



## LCA 1.6 Oatleys Plateau (LCT 1)

### Key Characteristics

- Gently sloping high ground
- Large areas of 20<sup>th</sup> century landscape
- Hedgerow pattern – where remaining
- Parliamentary enclosure fields
- Few water courses
- Small blocks of woodland
- Open views

### Distinctive Features

- Airfield
- Ash Furlong Lane bridleway
- Oatleys Hall Parkland
- Views across Great Ouse valley

### Intrusive Elements

- Airfield fencing and sheds
- Industrial units
- Prairie fields in the south
- A422
- Pylon line

**Location** Above the meandering Great Ouse between Buckingham and Brackley in the north western corner of the district. To the east it is bounded by the more wooded higher ground of LCA 1.3 Wood Green Wooded Farmland. The A422 crosses the southern part.

**Landscape character** An open, agricultural landscape with predominantly arable farming. The hedgerow pattern is variable and in places has been lost, this coupled with gently sloping nature of the landform, which provides little sense of enclosure means that the landscape is quite open and bleak. Close to the airfield sheds are used for light industry, which along with perimeter fencing and the flat landform create little sense of place. The areas of greatest visual interest tend to be associated with areas where the tree cover is stronger such as around Oatleys Hall or Ash Furlong Lane (Bridleway), which is bounded by strong high hedgerows. The edges of the area afford good views out across the Great Ouse valley.

**Geology** Glacial till covered by scattered undifferentiated glacial deposits with larger exposures of limestone.

**Topography** High ground, which slopes gently from north to south. To the north, west and south the ground drops towards the Great Ouse valley. An area in the northwest was levelled in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to create an airfield. The elevation ranges from 110-130m AOD.

**Hydrology** In two locations the heads of streams cut into the gently sloping plateau but it is predominantly without obvious watercourses. Other water features are limited to a few ponds.

**Land use and settlement** This is a mixed agricultural landscape with a predominance towards arable farming. Woodland represents about one tenth of the area. A large part of the north is an airfield part of which is used for light industrial units. There is also a large shed for grass drying in the southeast. The area is notable for its lack of settlement; there are only a few scattered farms and Oatleys Hall and Turweston Fields on the western edge.

**Tree cover** The tree cover is generally thinly scattered small woodland blocks. There is however, a central area where trees along Ash Furlong Lane (bridleway) and woodland around Oatleys Hall create a far more wooded landscape. The tree cover in hedgerows is generally quite poor.

**Biodiversity** The area is comprised largely of arable land; however the most western part is dominated by grassland. The grassland that is present is almost entirely improved with the exception of a block of unimproved grassland in the east. A few small areas of standing water are also distributed across the area.

Broadleaved woodland is scattered in small fragments throughout the plateau but a few small fragments of coniferous woodland are also present.

With the exception of one BNS at Oatleys Farm, the plateau lacks designated sites. Overall biodiversity interest is limited however where present the hedgerows provide good connectivity.

**Historic environment** The northern part was once within the medieval royal hunting forest of Whittlewood. Historic features include minor parkland at Oatleys Hall and farms that are identified as historic settlements. There has been good retention of large areas of early enclosure, which is primarily associated with parliamentary enclosure rather than pre 18<sup>th</sup> century. The

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airfield in the north has removed the original enclosure pattern as has later enclosure and prairie farming, leaving about a third of the area with a largely 20<sup>th</sup> century landscape. The lack of recorded archaeological remains probably reflects in part an absence of survey in contrast to the better studied Whittlewood Project area which it resembles.

***Designations***

BNS – 1 No.

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Open view looking south over the gently sloping plateau.



Arable field with woodland within Wood Green Wooded Farmland (LCA 1.3) to the right and trees along Ash Furlong Lane to the left.

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### Summary of Condition/Sensitivity Analysis

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
Pattern of elements:	Coherent
Visual detractors:	Some
Visual unity:	Coherent
Cultural integrity:	Poor
Ecological integrity:	Weak
Functional integrity:	Very Weak

<b>Sensitivity</b>	<b>High</b>
Distinctiveness:	Distinct
Continuity:	Historic
Sense of place:	Moderate
Landform:	Apparent
Tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High

<b>Guidelines</b>	<b>Restore</b>
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### Condition

The landscape of this area has a coherent pattern of elements held together by a generally intact hedgerow pattern. There are some visual detractors but their impact tends to be quite localised. The coherent pattern of elements with some visual detractors combines to produce a landscape with a coherent sense of visual unity. The cultural integrity is considered to be generally poor due to the lack of identified archaeological remains or historic buildings. It is better where the hedgerow pattern remains or close to historic settlement and weakest where historic landscape features have been removed in association with the former airfield. Ecological integrity is weak despite a locally strong connectivity provided by a good hedgerow network, because of a lack of broad habitats of District significance and statutory designated sites. The poor cultural integrity and the weak ecological integrity combine to produce

a very weak functional integrity. Overall the coherent visual unity and the very weak functional integrity combine to create a landscape in moderate condition.

### Sensitivity

The area has a distinct character although this is weaker around the airfield. This distinct character creates a landscape which is assessed as having a moderate strength of character. The landform is apparent and the tree cover generally open, which gives the area a high level of visibility. The combination of the moderate sense of place and the high level of visibility combine to give this area a high level of sensitivity.



Grass drying plant to the north of Westbury - screen planting is starting to mitigate visual impact.

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### Landscape Guidelines Restore

The landscape guidelines for Oatleys Plateau are as follows:

- Maintain and improve the condition of existing hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes and the promotion of restoring gaps with indigenous species.
- Maintain connectivity of habitats, and enhance where possible, particularly between woodland fragments.
- Promote good woodland management using traditional techniques aiming to create and maintain a wide diversity of habitats.
- Support and promote the identity of the medieval hunting forest of Whittlewood with new planting, access and interpretation.
- Encourage the establishment of new woodland of locally occurring native species. The woodland should be appropriate in scale to the landscape character of the area and reflect the historic landscape pattern.
- Encourage the establishment of new woodland and structure planting to minimise the impact of visually intrusive elements.
- Promote the establishment of new hedgerow trees to improve the age diversity. Oak is the most typical hedgerow tree in this area.
- Maintain the extent of unimproved and semi-improved grassland wherever possible. Encourage good management practice.
- Promote the survey, retention and conservation of historic parkland at Oatleys Hall.
- Identify key views from publicly accessible locations and promote the retention and enhancement of these viewpoints.