

Appendix 22: A conservation management plan for the central area of the Ashridge Estate (part 1), September 2019

Historic Environment Associates

Ashridge Estate



A Conservation Management Plan for the Central Area
of the Ashridge Estate

Part 1 Report

Final

September 2019

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Executive Summary

The study area comprises predominantly c250ha of some of the finest beech woodlands in the UK; this is part of the c640ha Ashridge Estate managed by the National Trust. It lies on a chalk ridge within the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB) and is one of the largest areas of natural open accessible land in the region. Within a 10-15-mile radius are the growing towns of Tring, Berkhamsted, Hemel Hempstead and Dunstable; together these towns contribute the majority of the visitors to the site.

The study area is primarily significant for its international and national designations for its ecology (Special Area of Conservation, Site of Special Scientific Importance) but it is also nationally significant for its cultural management practices, archaeology (Scheduled Monuments) and designed landscape (Grade II* Register of Historic Parks and Gardens) as well as falling within the nationally important landscape designation of AONB. Areas of the site are designated as 'common land' and 'open access land' enshrining the rights of access to significant parts of the site. Long distance footpath trails cross the site as well as a network of local footpaths and bridleways. These designations ensure a comprehensive range of protection to the landscape but with such an array of protection comes obligations and restrictions in management.

Much of the significance of the site can be attributed to the long-term human interaction with this environment. There is widespread evidence of archaeological activity across the site. In more recent historical times, the ecology of the site has been strongly influenced by medieval management of the common lands and woodlands: the scarp of the ridge being grazed as well as grassland amongst trees (wood pasture) whilst the wooded areas were a mix of high canopy with areas of coppice and standard trees. This period was probably the richest ecologically in the recent history of Ashridge as at the time it supported a range of habitats each attracting a diverse flora and fauna.

In the C19 the site was part of the much wider estate with Ashridge House, now separately managed, at its core. Within the study area rides and ornamental drives were cut through the woodland and ornamental features such as viewing terraces, lodges, cottages and the Bridgewater Monument were added.

Around a hundred years ago the landscape was much more open, particularly the grazed common land and scarp face; the Bridgewater Monument was much more visible, and the ridge top drive and paths afforded less obstructed views over the landscape to the west.

Over the last century, with the decline in grazing, the commons and scarp have become covered in trees. Coppice has declined as the need for coppicing products has diminished and the distinction between areas of woodland and wood pasture on the commons has become blurred.

Today it is becoming apparent that sites designated for their high ecological interest are becoming less biodiverse. The reasons are complex but human impact on a national and international scale through farming, habitat fragmentation, development and pollution are the most obvious. Simply conserving land of high ecological value is no longer sufficient and in response the National Trust has adopted a strategy, *Playing our Part*, to more effectively manage such high-quality areas in its ownership. Where possible, it will also seek to expand its holdings of such land and put it into active ecologically-orientated management.

Executive Summary

Another strategic aim of the Trust has been to adopt a 'welcome to all' approach to encourage as many visitors as possible to embrace and bond with the natural environment. This is based on growing research that forming emotional attachments to nature will result in healthier people, be that mentally or physically, and in turn such people will feel more strongly about the environment. Ashridge is already one of the Trust's most visited sites with over 500,000 visitors a year. Encouraging a 'welcome to all' in combination with an ever-expanding local population is only likely to increase these figures.

Managing such numbers is already difficult. Monument Drive is effectively a linear car park on many days and during peak season overspill parking is required on Meadleys Meadow. The visitor centre, café and toilets are sited in the historic core of the study area forming the main attraction of the site, adjacent to the Bridgewater Monument. Facilities struggle to meet the needs of visitors during peak periods.

Trust staff have undertaken reviews of how to deal with the issues of parking and the location and scale of visitor facilities. It is clear that there are no easy solutions to providing the optimum outcome of adequate parking and associated visitor facilities located away from the main heritage core, with minimal ecological impact to designated areas. The very scale, importance and diversity of designations mean relocation is at present only a long-term ambition.

The main focus for enhancing the ecological value of the site is to diversify habitats and management, reintroduce grazing and wood pasture, expand coppice management, continue to conserve veteran trees and to reduce the impacts of natural pests and dogs off lead on both habitats and wildlife. Improved networks of surfaced paths should limit damage to habitats from trampling and encourage more visitors to explore the site and thereby reduce the concentration of visitors around the heritage core.

The archaeology and designed landscape value of the site should be conserved and over time enhanced. There is a need to increase the understanding of the Romano British archaeology as well as understanding the origin of the field systems and enclosure, and the dating and reason for their decline. There is also a possibility of understanding more about the changing natural environment from evidence preserved in damp places and buried soils. Modest management inputs will ensure paths and rides are maintained and wood banks and mounds are not eroded. Once the immediate imperatives of ecological and visitor issues have been addressed restoration of historical features, such as the drives and terraces, can be addressed, and general enhancement of the archaeological/historical features realised.

Following the current strategic approach of the Trust, the logical conclusion is to aim, long-term, to reunite the currently separately managed elements of the wider Ashridge Estate and House landscape into a single or agreed management regime. This would allow expansion of the actively managed SAC and offer the opportunity to both recreate ecologically rich woodland that has been lost whilst reconnecting the wider elements of the historic landscape.



1 Introduction

1.1 The Central Area of the Ashridge Estate, our study area, comprises 250ha of the Ashridge Estate managed by the National Trust. It is situated in the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, approximately 25 miles from the centre of London and within easy reach of residents of nearby towns including Berkhamsted, Tring, Dunstable and Hemel Hempstead -see **Figures 1.1 and 1.2.**- and is a major recreational resource to these communities: current estimates by the Trust project over 500,000 visitors a year.

1.2 The site lies on a chalk ridge running South-West to North-East affording long distance views to the North-West over the Bulbourne valley. The landscape is dominated by mainly semi-natural woodland with small areas of chalk grassland and open meadows and the site is of national and international importance for the wildlife and habitats it supports. There is strong link between the site and human occupation resulting in a diverse, nationally important archaeological record. The study area was also once part of a much larger estate, centred around Ashridge House, and features of a designed landscape, particularly Monument Drive and the Bridgewater Monument, can be seen today.

Background to the study

1.3 The National Trust has been undertaking a series of strategic reviews of the Ashridge Estate to guide its future sustainable management. Initially looking at issues arising from general visitor impacts, such as extensive parking along Monument Drive, a series of strategic statements and specialist reports have been developed and commissioned providing a wide-ranging baseline from which to make future conservation and visitor management proposals.

1.4 This study provides an assessment of the significance of the current ecological, archaeological, designed landscape and cultural value of the central core of the wider Ashridge Estate. The plan presents a balancing of these different significances in a statement of significance before identifying some current issues and management opportunities that can be considered further in future plans and strategies.

1.5 The conservation management plan is seen as an essential part of the 2019 baseline which can inform the preparation of other reports, such as the woodland management plan and estate management plan, and any detailed proposals that are developed in due course.

National Trust Policy

1.6 In preparing this report we are mindful of the context of the strategy of the National Trust and how a site such as Ashridge Estate contributes to this approach. As an organisation the Trust wants to promote positive messages about our emotional relationships with nature, to enhance our enjoyment of nature, leading to a better appreciation and therefore care for the natural world.

1.7 The Trust states in its 'Playing our Part' summary of its current strategy¹:

"Our 21st century ambition is to meet the needs of an environment under pressure, and the challenges and expectations of a fast-moving world. We want to continue to maintain the highest standards of care for everything we look after, while working in a way that feels relevant and necessary to people and their day-to-day lives"

1.8 The strategy outlined has four main aims:

- **Looking after what we've got:** *We benefit the nation by looking after the places in our care and providing access to them now and in the future;*
- **Restoring a healthy, beautiful, natural environment:** *The natural environment is under pressure, the land is unhealthy, and wildlife is in decline. With the help of our supporters and our partners we will restore it and make it healthy, beautiful and rich in wildlife;*
- **Experiences that move, teach and inspire:** *We provide access to extraordinary places and enable people to experience them in ways that deepen their understanding and engagement, inspire them to value places and to want to look after them;*
- **Looking after the places where people live:** *We will celebrate the value of local heritage and green spaces and enable people to make a difference, looking after and*

¹ *Playing our Part* The National Trust 10 year strategy launched 2015

protecting the local places they love.

1.9 The strategy also recognises the importance of engaging people to support the Trust's work:

'To help us achieve our four strategic objectives we need to grow support so that the public believe what we do is relevant to their day-to-day lives, and are connected emotionally and practically to our places and what we stand for.'

1.10 Increasingly, the Trust has been active in promoting the benefits of the natural environment to the wellbeing of people. This builds on work that emerged during the turn of the century in the United States with authors such as Richard Louv highlighting the developmental benefits of children engaging with the natural environment which was taken up by play and urban greenspace managers as a rationale for their work and developed further by Natural England in the UK. There is also an expanding body of academic research that is making connections between the natural environment and health and wellbeing outcomes.

1.11 There has also been a growing realisation that connecting people with nature is beneficial for both people and place. The more people understand and engage with nature the more they will appreciate and want to protect it. In 2018 the Trust published 'Growing our care for nature' which puts together work of Dr Miles Richardson showing the connections between greenspace and wellbeing.

'Feeling part of nature and having a deep emotional relationship with it brings meaning and satisfaction with life.'

Whilst at the same time:

'A connection with nature brings about more positive environmental attitudes and behaviour.'

1.12 As part of the Trust's strategy 'restoring a healthy, beautiful, natural environment' identified above they have drawn on the *Making Space for Nature*² report that identified wildlife sites were too small and disconnected and stated that they need to be 'better, bigger, more and joined up', to develop its own guidance and objectives for its managers of sites of national and international conservation value. These objectives are:

1. Improve the condition of our SSSIs and existing Priority Habitats;
2. Create/restore 25,000ha of Priority Habitat;
3. All our land is managed to a High Nature Status;
4. Ensure all our land is above minimum standard;
5. Influence change beyond our boundaries.

1.13 The area of the Ashridge Estate that forms our study area can clearly play an important role in delivering this strategy, particularly objectives 1-4. It is an SAC / SSSI³ and can be considered a

² *Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network* Chair Sir John Lawton September 2010

³ See Chapter 2

1 Introduction

Priority Habitat and these objectives provide a strategic steer for this plan.

Spirit of the Place

1.14 To try describing the more emotional qualities of each of its sites the Trust has produced a 'Spirit of the Place' description as a way of capturing the essence of what they are managing. For Ashridge Estate, an area wider than our study area, the description reads:

"We all need space; unless we have it we cannot reach that sense of quiet in which whispers of better things come to us gently. Our lives in London are over-crowded, over-excited, over-strained. This is true of all classes; we all want quiet; we all want beauty for the refreshment of our souls". Octavia Hill

A place of wildness, fresh air, freedom and tranquillity. An oasis to feel lost and found in. An escape from urban life. Walk for miles without encountering a fence or wall or another person. Underfoot, the bumps, pits and gullies bear the mark of lord, pilgrim, cattle drover, commoner, brick maker, sawyer and soldier.

It's a place for families to live, work and play together. A place for farming and wood cutting. A place for hunting, pleasure and toil. A holy place to pray; a place to bury the dead.

A panorama high above tea, cake and picnics. A vast distant mansion sits at the heart of parkland avenues and lost paths – a vista into history, industrial innovation and land use. It's a place of historical conflict over commoners' rights.

It's a place to enjoy the seasons. Precious bluebells, filling the air with their scent, crowd the trunks of ancient pollards and coppice stools. Wild thyme, crushed underfoot on the chalky hills, mingles with the song of skylarks and mewing buzzards above the remains of Iron Age earthworks. Deep in the grassland tiny solitary bees lay eggs in empty snail shells and rare butterflies bask in the sun. Canopies of amber beech, huge fallen boughs consumed by fungi and tiny insects. The groans of rutting fallow deer, heard centuries before by monk, keeper and king. On every wood bank stands a giant ancient tree, bowed heavy with the silence of the winter snow - in life and death they are the epitome of Ashridge.

A place shaped by people, saved by people, spoilt by people, nurtured and loved by people.

November 2014

Methodology

1.15 The study was commenced in October 2018 with a draft report prepared by the end of January 2019 with a final report to be circulated and agreed by April 2019.

1.16 Site survey has been undertaken by members of the study team during the winter along with consultation and discussions with site staff. Archival research was initially undertaken in October / November with the aim of informing survey work in the field.

1.17 This background information has been compiled and analysed in the chapters that follow in this draft report as a basis of discussion informing the production of the final report during February and March 2019.

Authorship

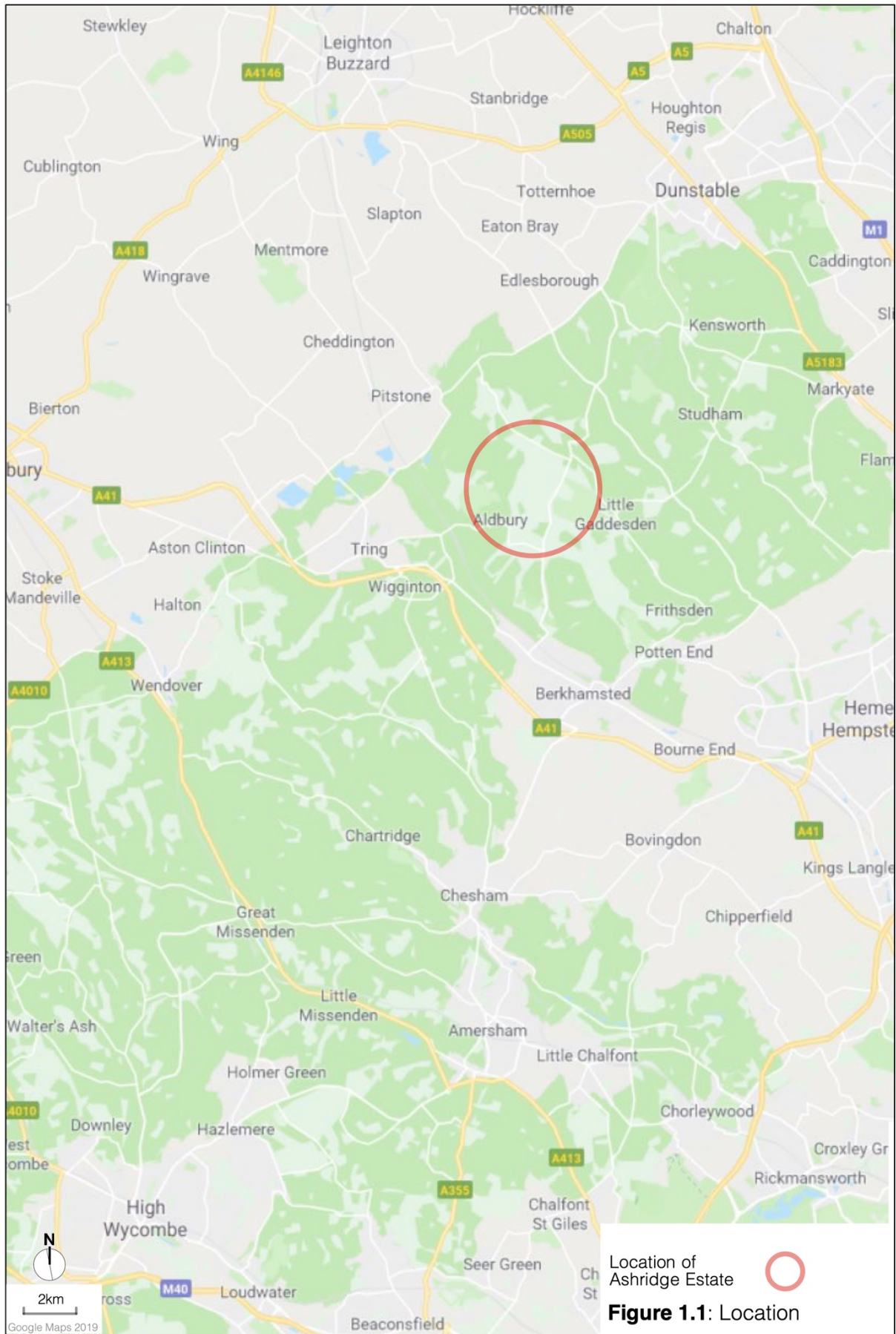
1.18 The report has been prepared by:

- Paul Bramhill – Project Manager
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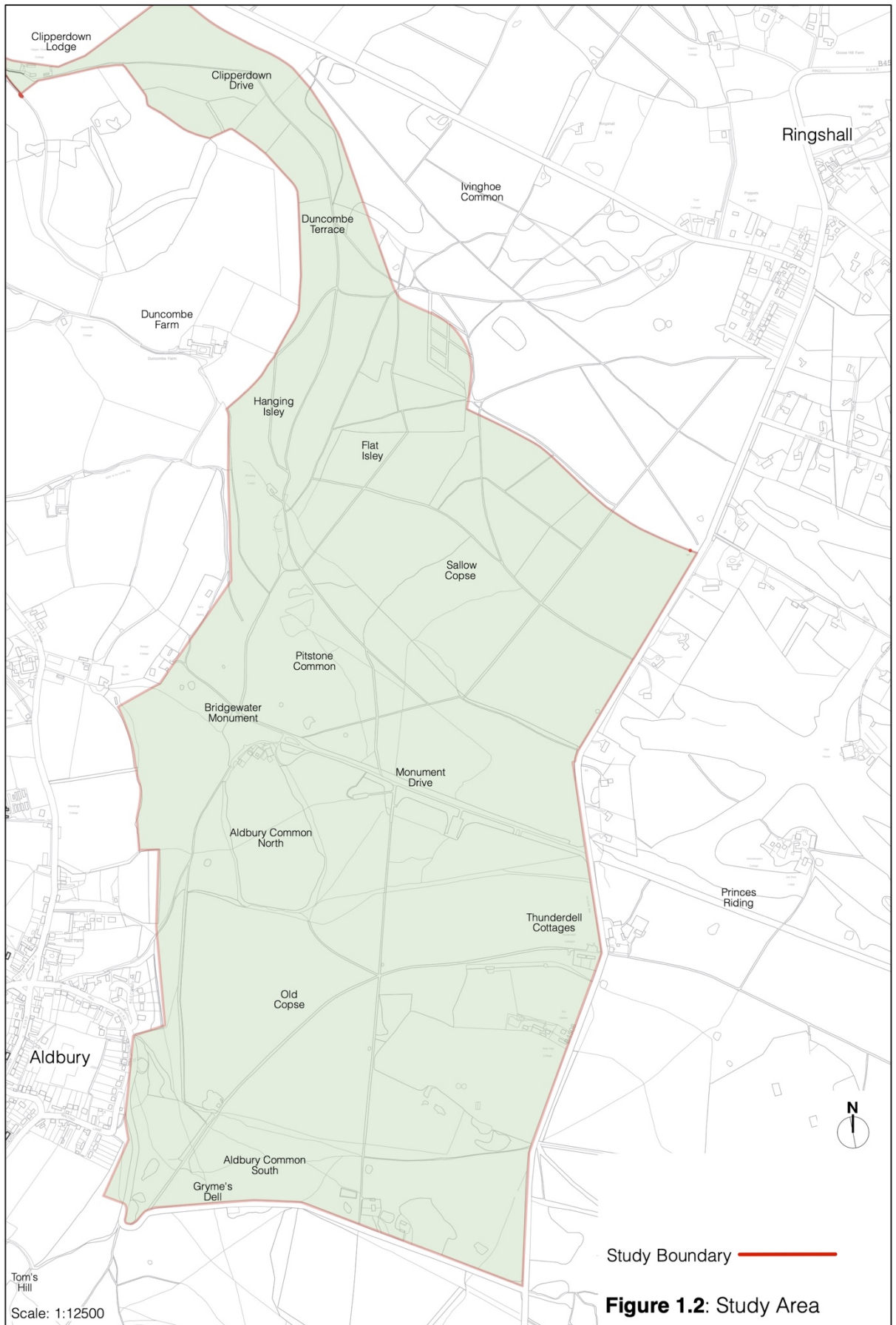


Figure 1.2: Study Area

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2

Baseline Information

Ownership and Land Management

2.1 Almost the entire study area is within the ownership of the National Trust. The land was acquired during the 1920s when Ivinghoe, Pitstone and Aldbury commons were purchased. A small area of open pasture neighbouring the B4506 is in private ownership. See **Figure 2.1**.

2.2 The study area is directly managed by in-house staff – see later section on Current Use and Management – except for the Old Dairy pasture which is managed by Park Farm under a business tenancy. There are significant areas of land that are managed under a variety of tenancies and agreements immediately outside the study area, particularly adjacent to the area near Duncombe Terrace. These agricultural agreement areas, as well as the land managed by Park Farm, are shown in **Figure 2.2**.

Covenants and Legal Restrictions on Management

2.3 From research by Trust staff there is a **Deed of Covenant** that applies to the area of pasture surrounding the Old Dairy, namely the area of land not owned by the Trust and the area managed by Park Farm, shown in **Figure 2.3**. The covenant appears to have been set up by the Trust to ensure no unsightly or unnecessary development or inappropriate activities take place immediately

Understanding the asset

adjacent to their land. The covenant restricts the erection of temporary structures or use of caravans on the land but permits some temporary structures if they are required for agricultural business and appears to permit a small area of the site to be used for farm sales or tea garden. Permanent building is restricted by number of potential dwellings and location, and any proposals need to have the approval of the Trust and to be constructed in specific materials. The Trust for its part is restricted from setting up a competing tea room offering in the immediate vicinity of the Old Dairy.

2.4 There is also a **Deed of Covenant** with the Forestry Commissioners dated 15 June 1955 affecting part of the site which includes a covenant not to use the land otherwise than for growing timber in accordance with rules or practice of good husbandry, **Figure 2.3**.

2.5 As noted in 2.1, the majority of the study area was conveyed to the Trust as a series of parcels during the 1920s: the areas shown blue on **Figure 2.3**, represent the land transferred 7th June 1926 and 22nd May 1928. The conveyances both contain a provision that the land be held as “an open space for the benefit of the public in pursuance of the National Trust Act 1907”.

2.6 There is also **Deed of Declaration** dated 23 March 1970 applying section 193 of the Law of Property Act 1925 to Aldbury Common. Section 193 provides for members of the public to have rights of access for air and exercise to any land which is a metropolitan common and so it would seem that by entering into the Deed the intention was to apply those rights even though the land was not metropolitan common.

2.7 There are two known wayleaves linked to power lines within the study area. Electricity is delivered from Aldbury to the visitor centre, café and cottages via overground lines as far as the Monument, before being buried underground to the buildings. There is another overground line from Aldbury passing through southern Aldbury Common adjacent to Old Copse serving Outwood Kiln Cottages. Water is also supplied from Aldbury. Lodge and cottage sewerage is treated locally in septic tanks.

Local Planning Context

2.8 The site straddles the county boundary between Buckinghamshire in the north and Hertfordshire in the south – see **Figure 2.4**. In Buckinghamshire the site is in Buckinghamshire County Council administration and lies in Aylesbury Vale District authority. The study area covers parts of two civil parishes, Ivinghoe CP and Pitstone CP.

2.9 In Hertfordshire the council is Hertfordshire County Council, the district level is Dacorum Borough Council, and at the parish level Aldbury CP covers the south of the study area.

2.10 Ashridge forms part of the crescent of protected landscape, the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, covered by numerous designations – see next sections – but within easy travelling distance of densely populated areas. Towns such as Tring and Berkhamsted are within 5km, whilst Dunstable, Luton, Hemel Hempstead, Chesham and Aylesbury are only 15km from the site.

2.11 There are huge pressures on land for development in both Aylesbury Vale and Dacorum councils. Projections for Dacorum 2006-2031 are for 11,320 new homes to be built with large developments planned to the north of Hemel Hempstead, Tring and Berkhamsted. Aylesbury Vale have estimated a need for 19,400 new homes in the 2013-2033 period most being built around

Aylesbury itself although 199 new homes have already been completed in Pitstone alone⁴. This in turn puts increasing pressure on parks and green spaces within settlements but also, very significantly for Ashridge, on the natural greenspace that surround these expanding towns.

2.12 Within the context of Aylesbury Vale and Dacorum Ashridge plays the role of a strategic open space. Natural England has developed the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (Natural England, 2003) which is considered as a national benchmark and is accepted as forming part of government guidance on strategic greenspace provision and having the best fit to Green Infrastructure planning and assessment. The standard emphasizes the importance of communities in towns and cities having easy access to different sizes of natural and semi-natural greenspaces close to where they live and provides two measures of analysis based on scale (sizes of green space provision) and catchment (representing the zone of influence of a provision and the distance that people are prepared to travel). The ANGSt model states:

- no person should live more than 300m from their nearest area of natural greenspace of at least 2ha in size, and that;
- there should be least 2ha of accessible natural greenspace per 1000 population;
- there should be at least one accessible 20ha site within 2km of people's homes;
- there should be one accessible 100ha site within 5km of people's homes;
- there should be one accessible 500ha site within 10km of people's homes;
- there should be 1.4ha per 1000 population as incidental open space;
- there should be 2.4ha per 1000 population as major open space.

2.13 Aylesbury has a relative lack of medium to large accessible greenspaces in proximity to the town and the main residential areas. There are no sites over the 20ha size threshold within 2km. Within 5km of the southern edge of Aylesbury there are a number of sites up to the 100ha size threshold along the Chilterns escarpment, however being more than 5km away from other parts of the town, they do not offer sustainable access. There are no sites over 500ha in size within 10km of Aylesbury but similarly sites such as the Ashridge Estate to the east of the Vale do provide public access

2.14 Dacorum BC has undertaken a Green Space Strategy in 2011⁵ and it identified the following:

'The historic market towns have relatively little green space within their boundaries, but sit in attractive countryside containing extensive areas of accessible green space. Approximately 800ha of accessible natural green space are provided at Ashridge by the National Trust and a further 100ha are provided by Britishn Waterways at Tring Reservoirs, resulting in a total of approximately 1600ha for the Borough.'

2.15 The authority has developed policies and actions, and within 'Policy 2: to protect and enhance our natural environment, heritage and habitats' they identify as part of Action 13:

⁴ Research provided by National Trust

⁵ *Green Space Strategy 2011-2016*

Understanding the asset

'Within the overall green space resource, there are special places that have a role to play across the Borough and should be managed accordingly. These Destination Parks will be managed and maintained to meet and exceed the standards required by the Green Flag Award' (The Green Flag Award is the national standard for parks and open spaces managed by Keep Britain Tidy).

2.16 Ashridge is then identified as one of these Destination Parks. Thus, the local authority is anticipating that the National Trust will provide high quality accessible natural green space on behalf of its residents. In effect, Dacorum anticipates Ashridge will function as a country park for Dacorum residents allowing the council to focus its resources on local parks and green space provision.

2.17 The significance of Ashridge to Dacorum residents is highlighted in a review of accessible natural greenspace (ANGSt) for the county⁶. This showed that Ashridge contributes to Dacorum meeting one of the hardest ANGSt standards, % of households able to access a 500ha+ site within 10km: in Dacorum 100% of households are able to do so.

Designations

2.18 The Estate is rich in designations reflecting the importance and complexity of the landscape. There are ecological, landscape, historical, archaeological and access designations applicable to the study area.

Ecological Designations

2.19 Ashridge is recognized as of European ecological importance through its Special Area of Conservation designation and of national importance in being recognized as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. See **Figure 2.5**

Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

2.20 The Chiltern Beechwoods SAC covers an area of 1,285ha; made up of several disjointed component parts, from Ringshall Coppice just north of the study area, to Cookham 30km south of the study area. These comprise nine separate Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The study area itself, at approximately 250ha covers around 20% of the total area of the whole SAC, and it is part of one of the largest continuous components of the SAC.

2.21 The SAC was designated in 2005 for three qualifying features:

1. *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests. (Beech forests on neutral to rich soils);
2. Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies⁷: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*). (Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone); and
3. Stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*).

2.22 Stag beetles are a qualifying feature of the SAC but they are not a primary reason for

⁶ *Analysis of Accessible Natural Greenspace Provision for Hertfordshire* Natural England and The Landscape Partnership 2010

⁷ Facies refers to the geological formation on which the vegetation is formed, in this case the scarp slope of the downs

designation of the site.

2.23 The whole SAC contains 569.64ha of *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forest, 104.15 ha of *Festuco-Brometalia* grassland and a population of between six and ten individual stag beetles, according to the SAC factsheet. The site is described as follows in the citation:

'The Chilterns Beechwoods represent a very extensive tract of ancient semi-natural beech (Fagus sylvatica) forests in the centre of the habitat's UK range. The woodland is an important part of a mosaic with species-rich chalk grassland and scrub. A distinctive feature in the woodland flora is the occurrence of the rare coralroot Cardamine bulbifera. Standing and fallen dead timber provide habitat for dead-wood (saproxylic) invertebrates, including stag beetle Lucanus cervus.'

2.24 The Conservation Objective for the SAC is to:

"Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- *The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;*
- *The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats*
- *The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species;*
- *The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely;*
- *The populations of qualifying species, and;*
- *The distribution of qualifying species within the site.*

2.25 Any plans or projects that may affect the Conservation Objectives of the SAC are assessed under the provisions of the Habitats Directive 1992, which is transposed into UK legislation via *The Habitats Regulations 2017*.

2.26 Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive sets out that:

"Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to an appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, having obtained the opinion of the general public."

2.27 Significant effects are those that will affect the integrity of the site, which can be defined as:

"the coherence of its ecological structure and function, across its whole area, that enables it to sustain the habitat, complex of habitats and/or the levels of populations of the species for which it was classified".

2.28 This may be interpreted in the case of the Ashridge Estate in terms of any action, plan or project that is likely to affect the extent or ecological integrity of either of the qualifying habitats

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(beechwoods and calcareous grasslands) or the qualifying species (stag beetles). Such actions need not necessarily have a direct effect on these features: even the removal of non-qualifying habitats can have an indirect effect on adjacent habitats.

2.29 The Site Improvement Plan for the SAC identifies the key threats to the Conservation Objectives of the SAC (which apply to the whole SAC, not specifically to the Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI component). These are, in order of priority (as quoted directly from the SIP – these threats therefore describe factors operating across the whole SAC and are not specific to Ashridge):

- **Forestry and woodland management:** The local history of woodland management for beech timber has contributed towards a uniform age structure in some woods. With few gaps in the canopy, regeneration is restricted. To encourage regeneration and conservation of beech woodlands, restoration management is needed to diversify age and physical structure. Current and future threats of climate change are also likely to impact upon woodland regeneration and species composition;
- **Deer:** Deer species across the Chilterns include fallow, roe and muntjac. Browsing by deer prevents or hinders natural regeneration of trees and ground flora. Without regeneration, diversity of woodland age and physical structure is declining, and this is particularly acute where age distribution is already limited. Not all parts of the SAC are affected, however, in those that are, current control measures appear ineffective in managing the problem;
- **Changes in species distributions:** Fit-for-purpose species recording and data to allow monitoring of the stag beetle population is not currently in place, making it difficult to manage the population and its habitat appropriately;
- **Invasive species:** Grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) and edible dormouse (*Glis glis*) damage growing trees by bark stripping. Where natural regeneration is occurring, the trees are attacked between the ages of 20 and 40 if not before. It is not known if this is impacting on tree health or regeneration but there may be a need for vigilance and consider increased awareness of likely effects and signs of impacts. Control measures have resulted in little or no ecological change to date;
- **Disease:** Box blight has been observed at Ellesborough and Kimble Warrens SSSI which represent the rare habitat type of box-dominated woodland. Other diseases are possible;
- **Public Access / Disturbance:** Removal of dead wood by the public is an issue on some parts of the SAC. This could impact in saproxylic invertebrate fauna. Also, storm-damaged dead wood may be removed in the interests of health and safety, and tidiness;
- **Air pollution:** impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition: Atmospheric nitrogen deposition exceeds the critical loads for ecosystem protection. Some parts of the site are recorded as unfavourable (recovering), but impacts associated with nitrogen deposition are unclear.

2.30 Public access is identified in the Site Improvement Plan specifically in respect of the potential for it to indirectly lead to the loss of dead wood habitat for stag beetles. Public access also has potential to lead to damage to the primary qualifying features of the SAC through trampling, littering, dog fouling and erosion, although this is not specifically referred to in the Site Improvement Plan. The pressures of public access are likely to increase over time as the local human population increases, particularly in relation to the Local Plans in the surrounding local

authority areas, which have allocated large numbers of additional housing units.

2.31 The full citation is included in **Appendix 1**.

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

2.32 The Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI was first designated in 1952, and again in 1987 under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It covers a total area of 640.1 ha (accounting for approximately 50% of the total area of the SAC).

2.33 The SSSI citation describes it as follows:

2.34 Natural England summarise the importance of the site as follows:

'Ashridge Commons and Woods is an extensive area of mainly semi-natural vegetation on the Hertfordshire/Buckinghamshire border. Situated towards the northern end of the Chiltern escarpment on wet, acidic Clay- with-Flints plateau soils and more base rich flinty chalks of the scarp slopes, the site comprises a mosaic of different habitats: a mixture of ancient semi-natural and secondary woodland, plantation, scrub, a more open component dominated by bracken, and grassland. The site supports an exceptionally rich breeding bird community including both county and national rarities.'

2.35 The citation references several birds or particular note:

"Of particular importance within the community are species found rarely elsewhere in Hertfordshire, such as redstart, nightingale and wood warbler. The nationally rare firecrest is found here at one of its two known county localities. Other more widespread species are breeding in good numbers at this site, examples being sparrowhawk, tree pipit, lesser spotted woodpecker and hawfinch. The last species has a particularly strong population in the Ashridge woodlands."

2.36 The study area contains two of the SSSI units: Unit 6 occupying the northern half of the study area, which is approximately 158 ha and was classed as being in Favourable condition (based on an assessment in 2009); and Unit 5 occupying the southern half of the study area, which is approximately 120 ha and was also classed as Favourable. The study area thus includes 40% of the SSSI area.

2.37 The full citation is included in **Appendix 2**.

Local Wildlife Sites

2.38 There are three locally designated wildlife sites within the study area, two centred around buildings:

1. Thunderdell Cottages and Local Area – designated for protected species (bats);
2. Monument Cottage Area – also designated for protected species (bats);
3. Chalk Slope west of Aldbury Common: A narrow field with species-rich chalk grassland on a moderately steep west facing bank. The chalk grass community supports species such as Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*), Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), Greater Knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*), Common Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*), Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*), Quaking Grass (*Briza media*) and Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*). Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) have also been recorded.

Landscape Designations

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

The Chiltern Hills was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1965. The Countryside Commission described the area in 1992⁸:

'The landscape of the Chiltern Hills is defined by the chalk escarpment which runs from Goring-on-Thames north-eastwards to Hitchin - a distance of 50 miles. At its highest point, near Wendover, it reaches nearly 900 feet. The steep scarp slope faces to the north west; the dip slope appears more like a plateau, gently shelving to the south east, incised by shallow valleys, some with chalk streams flowing to the River Colne and River Thames.'

2.39 The designation recognizes the landscape character, beauty, and the interaction between people and place over time. In terms of landscape character Ashridge embraces two of the distinctive landscape types of the area, the Escarpment and the Level Plateau.

2.40 Landscape character studies of the area⁹ describe the landscape character of the escarpment as:

'Narrow steeply sloping and heavily wooded chalk scarp. The scarp is a dominant landmark visible over long distances from the lower lying Aylesbury Vale to the north. Narrow, incised winding lanes climb up the scarp.'

There is a high proportion of woodland cover with grass pasture downland, with steep sided valleys (coombes) and woodland on steep slopes (hangers). Ivinghoe Beacon is a popular visitor attraction affording long distance views over the Vale landscape to the north and west. Earthworks relating to pre-historic settlement are common.....

Open areas of the eastern chalk scarp are used predominantly for grazing.'

2.41 The level plateau character is:

'Gently sloping chalk downland enclosed by extensive mature woodland. Small farmsteads, regular sized fields set out in geometric pattern predominantly used for grazing.'

2.42 The landscape of the Chilterns is characterised by chalk grassland, beech woodlands rich in biodiversity, archaeology and cultural associations not least significant remnants of common land.

2.43 The Hertfordshire part of the estate, which includes the majority of the study area, lies within Dacorum District Council. Its characterisation of the landscape notes the landscape character as follows¹⁰:

'The estate covers a gently undulating plateau with some dry valleys, particularly to the east, which run in a parallel formation. A number of sub areas illustrate a diversity of landscape elements including; ancient semi natural woodland, wood pasture, chalk grassland and

⁸ The Chilterns Landscape: Countryside Commission CCP392 1992

⁹ Aylesbury Vale District Council & Buckinghamshire County Council Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment LUC 2011

¹⁰ *Landscape Character Assessment* Dacorum Borough Council The Landscape Partnership 2002

downland, common, secondary woodland, plantations and the historic parklands of Ashridge College. Apart from localized areas of medium scale arable farming, land use is essentially recreational, the majority of the estate and parkland being devoted to public open space, with extensive and discreet, informal access.

There is a marked estate and managed feel throughout. The formal parklands of Ashridge College, including the wellingtonia avenue and the Prince's Riding driveway to the Bridgewater monument, are a strong visual feature, as is the estate architecture including the mansion and lodge houses. Other settlement includes an interesting range of vernacular styles, including limestone and flint chequerboard, parquetry and half timbering with brick. Much of the estate is owned and managed by the National Trust.'

2.44 The characterisation is inevitably broad brush, and it should be noted that there are areas of the estate that do not have the 'managed' feel, but rather a much more 'wild' or 'natural' character.

2.45 **Appendix 3** shows the indicators identified for monitoring the health of the Chilterns AONB. This shows the importance of Ashridge Estate to the AONB landscape as it can positively affect 11 out of 20 key indicators.

Historic Landscape Designations

Registered Landscape

2.46 There are two linear features within the study area that are recognized as part of the adjacent Ashridge Park, listed as Ashridge designed landscape by Historic England (Register of Historic Parks and Gardens)¹¹. One element is Monument Drive which extends from the B4506 to the Bridgewater Monument and the other is Old Copse Drive that connects Old Copse Cottage curving through the woodland to the same B-road. Ashridge is designated grade II*, or of national importance – see **Figure 2.6**.

2.47 The listing describes the site as follows:

'A medieval monastic college, founded in 1283 at Ashridge, and owning a c 50ha deer park, was dissolved in 1539, becoming a royal residence for Henry VIII's children and passing to the Princess Elizabeth after her father's death. Thomas Egerton, Queen Elizabeth's Lord Chancellor, bought the estate in 1604, incorporating the former monastic buildings within his own domestic buildings. His son John purchased an earldom following his father's death in 1617 and assumed the title Bridgewater. The fourth Earl (d 1745) became the first Duke of Bridgewater, and his younger son, Francis, the third Duke (d 1803), also known as the Canal Duke, consolidated the family fortunes by developing canals during the late C18. He employed Henry Holland (1745-1806) in the 1760s to build a new house on the site of the present orangery, employing Lancelot Brown (1716-83) from 1759 to 1768 to improve the parkland. John Egerton, the seventh Earl, employed James Wyatt (1747-1813) from 1808 to build a new house on the site of the adjacent monastic buildings, the Holland house being subsequently demolished, together with most of the associated garden features. In 1813 Humphry Repton (1752-1818) produced a Red Book of suggestions for the gardens and

¹¹ Ashridge Historic Parks and Gardens Register, Historic England 1998/2000

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pleasure grounds immediately around the house, his designs being laid out piecemeal over the following decades.

The second Earl Brownlow inherited the estate in 1851, aged eleven, the estate, including the garden, being administered and improved by his mother, Lady Marian Alford. The estate was sold up in the 1920s, the house and garden becoming a training centre for Conservative Party workers, the park and woodland being largely acquired by the National Trust and peripheral plots being sold for housing. The house became the Ashridge Management College in 1959, in which use it and the gardens remain (1998).'

2.48 The full listing for Ashridge is included in **Appendix 4**.

Archaeological Designations

2.49 There are three scheduled monuments within the study area – see **Figure 2.6**:

- Barrow on Moneybury Hill (152780 – the National Trust Historic Building and Scheduled Monument Record Number);
- Two barrows at the Bridgewater Monument (152802 and 152803).

2.50 Roman site on Moneybury Hill (152806)

2.51 The barrows are remnants of Bronze Age funerary practice associated with settlements probably in the Vale. The third, Roman, site, thought to be a temple, emphasises continuing ritual use of the landscape evidenced by the earlier barrows. Scheduled monuments are sites or buildings that are not graded but are all considered of **national importance**. Historic England is responsible for their listing and protection on behalf of the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Any changes or works to designated monuments require consent from Historic England.

2.52 Listings for the scheduled monuments is given in more detail in **Appendix 5**.

Listed Buildings

2.53 The only listed structure within the study area is the Bridgewater Monument (152804), which is considered by the Secretary of State for DCMS to be of special architectural or historic interest. Listed buildings do have a grading system and the Monument is listed grade II* - see **Figure 2.6**. Grade II* buildings are particularly important buildings of more than special interest. 5.8% of listed buildings are Grade II* out of a national stock of 377,587 (2016)¹².

2.54 Like scheduled monuments the listing is managed by Historic England.

2.55 A discussion paper considering the monument and its importance is given in **Appendix 6**.

¹² Historic England website, historicengland.co.uk

Access Designations

Rights of way

2.56 There is excellent access to the Ashridge Estate via an extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and a byway, see **Figure 2.7**.

2.57 There are three major trails that cross the site. At the south of the study area the Chiltern Way runs East-West across the site. This is a 125-mile-long distance footpath created by the Chiltern Society as its Millennium Project running through the Chiltern AONB.

2.58 Further north, the Hertfordshire Way follows the route of Monument Drive from the east before dropping down the scarp face in the west into Aldbury. The Hertfordshire Way is a circular walk around the county 194-miles-long. The walk is cared for by The Friends of Hertfordshire Way.

2.59 Running along the top of the scarp north to south is the Icknield Way, the third long distance trail to cross the site. The path runs for 110 miles eastwards to Peddars Way at Knettishall Heath in Suffolk. The Icknield Way meets a national trail, the Ridgeway, immediately to the north west of the study area. The Ridgeway connects Avebury, in Wiltshire, to Ivinghoe Beacon, part of the wider Ashridge Estate.

Common Land and 'Open Access Land'

2.60 There are also large areas of 'open access land' that are the common lands of Aldbury and Pitstone commons. **Figure 2.7** shows the extent of land designated as commons and also 'open access land' under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000.

2.61 According to the government guidance on **open access land**¹³:

'People can normally access your open access land on foot. They can:

- *Walk;*
- *Sightsee;*
- *bird-watch;*
- *climb;*
- *run.*

There's a general rule that visitors using their open access rights must keep dogs on a short lead of no more than 2 metres between 1 March and 31 July each year (except in the coastal margin) and at all times near livestock.'

The 'CROW Act' has a list of general restrictions that limit what people using their open access rights may do, unless you give them permission to do something on the list, or the right to do something already exists.

They can't:

- *ride a horse or bicycle;*
- *drive a vehicle (unless it is an invalid carriage);*

¹³ www.gov.uk *Open access land: management, rights and responsibilities* updated 10 May 2016

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- *bring an animal, other than a dog;*
- *camp;*
- *play organised games;*
- *hang-glide or paraglide;*
- *use a metal detector;*
- *run commercial activities on the land such as:*
 - *trade or sell;*
 - *charge other visitors for things they do on your land;*
 - *film, photograph or make maps;*
- *remove, damage, or destroy any plant, shrub, tree or root with intent;*
- *light, cause or risk a fire;*
- *damage hedges, fences, walls, crops or anything else on the land;*
- *leave gates open, that are not propped or fastened open;*
- *leave litter;*
- *disturb livestock, wildlife or habitats with intent;*
- *post any notices;*
- *commit any criminal offence.*

2.62 The **commons** designation provides the 'right to roam', similar to CROW Act land, and has similar restrictions on use although the government website ¹⁴also states that on commons you cannot hold a festival or drive across the land without permission, unless you have the right to access your property.

2.63 In managing common land there are works that the landowner normally needs to gain consent for from the Planning Inspectorate, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. These works could include:

- Putting up new fences;
- Erecting buildings;
- Making ditches or banks;
- Resurfacing the land;
- Building new solid surfaced roads, paths or car parks.

2.64 The National Trust's powers to do works on its commons are slightly modified and less onerous in some specific cases and are governed by section 29 of the 1907 Act¹⁵ and section 23

¹⁴ www.gov.uk Common Land and village greens

¹⁵ *National Trust Act 1907*

of the 1971 Act¹⁶. Works undertaken under section 23 must be considered by the Trust to be desirable for the purpose of providing and improving opportunities for the enjoyment of the property by the public. An internal paper covering works on commons sets out the best approach to adopt and how best to consult on works proposed.¹⁷

2.65 One of the main management issues for commons management is grazing on land that is usually unfenced and accessible to all. Establishing permanent fencing can take a great deal of time, consultation and expense although it is not impossible it is not normally introduced. However, temporary fencing may be used to assist in safe stock control on commons if regularly moved and resited.

2.66 It appears that only Aldbury common has commoners with rights. When the commons were registered in 1968 140 applications were made to register rights. *Twenty four households had some right of pasture based on acreage, though it is thought that grazing ceased in 1926 (Edmunds, undated), the ratio being 1½ animals per acre owned by the commoner. The commoner could apparently elect which animal was nominated for grazing (horse, donkey, cattle, sheep, pig). Rights of wood, fern, furze and chalk could be claimed by any occupier. Only fallen wood not more than 9 inches in diameter could be taken, and not less than one calendar month from the time that it had fallen. The rights extended only over the common itself and did not include the enclosed woods, Old Coppice and Little Coppice. Ripened fern was used as bedding for animals but could not be cut before 1st September, the commoner securing their claim by cutting around the area selected. Furze or gorse was used as a fuel, particularly for bread ovens, and was cut using two-handed bills and scythes.*¹⁸

Monument Drive Byway

2.67 Monument Drive is registered as a byway open to all traffic (BOAT) which according to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is:

'A highway over which the public have a right of way for vehicular and all other kinds of traffic, but which is used by the public mainly for the purpose for which footpaths and bridleways are so used'.

2.68 This provides access for vehicles to the Drive. However, a Traffic Regulation Order 1991 from Dacorum Borough Council limits this access, stating:

'all vehicles are prohibited between the hours of 10.00pm on any one day and 7.00am on the following day except for access'.

2.69 The BOAT designation is silent on the exact area to which it applies and whilst its length is reasonably defined the width of byway is unclear. Currently, the Trust is working with the highway authority to bring clarity to the situation.

¹⁶ National Trust Act 1971

¹⁷ Works on National Trust Commons – Guidance National Trust January 2014 (V3.0)

¹⁸ Archaeological Survey of the Ashridge Estate Volume VII Northamptonshire Archaeology 2010

Current use and management

2.70 The Ashridge Estate team currently comprises 20 posts broadly divided between visitor and countryside management – see **Figure 2.8**. The visitor team is under the Visitor Experience Manager and comprises staff addressing membership and visitor welcome, retail, learning and marketing. The countryside team is under the Countryside Manager and comprises rangers that undertake site management work. The whole team is overseen by a General Manager.

Visitor / Use Management

2.71 The visitor management team is responsible for the running of the visitor centre exhibition space and shop, education and events.

Visitor data

2.72 There have been various initiatives to collect visitor data in recent years but with the appointment of the Project Manager - Ashridge Car Park Improvements more attention is being focused on understanding visitor numbers, characteristics and patterns. Car flow data on Monument Drive has been monitored from August 2017. In 2018 a new study showed the scale of visitation – see **Figure 2.9**.

2.73 This shows that there are peaks during the observed popular visitor periods, namely May for the bluebells and autumn for the woodland autumn colour, as well as high numbers during the summer school holidays. However, there is still a significant 'background' car flow of around 15,000 visits per month.

2.74 Further data for the numbers of cars on site at any one time shows that on week days there are on average around 500 car movements per day which can go up to 850, whilst at weekends there can be between 1000 and 2000 cars dependent upon weather conditions. These cars all have to be accommodated along Monument Drive, Barracks Square and the visitor centre car park.

2.75 Other visitor survey data, collected by volunteers and staff, gives more background on the visitors themselves. The information covers a period between April 2017 and January 2019. The data shows that of the visitors interviewed who answered the question nearly a third were NT members. Over half of the people visited for around a couple of hours (54%) although 21% stayed for a half day and nearly the same remained for the day (17%). Around 10% of those interviewed were first time visitors, 20% regular (daily/weekly) 60% frequent (monthly/quarterly) and 10% occasional (annual). **Figures 2.10 and 2.11**.

2.76 From the same data set visitors were asked how far they had travelled, and this was averaged to just over 12 miles and almost 90% of visitors travelled from within a 25-mile radius **Figure 2.12**. More recent work, ongoing, is looking at origin of visit by using postcode data. This is showing that the most people are visiting from Berkhamsted, Hemel Hempstead and Dunstable.

2.77 Visitor numbers are very much an estimate as there is no controlled access to the site. Working from car numbers and occupancy recent estimates are in the region of 500,000 people visiting Monument Drive per year. Using declared visitor numbers for sites in 2017 such numbers would put Monument Drive at Ashridge between sites such as Waddesdon Manor (467,308) and

Westonbirt Arboretum (538,605)¹⁹, making it the 68th most visited in the country. Many of the sites at this level of visitation have large, well-managed parking facilities. Waddesdon Manor has recently invested in a substantial parking facility (over 1,000 spaces with about a tenth of spaces dedicated to disabled visitors) with the option to take a shuttle bus to the main attraction.

2.78 On certain days during peak season the Drive has to be closed and visitors advised to use car parks along Beacon Road where there is capacity for 100+ more vehicles.

2.79 Historically, large events used to be held at Ashridge, but they caused parking chaos and congestion. In order to reduce this impact, the Trust has moved to hosting around twenty smaller events each year targeting different audiences at different times of the year. For example, there are events targeting families during the school holidays, such as Easter egg hunts for Easter or Bioblitz in the summer; bluebell walks attracting wider audiences during late spring / early summer; or a Gentle Stroll, a ranger led walk in August. The events diary for 2019 is enclosed as an example.

2.80 School visits are actively encouraged and over the last three years bookings have increased from 1-2 per week during term time to more like 3-5 per week. This is targeting junior school visits, Key Stages 1-2, and there may be potential to attract some senior school visits, Key Stages 3-4, although curriculum pressures make out of school activities difficult to programme. Some visits have to be turned away as there is not capacity to accommodate more than one visit at a time. There is no specific parking available for coach visits so once children are dropped off the coach driver has to find space along Monument Drive for the duration of the visit.

2.81 People are mainly attracted to volunteer to undertake countryside management tasks. Some volunteers also support visitor welcome operations and currently visitor survey work is being facilitated by volunteers. There are around 200 active volunteers registered to the property.

2.82 The national or regional trails that cross the site do not attract many visitors in comparison to those arriving by car, but significant numbers coming are interested in walking and not just in visiting the café. In summer the numbers coming to picnic increases but walking still remains popular. This year, 2019, two new waymarked trails have been added so there is now a choice of 4 routes of varying lengths, namely:

- Wildlife walk 8 miles 4 hours
- Woodland walk 1 mile ½ hour
- Rangers ramble 3 miles 2 hours
- Foresters walk 3 miles 2 hours

2.83 Details of the walks and promotional leaflet is in **Appendix 7**.

2.84 There is also a fleet of disabled access vehicles that are managed at the visitor centre by staff and volunteers, available from April to October.

¹⁹ Association of Leading Visitor Attractions 2017 ALVA.org.uk

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Visitor Erosion

2.85 As a result of the high number of visitors the site staff have noticed certain areas are being eroded by footfall. **Figure 2.13** shows the areas most affected at the time of writing this report. This figure shows erosion is taking place to sections of popular footpaths, the medieval markers of woodland boundaries, known as wood banks, and areas of grassland worn to bare earth around the most visited areas of Monument Drive, the Monument, café and visitor centre.

2.86 A response to these eroded areas has been to establish the four waymarked routes discussed earlier and with the new paths it is hoped to attract more people to keep to paths rather than make their own through the sensitive woodlands.

Countryside Management

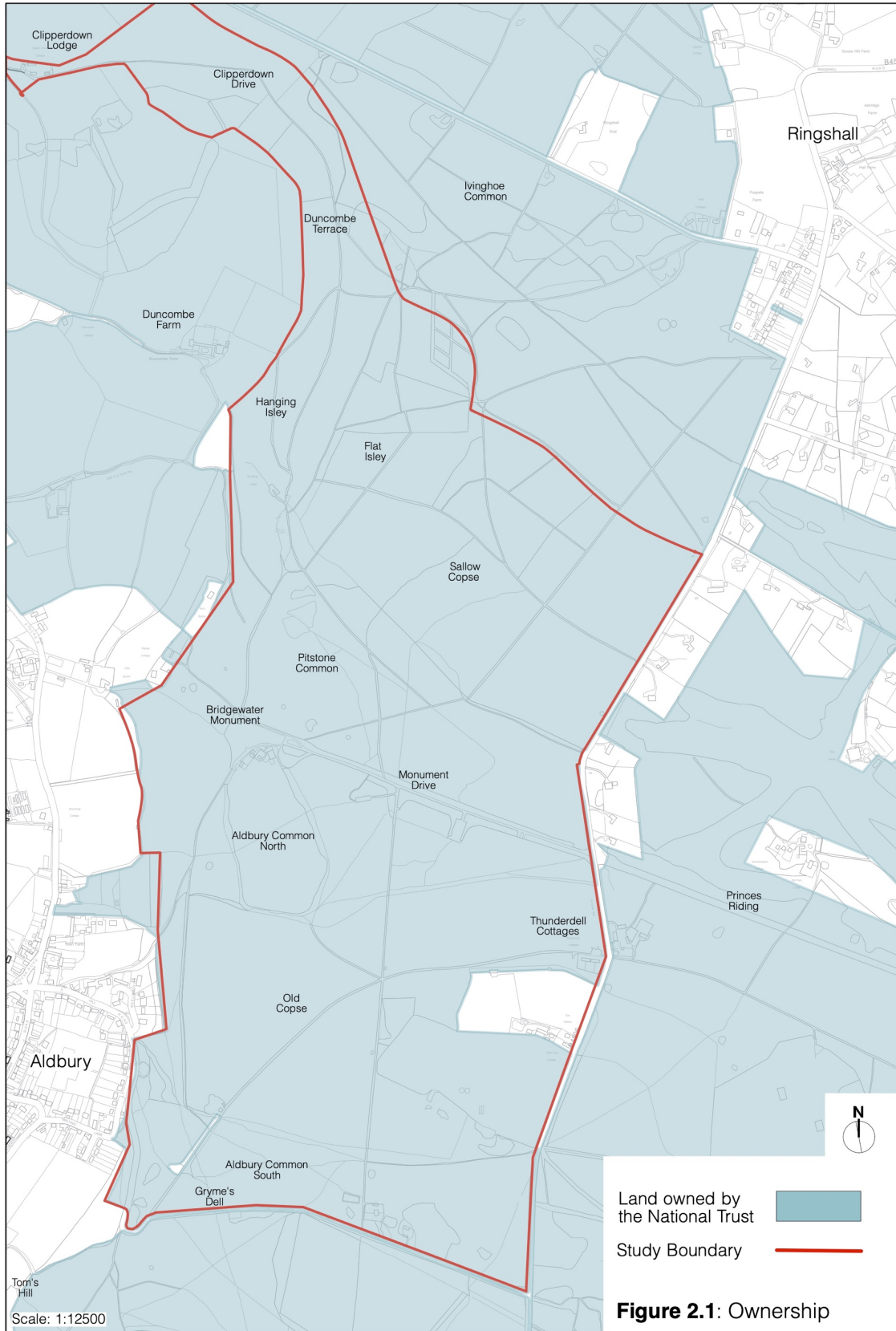
2.87 Currently a team of 9 rangers is responsible for the management and running of the wider Ashridge Estate, including the study area, although 2 positions are vacant. The team is managed by the Countryside Manager.

2.88 Operations fall into two main categories: countryside management and engagement with the public. Activities include:

- Direct estate management;
- Habitat management;
- Management of archaeological features;
- Maintenance of paths and access;
- Car park management and maintenance;
- Engagement and coordination of countryside management volunteers;
- Developing and managing events;
- Leading walks and talks.

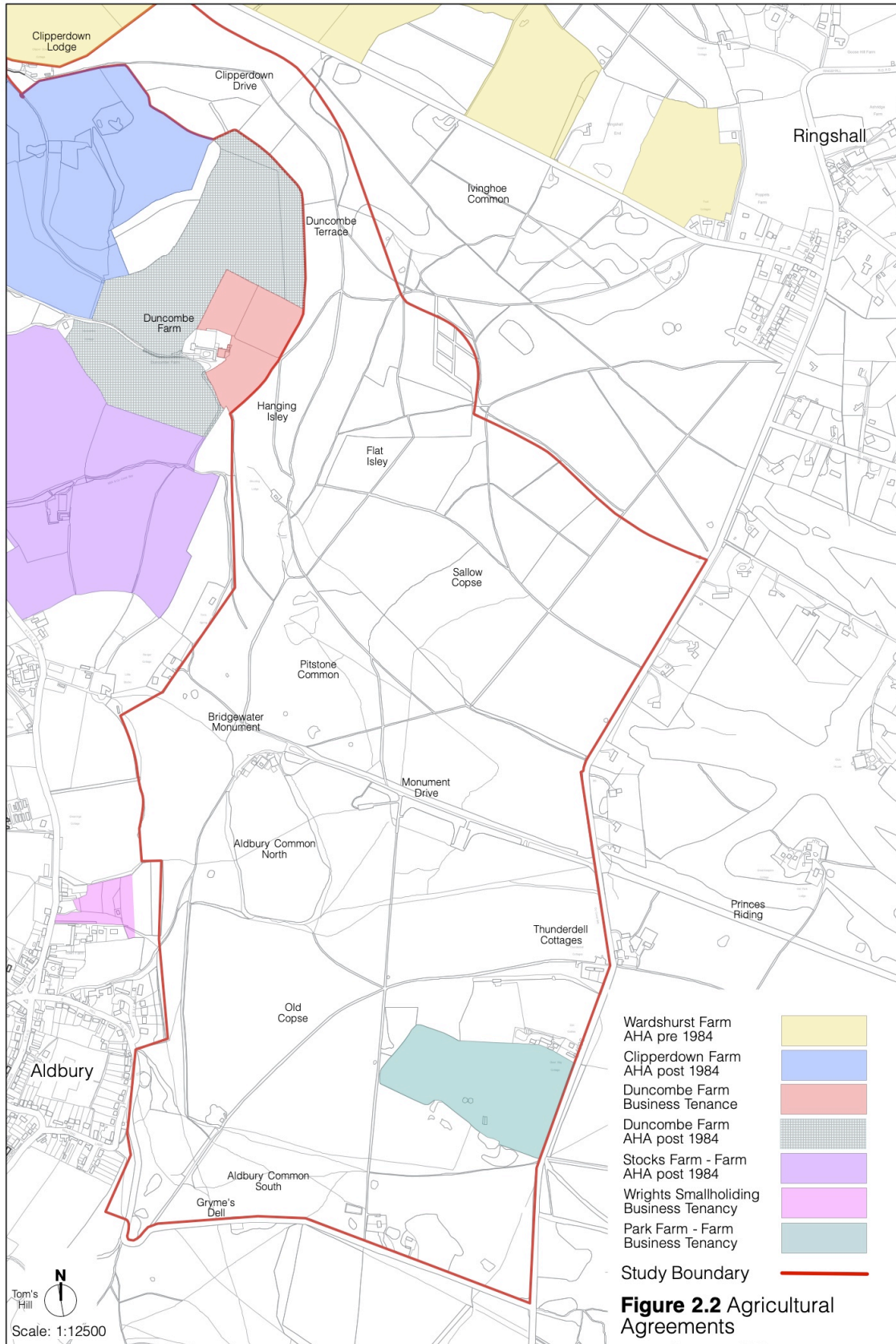
2.89 The team runs a series of volunteering sessions which have become increasingly popular particularly on Thursdays, c10 volunteers per session; Sundays, c10-20 per session; and Wednesdays with up to c10.

2.90 These volunteers expand the capabilities of the ranger team to deliver works on the ground. The Countryside Manager is looking to retain the integrity of the ecological designations of the estate and where possible, enhance its conservation value.

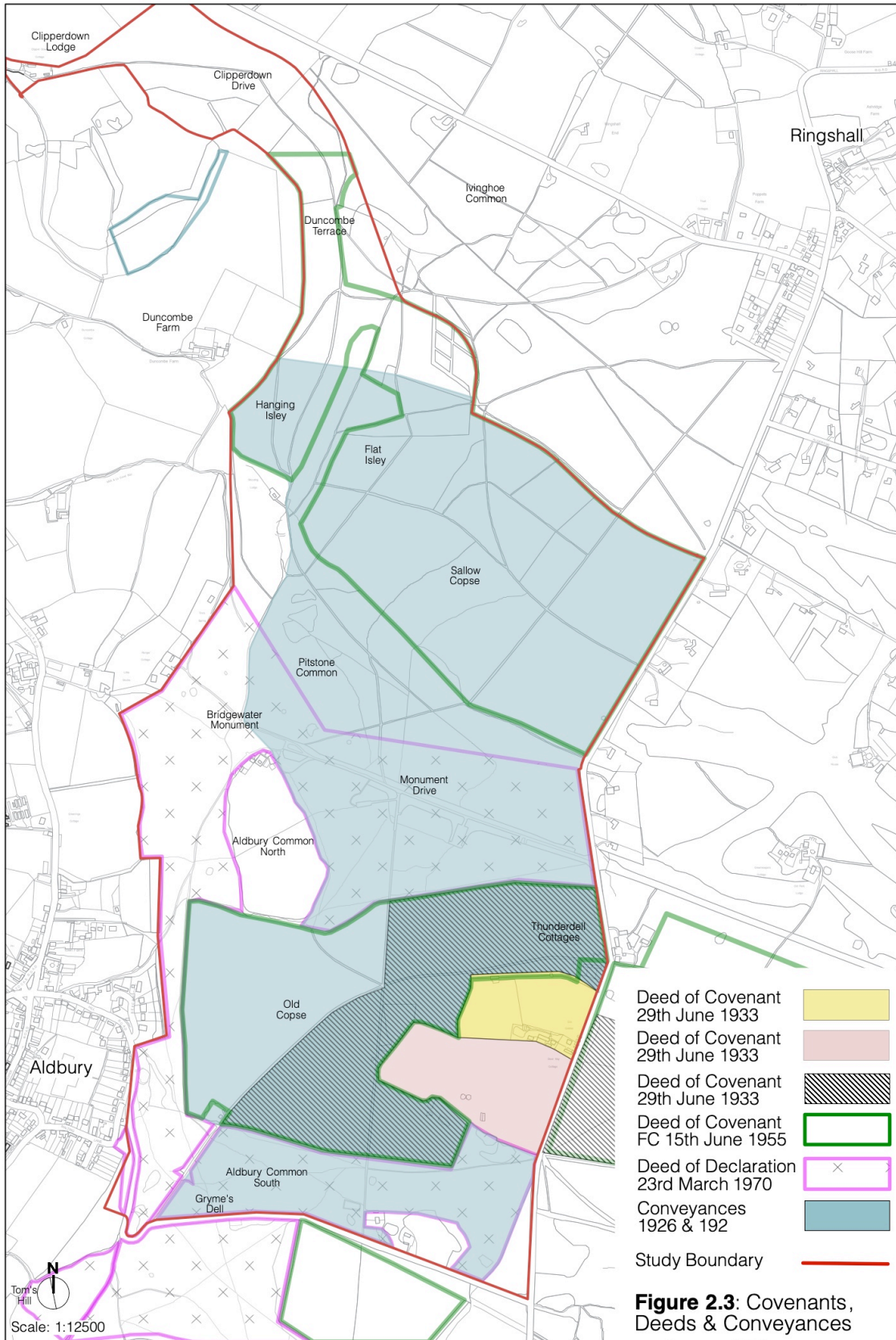


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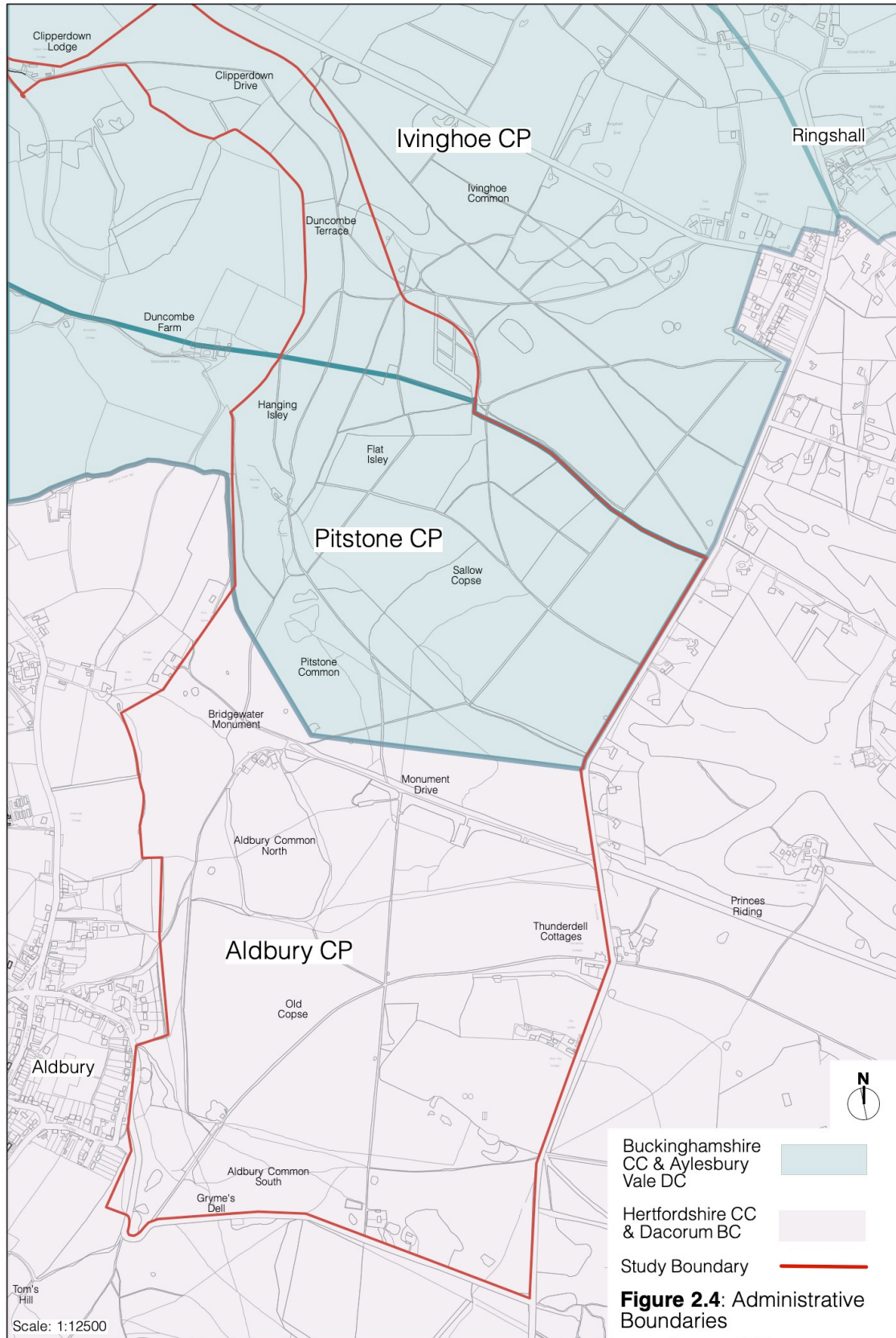


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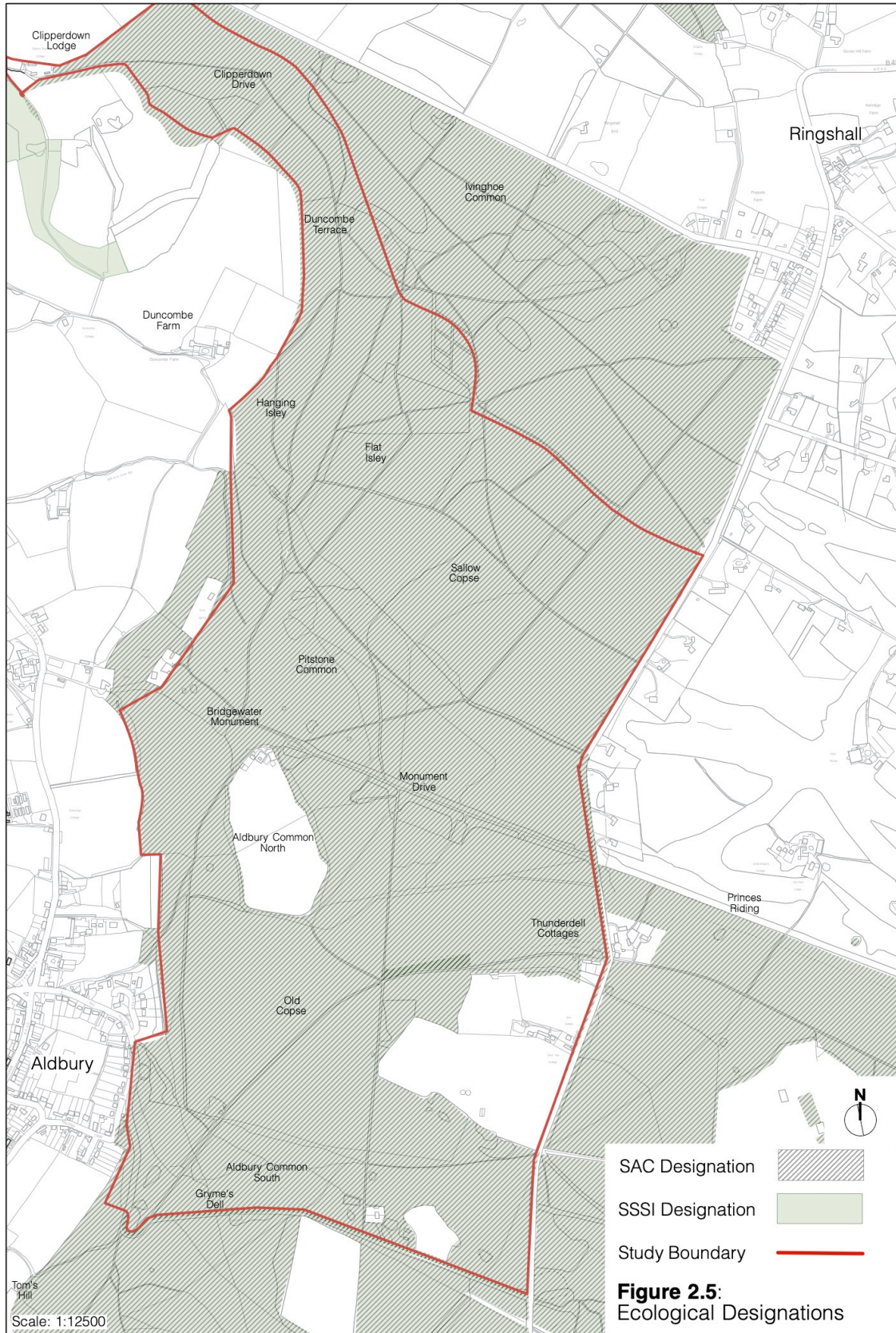


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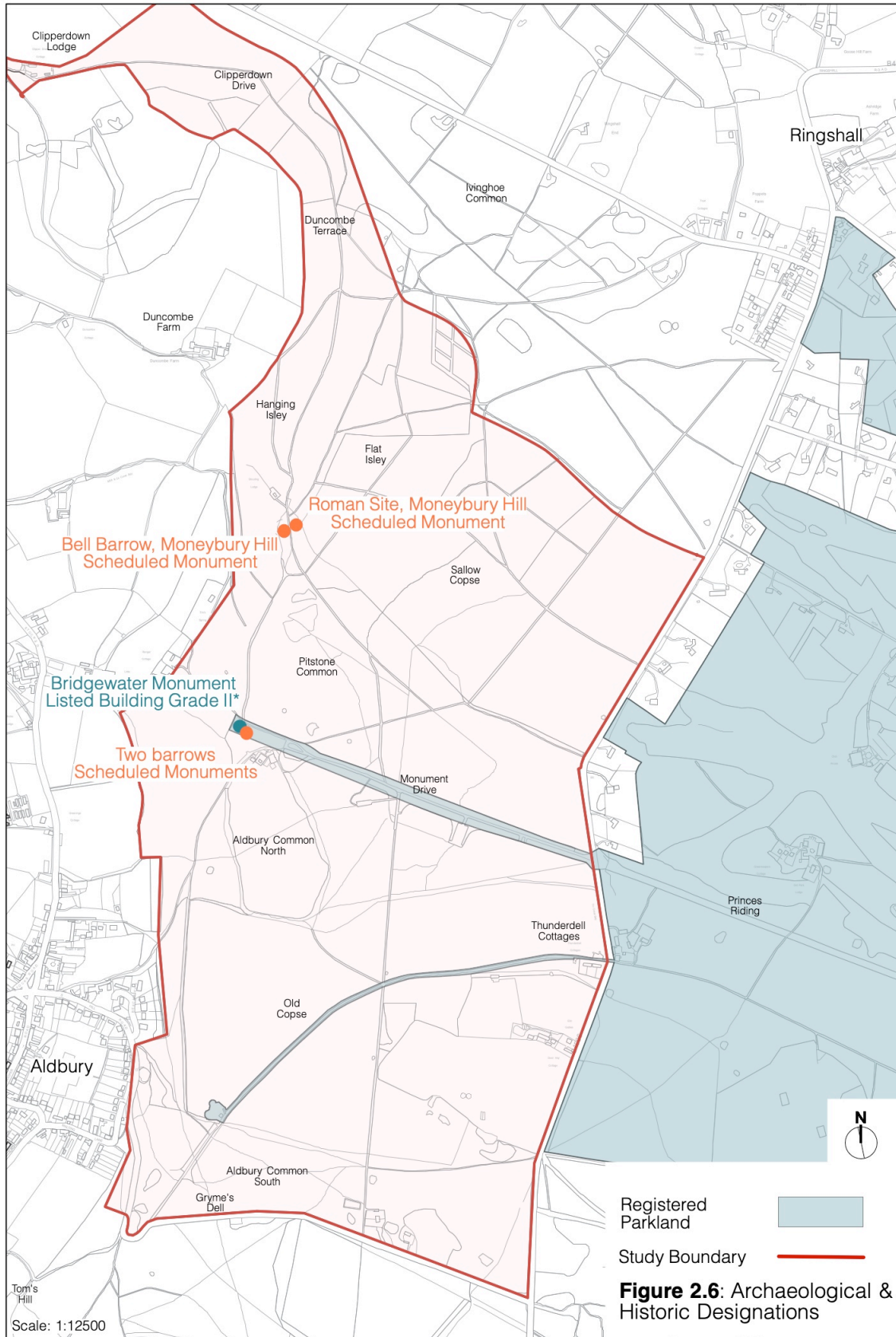
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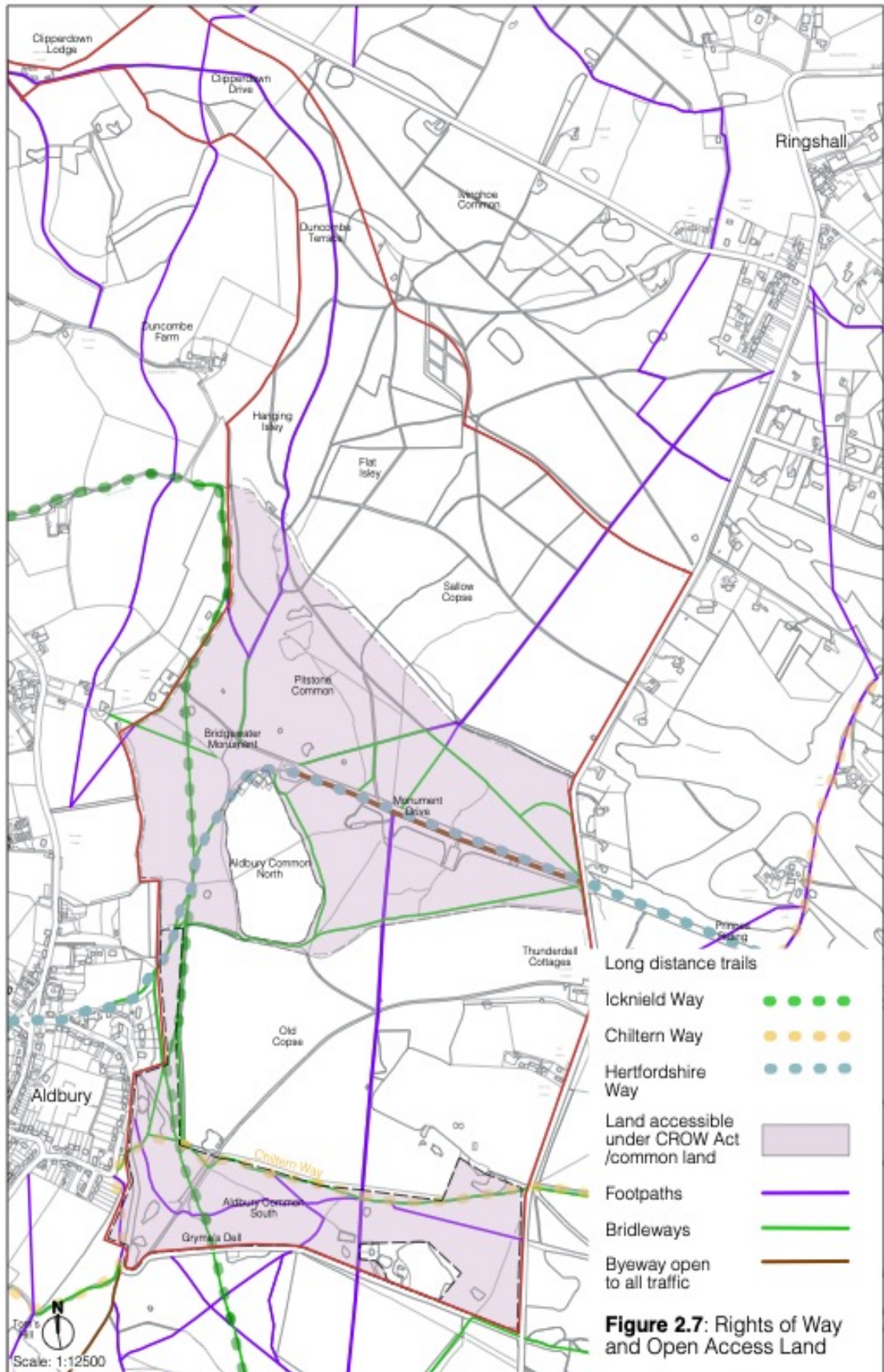


Figure 2.7: Rights of Way and Open Access Land

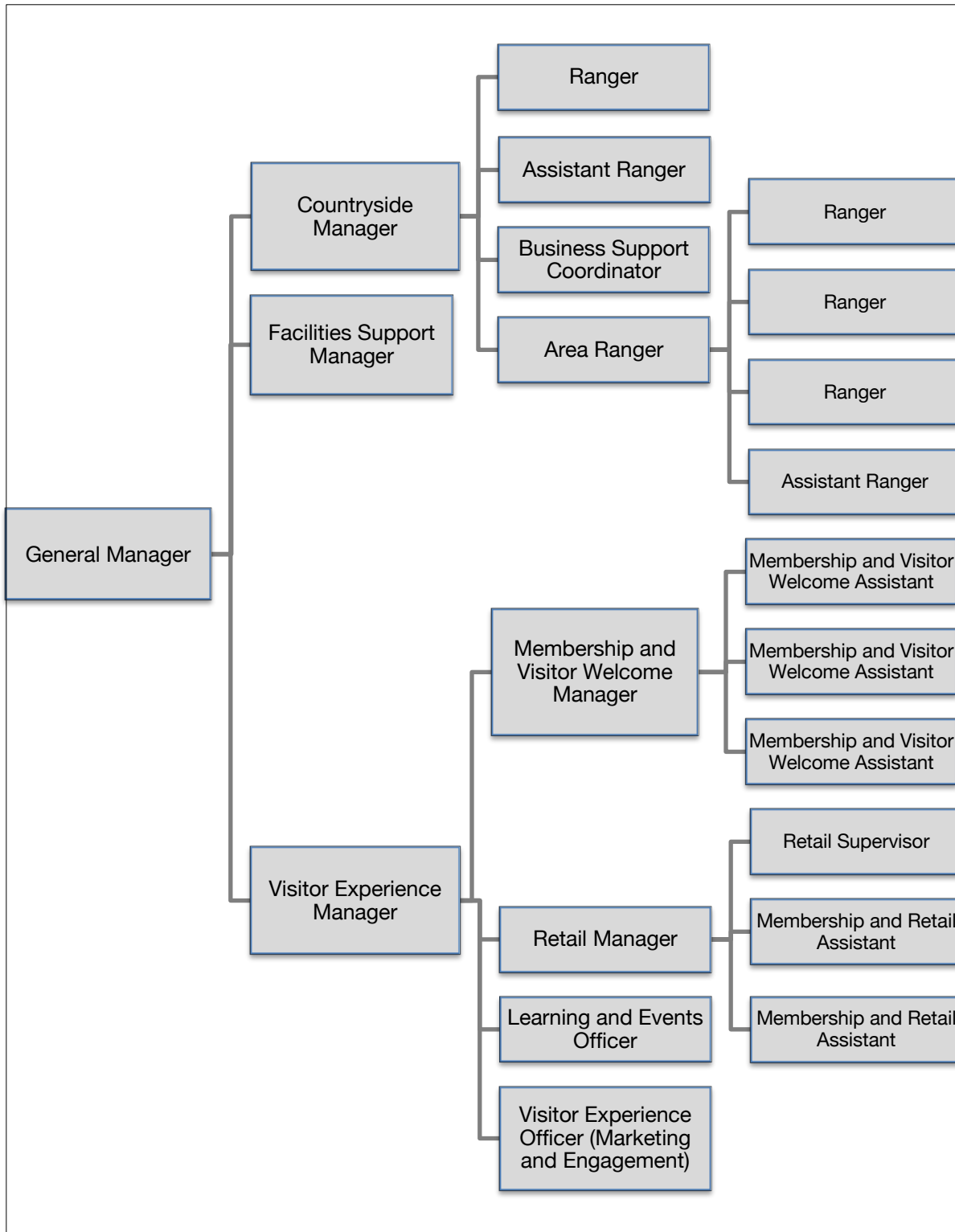


Figure 2.8 Ashridge Management Team

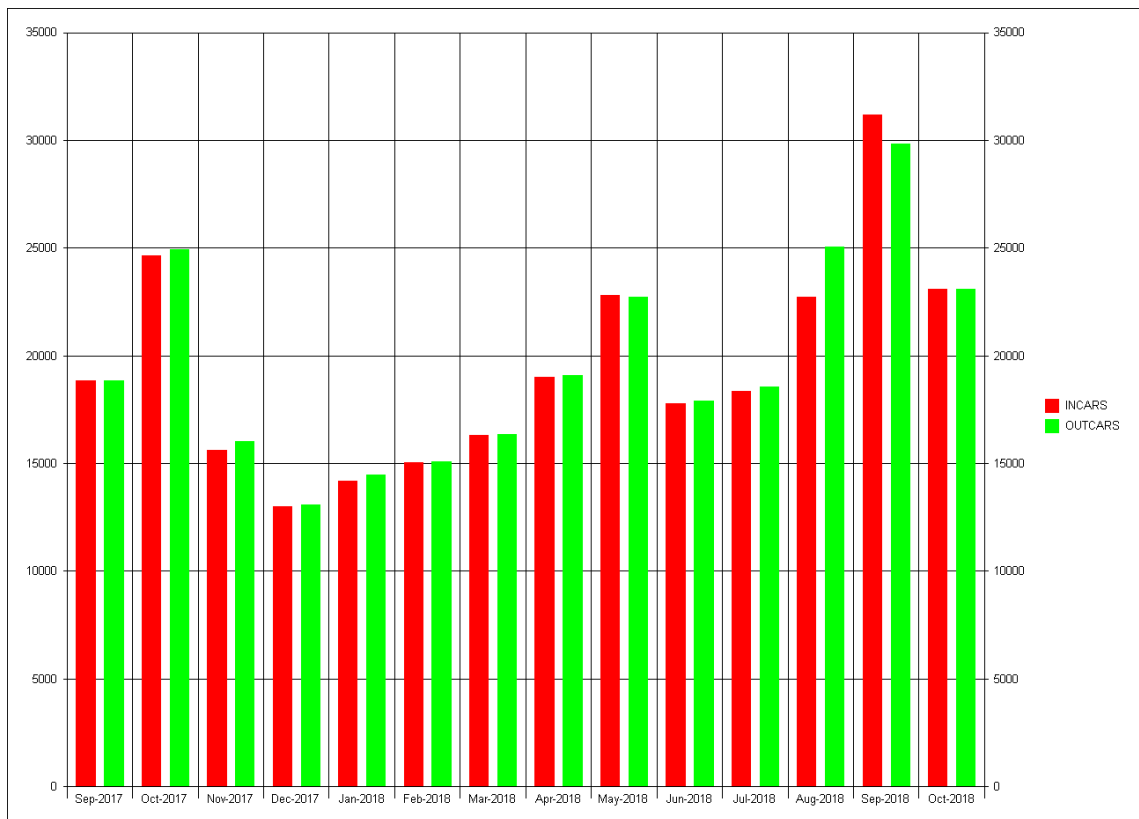


Figure 2.9: Monthly adjusted directional totals for cars²⁰

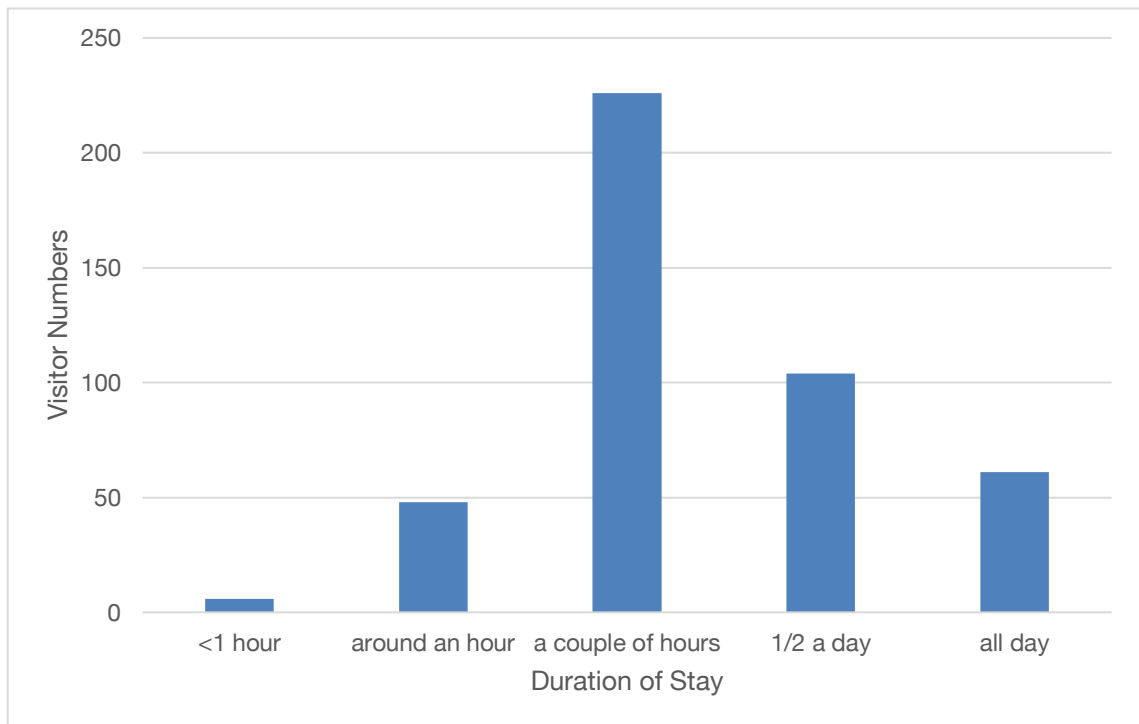


Figure 2.10: Duration of stay

²⁰ NT Ashridge Car Counter Study Report for Autumn 2018 (Issue 1) Linetop Ltd

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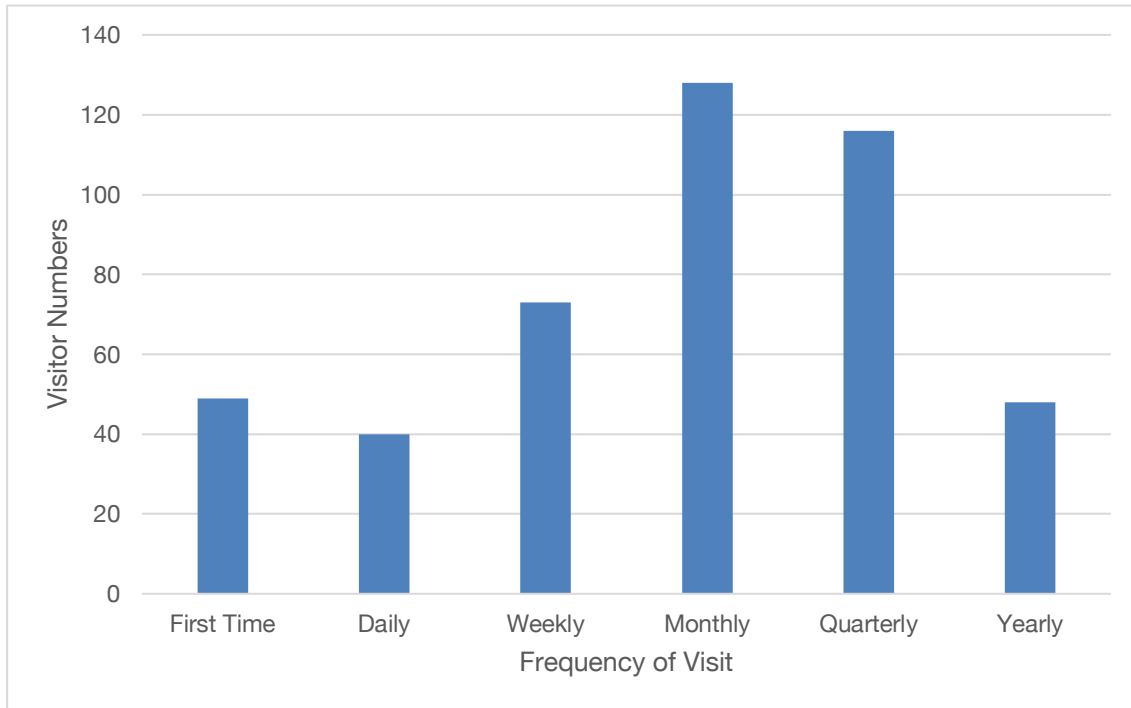


Figure 2.11 Frequency of Visit

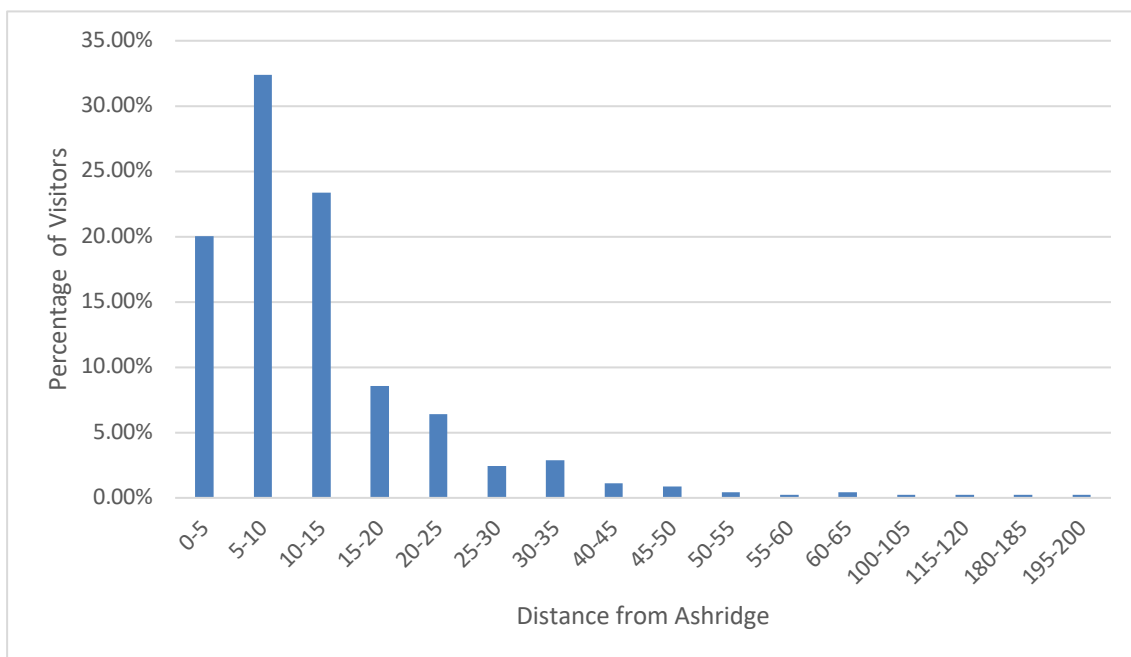
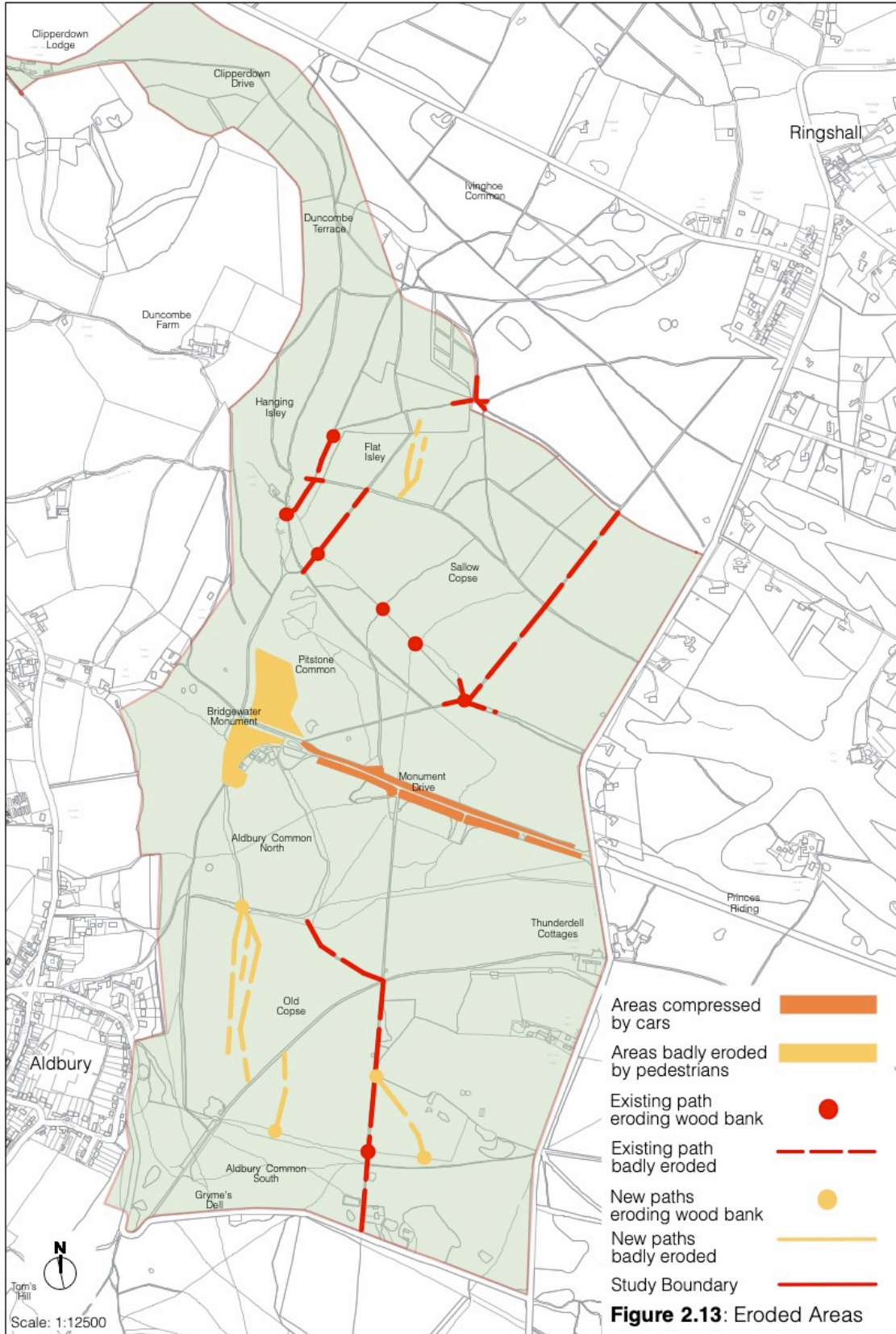


Figure 2.12 Distance travelled by visitors



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3 Historical Development

Introduction

3.1 It is important to understand the historical development of the study area and the wider setting of Ashridge estate and commons in order to understand the ecology and archaeology as well as the designed landscape and other historical aspects.

3.2 This section should be read with **Appendix 8** which provides a detailed chronology and a series of plates which may be referred to in the text. **Appendix 12** analyses the historical views and vistas within the study area.

Relationship of the Parishes in the study area

3.3 The study area is divided between three parallel parishes which run roughly west to east from the low land of the Vale in the west, up the central scarp slope and take in areas of the plateau in the far east of each parish:

3.4 These parishes are divided between two counties: Pitstone and Ivinghoe are in Buckinghamshire and Aldbury is in Hertfordshire. The historic characters of the parishes have to some extent influenced the definition of the Character Areas addressed in the Gazetteer (Volume 2) but not entirely (see **Figure 2.4**).

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3.5 **Ivinghoe** is the northernmost parish. It contains Duncombe Terrace and the north end of Isley's Wood.

3.6 Although it was enclosed in 1821 and largely absorbed into the management of the Ashridge Estate, part was re-registered as a common in 1965. The southern extents of this parish form Character Area A.

3.7 **Pitstone** is the central parish. It contains the south half of Isley's Wood, Sallow Copse and Pitstone Common, including Moneybury Hill, with part of one of the goose-foot of early C19 rides. Although it was enclosed in 1854, the part in the study area was registered as a common in 1965. This parish falls into B (the whole area) and C (the north section including the north ride).

3.8 **Aldbury** is the southernmost parish. It contains Aldbury Common including Monument Ride and the flanking southern subsidiary ride and the World War II Monument Drive, and the former brickworks. Enclosures within this include Tim's Spring wood, Meadleys Meadow and Old Copse with Old Dairy Fields. The Common was never subject to Parliamentary Enclosure and was registered as a common in 1965. This parish falls in to Character Areas C (the south section), and all of Areas D and E.

3.9 The study area east boundary is the Northchurch to Dagnal road but two of the parishes (Ivinghoe and Pitstone) continue east beyond this for some distance as narrow strips towards Little Gaddesden parish.

Early history to C13

3.10 Considerable prehistoric activity occurred in the study area, for which evidence survives including three burial mounds possibly of the Early Bronze Age (2500-1400 BC). Further evidence of activity during the Roman period/ Iron Age includes the site of a possible Roman villa or temple, finds including coins, and nine enclosures which probably form part of a field system that were preserved within woodland. The situation and Chiltern topography of the study area, at the top of the scarp with panoramic views, leading to a plateau in the hinterland that was suitable for cultivation, probably influenced this pattern of occupation.

3.11 Our understanding is *'barrows would have been built in an open environment, which suggests that in the bronze age at least, these immediate areas were not wooded. The evidence from very limited excavations suggests that settlement was already being abandoned in the Roman period. Evidence is lacking for the Saxon period but by the medieval period woodland was present but its extent in relation to heath and wood pasture is unknown (further research required). The abandonment of the Romano British settlements may be partly to do with the difficulty of getting water but plenty of sites carried on in occupation in similar locations. The challenge of cultivating these soils would also make them more marginal in periods of lower population when the lighter valley soils would be favoured. It seems likely that the settlement spread up into the hills in the early Roman period when population was high then retreated back into the valleys when the population decreased. Economic and social factors related to Roman estate structures and the changing needs for arable produce as opposed to meat may have played their part. For example, it is possible that the area converted from a regime of small mixed farms to one of extensive*

*ranching across the whole area due to market forces.*²¹

3.12 By the early medieval period there had been abandonment of most occupation in the study area, in favour of the lower lands below the scarp, focussed on the villages of Aldbury, Ivinghoe and Pitstone, and associated manor settlements. In 1086 Aldbury contained enough woodland for 500 pigs, suggesting a large area of waste (Common), presumably on the poorer high ground of the parish.

Phase 1: Medieval period, C13-1600

3.13 Early in this period the common land, which had probably initially been shared on the scarp and plateau by the three parishes (Aldbury, Pitstone and Ivinghoe), and also with Berkhamsted parish, was likely allocated to each of the parishes. It was the existence of these commons and the rights attached to them which largely dictated the way in which the Ashridge landscape developed, along with other aspects including the topography, ownership patterns and economy. All commons have an owner and the term 'common' refers to the rights held in common by certain people to use the product of the soil of the commons by grazing, cutting turf etc.

3.14 Commons were the property of the Lord of the Manor but commoners including farmers and cottagers had rights including of pasture and fuel gathering. Thus, the Lord of the Manor had the freehold of the land but could not fence the commons or do anything that would damage the rights of the commoners. This non-invasive type of land management, based on perpetuating grazing and the cultivation of wood (via wood pasture and coppice in woodland) and timber (via timber trees in fenced woodland), had the effect of preserving the remains of earlier activities as no major change to the land was permitted without the agreement of the commoners, and this was not usually forthcoming as it was a complicated and time-consuming process.

3.15 The land for use by the commoners was not just grazed wood pasture but included areas of fenced common woodland, particularly Pitstone, or Sallow, Copse (Pitstone parish) which would also have included regularly coppiced stools for small poles. Surprisingly, within the study area two significant private enclosures were made, as assarts from the waste land for cultivation, including Old Copse Wood and Meadleys Meadow adjacent to the north, both in Aldbury parish, but none in Pitstone or Ivinghoe. This must have required the agreement of the commoners, but may have been to their benefit, particularly if they were allowed to use Meadleys to fold their stock.

3.16 The fabric of the study area was in this way preserved at a point, probably when the commons were established for the three parishes. This unchanging and very specific management also led to its establishment as a habitat with a similarly specific community of flora and fauna closely associated with the continuity of the management regime.

3.17 Adjacent to the study area the Ashridge estate began to be defined, with royal parks created in the late C13 for Edmund, grandson of King John, at Ashridge (1270s) and Berkhamsted (1280). Shortly after in 1283 a monastery was founded on the site of the present house and gardens split between Pitstone (Buckinghamshire) and Berkhamsted (Hertfordshire) parishes which

²¹ Note from NT Regional Archaeologist

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was granted Ashridge Park and other lands.²²

3.18 The lack of water made it an unpromising site to build upon, leaving this an isolated settlement, but a 70m deep well was sunk in the C13 to supply the inhabitants (still present below the mansion). The Abbey continued its ownership until the Dissolution when c.1539 it was confiscated by the Crown and the buildings converted to a substantial house.

3.19 The boundaries of the three parishes were defined by ditches and banks, much evidence of which survives. They were typical Chiltern parishes, long and thin, so that areas of varying quality were included in each, with the arable land of the Vale to the west leading east to the barren scarp slope, and this in turn giving on to the plateau waste (a misnomer in today's understanding) or common land that was grazed and used for fuel gathering.²³ There was little woodland initially. The land would have been managed as wood pasture, i.e. growing trees for pollarding instead of for coppice where grazing animals cannot be excluded.

3.20 By 1315 the large meadow called Meadleys was privately enclosed on the plateau in Aldbury parish and held by John of Aldbury. Its purpose was to produce good hay around mid-summer and then be used later in the year for grazing. Adjacent to the south Old Copse was enclosed from Aldbury Common as a substantial single area of woodland (presumably managed as coppice with standards) in the study area. By 1574 the wood had been divided, with the 40 acre Dairy Farm carved out of the east end, including a house and small grove called Lyons Grove. This included the fields still known as Old Dairy Fields. The process of agreement of these enclosures is unclear as no documentation has been found.

3.21 Pitstone Common Wood was recorded from the C14 onwards and provided a significant amount of wood for those commoners entitled to it.²⁴ Extensive common woods were found in most parts of the Chilterns in medieval times. They were important in the economies of both Hill villages and those in the Vale below the escarpment, providing for many small landowners the principal source of building materials and fuel. The woodland would have consisted of timber trees spaced far enough apart to allow the growth of regularly coppiced stools below, rather than the modern concept of plantation woodland which is just timber trees with open ground below. This wood lay on the plateau above the parish section of the scarp and what became a significant hollow way was the main route from the village below up to the wood and adjacent common pasture, sandwiched between Ivinghoe and Aldbury parishes. By the early C16 at least, Pitstone Wood was subject to disputes between the tenants of Pitstone who had rights over the area, and the freeholder monks of Ashridge.²⁵ In one of these disputes (in 1569) there is reference to many great timber oaks in the Wood which would have been planted in the medieval period.²⁶

3.22 Isleys in Pitstone parish, was a second common wood, assarted from the waste, and

²² The house and gardens were moved entirely into Hertfordshire county in the 1890s and Little Gaddesden parish.

²³ Although 'waste' land, which belonged to the lord of the manor, was usually set on poor land which was not profitable for regular cultivation, it played a vital role in providing grazing for commoners, and as a source of fuel and building materials. The commoners' rights are still active today.

²⁴ The Wood Book dating c.1370-99 records entitlement to wood in terms of cart loads totalling 143 loads. H. Hanley, 'The Inclosure of Pitstone Common Wood in 1612', *Records of Bucks*, vol. 29 (1987), 177-79.

²⁵ Hanley, 179-80.

²⁶ Hanley, 181.

including both part of the scarp and the plateau to the east. Later this area was known as 'Round Wood', reflecting the curved eastern boundary flanking the medieval Isleys Lane (NTHBSMR 151666) linking Pitstone Common with Ivinghoe Common.

Phase 2: Enclosures in the Early & Later Seventeenth Century

3.23 During this phase another wave of large-scale enclosures of common land took place by the Egerton family, partly to create a park but also to enclose woodland.

3.24 The common woods underwent gradual enclosure after 1550 and this process is particularly well recorded in Pitstone parish records.²⁷

3.25 In 1604 the Ashridge estate was bought by Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Ellesmere, a wealthy courtier and politician at the court of James I. Egerton began the process of large-scale enclosure (i.e. privatization) of the common woodland, in part to expand the existing Ashridge Park. On the commons he acquired the freehold of c.300 acres of Pitstone Common Wood, including what were later called Sallow and Pitstone Park Copses, flanking the Ringshall Road. This resulted from 1607, in a typically acrimonious dispute with the commoners over rights. At this point it was said that a third was already 'cut down and wasted' without inclosing or preservation, and the trees remaining are for the most part of 100 years growth and above'. A considerable number of mature beech trees were mentioned as well as oak.²⁸

3.26 Finally, in 1612 Egerton negotiated an agreement to enclose much of the Wood for himself, awarding some tenants parcels in 50 acres in a rough rectangle in the north-west half of Sallow Copse (many of the parcel boundaries survive). This area was bounded by Pitstone and Ivinghoe Commons and on the north-west by the now lost, curving Isley Lane marking the east edge of Isleys assart.²⁹ The boundary of the tenants' area is shown in 1762 (Grey, **Figure 3.1**), lying outside the area of the estate (it is erroneously marked as 'Mr Wickham's Land'). The agreement was that the tenants' 50 acres was to be speedily fenced about with a substantial ditch and with quicksets and preserved 'inclosed' and 'encoppiced'. Stress was laid on conservation to avoid destruction of the woodland and the soil. Hanley³⁰ points out that Egerton's concern for the preservation of the woodland contrasts with the attitude of his fellow minister, Robert Cecil, who was engaged in enclosing and clearing much of Hatfield Wood for Hatfield House.³¹

3.27 Importantly Egerton agreed to leave Pitstone heath adjacent unenclosed, in which state it remained until 1856.

3.28 The origin of the Ringshall Road bounding the east side of the study area is unclear. It was well established by the mid-C18 (Grey) and may have been part of Egerton's work by 1617 (when he died), or possibly for his grandson, the 2nd Earl of Bridgewater (d.1686, see below) while

²⁷ Hanley, 175-204.

²⁸ Quoted in Hanley, 183, 187.

²⁹ H. Hanley, 'The Inclosure of Pitstone Common Wood in 1612', Records of Bucks, vol. 29 (1987), 175-204., 195, describes in more detail how the largely rectangular plots were arranged.

³⁰ H. Hanley, 'The Inclosure of Pitstone Common Wood in 1612', Records of Bucks, vol. 29 (1987), 175-204.

³¹ H. Hanley, 'The Inclosure of Pitstone Common Wood in 1612', Records of Bucks, vol. 29 (1987), 175-204., 192.