

Appendix G

Landscape and Landuse

This table summarises the 13 main description areas that cover the majority of Thames region. In each case the Countryside Character Area (CCA) and equivalent Natural Area (NA) is shown with a summary description. These 13 areas combine to cover 88% of the Thames region by area.

Countryside Character Areas

The landscape of England and Wales varies considerably, largely as a result of the underlying geology and climate. This influences the development of soils, vegetation and farming practices. The Countryside Agency, English Nature and English Heritage use Countryside Character Areas to integrate the ecological, landscape and cultural aspects of the countryside to aid its management

Natural Areas

Natural Areas are sub-divisions of England, each with a characteristic association of wildlife and natural features. Each Natural Area has a unique identity resulting from the interaction of wildlife, landforms, geology, land use and human impact. Natural Areas provide a consistent, ecologically coherent countrywide framework to focus national targets to a level that can be used locally.

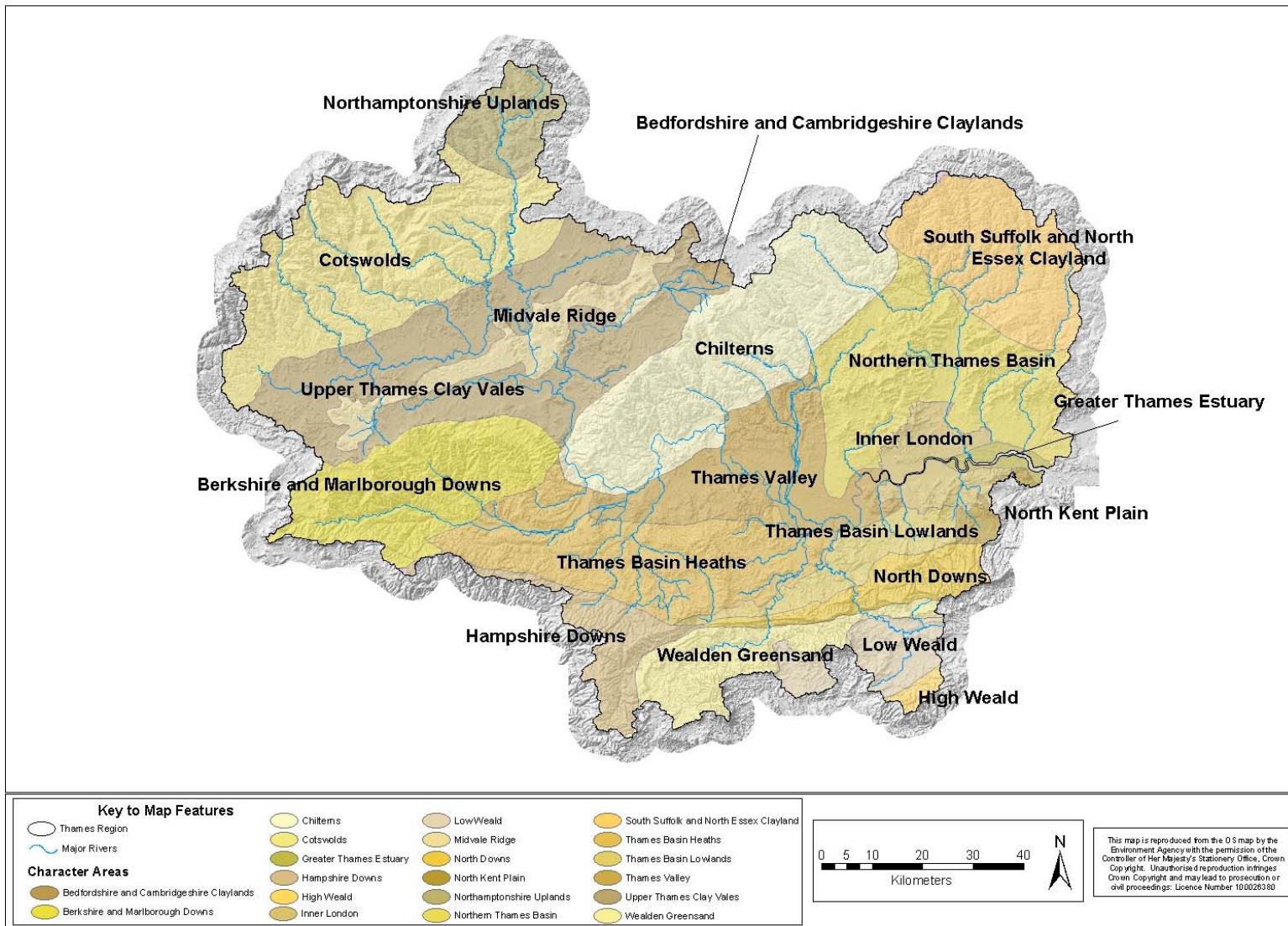
Countryside Character Area	Natural Area	Description
Cotswolds CCA(107)	Cotswolds NA(55)	<p>Defined by its underlying geology: a dramatic scarp rising above adjacent lowlands. The Cotswolds overlies a band of limestone stretching from Somerset to Warwickshire. Unimproved grassland is an extensive semi-natural habitat, with the area supporting over 50% of the national resource of limestone grassland.</p> <p>The Cotswolds also contain significant areas of ancient woodland. Cover is relatively continuous on the scarp where internationally important stands of beechwood are to be found.</p>
Berkshire and Marlborough Downs CCA(116)	Berkshire and Marlborough Downs NA(79)	<p>Geologically Berkshire and Marlborough Downs is noted for its chalk downland landscape. It features high, large-scale rolling chalk downland characterised by intensive arable farming and sparse woodland cover.</p> <p>The area is of great importance for its chalk grasslands. Other key wildlife habitats are broadleaved woodland, wood pasture (its ancient trees supporting rare invertebrates and rich lower plant communities), and grazing marsh, the rich chalk rivers of the Kennet, Lambourne and Pang and the remaining fragments of biodiversity-rich arable land with its populations of rare plants and animals. Ten species have been identified within the Natural Area for special attention, including some that are rare and declining on a European scale.</p>
Chilterns (65)	Chilterns (110)	<p>The chalk escarpment of the Chilterns is a dominant geological and landscape feature that rises steeply from the Vale of Aylesbury to 275 metres above mean sea level. It features chalk hills and plateau with a prominent escarpment in many places, and extensive dip slope with numerous dry valleys and extensive areas of downland invaded by scrub.</p> <p>The habitats of importance comprise chalk downland and scrub, ancient semi-natural and secondary woodlands, and species-rich hedgerows with small areas of acid grassland on the Chiltern Commons. The Chilterns contain the most extensive area of native</p>

		beech woodland in England, which cover the full range of native beech woodland types. Chalk grassland is the other key habitat. The Chilterns is also a valuable area for a large number of rare and scarce plants, including arable weeds and lichens.
Midvale Ridge (109)	Midvale Ridge NA(64)	<p>The Midvale Ridge is a low irregular wooded limestone ridge giving way to a series of isolated steep-sided tabular hills. It stretches east-west across the otherwise low-lying plain of the Thames and Avon clay vales. It is a band of limestone with outcrops at either end. There is a contrast between the moderately elevated limestone hills and ridges and the surrounding low-lying clay vales. The soils are generally sandy and free-draining, whereas those on the vales are of heavy clay. This gives rise to a distinctive landscape of dry woodlands, sandy pastures and arable fields.</p> <p>This Natural Area has one of the most important concentrations of calcareous fens and flushes in southern England. These support unique insect communities and they have remarkably high numbers of rare plants and insects. Also of very high importance are the grassy heaths, a scarce habitat nationally which also supports a very high diversity of rare species. In addition, arable weed communities are particularly favoured by the light soils and many rapidly declining plants are present. The Midvale Ridge also has an exceptionally important geological resource with a long history of study.</p>
South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands CCA 86	East Anglian Plain NA50	<p>The East Anglian Plain is an ancient landscape upon which modern agriculture has been imposed. Broadly flat, chalky, boulder clay plateau dissected by an undulating river valley topography, particularly marked in upper valley reaches, which are much smaller in scale. The area is predominantly arable with a wooded appearance. Some pasture exists in valley floors. Much of the vegetation's character derives from the widespread chalky clay soils deposited by glaciers over chalk rock.</p> <p>Habitats of particular importance include a small number of fens scattered throughout the East Anglian Plain, most of which are small and isolated from other fens, small lowland meadows which are now very sparsely scattered through the East Anglian Plain, and ancient woodlands that are amongst the richest in the country for flowering plants. River valleys occur widely spaced across the whole area. Each valley is a mosaic of habitats, including floodplain grazing marsh, fens, eutrophic standing water (e.g. in ditch systems) and wet woodlands. Chalk rivers are not common in the East Anglian Plain, with eutrophic river types being more usual.</p>
Northern Thames Basin(111) Inner London (112) Thames Basin Lowlands (114) Thames Valley (115)	London Basin NA 66	<p>The London Basin is a large, trough-like basin which was formed around 50 million years ago, and is filled with mostly sands and clay sediments. About one-third of the area is covered by London and the wildlife is characterised by islands of semi-natural habitats. These habitats include large areas of woodland, with extensive stands of mature beech woods, significant areas of lowland mixed deciduous woodland and numerous large wood pastures and parklands.</p> <p>The London Basin is drained by the River Thames and its extensive network of tributaries. It also has numerous canals, with some areas that are very rich in plants and invertebrates. Other freshwater habitats include a series of flooded gravel pits and reservoirs that support nationally important populations of waterfowl. Associated with many of these freshwater habitats are areas of grazing marsh, neutral grasslands and fens.</p> <p>The London Basin Natural Area covers 5 of the Countryside Character Areas. These are Northern Thames Basin, Inner London, Thames Basin Lowlands, Thames Valley, and Thames Basin Heaths.</p>

Thames Basin Heaths (129)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Northern Thames Basin (111) <p>This description consists of four sub-character areas: Hertfordshire Plateaux and River Valleys; Essex Wooded Hills and Ridges; London Clay Lowlands and Essex Heathlands.</p> <p><u>Hertfordshire plateaux and river valleys</u> A diverse landscape with a series of broad valleys containing the major rivers Ver, Colne and Lea and extensive areas of broadleaved woodlands being the principal features of the area. The landform is varied with a wide plateau divided by the valleys. Hertfordshire's large towns, the M25 and M1 motorways, and railway lines are also a major influence on character. Floodplain land is commonly arable sub-divided by hedgerow-deficient field boundaries. Many river valleys have been extensively modified by reservoirs, current and reclaimed gravel pits, landfill sites, artificial wetlands, river realignments and canals.</p> <p><u>Essex wooded hills and ridges</u> Well wooded and prominent hills and ridges on a belt of sand often referred to as the 'Bagshot Hills' stretching through Essex from Epping Forest to Tiptree. The historically scattered and relatively sparse settlement pattern now largely obliterated by modern developments including extensive residential developments and large towns.</p> <p><u>London Clay Lowlands</u> Flat, extensive tract of traditionally unproductive farmland on heavy clay soils. The overall landscape pattern reflects the simple rectilinear character of the fields and hedgerows.</p> <p><u>Essex Heathlands</u> Intensively farmed plateau encompassing an area of former heaths and commons on soils derived from ancient river deposits, much of which has an open, often relatively treeless character. Abundance of archaeological features and remains identified by cropmarks. Clusters of woodland, many of which are semi-natural and of ancient origin. Intricate pattern of hidden creeks and small valleys extending the influence of the coastal marshes inland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inner London (112) <p>Inner London lies on the banks of the Thames where the river valley widens out into a broad floodplain. Alluvial gravels overlie the heavy London clay, and rise in gentle steps to form river terraces to the north and south. In places, sand and gravel glacial deposits form more noticeable low hills, as at Hampstead. The landform is almost completely obscured by the dense urban development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Thames Basin Lowlands (114) <p>A small-scale lowland farmed landscape lying within a generally flat but gently undulating clay vale. Gentle lowland character reinforced by river tributaries that meander through flat farmed valley landscapes with large areas of estate land. Some of the essential farmland character has been fragmented by the expansion of settlements and the associated major roads that dissect this area.</p>
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Northern Thames Basin(111) Inner London (112) Thames Basin Lowlands (114) Thames Valley (115) Thames Basin Heaths (129) Continued ...	London Basin NA 66 Continued...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thames Valley (115) <p>The hydrological floodplain of the river Thames as a landscape feature provides unity to the large areas of fragmented poor agricultural land. The western Thames valley is wide and flat with the river barely discernible, occupying only a small part of the wider geological floodplain. To the south, the open Thames floodplain dominates with its associated flat grazing land, becoming characterised by a number of formal historic landscapes on higher ground such as Windsor Park.</p> <p>Towards London in the east, the natural character of the area is overtaken by urban influences; a dense network of roads including the M25 corridor, Heathrow Airport, railway lines, and numerous flooded gravel pits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thames Basin Heaths (129) <p>A heavily populated and developed area characterised by large towns plus numerous smaller settlements along transport corridors interspersed by open land. A particularly diverse landscape unified by the high incidence of heathland and coniferous forestry. The open unenclosed nature is unusual within the context of the south-east region. An important occupation area from Mesolithic to modern times based on exploitation of the rivers with numerous Prehistoric, Roman and medieval settlements, the latter of which extended along valley bottoms.</p> <p>The western part of the area is fairly well-wooded with grazed pasture. Variety and contrast is given by the wide grazed floodplain, drainage ditches, restored gravel workings and lush wetland vegetation associated with the Kennet Valley. Large tracts of coniferous plantations or mixed wood with beech and birch are typical of much of the area, with significant areas of ancient woodland in the west.</p>
Greater Thames Estuary CCA(81)	Greater Thames Estuary NA(67)	<p>The Greater Thames Estuary comprises the coast and low-lying hinterland, indented by several estuaries of varying sizes, between the mouth of the Stour Estuary on the Essex/Suffolk border and the Swale Estuary in north Kent. The intertidal zone is dominated by soft sediments that form extensive saltmarshes and mudflats. These are separated along most of the length by man-made sea defences from the low-lying land on alluvial soils. Formerly subject to frequent flooding, these areas are now mainly arable land, along with grassland and some substantial areas of grazing marsh. Urban development on the coast is mainly confined to higher ground except in the inner Thames Estuary.</p> <p>Extensive open spaces featuring open beaches and salt marshes, reclaimed farmed marshland and mudflats populated by a large and varied bird population. The Thames edge marshes are subject to various major developments including ports, waste disposal, marine dredging, urbanisation, mineral extraction and prominent power stations plus numerous other industry-related activities such as petrochemical complexes.</p>
Upper Thames Clay Vales CCA108	Thames and Avon Vales NA63	<p>The Thames and Avon Vales make up the central section of an extensive belt of low-lying land running through south central England from Somerset to Lincolnshire. The area is predominantly open, gently undulating lowland farmland on clays containing a variety of contrasting landscapes. It includes the enclosed pastures of the claylands, the wet valley bottoms and the more settled open arable lands of the gravel. The valley bottoms, with open floodplain landscapes display gravel workings and flooded pits.</p> <p>It forms an important element of an English lowland scene with its gently rolling vistas with a mixture of arable and grass fields</p>

		<p>surrounded by thick hedgerows and interspersed with small woods. This is a very rural area with Oxford, Aylesbury and Swindon the only large built-up areas. The Natural Area has a series of flooded gravel pits that form a series of wetlands of high nature conservation value. The water is often highly alkaline and of good quality, and a number of the pits are developing into marl lakes that contain a diverse range of aquatic plants and animals.</p>
North Downs CCA(119)	North Downs NA(69)	<p>The North Downs are a rural landscape extending across an outcrop of chalk, from the narrow ridge of the Hogs Back near Farnham in the west to the white cliffs of Dover in the east. It is a dramatic and distinctive Chalk downland with a continuous and steep scarp giving extensive views across Kent and Surrey towards the South Downs. Towards London, while some valleys of species-rich grassland are still retained, the character changes to urban, with the topography masked by the built-up areas.</p> <p>The calcareous soils support an outstanding variety of wildlife. On the south-facing scarp slope grazing has maintained a grassland rich in plants and insects, some of which are internationally important for their orchids. The north-facing dip slope, level in places with shallow, dry valleys, has been agriculturally improved with the main land uses being arable farming and improved pasture.</p> <p>On the deeper soils, such as clay-with-flints, which cover the top of the Downs, the vegetation is very different. Some soils, especially where there are sandy deposits, are markedly acidic and heathland can be found, in striking contrast to the chalk downland. The valleys of the Rivers Wey, Mole, Darent, Medway and Great Stour cut the ridge of chalk, and there are riverside cliffs at Box Hill.</p>



Thames region topography, Countryside Character Areas and Natural Areas