

# **Colne Valley Park**

## **Historic Landscape Characterisation Project**

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## Executive Summary

The English Heritage ALSF funded Colne Valley Park Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) Project was carried out by Buckinghamshire County Council and Groundwork Trust on behalf of the Colne Valley Regional Park. The project complements the county HLC databases maintained by Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Surrey County Councils. As well as providing a detailed and cohesive historic landscape characterisation for the Park, this database includes additional information on historic farmsteads and estates, boundaries, routeways and waterways. The report provides a detailed summary of this database focussing on the impact of aggregates extraction and settlement expansion in the twentieth century. The report also defines and describes local historic landscape zones which can be used to inform future land use within the Park. The potential for further research and involving the local community is also discussed.

The Colne Valley Park HLC highlights areas of significant twentieth century development including large areas of flooded mineral extraction sites, reservoirs and early twentieth century settlement zones. However, despite this high level of modern influence, historic parks and ancient woodland survive as public recreation areas whilst areas of significant 19th century and earlier field systems also survive. Distinctive historic characteristics of the present day Colne Valley Park include the following:

- *A rich archaeological heritage spanning more than ten thousand years. Several nationally important prehistoric sites are recorded in and around the Colne Valley Park such as Three Ways Wharf, Uxbridge and Yeoveney Lodge, Spelthorne.*
- *Series of flooded mineral extraction sites running from Batchworth Lake in Three Rivers, Herts to Denham Quarries, near Denham the majority of which are used for recreation and are recognised for their wildlife interest under a number of designation from SSSI's to local or county wildlife sites.*
- *Four large reservoirs in the south of the Colne Valley Park also functioning as recreational areas. The reservoirs are also protected by several designations including Special Protection Areas for three of the four with Wraysbury reservoir listed as a local or county wildlife site.*
- *Several nationally important registered historic parks now open to the public including Langley Park and Denham Country Park*
- *National Trust property at Ankerwycke Estate*
- *A number of historic parks now in use as golf courses such as Harefield Place and Richings Park.*
- *Several areas of pre 18<sup>th</sup> century hedged field systems.*
- *Surviving areas of meadowland around the river Misbourne.*
- *Significant early twentieth century settlement including Richings Park estate and Wraysbury estates*
- *The 19<sup>th</sup> century planned community of Heronsgate, now a conservation area.*
- *Artificial watercourses, including the Grand Junction Canal.*

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## List of Abbreviations

ALSF	Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund
BRG	British Regional Geography
BP	Before Present (1950)
CVP	Colne Valley Park
CVRP	Colne Valley Regional Park authority
EH	English Heritage
HLC	Historic Landscape Characterisation
HLT	Historic Landscape Type
HLZ	Historic Landscape Zone
Ha	Hectare
Ma	Million years Ago
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

# 1. Background

## 1.1. Circumstances of the study

The Archaeological Service of Buckinghamshire County Council conducted the Colne Valley Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) Project in conjunction with Groundwork between August 2006 and March 2007 on behalf of the Colne Valley Regional Park (CVRP). In recognition of the substantial impact of mineral extraction on the Colne Valley's modern landscape, funding was provided by the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF) and administered by English Heritage (EH). The project team reported to a steering group that included representatives of English Heritage and the local authorities covered by the Park. This report covers the technical HLC study carried out by Buckinghamshire's Archaeological Service, which formed stages 1 to 3 of the project. A fourth stage involving public dissemination and community involvement was led by Groundwork.

## 1.2. Aims

The overall aim of the Colne Valley HLC project was to produce a detailed historic landscape characterisation of the Park that would combine existing HLC data from several county level studies as well as creating base mapping for relevant areas in Hillingdon, Slough and Windsor and Maidenhead in order to provide a complete dataset and analytical report for the Park.

The end uses for this resource is to inform future planning decisions within the Park as well as identifying areas that might benefit from conservation and community based projects.

The project was divided into several stages, each with specific aims.

### Stage 1

- To produce a completed HLC for the entire Park.
- To enhance this dataset to allow for a more in depth study of the landscape focusing on twentieth century change in settlement and aggregates.

### Stage 2

- To produce a more detailed study of the historic farmsteads and their associated estates in order to assess the impact of increased twentieth century urbanisation and gravel extraction.
- To create a detailed study of boundary change within the current field systems with the aim of providing an additional dataset for future planning and community projects.
- To create a comprehensive study of the routes and watercourses within the Park in order to provide a basis for future planning and community projects.

### Stage 3.

- To deliver a GIS based HLC database
- To deliver a report describing and analysing the HLC
- The fourth and final stage of public dissemination run by Groundwork is not covered by this report.

### **1.3. National relevance of project**

This report forms part of a genre of HLC projects commissioned by English Heritage from the early 1990s with the initial aim of producing HLC databases at a county level for England as a whole. These projects have been carried out at local government level with the end database being housed at both county HER/SMR Offices and at English Heritage. The ALSF funding provides the scope to further enhance this data through smaller scale, more in-depth, surveys of specific areas affected by mineral extraction, such as the Colne Valley.

This project has followed the general principles as laid out by the English Heritage HLC programme; examining the historic derivation of the modern landscape of an area through the use of GIS software and assessing the human impact at a broad scale. It has used a number of English Heritage papers in order to inform certain aspects of this project including the following;

#### **English Heritage Research Papers**

- *Using Historic Landscape Characterisation. Clark, J. & Darlington, J. & Fairclough, G.*

Overview of the applications and methodology involved in HLC.

- *Living buildings in a living landscape: finding a future for traditional farm buildings (long version). (HELM Paper)*

The southeast preliminary character assessment created as part of this paper was also used in order to help identify trends in farmstead patterns specific to this area.

#### **English Heritage Research Agenda. 2005**

The Colne Valley Park Project has also aimed to fulfil several aspects of the 2005 English Heritage Research Agenda including the following general themes;

- *A1. What's out there? Defining, characterising and analysing the historic environment.*

Through the enhancement of existing HLC datasets and the creation of new data for certain areas, the Colne Valley Project has produced a comprehensive database of the survey area paying particular attention to the impact of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century on the landscape through settlement growth, mineral extraction and boundary change as well as the transport network.

- *C2. Making friends. Building understanding and appreciation through education & outreach.*

The Colne Valley HLC Project will include dissemination and presentation to the public through guided historic walks and talks held at the Colne Valley Visitor Centre. A website will also be developed together with a travelling display and leaflets.

It is also the intention of the Partnership to extend the use of this report beyond planning and conservation to provide for educational projects and community involvement in the Colne Valley.

- *D2. Measuring threat. Studying the reasons for risk and developing responses.*

The study looked particularly at the effects of mineral extraction and other modern land use change on the rural-urban fringe of Greater London. A primary function of

this database will be to help inform planning decisions as well as to identify areas in need of conservation works. In particular, the boundary mapping will be used as a basis for more in-depth surveys of hedgerow survival and biodiversity.

### **ALSF Research Priorities**

This project has also addressed several objectives and priorities of the Defra led ALSF Research Initiatives including the following;

*Objective 3: Addressing the environmental impacts associated with past aggregates extraction.*

- *Addressing the impacts of past aggregate extraction; specifically conservation and repair of sites, monuments, buildings and landscapes within communities affected by aggregates extraction*

The Colne Valley Regional Park has undergone extensive aggregates extraction in the past and assessing the impact of this extraction is an integral part of this study. The study has documented and quantified the distinctive contribution of mineral extraction to the landscape and heritage of the area as well as identifying where earlier landscapes have survived

- *Local education, interpretation, outreach and community involvement*

Dissemination of the findings of this report will be carried out primarily by Groundwork Trust in the form of travelling displays and publicity but also by Buckinghamshire County Council through a series of walks and talks in the Colne Valley Park.

### **Colne Valley Park Regional Park Action Plan 2006-2009**

This report encompasses several points of the current Colne Valley Regional Park action plan including the following;

- *Action 53. Investigate the potential to establish an educational resource in partnership with a CVP farm.*

The historic farmsteads and estates segment of this report will provide a basis of understanding for local farmsteads and dissemination to a wider audience.

- *Action 58. Produce leaflets and web based information on CVP historic landscape characterisation and provide a series of guided walks and talks.*

Leaflets, a permanent travelling display and web based information will be produced by Groundwork Trust following the completion of this report.

- *Action 67. Undertake an ancient hedgerow survey/management project*

The boundaries mapping data will be used as a basis for more detailed projects on hedgerow changes and habitat surveys within the Colne Valley Park.

## **1.4. Sources and resources**

The project drew upon existing county-based HLC studies available for Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Surrey and filled in the gaps for the remaining areas of Hillingdon, Slough and Windsor and Maidenhead. Due to the majority of the area lying within the borders of Buckinghamshire, the methodology used for this completion and integration exercise (project stage 1) was based on Buckinghamshire

County Council's HLC. In order to address the "deepening themes" of stage 2 historic estate and tithe maps were used and other characterisation methodologies incorporated. The Black Country Urban Survey provided the methodological basis for characterising the built environment. The HELM historic farmsteads preliminary characterisation report was used for the farmsteads mapping; the Chilterns HLC project for the routeways mapping; and Hertfordshire's Minerals Historic Environment Characterisation Project for assessment of boundary change and survival. A number of parallel studies were also used for the creation and assessment of historic landscape character zones for the Colne Valley Park including the current Bucks CC historic landscape zones methodology and Hampshire's historic landscape character assessment report. Appendix 2: Table 1 provides a list of sources together with their main application for this project. Appendix 2: Table 2 supplies a list of datasets provided by other counties. Finally, Appendix 2: Table 3 provides a summary of the datasets produced in this project with their main purpose.

## **1.5. Acknowledgements**

Report written and produced by Ruth Beckley, supervised by David Green and managed by Sandy Kidd MIFA of the Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service.

Assistance was provided from the following organisations as part of the project steering group:

- English Heritage
- Groundwork Trust
- Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service
- Hertfordshire County council
- Surrey Archaeology Services
- Berkshire Archaeology Services

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## **1.7. Historic Landscape Characterisation**

The landscape around us is formed by the interaction of the natural and human environments. It represents a dynamic environment that has been affected and altered by thousands of years of human activity, it is what we see around us, both the physically altered and the culturally embodied environment. Historic landscape characterisation is the study of the human dimension of landscape, particularly how the modern landscape has been created by human action whether in the recent or more distant past.

The word 'landscape' is derived from the Dutch term 'landschap' and was brought to wider audiences through painters in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as concepts of perspective were first introduced to art (Gosden, 1999). It was used to describe wholly or partially created sceneries and vistas both through the obvious mediums of landscape gardens and planned communities as well as through the greater countryside. Today the term 'landscape' has been broadened to include other environments; we talk about urban townscapes and maritime seascapes with equal validity, expanding on the classical definition of the term. Characterisation seeks to define the special characteristics of a place through an understanding of origin, development, form and function.

HLC has its roots in a number of different projects and ideas; in the 1990's it became increasingly important to characterise the environment in a clear and comprehensive way. Some approaches to characterisation focused on specialised zones such as settlement or woodland rather than the landscapes as a whole (e.g. Roberts and Wrathmell's Settlement Atlas, 2000). It became increasingly apparent however, that characterisation of the historic landscape as a whole was the next necessary step in understanding the landscape. A 1994 study of the Cornish landscape was the first to define the historic dimension of the landscape at a county level using the emerging HLC techniques (Herring et al). This work has since formed the basis for an English Heritage led national programme of characterisation.

All HLC programmes today share a number of basic principles that guide and shape how each project develops (Clark et al: 2004). However, there is also a desire to keep individual projects as flexible as possible allowing for variations in methodology and interpretation on a county level.

**Some guiding principles for HLC projects (EH: Using Historic Landscape Characterisation):**

*Projects should aim to characterise all aspects of the landscape up to and including the modern day.* The landscape is a dynamic environment that is constantly changing and as such HLC projects aim to characterise not only the past landscape but also the modern. It is understood that HLC is not a static database and should be maintained and changed as the landscape changes.

*Projects should characterise the entire landscape and not just focus on site level assessment.* Projects should be able to adequately characterise all aspects of the landscape in such a way as to focus on the landscape rather than the site level, terms and methodologies based on site interpretation should be avoided.

*Projects are acknowledged to be based on interpretation and perception.* Interpretation is a valid form of characterisation and can contribute valuable insights into the cultural heritage of a landscape. HLC relies on interpretation by the officer in charge and the concise justification and explanation of the process involved.

*Projects should be accessible to the public.* Reports should be clear and concise and understandable to the non-professional. Dissemination and publication including community outreach programmes should also be an important aspect of a project.

**1.8. Stage 1 Methodology: Complete mapping of the Colne Valley Park**

At the outset of this project, three different HLC databases needed to be merged to form a basis for a more in-depth characterisation of the Colne Valley Park. This included several parishes from the Buckinghamshire HLC project comprising 45% of the total area, as well as segments of the boroughs of Spelthorne in Surrey (10%) and Three Rivers in Hertfordshire (11%). The remaining 34% of the Park had yet to

be characterised. The first stage of this project, therefore, involved the merging of the three completed datasets followed by characterisation of the un-mapped areas. This involved finding suitable equations between the terms used in each study, Appendix 2: Table 4 outlines the comparisons between relevant codes. The HLC methodology developed by Bucks CC was adopted in this case as it was the most recent survey and because the majority of the Colne Valley Park lies within Buckinghamshire; it was also the easiest characterisation to use. The second stage of base mapping involved the completion of a single comprehensive HLC for the Park; using the Bucks CC methodology, characterisation was carried out over the remaining areas of Hillingdon, Slough and Windsor & Maidenhead. The previously completed characterisation across the Colne Valley Park was also updated in order to reflect modern changes to the landscape since the original HLC county projects; current mapping was based on the latest edition of the OS Mastermap dating to 2005 (see Appendix 2: Table 5 for attribute table for stage 1 HLC mapping). Appendix 2 Figure 1 illustrates the completed HLC mapping for stage 1 including the deepening phase.

**Figure 1: Location of Colne Valley Park in relation to neighbouring authorities**

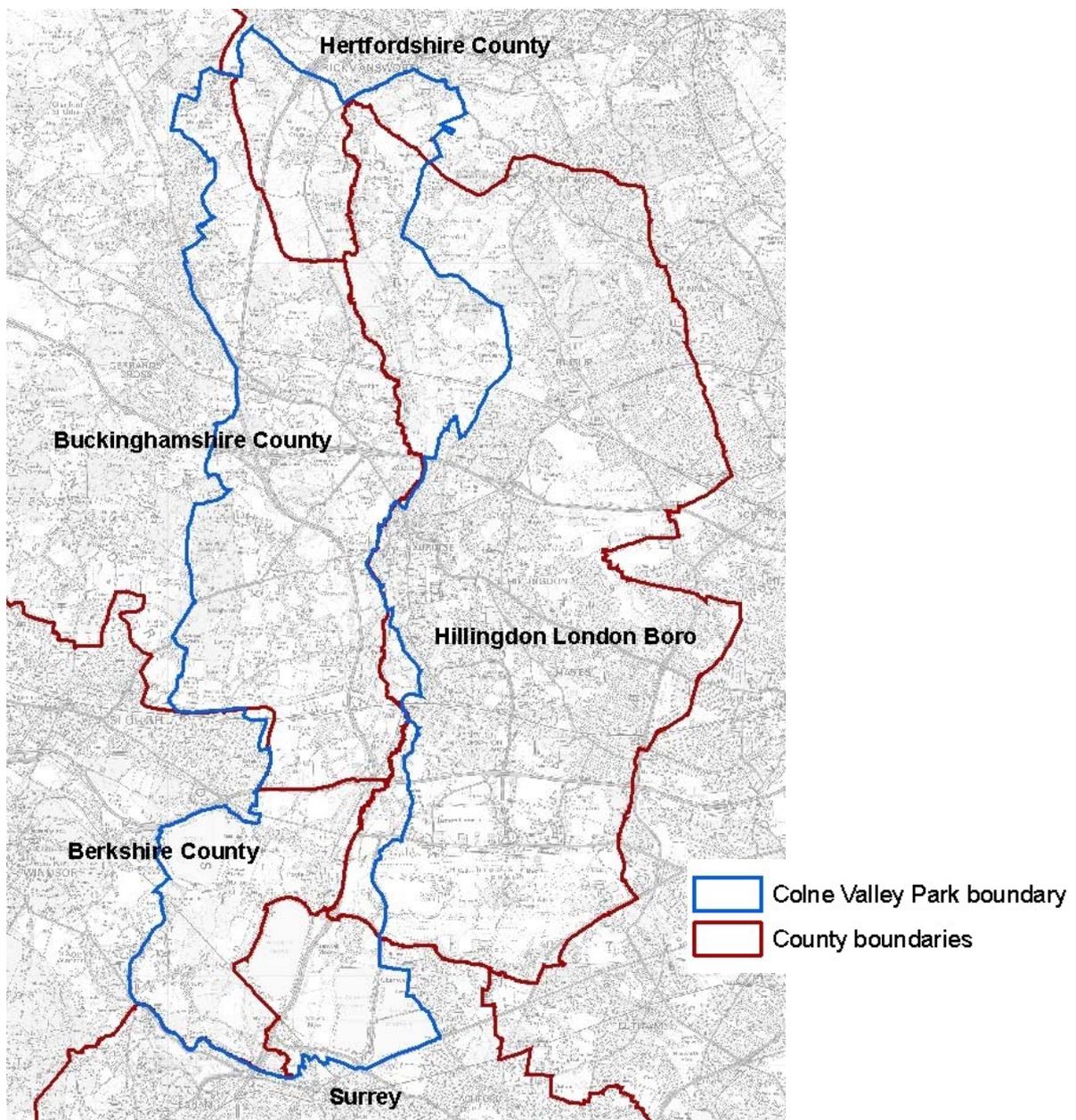
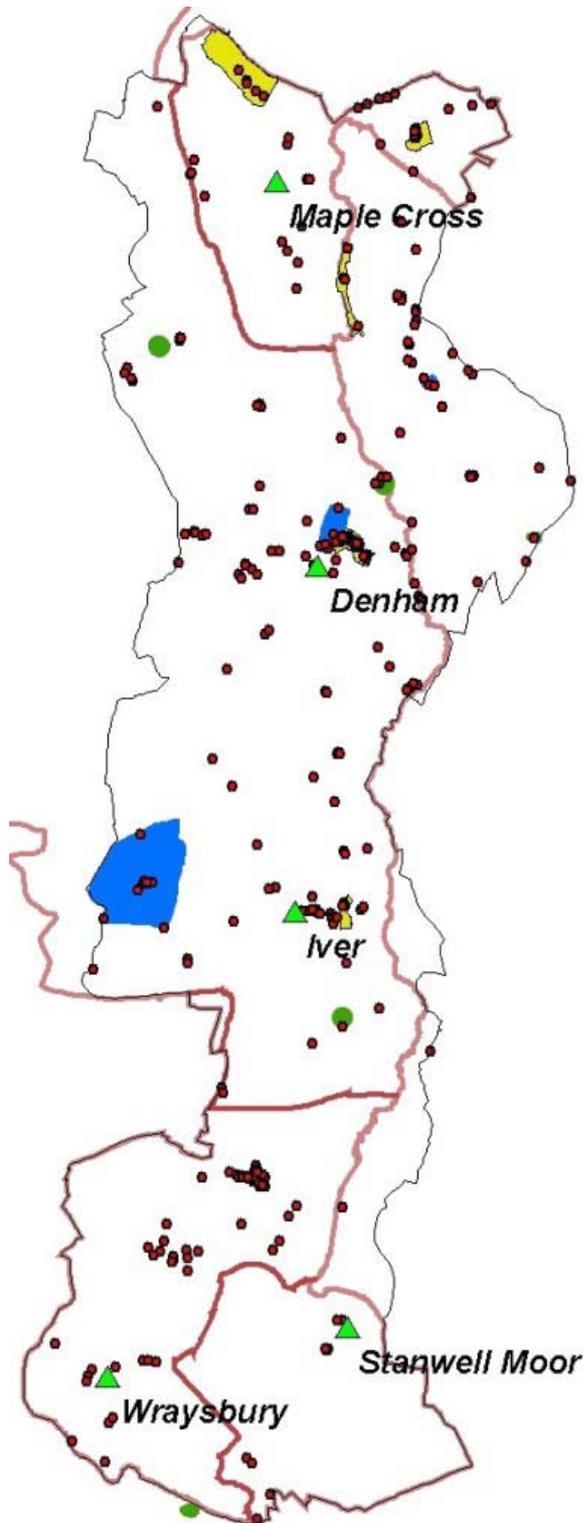


Figure 2: The Colne Valley Park in its wider context



The Colne Valley changed rapidly in the twentieth century when its close proximity to London made it a prime location for new settlement and its geology a prime location for aggregate extraction. The primary aim of this study was to examine in detail this twentieth century change and how it has affected the landscape. In order to achieve this, a more detailed methodology, based in part on the Black Country Urban Survey, was created to characterise twentieth century development. The Black Country report (Wolverhampton CC) covered an area of rural as well as urban landscapes producing, in particular, a highly detailed characterisation of settlement types based on a number of factors including the morphology and size of individual buildings. For the Park this methodology was simplified to include categories for historic settlement pre-dating maps, 19<sup>th</sup> century settlement as well as separate categories for 1920's, 1950's, 1970's and modern housing (see Appendix 7 for full HLC characterisation). Characterisations of housing types were based firstly on their period of construction as documenting settlement growth in the Park was a primary aim of this project and secondly on their morphology; if, for example, they were terraced, semi detached or detached housing. Also taken into account was the size of housing development as, for example, several large scale housing developments were built in the 1920's around Wraysbury and Richings Park, whereas development from other periods were carried out on a much smaller scale. Assessment was based entirely on map and photographic sources using primarily the OS series of maps from the 1820's to the present day and aerial photographs providing further information for the 1950's and 2003.



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**Figure 3: Statutory Historic Environment Designations in the Colne Valley Park**

- English Heritage Listed Buildings
- Scheduled Monument
- English Heritage Parks & Gardens
- Conservation areas