

## **UPV Upper Pang Valley**

### **Topography, Geology and Soils**

This is the upper end of the Pang Valley and neighbouring areas of the high-downs. It includes a major dry valley that joins the Pang Valley from the north at Compton. The geology is almost entirely chalk, although a small outcrop of Reading Beds exists at Aldworth, and is overlain on the valley floor by gravels. This has given rise to fine rendzinas on the valley sides and silty brown calcareous earths on the valley floor. The soil changes to a clayey palaeo-argillic brown earths toward the south-western edge of the area.

### **Historic Landscape**

Like adjacent downland areas the medieval landscape was based around nucleated settlements set amongst open fields on the lower valley sides and utilising common grazing on adjacent or nearby downs. Most of the boundary of this area coincides with parish boundaries. Some open field between Compton and Aldworth and at West Ilsley had been enclosed by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This process is far less widespread than in adjacent areas and most of the open field and downland were enclosed through Act of Parliament in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. East Ilsley is the exception to this pattern and remained an unenclosed parish throughout the great phase of Parliamentary enclosures. It was one of the latest parishes to be enclosed, the open field finally being divided into private fields by agreement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century whilst its downs remained unenclosed into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many field barns existed within the open fields.

This was a relatively unwooded area although some areas of woodland did exist. South of West Ilsley and Compton sizeable blocks of ancient woodland existed near the edge of the area and small isolated blocks of other old woodland were scattered across the area.

The historic settlement pattern was dominated by nucleated villages sited on the valley floor, such as West Ilsley, East Ilsley, West Compton and Compton. This trend was so strong across most of the area that other forms of settlement were almost totally absent. A slightly different pattern existed around the village of Aldworth. Aldworth was situated at the extreme east of the area on the Pang–Thames watershed, and several farms existed in its immediate neighbourhood.

### **Modern Landscape**

The mechanisation of agriculture in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century has led to an almost total re-organisation of these fieldscapes and few historic enclosures remain unaltered. The East Ilsley downs have also now been enclosed into fields and only small strips of downland grassland remain within the area. These changes have created a landscape typified by very large arable fields with few obvious boundaries in the place of extensive downlands. The growth of the racehorse industry has also had an effect on the area; extensive gallops exist amongst the modern fields on former downs and areas of studs and paddocks are developing around West Ilsley and Compton. The loss of downland is significant as it is now recognised as a significant and threatened habitat and the district as a whole has lost around 95% of recorded downland.

### *Historic Environment Character Area*

Some sizeable areas of ancient woodland have been lost through clearance to create farmland but most of this was carried out in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The remaining areas of ancient woodland have fared better than in many other HECAs, and only small sections of have been subject to clearance and replanting. Some plantations have been created in the area: mostly shelter belts and long, thin plantations. They do not gel with the grain of the landscape but since they are not common and mostly small-scale they have not had much of an impact on the overall character of the area.

Modern settlement is concentrated on expansion around West Compton with little growth elsewhere in the area. The growth at Compton is typified by small housing estates which were probably constructed to house personnel at the local research establishment, now named the Institute for Animal Health, or possibly at the UK Atomic Energy Authority at Harwell, established north of the village in the 1950s. These residential developments also seem to coincide with the re-naming of the creation of a single village, known simply as Compton, from the neighbouring villages of Compton and West Compton.