

Boughton Monchelsea:

Priority Local Landscape



		Page
1	Introduction	1
2	Discussion	1
List of Figures	Figure 1: Local Landscape Designations	4
	Figure 2: Priority Local Landscape Area: Aerial Photo	5
	Figure 3: Land Use Within the Priority Local Landscape	6
	Figure 4: Settlement Pattern and Views	7
	Figure 5: Extract of 1898 Ordnance Survey Map	8
	Figure 6: MAGIC Map Extract Showing UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat: Broadleaf Woodland	9



1 Introduction

In late 2017, Colvin and Moggridge Landscape Architects were appointed by Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council to undertake a full review of the parish landscape, in order to provide recommendations for landscape management and environmental improvement, and to gather evidence to support the emerging Neighbourhood Development Plan.

In the course of carrying out landscape character and condition assessments, and a village-wide views study, it became apparent that the parish contained land which appeared to be as important, on professional consideration, as adjacent Landscape of Local Value (LLV) areas, but which was not so designated. After discussion with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, their planning advisor and Maidstone Borough Council, a decision was taken to propose a local designation for this land in the Neighbourhood Plan, calling it a Priority Local Landscape. This document provides evidence to support such an approach. The document assesses the potential Priority Local Landscape using the same criteria for Maidstone Borough Council's Landscapes of Local Value in the hope that it can be used to support designation as LLV in any review of the LLV boundaries.

2 Discussion

Two Maidstone Borough Council designated Landscapes of Local Value (LLV) cross Boughton Monchelsea parish (see Figure 1). In the northern part of the parish, the Loose Valley LLV occupies all the land between The Quarries and Loose Woods and the urban area of Maidstone. This document is concerned with land adjoining the Greensand Ridge LLV, which occupies a belt of land running from east to west around the Greensand Way long distance path in the southern half of the parish. It is characterised by frequent small blocks of coppice and deciduous woodland, extensive orchards and frequent oast houses, with ragstone being a predominant material in walls and buildings (see Maidstone Borough Council Adopted Local Plan 2017, policy SP17, 4.115).

Further west, within Linton parish, the Greensand Ridge LLV extends north as far as Heath Road but on reaching Boughton Monchelsea parish boundary, the LLV belt drops away from Heath Road to half the width, excluding a contiguous area of very high-quality, distinctive landscape that is of great importance to the local community.

This additional area, which extends along Heath Road from Loddington Lane in the west to Cock Street, and then along Back Lane from Cock Street to Amberfield is very similar in character and quality to the designated Greensand Ridge LLV and appears to satisfy the same established criteria. Information to support this view is set out in the text and images on the following sheets.

Landscapes of Local Value - The Qualification Criteria

Maidstone Borough Council's Landscapes of Local Value have been identified and judged according to a number of criteria relating to their character and sensitivity (Maidstone Borough Council Adopted Local Plan 2017, policy SP17, 4.113).

The Landscape of Local Value must be part of a contiguous area of high-quality landscape, significant in long distance public views and skylines, locally distinctive in its field patterns, geological and other landscape features and ecologically diverse and significant. It must prevent the coalescence of settlements which would undermine their character, should be identified through community engagement and provide a valued transition from town to countryside.

Each of these qualifying criteria is set out below, with a paragraph explaining how the area identified as Priority Local Landscape area meets each one.

Part of a Contiguous Area of High-Quality Landscape

The area under discussion is bordered by the Greensand Ridge LLV in the south, and by Heath Road and Back Lane in the north (see hatched blue on Figure 1).

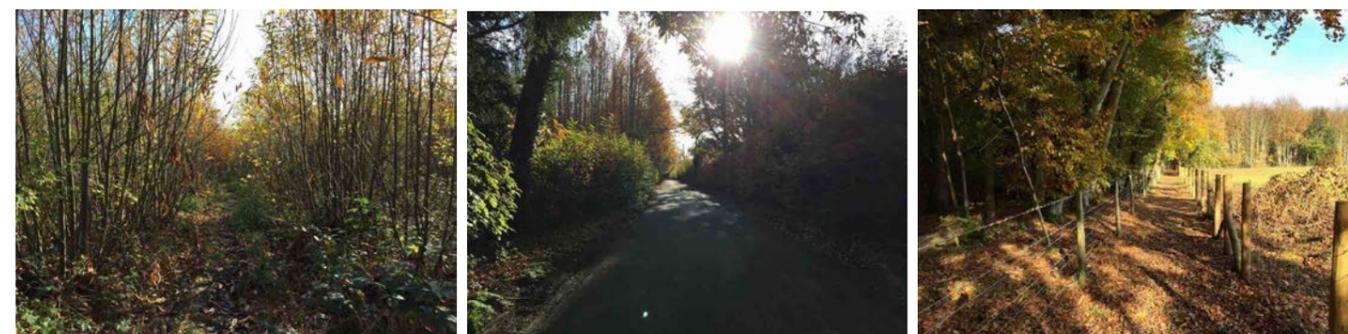
The aerial photograph extract (Figure 2) demonstrates the presence of a near-continuous woodland boundary along the south side of Heath Road, running from beyond the parish boundary in the west at Linton Crossroads to Parsonage Farm, near Cock Street (see photographs below).



Dropping south to Back Lane, there is again a continuous tree-lined boundary from Tilt's Wood to Lower Bell (see photographs below), creating a clearly defined northern edge to the Priority Local Landscape.



Within the PLL, there are several large areas of deciduous woodland, dominated by Sweet Chestnut with Oak and Sycamore specimens. All the woodlands are in good condition and most are under active rotational coppice management (see photographs below). The woodlands link to one another, as well as to wooded areas within the LLV to the south and include three areas of scheduled Ancient Woodland (see Figure 3).



Whilst deciduous woodland is the dominant landscape type, the PLL also includes significant swathes of orchard planting and two areas of non-scheduled historic parkland at Wierton Place and Wierton Grange. There are small areas of pasture enclosed by woodland, one arable field and a small area given to market gardening (see photographs below).



Settlement within the PLL is minimal, and buildings are isolated in pattern (see Figure 4). Virtually no significant development has taken place in the area since the 1950s with the exception of the vicarage on Church Hill and two recent areas of mobile homes on Church Hill and at Tilt's Wood. Key buildings, visible from public areas, are of distinctive local character and materials, including the ragstone village primary school and Boughton Monchelsea Place Lodge, and the two brick built lodges to Wierton Place. The farm cottages on Loddington Lane and Grade II listed Parsonage Farmhouse are also of traditional ragstone construction whilst the historic farmhouse cluster near Wierton Place is brick and timber (see photographs below).



The Priority Local Landscape contains very few discordant features, with both areas of industrial and farm activity and most recent mobile home accommodation well-screened from public view.

Significance in Long-Distance Public Views and Skylines

There are direct views towards the PLL from public footpath KM108 and from key village routes such as Church Street and Gandy's Lane, where the PLL provides a wooded 'stop end' to the view (see Figure 4 and photographs below).



The same dense wooded edge forms the whole of the southern view from the Boughton Monchelsea recreation grounds and the village hall, giving this space a unique and beautiful character in spite of the proximity of the busy road (see photographs below).



The Priority Local Landscape is extremely important in views along Heath Road in both directions, for traffic passing through the parish or approaching from the east and west. The continuous wooded edge on the south side of the road stands in strong contrast to the ribbon development on the north side, forming a clear and obvious boundary between the developed areas and the unspoilt, rural character of the southern parish (see photographs below).



There are beautiful views towards the PLL from the Greensand Way, and within the PLL both from public rights of way and smaller roads such as Church Hill and Wierton Lane (see photographs below).



The PLL provides a wooded skyline in views from private homes on parts of Haste Hill Road, Church Street and the east end of Green Lane, as well as the immediate view to all those on Heath Road.

Locally Distinctive Field Patterns, Geological and Other Landscape Features

Early Ordnance Survey mapping shows that the pattern of land use in the PLL area has remained virtually unchanged in the last 150 years (see Figure 5). The most significant alterations have been the recent introduction of the two traveller settlements on Church Hill and at Tilt's Wood, plus the loss of a portion of the historic parkland at Wierton Place to orchards during the 1980s and the loss of a small orchard south of Wierton Grange to grazing during the same period.

Both of the major land uses are characteristic of the parish and distinctive to this part of Kent; there are large blocks of Sweet Chestnut coppice still managed for poles and firewood and large areas of productive fruit orchards. In addition, there are narrow belts of roadside woodland along Wierton Lane and part of Back Lane that are a common feature across the southern part of the parish, for example along Church Hill.

Throughout the PLL, roads, lanes and public rights of way are all enclosed by strong, well-managed field hedges of a distinctive local mix of native species incorporating Hazel, Field Maple and Elm as well as thorn species.

Whilst settlement across the area is sparse, there are a number of important historic buildings, including the northern lodge of Boughton Monchelsea Place and the north and eastern lodges to Wierton Place, the National School (now the village Primary School) and two Grade II listed buildings at Parsonage Farmhouse and Wierton Grange.

Ecologically Diverse and Significant

The Priority Local Landscape area contains large blocks of Ancient and Semi-natural Woodland, and woodland under coppice management that are connected both to one another and to other woodlands outside the PLL. Often, these larger blocks are connected by narrow roadside or fieldside woodlands (called 'shaws' locally) which provide a continuous corridor for wildlife. Overall, approximately 28% of the PLL area is recorded as UK BAP Priority Habitat Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland (see Figure 6).

Oak is the dominant species within the Ancient Woodland areas, supported by Sycamore, Field Maple, Sweet Chestnut and Hazel. The coppice woodland is predominantly Sweet Chestnut, with some Hazel and occasional mature specimen Oak. Coppice management is beneficial to a range of flora and fauna that thrive at the woodland edge, including dormice and other small mammals, dragonflies, birds and reptiles, since the regime of cutting coups on rotation replicates the higher light conditions found at woodland edges, allowing regeneration to take place and maintaining a mixture of young and mature woody habitats (see Kent Wildlife Trust's Land Management Advice Series, No. 10). Coppice woodland, whether managed or un-managed, is likely to be biologically rich and since the total area of such woodland in Britain is now only about 20 000 hectares it is generally agreed that where coppice systems are still active they should be retained (see Harmer, Kerr and Thompson (2010), Managing Native Broadleaved Woodland, Stationery Office, Edinburgh).

Throughout the Priority Local Landscape area, at all other road and field boundaries, there are strong, well-kept mixed native field hedges. These are also classed as UK BAP Priority Habitat, providing rich feeding habitat for birds, small mammals and invertebrates.

Targets for Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland and Hedgerows can be found in the Kent Nature Partnership document Kent Biodiversity 2020 and beyond – a strategy for the natural environment 2015-2025.

Preventing Coalescence of Settlements

The Priority Local Landscape area represents the frontier between the developed land north of Heath Road and the undeveloped southern part of the parish (see Figure 4). The continuous wooded edge to Heath Road (south) with its dense blocks of woodland and absence of settlement signals this clear delineation with an immediate and obvious change in landscape character and prevents both ribbon development and the two larger settlement areas of Boughton Village and Cock Street from incremental expansion southward. Any development on the south side of Heath Road or Back Lane would irreversibly damage the quality and character of the parish landscape, by breaking the continuity which at present provides a natural 'stop end' to development and encouraging expansion further south into the parish, towards the hamlets of Loddington and Wierton, and the village church.

Identified Through Community Engagement

During the Neighbourhood Development plan consultation process, local people expressed their thoughts in relation to the parish environment. Whilst there was broad acceptance for a limited amount of well-designed housing development, this was subject to location, with brownfield sites considered most suitable. The need to protect the rural character of the parish was a key theme in consultation, as well as an interest in promoting biodiversity and supporting resilience to climate change. Community engagement in the Neighbourhood Development Plan is set out in full in the Neighbourhood Plan Community Consultation Statement.

The PLL area is fundamental to views entering and leaving the village from the south and to views from local housing, footpaths, lanes and amenity areas and its status as a boundary between the developed and rural parts of the parish has been described previously.

It is served by a number of well-used public rights of way that lie within easy distance of the main settlement areas for regular recreation and amenity, as well as providing connections to longer distance routes along the Greensand Ridge that are used for more occasional recreation (see Figure 3).

The woodlands are highly valued by locals and visitors for their beauty, including the displays of bluebells in Spring, as well as for the interest and shelter they provide throughout the year. In addition, the community understand and value the great contribution the woodlands, orchards and hedges make towards biodiversity and carbon reduction.

An Important Transition from Town to Countryside

At community consultation, local people identified the woodlands, orchards and historic buildings as being valuable distinctive local features, and the quiet, undeveloped nature of the area as important to their wellbeing.

The value of the PLL area to wellbeing related to two quite different issues. The first was the use and enjoyment of the landscape as a place for recreation and for public amenity, whilst the second related to a feeling of permanence, or continuity. Whilst local people accepted that the environment around the existing settlement areas north of Heath Road would continue to change as a result of development pressure, they felt that the strong, wooded boundary, distinctive character and high quality of the Priority Local Landscape would form a natural limit to development. The PLL was therefore valued because it appeared to limit uncertainty and to provide a clear point of transition between developed and undeveloped areas; reassurance that whatever may happen around the village, the high quality and rural, wooded character of the landscape in the south of the parish will remain coherent and unchanged.



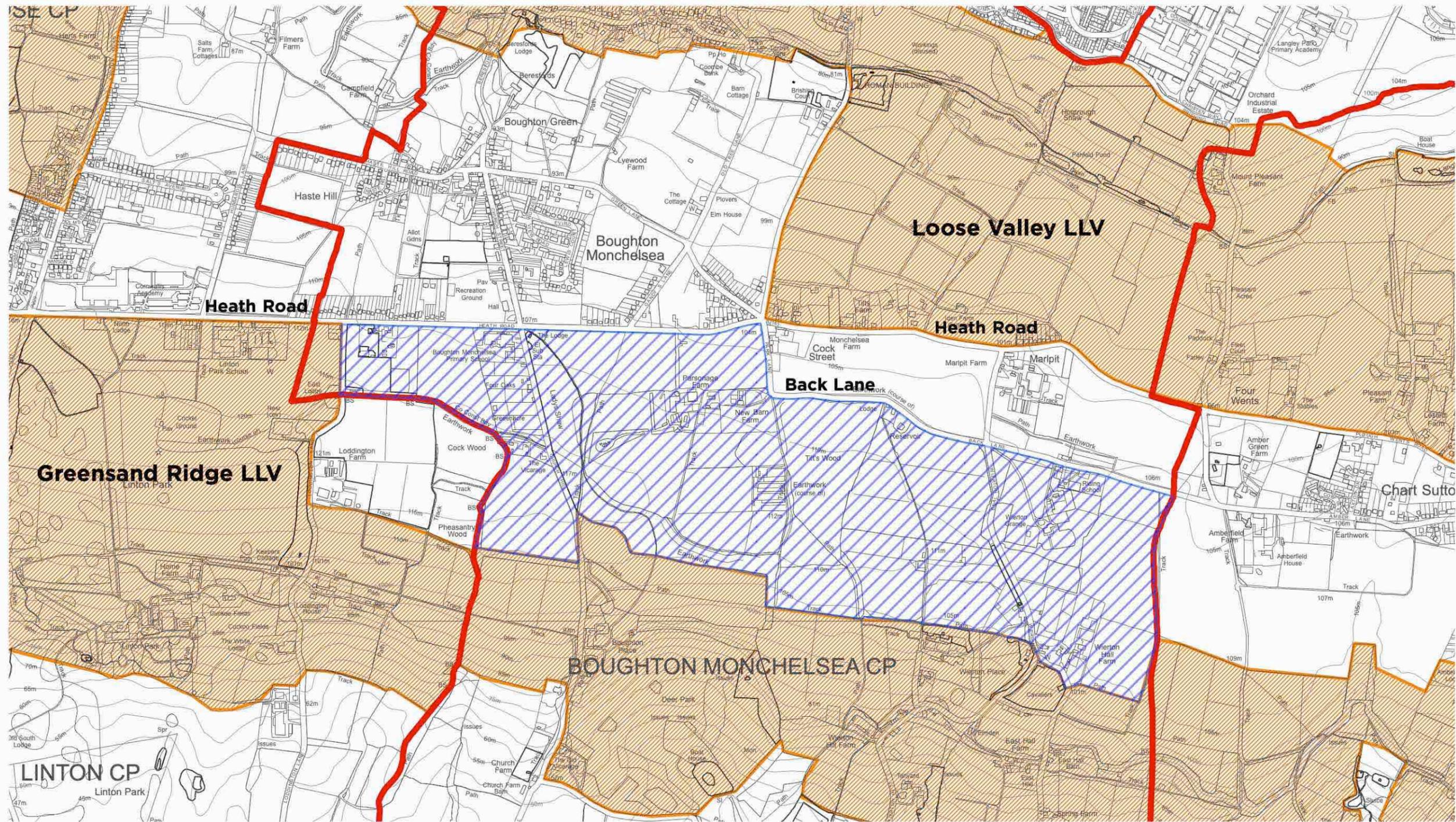


Figure 1 Local Landscape Designations

Designations Key:

- Existing Landscapes of Local Value
- Priority Local Landscape
- Parish Boundary



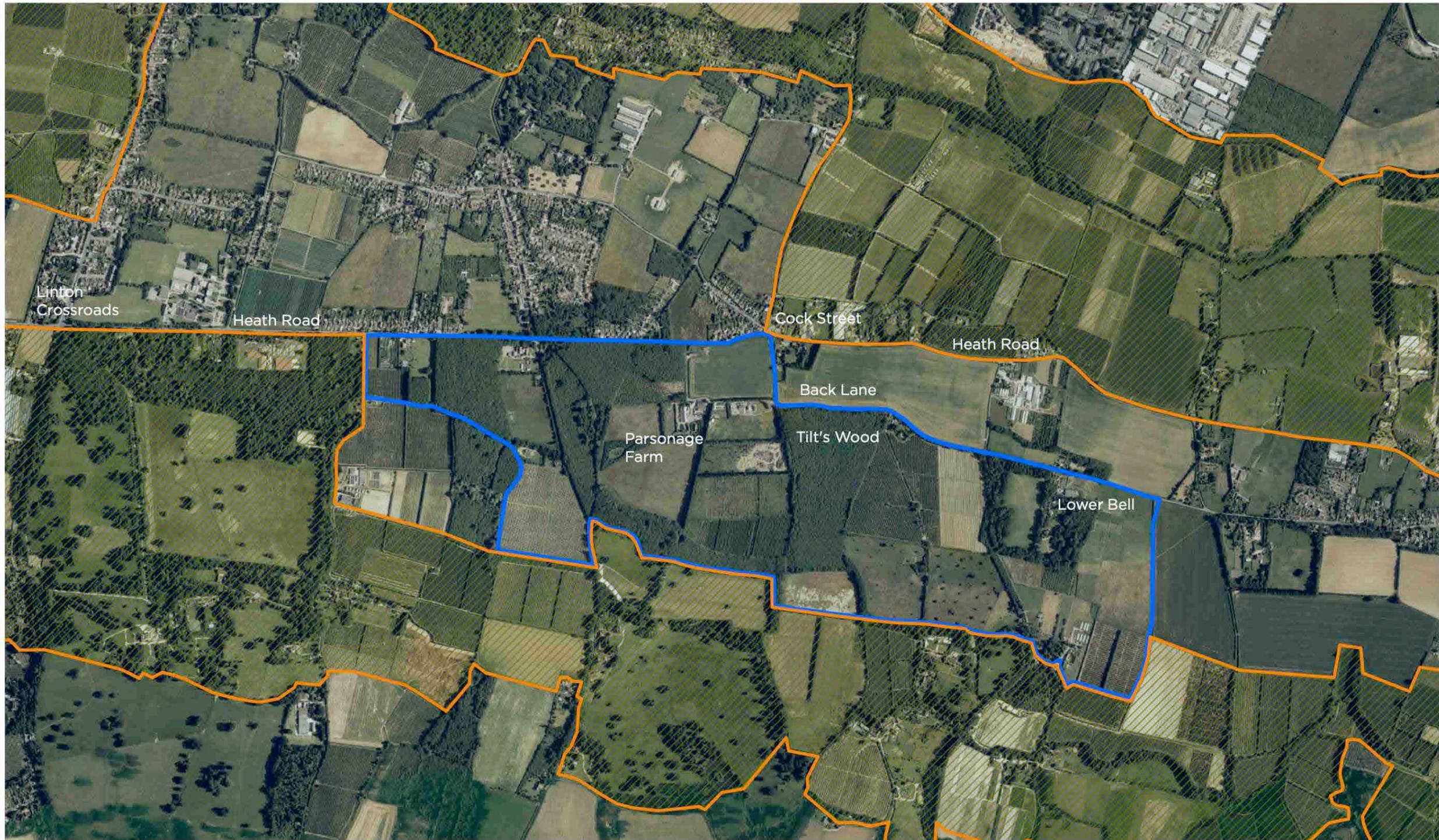


Figure 2 Priority Local Landscape Area: Aerial Photo

Key:

-  Priority Local Landscape
-  Existing Landscapes of Local Value



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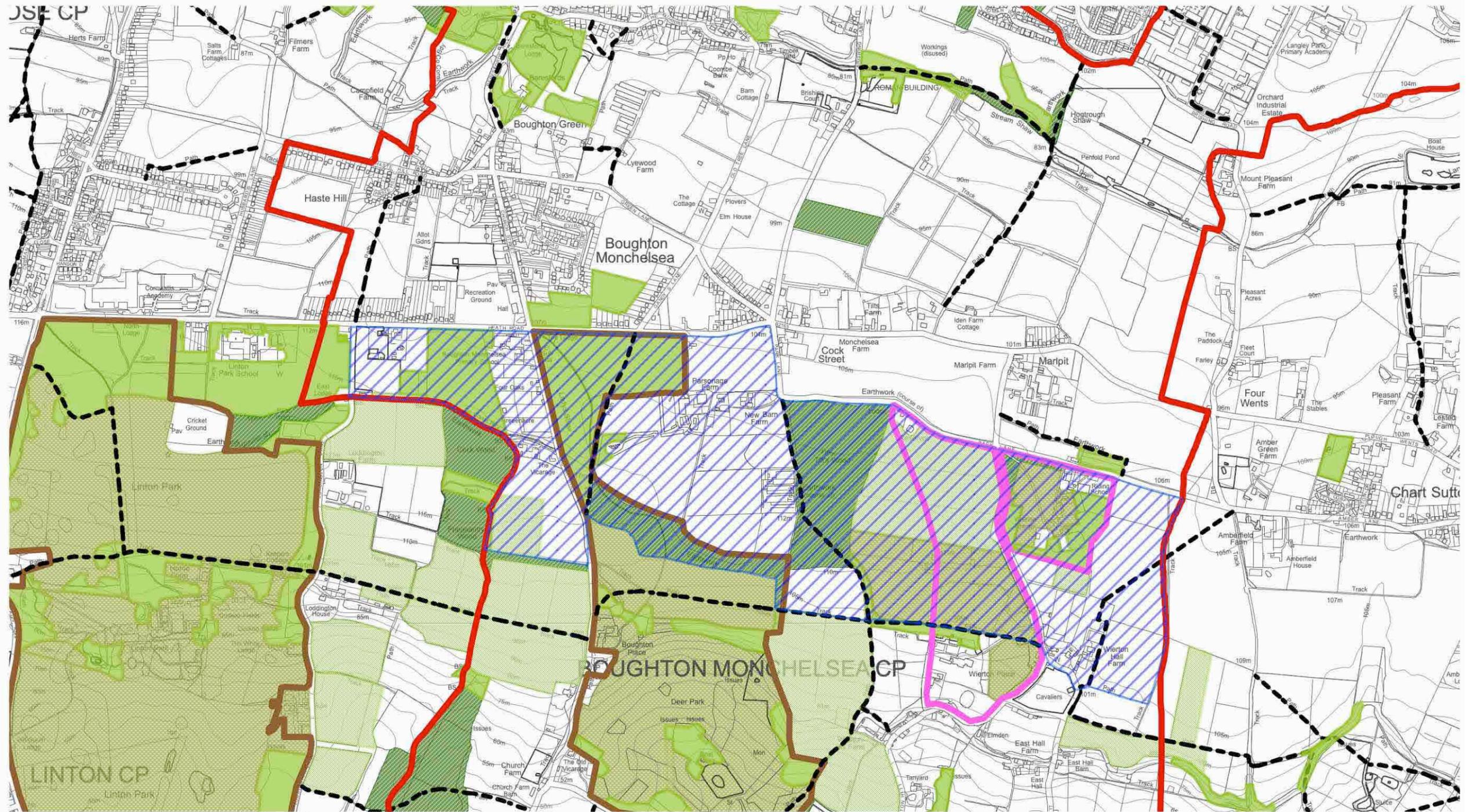
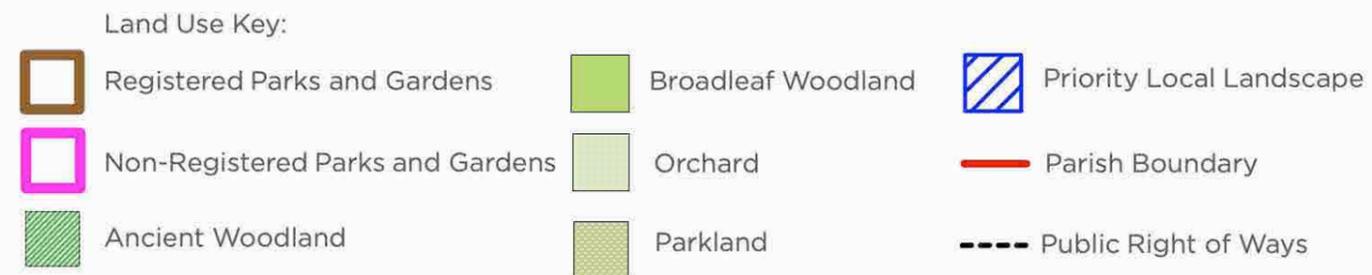


Figure 3 Land Use within the Priority Local Landscape



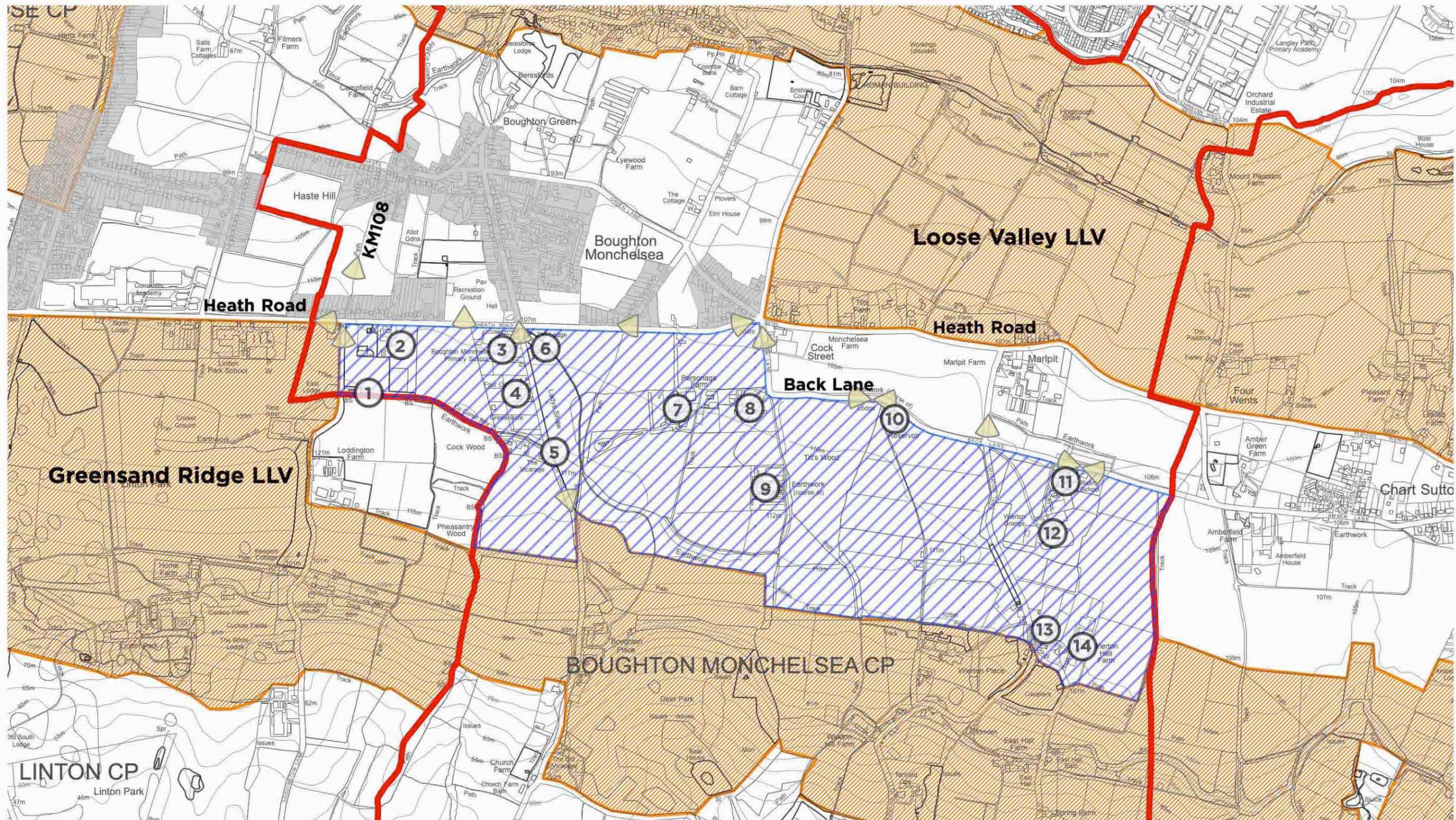


Figure 4 Settlement Pattern and Views

Settlement Key:

- | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----|-------------------------------|----|-----------------------|
| 1 | Farm Cottages | 6 | Boughton Place Lodge | 11 | Riding School |
| 2 | Two Residential Properties | 7 | Farm/Industrial Unit | 12 | Wierton Grange |
| 3 | Primary School | 8 | Isolated Residential Property | 13 | Wierton Place Lodge |
| 4 | Mobile/Lodge Homes | 9 | Mobile Homes | 14 | Historic Farm Cluster |
| 5 | Vicarage | 10 | Wierton Place Lodge | | |

- Existing Landscapes of Local Value
- Priority Local Landscape
- Key Settlement Areas
- Parish Boundary
- Key Views



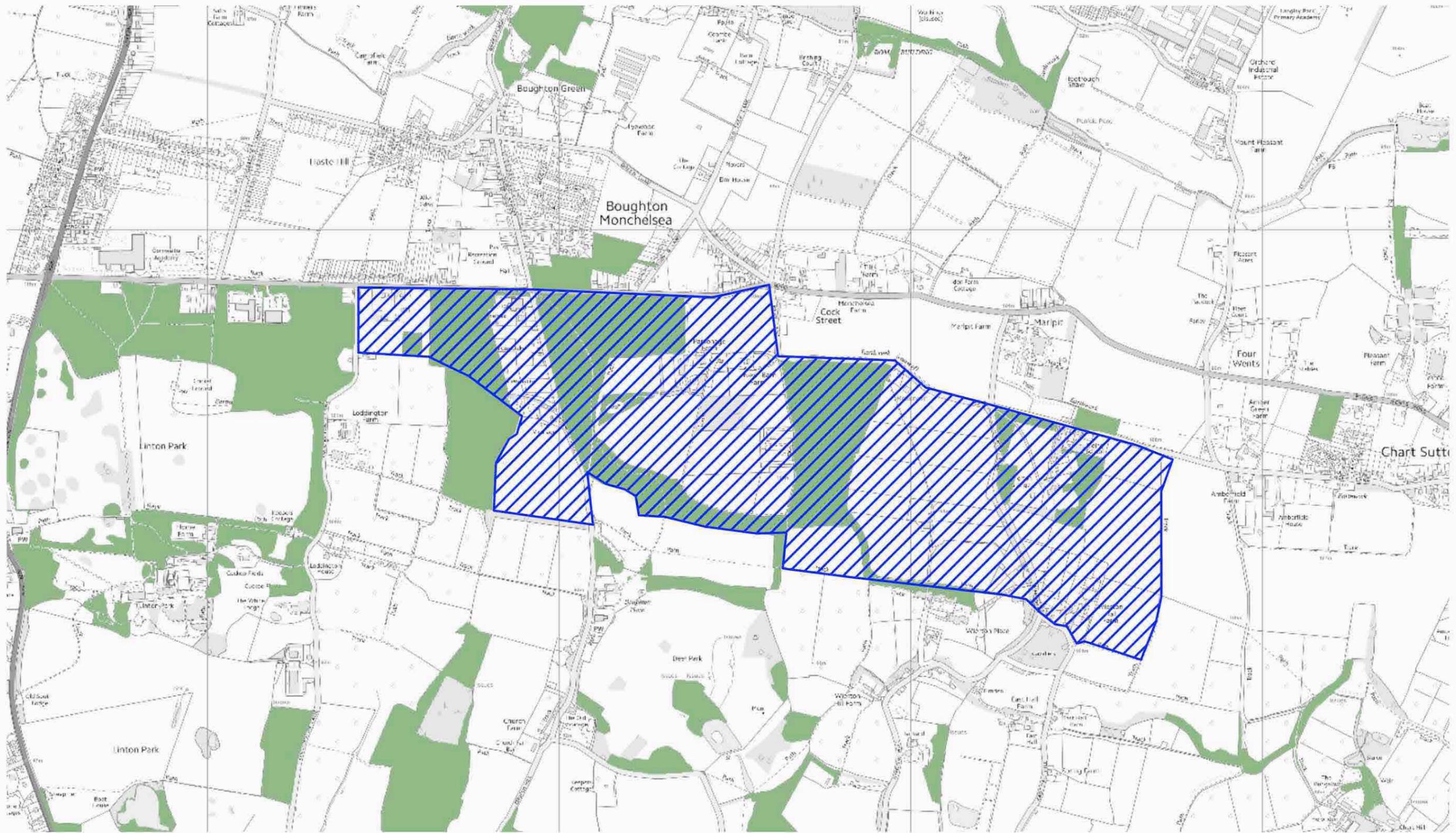


Figure 6 MAGIC Map Extract Showing UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat: Broadleaf Woodland

Key:



Priority Local Landscape



UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Broadleaf Woodland



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