

# Looking after the Environment

## Strategic Objectives

- To protect and enhance Dacorum's distinctive landscape character, open spaces, biological and geological diversity and historic environment.
- To promote the use of renewable resources, reduce carbon emissions, protect natural resources and reduce waste.
- To protect people and property from flooding.
- To minimise the effects of pollution on people and the environment.



## 16. Enhancing the Natural Environment

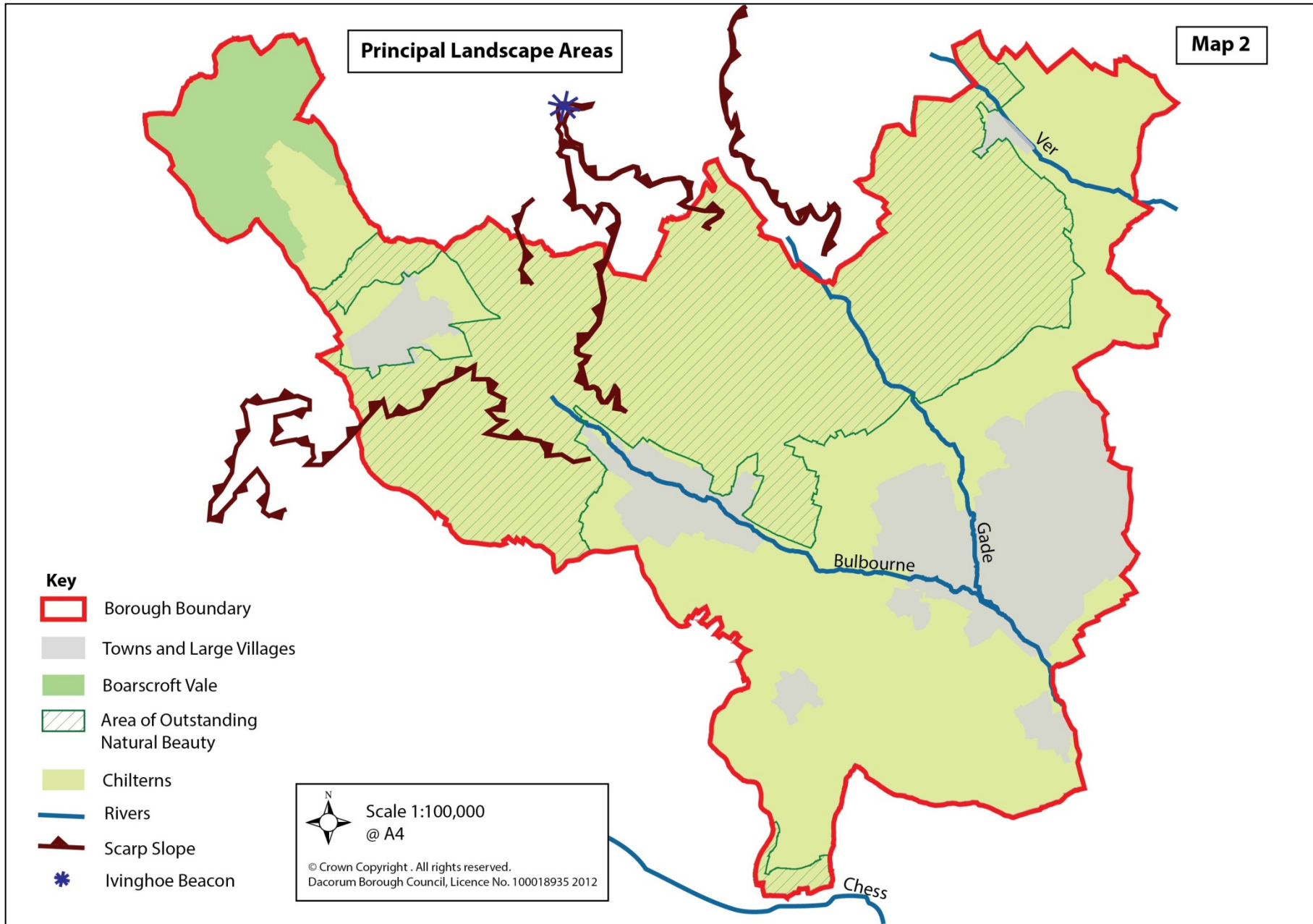
- 16.1 The borough's landscape, its appearance, its economy, its habitats and its heritage are a valued asset. The protection and enhancement of its natural environment through prudent investment and careful management is a key local priority.

### Protecting and Improving the Landscape

- 16.2 The majority of Dacorum is within the Chilterns National Character Area<sup>1</sup>. Whilst the character of the south eastern section has been eroded through 20<sup>th</sup> century development, much of the remainder is protected by its designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 16.3 The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of the borough's most important landscape assets. It was designated for the natural beauty of its landscape and its natural and cultural heritage. Its special qualities include the steep chalk escarpment with areas of flower-rich downland, woodland, commons, tranquil valleys, the network of ancient routes, villages with their brick and flint houses, chalk streams and a rich historic environment. Its conservation and enhancement is a national priority that will be reflected locally. The Chilterns Conservation Board has a statutory duty to produce a management plan, supported by a delivery plan. This identifies the management issues faced and provides policies and actions to guide the work of all those who care for the AONB.
- 16.4 The north western tip of the borough forms part of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands – an area known locally as Boarscroft Vale. These key landscape types are illustrated on Map 2.
- 16.5 A more detailed landscape assessment<sup>2</sup> divides the borough's countryside into 30 different landscape character areas. The assessment covers physical influences such as geology and topography, vegetation and wildlife, as well as historical and cultural influences such as the field pattern and settlement form. The character of some areas includes their relative tranquillity and quietness. For each character area, management guidelines have been drawn up based on a condition and sensitivity analysis. Development proposals will be expected to adhere to the guidelines, conserving, restoring or improving the landscape as appropriate. This action will support the prudent management of land and water resources, and benefit ecology.

<sup>1</sup> The Character of England's Landscape, Wildlife and Cultural Features Map, 2005 Countryside Agency (now part of Natural England)

<sup>2</sup> Landscape Character Assessment for Dacorum



- 16.6 The borough has extensive areas of surviving high quality historic landscapes. The variety is extremely high, with three of particular rarity in the borough<sup>3</sup>:
1. coaxial field systems (particularly around Gaddesden Row);
  2. Iron age mining and settlements (beneath the woodlands at Ashridge); and
  3. deserted Medieval landscapes (Boarscroft Vale).

Some areas, such as the National Trust's Ashridge Estate are exceptionally well-preserved. Others, such as the vale of Aylesbury and Chiltern dip-slope areas, although altered, still contain many elements of surviving past landscapes of prehistoric Roman, medieval and post-medieval date. There are a large number of commons and parks and gardens of historic interest. Ashridge, Tring Park, Markyatecell Park and the Jellicoe Water Gardens in Hemel Hempstead town centre are listed on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. Unregistered parks and gardens are considered to be of significant local interest.

- 16.7 The Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record provides up-to-date information on all of the county's historic buildings, archaeological remains and historic sites, together with surveys, reports and aerial photographs to help identify both their physical scale and relative importance.
- 16.8 The approach to conserving the area's built historic heritage is set out in more detail in Section 17.

## **Green Infrastructure**

- 16.9 'Green Infrastructure' sits within the urban and rural landscape. It is a network of protected sites, nature reserves, habitats, green spaces, waterways and green linkages that crosses the whole area.
- 16.10 It brings a range of benefits: acting as natural 'air conditioning,' assisting with pollution control and flood management, improving the health and well-being of residents by providing space for leisure activities, reinforcing the character and identity of places, helping support renewable energy production, as well as having a positive impact upon social interaction and property prices.
- 16.11 Green infrastructure provides a setting for the borough's towns and villages, threading through and connecting them to the wider countryside. It contributes to the character of the area, helping to give Dacorum its strong sense of place and high

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<sup>3</sup> Hertfordshire Historic Landscape Character Assessment, which zones land according to its historic character and the likelihood that a particular area will contain historic landscape features – County Council

quality environment, and is particularly important on the urban fringe, where it helps to soften the transition between urban and rural landscapes.

16.12 As a 'life support system' for both people and the wider environment it is vital that the quality and integrity of the borough's green infrastructure network is maintained and improved at all spatial scales, from sustainably designed buildings and gardens and trees, to wildlife corridors, open land within settlements and to the wider pattern of habitats and open space that feature throughout the countryside.

16.13 The high level green infrastructure network for Dacorum (Map 3) includes key landscape features, strategic wildlife corridors and areas of high biodiversity - resources which should be cherished, protected, enhanced and extended. They provide the context for local detailing and finer grained networks, in particular:

- the more detailed borough-wide Green Infrastructure Strategy; and
- the place strategies in Sections 20-26.

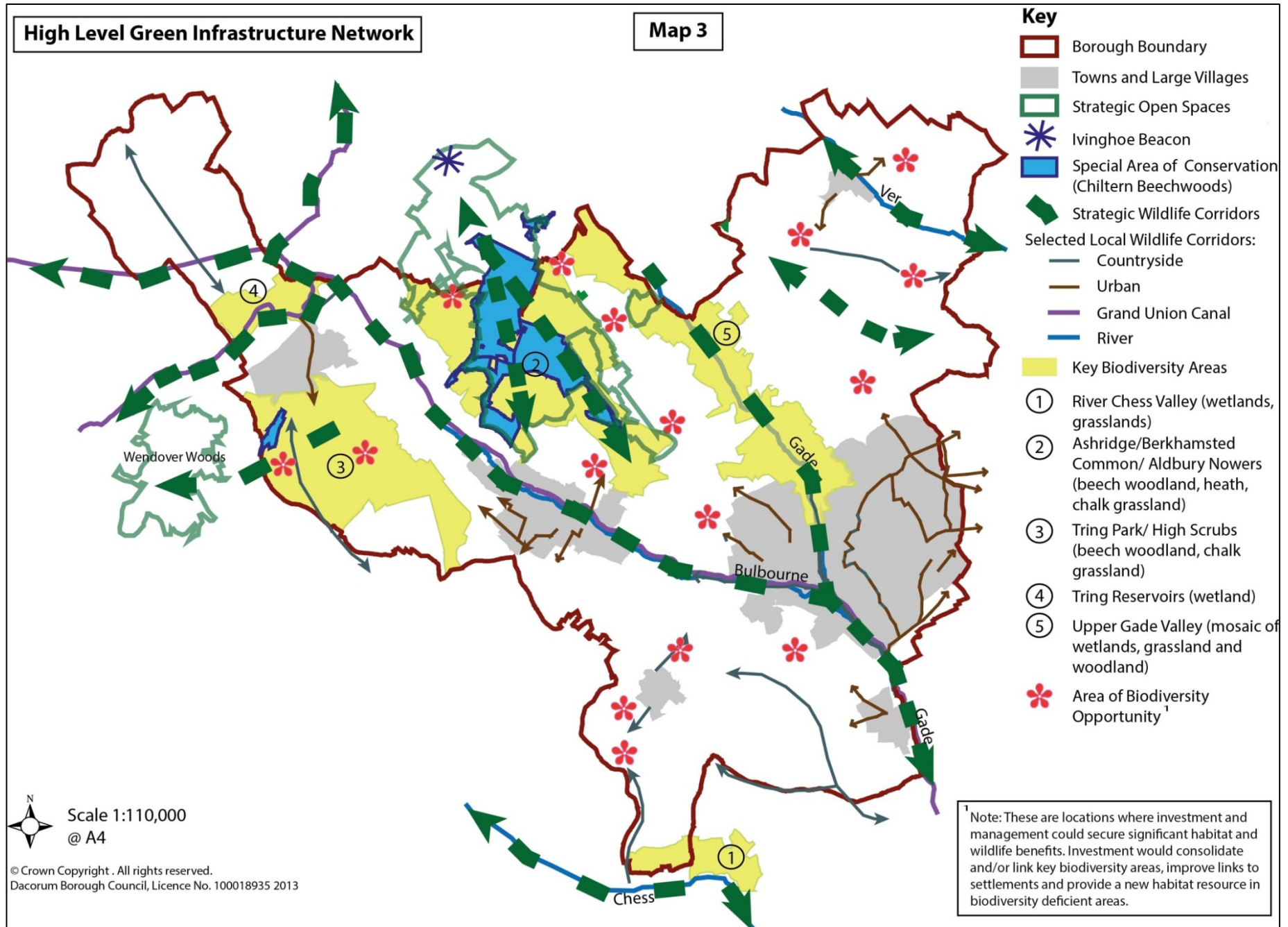
16.14 The Green Infrastructure Strategy and associated Action Plan will show habitat management zones for chalk grassland, woodland and farmland and their connection with the key biodiversity areas. It will contain policies for conserving and extending the network. Key projects will focus on enhancement of the river valleys and associated wetlands, enhancement of the Grand Union Canal, enhancement of the Tring Park, Aldbury Nowers and Ashridge areas, links to commons and rural villages and the enhancement and better use of spaces in Hemel Hempstead. It will also raise understanding and awareness of the green infrastructure network in the borough and outside, and will inform the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

16.15 The vision diagram for each settlement identifies local wildlife corridors and areas of open land that are of particular importance to that town or large village, and which should be protected from development.

16.16 Policy on green infrastructure derives from a number of studies and strategies<sup>4</sup>. The overall aim is to ensure that environmental assets are protected and enhanced, that opportunities are found to extend and link them together, and that access is provided.

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<sup>4</sup> The Urban Nature Conservation Study, the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan, the Green Space Strategy, Appropriate Assessment, Open Space Study and Dacorum Green Infrastructure Plan





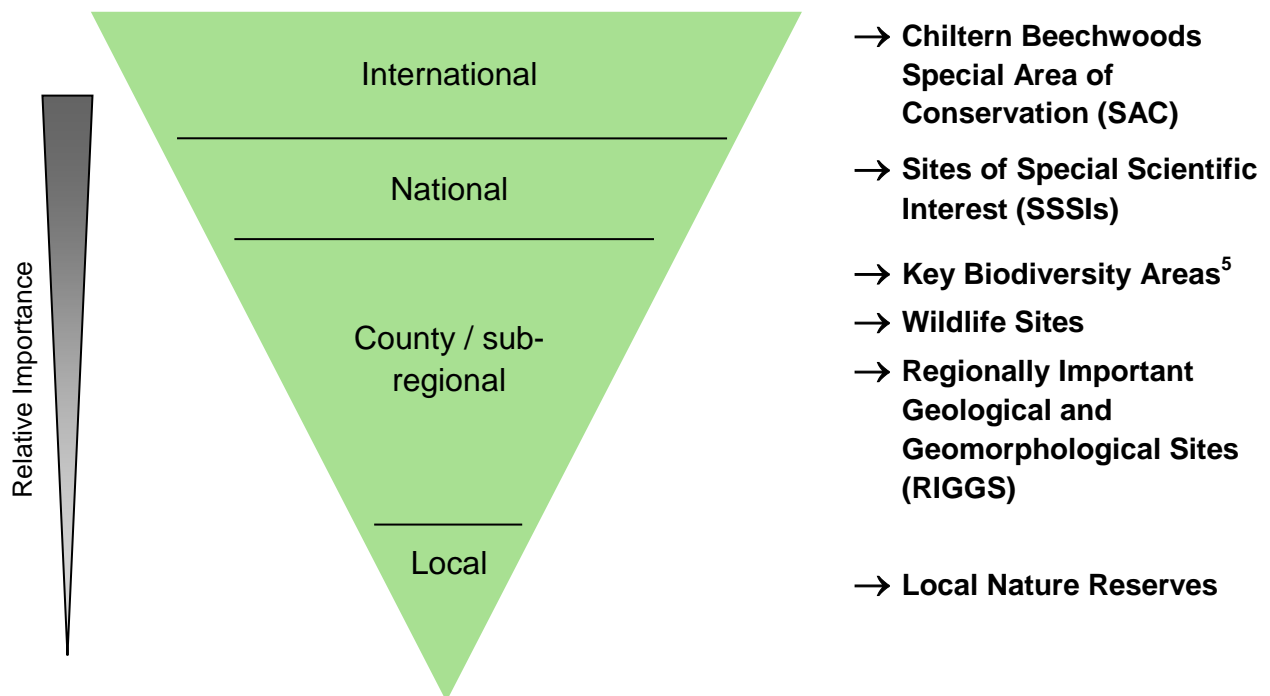
## Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

16.17. Biodiversity and geological resources are an essential component of green infrastructure. Their protection will vary according to their relative importance (see Figure 15), the highest being international importance.

16.18. Potential damage to the Chiltern Beechwoods (SAC) from development proposals will be subject to special assessment. A precautionary approach, avoiding damage and encouraging alternative natural greenspace, will be pursued: mitigation of damage may be appropriate, but only as a secondary option. The general principles of avoidance and mitigation will be applied by the Council, when considering impacts on any site of biodiversity or geological interest.

16.19. Important landforms and geology will be designated as Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites, e.g. the Bourne gutter and pingos on Boxmoor. Their management and interpretation can provide local communities with enjoyment and an appreciation of the characteristics of the Chilterns chalk landscape and how it has evolved.

**Figure 15: Biodiversity and Geology Designations**



16.20. The Habitat Survey for Dacorum<sup>5</sup> identified over 200 Wildlife Sites. This list is updated annually by the Hertfordshire Wildlife Sites Partnership, when new sites are identified or existing sites lose their nature conservation value.

<sup>5</sup> Hertfordshire Habitats Survey and Reports, 1994-1998, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and the Hertfordshire Biological records Centre



- 16.21. Not all areas of importance to biodiversity are protected by the formal designations shown in Figure 15. Features such as the Grand Union Canal, river valleys, chalk streams, areas of ancient semi-natural woodland, orchards, nature reserves, important trees and hedges and other local green spaces within towns and villages are collectively very significant and need protection. Opportunities will be taken to create new greenspace, designate new Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) to meet the local accessibility standards set by Natural England and support countryside management initiatives. Better management of the water resource and restoration of seasonal flows in the chalk streams, which are suffering from over-abstraction, will be critical.
- 16.22. The increasing fragmentation of habitats will be addressed. Many areas have become isolated 'islands,' increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions, disease and climate change. Habitat fragmentation is greatest at Hemel Hempstead and in the eastern part of the borough.
- 16.23. Key Biodiversity Areas<sup>6</sup> are identified on Map 3. They contain particularly high concentrations of either woodland, wetland, grassland or a broader mosaic of habitats and have the greatest potential for joining fragments of habitats and creating, restoring and managing large areas of quality habitat. Large scale biodiversity initiatives, such as the Living Landscapes Project, are expected to come from the national and local conservation bodies. They will help guide priorities for nature conservation and sympathetic land management, and will therefore be incorporated into the Green Infrastructure Strategy and related action plans.
- 16.24. A Sustainability Offset Fund (Policy CS30) will help provide additional tree and woodland planting, to extend and supplement existing green corridors and habitats and to reinforce existing landscape belts. The biodiversity value of new landscaping and open space will be increased through careful design and the use of appropriate native species.

**POLICY CS24: The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

**The special qualities of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be conserved.**

**The scarp slope will be protected from development that would have a negative impact upon its skyline.**

**Development will have regard to the policies and actions set out in the Chilterns Conservation Board's Management Plan and support the principles set out within the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide and associated technical notes.**

<sup>6</sup> Defined by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and included within the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

**POLICY CS25: Landscape Character**

All development will help conserve and enhance Dacorum's natural and historic landscape.

Proposals will be assessed for their impact on landscape features to ensure that they conserve or improve the prevailing landscape quality, character and condition and take full account of the Dacorum Landscape Character Assessment, Historic Landscape Characterisation and advice contained within the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record.

**POLICY CS26: Green Infrastructure**

The Green Infrastructure Network will be protected, extended and enhanced. Habitat management zones, projects and more detailed policies will be set out in a Supplementary Planning Document and related Action Plan(s).

National and local Biodiversity Action Plans will be supported. Designated sites will be protected and opportunities taken to link them with the wider Green Infrastructure Network.

Development and management action will contribute towards:

- the conservation and restoration of habitats and species;
- the strengthening of biodiversity corridors;
- the creation of better public access and links through green space; and
- a greater range of uses in urban green spaces.

Open spaces will be managed in accordance with the Council's Green Space Strategy.

**Monitoring:**

<b>Indicator(s)</b>	<b>Target(s)</b>
Change in areas of recognised wildlife habitat importance	No net loss
Management of designated Wildlife Sites	Increase the proportion of local sites where positive conservation management has been, or is being, implemented
Loss of designated Open Land	0 hectares
Development within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.	-

**Delivery will be achieved through planning and land management, by:**

- identification of development sites and their requirements within the Site Allocations DPD and East Hemel Hempstead AAP;
- following the Development Management DPD and supplementary planning documents;
- acting sensitively on the results of environmental assessments and analyses;
- the use of the Landscape Character Assessments (including historic characterisation);
- implementation of the Green Infrastructure and Green Space Strategies and Biodiversity Action Plan objectives;
- adherence to the Chilterns Building Design Guide and associated technical notes;
- implementation of the Management Plan for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and associated guidance;
- supporting broad based initiatives from national and local conservation organisations such as the Chilterns Conservation Board, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre and the Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service, and working in partnership with them;
- supporting measures which develop sound food and woodland economies and help maintain the countryside (e.g. farmers markets);
- encouraging the take up of agri-environment grants through partners; and
- implementation and monitoring of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP).

