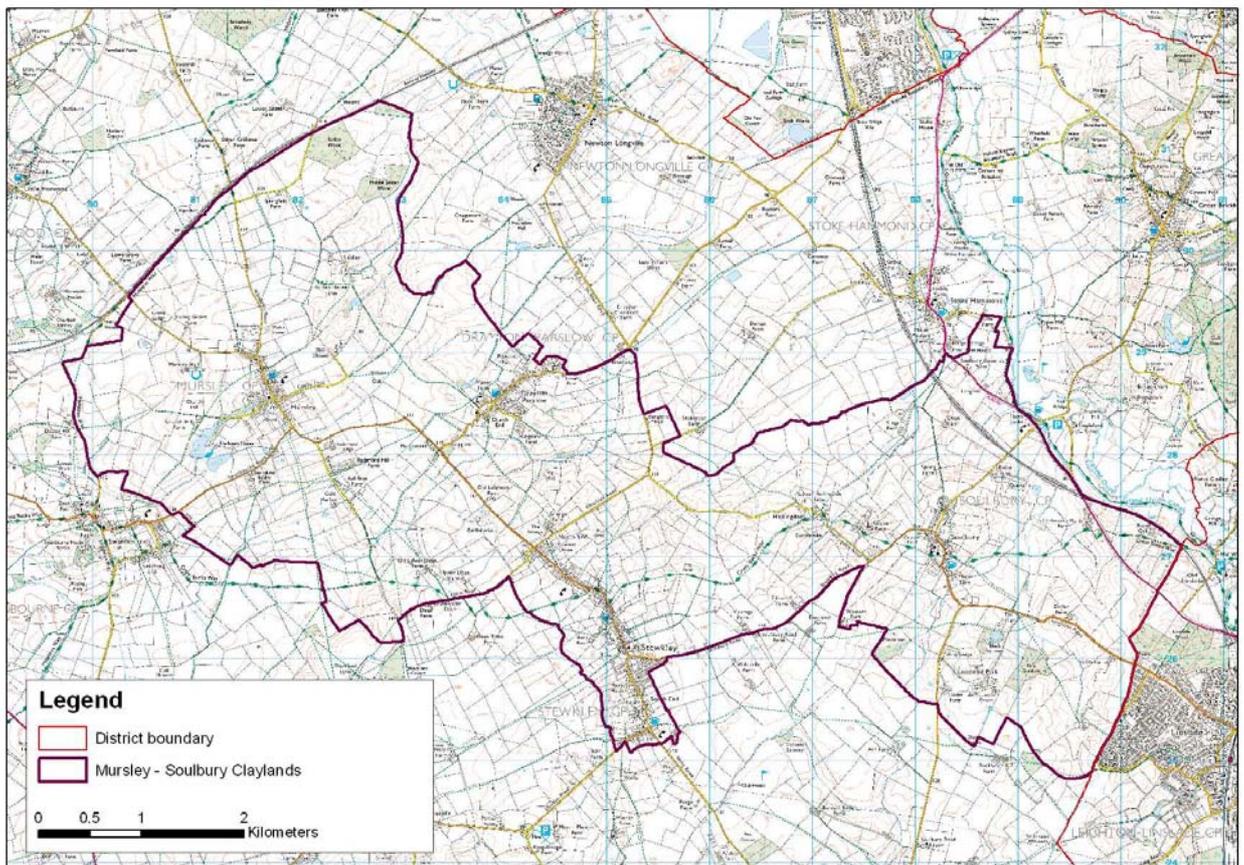
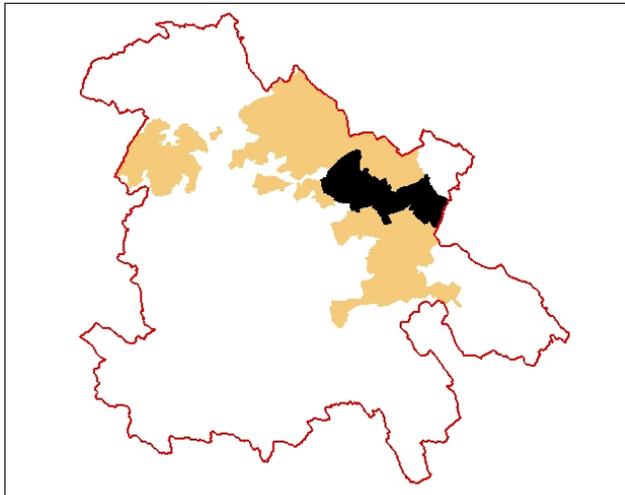


LCA 4.11 Mursley - Soulbury Claylands

Landscape Character Type: LCT 4 Undulating Clay Plateau



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Key Characteristics

- Rolling landform
- Clay soils with mixed agriculture use
- Springs and streams draining off the ridge
- Small dispersed pockets of woodland cover
- Area is exposed due to its elevation above surrounding areas
- Nucleated row settlements
- Parliamentary and pre18th century fields

Distinctive Features

- House and Parkland at Liscombe Park
- Ornamental lakes at Mursley
- Narrow strip paddocks at Stewkley
- Historic earthworks and former moated dwellings
- Medieval parish churches
- Vernacular architecture
- Tudor estate at Salden
- Lowland fen
- Neutral grassland
- Lowland neutral meadow

Intrusive Elements

- Water tower and telecoms masts at Mursley
- West coast mainline railway
- Stoke Hammond Bypass

Location Forming a shallow arc to the south of Newton Longville and includes the villages of Mursley, Drayton Parslow, Stewkley and Soulbury. East of Soulbury the boundary is formed by the county boundary with Bedfordshire.

Landscape character Eroded edge of a clay plateau with a shallow ridge running between Mursley and Stewkley. An incised network of valleys has produced a series of rolling ridges with streams between that drain both towards the Ouzel valley to the east and the River Thames to the west. Settlements are located on the drier ridge tops. Straight roads cut across the rolling landform. There are numerous ponds springs and streams dispersed over the area. Wet valley bottoms, often with self set willow copses are a common feature. The field pattern is a dominant characteristic of this mixed farming landscape bounded by a mixture of clipped and overgrown hedges with groups of mature hedgerow trees. There is a local concentration of woodland cover at Liscombe Park to the south.

Geology Glacial till overlain by substantial areas of undifferentiated glacial deposits. Incised valleys to the east have exposed Oxford clay formations and contain large deposits of glacial head. Incised valley to the southwest contains calcareous mudstone (West Walton formation).

Topography The Mursley to Stewkley watershed runs at a level of approximately 150m AOD. Drayton Parslow sits lower at a level of 130m AOD and Soulbury at 120m AOD. The clay plateau landscape has been eroded by the numerous streams often into a distinctive rolling landform of steep 'switchback' ridges such as can be experienced when travelling between Stewkley and Mursley and around Soulbury.

Hydrology The road between Mursley and Stewkley forms a watershed between the Ouzel, Thames and Great Ouse catchments. Drayton Parslow and Soulbury sit on shallow ridges between streams that drain into the Ouzel. The large lakes to the southwest of Mursley drain into the Claydon Brook which runs north into the Great Ouse. The land west of Stewkley drains into the Thames tributary.

Land use and settlement An even balance between arable land and grassland cover. Large arable areas occur between the main settlements and areas of grassland are concentrated around the perimeter of settlements. There are four large villages – Mursley, Drayton Parslow, Stewkley and Soulbury, also two smaller Hamlets at Salden and Hollindgon. Elsewhere there are dispersed farmsteads. Liscombe Park to the south of the area contains Liscombe House set in parkland.

Tree cover Three larger blocks of broadleaved woodland are located to the north of the hamlet of Salden. Small copses and coverts are dispersed over the area, predominately oak and ash woodland but with willow scrub along streamlines. Prominent groups of hedgerow trees mainly oak and ash are a common feature. There are mature parkland trees and mixed woodland at Liscombe Park.

Biodiversity The area comprises a mix of arable and grassland habitats in which a number of more interesting habitats occur including a few priority habitat types and more numerous broad habitat types all linked by the good hedgerow system.

Although most of the grassland is improved, there are occurrences of neutral pasture, lowland neutral meadow and unimproved grassland throughout

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including the priority habitat type of lowland meadow at Pokers Pond Meadow SSSI. Similarly there is also a scattering of broadleaved woodland with some moderate sized fragments in the southeast and northwest including the ancient woodlands of Salden Wood (also a CWS) comprising ash and field maple and a few oak, and the nearby Middle Salden Wood.

Several patches of lowland fen are present particularly in the centre and aquatic habitats are well represented by many ponds and moderate size bodies of standing water including eutrophic standing water a priority habitat type.

Most of the designated sites cover small areas - the larger ones include the Salden Wood BNS and Liscombe Park CWS which comprises parkland a priority habitat type.

Historic environment This is a large area with relatively little evidence for pre-medieval occupation. There are numerous large and small nucleated historic settlements, and some deserted or shrunken medieval settlements, set within scattered surviving ridge and furrow fields. There are conservation areas at Drayton Parslow, Mursley, Soulbury and Stewkley. Stewkley is a very large linear village which has developed from an interrupted row plan. It is notable for its outstanding Norman church and many timber-framed brick-infilled thatched houses. The village is surrounded by extensive ridge and furrow and to the north lie the earthworks of Stewkley Grange, a manor formerly held by Woburn Abbey. The other villages are smaller but also essentially row plan settlements. At Salden, one wing of the Tudor mansion of Sir John Fortescue survived the demolition of the remainder in 1738. The mansion lay within an area of unusually early enclosure for north Buckinghamshire depicted on a map of 1599 and still largely surviving. Irregular patterns of early field enclosure are also found between Mursley, Drayton Parslow and Stewkley and east of Hollingdon. Extensive areas of rectilinear Parliamentary enclosure survive across most of the area, especially around Mursley and between Stewkley and Soulbury. South of Soulbury, the 17th/18th century Liscombe House lies at the centre of Liscombe Park. Post-medieval brickworks and a bell foundry are also recorded in the area. The historic landscape patterns in the eastern margins of the area have been disrupted by the nineteenth century railway and modern bypass.

Designations

Conservation Areas - Drayton Parslow, Mursley, Soulbury and Stewkley

Archaeological Notification Areas – 41 No.

SSSI – 1No.

CWS – 9 No.

BNS – 2 No.

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The widely visible landmark of Mursley water tower seen from the footpath north of Dean Road.



Pastoral fields west of Whaddon Road.

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Summary of Condition/Sensitivity Analysis

Condition	Very good
Pattern of elements:	Coherent
Visual detractors:	Few
Visual unity:	Unified
Cultural integrity:	Good
Ecological integrity:	Strong
Functional integrity:	Very strong

Sensitivity	Moderate
Distinctiveness:	Distinct
Continuity:	Historic
Sense of place:	Moderate
Landform:	Apparent
Tree cover:	Intermittent
Visibility:	Moderate

Guidelines	Conserve and Reinforce
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Condition

Overall the condition of the landscape is considered to be very good. The pattern of elements is coherent. The area covers a shallow clay ridge eroded by an incised network of shallow valleys and intervening ridges. Overlying this, the irregular pattern of field parcels and mature hedgerows reinforces the visual unity of the area. There are few visual detractors, chief amongst these are the west coast railway and the development of the Stoke Hammond Bypass being constructed parallel to the railway. These are concentrated in the north east corner and do not affect the majority of the area. The water tower at Mursley is a local landmark. Cultural integrity is good and is represented in the well preserved historic village cores and churches, the parkland at Liscombe, the well preserved fields patterns and medieval archaeology. Ecological integrity is strong due to

good connectivity and relatively large areas of designated sites and habitats of District significance. Functional integrity is very strong.

Sensitivity

The area is noted as a distinctive landscape with good historic associations and sense of continuity. There is a moderate sense of place reflected on the intrinsic rural appearance which supports a large proportion of small settlements and farmsteads. The degree of visibility which is assessed as moderate is supported by the undulating landform and the intermittent distribution of mature tree cover and smaller woodland parcels. Overall the degree of sensitivity remains moderate.



View from the northern edge of Mursley over arable field. Salden Wood is on the horizon.

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Landscape Guidelines Conserve and Reinforce

The landscape guidelines for Mursley – Soulbury Claylands are as follows:

- Encourage the management of hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes and restoration of damaged patterns, especially at the Tudor estate of Salden.
- Maintain the existing condition and extent of woodland using traditional techniques to create and manage a wide diversity of habitats.
- Encourage landowners to improve ecological diversity by establishing and maintaining varied land maintenance regimes to benefit landscape and habitats.
- Encourage the conservation and interpretation of the areas rich historic environment.
- Ensure the preservation of archaeological earthworks by maintaining grassland
- New housing and alterations to existing housing should be designed to reflect the traditional character of the area and use locally traditional materials.
- Promote good pond management to encourage a wide diversity of habitats.
- Promote the retention of the character of minor roads by the management of hedgerows and verges and limiting urbanising elements such as signage and kerbing.
- Consider encouraging the planting of new woodland following historic landscape pattern to reduce visual impact of intrusive elements.
- Encourage the survey, management and conservation of historic parks and gardens.
- Maintain the existing extent and condition of lowland fen.
- Maintain the existing condition and extent of neutral grassland and lowland neutral meadow.
- Maintain connectivity of habitats.



Gates to Liscombe Park with view of parkland trees beyond.