

# **Pyrford Community Landscape Character Assessment**

## **Introduction**

In 2002 The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage produced guidelines<sup>1</sup> which would enable communities to identify what gives their locality its own sense of place and makes it different from other areas.

The CPRE<sup>2</sup> describes the most important advantages of undertaking such a study as being:

- to inspire action by local people to improve their environment.
- to help influence development in your area and protect what you value about your local landscape.
- to add local knowledge to your local authority's Landscape Character Assessment – a document which describes the features of the area, including geology, land cover and settlement patterns.
- to complement a village design statement by looking outside the built environment to the surrounding countryside.
- to create a historical snapshot of your landscape which can be preserved for future generations.

Pyrford Neighbourhood Area includes significant tracts of open space and it was felt that a landscape character study would be a useful toolkit to help plan the future development of the community. The PNF Open Spaces group agreed to undertake this study.

Pyrford has a fairly clear divide between the built up area to the north and open spaces to the south and east. The open spaces to the north, such as recreation grounds and street verges, are described in the Built Environment character study so it was not felt necessary to refer to them in this study. Descriptions of the character of the relatively small number of buildings in the area were kept to a minimum for the same reason.

The open spaces were divided into six areas:

Area 1: Pyrford Common, The Rough, Pyrford Court, water meadows, fields and the area known as Shey Copse.

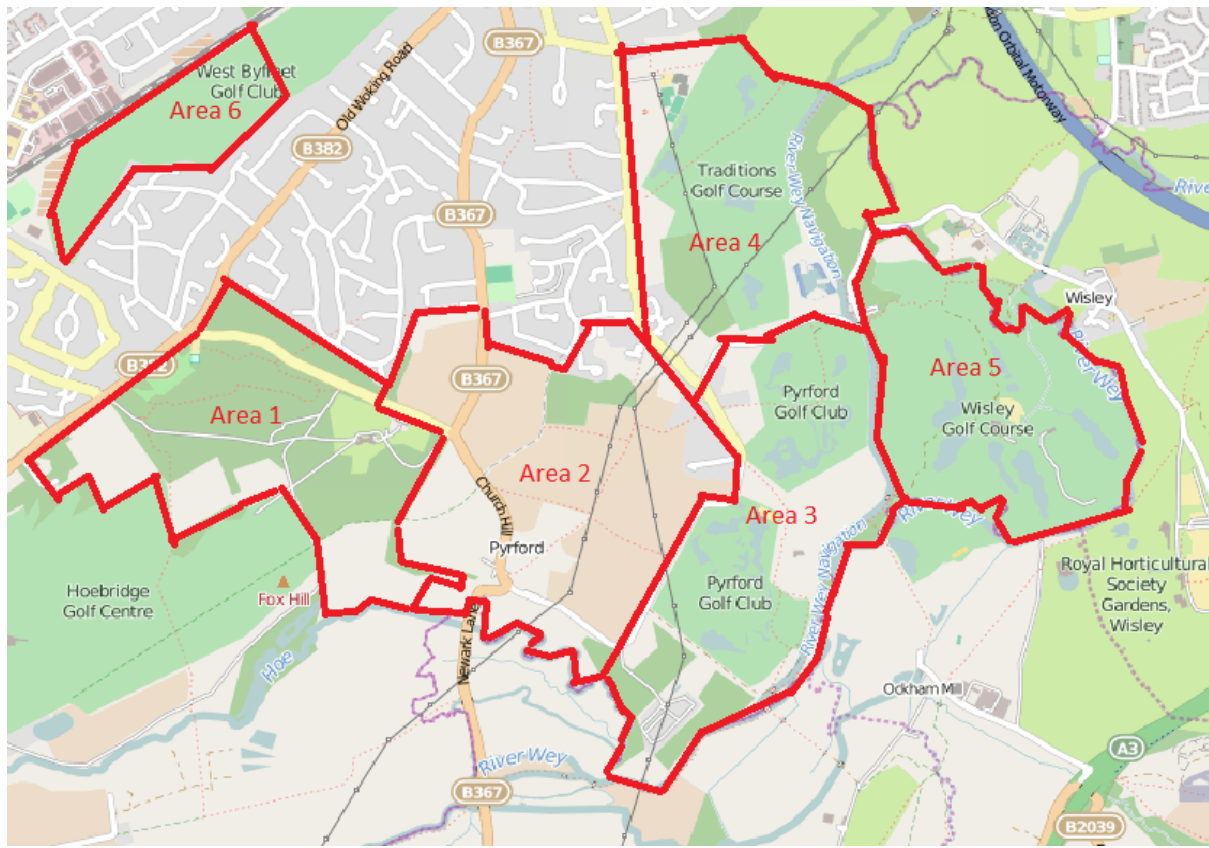
Area 2: Pyrford village, the open farmland either side of Upshott Lane, the farmland either side of Church Hill and the water meadows north of the Bourne stream.

Area 3: Pyrford Golf Course, the Wey Navigation and river, Pyrford Place and Warren Farm.

Area 4: Traditions Golf Course, Pyrford Road, Wey Navigation and Pyrford Marina.

Area 5: Wisley Golf Course and RHS gardens small nature reserve.

Area 6: West Byfleet Golf Course.



This map shows the location of the six Pyrford Neighbourhood open space character areas.

Members of the group walked the footpaths in each area and gained permission to visit areas not currently accessible to the public.

The reports followed a set pattern which it was felt explained the landscape in the most useful way. The categories chosen were based on character studies undertaken by community groups in Hampshire which included factual information as well as descriptions of the experience of walking through an area. Members of the community with local knowledge were consulted to provide background information and data was commissioned from the Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre<sup>3</sup>.

This report was prepared by Carole Gale with invaluable help from a number of people acknowledged at the end of this document.

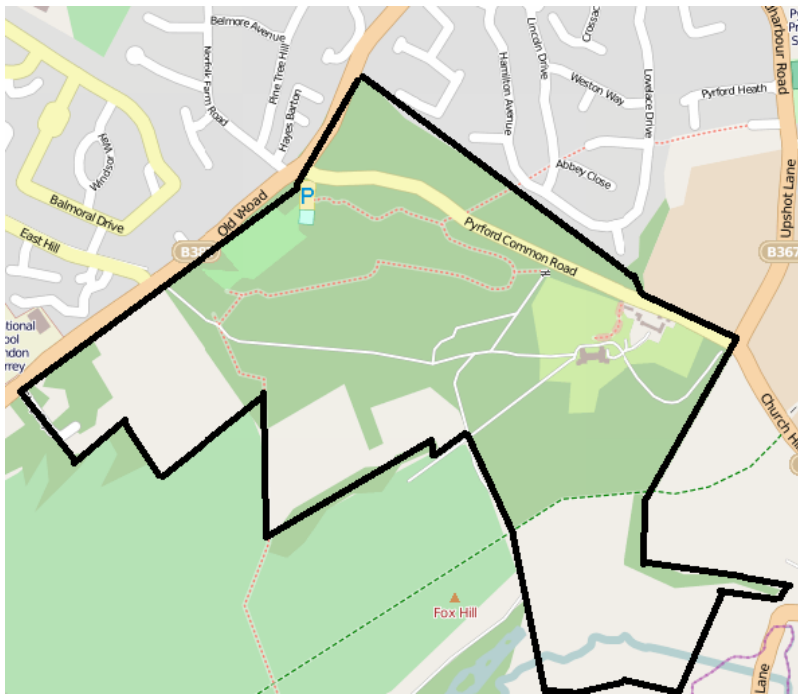
December 2014

## Landscape Character Area 1

### Key characteristics

- Recreation area
- Common land
- Riding stables and paddocks
- Private estate of woodland and fields
- Private mansion with listed garden
- Ploughed field
- Woodland hanger on escarpment
- Wet meadows and stream

### Location and Boundaries



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This character area includes Pyrford Common, the private area known as The Rough, Pyrford Court and its historic gardens, water meadows, agricultural land, fields and the area known as Shey Copse.

### Physical landscape

Pyrford Common is a small area of heathland which lies to both sides of Pyrford Common Road. It has a variety of habitats including deciduous and coniferous woodland, heathland,

grassland and scrub. It is designated as an SNCI<sup>3</sup> (Site of Nature Conservation Importance) for its surviving heathland which is a declining habitat in Surrey and for the fact that the site has good heathland regeneration potential. Most of the Common is owned by Horsell Common Preservation Society and is considered to be strategically important in taking pressure off the SSSI and SPA that is part of Horsell Common<sup>8</sup>. HCPS have registered the common as a Village Green. At the junction with Pyrford Common Road and Old Woking Road is a large car park giving access to the common land and to a substantial grassed area and recreation ground owned and maintained by Woking Borough Council. This grassed area of the Common and children's playground is not currently registered as a Village Green.

To the south of character area 1 the land rises from the river valley. The wet meadows by the Hoe stream are designated as Roundbridge Farm SNCI (Grid reference TQ036576) and are considered an important site for breeding Waders and rare migrants and have been identified as high potential Otter territory.<sup>3</sup> The Hoe stream is also designated as an SNCI, being regarded as an important wildlife corridor.

The Hanger (Grid reference TQ03618 58425 to TQ03894 58248) is a feature in the landscape, being a narrow strip of woodland on the edge of an escarpment leading from the Wey flood plain to the private grounds higher up. An area of the Hanger is designated as Semi-natural Ancient Woodland.<sup>3</sup> The Hanger separates two areas of agricultural land. One was left fallow for many years but since 2014 has been ploughed and planted with biomass maize.

The Rough (Grid reference TQ03171 58791), incorporating the house of the same name, is an area of mixed coniferous and deciduous woodland with remnants of garden planting such as rhododendrons. The fields to the south of the Rough (Grid reference TQ0294558594) contain jumps and are used infrequently as a horse riding cross-country course. The grass is left to grow as a wildflower meadow and is mown annually in the late summer.

The road to the Rough from Old Woking Road is lined by an avenue of tall beech trees. Pyrford Court and the former servant's quarters, The Bothy, are both Grade II listed and lie close to Pyrford Common. The land to the south of Pyrford Court contains natural areas of coppice and bluebell wood (Grid reference TQ03537 58491) with an area of naturalised daffodils. Closer to the house are the listed gardens which contain one of the National Collections of Wisteria.

Shey Copse is an area of stables, paddocks, woodland and a large pond. The footpath running between the paddocks from Pyrford Common is lined by a ditch and old oak trees. Part of the area is used by local Scouts and Guides as a campsite.

## **Perceptual/Experiential Landscape**

Pyrford Common car park lies close to the Old Woking Road. It is a large car park of around fifty spaces. It has potholes and it is immediately apparent that litter is a problem despite there being several litter bins in the area. The recreational area is separated from the Old Woking Road by a belt of deciduous trees, including aspen, birch and oak. The playground is well used, having a mixture of traditional equipment and more recent additions including a

zipwire. The grassed area is used for walking, gymkhanas, football and dog walking. The dog walkers leave plastic bags of excreta in many locations despite there being waste bins for the purpose. Empty cans of lager and vodka can be seen in different locations.

There is a bus stop near the Common and it is in walking distance of Maybury as well as Pyrford. The grass is all cut short and presents a fairly unimaginative scene which might be improved by leaving some of the grass uncut. The intensity of use by private and commercial dog walkers, with the attendant lack of care in clearing up makes the experience of walking or sitting in the grassed area a not entirely pleasant experience. To one side of the grassed area are abandoned tennis courts with weeds growing through the surface. The courts were very popular but were vandalised and not repaired by the council.

On the Common is found a mixture of birch, oak, holly, gorse and bracken. The main path from Pyrford passes through a clearing with remnants of heather. This small area has a different feel, being light and having a variety of insects such as dragonflies, grasshoppers butterflies and moths in evidence. The path itself is very uneven and full of tree roots. The speed of traffic along Pyrford Common Road makes it difficult to cross to this footpath from Pyrford. Dog walkers leave debris in this area of the Common too.

There are many paths through the Common and it is large enough to feel a sense of wildness and connection with nature.



There is also a section of common to the north of Pyrford Common Road. A footpath leads down through this area revealing at one point a pleasant glade in which comma and skipper butterflies and dragonflies take advantage of the increased light. Running across this section of common is a series of raised hummocks and dips assumed to be a BMX trail. There is an area of hazel coppice at the bottom succeeded by a hedge of rhododendron lining the Old Woking Road which creates a barrier and discourages entry into the area.

A footpath leads from the south western end of the main common (Grid reference TQ 02676 58835), just beyond a small hazel coppice, and travels uphill with Hoebridge golf course on the right and a large field on the left. The feeling on taking the path is of entering the countryside and just beyond the Forum boundary some magnificent views open out.



The footpath intersects with the drovers route known as the Sheepwalk which in turn connects with Sandy Lane.

The Sheepwalk track traveling along the perimeter of the private land south of Pyrford Court affords glimpses into the coppiced woods where bluebells and daffodils can be seen in season. As the path rises it becomes a sunken lane with high banks on either side. The lane is often wet in the winter and is

sometimes impassable due to poor maintenance.

From the high bank the strip of woodland known as The Hanger performs a dogleg round the edge of a steep escarpment, forming a corridor linking the woodland north of the Sheepwalk to the hedgerows lining the Bourne stream below.

The Hanger woodland is comprised of oak, beech, substantial holly trees and hazel coppice. From the base of the Hanger are extensive views of the water meadows sometimes described as the 'Surrey fens.'

## **Biodiversity**

Owls inhabit the woods of The Rough and owl boxes have been erected to encourage them. Uncommon species of moths and glow worms are found in this area. In winter large numbers of redwing and fieldfare gather in the fields in the area of Shey Copse. The field on the sloping ground south of the Rough is unimproved grassland and populations of meadow brown butterflies can be seen there. Deer also raise their young in this quiet area, the increase in numbers causing problems in the local gardens and woodland. The field is partially divided by a belt of beech, oak and sweet chestnut trees. A cuckoo returns to the area and has been heard this year.

Badger setts have existed for many years in the area around the Sheepwalk.



Preceding the sunken lane section of the track there is an area of ivy very popular in the summer with comma and red admiral butterflies and hornets.

Pyrford Common has a variety of trees and shrubs including aspen, alder buckthorn, hazel, birch, pine, holly and oak. Where clearings have been created these are noticeably alive with insects including wood ants, grasshoppers, butterflies and dragonflies.

## **History and settlement**

Pyrford Common was originally designated for the benefit of local people by an Enclosure Award in the time of George III. The Common was purchased by Horsell Common Preservation Society in 2006. It was never registered as a Common and HCPS have registered the area in their ownership as a Village Green in order to protect it as an open space. The boundary with The Rough has corrugated fencing along it and a deep trench marking the boundary. Close by there is also thought to be the remains of a deer enclosure from the period when the Common was part of Woking Park.

Pyrford Court, lying to the east of the area, is a substantial Grade II country house and garden built around 1907 by Lord Iveagh on land he purchased from his father-in-law the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Onslow. An ornamental woodland was developed and a path formerly lead from the south-east corner of the woodland down the valley, through The Hanger, to a lake. The



southern part of the woodland and the Hanger are no longer in the ownership of Pyrford Court and the footbridge over the public right of way, into The Hanger, has recently collapsed.

There are a small number of lodges and cottages in the area associated with the Iveagh Estate. The Bothy, built in 1913 as servant quarters for Pyrford Court, is set back but visible from Pyrford Common Road. It contains approximately five acres of grounds originally incorporated into Pyrford Court, including a restored formal garden and a currently unrestored brick summerhouse. It also retains remnants of the celebrated colour themed borders influenced by Gertrude Jekyll.

The house known as The Rough sits to the west of Pyrford Court in grounds of approximately three quarter of an acre. It was built in 1885 by the politician Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke. It is surrounded by a substantial area of land also known as The Rough, currently in the ownership of the present Lord Iveagh and members of the Guinness family.

### **Landscape management issues**

- Pyrford Common has the potential to be restored to heathland. It also has a role in drawing dog walkers away from Horsell Common.
- The Sheepwalk is often impassable in winter.
- More diversity and interest could be provided by allowing the grass in an area of the recreation ground to grow long.
- Litter is a problem on the Common.
- A footpath should be created on Pyrford Common Road between The Bothy and Stone Lodge.
- Shey Copse pond should be restored.
- The area of tennis courts could be restored to some form of recreational use.
- An official BMX trail in an appropriate area might discourage the building of unofficial trails.

### **Development issues**

- Pyrford Court gardens and the Bothy gardens are of historical interest and should be preserved and restored where possible.
- Shey Copse acts as a buffer between Pyrford Common and housing development and should be preserved as open space.
- Pyrford Common in its entirety should be preserved for community use and, if possible, part of the site should be set aside for restoration to internationally rare heathland.

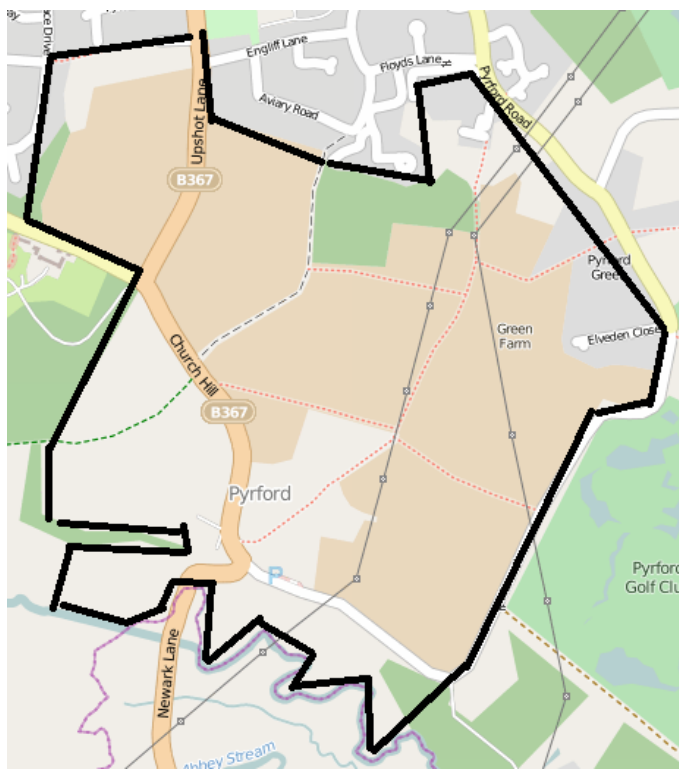
This area has been assessed) by the Woking Green Belt Review.<sup>9</sup> The area of Pyrford Common to the north of Pyrford Common Road (Area E in the report) was recommended for removal from the Green Belt. The reason given was the connection with the suggested development of parcel 9. It is noted in the report that the Common is protected as an SNCI.

## Landscape Character Area 2

### Key characteristics

- Bourne stream and surrounding wet meadows
- Escarpment
- Open farmland
- Oak woodland
- Uninterrupted views to North Downs
- Several footpaths and bridleways
- Medieval settlement with Norman church

### Location and Boundaries



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This character area includes Pyrford Village, which is a conservation area, the open farmland either side of Upshot Lane, the farmland either side of Church Hill and the water meadows north of the Bourne stream. Just to the north of the area lies Aviary Road, the second conservation area in Pyrford.

### Physical landscape



The majority of this area is underlain by Bagshot Beds. The soils are mainly light and the agricultural land is classified as grade 2 (very good) and grade 3 (good). The land rises from the edge of the river Wey flood plain to an escarpment which affords extensive views.

The field patterns have changed in recent years with smaller fields being merged into larger units.



Rowley Bristow wood (Grid reference TQ04235 58886) is largely oak woodland, quite densely planted with little understorey except for a large area of English bluebells and some areas of bracken.

To the south of the area lies the Bourne stream which is flanked by wet meadows. Known as Wheeler's Fields (TQ 042581), this wet grassland is a rare habitat in Surrey and

is designated as an SNCI (Site of Nature Conservation Importance).

At the north-western tip of the area, behind the Arbor community centre (Grid reference TQ 03845 59256), is a strip of land sometimes used as paddocks. It is currently used by Pyrford Scouts and Guides for communal activities. These fields are flanked by Teggs Lane to the north and a belt of trees which links with Pyrford Common to the south. The trees in the belt are Scots pine interspersed with deciduous trees.

## **Perceptual/Experiential Landscape**

Sandy Lane is a bridleway which leads to the open farmland. It begins, at the Aviary road end, as a green lane, with oak woodland to the left and a hedgerow of elm saplings and oaks to the right, beyond which is a large open field planted with biomass maize. There are three mature field oak trees, remaining from the removal of the hedgerow in the late 1960s, which relieve the monotony of the planting. The lane has a number of coppiced hazels and very mature oak trees which give it a rural feel. This is reinforced when the rising ground reaches a crossroads and the whole landscape opens up to reveal extensive views to the North Downs. The lane carries along the escarpment with continuing fine views, very little sign of human habitation, no visible roads and only a distant hum of traffic from the A3. The rural landscape is marred only by a line of pylons which cross the fields.

The middle-distance woodlands and the North Downs behind provide a charming backdrop; the scenery was admired by the nineteenth century poet and diarist A J Munby who eventually settled at Wheelers Farm. The surrounding fields are all large in scale, planted with one crop (maize) and hedges have largely disappeared. The maize is stored in large tubes of plastic which snake along the edges of the fields and attracts crows and rats. Arguably the best view in Pyrford is from the gate at the end of this eastern section of Sandy Lane. It is totally spoilt, however, by the mounds of plastic clad, composting biomass maize.



A series of interlinking footpaths separate the fields and retain a margin of wildflowers such as white and red campion, bluebells and lesser stitchwort, and occasional trees such as hawthorn and elder. Several oaks lining the footpaths are of great age. The footpaths manage to retain charm and character despite the surrounding monoculture. There are a number of stiles which, due to the lack of surrounding fencing, are redundant but some, particularly those into the graveyard, prevent cyclists going through and over footpaths.

One area of farmland, close to Pyrford Green House, has recently been enclosed.



There are also paddocks in this area, some of which are host to the southern marsh orchid; in one field the orchids appear in large numbers (Grid reference TQ04746 58787).

Randalls field is a further area of paddock lying to the west of Upshott lane, behind the Arbor. This field is little used and contains banks of ox-eye daisies. There is a communications tower hidden in one corner of the field. Teggs lane, running alongside the field, retains a semi-rural feel, despite leading to the Lovelace Drive housing estate. It is lined by gardens on one side and a deep verge on the other which includes a number of oak trees, some very old, plus elm saplings, rowan, ash,

sweet chestnut and sycamore. The belt of Scots pine and deciduous trees on the far side of the field, links from the Arbor to Pyrford Common and has been used as a footpath for many years but has recently been fenced off.

The mysterious Pyrford stone, possibly a prehistoric standing stone is found on Church Hill. There is a belt of Scots pine trees running along the side of the road, becoming predominantly lime and elm higher up. Sandy Lane continues across Church Hill, passing in front of Stone farm. Another charming view presents itself from Sandy Lane as the roof tops of some of the houses in Pyrford Village and the church can be glimpsed from this section of the lane.

The open spaces around the village include a churchyard with three ancient yew trees. In front of the churchyard is a grassed verge which is allowed to grow as a meadow. The cemetery across the road also has an area of uncut grass. A native hedge has recently been planted around the car park which gives access to the cemetery. To the south of Lady Place Cottage is an old orchard which is mentioned on the tithe map of 1843. Taking the footpath from the cemetery to the open farmland it is noticeable that there are large areas of neglected land, giving cover for deer, and dilapidated farm buildings which detract from what would have been an idyllic view of Wheelers Farm roof and the green countryside beyond.

## Biodiversity

There are several banks of nettles in sunny positions lining the footpaths across the fields. These provide an ideal habitat for small tortoiseshell butterflies which are seen in large numbers in the summer. Wild flowers such as white dead nettle provide food for bumble

bees. Whitethroats return to nest in the area each year. Birds which were common until a few years ago have virtually disappeared including skylarks, lapwing and cuckoos. Yellow hammers were also formerly commonly seen in the area. Linnets and swallows can still be seen around the farm buildings. Buzzards and red kite can now be seen regularly as can green ring-necked parakeets. Thrushes are seen around the village and in the Rowley Bristow private grounds.

The wet meadows are a rich habitat for invertebrates such as crickets and dragonflies. Lapwing are still seen there, sometimes in parties of 50 or more. A hobby has also been seen there. The Bourne supports a healthy population of the attractive Banded Demoiselle damselfly and is considered to have potential to support otters. Below the church there is an area of reed bed and on the church hillock an attractive display of snowdrops can be seen at the beginning of the year.

Rabbits and foxes are common in the area and occasionally roe deer and muntjack are seen. Brown hare used to be seen in good numbers around the church and meadows but are no longer present. Hedgehog, owl and bat numbers in the area have tumbled. Pipistrelle bats roost in the church.

## **History and settlement**

This area includes the Norman church and the medieval farmhouses which make up Pyrford village. Many of these were built in the mid-1500s, following the Dissolution of the Monasteries when the Crown gave land to Nobles and they created Yeoman run farms. There are several more late medieval timber framed farms and houses dispersed along Warren lane, Lower Pyrford Rd and Church Hill. The footpaths and bridleways and the roads which were built on them were established to link to the fords and mills along the river and there would have been a route to Newark Priory. Sandy Lane is thought to have existed as a drover's route to Guildford market and may also have been a main route to Woking Palace and Chertsey Abbey.

St Martin's Mews and St Nicholas Crescent is a gated development of town houses sitting in park like grounds of 22 acres. These homes are built on what was formerly the church of England Waifs and Strays home built in 1881 which subsequently became the Rowley Bristow hospital until it closed in 1990.

The houses in Elvedon Close were built at different intervals in the 1930s, the 1950s and the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the houses back onto the open fields and the close is the only habitation which can be clearly seen from the escarpment.

## **Landscape management issues**

- Modern farming practice has led to a reduction in biodiversity. This could partly be redressed by the reintroduction of hedgerows and allowing wider field margins.
- Coppices and woodland are not managed.

- Footpaths are not maintained. Ditches are not cleared resulting in impassable rights of way, particularly the footpath leading to the cemetery and from Elvedon Close.
- Footpaths should be protected from careless use of farm machinery which has resulted in footpath signs being demolished and deep ruts appearing across rights of way.
- Apart from the fields which are given over to maize crop grown for biomass there are large areas around the farm cottages which are no longer cultivated or used. Initiatives such as a community orchard might be considered here.
- The community wish to have a footpath from Upshot Lane or Teggs Lane to Pyrford Common round Randall's Field (such a footpath existed for many decades until very recently).

## **Development issues**

- The unspoilt rural feel of this area, with its outstanding views, should be protected.
- The water quality of the Bourne and nature conservation value of the SNCl's should be protected.
- The paddock behind the Arbor to be retained for community use and, if possible, made more accessible to the community.
- A footway/cycle path along Upshot Lane is desirable.

This area has been assessed (parcel 9) by the Woking Green Belt Review<sup>9</sup>. It is described as having very low suitability for removal from green belt having been assessed as performing a critical green belt purpose (p22). On environmental grounds it is considered that there are major constraints upon the development of this area (p38), 'due to the prominence of the escarpment in the landscape.' The parcel is ranked 18<sup>th</sup> out of 31 locations in terms of sustainability (p47). In terms of landscape character and sensitivity to change the south eastern section of the parcel is considered to have little or no capacity for change and the north western area to have low capacity for change (p52).

An area of parcel 9 was proposed for removal from the green belt as shown below:



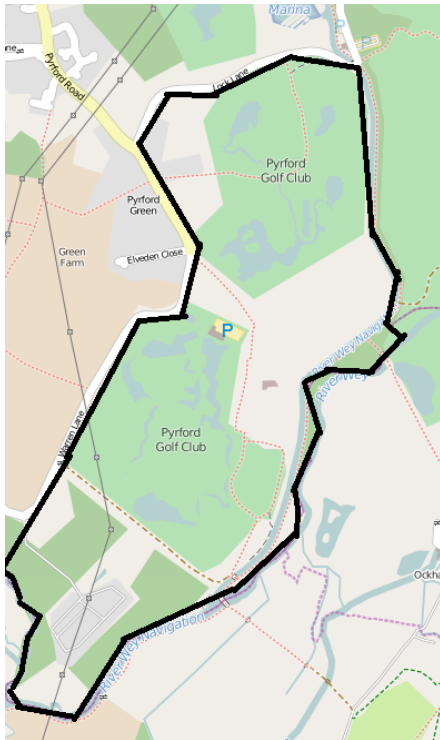
The proposed development area is outlined in red and referred to in the report as WGB009a.

### **Landscape Character Area 3**

#### **Key characteristics**

- The Wey Navigation and the River Wey
- Pyrford Golf Course
- Pony paddocks
- Pyrford Place and environs
- Warren Farm static home park and environs

#### **Location and Boundaries**



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This character area has Lock Lane as the boundary to the north, the River Wey navigation to the east and south and the Bourne stream and Warren lane to the west.

## Physical landscape

The area is low lying and skirts the Wey flood plain. The area is mostly underlain by Bagshot Beds.

There is a large network of frequently interlocking lakes and ponds which have been excavated within the golf course and the land is prone to become waterlogged in winter.

One area within the course is designated as Semi-natural Ancient Woodland<sup>3</sup> (Grid reference TQ050583).

The canal and river provide a green corridor through the area and are flanked by a variety of deciduous trees.

The river Wey is an SNCI<sup>3</sup> (Site of nature Conservation Importance) along with Pyrford Place lake which adjoins it. There is another SNCI in the area, this being Warren Farm Wood and Riverside (TQ 046575). This was selected for its high species diversity, including alder carr in its marshy areas and for the fact that it forms a green corridor with the Bourne stream.

## Perceptual/Experiential Landscape

Pyrford Golf Course occupies two thirds of this area. A particular feature of the course is the large amount of water in the form of lakes, ponds and interconnecting channels. The ground surrounding the greens is shaped into undulating mounds on which the grass is allowed to

grow long and wild flowers such as vetch are able to grow. Some of the mounds have vestiges of gorse and other shrubs growing on them. The course also has some stands of trees such as silver birch which have been incorporated into the design.

The perimeters of the course have some natural areas which are far enough from the golfers to be genuine wild areas. One such area (Grid reference TQ05055 57896) is near Walsham gates and the footpath through the course here, although overgrown and marshy, gives access to a peaceful area where whitethroats can be heard. The escarpment can be seen from here. The area of gorse next to Walsham gates, within the golf course, was known on the tithe map of 1843 as the gorse field. Other notably wild areas of the course include the hazel coppice near The Anchor and the area beneath the pylons. The lakes include margins of yellow flags and are home to a number of different species of water birds.

There is an area of woodland on the course, behind Pyrford Place, which on the tithe map is named as Pyrford Wood (Grid reference TQ050583) and is currently designated as an area of ancient and semi-natural woodland and includes a number of old oaks.

At the junction of Lower Pyrford Road and Lock Lane lies an entrance to the area previously known as 'Bennetts Farm' which is used as storage by Crown Golf, the owners of Pyrford Golf Club and Traditions. This is a ramshackle area including two run-down buildings and areas of scrub land. There is a house sparrow population here.

The golf course in this northern section can be accessed via a footpath which runs through a green paddock. This paddock runs along three sides of the cottages known as Henry VIIth Cottage and East Cottage. The paddocks are not used for grazing, but are mown regularly, except for one small section near the depot which is used as an allotment area. The paddock boundaries have been planted with native hedges including hawthorn and beech.

The footpath traverses the golf course between two lakes and is currently the only way that pedestrians can walk to the Anchor from this vicinity as Lock Lane is too dangerous. The experience of crossing the course is very unpleasant as there are a number of greens to cross and it isn't always possible to see where and when the balls might appear and footpath signs suddenly disappear. The footpath finishes on Lock Lane where there is the added dangerous task of walking along a section of Lock Lane to reach the canal towpath.

There are a number of paddocks in the area, dividing the northern part of the golf course from the southern. The fields closer to the canal and a small orchard are associated with cottages, including Home Farm and Manor Farm, which have been transformed into luxury homes. The paddocks closer to the road are lightly grazed natural grassland and are known to contain southern marsh orchids. The fields and the coppiced hazel and old oaks lining the footpath (right of way footpath 82) provide a pleasant pastoral scene.

The canal is an oasis of calm where the occasional passing narrow boat adds colour and interest to the scene. The distant hum of traffic on the A3 can be heard and the golf courses either side of the canal create a suburban feel to the stretch from the Anchor to Pigeon House Bridge. Linear woodlands of oak, alder, ash and hazel coppice line the canal towpath.



In addition there is a very tall avenue of limes on the Wisley side of the canal which is prominent in the landscape. By Pigeon House Bridge is a small copse, known as Pigeon House Copse on the tithe map. A local land mark is found a little further on the canal in the form of the summerhouse which was associated with Pyrford Place and the poet John Donne who lived at the house. The modern house built close to the landmark detracts from the scene.

Between Pigeon House Bridge and Walsham Lock, the river and canal are separate and the gap between them forms a wild area of wet woodland with the river being secluded and glimpsed only occasionally.



The section of the canal from Walsham Gates to the point where the Abbey stream joins the canal is a natural section of the navigation which provides picturesque views and is much photographed and painted.

The Warren Farm static home park is set well back (60 metres) from the Wey Navigation and is surrounded by woodland. In addition to being an SNCI the woodland surrounding the park is an important landscape feature which is visible from different locations around

Pyrford. The woodland species are principally silver birch, oak and beech with the alder trees being restricted to the water's edge and the swampy inlet which borders the Bourne. There is a small reedbed along one stretch of the river.

The area bordering the river is secluded and the restriction on the owning of animals on the estate means that there are no demands made on the area by dog-walkers.

## **Biodiversity**

There are significant undisturbed areas in the vicinity of the Wey navigation in which warblers such as blackcap, chiff chaff and whitethroat can be heard. The river is secluded in places and has potential to provide a habitat for otters and water voles, the latter having been seen by residents in former years. American mink, which are significant predators of water vole, have been seen in the area. Kingfishers and grey wagtail are frequently seen in the area.

Patches of wild flowers such as foxgloves and butterflies including Speckled Wood hint at the potential for a rich and varied habitat around Walsham plantation. There is, however, a serious invasion of Himalayan balsam which has spread across much of the area. There is still, however, a good variety of marginal water plants in the vicinity of Walsham gates. A bird count on Pyrford golf course in the winter recorded twenty five species including kestrel, Egyptian geese, greylag geese and green woodpecker.

## **History and settlement**

Pyrford Place was an important manor house originally built in the 1550s. The current building was constructed in the mid-1990s as 15 luxury apartments and retains seven acres of landscaped grounds extending down to the Wey and includes Pyrford Place lake. There are a small number of cottages near the gated development which have been developed into luxury homes surrounded by landscape grounds and paddocks.

The Wey was one of the first British rivers to be made navigable, and opened to barge traffic in 1653. The canal is maintained by the National Trust and the water and towpath are a very important local historical asset as well as being a wildlife haven and leisure amenity.

Pyrford Golf Club was established in 1993 on land which was formerly used as a market garden.

Warren Farm was built in the late 17th or early 18th century to provide Pyrford Place with food, including rabbits. The raised mounds of the artificial rabbit warrens can still be seen by the track leading to Walsham gates. The farmhouse no longer exists but the 60 acres of woodland known as Warren Farm currently provides affordable static homes in a rural setting with 60 acres of woodland.

### **Landscape management issues**

- Retain natural areas of golf course.
- Improve signposts/waymarkers for Public Footpath through Pyrford Golf Course and if possible create alternative permissive path.
- Create footpath to link Footpath 80 from Walsham Lock to Footpath 75 further along Warren Lane.
- Create a footpath along Lock Lane to enable residents to walk to The Anchor and the canal.
- Invasive species such as Himalayan balsam.
- Avoid proliferation of buildings associated with horse paddocks.
- Maintain the character of the watercourse and provide undisturbed refuge for wildlife using the river corridor.
- Maintain and, if possible, improve water quality.
- Risk of golf course water, rich in nutrients and invasive water weeds draining into canal and river. Conversely, too much water extraction by golf courses in dry years.
- Garden waste on Warren Farm close to natural areas risking growth of non-native species such as bamboo.
- Damage to Wey navigation banks and therefore plants, by speeding canal traffic.

### **Development issues**

- Small marina for up to 10 narrow boats by Walsham gates vulnerable to development which would destroy the natural rural feel of the area.

- No development within 5 metres of canal buffer zone and 8 metres of Wey river buffer zone in accordance with Woking 2027 Core Strategy 17.

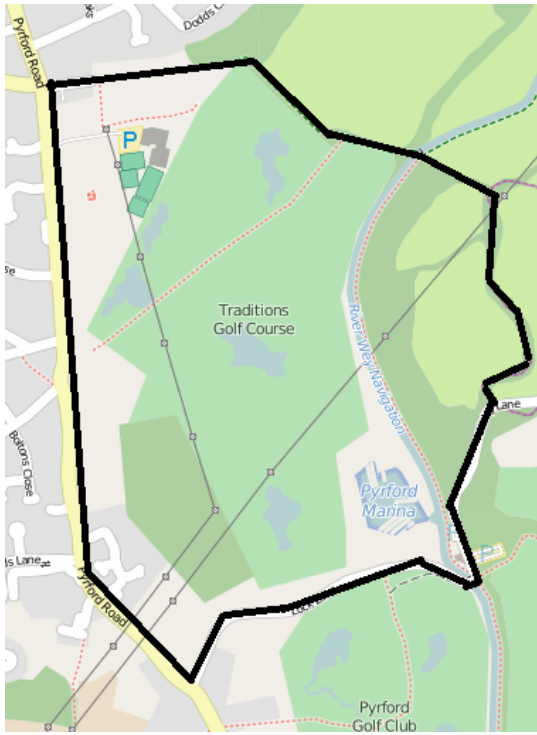
## **Landscape Character Area 4**

### **Key characteristics**

- Traditions Golf Course
- Pyrford Marina and Wey Navigation
- Listed house and barn
- Woodlands and fields
- Wexfenne Gardens housing development
- Health club and tennis courts

- Spirit Daycare children's nursery and environs

## Location and Boundaries



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This sector occupies the north-eastern section of the Forum area. It includes Traditions Golf Course, a small modern housing development, the Wey navigation, woodland and some traditional houses and converted barns.

## Physical landscape

The area is a low-lying open space with the largest portion occupied by Traditions Golf Course, an 18 hole pay and play golf course opened in 1999. The golf course has a gently undulating landscape with a number of ponds and lakes incorporated into the design of the course. The canal is raised above the surrounding land which means that the land may flood but not the navigation. Drains and ditches flow under the canal and not into it. The canal corridor is flanked by the golf course on the west and by a deep band of alder carr on the east. Pyrford Marina, lying to the south east of the area, was extended in 2011 and now provides moorings for over 200 boats.

Peatmore Wood, to the south of the area, is designated as an area of Semi-natural Ancient Woodland<sup>3</sup> and coincides with an area on the 1843 tithe map known as Peat Moor Copse. An archeological evaluation conducted by Surrey County Archeological Unit prior to the building of Traditions golf course found a considerable depth of peat in this area. Another small woodland is located to the north of the area fronting onto Pyrford Road and adjacent to Providence Place.

Also located along this section of Pyrford Road are a fitness centre, a tennis club and the Spirit Daycare children's nursery. In a field close to the nursery it is possible to make out the curious site of a circle of standing stones placed there by the healer Jack Temple. In the field next to Traditions car park there is a small orchard.

## **Perceptual/Experiential Landscape**

Although it would be pleasant to walk to the Anchor pub along Lock Lane it is far too dangerous and means that local residents have to take a circuitous walking route via Dodd's Lane and the canal towpath or drive to the pub. It is possible to walk along Pyrford Road, with one notable exception being between Floyds Lane and Boltons Lane, where the pavement has disappeared and the dangers of stepping into the road are very great.

With the exception of the small modern Wexfenne Gardens housing estate there are few residential buildings backing on to the open space and most are of some interest. The imposing Grade II listed Old House, located a short distance from the entrance to Traditions, presents an elegant 18<sup>th</sup> century façade, enveloping an older 16<sup>th</sup> century building. Providence Place, at the northern boundary, is a row of former almshouses listed locally as of architectural interest.

At the entrance to Traditions Golf Course is found a collection of buildings associated with the former Lees farmstead. These include the former modern farmhouse now the clubhouse building, Lees Farm Barns, including a listed barn, now converted to residential use, and two cottages known as Lees Farm Cottages. Close to the cottages is a small timber framed cart shed built in the local Surrey style, which is in a state of disrepair, the council having failed to enforce the order they made for repairs over a decade ago.

The perimeter of Traditions Golf Course is lined by trees and shrubs with small copses and individual old oaks dotting the course so that the feel is of a parkland with pleasing views across the extent of the course and to the hills beyond. The course is intersected by pylons which detract from the view. The course has six lakes of varying sizes, all are well-integrated into the landscape with some of the smaller water bodies having a natural feel with areas of bulrush and other vegetation around the edge. The alternative footpath created around the perimeter of the course has a relaxed feel, being largely separated from golfing activity by a lake, rough grassland and clumps of trees. The blackthorn hedgerow to the left of the path contributes to the semi-rural feel of the walk. The footbridge over the ditch to Dodds Lane has collapsed but there is an alternative crossing route further down the course.

The area of the course away from the public footpath is more diverse; it is intersected with ditches, has the dense Peatmore Wood to one side, an environmentally protected marshy area, an avenue of oaks and a large rough grassy area close to the junction of Lock Lane and Pyrford Road which recently has been used as an apiary.

Dodds Lane begins from Pyrford Road as a path through fields which are infrequently cut and provide a pleasant walking and cycling route to the canal. The path becomes a tree-lined track with hazel coppice, hornbeam, ash, oak and aspen trees contributing to the rural feel. A deep ditch lines the track which passes under the canal.

Dodds Bridge provides access to the canal towpath. The towpath along the canal from the north is peaceful but well-used with alder trees lining the opposite bank and a deep belt of wet woodland comprised of alder, ash and oak to the left. The trees and quiet waterway create a sense of seclusion for some way along the path until it approaches Pyrford Marina and shortly afterwards the popular Anchor public house located in a picturesque spot next to Pyrford lock.

## **Biodiversity**

A community of house sparrows are found close to the derelict barn and Lees Farm cottages and swifts nest every year in the eaves of 1, Lees Farm Cottage. Green woodpeckers frequent the old oak trees on the golf course and chaff chaff can be heard in the copses on the course. There is an area of the golf course marked out as environmentally sensitive. This land lies close to Lock Lane and includes a shallow pond with much vegetation including bulrush. The area is managed to prevent it becoming completely overgrown and golfers are not allowed to retrieve their balls from it. It is believed to contain a breeding population of newts, possibly great crested newts.

The golf course was given planning permission on appeal, despite concerns that construction of the course would lead to the loss of wet grassland and affect the ability of skylarks to breed in the area. The inspector regarded the presence of skylarks as anecdotal. Since the construction of the golf course there are no longer skylarks breeding in Pyrford. Marsh frogs, introduced to the UK in the 1930s, can be heard calling from the pond close to the Clubhouse. An area of the course is identified by SEEBF (South East England Biodiversity Forum) as a BOA (Biodiversity Opportunity Area), an area where increased biodiversity should be targeted.

## **History and settlement**

The tithe map of 1843 shows the area to be largely pasture land with some arable fields to the north of the area. The Old House is the oldest property in the area, dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A short distance from the Old House, facing Pyrford Road, is the Grade II listed Barn, now converted to residential use, which dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Lees Homestead can be seen on the tithe map occupying the location where Traditions clubhouse now sits. The Wey navigation, officially opened in 1653, was one of the first rivers to be made navigable. In 1863 the writer A J Munby<sup>4</sup> describes a visit to the Anchor public house on the canal and a walk down the lane towards Pyrford 'that wound between earthen banks hidden in grass and flowers and overhead an almost continuous avenue of trees.' Lock Lane retains much of this character but can no longer be walked down due to the lack of verges and frequent use by traffic heading for the A3.

The healer Jack Temple lived on Pyrford Road until his death in 2004. He went into practice as an alternative therapist, opening his clinic, the Temple Healing Centre, in a prefabricated hut. His clients included Diana, Princess of Wales, the Duchess of York, the model Jerry Hall, and the Prime Minister's wife, Cherie Booth. To help cure his clients He constructed a

Neolithic circle of stones in a field close to his home which can still be seen today. The Spirit Daycare nursery now operates on the site.

Wexfenne Gardens is a small estate of 45 detached houses built in 1987 on brownfield land. The houses were built closer together than had previously been the practise in the area.

### **Landscape management issues**

- Retention of alternative footpath on Traditions Golf Course in addition to right of way across fairways and improved way marking across the middle.
- Landscaping of golf course should retain natural features including trees and replace trees that die with native trees.
- Create footpath along Lock Lane and restore missing section of footpath on Pyrford Road between Floyds Lane and Boltons lane.
- Dodds Lane could be enhanced to create a cycleway to the canal and hence to Byfleet.

### **Development issues**

- The field through which Dodds Lane passes has a natural feel which provides an experience of walking or cycling through grassland and it's character should be protected.
- The collection of buildings around and including the Old House have a special character which should not spoiled.
- The almshouses are also considered to be buildings of local character which should be protected.
- Any development in this area should make provision for swift, swallow and house sparrow nests. In particular, any development of 1, Lees Farm cottages where swifts currently nest.

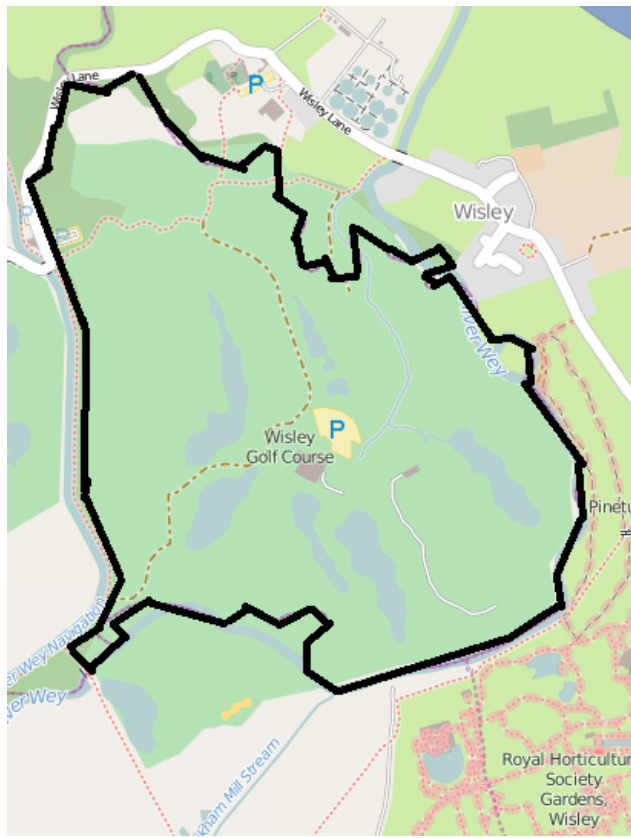
## **Landscape Character Area 5**

### **Key characteristics**

- Wisley Golf Course
- Wisley Gardens nature reserve
- The Decoy historical feature
- Areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland
- Large lakes within golf course



## Location and Boundaries



This character area includes Wisley Golf Course, Lock Copse opposite the Anchor and the small nature reserve within Wisley gardens.

## Physical landscape

The area lies on Bagshot Beds and is bordered to the south and east by the River Wey and to the west by the Wey Navigation. It lies within the Wey flood plain and is identified by SEEBF (South East England Biodiversity Forum) as a BOA (Biodiversity Opportunity Area), an area where increased biodiversity should be targeted. Lock Copse is an area of woodland mentioned in the 1843 tithe map and is also designated as an area of Semi-natural Ancient Woodland.<sup>3</sup> The Decoy, lying within the golf course, is an area of woodland similarly designated. The golf course is very gently undulating and in addition to several large lakes the River Wey runs through the golf course with passage over the river provided by a white decorative bridge. The course is planted with woodland, copses, native hedges, individual trees and areas of wild gorse. Towards the clubhouse the course is landscaped with flower borders.

In this area the Forum boundary takes the route of the borough boundary which follows the River Wey. As the course of the river has changed over time the boundary dips into Wisley Gardens rather than following the current river. The island which has been formed between

the old course of the river and the new has been developed as a nature reserve by the RHS, complete with a two storey bird hide.

## **Perceptual/Experiential Landscape**

Lock Copse is a small area of woodland comprising some magnificent specimens of white poplar although some are falling over and the woodland has a neglected air. In spring the woodland is populated by English bluebells. The path from Pyrford lock leading into the golf course has a pleasant rural feel with hazel coppice leading to extensive areas of gorse and broom. The oak trees growing on the green gives the course a park-like feel and extensive views to the hills in the distance create a very serene environment. In contrast to Pyrford and Traditions golf courses there are no pylons crossing the course. The M25 can be heard in the distance in some areas of the course.

The Decoy is a substantial area of woodland including coniferous and deciduous trees. The course is well maintained with clearly marked footpaths and indications for walkers on which way to look when crossing fairways. One footpath leads through an avenue of tall lime trees to the clubhouse which is attractively landscaped with flower beds. The RHS at Wisley Gardens provides advice to the golf club which perhaps accounts for the feeling, in places, that the course is more like a garden than a natural landscape.

At the South-western tip of the area lies Wharf lane. This is a popular footpath leading from Ripley to the canal which at the present time is inaccessible due to the collapse of the bridge over the river.

Within Wisley Gardens the nature reserve can be observed from the bird hide. The old river channel has been reconnected with its current course and this quiet wet woodland area plays host to a wide range of flora and fauna including kingfishers.

## **Biodiversity**

Wisley Golf Course has recently been reseeded with more sustainable traditional native fescue/bent mixes of grass which require less fertilizer. The lakes support populations of birds including Egyptian geese and herons. The river has a narrow band of natural vegetation lining it and riffles which are considered helpful in building up biodiversity. In addition to the lakes and river there is a range of habitats from mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland to areas of natural gorse and broom.

Recent records for the river side nature reserve in RHS gardens include slow worms and grass snakes amongst a long list of other species.

## **History and settlement**

The land in this area was part of the estate of Pyrford Place which was originally built in 1550. The Decoy was mentioned in Evelyn's diary of 1681. He describes a sumptuous meal at Pyrford Place which included venison, hare, quails and partridges, supplied entirely from the estate and states that 'after dinner, we went to see sport at the decoy, where I never saw so many herons'<sup>5</sup>.

In the nineteenth century the Decoy was described as having five pipes and lying in a wood of more than 18 acres although by that time it had fallen into disuse.<sup>6</sup>

The 27 hole golf course was established in 1991. The Lutyens inspired clubhouse was designed by the architect Charles Mador and is the only building in the area. The new Wisley glasshouse can be observed from parts of the course.

Wharf Lane was once a busy thoroughfare between Ockham Mill and Pigeon House Wharf on the Wey Navigation.

### **Landscape management issues**

- The river Wey and its environs is designated as a Biodiversity Opportunity Area in Woking. This may be difficult to reconcile with the objectives of the golf course.
- Lock Copse contains impressive specimen trees but some are in need of attention.
- The bridge over the Wey in Wharf lane has been out of action for some time, following the severe floods of winter 2013.

### **Development issues**

- The extensive green landscape with unspoiled distant views should be protected.

## **Landscape Character Area 6**

### **Key characteristics**

- West Byfleet Golf Course
- Conservation area running along railway line
- A pond and a reservoir
- Areas of heather and mixed deciduous and coniferous trees

## Location and Boundaries



This character area includes the south-western half of West Byfleet Golf Course

## Physical landscape

The area lies on Bagshot Beds. The course is a fairly level course of 18 holes and is a private members club. There are no footpaths allowing access to the course. It is bounded by the railway line to the north and the houses of Pyrford and West Byfleet to the south. The course is surrounded by a belt of trees, has a belt of trees running through the centre of the course and has areas of natural heather beds. Unlike the other open spaces of the Pyrford Neighbourhood Area West Byfleet Golf Course is not designated as green belt land.

## Perceptual/Experiential Landscape

The golf course lies in an urban setting but is screened from surrounding areas. Glimpses can be had of allotments which line the opposite bank of the railway. The pond is a scenic area of the course with flowering water lilies floating on top. Trees are a dominant feature of the course with many different species being present. The proximity to golfers ensures that they are well managed. It is understood from the recently compiled history of the club<sup>7</sup> that the course was tidied up in the 1970s, with 'unnecessary trees' and undergrowth being removed to increase speed of play. Possibly some aesthetic and biodiversity benefits may have been lost at this point.

## Biodiversity

The club logo is a green woodpecker and this bird is regularly seen on the course. A natural area of woodland along the edge of the railway line is kept as a Conservation Area. Golfers are requested to keep clear of the area and owl boxes have been placed in the trees. Deer also frequent this area and venture out onto the course whilst golfers are playing. The pond and reservoir have natural vegetation growing around them and moorhens are resident on the pond.

There are a wide variety of trees on the course, including oak, sweet chestnut, birch and Scots pine. Other species have also been introduced to the course, including Chilean Pine and cedar.

## **History and settlement**

The land was originally heathland until the Enclosure Acts which enabled Lord King to purchase much of the area of the course at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The course, originally known as 'Bleakdown,' was built by Hugh Locke King and opened in 1906. In 1921 a limited company was formed to buy the club and West Byfleet Golf Club came into existence. To ensure the clubs continued existence, 11.25 acres were sold to Woking Urban District Council in 1948.

From the 1930s through to the 1950s and 1960s the land has been threatened with development. In 1952 Woking Urban District Council applied for a compulsory purchase order, wanting to put 1,000 homes on the land. In 1968, after another hard fought battle by the Club and Residents Association, the Minister of Housing stated that the land should remain an 'open space and golf course.'

## **Landscape management issues**

- The trees, heather beds and water feature provide the character of the course and should be retained.

## **Development issues**

- Although the land is not designated as green belt it does serve two of the main functions of green belt – to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas and to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another.

## **Acknowledgements**

Contributions from and thanks to the following Forum members:

Pat Barnes

Martin Doyle

Ernie Elliott

Ivan and Carole Gale

Ann McClean

Tracey McGuigan

Andrew and Marion Melcher

Jimmie Walker

Brian Wilson

Thanks also to the following whose help has been invaluable:

Iden Adams, Deputy Secretary, West Byfleet Golf Club

Alistair Kirk, Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre

Mike Waite, Surrey Living Landscape Manager

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