



Cuddington Neighbourhood Plan

2017 to 2033

PRE-SUBMISSION REGULATION 14

CONSULTATION DRAFT October 2020

APPENDIX C: LANDSCAPE REPORT



CUDDINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

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Section 1: INTRODUCTION

The village and its environment are described in the following reports:

- Appendix A: General Evidence base
- Appendix B: Cuddington Neighbourhood Plan Local Green Spaces Report
- Appendix C: Cuddington Neighbourhood Plan Landscape Report
- Appendix D: Cuddington Neighbourhood Plan Important Local Views
- Appendix E: Cuddington Neighbourhood Plan Built Environment Report

Appendix C describes the landscape surrounding the village and the relevant planning context.

Section 2. THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE

The landscape setting of Cuddington is largely defined by its topography, on the southern ridge of the Thames valley, and the predominantly agricultural land use.

2.1 Topography

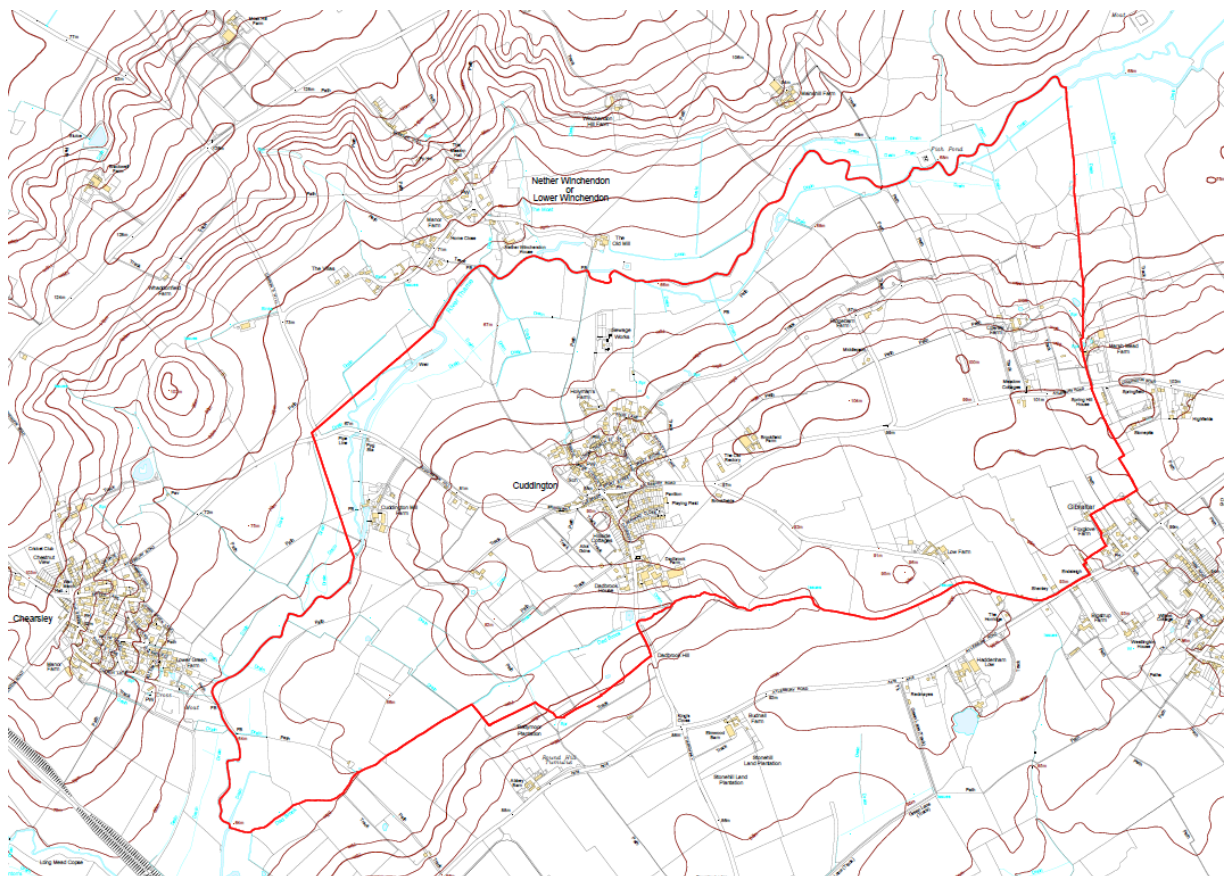


Fig 1 Topography

The centre of the village is at 90m AOD and the ground slopes northwards down to the River Thames at 67m AOD before rising to the ridgeline above Nether Winchendon at 125m AOD. To the south the land falls to the Dadbrook at 75m AOD before rising up to the A418 Aylesbury Road at 90m AOD.

The location on the ridge provides attractive views over the valleys and adds interest to the local walks around the village.

2.2 Land use



Fig 2 Land use

The village sits in an agricultural landscape with a mixture of arable and pasture fields divided by hedgerows and woodlands.

2.3 Public rights of way

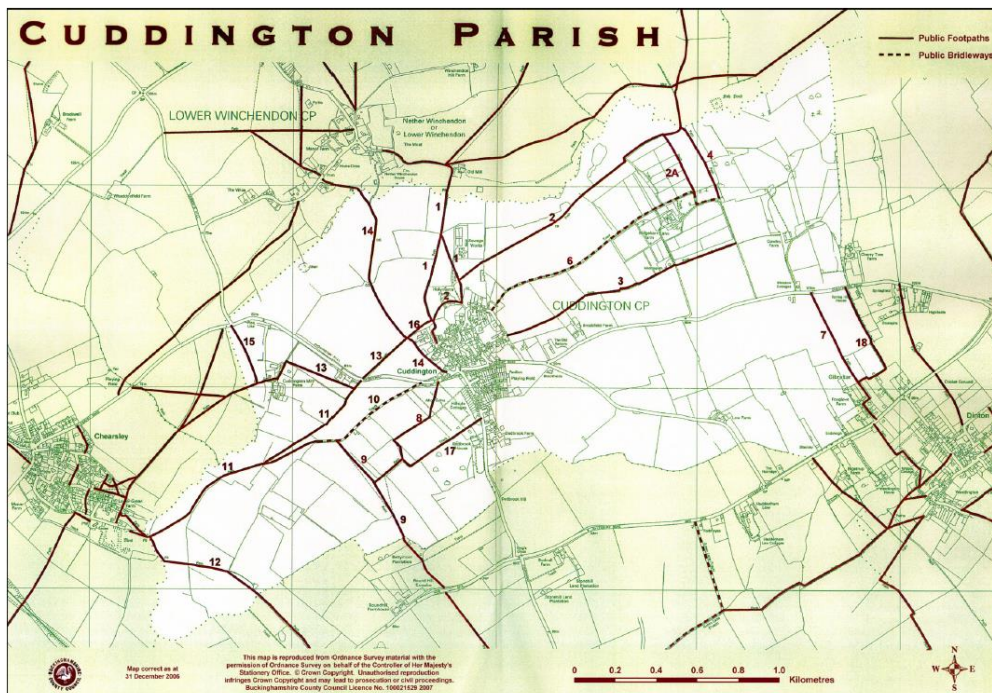


Fig 3 Footpath map

The local network of footpaths and bridleways creates a popular series of circular walks between the villages of Cuddington, Nether Winchendon and Chearsley with links to Stone and Haddenham to the west and south. The principal paths lie to the north and west of the parish.

2.3 Landscape designations: Brill – Winchendon Hills Area of Attractive Landscape (AAL)

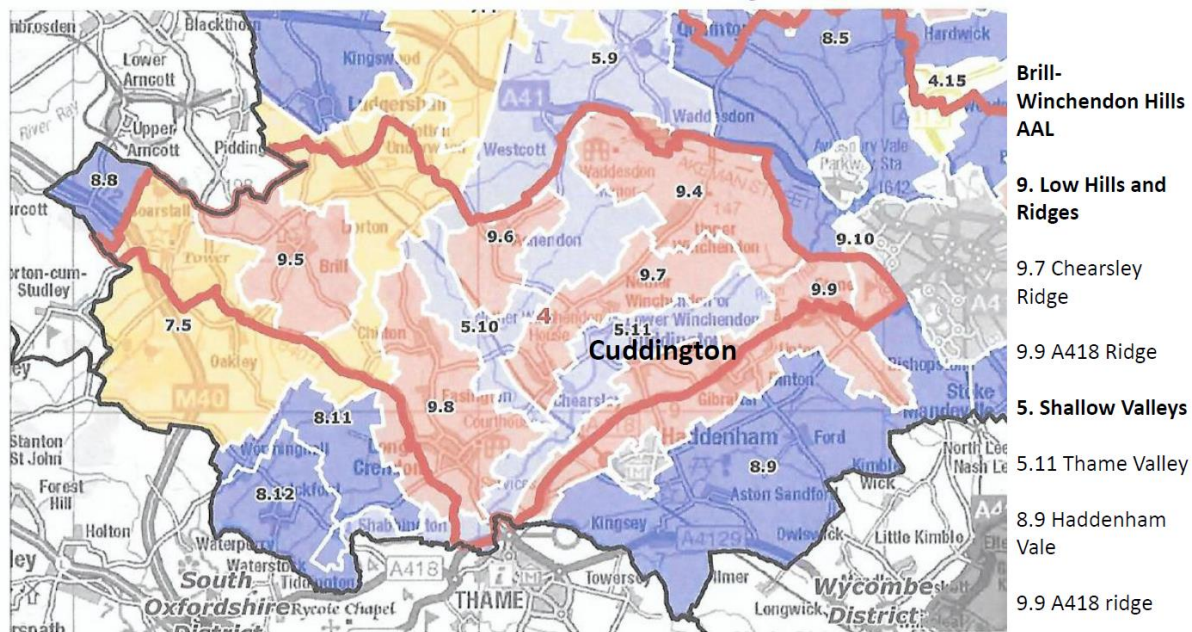


Fig 4 Boundary of the Brill-Winchendon Hills AAL and landscape character areas

The village of Cuddington sits in the Brill-Winchendon Hills section of the Buckinghamshire countryside which was designated as a special Area of Attractive Landscape (AAL) by Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) in 1979. In their report, BCC described AALs as:

“An Area of Attractive Landscape (AAL) is a locally defined area under the 1971 Town and Country Planning Act which, whilst not extensive enough or of such outstanding natural beauty as to merit national recognition under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the countryside Act, is of sufficient county-wide value as to justify the application of the same planning restrictions on development as apply to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Beauty in the county structure plan.”

This description of the Brill-Winchendon Hills region as an AAL was continued thereafter by successive local plans, including the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan 2004. In 2008, AVDC followed up by a detailed Landscape Character Assessment report, which has become the primary evidence base for dividing the district landscape (beyond towns and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) into character areas. The assessment sets out landscape conservation guidelines for each landscape character area. In alignment with the NPPF, all the landscape in the district is considered to have innate ‘value’ but the AALs were assessed as being of the greatest significance followed by the Local Landscape Areas (LLAs).

More recently, AVDC commissioned a study by Land Use Consultants (LUC) who carried out a criteria-based assessment of all AALs and LLAs, applying a nationally-accepted methodology to what influences landscape value. This new evidence base, 'defining the special qualities of local landscape designations in Aylesbury Vale District' was published as a final report following stakeholder engagement in August 2015 and public engagement in October-December 2015. The study recommendations included the following comments about AALs:

'Most of the areas of attractive landscape (AALs) have stronger special qualities and are relatively higher in landscape value in comparison to the local landscape areas (LLAs), which are generally smaller scale locally valued features.....It may therefore be useful to retain the hierarchy of AALs and LLAs in order to distinguish the most valued landscapes from those that are not so greatly valued although still considered worthy of designation.'

In its report, LUC confirmed its view that the Brill-Winchendon Hill area should continue to be designated as an AAL, describing it as "a highly valued and coherent landscape" with "strong indicators of value in all criteria, many of which relate to very strongly significant scenic and perceptual landscape characteristics and features of particular natural and cultural value."

AVDC has accepted the recommendations of LUC and re-affirmed the AAL designations in its submitted VALP 2013-2033.

The landscape around Cuddington is consistent with the special qualities of the Brill-Winchendon AAL. For example, it contains: -

- *A distinctive, coherent and intact landscape of high scenic quality provided by open rural hills and undulations and a strong settlement pattern of small nucleated (compact) villages on hilltops and dispersed isolated farms.*
- *Landmark features, many of which are listed, relate to the landscape including church towers and the Brill windmill.*
- *Fine and exhilarating long distance and panoramic views across rural countryside from many vantage points at crests of inclines.*
- *Quiet and tranquil with a lack of intrusion from large development or major roads, and some remote areas. Sense of dominance of the landscape and seasonal colours of agricultural fields. Picturesque river valley landscape of the Thame.*
- *Number of Conservation Areas reflecting the historic value of a number of the attractive villages and listed historic buildings of natural materials which add great texture, richness, variety and interest to the landscape. The landscape provides a strong setting to the many villages and Conservation Areas.*
- *Strong ecological integrity across the landscape, with designated sites linked through areas of woodland and hedgerows.*

- Concentration of features of cultural historical value which provides a strong sense of history and sense of place, including a number of Scheduled Monuments. Notable preserved examples of earlier enclosed fields around Brill.
- Provides a backdrop and sense of enclosure to the Vale of Aylesbury to the north and the small valley of the Thame in the south of the area

2.4 Landscape Character Areas

Cuddington village sits at the junction of Landscape Character Area 5.11: Thame Valley and Landscape Character Area 9.9 : A418 Ridgeline – see Fig 4 below.

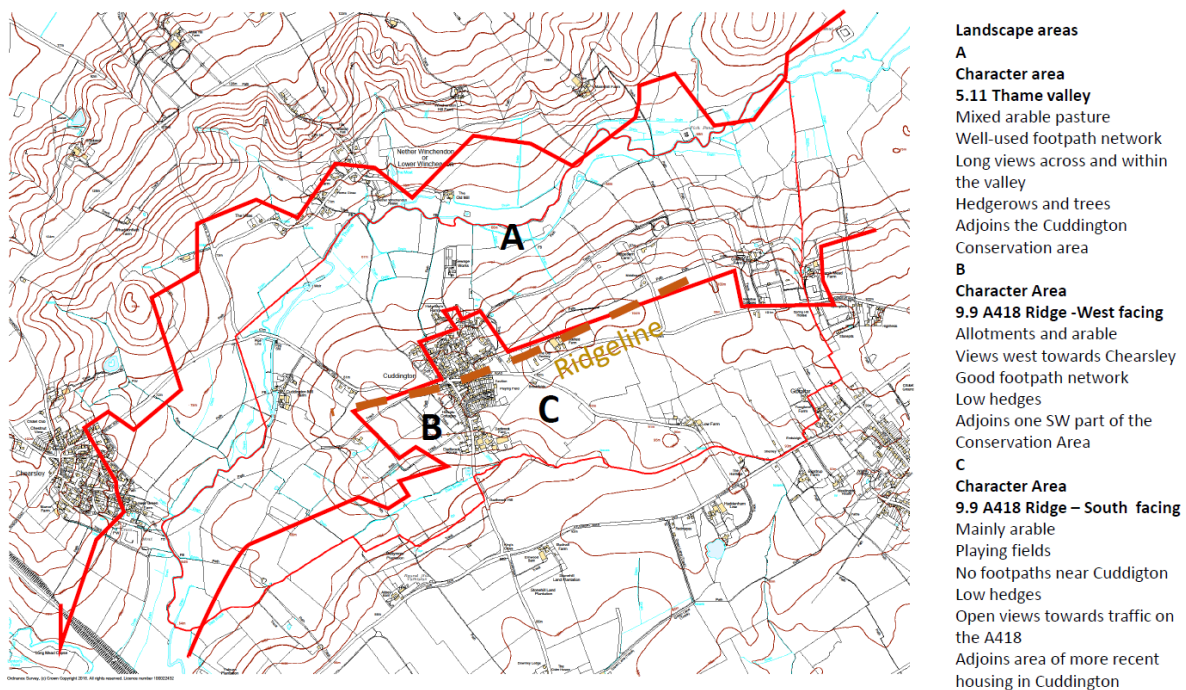


Fig 5 Landscape character areas

The A418 Ridge character area has been divided into two sub areas (B and C) reflecting the different land use in each and the greater density of footpaths to the west, between Cuddington and Chearsley.

The Thame Valley (Area A) is described in **the AVDC Landscape Character Assessment Report** May 2008 as follows:-

This is a small river valley with gently sloping ground where the landscape is contained by the surrounding higher ground of ridges. The landscape is predominantly pastoral with a scattering of small woodlands. There are some areas of prairie farming on the edges of the area but the historic pre 18th century landscape pattern has been retained in most of the area and the meadows adjacent to the river are of particular note.

The area of greatest visual appeal is generally close to the meandering river where the bank side vegetation, historic buildings, such as mills and bridges, and a range of habitats create a rich and lively landscape. Mature pollarded willows are a consistent landscape feature along most of the river. Away from the river the landscape quality is more varied.

The villages which border the area have retained the link between the historic settlement and the river valley. The churches are a focal point of views within the valley. Much of the valley is inaccessible by road. The Thame Valley Walk and other footpaths give access to tranquil areas, which feel slightly remote, but farms or village edges are generally visible.

Hedgerows are sometimes in a poor condition or have been lost or replaced with post and wire fencing. This is, however, generally an intact landscape with an enclosed intimate character and great visual interest. However, in the area between Long Crendon and Thame, the industrial estate and the road junction disrupt the landscape pattern and are visually intrusive.



Fig 6 View north towards Thame Valley

Landscape Areas B and C fall within the A418 ridge character area and are described in the AVDC Landscape Character Assessment Report May 2008 as follows :-

Locally prominent low ridge with contrasting sides in terms of settlement, tree cover and topography. The A418 ridge is overlooked by the ridge on the north side of the Thame valley. There is a distinctive transition from a more mature, wooded landscape with settlement in the east towards an open intensively arable landscape with well-trimmed hedges in the west. This is exaggerated by the openness of the landscape around Haddenham airfield. This also applies to the ridge where it extends towards Bishopstone.

The northern face of the ridge generally has steeper slopes with grassland areas and narrow fields and paddocks running down the valley sides particularly noted at Gibraltar and also around the settlement of Dinton. There are also narrow shelter belts that run down the valley sides in harmony with the field pattern. In contrast the shorter Bishopstone ridge is predominantly arable land however, the pattern is interrupted around the settlement where there is a greater concentration of smaller fields in pastoral land use.



Fig 7 View east towards Chearsley



Fig 8 View south towards the A418

Section 3. LANDSCAPE POLICY

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Feb 2019

NPPF seeks to avoid duplication of policies (Para 16f)) and reference has been made to VALP policies to ensure that any proposed NP policies are not duplicating the protection afforded to the Landscape in the Local Plan.

Particular note is made of the advice in Para 171 which states *that 'Plans should. allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value...' and 'take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure'...*

[NPPF Definition: **Green infrastructure:** A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities].

The NPPF includes guidance on policies for: -

- Promoting healthy and safe communities
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

The relevance of these to Cuddington is that the village relies on its landscape setting to provide its:-

- historic context (for the Conservation Area and Listed buildings),
- rights of way for recreation
- views for amenity and a visual connection to the surrounding countryside
- access to greenery and nature for well-being

The landscape setting of Cuddington performs these multiple roles in a way that is consistent with the definition of green infrastructure (see above).

The NPPF offers the opportunity to protect some of these assets through a Local Green Spaces policy (para 99).

Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) as modified

The relevant landscape policies in VALP are:-

- BE1 Heritage assets
- C4 Protection of public rights of way
- I1 Green infrastructure
- NE5 Landscape character and locally important landscape
- NE9 Trees, hedgerows and woodlands
- NE2 Biodiversity and geodiversity

These policies provide adequate protection for the landscape within and around the village with additional protection being provided through proposed Cuddington Neighbourhood Plan policies: -

CUD 1 : Village boundary – to restrict new development to areas within the existing built-up envelop of the village and protect its landscape setting

CUD4 : Local Green Spaces – to protect valuable green space from development

CUD3 : Important Local Views- to protect and conserve important views into and out of the village. This policy also covers views along the approaches to the village to conserve the distinctive character of the settlement and its relationship with the surrounding countryside.

References

Defining the special qualities of local landscape designations in Aylesbury Vale District
Final Draft Report prepared by LUC October 2015

Aylesbury Vale District Council & Buckinghamshire County Council Aylesbury Vale Landscape
Character Assessment May 2008

Aylesbury Vale District Council & Buckinghamshire County Council Aylesbury Vale: Areas of Sensitive
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