

## Datchet: Green environment and open spaces

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### Landscape summary

Datchet village, and civil parish, is in the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead in the county of Berkshire. It is situated on the north bank of the River Thames opposite Windsor Castle Home Park. The parish is approximately 3.8km (2.5 miles) x 3.4 km (2.4 miles), or 671ha (1657 acres) of which approximately 25 per cent is of housing and commercial use, 20 per cent is covered by bodies of water and 55% is Green Belt made up of public open space, agriculture, woodland, bush and leisure facilities. The land is low-lying, being only about 20m above sea level at the highest points in the north and northwest and sloping to the south west to about 19m and below.

The geography of Datchet is dominated by the flood plain of the River Thames. (An estimated 80-85 per cent of Datchet is designated as in Flood Zones 2 and 3). This was formed at the end of the last Ice Age when the river was diverted south by melt water and carved out the present flood plain and terraces. The flood waters deposited gravel and silt on the underlying chalk basin. The modern river is wide, meandering and subject to frequent floods which have both enriched the soil and formed the main constraint to development. Flooding has helped to preserve the natural environment and the open space which gives Datchet its characteristic ‘greenness’. The alluvial deposits have weathered to produce fertile, although periodically waterlogged or dry, agricultural land which has sustained limited settlement for thousands of years and given the village a strong sense of a farming heritage. In 1925, for example, 86 per cent of the land was either agricultural or woodland (35 per cent arable, 46 per cent pasture) with 14 per cent housing and commercial.

Comparison with today’s land use shows a decline in the agricultural acreage and a change in the open landscape, although this is not as great as can be seen in other settlements and a strong sense of the former rural village remains. However in 2017 Datchet has a ‘transitional landscape’ which is influenced by the settlements of Slough, Datchet and Wraysbury as well as the rich agricultural landscape to the south and the fragmented wetland landscape of the developed floodplain to the east.

To the north of Datchet, once renowned for its productive agricultural land, is the M4 corridor where the Grade II Listed Ditton Park with Grade II listed structures sits close to a large commercial building and next door to a developing gravel extraction industry and business park. There are pockets of arable farming but the urban edge of Slough is visible above the tree cover and is an important influence on the landscape.

### Landscape summary continued

To the south, the landscape is more tranquil and unified, with large cereal fields and pasture for cattle. However the proposed River Thames Scheme will traverse this area and the new watercourse will introduce fragmentation and new landscape influences.

To the east the 30m-high embankment of the Queen Mother reservoir is visible above the built development, and parts of the remaining open land contain small commercial units, some 'unauthorised' car parks and earth embankments which are adjacent to compact residential areas. (The car parks and embankments are presently under an Enforcement Order because they are incompatible with the character of the Green Belt.)

To the west the open landscape of meadow grassland and woodland along the river is the least changed and the outstanding views across to the rural Home Park and Windsor Castle are little changed since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Much of the riverside frontage is privately owned and fenced off. It is only the small public open space of the Datchet Parish Council Riverside which reveals the beauty of this frontage and presents the best visual landscape in Datchet.

## Special landscape designations

(All areas are in the Green Belt unless stated otherwise)

### Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)

A LWS has no statutory designation but is recognised as an important local refuge for wildlife and the local planning authority should identify and protect them, and ensure they are listed in the Local Plan. Datchet has two sites:

- **Datchet Common and Gravel Pits**
- **Upton Court Wetlands** (located partly in Slough and partly in Datchet)

### Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

(Most in built-up areas)

Tree lined roads and avenues of trees are a pleasing characteristic of the built environment in Datchet. All trees in the Conservation Area have some protection and TPOs have been made on 51 individual trees and 10 group or woodland areas, some of which are outside the Conservation Area. TPOs are not on all the valuable trees in the village but have been made when a particular tree, or group of trees, is threatened by a planning application.

Although not specifically designated, Datchet retains "historic features such as field systems lined with hedgerows and mature trees". These contribute to the character of the landscape.

Datchet Neighbourhood Plan's topic groups might investigate whether certain trees and hedgerows could/should be given further protection.

**Sites of Special interest (SSIs)** – none in Datchet

**Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** – none in Datchet

## Main areas of open space

### Datchet Parish Council Land

Open to the Public

#### 1. Datchet Recreation Ground

This is not in the Green Belt.

Over 6ha in area, the 'Rec' is the largest public green space in the parish and is a very important public leisure amenity, with two children's play parks, tennis courts, basketball court, football pitches and a 'Green Gym' all provided by the parish council and a local trust.

It is also an important feature of the landscape as it represents low open land between Horton Road and the railway line and between the housing areas which almost surround it. However as it forms a 'green barrier' to development it has resulted in maintaining the separation of west Datchet from the formerly named Datchet Common in the east, although both lie in the same parish.

The Rec is mainly open cultivated grassland although it is tree lined along the Horton Road, has trees and shrubs along the railway and rough grass and shrub in its south - eastern extension, the Land at Mill Place.

#### 2. The Cut

This is not in the Green Belt.

A 0.3ha strip of open grassland, with a row of trees and park benches, which borders Horton Road and forms a green link between the Recreation Ground and the village greens in the historic centre of the village.

#### 3. Village Greens

These are not in the Green Belt.

There are five greens: Gossip Green, South Green (Memorial Green), Jubilee Green, North Green and May's Island. Historically an area of pools and waterways, today the five Greens, together about 0.25ha, represent the most important open space in Datchet in that they form the heart of the central Conservation Area. Most of the historic and commercial buildings, are clustered around them and the important village memorials and commemorative trees are sited there. It is set out with flower beds and benches for recreational purposes. Village events and community parties are held, usually on the largest area, the South Green. The Greens give Datchet its essential character and are the most popular open spaces with residents (see DNP village-wide survey 2017), in spite of their contribution to traffic congestion.

#### 4. Datchet Riverside Conservation Area

This is in the Green Belt.

The western edge is owned by the RBWM and leased to DPC.

This small area of 0.17ha of grass and trees is away from the village centre and lies between privately-owned, fenced-off river gardens and the boatyard, with its numerous jetties and vessels, and is adjacent to the busy Windsor Road. Due to extensive ownership of the riverbanks, mainly by the Crown Estate, it is the only place in Datchet where the public have free access to the River Thames and where views of the river are open and prominent.

Consequently the Riverside is highly prized for its exclusive river views and was awarded Conservation Area status because the views have 'important historic and aesthetic merits'. It is traversed by the Windsor–Runnymede section of the Thames Path, and is regularly visited by walkers.

The Riverside has recently been refurbished to create an attractive park with benches looking out over the river and a picnic area. It is also important for wildlife, especially a family of swans, although measures have had to be taken to deter geese from eating the grass. There are rings for mooring for up to three boats of shallow draft because the water is shallow, particularly at the western end.

In recent years some of the trees, which formed an attractive avenue between the road and the river, have become diseased and have had to be felled. Nevertheless the area retains most of its shaded grassland character.

### **5. The Willowfields**

This is in the Green Belt.

Situated to south east of the Recreation Ground, alongside the railway line, the Willowfields is a 1.5ha parcel of mixed shrub and woodland. In the 1950s the present Willowfields, and the land further east, the land at Mill Place, were used for gravel extraction and the name is derived from the willow trees which grew around the gravel pit. Eventually the pit was used for landfill, which was capped with soil by RBWM and allowed to develop as a wild grassy area.

In the recent past, a Willow Walk was created so that residents could walk around it and enjoy the abundant butterflies, birds and plants. Today it has an air of neglect and seems little visited. A local school has expressed an interest in developing the area for a 'forest school'.

### **6. Cemetery**

The cemetery is a 0.74ha piece of land located to the east of the village, between Ditton Road and Datchet Reservoir, and the rear gardens of Penn Road houses to the south. There is a Grade II listed Chapel on the site and a small Grade II listed lodge which is rented out by Datchet Parish Council. The cemetery came into use in 1899 when St Mary's churchyard was full. It is surrounded by mature hedges and trees and the gravestones are set within several mature trees and grass.

## **RBWM land**

### **1. Datchet Common/The land at Mill Place (leased by Datchet PC)**

Some parts are privately owned.

In the 1950s this area was used for gravel extraction and later for landfill. It is commonly thought that the land was filled with toxic waste, which makes it unfit for development. The evidence for this is not entirely clear as there have been conflicting accounts in the public domain. The land has been recognised as a local wildlife site (LWS).

The area is of 4.3ha and is only partially open space, since it contains a static caravan site and some commercial activity. The more open land is of rough grass and shrub, some of which is occupied by officially unplanned mounds of tree stumps and green waste, as well as some areas of general tipping and land which has been cleared.

## 2. Green spaces along the roads – RBWM Highways

A characteristic feature of Datchet is the number of wide grass verges which line the roads in and out of the village centre. Some are planted with trees and some contain bollards to prevent car parking. The most notable verges are on the Slough Road, along the Horton Road and bordering parts of Southlea Road, Ditton Road and London Road. Several suburban streets also have tree lined verges.

There is a copse of mature trees on the corner of Slough Road and Eton Road. It is possible that this area is privately owned as it is on the former site of a Victorian house, Holmwood, which was sold for the development of Ruscombe Gardens. *(To be investigated further.)*

There is another copse on London Road. *(To be investigated)*

The combination of verges, trees and hedges to agricultural land, helps to screen and soften the urban development and adds a rural character to the village.

## 4. School playing fields (not open to the public)

Churchmead School – 3.1ha

St Mary's Academy - 0.3ha

## Trust Land

### 1. Southlea Road land

Owned by Barker Bridge House Trust, BBHT. Not open to the public.

Total land area 0.94ha, split into two pieces: the smaller of which, 0.08ha is adjacent to Southlea Road and is presently used for a pony enclosure; and the larger, 0.85ha, which is leased as grazing land to the farmer at Southlea Farm. It is likely that the larger plot will be absorbed by the Channel 1 of the River Thames Scheme (RTS).

### 2. Sabatini Land

Owned by Datchet Recreation Centre Charities Trust, DRCCT. Open to the public.

A strip of well-tended grassland with some trees, of 1.4ha, bordering the Recreation Ground between Horton Road and the Ditch, and extending to edge Allen Way and parts of Green Lane. The open nature of this recreation land, with a ha-ha, is an important open space which gives extensive views across the Recreation Ground and 'sets the scene' for the village Conservation Area to the west. There is also a footpath/marked cycle lane running parallel to Horton Road, as well as the roadside footpath.

## Crown Estate Land

This is not open to the public.

### 1. Riverbank

Most of the land bordering the River Thames, including the privately-leased river gardens bordering Southlea Road and Windsor Road, and Datchet Golf Club. There is a public right of way through the Golf Club, from the end of the housing on Windsor Road to Black Potts. This links up with the Jubilee River path, and there is access (possibly unofficial) to the river at several points from the golf course except the parts leased by the house boats and by Stanley & Thomas.

## 2. Southlea Farm

80ha (200 acres) of farmland occupies most of the land enclosed between the Thames meander and the railway line. Until recently the tenant farmer specialised in dairy cattle but now the land is put to grazing and fodder crops for beef cattle. The beef is sold at the nearby Windsor Farm Shop.

The farmland has been occupied by rural communities since pre-historic times and certain areas are rich in archaeological material.

The proposed route for Channel 1 of the River Thames Scheme cuts right across the farm, and when it is built it may not be economic for farming to continue.

## Privately-owned land

Not open to the public.

### Thames Water

1. Area near Southlea Road water in-take, both sides of Southlea Road
2. Land around the Queen Mother Reservoir
3. Land around the Horton Road Pumping Station
4. Eton End School Playing Fields

## Land bank companies/private individuals

### 1. Land north and east of Churchmead School

Agricultural land, mainly put to cereals and pasture, which lies between Slough Road, the M4, Churchmead School and the Allotments. Classified as Grade 1 agricultural land, a recent re-classification as Grade 3a has been accepted by RBWM. It is currently in the Green Belt. Most of this land has been allocated for housing in RBWM's emerging Borough Local Plan (BLP).

### 2. Land at London Road/Riding Court Road

South of M4

Although classified as Grade 1 agricultural land, except for the SE edge, it presents as rough grassland. It is edged with trees and borders the M4. It is currently in the Green Belt. The area has been allocated for housing in the emerging BLP.

North of the M4

Also in the Green Belt, to the north of the M4, this Grade 1/3b land is still used in pockets for arable farming but the landscape is much influenced by commerce and mining. The land was designated for mining (in the existing Local Plan) and gravel extraction is presently taking place. Eventually the landscape will be restored. To the east the land is occupied by the historic Ditton Park, with a Grade II-designated country house and gardens. North-west of Ditton Park, some of the land is classified as contaminated (by military use). A high-tech industrial building and a small business park further encroach on the green space.

### 3. Land north of Eton Road, adjacent to St Augustine's Church

Originally classified as Grade 1 Agricultural Land, an independent assessment has downgraded it to 3b Classification. A section of this land may be contaminated. It is largely

grassland, edged with trees and was once used for playing fields. It is currently in the Green Belt and has been allocated for housing in the emerging BLP.

#### **4. Farmland in the north-west of Datchet**

There is agricultural, open land between St Augustine's and Thames Valley Athletics Centre TVAC. This extends to Slough Road and The Myrke. Most of this land is leased to a farmer for cereal cropping.

#### **5. Cricket Ground**

Datchet Cricket Club uses the Green Belt land on the corner of London Road and Riding Court Road.

#### **6. Land in North Datchet, between and around Slough Rd and M4**

Open space partially occupied by The Myrke Allotments (managed by Slough Borough Council), a horse grazing field, a motorcycle track and a model car race track RWMCC.

## **Major water bodies**

### **1. River Thames**

This forms the western, and most of the southern boundary of the parish. It is a major supplier of water and has numerous leisure activities – in Datchet mainly pleasure boats, kayaks, canoes, fishing and rambling along the Thames Path (although the latter is restricted by the Windsor Castle Home Park).

### **2. Jubilee River**

A hydraulic channel, opened in 2002 to take overflow from the River Thames and so alleviate flooding in Windsor, Maidenhead and Eton. It diverts the river upstream of Maidenhead and rejoins between Datchet and Eton. It is 11.6km (7mi) long and 45m (49.2yds) wide.

In addition to flood alleviation, the channel is a local recreation and wildlife amenity. The banks are artificially constructed wildlife habitats, with reed beds, wet woodlands and 250,000 trees which support a wide variety of bird life. Footpaths and the National Cycle Route 61 run along nearly all the length of the channel.

Very little of the Jubilee River is physically in Datchet, except at Black Potts Bridge and near the Thames Valley Athletics Centre at the Northern boundary.

### **3. Queen Mother Reservoir**

This public water supply reservoir lies between the M4 and the M25 to the east of Datchet. It is about 1km (0.6mi) in diameter and covers 192ha (475 acres), making it one of the largest inland areas of water in southern England. About half the lake lies in Datchet.

Built in 1976, it is managed by Thames Water. The water is pumped from the River Thames and is about 35m deep when full. It forms part of the Colne Valley Regional Park and is used for recreational purposes as well – sailing, bird watching and walking in the surrounding area, with the permission of Datchet Water Sailing Club. Permits for bird-watching are also issued free through the Berkshire Ornithological Club.

#### 4. Horton Road Pumping Station area

- There are 2/3 lakes (former gravel pits) in the south east of the parish, which are presently used as a large aqua park named Liquid Leisure, with cable and boat lakes, paddle boarding, swimming and various other water sports.
- Also two 'fishing lakes' (former gravel pits) near Mill Place Caravan Site named 'Windsor View Lakes'.

5. **Ditton Park** has a moat and numerous small lakes. These are mainly ornamental.

#### Information sources:

*Datchet Past* by Janet Kennish

*Datchet History*, [www.datchethistory.org.uk](http://www.datchethistory.org.uk)

*Datchet Village Society*, [www.datchetvillagesociety.org.uk](http://www.datchetvillagesociety.org.uk)

*Datchet Parish Council*

*Bucks County Council Datchet Village Plan, 1970*

*Landscape Character Assessment, RBWM 2004*