400 hectares of attractive countryside, lying midway between Farnham and Hindhead on either side of the A287.</p> <p>The Common is made up of a large area of heathland, together with some coniferous and mixed woodland, and two large ponds, known as Frensham Great and Little Ponds, which were created in the Middle Ages to provide fish (especially carp) for the Bishop of Winchester's estate.</p> <p>It historic value as a common and past uses comply with the AHLV.</p>

⁴ From Waverley Council Consultant Brief

Table 3.3 Strategic Gap

Designation	Definition of Purpose	Area	Definition of Area and Analysis
Farnham Aldershot Strategic Gap	<p>The Gap was introduced in the 1990 Local Plan, allowing the preservation of the character of the immediate locality and Farnham, and forming a 'vital green wedge' between Farnham and Aldershot. It was an area subject to pressure arising from mineral working and from the Runfold diversion which was under construction.</p> <p>The 1993 Local Plan included such a policy to protect and improve the landscape of what was then to be called the Farnham/Aldershot Important Open Gap. In the 1994 <i>Surrey Structure Plan</i> there was a new policy to protect and enhance the Blackwater Valley Strategic Gap. This County policy gave an opportunity to apply a much stronger strategic policy to the Farnham/Aldershot area. The County Council interpretation of the Gap was slightly different as it did not include the area south of the A31, which is shown in the Local Plan. This southern area was regarded by the Borough Council as part of the Gap because visually it is an integral part of the open landscape between the two towns of Farnham and Aldershot.</p> <p>The value of this policy is such that it specifically identified an area which was vulnerable to pressure for redevelopment but which has the important role of preventing the coalescence of Aldershot and Farnham.⁵ The area continues to be protected as a Strategic Gap in the 2002 Local Plan.</p>	Farnham	<p>The northern area complies with the Gap aspirations, with the wooded heathland, and it providing a strong green undeveloped wedge between Farnham and Aldershot.</p> <p>The area to the east around Badshot Lea is not so successful, as this is already of mixed character, comprising grazed fields, equestrian activities, road infrastructure, and residential development. Although comprising some pleasant open fields in the western part of the area, it feels more urban with visibility to the developed edges, and residential development within. To the east the ex mineral workings due to their scale and the planting around them provide a stronger visual 'gap' landscape to the area.</p>

⁵ From Waverley Council Consultant Brief

Table 3.4 Godalming Hillsides

Designation	Definition of Purpose	Area	Definition of Area and Analysis
Godalming Hillsides	<p>Godalming's historic core lies in the Wey valley and it is surrounded by steep wooded hillsides.</p> <p>The Frith Hill area north of Godalming was identified in the 1984 Local Plan and the current extent was agreed in the 1993 Local Plan.</p> <p>The policy was challenged at Examination but the Inspector concluded "that the topography and character of Godalming Hillsides is sufficiently unique and valuable that a separate policy is justified despite the presence of other controls."⁶</p>	Godalming	<p>The policy is strongly supported by the areas identified as Godalming Hillsides, with them exhibiting mostly wooded hillsides, either adjacent to the road, or in some instances behind housing. This contributes to Godalming's landscape character, preserving where possible the original wooded hillsides that helps give a unique landscape character to the town.</p>

⁶ From Waverley Council Consultant Brief

4. Assessment Results

4.1 Overview of Key Results

The results of the assessment of the designations reflect the interaction and evolution of the Borough's settlement pattern and landscape character. Thus conclusions on the protection of the land from changing the local character, sprawl and encroachment into the countryside reflect how development has been managed and the role of the designations in maintaining this pattern and character.

The heavily wooded landscape character of the Borough exerts a considerable influence over the perception of the openness of the landscape. Across substantial areas of the Borough, views are restricted to the short and middle distance creating a strong sense of enclosure and rural character, even within the vicinity of relatively (for this Borough) urbanised areas. The network of villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings which lend the Borough character, reflect a long history of settlement for farming and forestry, and more recently modest residential development. Aside from the main settlements, a sense of urbanisation is most keenly felt in the vicinity of the road corridors (principally the A3, A286, A283, A281 and A287) where in some locations ribbon development has occurred, although extensive woodland cover which limits views often masks this impact.

The various landscape designations have contributed to the protection of the settlement pattern across the Borough, maintaining the separation between the four main settlements and the surrounding network of villages and hamlets.

4.1.1 Areas of Strategic Visual Importance

Areas Making a Significant Contribution to ASVI Purpose

Farnham 3 – this makes a good contribution to the ASVI with its setting properties and position to reduce coalescence.

Farnham 4 – This keeps the rural edge character for the town.

Godalming Area 1 – This makes a strong contribution to the ASVI with its riparian character and position of a green gap.

Areas Making a Contribution to ASVI Purposes

Cranleigh Area 1 – The sports fields are an open green space, on the edge of a rural open space, but do not fully comply with the preserving the character aspect of the ASVI.

Farnham Area 1 – This makes a contribution due to its open space and landscape character close to the sewage treatment works. The majority of the open area in the southern part is making a contribution especially in the Wey river valley, but this reduces in the west with the residential edge of Compton.

Farnham Area 2- This makes a contribution with the landscape character of open fields to the north of the town.

Godalming Area 2 – The area complies with the ASVI with its wooded and rural character.

Haslemere Area 1 – Although the area contains some residential properties, with its wooded character including some Ancient Woodland, it preserves the character of the area and therefore makes a contribution to the ASVI.

Areas Making a Limited Contribution to ASVI Purpose

Haslemere Area 2 – Although a wooded area, it makes a limited contribution to the ASVI due to the developed nature of the area.

4.1.2 Area of Historic Landscape Value (AHLV)

Areas Making a Significant Contribution to AHLV Purpose

Both areas at Farnham and Frensham Common make a strong contribution with their historic background and their current landscape value to the areas they occupy.

4.1.3 Farnham Aldershot Strategic Gap (FASG)

Areas Making a Significant Contribution to the FASG Purpose

The area to the north (1) strongly complies with the purpose of the Gap designation, with its rural heathland landscape, and undeveloped character.

Areas Making a Limited Contribution to the FASG Purpose

The area around Badshot Lea to the east of Farnham is less strong as a landscape ‘Gap’, with development already existing, and therefore is more limited as successfully fulfilling the Gap requirements.

4.1.4 Godalming Hillsides

The wooded valley sides identified in Figure 6 strongly promote the unique landscape character of Godalming and this specific policy is very local but important for keeping this landscape as part of the townscape.

4.2 **Summary Assessment and Recommendations**

In light of the above analysis and that set out in the tables in Section 3 summarises the assessment of the areas within the various designations. There are also recommendations as to whether boundary review might be merited in the short or longer term, depending on development requirements. The recommendations need to be considered in the context of the wider evidence base, notably environmental and development needs, and should not be taken in isolation.

5. Summary and Conclusions

5.1.1 Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

A large proportion of the landscape designations in Waverley are assessed as making a contribution or a significant contribution to their purposes. The designations in some of the settlements for specific landscape character requirements are performing their function in keeping local character at the heart of the planning assessment process. Future landscape character studies should support this with the result that character continues to be a consideration in the process.

There are a limited number of areas which could be marginal in terms of fulfilling the purpose of the various designations and could be considered for removal, to keep the strength of the designations for the remaining areas.

Further study in more detail may be required to ascertain any detailed boundary changes.

Appendix A













