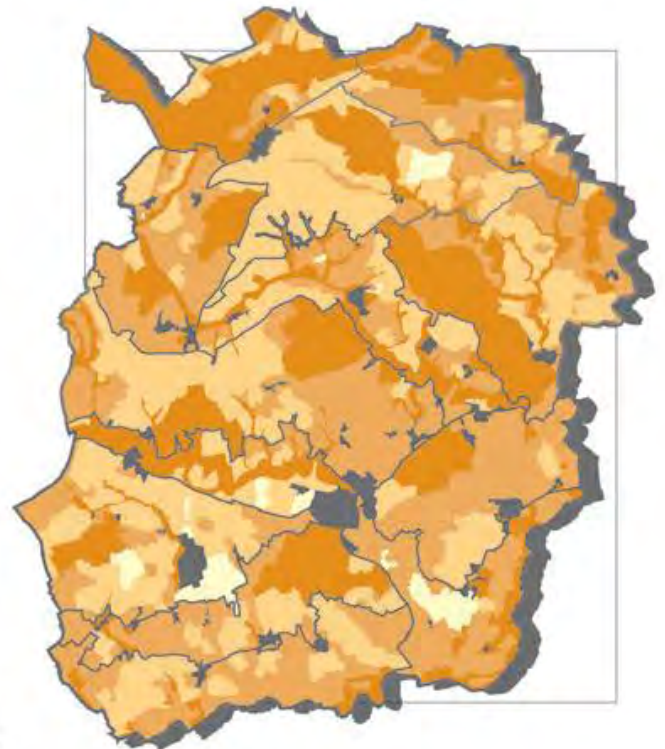
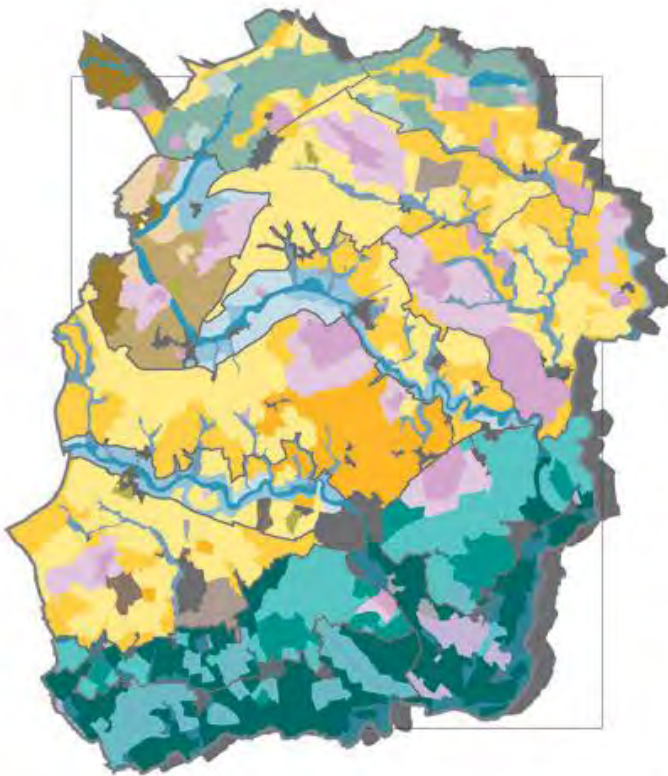
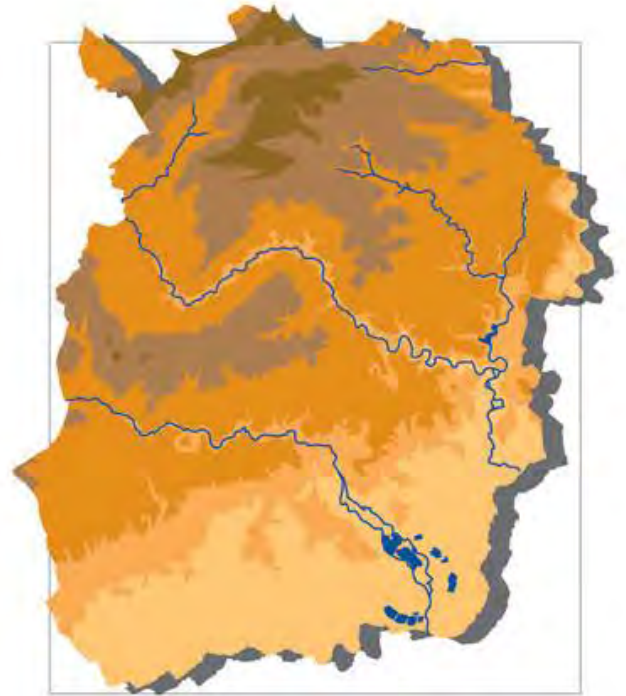
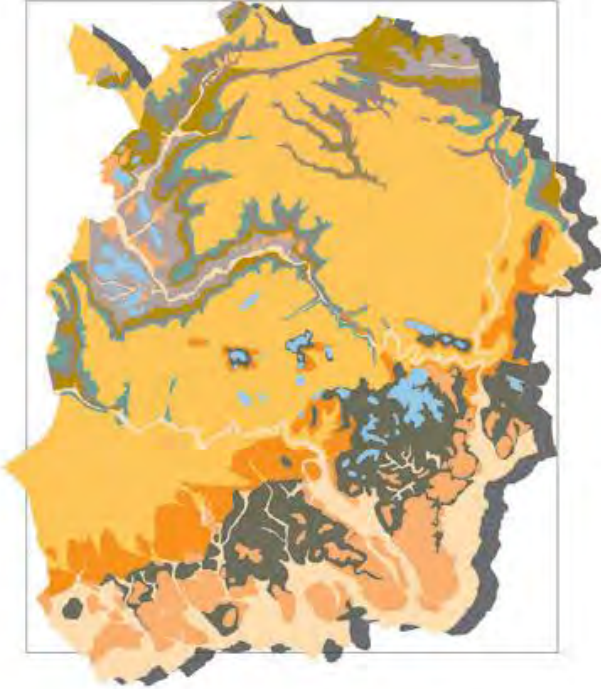


West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment



WEST OXFORDSHIRE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

Prepared *for* West Oxfordshire District Council

by

Atlantic Consultants
Hems Court
Longbrook Street
Exeter
Devon
EX4 6AP

May 1998

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CONTENTS

PART ONE

The Study

Background	1
Structure of the document	1

Approach and Rationale

Landscape character assessment	2
Guidelines for landscape enhancement	3
Guidelines for built development	5

A Landscape Overview

Introduction	8
Physical influences	8
Human influences	9
Variations in landscape and visual character	11
Variations in landscape quality and condition	15

PART TWO

Character Areas

1 Northern Valleys and Ridges	17
2 Ironstone Valleys and Ridges	22
3 Enstone Uplands	27
4 Eastern Parks and Valleys	32
5 Upper Evenlode Valley	37
6 Lower Evenlode Valley	42
7 Wychwood Uplands	47
8 Upper Windrush Valley	52
9 Shilton Downs	57
10 Bampton Vale	62
11 Eynsham Vale	67
12 Lower Windrush Valley and Eastern Thames Fringes	72
13 Western Thames Fringes	77

PART THREE

Key Settlements

Introduction	80
Bampton	81
Burford	84
Carterton	86
Charlbury	88
Chipping Norton	91
Ducklington	94
Eynskam	95
Milton-under-Wychwood	97
Witney	99
Woodstock	103

Appendices

1 Checklist of key characteristics	
2 Matrix of tree and shrub species	
3 Glossary of terms	

Bibliography

Figures

1 Geology	
2 Topography	
3 National/Regional Landscape Context	
4 Character Areas	
5 Landscape Types	
6 Enhancement Strategy	

PART ONE

STUDY CONTEXT

THE STUDY

Background

Over recent years, there has been growing recognition of the role of landscape assessment as a basis for countryside planning and management. In particular, the use of landscape assessment as a tool for describing the character of our landscapes is increasingly recognised as an important first step in conserving and enhancing them, and for planning for sustainable development in rural areas.

The impetus for preparing landscape assessments at a district level has come from two main directions:

- the Countryside Commission actively encourages local planning authorities to undertake district-wide assessments to provide an informed background for policy and development control decisions and for countryside management. It has published detailed guidance on landscape assessment and has recently produced a 'New Map of England' which provides a broad context for defining landscape character at a local level. It also promotes the concept of local distinctiveness through its 'Design in the Countryside' initiative.
- Government advice contained within the revised PPG7 (February 1997) takes forward these approaches and encourages planning authorities to undertake comprehensive landscape assessments as part of the local plan review process. The extent and effectiveness of local landscape designations is to be given particular consideration in such reviews.

In response to this background, West Oxfordshire District commissioned Atlantic Consultants to prepare a district-wide landscape assessment. Its main objective is to increase understanding of the landscape resources of the district, to assist with policy formulation and development control and to assist with the targeting of resources for enhancement and management.

Whilst the assessment is primarily intended to assist the District Council, it is also considered to be of relevance to a wide range of organisations and individuals whose activities may have an effect upon the landscape of West Oxfordshire. These will include landowners, farmers, private developers, community organisations and other local interest groups.

The brief outlined the following main requirements of the study:

- to identify and describe the attributes of the landscape (both natural and man-made) that contribute to local distinctiveness;
- to provide a breakdown of the district into areas of distinctive landscape character;
- to examine the relationship between the landscape and patterns of settlement and buildings;
- to identify simple enhancement strategies and priorities for each landscape type;
- and to identify variations in landscape sensitivity across the District and its ability to accommodate change.

Structure of the document

This document is divided into three main parts:

- Part One provides the overall background and context to the study, including an explanation of the approach and methodology employed and a brief overview of the District landscape, its formative influences and overall character;
- Part Two deals with the individual Character Areas, describing in detail their landscape and settlement character together with appropriate guidelines for landscape enhancement and built development;
- Part Three provides more detailed assessment of the fringes of a number of key settlements (mainly local service centres) within the district.

APPROACH AND RATIONALE

landscape character assessment

Over recent years, there has been a general trend away from quantitative systems of landscape evaluation towards an approach based upon understanding the intrinsic character of a locality and its distinctive features, allowing land use planning and management to respond to the local 'landscape vernacular'. This approach is explained within the landscape assessment guidance published by the Countryside Commission (CCP423), which forms the basis for this study.

The approach recognises that the character of the landscape is not simply a scenic or visual phenomenon but is the product of its physiography, history and land management. It recognises that factors such as ecology, history and culture, have a bearing upon the way landscape is experienced and valued and that these factors should also be taken into account within the assessment process. Overall, the approach relies upon a mix of objective recording and subjective judgement, used in a systematic and iterative way.

The assessment process has involved the following main stages of work:

- **Desk study** - this stage involved the collation of a wide range of existing information on the physical and human influences that have shaped the landscape of the district. The process involved 'overlay mapping' of key factors (eg. geology, topography, drainage, woodland cover, and sites of ecological/historical importance etc.) as well as detailed examination of other documentary, map-based or photographic evidence. Other landscape assessments (eg. the New Map of England and Cotswolds AONB assessment) were also consulted to provide context and consistency.

Field survey - this part of the study involved travelling extensively throughout the district, recording detailed variations in landscape character and key features onto 1:25,000 base maps. Other factors, such as evidence

of pressures on the landscape and key management or enhancement needs, were also noted during the field survey.

- **Analysis** - this stage involved combining the results of the desk and field studies to produce a breakdown of the district into areas of distinctive character.

The assessment examines landscape character at two levels. Firstly, it **looks** at the way in which particular landform and landcover elements combine to produce distinctive landscape types. These are generic descriptions and the types can repeat across the district without necessarily being related to geographical location.

Landscape types are particularly useful as a tool for understanding the detailed pattern of landscape variation that occurs across the district as a whole and to assist in day to day development control decisions. However, in planning policy and management terms, it is as important to understand the landscape character and qualities of particular places or areas, so that appropriate policies and action can be applied at a local level. Therefore, it is common practice to define landscape character areas. These are units of landscape which may embrace a number of different landscape types but which in some way have a coherent and recognisable 'sense of place' or local identity.

It is important to stress that the boundaries between landscape types or between character areas are rarely distinct. Instead, the boundaries tend to be best approximations of a gradual but discernible change in character. It is also important to stress that landscape character rarely stops at the district boundary and will usually extend beyond into neighbouring districts.

The basis for the division of West Oxfordshire District into distinctive landscape types and character areas, is explained in the 'landscape overview' section.

Guidelines for landscape enhancement

Approach to evaluation

The second part of the study involves identifying variations in landscape quality and condition across the district, primarily to allow appropriate guidelines for landscape conservation, management and enhancement to be defined.

The aim is, therefore, not to identify the 'best' or 'worst' quality landscapes within the district but to examine the intrinsic quality and condition of individual landscape types so that intervention can be targeted to the most needy areas. This approach has therefore been applied across the whole of the district landscape irrespective of the presence of existing landscape designations.

Using the experience and judgement of the study team, each landscape type was assessed in terms of the following attributes (based upon Countryside Commission guidelines):

- Scenic quality - the degree to which the landscape is attractive with pleasing patterns and combinations of landscape features;
- Sense of place - the extent to which the landscape has a distinctive character and a 'sense of place';
- Unspoilt character - the degree to which landscape structure is 'intact' and the landscape is affected by intrusive or detracting influences;
- Landscape as a resource - whether the landscape type represents a scarce or especially fragile landscape resource;
- Conservation interests - whether there are other notable conservation interests that contribute to landscape quality and value.

The landscape types were then assigned one of the following enhancement strategies:

- Conserve - this strategy applies where the landscape is of particularly high scenic quality, is unspoilt, retains a strong, intact landscape structure and sense of place, and often contains areas or features of ecological or cultural heritage significance. In these landscapes, conservation is an overwhelming priority in order to maintain landscape character and quality.

- Strengthen - this strategy applies to those landscapes which have a positive rural character, attractive qualities and where character, landscape structure and sense of place are still comparatively strong, but which are not 'special' or distinctive to quite the same degree as those in the above category. These landscapes are also important to conserve but would benefit from some enhancement through appropriate land management, to strengthen weakened landscape structure and quality and to reinforce local distinctiveness.

The degree to which landscape structure and character require strengthening differs across the District. A distinction is therefore drawn in this category between 'a' landscapes, where only modest strengthening is required, and 'b' landscapes, where more significant strengthening is required to restore landscape structure and features that have been weakened by intensive farming practice.

- Reconstruct - this strategy applies in those areas where the character and quality of the landscape has been substantially modified by poor land management, non-agricultural land uses, or intrusive features, eg. airfields, built development, mineral extraction, roads, power lines etc. They require more significant intervention to mitigate the influence of detracting land uses or features, to raise landscape quality and to reconstruct landscape character and identity.

It is important to stress that these strategies do not equate with any nationally established system or yardstick but are adapted from Countryside Commission guidance to suit the particular circumstances of West Oxfordshire District. They should therefore be regarded as indicative of differences in quality and condition which occur within the context of the district and comparisons should not be made with similar strategies applied elsewhere.

The variations in landscape quality and the application of enhancement strategies across the district are explained in the 'landscape overview' section.

Enhancement principles

The guidelines for landscape enhancement are intended to provide advice on the most appropriate type of management or enhancement needed to maintain or raise landscape quality within each character area. As a general rule, they are aimed at reinforcing or strengthening existing characteristics in the landscape rather than promoting widespread landscape change. Specific guidelines on enhancement priorities are set out for each character area but a number of more general principles are outlined opposite. In addition, a table showing characteristic native species that typically occur within the different landscape types is contained within Appendix 2.

Mechanisms

Clearly, most of these objectives involve changes in land management which can only be achieved through voluntary co-operation. However, there are a number of potential ways in which the guidelines can be taken forward, including:

- through various initiatives, grants and incentive schemes operated by local authorities and other statutory agencies;
- through the work of countryside management services run by local authorities or other agencies;
- through the work of voluntary bodies and community groups involved in local environmental or landscape projects;
- through the activities of farmers and other private landowners;
- through development briefing and the use of landscape conditions, legal agreements and planning gain.

It is important to stress that the achievement of landscape enhancement through development proposals would only be appropriate where the development itself was in compliance with strategic and local planning policies.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR ENHANCEMENT

- management or enhancement should aim to reinforce or restore the local landscape 'vernacular', ie. those characteristics which contribute to local distinctiveness;
- in general, intervention should aim to restore diversity and structure to the landscape (eg. through hedgerow and tree planting, habitat creation etc) to reflect the varied typical landscapes of the District;
- the more 'intact' examples of landscape types described within this assessment, and historical maps and records, can be used as a guide to the most appropriate form of enhancement;
- new planting and habitat creation should also reflect the ecological character of the local area to reinforce local distinctiveness and maximise wildlife benefits;
- particular priority should be given to the mitigation of intrusive features or influences which detract from the rural character of the landscape (eg. hard urban edges, unsightly buildings or structures, poorly managed or degraded land on the fringes of settlements or associated with quarrying activities, insensitive highway improvements etc.);
- special attention should also be given to the enhancement of settlement fringes and road corridors to reduce their impact and to provide a clear definition between built areas and open countryside;
- strong landscape frameworks should be an integral part of any new development.

Guidelines for built development

The third part of the study focuses on the inherent characteristics and qualities of the landscape that will determine its sensitivity to change and, in particular, its ability to accommodate new development.

Policy context

Current Government advice contained within PPG7 (revised February 1997) places a firm emphasis on protection of the countryside for its own sake, even in areas of no special designation, and advises that development in the countryside should maintain and enhance the environment. This advice is reflected in policies contained within the Oxfordshire County Structure Plan and the West Oxfordshire Local Plan (adopted in November 1997).

The Local Plan currently contains a number of policies which specifically seek to protect the character and 'quality of the landscape from potentially adverse impacts of development (as listed opposite). A particular emphasis is placed upon the protection of designated areas (ie. the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Area of High Landscape Value, which covers much of the remainder of the district, and Parks and Gardens of Special Interest). However, Policy CO1 of the plan recognises the importance of protecting all landscape, even non-designated areas, for its own sake, while a number of other policies (eg. BE3, C03, CO10, H12, R13, TM1) refer to the need to protect the landscape setting of settlements or otherwise safeguard the landscape from adverse impacts of development.

The Local Plan indicates a general presumption against housing development in open countryside but other types of development may be permitted by the plan. Where this is the case, the aim is to ensure that it can be integrated sensitively without adverse impact on the landscape. This landscape assessment aims to provide as much information as possible to enable the local authority and others to make such judgements. Although it will clearly be too coarse a tool to deal with many site-specific issues, the principles and considerations outlined within the assessment can equally be applied at a more local level.

SELECTED EXTRACTS FROM KEY LOCAL PLAN POLICIES AFFECTING LANDSCAPE

POLICY CO1: Proposals for development in the countryside will be considered against the need to safeguard its beauty, the diversity of its natural resources, and its ecological, agricultural and recreational values.

POLICY CO6: In the Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty conservation and enhancement of its special landscape qualities will be the overriding consideration.... Although regard will be had to the economic and social well-being of the area any development should not harm its natural beauty.

POLICY CO7: In Areas of High Landscape Value shown on the proposals map the Council will seek to protect and enhance the beauty of the area. Development should not have an adverse impact on the landscape.

POLICY CO8: Within the Area of High Landscape Value near the River Thames and its tributaries, new development should be sited, designed and landscaped so that it does not detract from the special character of these riverside areas.....

POLICY BE3: All development should be of a high standard of design and appearance. It will be expected to...(c) not damage the surrounding countryside which forms an attractive setting to a settlement; (d) respect the scale, pattern, density and character of its setting...

(West Oxfordshire Local Plan (Adopted))

Sensitivity to development

The ability of the landscape to accommodate development is a complex issue which is not simply related to the intrinsic quality of the landscape but will depend upon a combination of different factors. Of key importance will be the nature and scale of the development itself, along with:

- the potential impacts of this development on distinctive **landscape and settlement character**;
- the potential impacts on intrinsic **landscape quality** and valued features and the overall **sensitivity of the landscape to change**;
- the **visual sensitivity** of the landscape, ie. the degree to which it benefits from screening or filtering of views.

A number of general principles for development in the countryside, which will apply across the district, are shown in the table opposite. However, to make the assessment as helpful as possible, we have provided further guidance on the sensitivities of landscapes of differing character and surrounding a number of key settlements, as explained below.

Guidelines for landscape types

Much of the information required to assess the appropriateness of new development in different landscape types should be implicit within the landscape character descriptions and quality evaluations for the individual character areas. In addition, however, some key conclusions on the ability of different landscape types to accommodate development are also summarised for each character area.

For further guidance, a **matrix** is included in Appendix 1 which identifies some of the key characteristics that need to be taken into account in assessing the impact of development proposals on individual landscape types. These are grouped under the headings of 'landscape character', 'settlement character' and 'landscape quality and sensitivity'.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- as a rule, those landscapes of particularly high quality and unspoilt character (ie those within the conserve and strengthen (A) categories) are most sensitive to development;
- development should also be avoided in areas of unspoilt countryside (in the conserve and strengthen categories) which are particularly open and visually exposed especially on prominent ridgelines, hilltops or valley sides/escarpments);
- in other open or visually sensitive landscapes, new development should be closely related to existing built form or well-integrated within existing or new landscape frameworks;
- in visual terms, landscapes enclosed by landform or vegetation are generally more able to absorb new development but can be highly sensitive to change because of their intrinsic landscape quality or their ecological and archaeological value;
- extra care is required to maintain the quality of vulnerable landscapes on the fringes of settlements and along road corridors and to prevent ribbon development and the coalescence of settlements;
- all new development should respond to the characteristics of the landscape and built environment within which it is located, to reinforce local distinctiveness and to minimise any adverse impacts;
- development should not erode the rural character of landscape and settlements (eg. introducing lighting into remote countryside, insensitive/urbanised highway treatments, fencing, signage etc.)

The matrix identifies a range of typical characteristics (eg. scale, pattern, boundary types, building materials, visual sensitivity and scenic quality) for individual landscape types and, in conjunction with the character area descriptions, may be used as a checklist to guide the acceptability of development proposals within different parts of the district landscape.

While this additional background information should help in assessing the appropriateness of development proposals, it is clearly still too generalised to provide all of the answers. The main purpose of the matrix is, therefore, to help introduce a discipline in the assessment of potential impacts of any development proposal and to enable a degree of transparency to be applied to development control decisions.

Importantly, it is also intended to help encourage those proposing development in the countryside to view landscape in a more holistic way and to consider not only the potential visual impacts of a development, but also its impact upon the intrinsic character and quality of the receiving landscape.

Guidelines for key settlements

The larger settlements of the District have, in the past, inevitably been under pressure for additional development. These pressures are likely to continue, particularly on the fringes of these settlements. Difficult decisions regarding the opportunities for and direction of potential future growth will have to be made. While the landscape assessment provides a broad context, a more detailed study of the fringes of ten key settlements has been undertaken in order to provide a finer-grained analysis of key landscape sensitivities and considerations. They comprise the main service centres, with the addition of Ducklington, because of its proximity to Witney, and the inclusion of Milton-under-Wychwood, as a secondary local centre within the AONB.

The ten settlements are listed below, with the Character Areas to which they are most closely related given in brackets:

- Bampton (10)
- **Burford** (8, 9)
- Carterton (9)
- Charlbury (6)
- Chipping Norton (1, 3)
- Ducklington (12)
- Eynsham (11, 12)
- Milton-under-Wychwood (5)
- Witney (8, 9, 7, 11)
- Woodstock (4)

The landscape setting of each settlement is divided into a number of sectors for which we have summarised the key factors which may influence development decisions, namely:

- landscape characteristics;
- visual characteristics;
- key landscape sensitivities and considerations.

We do not seek to recommend areas for development. We simply aim to provide additional detail to assist all those involved in making decisions in respect of appropriate development in the landscape.

Further explanation of these studies and the findings of the assessment are presented in Part Three.

Introduction

West Oxfordshire is a predominantly rural, agricultural district which covers a land area of around 715 square kilometres. It embraces large areas of unspoilt countryside within its boundaries and a diverse pattern of landscapes, including rolling limestone uplands, pastoral river valleys, historic parkland, remnants of ancient forests, low-lying farmland and riverside meadows, with a scattering of rural villages and some larger settlements.

This patterning is the product of the interaction between the physical structure of the landscape and the nature of the vegetation and land uses that cover it. To understand what makes places distinctive, it is helpful to summarise the main physical and human influences which have shaped the district's landscape over time.

Physical influences

The geology of West Oxfordshire (see Figure 1) is dominated by rocks of the Jurassic period, laid down in warm seas 150 million years ago, and forming part of the 'stone belt' that stretches right across England from Dorset to the Humber. It comprises a sequence of clays and limestones that dip, and get progressively younger, towards the south-east of the district, creating two distinctive broad belts of terrain: the Cotswold Hills and the Upper Thames Clay Vale.

The **Cotswold Hills** sweep across the centre and north of the district and are formed by the rocks of the middle and lower Jurassic. The **lowest** strata in the sequence are the Lower, Middle and Upper Lias, which are mostly composed of soft clays, siltstones and shales. However, they also include a band of Marlstone, a shelly ferruginous limestone, between the Middle and Upper beds. The most extensive exposures of the **Lower Lias** occur within the upper Evenlode Valley, where it forms a broad, shallow basin characterised by low-lying and gentle topography (see Figure 2), with heavy clay soils supporting mixed farmland and a strong structure of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. The **Middle and Upper Lias** are

exposed mainly across the north of the district, where these *soft* rocks are heavily folded and cut through by rivers and streams to form an area of extremely complex topography supporting a rich pattern of mixed farmland, thick hedgerows, trees and woods.

The Lias is overlain by the harder Oolitic limestones of the upper Jurassic. The Inferior Oolite occurs in thin localised outcrops mainly along the upper edges of the river valleys. However, like the Marlstone, it contains rocks with a high iron content, known as 'ironstones' which give rise to the red soils and warm orange-coloured building stone characteristic of the north-east corner of the district.

It is the thick limestone bed of the Great Oolite which dominates much of the district and gives the Cotswolds its distinctive character. This pale, hard rock is much prized as a building stone and it forms the high, smoothly rolling plateaux which reach an elevation of around 220 metres **AOD** near Chipping Norton and dip gently towards the south-east. Soils tend to be thin, well-drained and calcareous and typically support medium-grade arable farmland or, less commonly, grassland. Localised deposits of Oxford Clay and glacial **till** around Leafield and Ramsden in the Wychwood area create heavier, more acid soils typically under pasture or woodland. The limestone plateau is dissected by the main river valleys of the Windrush and Evenlode, with their alluvial deposits predominantly under pasture.

A band of coarse, crumbly Cornbrash limestone marks the transition between the Great Oolite and the clay vale to the south, forming a series of **low** bluffs and hills, including the island of landform within the Windrush valley upon which the town of Witney was sited. The low-lying floodplain landscape of the Upper **Thames** Clay Vale itself occupies extensive deposits of Oxford Clay and alluvium supporting **heavy** clay soils and larger-scale mixed farmland with a comparatively strong structure of hedgerows and trees. However, large drifts of river gravels produce pockets of well-drained, slightly elevated land which support more intensive arable farming and have a distinctively open character.

Human influences

The basic physical structure of the landscape has also had a strong influence on patterns of human occupation and activity within West Oxfordshire. Evidence of prehistoric settlement indicates that early settlers had a distinct preference for sites on higher ground less prone to flooding, with more easily worked soils and access to springs or other supplies of water. Favoured sites are found on the well-drained, light soils of the Cotswold limestone and ironstone uplands and the Thames-side gravels. By contrast, the heavy, wet soils and woodland cover of the clay lowlands were less attractive. The outcrops of dry permeable rocks also supported a network of important prehistoric routeways, such as the Jurassic Way which follows the oolites right across England.

The succession of prehistoric cultures was responsible for radical changes in the landscape. They progressively cut clearings in the dense forests to create extensive open pastures or croplands, firstly on the lighter soils of the limestone hills and river gravels but later extending to the heavier soils of the clay vale, using iron tools for axes and ploughshares. These early landscapes have since been obscured by later land use patterns but tangible evidence of early settlement is found in the scattering of tombs, long barrows, standing stones and ring ditches across the Cotswolds.

The Romans brought further changes to West Oxfordshire, creating an integrated pattern of new settlements, planned roads and farmed estates. The process of pre-Roman woodland clearances and the development of sophisticated farming techniques was accelerated by the Romans, bringing further areas of free-draining limestone uplands into highly productive agricultural use for growing barley, wheat and wool which could be marketed at great towns like Cirencester. The scale of romanisation was most impressive on each side of Akeman Street - a major east to west Roman Road - where it crosses the valleys of the Windrush, Evenlode and Glyme and in the neighbourhood of Grim's Ditch. This process created a largely open, farmed landscape, even in the Wychwood area which was reinvaded by forest in later centuries. This highly commercial agriculture was

accompanied by magnificent country houses and villas, such as those at North Leigh and Ditchley.

From the early fifth century, the Saxon period brought the invasion of groups of Germanic immigrants who laid the foundations of the English countryside. They were credited with further taming of woodland, heath and marsh to clear ground for livestock, and with building new villages and farming settlements. These were mostly concentrated on lighter soils within the river valleys and on the gravel terraces of the Thames, close to well-watered river meadows - examples include Eynsham, which incorporates the Old English word for meadow - 'ham'; Chimney, or 'Ceomma's island', which was located on a low ledge of gravel safe from the Thames floodwaters; and Witney, or 'Witta's island', which stood on a dry combash outlier surrounded by alluvial levels. The Saxons were also responsible for establishing extensive hunting preserves or parks, the management of which was later codified by the Normans in forest law. Woodstock Park was the earliest hunting ground of the Saxon Kings and formed part of the extensive belt of wood, coppice, underwood and spinney which stretched through the Oxfordshire countryside between the royal forests of Wychwood and Shotover in the Oxford Heights.

By the early middle ages, the Domesday survey of 1086 revealed an even pattern of settlements across the district, apart from Wychwood which remained comparatively empty. However, this was a time of expansion and gathering change in the landscape. New villages, such as Leafield, Finstock, Ramsden and Hailey, and fields were carved out from Wychwood through the process of 'assarting', although extensive woodland cover remained. Drainage and reclamation of the flood-plain flats along the Upper Thames also created new marshland villages such as Northmoor and Standlake. The steady advance of sheep-farming on the limestone led to a thriving woollen industry, with early fulling mills established near Enstone and Witney and the grand houses of wealthy wool merchants still visible in the town buildings of many settlements, such as Burford, Witney and Chipping Norton.

Climatic, economic and social changes led to the desertion or shrinkage of many medieval villages, especially between the Thames and Windrush rivers. The great rebuilding that followed in the Tudor and Jacobean period was accompanied by the development of grand mansions and

manor houses. Examples within the Cotswolds include Great Tew, Swerford, Heythrop, Chadlington, Sarsden, Bruern, Chastleton, Combury, Shipton-under-Wychwood and Asthall, with equivalents in the clay vale at Kelmscott and Cote. The formal gardens and parks which surrounded these houses had a considerable impact on the landscape but not so dramatic as the picturesque, designed landscapes of the eighteenth century, with which West Oxfordshire is particularly well-blessed. The most notable examples include Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's work at Blenheim Palace; William Kent's masterpiece at Rousham and at Ditchley Park; and Humphrey Repton's work at Sarsden and Great Tew.

Open farmland had been steadily enclosed by hedges, banks, stone walls and sometimes ditches during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, these earlier and more irregular enclosures were largely overwhelmed by the major parliamentary enclosures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which transformed the landscape of much of West Oxfordshire into an almost 'blueprinted' pattern of square or rectangular fields surrounded by straight thorn hedges or, in the Cotswolds, by stone walls. New farms and model estates were a feature of the landscape and miles of new wide, straight roads were also introduced to replace narrow winding lanes or to create new routes, eg. between Bampton and Oxford.

The Victorian period brought a number of specific changes to the landscape of West Oxfordshire. Firstly, the act for the 'disafforestation' of Wychwood Forest was signed in 1857 and resulted in wholesale clearance of much of the remaining woodland cover and replacement with an entirely new landscape of **new farms, roads and villages**. The transformation from royal forest to harvested crops took only sixteen months and gave birth to new settlements to house farm labourers, such as Fordwells and Mount Skippett. Elsewhere, other new villages were created to accommodate smallholders, notably the Chartist settlement of **Charterville and Carterton**. The Victorian period also saw the expansion of many settlements in West Oxfordshire to accommodate a growing population. A feature of this was the distinction between 'closed' and 'open' villages, brought about by changes in the Poor Law which meant that parishes with few landowners actively sought

to keep out the immigration of new people by building only enough houses for their existing workforce. This placed the burden of housing provision upon the 'open villages' which expanded at a considerable rate in a sprawling and haphazard fashion, unlike the compact, well-shaped order of the closed settlements. These distinctions are still evident today, for example between the orderliness of Sandford St Martin and the formless, mixed character of nearby Middle Barton.

Changes to the landscape and settlements of West Oxfordshire during the twentieth century have resulted mainly from the pressures of modern farming and the growth in demand for new housing and more efficient communications. The increasing mechanisation of post war agriculture has obliterated many miles of hedgerows and woodlands and transformed many of the former enclosure landscapes back to the bare, open vistas of the ancient common fields. Recent agri-environment initiatives (eg. Countryside Stewardship) seek to reverse these trends and, in effect, to replace **some** of the lost structure and biological diversity of the former enclosure landscapes. For example, within the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area, the emphasis is on returning a wider range of wetland habitats to the river valleys while in the arable uplands, incentives are available for hedgerow planting, conversion of arable land to grasslands (possibly restoring the former character of the broad Cotswold 'sheepwalks') and the creation of more diverse field margins. However, farming practice is still primarily driven by market forces and financial subsidies and whilst the current systems of incentives remain in place, the effects of the agri-environment policies on the landscape will be slow to materialise.

Demographic changes and improvements in road and rail communications continue to place significant pressures on the district to accommodate new housing, although much of this pressure has been successfully resisted, particularly in the smaller rural settlements. A less obvious effect of the prosperity of this area, however, is the gradual 'suburbanisation' and 'gentrification' of many of the districts villages and a gradual erosion of local distinctiveness. The same effects are evident across the district and are manifested in more 'urban' types of fencing, surfacing, buildings, lighting and highway

treatments, which cumulatively detract from the traditional, rural character of the village or hamlet. Other changes in the landscape include extensive mineral extraction, which has transformed parts of the Upper Thames/Lower Windrush Valley.

In planning for future change within West Oxfordshire, the main challenge is to provide a suitable balance between the contrasting claims for housing and business expansion on the one hand and maintenance of the generally unspoilt rural qualities of the landscape on the other.

Variations in landscape and visual character

Having explained the underlying physical and human influences that have shaped the overall landscape of West Oxfordshire, the process of sorting the landscape into units of distinctive character helps further to unravel the factors that contribute to local landscape character.

The process of characterisation has been informed by other landscape assessments which apply to West Oxfordshire. In particular, the study aims to be broadly consistent with the Countryside Commission's 'Countryside Character Map of England', which provides a national/regional context for defining character areas, and other landscape assessments specifically prepared for the Cotswolds AONB and the Upper Thames Tributaries ESA.

Landscape character areas

The Countryside Character Map identifies two **regional character areas** within the boundaries of West Oxfordshire (see Figure 3):

- the Cotswolds;
- the Upper Thames Clay Vale;

These conform to the main topographical and geological regions and provide the broad context for defining a total of thirteen **local character areas** within the district. These are tracts of landscape which may be quite diverse in character but have some unifying or consistent elements which are related to their physical form or geographical location (see Figure 4). Detailed descriptions of the Character Areas are given in **Part Two** but their main distinguishing characteristics are summarised as follows:

- 1 **Northern Valleys and Ridges** - a topographically diverse area of complex geology to the north of Chipping Norton, where folding and faulting have created a distinctive landscape of valleys and ridges, a particularly rich pattern of landscape elements and a generally strong landscape structure;

- 2 Ironstone Valleys and Ridges - an area with similar landform and landscape pattern to the above but which is distinguished from it by the presence of characteristic iron-rich red soils and warm orange building stone;
- 3 Enstone Uplands - a high limestone plateau dissected by the River Glyme but otherwise characterised by rolling landform with a distinctive elevated and open character;
- 4 Eastern Parks and Valleys - an area of rolling limestone landscape which is heavily dissected by the valleys of the Glyme, Dorn and Cherwell and distinguished by a particular concentration of formal parks, designed landscapes and estate farmland;
- 5 Upper Evenlode Valley - a distinctive area of rolling Lower Lias clayland which forms a broad, shallow basin around the upper reaches of the River Evenlode, characterised by heavy clay soils and a strong landscape structure of thick hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees, in marked contrast with the limestone areas to the south and east;
- 6 Lower Evenlode Valley - an area with a distinctive valley landform which, although varying in width between Shipton-u-Wychwood and Bladon, creates a sense of enclosure and a particularly strong pastoral and riparian character;
- 7 Wychwood Uplands - an area of smoothly rolling limestone bounded by the valleys of the Evenlode and Windrush. It has similar characteristics to the Enstone Uplands but is distinguished by the presence of the extensive woodlands of Cornbury Park, remnants of the former Wychwood Forest, which contribute to a more enclosed character at its eastern end;
- 8 Upper Windrush Valley - the Windrush Valley dissects the limestone plateau and forms a distinctive landform unit with its own particular, intimate and pastoral character;
- 9 Shilton Downs - an area of limestone landscape which forms the divide between the low-lying clay vale to the south and the Windrush Valley and limestone uplands to the north;
- 10 Barnpton Vale - an area of distinctively low-lying but gently rolling landscape lying between the edge of the limestone to the north and the very flat, expansive floodplain landscape which borders the River Thames to the south;
- 11 Eynsham Vale - a low-lying area characterised by large-scale, rolling farmland and including the formal parkland and well-managed wooded farmland of Eynsham Park and other large estates;
- 12 Lower Windrush Valley and Eastern Thames Fringes - an area of distinctively flat, low-lying landscape occupying the 'floodplain' of the River Windrush and the margins of the River Thames, heavily modified by mineral extraction but retaining areas of floodplain pasture;
- 13 Western Thames Fringes - an area occupying the very flat, low-lying landscape of the River Thames floodplain, comparatively free from mineral extraction but dominated by arable farmland.

Landscape Types

Although the character areas have a definable physical context and coherent identity, they are inevitably quite diverse in themselves. Even subtle differences in landform, land-use, landscape structure, the degree of visual enclosure and the influence of built development or specific land uses, can create variations in landscape character and local distinctiveness.

Landscape types are classified into the following groups, reflecting broad distinctions in landscape character:

- Valley Landscapes;
- Limestone Wold landscapes
- Clay Wold landscapes
- Clay vale landscapes;
- Parkland and Estate landscapes;
- Sub-rural landscapes

A number of sub-types reflect degrees of character variation within the main types, as shown in the following table.

West Oxfordshire Landscape Types:

Valley Landscapes

- Minor valleys
- Valley floor farmland
- Open valley-side farmland
- Semi-enclosed valley-side farmland
- Open valleys and ridges
- Semi-enclosed valleys and ridges

Limestone Wolds Landscapes

- Open limestone wolds
- Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)
- Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (smaller-scale)

Clay Wolds Landscapes

- Open clay wolds
- Semi-enclosed clay wolds (large-scale)
- Semi-enclosed clay wolds (smaller-scale)

Clay Vale Farmland

- Floodplain pasture
- Open flat vale farmland
- Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland
- Open rolling vale farmland
- Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland
- Floodplain wetlands

Parkland landscapes

- Parkland
- Estate farmland

Sub-rural landscapes

- Rural fringe land
- Sport landscapes
- Airfields and MOD sites
- Minerals and landfill sites

Valley landscapes

These landscapes comprise the various valleys which dissect and contrast with the rolling Cotswold plateau and dip-slope. They occur at varying scales but all have a distinctive valley form creating intimate, enclosed areas of farmland. The smaller V-shaped valleys are treated as a single landscape unit, while larger valleys with a U-shaped profile are divided into valley-floor and sides. A separate type describes particularly complex and intricate landform of valleys and ridges where it cannot easily be divided into its component parts.

The following valley types have been identified:

- **Minor valleys** - small-scale, enclosed and intimate tributaries of main valley systems, typically with a distinctive V-shaped profile;
- **Valley floor farmland** - the distinctive flat floor of larger valleys, typically occupied by floodplain pasture and with pastoral, riparian character;
- **Valley-side farmland** - distinctive, sloping valley-side landform typical of larger valleys, divided between a predominantly *open* and a *semi-enclosed* character;
- **Valleys and ridges** - complex systems of heavily folded and 'corrugated' minor valleys divided by narrow ridges, spurs and low hills. Areas with an *open* and *semi-enclosed* character are distinguished;

Limestone Wold landscapes

These are the landscapes which occur to the north of the Upper Thames Vale on higher, more pronounced landform underlain by the Oolitic Limestones, Lias Clays and shales of the Cotswold region. They are characterised by a distinctive smoothly rolling landform and a predominantly large-scale rectilinear field pattern bounded by dry-stone walls and hedges. The main differences lie between the structure of hedgerows, trees and woodland and the scale and pattern of enclosure.

The following limestone wolds types have been identified:

- Open limestone wolds farmland - these are the wide open, arable landscapes of the limestone summits and slopes (formerly extensive grassland sheepwalks) with a pattern of large-scale, regular enclosures, thin, well-drained soils and a very sparse network of hedgerows and trees;
- Semi-enclosed limestone wolds farmland - farmed landscapes of the limestone uplands with a more intact structure of hedgerows, trees and woods which interrupt the bare open vistas of the plateau. Two main sub-types are identified: predominantly *large-scale*, arable farmland with straight boundaries typical of later enclosures; and more mixed land use and *smaller-scale* pattern of irregular fields with strong hedgerow trees and woodland, typical of fields cut out from former woodland cover.

Clay wold landscapes

These are landscapes underlain by Lower Lias Clays, glacial deposits and alluvium in the lower lying parts of the Cotswolds. Their softly rolling landform and thicker hedgerows gives them a distinctively 'lowland' feel in comparison to the dry limestone uplands. Distinctions have been drawn between differences in field pattern and hedgerow structure as above:

- Open clay wolds farmland - typically open, arable landscapes with a pattern of large-scale, regular enclosures and sparse network of hedgerows and trees;
- Semi-enclosed clay wolds farmland - farmland with a stronger structure of hedgerows and trees, either with a *large-scale* regular field pattern, mostly under arable, or *smaller-scale* irregular fields with a more mixed pattern of land use.

Clay Vale Farmland

The landscapes of the Upper Thames Clay Vale are characterised by a patchwork of arable fields and pastures, hedgerows, trees and woodland blocks typical of much of lowland England. It is underlain by Oxford Clay, alluvium and river gravels and is distinguished by its subdued and

low-lying relief. Fields are typically bounded by hedges and ditches rather than the walls of the stone country. Differences between types relate mainly to very subtle differences in landform, the dominant land use and the degree of enclosure provided by hedges and trees.

- Floodplain pasture - low-lying, very flat pasture found immediately alongside rivers and watercourses, with a distinctive pattern of tree-lined ditches and a tranquil, pastoral character;
- Flat vale farmland - low-lying, very flat, drained and cultivated farmland within the floodplain, with low horizons and dominance of sky. Distinctions are drawn between those which are very *open* and expansive, and *semi-enclosed* landscapes with a stronger structure of hedges and trees which filter views.
- Rolling vale farmland - low-lying cultivated farmland, similar to above, but distinguished by its slight elevation above the floodplain floor and a discernible but subtly rolling landform. Distinctions are drawn between areas which are very *open* and expansive, and *semi-enclosed* landscapes with a stronger structure of hedges and trees which filter views.
- Floodplain wetlands - parts of the floodplain which are characterised by open water and wetland habitats, typically created from the extraction of sand and gravels.

Parkland landscapes

These are highly distinctive landscapes associated with large country houses and estates where a formal or designed character has been imposed upon the underlying landscape. They include:

- Parkland - comprising the grand designed landscapes of the C18 and other, smaller areas of formal parkland with typical characteristics of parkland trees, avenues, woods, lakes and other formal landscape features;
- Estate farmland - the wider farmed landscape of large country estates, typically with a mature, well-managed and well-wooded character (with copses and coverts)

for game), and often with distinctive estate boundaries and avenues of mature trees.

Sub-rural Landscapes

These are landscapes which lie within a rural context but which have developed semi-urban characteristics because of their land uses or proximity to urban influences. Their underlying character is overwhelmed by specific land uses or management regimes to produce distinctive landscape types and include:

- Rural fringe land - somewhat scruffy land (typically small, fields on the edges of settlements) which are not strictly in agricultural use, eg. pony paddocks, small-holdings, allotments, waste ground, disused airfields etc.
- Sports landscapes - such as golf courses and playing fields, which have an intensively managed character, often unrelated to their landscape context;
- Airfields and MOD land - including active airfields and defence sites with a highly distinctive character of flat open landscape, large-scale sheds, security fencing etc.;
- Minerals and landfill sites - where the landscape is in the process of being physically altered through active quarrying, tipping or restoration.

Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of these landscape types across the district as a whole and further details of their distinguishing features are given within the individual character area descriptions. It is important to emphasise, however, that the 'grain' of characterisation within a district-wide assessment is too coarse to map the more localised variations in character that will inevitably occur, especially around the fringes of settlements. It is also important to note that, because of the difficulties in drawing accurate settlement boundaries, some landscape types may include areas of built form which do not register within the landscape type description.

Variations in landscape quality and condition

West Oxfordshire remains a predominantly rural district with some outstanding areas of landscape and a high proportion of very attractive, unspoilt countryside. The high quality of its landscape is confirmed by the designation of a large part of the district within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (a national designation) and by the inclusion of most of the remainder within the Area of High Landscape Value (a local designation).

Given that most of the district's landscape is intrinsically of high quality there are, nonetheless, some subtle variations in condition within it, even within the designated areas. These primarily result from a weakening of landscape structure through intensive farming practices, such as the removal of traditional dry-stone walls and the creation of bare, arable 'prairies'. While these landscapes can still be impressive, they lack the ecological or visual diversity which characterises some of the more richly-patterned landscapes. Lack of management, and some specific land uses like quarrying, can also affect landscape and ecological condition and be destructive to 'natural' landscape elements.

Different enhancement strategies are required to deal with these conditions, as defined on page 3. Their distribution across the district is illustrated in Figure 6 and summarised below. However, it must be stressed that the differences are subtle and even those landscapes within the 'reconstruct' category are not seriously degraded by wider standards.

Conserve

Landscapes which fall into the conserve category are those which have a particularly strong, unspoilt character, a diverse and intact landscape structure, high aesthetic appeal and a range of valued habitats and archaeological resources. These primarily comprise:

- the outstanding landscapes of the eighteenth century parks and other scenically attractive areas of parkland and estate landscape,
- the unspoilt, pastoral and tranquil floodplain and valley landscapes of the River Thames,

- Windrush, Evenlode and Glyme and their minor tributaries;
- the scenically diverse, richly-patterned and textured landscapes of the northern and ironstone valleys and ridges;
- some of the other particularly attractive well-wooded and enclosed landscapes with remnant ancient woodland on the limestone and in the vale, such as around Lew and above Swinbrook.

Strengthen

Landscapes within the 'strengthen' category represent rural, attractive landscapes but which are not quite so special or distinctive as those listed above. They would benefit from some enhancement to strengthen weakened landscape structure and reinforce local distinctiveness.

Those within the Strengthen 'a' category are those which require only modest enhancement and primarily comprise:

- those parts of the limestone and clay wolds which have retained a strong structure of hedgerows and trees and a mixed pattern of fields and land uses (eg. the more 'ancient', assarted landscape to the south of Wychwood Forest);
- those parts of the clay vale which have retained a strong structure of hedgerows and trees and where variations in landform and land use create some visual diversity (eg. to the south of Eynsham Park);
- areas of cultivated farmland within the flat river corridors which lack the pastoral qualities of the floodplain farmland but which have retained a good structure of hedgerows and trees.

Those landscapes within the Strengthen 'b' category tend to be those which have a particularly denuded character. While their open character may be impressive, allowing extensive views, for example, across the Cotswold plateau, their ecological value is diminished and they lack the variety and 'health' of some of the more richly-patterned landscapes. They include:

- the intensively farmed and highly mechanised arable 'prairie' landscapes of the open limestone wold on the Cotswold plateau;

- the low-lying and windswept open arable farmland of the Clay Vale, typically associated with deposits of terrace gravels.

Reconstruct

Only a few pockets of landscape fall within the reconstruct category. These represent landscapes which have undergone major change in character, such as gravel pits and limestone quarries and other fringe land uses that, in visual terms, do not fit comfortably within the rural landscape. They include:

- active and disused airfields at Brize Norton, Enstone and near Bradwell Grove which intrude upon the rural scene or have a derelict and somewhat degraded character;
- pockets of land on the fringes of the main settlements which are affected by unsightly land uses and built form;
- mineral extraction sites on the limestone wolds and, particularly, within the clay vale, where the natural landscape has been disrupted or destroyed and plant, machinery, vehicles, road improvements etc. detract from local landscape quality.

PART ONE

STUDY CONTEXT

THE STUDY

Background

Over recent years, there has been growing recognition of the role of landscape assessment as a basis for countryside planning and management. In particular, the use of landscape assessment as a tool for describing the character of our landscapes is increasingly recognised as an important first step in conserving and enhancing them, and for planning for sustainable development in rural areas.

The impetus for preparing landscape assessments at a district level has come from two main directions:

- the Countryside Commission actively encourages local planning authorities to undertake district-wide assessments to provide an informed background for policy and development control decisions and for countryside management. It has published detailed guidance on landscape assessment and has recently produced a 'New Map of England' which provides a broad context for defining landscape character at a local level. It also promotes the concept of local distinctiveness through its 'Design in the Countryside' initiative.
- Government advice contained within the revised PPG7 (February 1997) takes forward these approaches and encourages planning authorities to undertake comprehensive landscape assessments as part of the local plan review process. The extent and effectiveness of local landscape designations is to be given particular consideration in such reviews.

In response to this background, West Oxfordshire District commissioned Atlantic Consultants to prepare a district-wide landscape assessment. Its main objective is to increase understanding of the landscape resources of the district, to assist with policy formulation and development control and to assist with the targeting of resources for enhancement and management.

Whilst the assessment is primarily intended to assist the District Council, it is also considered to be of relevance to a wide range of organisations and individuals whose activities may have an effect upon the landscape of West Oxfordshire. These will include landowners, farmers, private developers, community organisations and other local interest groups.

The brief outlined the following main requirements of the study:

- to identify and describe the attributes of the landscape (both natural and man-made) that contribute to local distinctiveness;
- to provide a breakdown of the district into areas of distinctive landscape character;
- to examine the relationship between the landscape and patterns of settlement and buildings;
- to identify simple enhancement strategies and priorities for each landscape type;
- and to identify variations in landscape sensitivity across the District and its ability to accommodate change.

Structure of the document

This document is divided into three main parts:

- Part One provides the overall background and context to the study, including an explanation of the approach and methodology employed and a brief overview of the District landscape, its formative influences and overall character;
- Part Two deals with the individual Character Areas, describing in detail their landscape and settlement character together with appropriate guidelines for landscape enhancement and built development;
- Part Three provides more detailed assessment of the fringes of a number of key settlements (mainly local service centres) within the district.

APPROACH AND RATIONALE

landscape character assessment

Over recent years, there has been a general trend away from quantitative systems of landscape evaluation towards an approach based upon understanding the intrinsic character of a locality and its distinctive features, allowing land use planning and management to respond to the local 'landscape vernacular'. This approach is explained within the landscape assessment guidance published by the Countryside Commission (CCP423), which forms the basis for this study.

The approach recognises that the character of the landscape is not simply a scenic or visual phenomenon but is the product of its physiography, history and land management. It recognises that factors such as ecology, history and culture, have a bearing upon the way landscape is experienced and valued and that these factors should also be taken into account within the assessment process. Overall, the approach relies upon a mix of objective recording and subjective judgement, used in a systematic and iterative way.

The assessment process has involved the following main stages of work:

- **Desk study** - this stage involved the collation of a wide range of existing information on the physical and human influences that have shaped the landscape of the district. The process involved 'overlay mapping' of key factors (eg. geology, topography, drainage, woodland cover, and sites of ecological/historical importance etc.) as well as detailed examination of other documentary, map-based or photographic evidence. Other landscape assessments (eg. the New Map of England and Cotswolds AONB assessment) were also consulted to provide context and consistency.

Field survey - this part of the study involved travelling extensively throughout the district, recording detailed variations in landscape character and key features onto 1:25,000 base maps. Other factors, such as evidence

of pressures on the landscape and key management or enhancement needs, were also noted during the field survey.

- **Analysis** - this stage involved combining the results of the desk and field studies to produce a breakdown of the district into areas of distinctive character.

The assessment examines landscape character at two levels. Firstly, it looks at the way in which particular landform and landcover elements combine to produce distinctive landscape types. These are generic descriptions and the types can repeat across the district without necessarily being related to geographical location.

Landscape types are particularly useful as a tool for understanding the detailed pattern of landscape variation that occurs across the district as a whole and to assist in day to day development control decisions. However, in planning policy and management terms, it is as important to understand the landscape character and qualities of particular places or areas, so that appropriate policies and action can be applied at a local level. Therefore, it is common practice to define landscape character areas. These are units of landscape which may embrace a number of different landscape types but which in some way have a coherent and recognisable 'sense of place' or local identity.

It is important to stress that the boundaries between landscape types or between character areas are rarely distinct. Instead, the boundaries tend to be best approximations of a gradual but discernible change in character. It is also important to stress that landscape character rarely stops at the district boundary and will usually extend beyond into neighbouring districts.

The basis for the division of West Oxfordshire District into distinctive landscape types and character areas, is explained in the 'landscape overview' section.

Guidelines for landscape enhancement

Approach to evaluation

The second part of the study involves identifying variations in landscape quality and condition across the district, primarily to allow appropriate guidelines for landscape conservation, management and enhancement to be defined.

The aim is, therefore, not to identify the 'best' or 'worst' quality landscapes within the district but to examine the intrinsic quality and condition of individual landscape types so that intervention can be targeted to the most needy areas. This approach has therefore been applied across the whole of the district landscape irrespective of the presence of existing landscape designations.

Using the experience and judgement of the study team, each landscape type was assessed in terms of the following attributes (based upon Countryside Commission guidelines):

- Scenic quality - the degree to which the landscape is attractive with pleasing patterns and combinations of landscape features;
- Sense of place - the extent to which the landscape has a distinctive character and a 'sense of place';
- Unspoilt character - the degree to which landscape structure is 'intact' and the landscape is affected by intrusive or detracting influences;
- Landscape as a resource - whether the landscape type represents a scarce or especially fragile landscape resource;
- Conservation interests - whether there are other notable conservation interests that contribute to landscape quality and value.

The landscape types were then assigned one of the following enhancement strategies:

- Conserve - this strategy applies where the landscape is of particularly high scenic quality, is unspoilt, retains a strong, intact landscape structure and sense of place, and often contains areas or features of ecological or cultural heritage significance. In these landscapes, conservation is an overwhelming priority in order to maintain landscape character and quality.

- Strengthen - this strategy applies to those landscapes which have a positive rural character, attractive qualities and where character, landscape structure and sense of place are still comparatively strong, but which are not 'special' or distinctive to quite the same degree as those in the above category. These landscapes are also important to conserve but would benefit from some enhancement through appropriate land management, to strengthen weakened landscape structure and quality and to reinforce local distinctiveness.

The degree to which landscape structure and character require strengthening differs across the District. A distinction is therefore drawn in this category between 'a' landscapes, where only modest strengthening is required, and 'b' landscapes, where more significant strengthening is required to restore landscape structure and features that have been weakened by intensive farming practice.

- Reconstruct - this strategy applies in those areas where the character and quality of the landscape has been substantially modified by poor land management, non-agricultural land uses, or intrusive features, eg. airfields, built development, mineral extraction, roads, power lines etc. They require more significant intervention to mitigate the influence of detracting land uses or features, to raise landscape quality and to reconstruct landscape character and identity.

It is important to stress that these strategies do not equate with any nationally established system or yardstick but are adapted from Countryside Commission guidance to suit the particular circumstances of West Oxfordshire District. They should therefore be regarded as indicative of differences in quality and condition which occur within the context of the district and comparisons should not be made with similar strategies applied elsewhere.

The variations in landscape quality and the application of enhancement strategies across the district are explained in the 'landscape overview' section.

Enhancement principles

The guidelines for landscape enhancement are intended to provide advice on the most appropriate type of management or enhancement needed to maintain or raise landscape quality within each character area. As a general rule, they are aimed at reinforcing or strengthening existing characteristics in the landscape rather than promoting widespread landscape change. Specific guidelines on enhancement priorities are set out for each character area but a number of more general principles are outlined opposite. In addition, a table showing characteristic native species that typically occur within the different landscape types is contained within Appendix 2.

Mechanisms

Clearly, most of these objectives involve changes in land management which can only be achieved through voluntary co-operation. However, there are a number of potential ways in which the guidelines can be taken forward, including:

- through various initiatives, grants and incentive schemes operated by local authorities and other statutory agencies;
- through the work of countryside management services run by local authorities or other agencies;
- through the work of voluntary bodies and community groups involved in local environmental or landscape projects;
- through the activities of farmers and other private landowners;
- through development briefing and the use of landscape conditions, legal agreements and planning gain.

It is important to stress that the achievement of landscape enhancement through development proposals would only be appropriate where the development itself was in compliance with strategic and local planning policies.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR ENHANCEMENT

- management or enhancement should aim to reinforce or restore the local landscape 'vernacular', ie. those characteristics which contribute to local distinctiveness;
- in general, intervention should aim to restore diversity and structure to the landscape (eg. through hedgerow and tree planting, habitat creation etc) to reflect the varied typical landscapes of the District;
- the more 'intact' examples of landscape types described within this assessment, and historical maps and records, can be used as a guide to the most appropriate form of enhancement;
- new planting and habitat creation should also reflect the ecological character of the local area to reinforce local distinctiveness and maximise wildlife benefits;
- particular priority should be given to the mitigation of intrusive features or influences which detract from the rural character of the landscape (eg. hard urban edges, unsightly buildings or structures, poorly managed or degraded land on the fringes of settlements or associated with quarrying activities, insensitive highway improvements etc.);
- special attention should also be given to the enhancement of settlement fringes and road corridors to reduce their impact and to provide a clear definition between built areas and open countryside;
- strong landscape frameworks should be an integral part of any new development.

Guidelines for built development

The third part of the study focuses on the inherent characteristics and qualities of the landscape that will determine its sensitivity to change and, in particular, its ability to accommodate new development.

Policy context

Current Government advice contained within PPG7 (revised February 1997) places a firm emphasis on protection of the countryside for its own sake, even in areas of no special designation, and advises that development in the countryside should maintain and enhance the environment. This advice is reflected in policies contained within the Oxfordshire County Structure Plan and the West Oxfordshire Local Plan (adopted in November 1997).

The Local Plan currently contains a number of policies which specifically seek to protect the character and 'quality of the landscape from potentially adverse impacts of development (as listed opposite). A particular emphasis is placed upon the protection of designated areas (ie. the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Area of High Landscape Value, which covers much of the remainder of the district, and Parks and Gardens of Special Interest). However, Policy CO1 of the plan recognises the importance of protecting all landscape, even non-designated areas, for its own sake, while a number of other policies (eg. BE3, C03, CO10, H12, R13, TM1) refer to the need to protect the landscape setting of settlements or otherwise safeguard the landscape from adverse impacts of development.

The Local Plan indicates a general presumption against housing development in open countryside but other types of development may be permitted by the plan. Where this is the case, the aim is to ensure that it can be integrated sensitively without adverse impact on the landscape. This landscape assessment aims to provide as much information as possible to enable the local authority and others to make such judgements. Although it will clearly be too coarse a tool to deal with many site-specific issues, the principles and considerations outlined within the assessment can equally be applied at a more local level.

SELECTED EXTRACTS FROM KEY LOCAL PLAN POLICIES AFFECTING LANDSCAPE

POLICY CO1: Proposals for development in the countryside will be considered against the need to safeguard its beauty, the diversity of its natural resources, and its ecological, agricultural and recreational values.

POLICY CO6: In the Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty conservation and enhancement of its special landscape qualities will be the overriding consideration.... Although regard will be had to the economic and social well-being of the area any development should not harm its natural beauty.

POLICY CO7: In Areas of High Landscape Value shown on the proposals map the Council will seek to protect and enhance the beauty of the area. Development should not have an adverse impact on the landscape.

POLICY CO8: Within the Area of High Landscape Value near the River Thames and its tributaries, new development should be sited, designed and landscaped so that it does not detract from the special character of these riverside areas.....

POLICY BE3: All development should be of a high standard of design and appearance. It will be expected to...(c) not damage the surrounding countryside which forms an attractive setting to a settlement; (d) respect the scale, pattern, density and character of its setting...

(West Oxfordshire Local Plan (Adopted))

Sensitivity to development

The ability of the landscape to accommodate development is a complex issue which is not simply related to the intrinsic quality of the landscape but will depend upon a combination of different factors. Of key importance will be the nature and scale of the development itself, along with:

- the potential impacts of this development on distinctive **landscape and settlement character**;
- the potential impacts on intrinsic **landscape quality** and valued features and the overall **sensitivity of the landscape to change**;
- the **visual sensitivity** of the landscape, ie. the degree to which it benefits from screening or filtering of views.

A number of general principles for development in the countryside, which will apply across the district, are shown in the table opposite. However, to make the assessment as helpful as possible, we have provided further guidance on the sensitivities of landscapes of differing character and surrounding a number of key settlements, as explained below.

Guidelines for landscape types

Much of the information required to **assess** the appropriateness of new development in different landscape types should be implicit within the landscape character descriptions and quality evaluations for the individual character areas. In addition, however, some key conclusions on the ability of different landscape types to accommodate development are also summarised for each character area.

For further guidance, a **matrix** is included in Appendix 1 which identifies some of the key characteristics that need to be taken into account in **assessing** the impact of development proposals on individual landscape types. These are grouped under the headings of 'landscape character', 'settlement character' and 'landscape quality and sensitivity'.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- as a rule, those landscapes of particularly high quality and unspoilt character (ie those within the conserve and strengthen (A) categories) are most sensitive to development;
- development should also be avoided in areas of unspoilt countryside (in the conserve and strengthen categories) which are particularly open and visually exposed especially on prominent ridgelines, hilltops or valley sides/escarpments);
- in other open or visually sensitive landscapes, new development should be closely related to existing built form or well-integrated within existing or new landscape frameworks;
- in visual terms, landscapes enclosed by landform or vegetation are generally more able to absorb new development but can be highly sensitive to change because of their intrinsic landscape quality or their ecological and archaeological value;
- extra care is required to maintain the quality of vulnerable landscapes on the fringes of settlements and along road corridors and to prevent ribbon development and the coalescence of settlements;
- all new development should respond to the characteristics of the landscape and built environment within which it is located, to reinforce local distinctiveness and to minimise any adverse impacts;
- development should not erode the rural character of landscape and settlements (eg. introducing lighting into remote countryside, insensitive/urbanised highway treatments, fencing, signage etc.)

The matrix identifies a range of typical characteristics (eg. scale, pattern, boundary types, building materials, visual sensitivity and scenic quality) for individual landscape types and, in conjunction with the character area descriptions, may be used as a checklist to guide the acceptability of development proposals within different parts of the district landscape.

While this additional background information should help in assessing the appropriateness of development proposals, it is clearly still too generalised to provide all of the answers. The main purpose of the matrix is, therefore, to help introduce a discipline in the assessment of potential impacts of any development proposal and to enable a degree of transparency to be applied to development control decisions.

Importantly, it is also intended to help encourage those proposing development in the countryside to view landscape in a more holistic way and to consider not only the potential visual impacts of a development, but also its impact upon the intrinsic character and quality of the receiving landscape.

Guidelines for key settlements

The larger settlements of the District have, in the past, inevitably been under pressure for additional development. These pressures are likely to continue, particularly on the fringes of these settlements. Difficult decisions regarding the opportunities for and direction of potential future growth will have to be made. While the landscape assessment provides a broad context, a more detailed study of the fringes of ten key settlements has been undertaken in order to provide a finer-grained analysis of key landscape sensitivities and considerations. They comprise the main service centres, with the addition of Ducklington, because of its proximity to Witney, and the inclusion of Milton-under-Wychwood, as a secondary local centre within the AONB.

The ten settlements are listed below, with the Character Areas to which they are most closely related given in brackets:

- Bampton (10)
- **Burford** (8, 9)
- Carterton (9)
- Charlbury (6)
- Chipping Norton (1, 3)
- Ducklington (12)
- Eynsham (11, 12)
- Milton-under-Wychwood (5)
- Witney (8, 9, 7, 11)
- Woodstock (4)

The landscape setting of each settlement is divided into a number of sectors for which we have summarised the key factors which may influence development decisions, namely:

- landscape characteristics;
- visual characteristics;
- key landscape sensitivities and considerations.

We do not seek to recommend areas for development. We simply aim to provide additional detail to assist all those involved in making decisions in respect of appropriate development in the landscape.

Further explanation of these studies and the findings of the assessment are presented in Part Three.

Introduction

West Oxfordshire is a predominantly rural, agricultural district which covers a land area of around 715 square kilometres. It embraces large areas of unspoilt countryside within its boundaries and a diverse pattern of landscapes, including rolling limestone uplands, pastoral river valleys, historic parkland, remnants of ancient forests, low-lying farmland and riverside meadows, with a scattering of rural villages and some larger settlements.

This patterning is the product of the interaction between the physical structure of the landscape and the nature of the vegetation and land uses that cover it. To understand what makes places distinctive, it is helpful to summarise the main physical and human influences which have shaped the district's landscape over time.

Physical influences

The geology of West Oxfordshire (see Figure 1) is dominated by rocks of the Jurassic period, laid down in warm seas 150 million years ago, and forming part of the 'stone belt' that stretches right across England from Dorset to the Humber. It comprises a sequence of clays and limestones that dip, and get progressively younger, towards the south-east of the district, creating two distinctive broad belts of terrain: the Cotswold Hills and the Upper Thames Clay Vale.

The **Cotswold Hills** sweep across the centre and north of the district and are formed by the rocks of the middle and lower Jurassic. The lowest strata in the sequence are the Lower, Middle and Upper Lias, which are mostly composed of soft clays, siltstones and shales. However, they also include a band of Marlstone, a shelly ferruginous limestone, between the Middle and Upper beds. The most extensive exposures of the **Lower Lias** occur within the upper Evenlode Valley, where it forms a broad, shallow basin characterised by low-lying and gentle topography (see Figure 2), with heavy clay soils supporting mixed farmland and a strong structure of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. The **Middle and Upper Lias** are

exposed mainly across the north of the district, where these *soft* rocks are heavily folded and cut through by rivers and streams to form an area of extremely complex topography supporting a rich pattern of mixed farmland, thick hedgerows, trees and woods.

The Lias is overlain by the harder Oolitic limestones of the upper Jurassic. The Inferior Oolite occurs in thin localised outcrops mainly along the upper edges of the river valleys. However, like the Marlstone, it contains rocks with a high iron content, known as 'ironstones' which give rise to the red soils and warm orange-coloured building stone characteristic of the north-east corner of the district.

It is the thick limestone bed of the Great Oolite which dominates much of the district and gives the Cotswolds its distinctive character. This pale, hard rock is much prized as a building stone and it forms the high, smoothly rolling plateaux which reach an elevation of around 220 metres AOD near Chipping Norton and dip gently towards the south-east. Soils tend to be thin, well-drained and calcareous and typically support medium-grade arable farmland or, less commonly, grassland. Localised deposits of Oxford Clay and glacial till around Leafield and Ramsden in the Wychwood area create heavier, more acid soils typically under pasture or woodland. The limestone plateau is dissected by the main river valleys of the Windrush and Evenlode, with their alluvial deposits predominantly under pasture.

A band of coarse, crumbly Cornbrash limestone marks the transition between the Great Oolite and the clay vale to the south, forming a series of low bluffs and hills, including the island of landform within the Windrush valley upon which the town of Witney was sited. The low-lying floodplain landscape of the Upper Thames Clay Vale itself occupies extensive deposits of Oxford Clay and alluvium supporting heavy clay soils and larger-scale mixed farmland with a comparatively strong structure of hedgerows and trees. However, large drifts of river gravels produce pockets of well-drained, slightly elevated land which support more intensive arable farming and have a distinctively open character.

Human influences

The basic physical structure of the landscape has also had a strong influence on patterns of human occupation and activity within West Oxfordshire. Evidence of prehistoric settlement indicates that early settlers had a distinct preference for sites on higher ground less prone to flooding, with more easily worked soils and access to springs or other supplies of water. Favoured sites are found on the well-drained, light soils of the Cotswold limestone and ironstone uplands and the Thames-side gravels. By contrast, the heavy, wet soils and woodland cover of the clay lowlands were less attractive. The outcrops of dry permeable rocks also supported a network of important prehistoric routeways, such as the Jurassic Way which follows the oolites right across England.

The succession of prehistoric cultures was responsible for radical changes in the landscape. They progressively cut clearings in the dense forests to create extensive open pastures or croplands, firstly on the lighter soils of the limestone hills and river gravels but later extending to the heavier soils of the clay vale, using iron tools for axes and ploughshares. These early landscapes have since been obscured by later land use patterns but tangible evidence of early settlement is found in the scattering of tombs, long barrows, standing stones and ring ditches across the Cotswolds.

The Romans brought further changes to West Oxfordshire, creating an integrated pattern of new settlements, planned roads and farmed estates. The process of pre-Roman woodland clearances and the development of sophisticated farming techniques was accelerated by the Romans, bringing further areas of free-draining limestone uplands into highly productive agricultural use for growing barley, wheat and wool which could be marketed at great towns like Cirencester. The scale of romanisation was most impressive on each side of Akeman Street - a major east to west Roman Road - where it crosses the valleys of the Windrush, Evenlode and Glyme and in the neighbourhood of Grim's Ditch. This process created a largely open, farmed landscape, even in the Wychwood area which was reinvaded by forest in later centuries. This highly commercial agriculture was

accompanied by magnificent country houses and villas, such as those at North Leigh and Ditchley. From the early fifth century, the Saxon period brought the invasion of groups of Germanic immigrants who laid the foundations of the English countryside. They were credited with further taming of woodland, heath and marsh to clear ground for livestock, and with building new villages and farming settlements. These were mostly concentrated on lighter soils within the river valleys and on the gravel terraces of the Thames, close to well-watered river meadows - examples include Eynsham, which incorporates the Old English word for meadow - 'ham'; Chimney, or 'Ceomma's island', which was located on a low ledge of gravel safe from the Thames floodwaters; and Witney, or 'Witta's island', which stood on a dry combash outlier surrounded by alluvial levels. The Saxons were also responsible for establishing extensive hunting preserves or parks, the management of which was later codified by the Normans in forest law. Woodstock Park was the earliest hunting ground of the Saxon Kings and formed part of the extensive belt of wood, coppice, underwood and spinney which stretched through the Oxfordshire countryside between the royal forests of Wychwood and Shotover in the Oxford Heights.

By the early middle ages, the Domesday survey of 1086 revealed an even pattern of settlements across the district, apart from Wychwood which remained comparatively empty. However, this was a time of expansion and gathering change in the landscape. New villages, such as Leafield, Finstock, Ramsden and Hailey, and fields were carved out from Wychwood through the process of 'assarting', although extensive woodland cover remained. Drainage and reclamation of the flood-plain flats along the Upper Thames also created new marshland villages such as Northmoor and Standlake. The steady advance of sheep-farming on the limestone led to a thriving woollen industry, with early fulling mills established near Enstone and Witney and the grand houses of wealthy wool merchants still visible in the town buildings of many settlements, such as Burford, Witney and Chipping Norton.

Climatic, economic and social changes led to the desertion or shrinkage of many medieval villages, especially between the Thames and Windrush rivers. The great rebuilding that followed in the Tudor and Jacobean period was accompanied by the development of grand mansions and

manor houses. Examples within the Cotswolds include Great Tew, Swerford, Heythrop, Chadlington, Sarsden, Bruem, Chastleton, Combury, Shipton-under-Wychwood and Asthall, with equivalents in the clay vale at Kelmscott and Cote. The formal gardens and parks which surrounded these houses had a considerable impact on the landscape but not so dramatic as the picturesque, designed landscapes of the eighteenth century, with which West Oxfordshire is particularly well-blessed. The most notable examples include Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's work at Blenheim Palace; William Kent's masterpiece at Rousham and at Ditchley Park; and Humphrey Repton's work at Sarsden and Great Tew.

Open farmland had been steadily enclosed by hedges, banks, stone walls and sometimes ditches during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, these earlier and more irregular enclosures were largely overwhelmed by the major parliamentary enclosures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which transformed the landscape of much of West Oxfordshire into an almost 'blueprinted' pattern of square or rectangular fields surrounded by straight thorn hedges or, in the Cotswolds, by stone walls. New farms and model estates were a feature of the landscape and miles of new wide, straight roads were also introduced to replace narrow winding lanes or to create new routes, eg. between Bampton and Oxford.

The Victorian period brought a number of specific changes to the landscape of West Oxfordshire. Firstly, the act for the 'disafforestation' of Wychwood Forest was signed in 1857 and resulted in wholesale clearance of much of the remaining woodland cover and replacement with an entirely new landscape of **new farms**, roads and **villages**. The transformation from royal forest to harvested crops took only sixteen months and gave birth to new settlements to house farm labourers, such as Fordwells and Mount Skippett. Elsewhere, other new villages were created to accommodate smallholders, notably the Chartist settlement of **Charterville and Carterton**. The Victorian period also saw the expansion of many settlements in West Oxfordshire to accommodate a growing population. A feature of this was the distinction between 'closed' and 'open' villages, brought about by changes in the Poor Law which meant that parishes with few landowners actively sought

to keep out the immigration of new people by building only enough houses for their existing workforce. This placed the burden of housing provision upon the 'open villages' which expanded at a considerable rate in a sprawling and haphazard fashion, unlike the compact, well-shaped order of the closed settlements. These distinctions are still evident today, for example between the orderliness of Sandford St Martin and the formless, mixed character of nearby Middle Barton.

Changes to the landscape and settlements of West Oxfordshire during the twentieth century have resulted mainly from the pressures of modern farming and the growth in demand for new housing and more efficient communications. The increasing mechanisation of post war agriculture has obliterated many miles of hedgerows and woodlands and transformed many of the former enclosure landscapes back to the bare, open vistas of the ancient common fields. Recent agri-environment initiatives (eg. Countryside Stewardship) seek to reverse these trends and, in effect, to replace **some** of the lost structure and biological diversity of the former enclosure landscapes. For example, within the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area, the emphasis is on returning a wider range of wetland habitats to the river valleys while in the arable uplands, incentives are available for hedgerow planting, conversion of arable land to grasslands (possibly restoring the former character of the broad Cotswold 'sheepwalks') and the creation of more diverse field margins. However, farming practice is still primarily driven by market forces and financial subsidies and whilst the current systems of incentives remain in place, the effects of the agri-environment policies on the landscape will be slow to materialise.

Demographic changes and improvements in road and rail communications continue to place significant pressures on the district to accommodate new housing, although much of this pressure has been successfully resisted, particularly in the smaller rural settlements. A less obvious effect of the prosperity of this area, however, is the gradual 'suburbanisation' and 'gentrification' of many of the districts villages and a gradual erosion of local distinctiveness. The same effects are evident across the district and are manifested in more 'urban' types of fencing, surfacing, buildings, lighting and highway

treatments, which cumulatively detract from the traditional, rural character of the village or hamlet. Other changes in the landscape include extensive mineral extraction, which has transformed parts of the Upper Thames/Lower Windrush Valley.

In planning for future change within West Oxfordshire, the main challenge is to provide a suitable balance between the contrasting claims for housing and business expansion on the one hand and maintenance of the generally unspoilt rural qualities of the landscape on the other.

Variations in landscape and visual character

Having explained the underlying physical and human influences that have shaped the overall landscape of West Oxfordshire, the process of sorting the landscape into units of distinctive character helps further to unravel the factors that contribute to local landscape character.

The process of characterisation has been informed by other landscape assessments which apply to West Oxfordshire. In particular, the study aims to be broadly consistent with the Countryside Commission's 'Countryside Character Map of England', which provides a national/regional context for defining character areas, and other landscape assessments specifically prepared for the Cotswolds AONB and the Upper Thames Tributaries ESA.

Landscape character areas

The Countryside Character Map identifies two **regional character areas** within the boundaries of West Oxfordshire (see Figure 3):

- the Cotswolds;
- the Upper Thames Clay Vale;

These conform to the main topographical and geological regions and provide the broad context for defining a total of thirteen **local character areas** within the district. These are tracts of landscape which may be quite diverse in character but have some unifying or consistent elements which are related to their physical form or geographical location (see Figure 4). Detailed descriptions of the Character Areas are given in **Part Two** but their main distinguishing characteristics are summarised as follows:

- 1 Northern Valleys and Ridges** - a topographically diverse area of complex geology to the north of Chipping Norton, where folding and faulting have created a distinctive landscape of valleys and ridges, a particularly rich pattern of landscape elements and a generally strong landscape structure;

- 2 Ironstone Valleys and Ridges - an area with similar landform and landscape pattern to the above but which is distinguished from it by the presence of characteristic iron-rich red soils and warm orange building stone;
- 3 Enstone Uplands - a high limestone plateau dissected by the River Glyme but otherwise characterised by rolling landform with a distinctive elevated and open character;
- 4 Eastern Parks and Valleys - an area of rolling limestone landscape which is heavily dissected by the valleys of the Glyme, Dorn and Cherwell and distinguished by a particular concentration of formal parks, designed landscapes and estate farmland;
- 5 Upper Evenlode Valley - a distinctive area of rolling Lower Lias clayland which forms a broad, shallow basin around the upper reaches of the River Evenlode, characterised by heavy clay soils and a strong landscape structure of thick hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees, in marked contrast with the limestone areas to the south and east;
- 6 Lower Evenlode Valley - an area with a distinctive valley landform which, although varying in width between Shipton-u-Wychwood and Bladon, creates a sense of enclosure and a particularly strong pastoral and riparian character;
- 7 Wychwood Uplands - an area of smoothly rolling limestone bounded by the valleys of the Evenlode and Windrush. It has similar characteristics to the Enstone Uplands but is distinguished by the presence of the extensive woodlands of Cornbury Park, remnants of the former Wychwood Forest, which contribute to a more enclosed character at its eastern end;
- 8 Upper Windrush Valley - the Windrush Valley dissects the limestone plateau and forms a distinctive landform unit with its own particular, intimate and pastoral character;
- 9 Shilton Downs - an area of limestone landscape which forms the divide between the low-lying clay vale to the south and the Windrush Valley and limestone uplands to the north;
- 10 Barnpton Vale - an area of distinctively low-lying but gently rolling landscape lying between the edge of the limestone to the north and the very flat, expansive floodplain landscape which borders the River Thames to the south;
- 11 Eynsham Vale - a low-lying area characterised by large-scale, rolling farmland and including the formal parkland and well-managed wooded farmland of Eynsham Park and other large estates;
- 12 Lower Windrush Valley and Eastern Thames Fringes - an area of distinctively flat, low-lying landscape occupying the 'floodplain' of the River Windrush and the margins of the River Thames, heavily modified by mineral extraction but retaining areas of floodplain pasture;
- 13 Western Thames Fringes - an area occupying the very flat, low-lying landscape of the River Thames floodplain, comparatively free from mineral extraction but dominated by arable farmland.

Landscape Types

Although the character areas have a definable physical context and coherent identity, they are inevitably quite diverse in themselves. Even subtle differences in landform, land-use, landscape structure, the degree of visual enclosure and the influence of built development or specific land uses, can create variations in landscape character and local distinctiveness.

Landscape types are classified into the following groups, reflecting broad distinctions in landscape character:

- Valley Landscapes;
- Limestone Wold landscapes
- Clay Wold landscapes
- Clay vale landscapes;
- Parkland and Estate landscapes;
- Sub-rural landscapes

A number of sub-types reflect degrees of character variation within the main types, as shown in the following table.

West Oxfordshire Landscape Types:

Valley Landscapes

- Minor valleys
- Valley floor farmland
- Open valley-side farmland
- Semi-enclosed valley-side farmland
- Open valleys and ridges
- Semi-enclosed valleys and ridges

Limestone Wolds Landscapes

- Open limestone wolds
- Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)
- Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (smaller-scale)

Clay Wolds Landscapes

- Open clay wolds
- Semi-enclosed clay wolds (large-scale)
- Semi-enclosed clay wolds (smaller-scale)

Clay Vale Farmland

- Floodplain pasture
- Open flat vale farmland
- Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland
- Open rolling vale farmland
- Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland
- Floodplain wetlands

Parkland landscapes

- Parkland
- Estate farmland

Sub-rural landscapes

- Rural fringe land
- Sport landscapes
- Airfields and MOD sites
- Minerals and landfill sites

Valley landscapes

These landscapes comprise the various valleys which dissect and contrast with the rolling Cotswold plateau and dip-slope. They occur at varying scales but all have a distinctive valley form creating intimate, enclosed areas of farmland. The smaller V-shaped valleys are treated as a single landscape unit, while larger valleys with a U-shaped profile are divided into valley-floor and sides. A separate type describes particularly complex and intricate landform of valleys and ridges where it cannot easily be divided into its component parts.

The following valley types have been identified:

- **Minor valleys** - small-scale, enclosed and intimate tributaries of main valley systems, typically with a distinctive V-shaped profile;
- **Valley floor farmland** - the distinctive flat floor of larger valleys, typically occupied by floodplain pasture and with pastoral, riparian character;
- **Valley-side farmland** - distinctive, sloping valley-side landform typical of larger valleys, divided between a predominantly *open* and a *semi-enclosed* character;
- **Valleys and ridges** - complex systems of heavily folded and 'corrugated' minor valleys divided by narrow ridges, spurs and low hills. Areas with an *open* and *semi-enclosed* character are distinguished;

Limestone Wold landscapes

These are the landscapes which occur to the north of the Upper Thames Vale on higher, more pronounced landform underlain by the Oolitic Limestones, Lias Clays and shales of the Cotswold region. They are characterised by a distinctive smoothly rolling landform and a predominantly large-scale rectilinear field pattern bounded by dry-stone walls and hedges. The main differences lie between the structure of hedgerows, trees and woodland and the scale and pattern of enclosure.

The following limestone wolds types have been identified:

- Open limestone wolds farmland - these are the wide open, arable landscapes of the limestone summits and slopes (formerly extensive grassland sheepwalks) with a pattern of large-scale, regular enclosures, thin, well-drained soils and a very sparse network of hedgerows and trees;
- Semi-enclosed limestone wolds farmland - farmed landscapes of the limestone uplands with a more intact structure of hedgerows, trees and woods which interrupt the bare open vistas of the plateau. Two main sub-types are identified: predominantly *large-scale*, arable farmland with straight boundaries typical of later enclosures; and more mixed land use and *smaller-scale* pattern of irregular fields with strong hedgerow trees and woodland, typical of fields cut out from former woodland cover.

Clay wold landscapes

These are landscapes underlain by Lower Lias Clays, glacial deposits and alluvium in the lower lying parts of the Cotswolds. Their softly rolling landform and thicker hedgerows gives them a distinctively 'lowland' feel in comparison to the dry limestone uplands. Distinctions have been drawn between differences in field pattern and hedgerow structure as above:

- Open clay wolds farmland - typically open, arable landscapes with a pattern of large-scale, regular enclosures and sparse network of hedgerows and trees;
- Semi-enclosed clay wolds farmland - farmland with a stronger structure of hedgerows and trees, either with a *large-scale* regular field pattern, mostly under arable, or *smaller-scale* irregular fields with a more mixed pattern of land use.

Clay Vale Farmland

The landscapes of the Upper Thames Clay Vale are characterised by a patchwork of arable fields and pastures, hedgerows, trees and woodland blocks typical of much of lowland England. It is underlain by Oxford Clay, alluvium and river gravels and is distinguished by its subdued and

low-lying relief. Fields are typically bounded by hedges and ditches rather than the walls of the stone country. Differences between types relate mainly to very subtle differences in landform, the dominant land use and the degree of enclosure provided by hedges and trees.

- Floodplain pasture - low-lying, very flat pasture found immediately alongside rivers and watercourses, with a distinctive pattern of tree-lined ditches and a tranquil, pastoral character;
- Flat vale farmland - low-lying, very flat, drained and cultivated farmland within the floodplain, with low horizons and dominance of sky. Distinctions are drawn between those which are very *open* and expansive, and *semi-enclosed* landscapes with a stronger structure of hedges and trees which filter views.
- Rolling vale farmland - low-lying cultivated farmland, similar to above, but distinguished by its slight elevation above the floodplain floor and a discernible but subtly rolling landform. Distinctions are drawn between areas which are very *open* and expansive, and *semi-enclosed* landscapes with a stronger structure of hedges and trees which filter views.
- Floodplain wetlands - parts of the floodplain which are characterised by open water and wetland habitats, typically created from the extraction of sand and gravels.

Parkland landscapes

These are highly distinctive landscapes associated with large country houses and estates where a formal or designed character has been imposed upon the underlying landscape. They include:

- Parkland - comprising the grand designed landscapes of the C18 and other, smaller areas of formal parkland with typical characteristics of parkland trees, avenues, woods, lakes and other formal landscape features;
- Estate farmland - the wider farmed landscape of large country estates, typically with a mature, well-managed and well-wooded character (with copses and coverts

for game), and often with distinctive estate boundaries and avenues of mature trees.

Sub-rural Landscapes

These are landscapes which lie within a rural context but which have developed semi-urban characteristics because of their land uses or proximity to urban influences. Their underlying character is overwhelmed by specific land uses or management regimes to produce distinctive landscape types and include:

- Rural fringe land - somewhat scruffy land (typically small, fields on the edges of settlements) which are not strictly in agricultural use, eg. pony paddocks, small-holdings, allotments, waste ground, disused airfields etc.
- Sports landscapes - such as golf courses and playing fields, which have an intensively managed character, often unrelated to their landscape context;
- Airfields and MOD land - including active airfields and defence sites with a highly distinctive character of flat open landscape, large-scale sheds, security fencing etc.;
- Minerals and landfill sites - where the landscape is in the process of being physically altered through active quarrying, tipping or restoration.

Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of these landscape types across the district as a whole and further details of their distinguishing features are given within the individual character area descriptions. It is important to emphasise, however, that the 'grain' of characterisation within a district-wide assessment is too coarse to map the more localised variations in character that will inevitably occur, especially around the fringes of settlements. It is also important to note that, because of the difficulties in drawing accurate settlement boundaries, some landscape types may include areas of built form which do not register within the landscape type description.

Variations in landscape quality and condition

West Oxfordshire remains a predominantly rural district with some outstanding areas of landscape and a high proportion of very attractive, unspoilt countryside. The high quality of its landscape is confirmed by the designation of a large part of the district within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (a national designation) and by the inclusion of most of the remainder within the Area of High Landscape Value (a local designation).

Given that most of the district's landscape is intrinsically of high quality there are, nonetheless, some subtle variations in condition within it, even within the designated areas. These primarily result from a weakening of landscape structure through intensive farming practices, such as the removal of traditional dry-stone walls and the creation of bare, arable 'prairies'. While these landscapes can still be impressive, they lack the ecological or visual diversity which characterises some of the more richly-patterned landscapes. Lack of management, and some specific land uses like quarrying, can also affect landscape and ecological condition and be destructive to 'natural' landscape elements.

Different enhancement strategies are required to deal with these conditions, as defined on page 3. Their distribution across the district is illustrated in Figure 6 and summarised below. However, it must be stressed that the differences are subtle and even those landscapes within the 'reconstruct' category are not seriously degraded by wider standards.

Conserve

Landscapes which fall into the conserve category are those which have a particularly strong, unspoilt character, a diverse and intact landscape structure, high aesthetic appeal and a range of valued habitats and archaeological resources. These primarily comprise:

- the outstanding landscapes of the eighteenth century parks and other scenically attractive areas of parkland and estate landscape,
- the unspoilt, pastoral and tranquil floodplain and valley landscapes of the River Thames,

- Windrush, Evenlode and Glyme and their minor tributaries;
- the scenically diverse, richly-patterned and textured landscapes of the northern and ironstone valleys and ridges;
- some of the other particularly attractive well-wooded and enclosed landscapes with remnant ancient woodland on the limestone and in the vale, such as around Lew and above Swinbrook.

Strengthen

Landscapes within the 'strengthen' category represent rural, attractive landscapes but which are not quite so special or distinctive as those listed above. They would benefit from some enhancement to strengthen weakened landscape structure and reinforce local distinctiveness.

Those within the Strengthen 'a' category are those which require only modest enhancement and primarily comprise:

- those parts of the limestone and clay wolds which have retained a strong structure of hedgerows and trees and a mixed pattern of fields and land uses (eg. the more 'ancient', assarted landscape to the south of Wychwood Forest);
- those parts of the clay vale which have retained a strong structure of hedgerows and trees and where variations in landform and land use create some visual diversity (eg. to the south of Eynsham Park);
- areas of cultivated farmland within the flat river corridors which lack the pastoral qualities of the floodplain farmland but which have retained a good structure of hedgerows and trees.

Those landscapes within the Strengthen 'b' category tend to be those which have a particularly denuded character. While their open character may be impressive, allowing extensive views, for example, across the Cotswold plateau, their ecological value is diminished and they lack the variety and 'health' of some of the more richly-patterned landscapes. They include:

- the intensively farmed and highly mechanised arable 'prairie' landscapes of the open limestone wold on the Cotswold plateau;

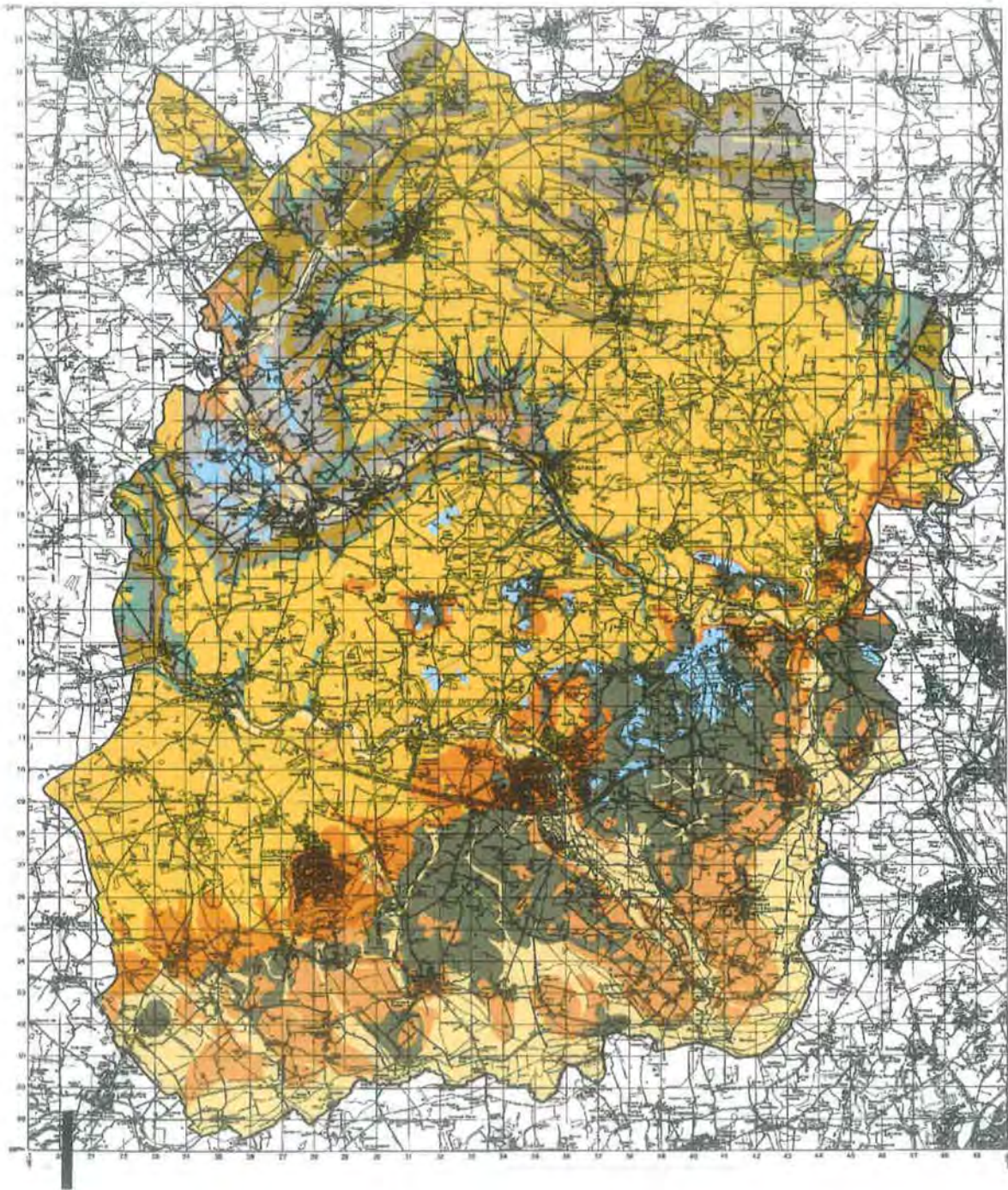
- the low-lying and windswept open arable farmland of the Clay Vale, typically associated with deposits of terrace gravels.

Reconstruct

Only a few pockets of landscape fall within the reconstruct category. These represent landscapes which have undergone major change in character, such as gravel pits and limestone quarries and other fringe land uses that, in visual terms, do not fit comfortably within the rural landscape. They include:

- active and disused airfields at Brize Norton, Enstone and near Bradwell Grove which intrude upon the rural scene or have a derelict and somewhat degraded character;
- pockets of land on the fringes of the main settlements which are affected by unsightly land uses and built form;
- mineral extraction sites on the limestone wolds and, particularly, within the clay vale, where the natural landscape has been disrupted or destroyed and plant, machinery, vehicles, road improvements etc. detract from local landscape quality.


Geology



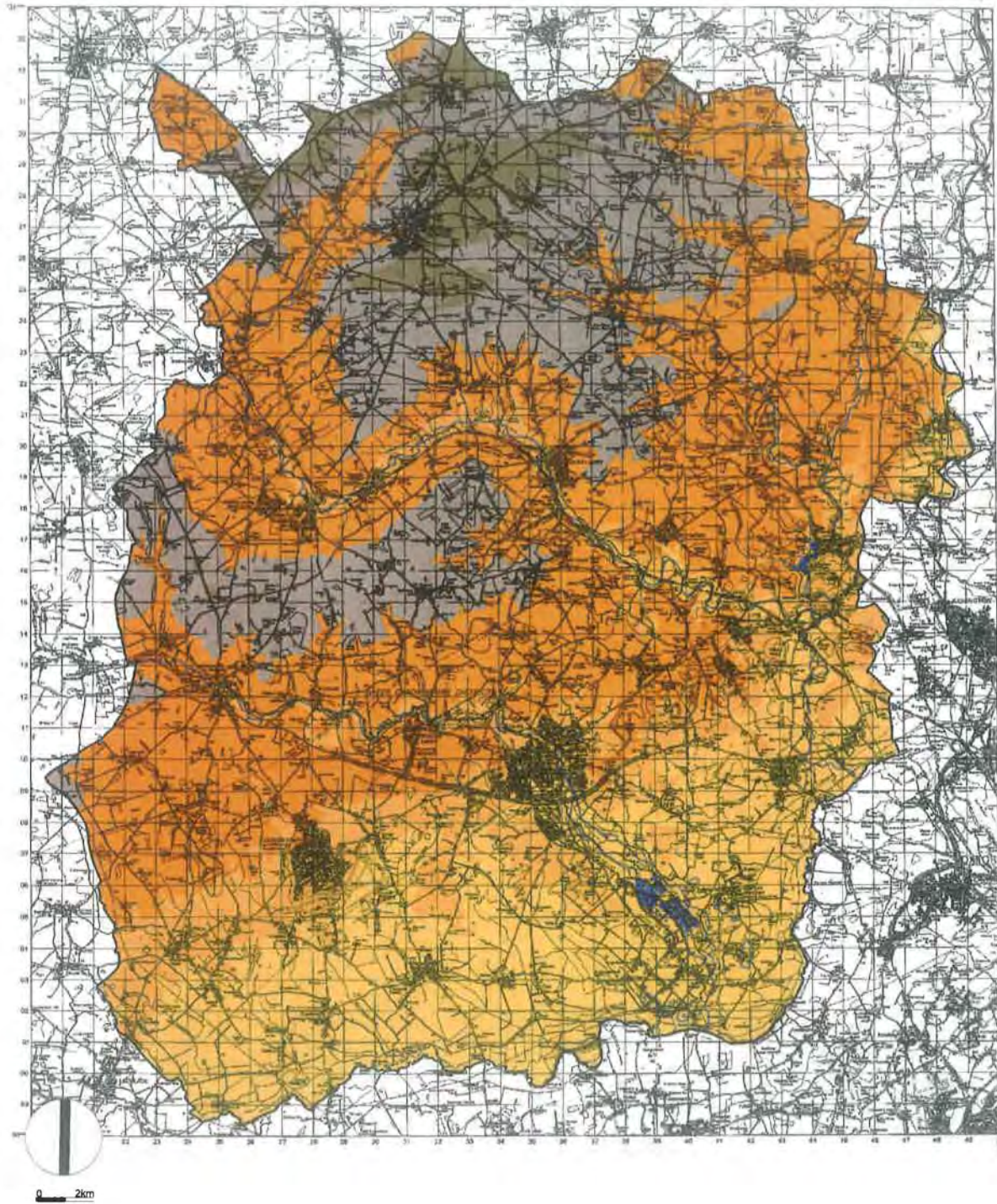
0 2km

Copyright © Crown Copyright and the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. All rights reserved. Aerial photography is the property of the Crown. Ordnance Survey is the registered trademark of Ordnance Survey Limited.

Key







Solid geology		Drift geology			
	Oxford Clay		Upper Lias		Alluvium
	Cornbrash		Middle Lias		River Gravels
	Great Oolite		Lower Lias		Glacial Deposit
	Inferior Oolite				

Topography

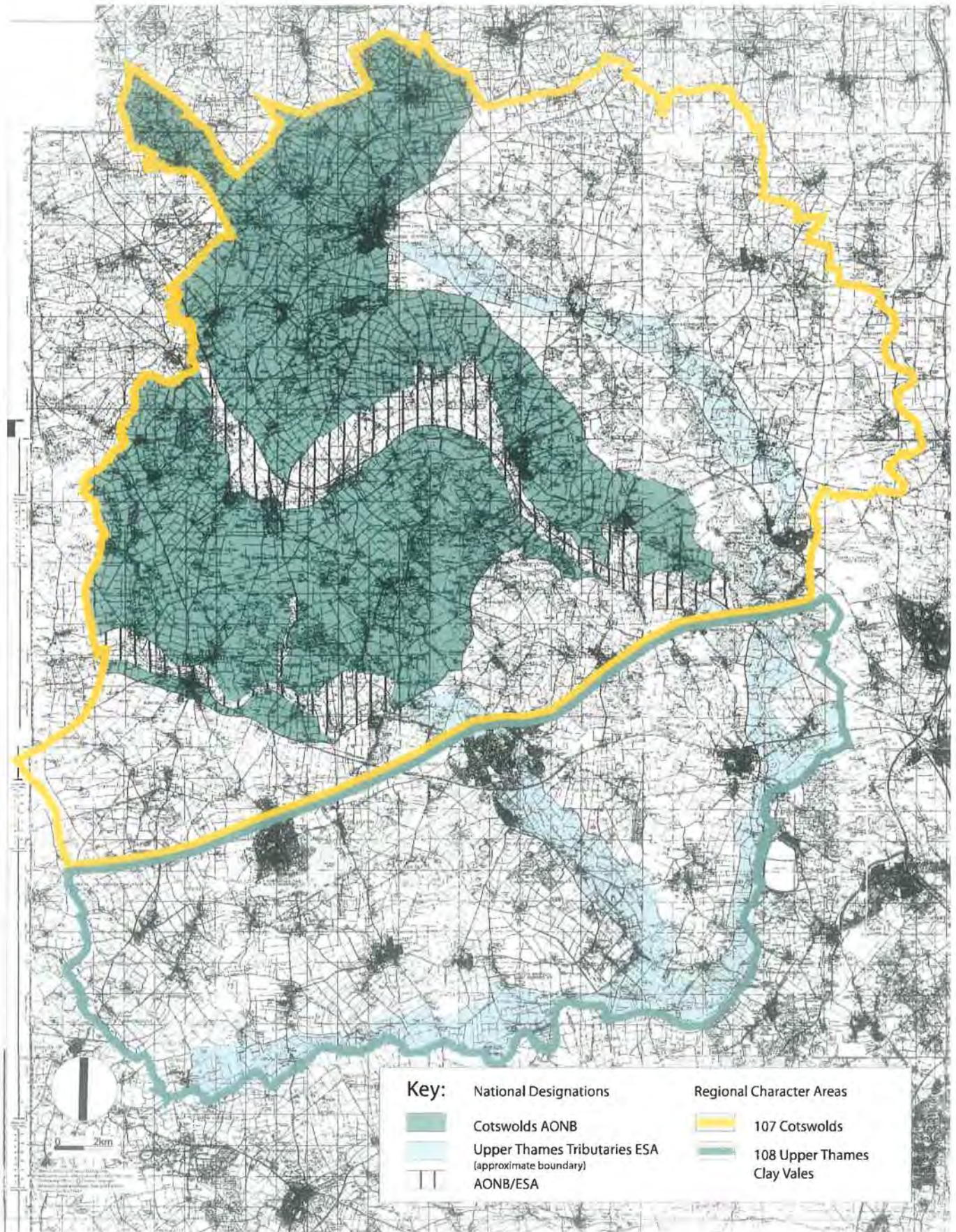


Based on the Ordnance Survey map with permission of the Land Use Institute, National Geographic, and the Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved.

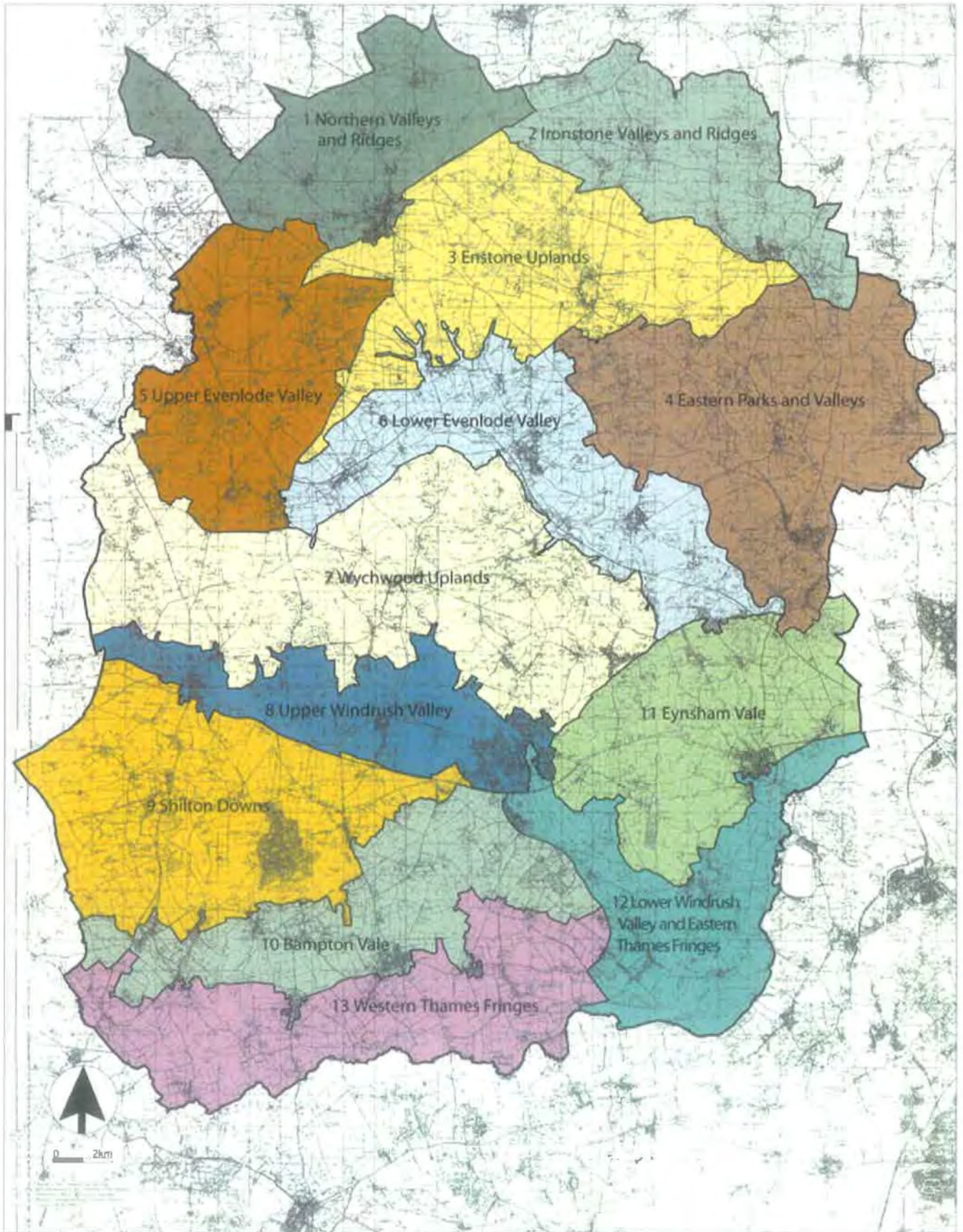
Key

	60-80m		200-250m
	80-100m		Rivers and Open Water
	100-150m		
	150-200m		

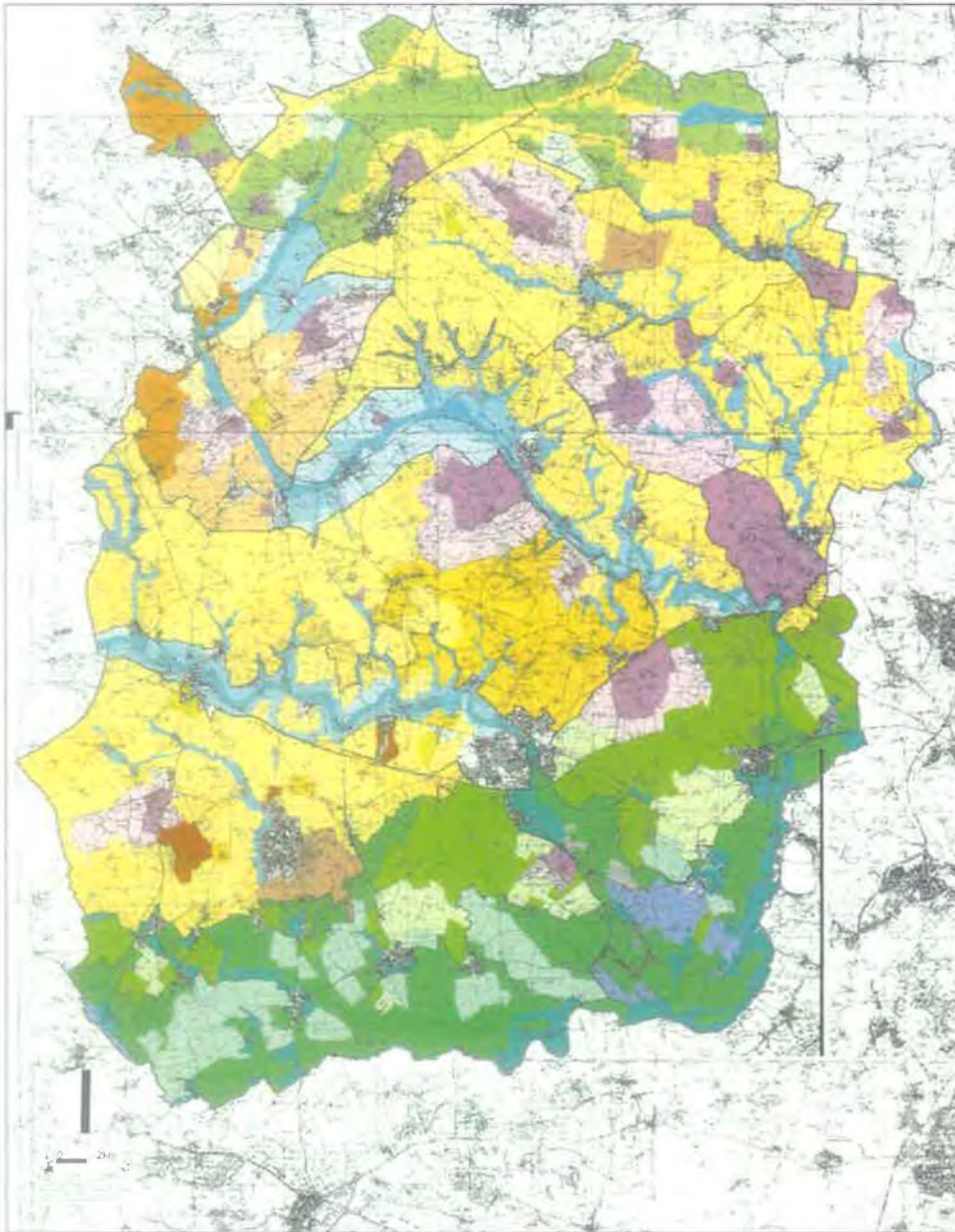
National/Regional Landscape Context



Character Areas

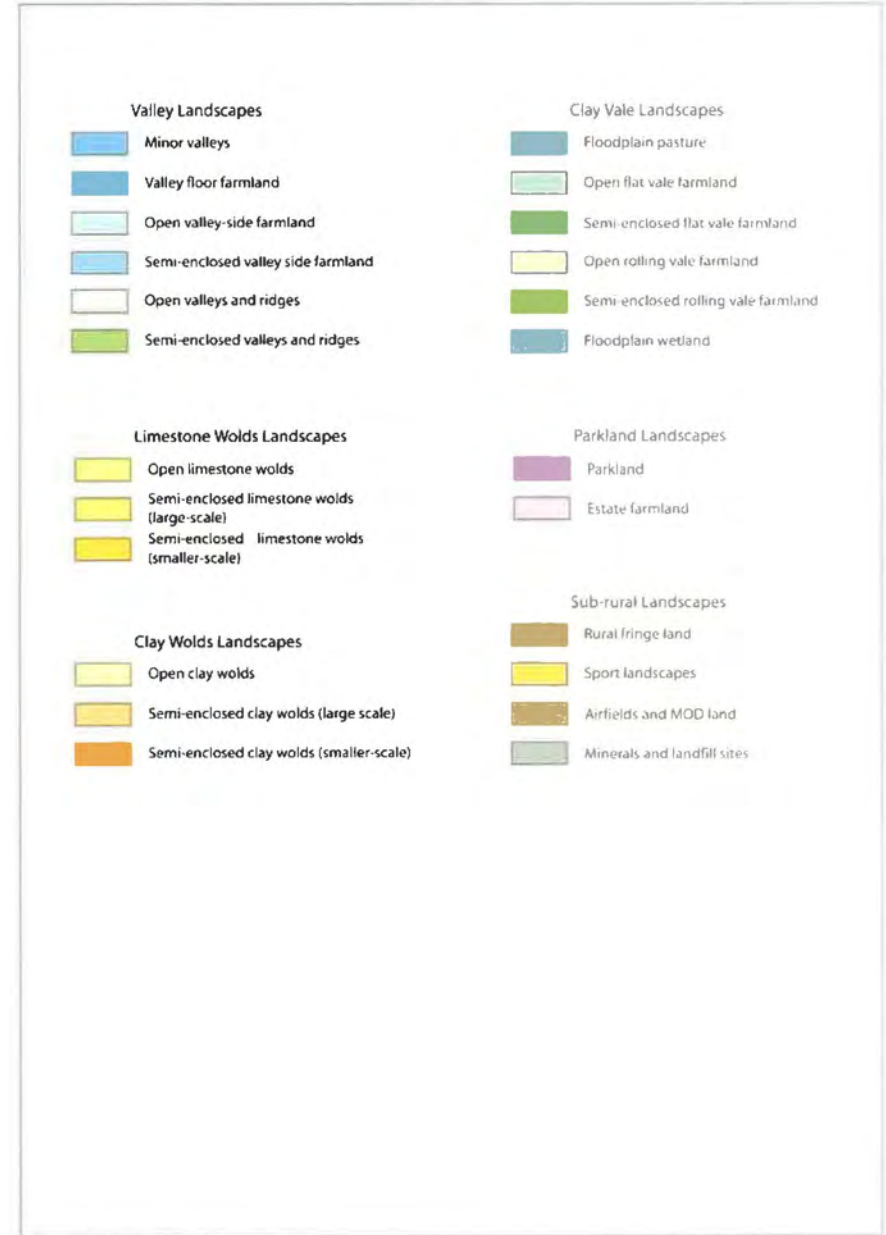


Landscape Types

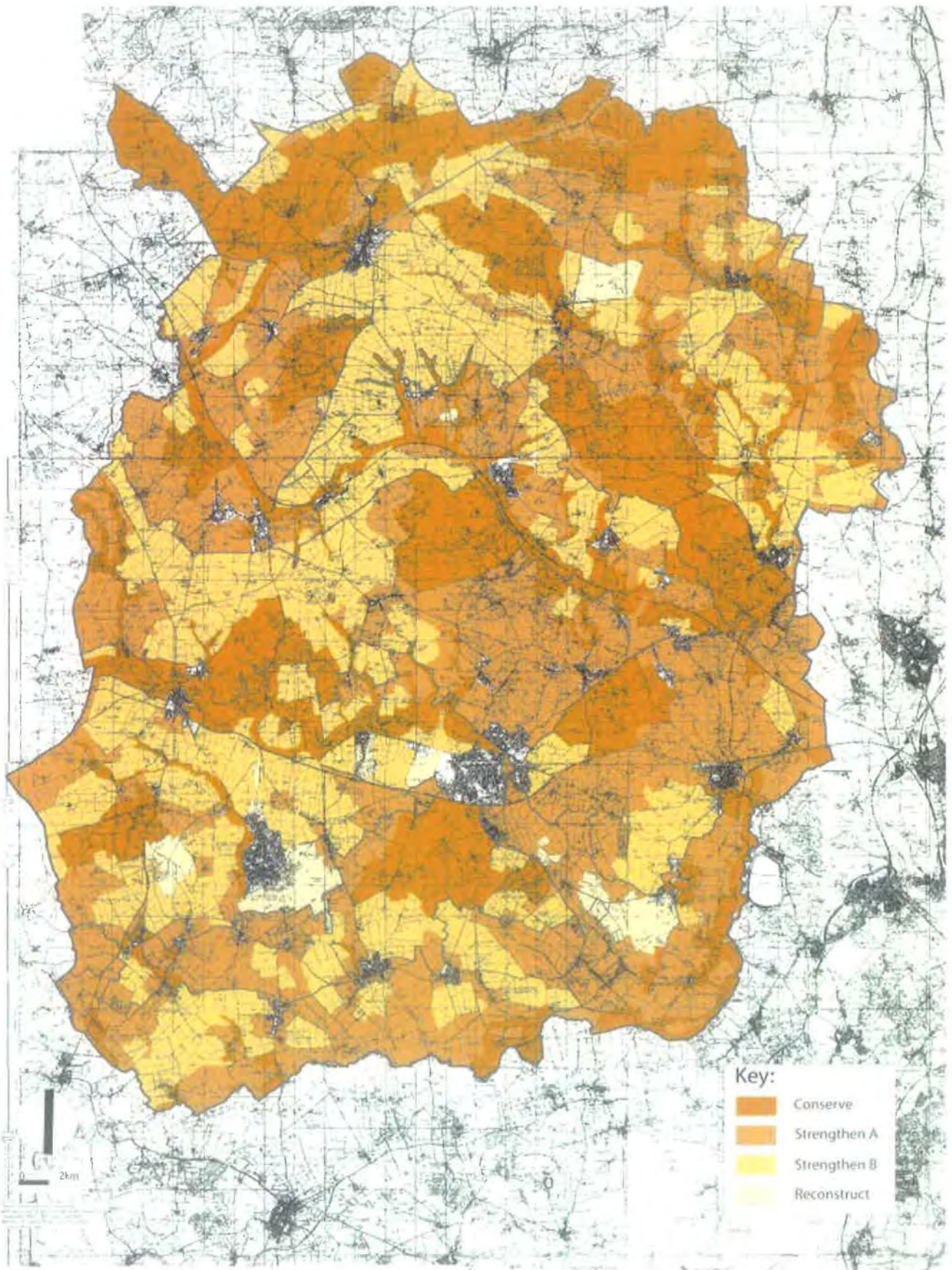


▲ For key to Landscape Types, see fold-out flap on reverse ▲

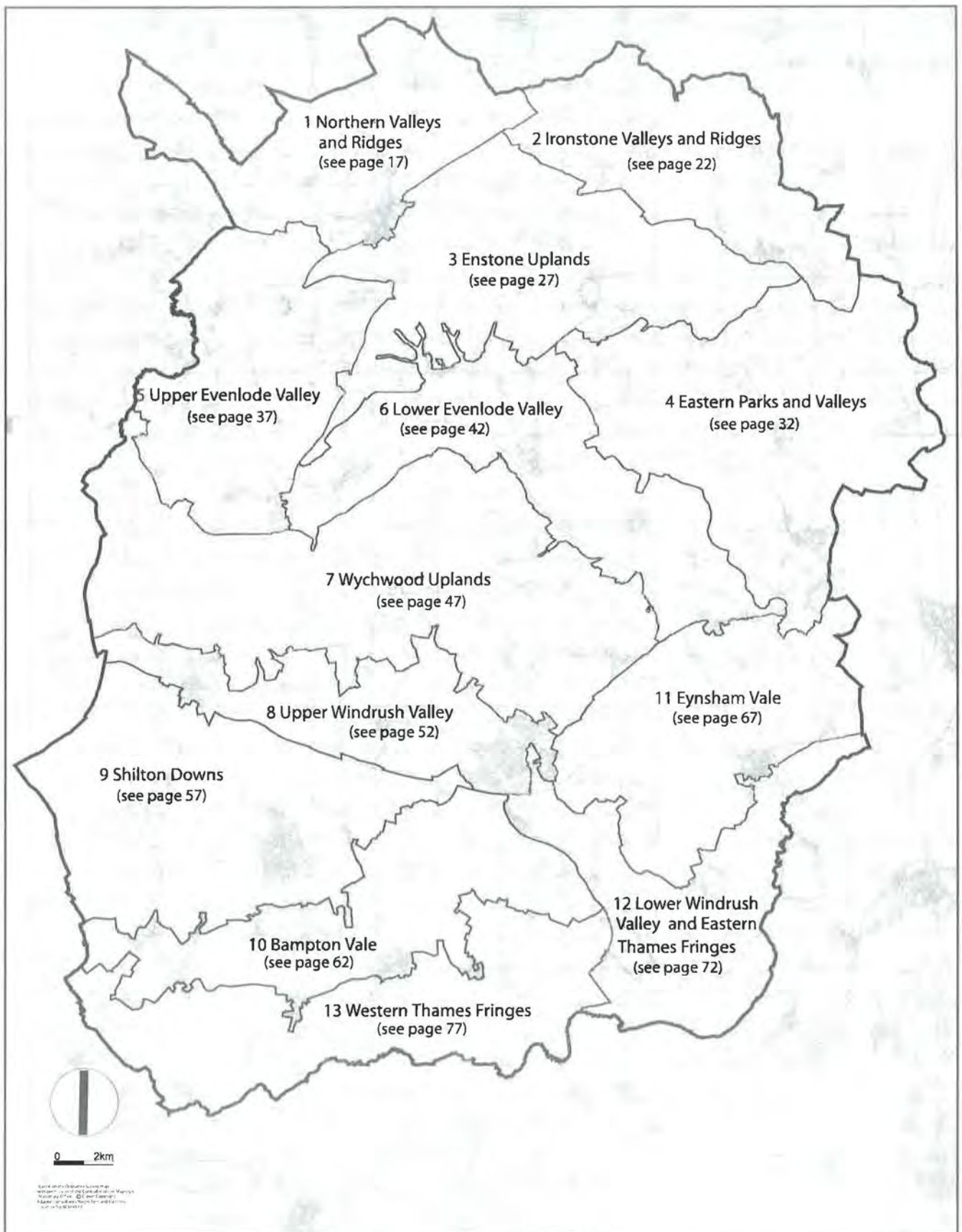
Landscape Types Master Key



Landscape Enhancement Strategy



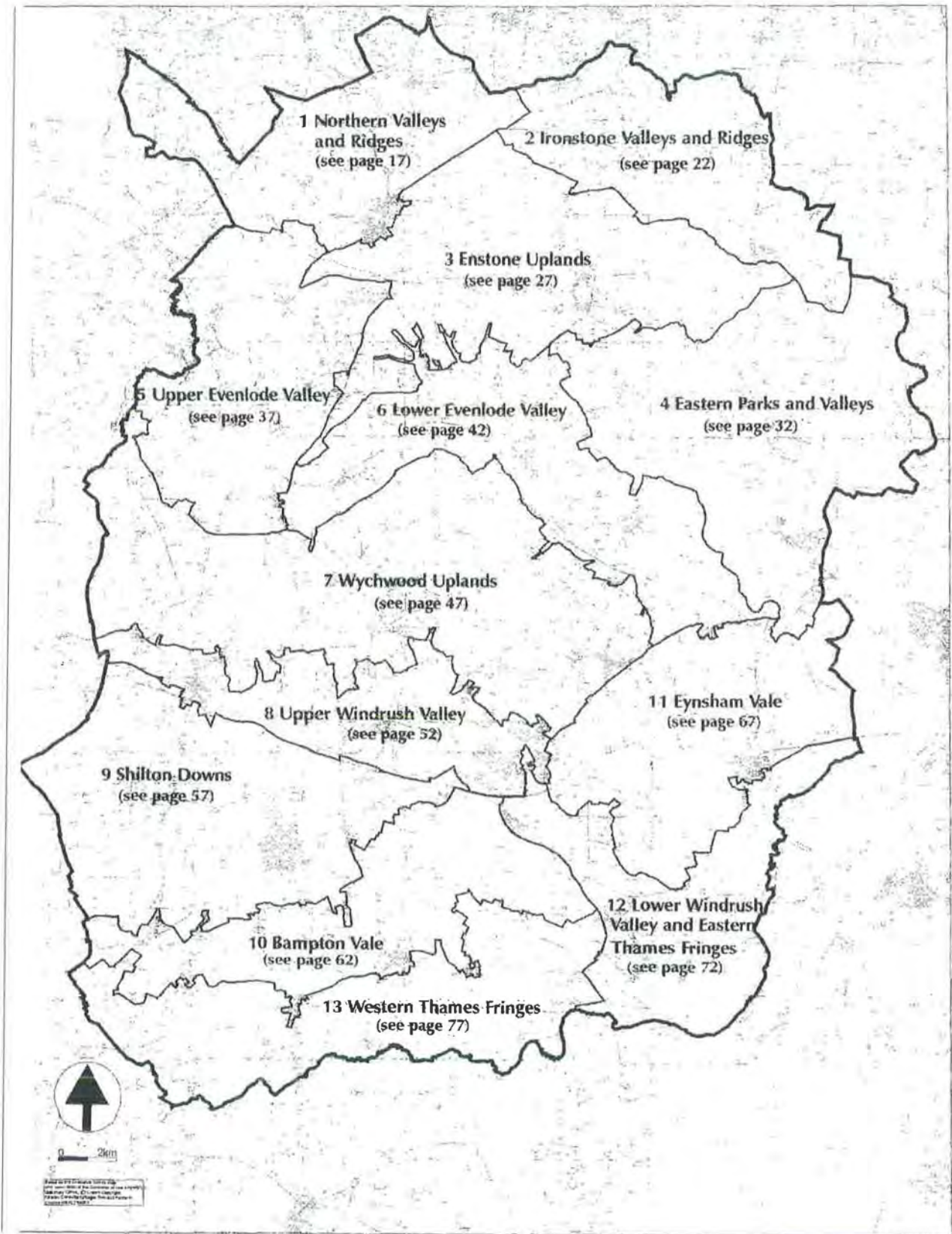
Character Areas: Key Map



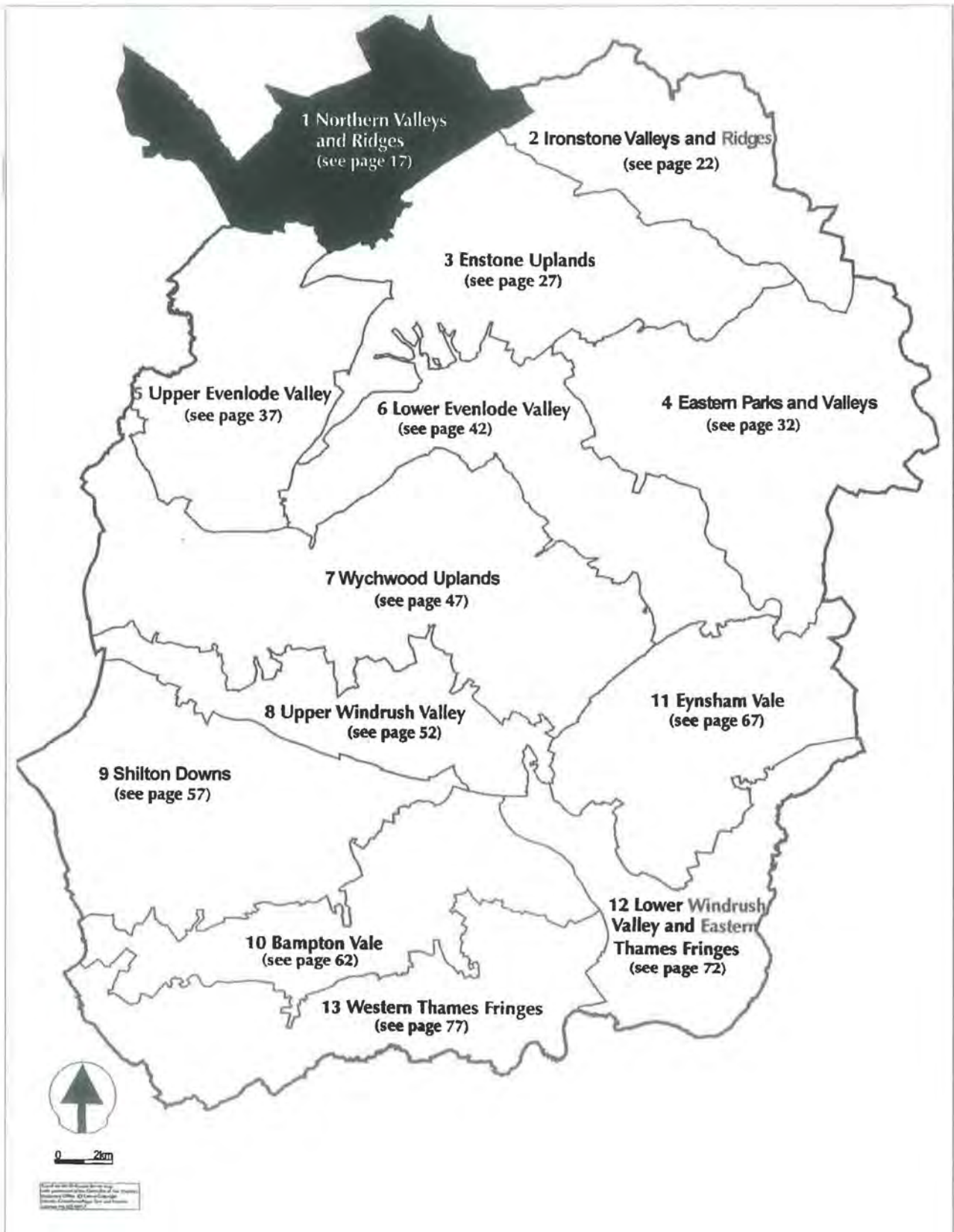
PART TWO

THE CHARACTER AREAS

CHARACTER AREAS: KEY MAP



1 NORTHERN VALLEYS AND RIDGES



1: NORTHERN VALLEYS AND RIDGES

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

A topographically diverse area of complex geology to the north of Chipping Norton, where folding and faulting have created a distinctive, 'corrugated' landscape of valleys and ridges. Landform has influenced land use, with a typical pattern of smaller-scale fields on steeper slopes and valley bottoms and larger-scale fields, mostly under arable, on gentler, upper slopes. The area is characterised by a generally strong landscape structure of thick hedgerows, hedgerow trees and scattered belts of woodland.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

To the north of Chipping Norton, the limestone plateau is broken up by a series of complex faults which have exposed the underlying clays and siltstones of the Upper and Middle Lias series. These softer rocks have been eroded by numerous streams and rivers to form a complex network of valleys separated by two main limestone ridges, running SW to NE, with many minor spurs and pockets of higher ground in between. This complex topography creates great variety in the landscape and a sense of intimacy and enclosure within the valley bottoms. In the far north-western corner of the district, the land falls sharply into the broad low-lying clay wold landscape of the Vale of Moreton.

LANDCOVER

Underlying geology and relief both influence patterns of vegetation and land use. The free-draining soils and level ground of the limestone ridges favour intensive arable cultivation with sparse hedgerow and tree cover. In contrast, the steeper slopes and heavier clay soils of the valleys are less easily worked and have a more mixed and intimate pattern of pasture and arable farmland. They also support a denser network of thick hedgerows and trees, with a higher frequency of woodland, some of which is of ancient origin.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

The distinctive character of this area is defined by its visual and physical diversity. The complex network of valleys and ridges and the intricate patchwork of fields, hedges and woodland combine to create great visual diversity and a rich pattern of landscape that is difficult to break down into individual components. However, a number of local landscape types have been identified, the key characteristics of which are summarised below.

Valley landscapes

Valley floor farmland

- distinctive flat valley floor;
- predominantly permanent pasture but with pockets of cultivated land;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- prone to winter flooding;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;
- intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character;
- moderate to low intervisibility, with some open views into the valley from above and some filtered longer views along the valley floor.

Open valleys and ridges

- distinctively complex and 'wrinkled' topography of interconnected, steep-sided valleys, spurs and ridges;
- underlain by heavily folded and faulted mixed geology at junction of Oolitic Limestone and Lias Clays;
- large-scale patchwork of fields, mainly under arable cultivation, typically occupying more gentle valley sides and elevated ground;
- regular field boundaries with weak structure of hedgerows and trees;
- open, exposed character;
- high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed valleys and ridges

- distinctively complex and 'wrinkled' topography of interconnected, steep-sided valleys, spurs and ridges;
- underlain by heavily folded and faulted mixed geology at junction of Oolitic Limestone, Ironstone and Lias Clays;
- mixed pattern of land use with pasture dominating steeper slopes;
- diverse field pattern, ranging from medium to large-sized fields with straight boundaries on more gentle slopes, to smaller-scale fields with irregular field boundaries on steeper slopes, valley bottoms and around settlements;
- strong landscape structure of hedges, trees and woodland blocks;
- an intimate and enclosed patchwork landscape formed by complex landform, mixed land use and strong landscape structure;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Limestone wolds landscapes

Open limestone wolds

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- typically large or very large fields, with rectilinear pattern of dry-stone walls (typical of later enclosures and often in poor condition) and weak hedgerows, with frequent gaps and very few trees;
- productive farmland predominantly under intensive arable cultivation;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- very open and exposed character;
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky and sweeping views across surrounding areas;
- high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- land use dominated by intensive arable cultivation with only occasional pasture;
- generally large-scale fields with rectilinear boundaries formed by dry-stone walls and low hawthorn hedges with occasional trees, typical of later enclosures;

- some visual containment provided by large blocks and belts of woodland creating a semi-enclosed character;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- ash, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky;
- moderate intervisibility.

Clay wolds landscapes

Semi-enclosed clay wolds (smaller-scale)

- softly rolling farmland underlain by Lower Lias Clays and glacial deposits;
- mixed land use and field pattern, with a patchwork of large arable fields and more frequent pasture and smaller-scale fields with irregular, sinuous boundaries;
- semi-enclosed character with views contained by strong hedgerow structure with frequent mature hedgerow trees and blocks or belts of woodland;
- oak dominant in hedgerows and woods;
- diverse and pastoral character;
- moderate intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Parkland

- formal, designed landscape and grounds surrounding large country houses;
- distinctive formal landscape features, including avenues, free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features;
- planting and landscape character generally unrelated to surrounding areas;
- distinctively rural, picturesque and pastoral character;
- mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The market town of Chipping Norton is the principal settlement within this area, with a population of approaching 5,000 making it the third largest town in the district. Otherwise, however, this area is sparsely settled with only a couple of villages of any size (eg. Great Rollright and Salford), the remainder comprising small villages, hamlets and scattered farms.

Settlement pattern is closely related to landform with settlements principally nestling along the sheltered valley sides or deep in the valley bottoms, avoiding the exposed ridge tops. Chipping Norton is an exception to this rule, however, occupying a prominent hill-top position where the Oolitic limestone plateau falls away north-westwards into the valley landscape of the Lias clays. Lying astride the 185m contour, it is one of the highest settlements of its size in southern England.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

The most dominant landscape influence is the consistent use of local Oolitic limestone as a building material in almost all of the area's settlements. The only exception is at Chastleton where traces of the warm orange ironstone become evident in some of the buildings, moving off the limestone ridge into the Lias Clays of the Vale of Moreton. Here, the typical stone slates of buildings in the limestone settlements are also sometimes replaced by thatch.

Landform has had a bearing upon settlement form, particularly at Chipping Norton where the town has developed a distinctively linear form along the ridgeline, focused on a fine, elongated market-place. Some of the other minor settlements have a typically 'strung-out' form along a minor road, such as Chastleton and Over Norton.

Other notable physical influences include the presence of many rivers and streams within the area which encouraged the development of a thriving wool and weaving industry at Chipping Norton, accounting for the prosperity of the town and its many fine stone buildings. The balustraded Victorian tweed-mill of Bliss Mill, located within a minor valley to the west of the

town, forms an impressive reminder of this history.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- the distinctive chimney and buildings of Bliss Mill set within an attractive valley to the west of Chipping Norton;
- forts, stone circles and other important archaeological sites located along the limestone ridge between Chastleton Hill and Great Rollright;
- attractive stone buildings within Conservation Areas and in open countryside, including manor houses, churches and farm buildings.

1: NORTHERN VALLEYS AND RIDGES

LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

Most of this character area lies within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, confirming its outstanding quality and national significance. The remainder of the area lies within the locally designated Area of High Landscape Value.

The character area also includes a number of other features of conservation value which contribute to its overall significance, including:

- Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Chastleton and Cornwell;
- Conservation Areas at Chastleton, Cornwell, Over Norton and Chipping Norton;
- a few scattered remnants of Ancient Semi-natural Woodland;
- a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments along the main limestone ridges.

Overall, the Northern Valleys and Ridges and have a very attractive and unspoilt, rural character with few detracting influences. Most localised variations in quality and condition are related to the effects of agricultural land management practice. Different strategies for management and enhancement are shown in Figure 6.

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of grassland to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- the influence of built development around the fringes of Chipping Norton;
- 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and roads.

GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLDS LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- retain and replant hedgerows and introduce more hedgerow trees, using native species typical of the limestone (eg. ash, field maple etc.);
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland;
- introduce a strong landscape edge to Chipping Norton to soften the impact of existing/new development;
- where possible, retain areas of existing permanent pasture, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture and discourage further field enlargement;
- encourage less intensive farming practices, the introduction of 'natural' vegetation cover in field headlands and margins, improve appearance and wildlife value of 'set-aside' land;
- repair and maintain traditional stone buildings in the landscape.

Development sensitivities

- open limestone wold landscapes on elevated ridgelines are very visually exposed and particularly sensitive to development;
- elevated, semi-enclosed limestone wolds landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely and sensitively integrated with existing buildings or within a strong landscape structure;
- these elevated landscapes are particularly sensitive to tall or prominent structures, such as communications masts, and large buildings.

GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of valley pasture and meadows and introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within valley floor, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- within more denuded valley and ridge landscapes, encourage less intensive farming practices and plant new hedgerows, trees and blocks of native broadleaved woodland to restore typical patchwork landscape;
- maintain and strengthen this patchwork within semi-enclosed valleys and ridges landscape, particularly around the fringes of settlements (eg. Chipping Norton);
- rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- in all landscapes, retain and replant hedgerows and introduce more hedgerow trees;
- repair and maintain traditional stone buildings in the landscape.

Development sensitivities

- unspoilt valley floor farmland and the minor valleys are of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- open valley-sides and ridges are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed;
- enclosed valley-sides are also highly visible but may offer limited opportunities to absorb small-scale development within a strong structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings;
- all valley landscape types would be particularly sensitive to the introduction of tall or large-scale structures.

GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- maintain, and where necessary, restore historic parkland landscapes at Chastleton and Cornwell, including distinctive elements such as parkland trees, avenues, woods, copses, boundary walls and structures;

- retain mature boundary trees and roadside avenues and replant as necessary;
- manage and extend existing areas of broadleaved woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce enclosed, wooded character;
- retain areas of permanent pasture and resist conversion to arable.

Development sensitivities

- historic parkland landscapes are of exceptional landscape value and extremely sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust.

GUIDELINES FOR CLAY WOLDS LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and replant hedgerows and hedgerow trees, with oak as the dominant species;
- where possible, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture;
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a more mixed pattern of woodland and farmland.

Development sensitivities

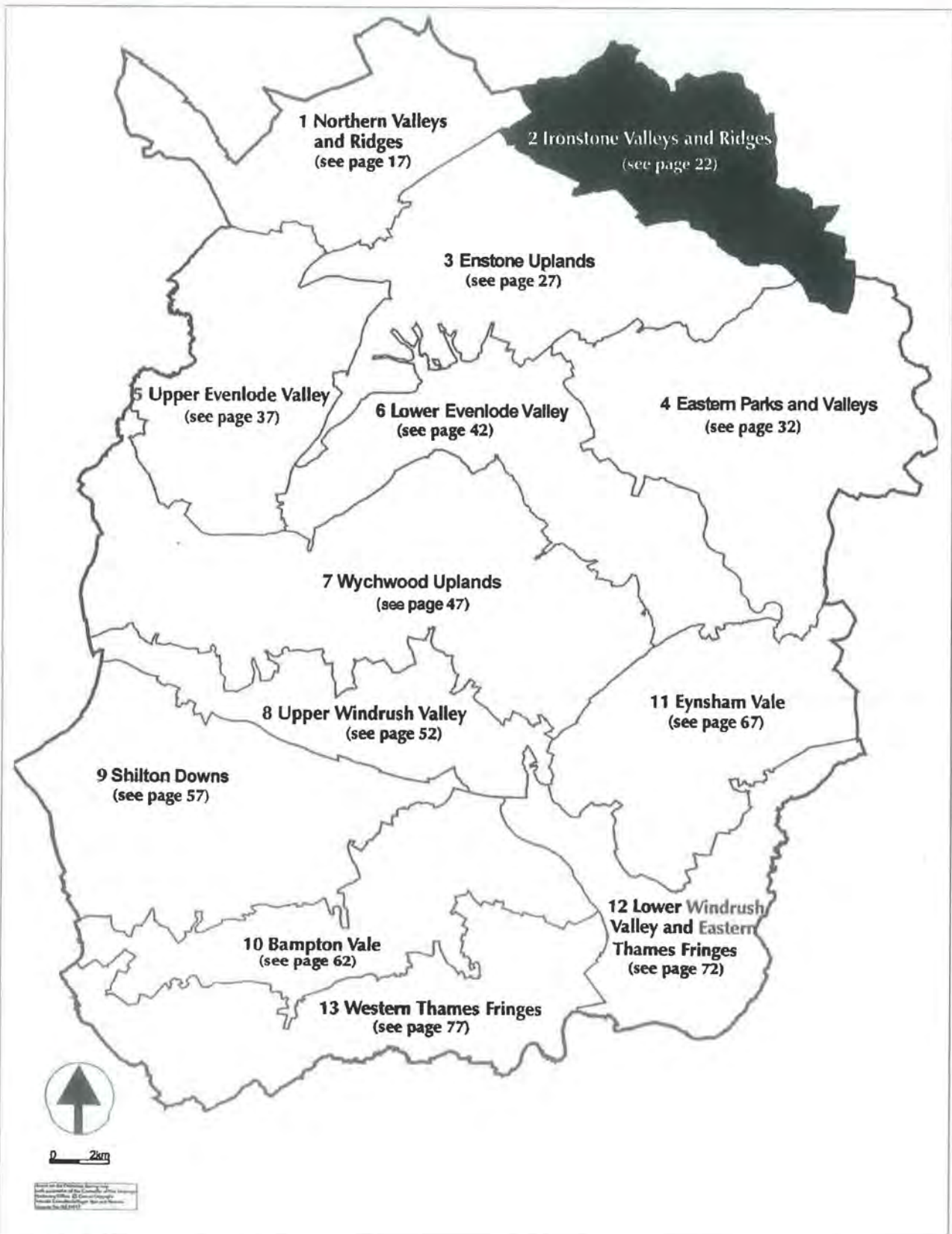
- open clay wold landscapes are very visually exposed and particularly sensitive to development;
- large-scale, semi-enclosed clay wold landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely integrated with existing buildings or within a strong landscape structure.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

Chipping Norton

2 IRONSTONE VALLEYS AND RIDGES



2: IRONSTONE VALLEYS AND RIDGES LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

This area shares the topographic complexity and patchwork landscape pattern of the Northern Valleys and Ridges area but is distinguished from it by the presence of iron rich clay soils and the use of Ironstone as a building material, lending a distinctive red colour to soils and warm orange to buildings. Parklands and estate villages (eg. at Great Tew, Sandford St Martin and Steeple Barton) are also characteristic of this area and contribute to its well-treed character.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

The southern boundary of this area roughly follows the line of the Sandford Fault, which marks the transition between the Great Oolitic Limestone to the south and the iron-bearing rocks and clays of the Inferior Oolite and Lias. This geological boundary can be detected in the different building materials to the north and south of the line, with the warm orange-coloured ironstone of Great Tew, for example, contrasting with the pale yellow coloured limestone of buildings further south.

Folding, faulting and erosion of the softer Lias beds has produced a distinctively complex pattern of valleys and ridges, dominated by the steep-sided east-west valleys which contain tributaries of the River Cherwell. This complex topography creates great variety in the landscape and a sense of intimacy and enclosure within the valley bottoms, such as at Swerford.

LANDCOVER

Underlying geology and relief both influence patterns of vegetation and land use. The free-draining soils and level ground of the limestone and ironstone ridges favour intensive arable cultivation with sparse hedgerow and tree cover. **In contrast, the steeper slopes and heavier clay soils of the valleys are less easily worked and have a more mixed and intimate pattern of pasture and arable farmland.** They also support a denser network of thick hedgerows and trees, with a higher frequency of woodland, some of which is of ancient origin. Large blocks of

woodland, avenues and mature trees are associated with the various parks and estates that are a feature of the area.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

Like the Northern Valleys and Ridges, the character of this area is defined by its overall diversity, with the complex landform and the intricate patchwork of fields, hedges and woodland combining to create a rich pattern of landscape. The ironstone geology and well-treed character are particularly distinctive and unifying elements in the landscape. Within the area, a number of different local landscape types have been identified, the key characteristics of which are summarised below.

Valley landscapes

Minor valleys

- small-scale tributary valleys which dissect plateaux and valley-sides and connect with major valleys;
- pronounced v-shaped profile with steep sides and absence of flat valley floor;
- watercourse often inconspicuous or absent (eg. dry or winterbourne valleys on limestone);
- shallower profile at upper end with few trees or hedges and a more open character;
- steeper valley profile at lower end of valley, with sides typically occupied by scrub, trees and occasionally woods;
- enclosed, intimate character created by valley form and vegetation cover;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Valley floor farmland

- distinctive flat valley floor;
- predominantly permanent pasture but with **pockets of cultivated land**;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- prone to winter flooding;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;

- intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character;
- moderate to low intervisibility, with some open views into the valley from above and some filtered longer views along the valley floor.

Open valleys and ridges

- distinctively complex and 'wrinkled' topography of interconnected, steep-sided valleys, spurs and ridges;
- underlain by heavily folded and faulted mixed geology at junction of Oolitic limestone, Ironstone and Lias Clays;
- large-scale patchwork of fields, mainly under arable cultivation, typically occupying more gentle valley sides and elevated ground;
- regular field boundaries with weak structure of hedgerows and trees;
- open, exposed character;
- high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed valleys and ridges

- distinctively complex and 'wrinkled' topography of interconnected, steep-sided valleys, spurs and ridges;
- underlain by heavily folded and faulted mixed geology at junction of Oolitic Limestone, ironstone and Lias Clays;
- mixed pattern of land use with pasture dominating steeper slopes;
- diverse field pattern, ranging from medium to large-sized fields with straight boundaries on more gentle slopes, to smaller-scale fields with irregular field boundaries on steeper slopes, valley bottoms and around settlements;
- strong landscape structure of hedges, trees and woodland blocks;
- an intimate and enclosed patchwork landscape formed by complex landform, mixed land use and strong landscape structure;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Limestone wolds landscapes

Open limestone wolds

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- typically large or very large fields, with rectilinear pattern of dry-stone walls (typical of later enclosures and often in poor condition) and weak hedgerows, with frequent gaps and very few trees;

- productive farmland predominantly under intensive arable cultivation;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- very open and exposed character;
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky and sweeping views across surrounding areas;
- high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- land use dominated by intensive arable cultivation with only occasional pasture;
- generally large-scale fields with rectilinear boundaries formed by dry-stone walls and low hawthorn hedges with occasional trees, typical of later enclosures;
- some visual containment provided by large blocks and belts of woodland creating a semi-enclosed character;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- ash, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky;
- moderate intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Parkland

- formal, designed landscape and grounds surrounding large country houses;
- distinctive formal landscape features, including avenues, free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features;
- planting and landscape character generally unrelated to surrounding areas;
- distinctively rural, picturesque and pastoral character;
- mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

Estate farmland

- well-managed farmland associated with large country estates, often lying beyond formal parkland boundaries;
- distinctively well-treed character, with extensive mature woodland blocks, belts and copses (often managed for game), lines of mature trees (predominantly oak) within hedgerows, along estate boundaries and roads, estate fencing (railings and post and rail) and other estate features or buildings;
- large-scale pattern of fields, typically bounded by belts of woodland or lines of mature trees;
- land use predominantly arable but with some areas of permanent pasture;
- enclosed, secluded and private character;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Settlement pattern within this area is also sparse, with only one larger settlement at the Bartons (comprising Middle Barton and the adjoining Westcott Barton) and a few smaller villages and hamlets, notably the Tews, Swerford, Over Worton and Sandford St Martin.

These are typically tucked away along the sides or bottoms of the numerous valleys that characterise the area, with only a few isolated farms occupying the higher, more exposed ground.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

The most distinctive feature of the settlements in this area is the consistent use of the warm orange-coloured ironstone as the predominant building material, plus the more frequent use of thatch for roofing. This creates a strong sense of harmony and unity that is best exemplified at the estate village of Great Tew, with its highly attractive and unspoilt rows of stone estate cottages and houses.

Great Tew, together with Swerford and Sandford St Martin, are examples of 'closed' villages, strictly controlled by one landowner. Their unity, compactness and ordered buildings along a single street contrast with the 'open' village of Middle Barton, a sprawling, unplanned settlement which follows the valley-side east of the old settlement of Westcott Barton, with a mixture of building styles and materials.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- attractive ironstone buildings, particularly those within the estate villages (eg. Great Tew, Swerford and Sandford St Martin).

2: IRONSTONE VALLEYS AND RIDGES LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

This character area is not covered by any statutory landscape designations. However, it lies within an Area of High Landscape Value and includes a number of features of conservation significance which contribute to its overall value, including:

- Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Swerford Manor and Sandford St. Martin;
- Conservation Areas at Swerford, Great Tew, Ledwell, Sandford St Martin and the Bartons;
- three Sites of Special Scientific Interest and a few scattered remnants of Ancient Semi-natural Woodland;
- a small number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments along the main limestone ridges.

Overall, the Ironstone Valleys and Ridges and have a very attractive and unspoilt, rural character with few detracting influences. Most localised variations in quality and condition are related to the effects of agricultural land management practice. Different strategies for management and enhancement are shown in Figure 6.

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of grassland to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- expansion and 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and roads;
- poor maintenance of some traditional stone buildings and historic parkland landscapes.

GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLD LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- retain and replant hedgerows and introduce more hedgerow trees, using native species typical of the limestone (eg. ash, field maple etc.);
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland;
- where possible, retain areas of existing permanent pasture, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture and discourage further field enlargement;
- encourage less intensive farming practices, the introduction of 'natural' vegetation cover in field headlands and margins, improve appearance and wildlife value of 'set-aside' land;
- repair and maintain traditional stone buildings in the landscape.

Development sensitivities

- open limestone wold landscapes on elevated ridgelines are very visually exposed and particularly sensitive to development;
- elevated, semi-enclosed limestone wolds landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely and sensitively integrated with existing buildings or within a strong landscape structure;
- these elevated landscapes are particularly sensitive to tall or prominent structures, such as communications masts, and large buildings.

GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of valley pasture and meadows and introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within valley floor, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- within more denuded valley and ridge landscapes, encourage less intensive farming practices and plant new hedgerows, trees and blocks of native broadleaved woodland to restore typical patchwork landscape;
- maintain and strengthen this patchwork within semi-enclosed valleys and ridges landscape;
- rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- in all valley landscapes, retain and replant hedgerows and introduce more hedgerow trees;
- repair and maintain traditional stone buildings in the landscape.

Development sensitivities

- unspoilt valley floor farmland and the minor valleys are of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- open valley-sides and ridges are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed;
- enclosed valley-sides are also highly visible but may offer limited opportunities to absorb small-scale development within a strong structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings;
- all valley landscape types would be particularly sensitive to the introduction of tall or large-scale structures.

GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

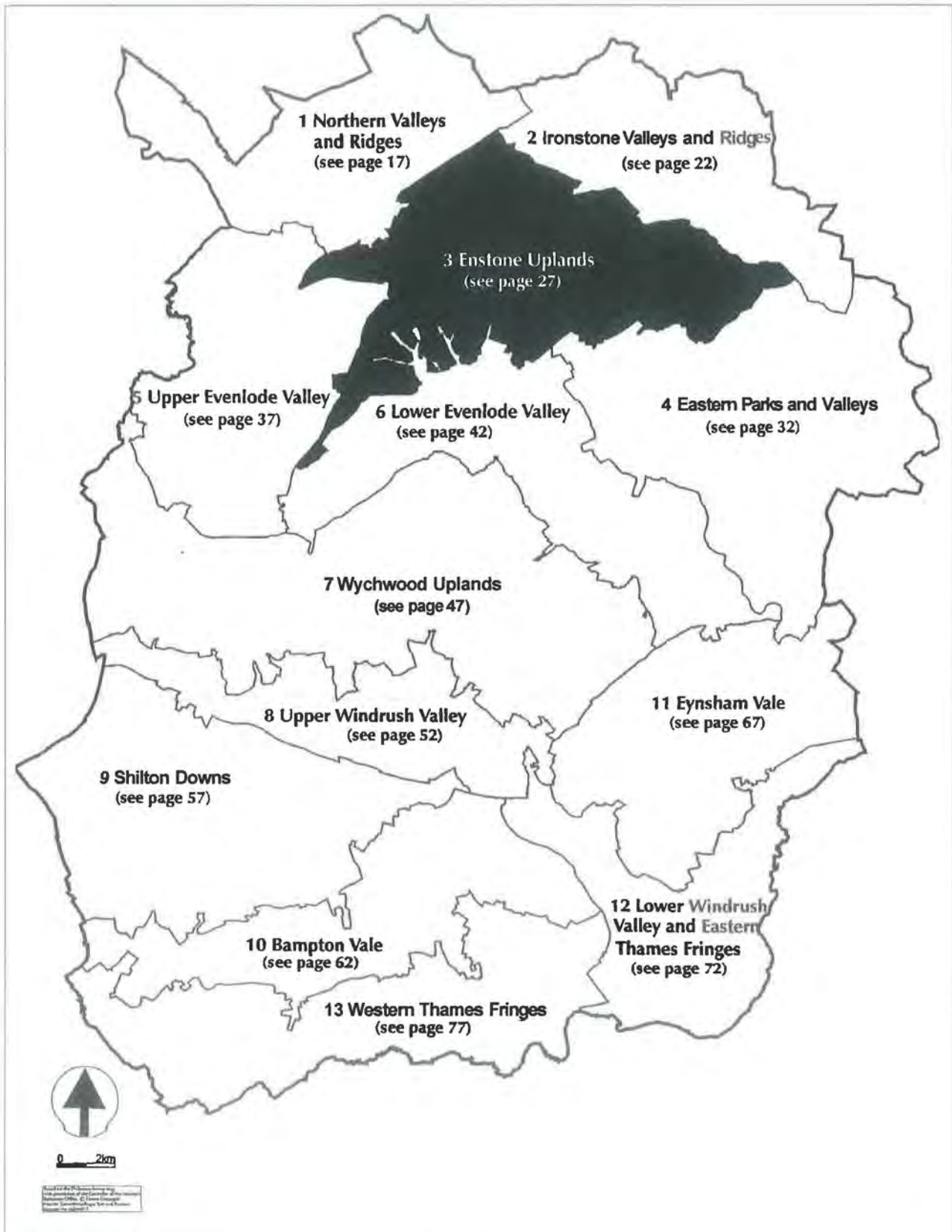
Enhancement priorities

- maintain, and where necessary, restore parkland landscapes at Swerford, Great Tew, Sandford St Martin and Barton Abbey, including distinctive elements such as parkland trees, avenues, woods, copses, boundary walls and structures;
- retain mature boundary trees and roadside avenues and replant as necessary;
- manage and extend existing areas of broadleaved woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce enclosed, wooded character;
- retain areas of permanent pasture and resist conversion to arable.

Development sensitivities

- parkland landscapes and their component features are of high landscape value and very sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust

3 ENSTONE UPLANDS



3: ENSTONE UPLANDS LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

This area occupies a high limestone plateau, dissected by the River Glyme but otherwise characterised by rolling landform with a distinctively elevated and open character. Intensive arable farming predominates, with large-scale fields bounded by dry-stone walls and hedges. Thin, dry calcareous soils over limestone result in a generally sparse vegetation cover (apart from woodland associated with Heythrop House and Park) and characteristic species (eg. ash, hazel and field maple).

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

This area occupies the most elevated part of the Oolitic Limestone plateau within the district, rising from the edge of the Evenlode Valley to over 220m AOD along its north-western edge around Chipping Norton. Across most of the area, the limestone forms a smooth, elevated and gently rolling plateau but its centre is sharply dissected by the steep-sided, narrow valleys of the River Glyme and its tributaries. The most southerly of these follows the Glyme Valley Fault line which marks a subtle change in geology between the Great Oolitic Limestone to the south and the older Chipping Norton Limestone to the north.

LANDCOVER

The free-draining soils of the limestone plateau are typically characterised by large-scale arable farming, with large fields enclosed by stone walls or low, clipped hedges, and sparse natural vegetation cover. However, the northern part of the plateau is transformed by the parkland and estate landscape of Heythrop House, with extensive planted woodland and belts of trees creating an enclosed, intimate character both within and between the river valleys.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

The overall character of this area is dominated by its limestone geology, forming the typically large-scale, open and elevated landscape of the limestone wolds. However, there is a sharp contrast between this and the heavily wooded and enclosed parkland and estate character around Heythrop House which dominates the northern part of the plateau and the minor river valleys. Within these broad differences, a number of different local landscape types have been identified, the key characteristics of which are summarised below.

Valley landscapes

Minor valley

- small-scale tributary valleys which dissect plateaux and valley-sides and connect with major valleys;
- pronounced v-shaped profile with steep sides and absence of flat valley floor;
- watercourse often inconspicuous or absent (eg. dry or winterbourne valleys on limestone);
- shallower profile at upper end with few trees or hedges and a more open character;
- steeper valley profile at lower end of valley, with sides typically occupied by scrub, trees and occasionally woods;
- enclosed, intimate character created by valley form and vegetation cover;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Limestone wolds landscapes

Open limestone wolds

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- typically large or very large fields, with rectilinear pattern of dry-stone walls (typical of later enclosures and often in poor condition) and weak hedgerows, with frequent gaps and very few trees;
- productive farmland predominantly under intensive arable cultivation;

- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- very open and exposed character;
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky and sweeping views across surrounding areas;
- high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- land use dominated by intensive arable cultivation with only occasional pasture;
- generally large-scale fields with rectilinear boundaries formed by dry-stone walls and low hawthorn hedges with occasional trees, typical of later enclosures;
- some visual containment provided by large blocks and belts of woodland creating a semi-enclosed character;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- ash, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky;
- moderate intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Parkland

- formal, designed landscape and grounds surrounding large country houses;
- distinctive formal landscape features, including avenues, free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features;
- planting and landscape character generally unrelated to surrounding areas;
- distinctively rural, picturesque and pastoral character;
- mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

Estate farmland

- well-managed farmland associated with large country estates, often lying beyond formal parkland boundaries;
- distinctively well-treed character, with extensive mature woodland blocks, belts and copses (often managed for game), lines of mature trees (predominantly oak) within hedgerows, along estate boundaries and roads, estate fencing (railings and post and rail) and other estate features or buildings;
- large-scale pattern of fields, typically bounded by belts of woodland or lines of mature trees;
- land use predominantly arable but with some areas of permanent pasture;
- enclosed, secluded and private character;
- moderate to low intervisibility

Sub-rural landscapes

Sport landscapes

- manicured or intensively managed land under amenity use (eg. golf courses or playing fields);
- landform, planting character and features (eg. lakes, bunkers) often unrelated to landscape context;
- suburban influences of clubhouses, gates and car parking;
- open, expansive character, particularly where planting has not yet matured;
- moderate to high intervisibility.

Airfields and MOD land

- active or disused airfield sites that typically occupy flat, exposed and prominent locations;
- open, expansive and bleak character with very weak landscape structure;
- visually prominent buildings and features (eg. large hangars, sheds, high security fencing, aircraft etc.)
- air of dereliction and neglect on disused sites;
- high intervisibility.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

This area is sparsely settled, particularly on the exposed high limestone plateau around Enstone which provides an inhospitable environment for settlement and supports only a scattering of individual farmsteads. Their even distribution suggests that many were the product of the parliamentary enclosures, when the open grasslands and wastes of the limestone plateaux were parcelled up into individual farming units centred around a new farmhouse.

Most farms and settlements are located in the shelter of the river valleys which dissect the plateau, either nestling along the side, such as Enstone itself, or deep in the valley bottoms close to a ready supply of water. Enstone, the largest settlement in the area, was also an important staging post along the medieval highway and later turnpike road between London and Worcester, now the A44.

Heythrop House is a notable exception to this overall pattern, with the house and park occupying a long finger of landform between two tributary valleys of the River Glyme, presumably for dramatic effect. Its prominent location is, however, sheltered by the extensive planted woodlands.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

Like most Cotswold settlements, the most dominant landscape influence is the consistent use of local Oolitic limestone as a building and walling material, with roofs constructed of Stonesfield slates.

Landform has had a bearing upon settlement form, with buildings typically clustered in the valley bottom, often on either side of a ford or bridge (eg. Lidstone), or strung out along a single road (eg. at Heythrop). Enstone itself has a more straggly form which reflects its 'unplanned' growth over the centuries along the highway.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- buildings and formal features associated with Heythrop House and Park;
- detracting features of prominent sheds and buildings at Enstone airfield.

3: ENSTONE UPLANDS LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

Part of this character area lies within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, confirming its outstanding quality and national significance. The remainder of the area lies within the locally designated Area of High Landscape Value.

The character area also includes a number of other features of conservation value which contribute to its overall significance, including:

- the Park and Garden of Special Historic Interest at Heythrop House ;
- one Site of Special Scientific Interest and several Scheduled Ancient Monuments dispersed across the plateau.

Overall, the Enstone Uplands have an attractive and unspoilt, rural character but with occasional detracting influences, such as Enstone Airfield. Most localised variations in quality and condition are related to the effects of agricultural land management practice. Different strategies for management and enhancement are shown in Figure 6.

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of grassland to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- visual intrusion of large prominent buildings or structures within visually exposed, elevated landscapes, eg. at Enstone Airfield;
- small-scale quarrying activity;
- 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and roads.

GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLDS LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- retain and replant hedgerows and introduce more hedgerow trees, using native species typical of the limestone (eg. ash, field maple etc.);
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland;
- where possible, retain areas of existing permanent pasture, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture and discourage further field enlargement;
- encourage less intensive farming practices, the introduction of 'natural' vegetation cover in field headlands and margins, improve appearance and wildlife value of 'set-aside' land;
- repair and maintain traditional stone buildings in the landscape.

Development sensitivities

- elevated, open limestone wold landscapes are very visually exposed and particularly sensitive to development;
- elevated, semi-enclosed limestone wolds landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely and sensitively integrated with existing buildings or within a strong landscape structure;
- these elevated landscapes are particularly sensitive to tall or prominent structures, such as communications masts, and large buildings.

GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- maintain, and where necessary, restore historic parkland landscape at Heythrop, including distinctive elements such as parkland trees, avenues, lakes, rides, woods, copses, boundary walls and structures;
- retain mature boundary trees and roadside avenues and replant as necessary;
- manage and extend existing areas of broadleaved woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce enclosed, wooded character;
- retain areas of permanent pasture and resist conversion to arable.

Development sensitivities

- historic parkland landscapes are of exceptional landscape value and extremely sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust.

GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of valley pasture and meadows and, where possible, convert arable fields to grassland;
- introduce new woodland planting along the valley-sides.

Development sensitivities

- the intimate landscape of the minor valleys **has a rural, pastoral and generally unspoilt** character and is very sensitive to built development;
- the upper, more open valley-sides are particularly visually sensitive and development would be **highly** prominent and exposed.

GUIDELINES FOR SUB-RURAL LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- improve the quality of the boundaries around Enstone Airfield by new planting and improved management, to reduce impact of intrusive structures, fencing and land uses;
- plant blocks and belts of trees at strategic locations around the airfield site, eg. along roadsides, to reduce the visual prominence of buildings;
- encourage appropriate restoration and afteruse of quarry workings, in keeping with rural landscape context.

Development sensitivities

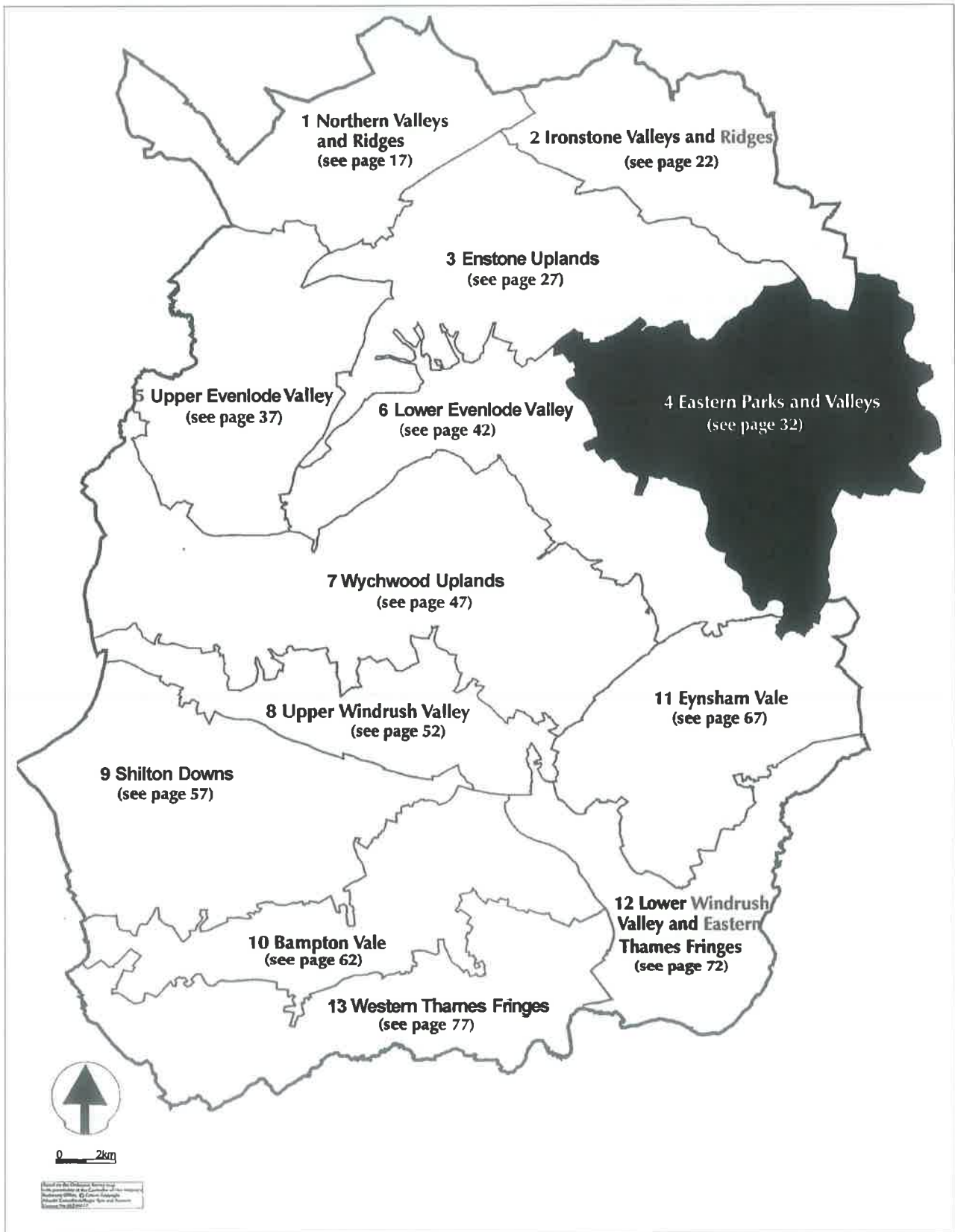
- 'brown-field' site of Enstone Airfield potentially more tolerant of development but prominent plateau location and rural context are limiting factors;
- any development of these sites should be set within a strong landscape infrastructure to minimise landscape and visual impacts;
- the introduction of urbanising influences, eg. styles of buildings, highway treatments and lighting would be potentially damaging to the rural character of the surrounding landscape.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

Chipping Norton

4 EASTERN PARKS AND VALLEYS



4: EASTERN PARKS AND VALLEYS LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

This is an area of rolling limestone landscape which is heavily dissected by the valleys of the Glyme, Dorn and Cherwell and distinguished by a particular concentration of formal parks, designed landscapes and estate farmland (Blenheim, Ditchley, Glympton, Kiddington, Rousham, etc). The parks have extensive areas of woodland and the landscape generally has a well-managed character typical of large estates.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

This area forms the lower, easternmost part of the Oolitic Limestone plateau. In common with the Enstone Uplands which adjoin it to the west, it forms a smooth, elevated and gently rolling landscape which is sharply dissected by a number of steep-sided river valleys. These include the deep, narrow and winding valley of the River Glyme and its minor tributaries, the Dorn Valley which follows a major fault line, and parts of the much larger Cherwell Valley along its eastern edge.

To the west of the Clyme Valley, geology is dominated by the Great Oolitic Limestone. However, to the east around Tackley it is capped by Cornbrash Limestone and Oxford Clay, while the underlying Lias Clays are exposed within the Cherwell Valley.

LANDCOVER

Geology is reflected in vegetation character, with intensive arable farming on the limestone and by the presence of woodland and remnant heath on the heavier, less workable soils of the Oxford Clay. Across much of this area, however, the natural patterns of vegetation have been masked by the designed landscapes of formal parks and estates, including the magnificent picturesque landscapes of Blenheim Palace and Rousham as well as Ditchley Park and lesser known, smaller parks at Kiddington, Clympton and Tackley. Surrounding these parks, the wider estate landscape is dominated by extensive woodland and tree planting, which give the area its heavily wooded character.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

The parkland and estate landscapes are the dominant feature of this area, creating a large-scale mosaic of woodland and farmland within which are set the mansions and formal elements of the designed parkland landscape. However, a number of different local landscape types have been identified within the area, the key characteristics of which are summarised below.

Valley landscapes

Minor valley

- small-scale tributary valleys which dissect plateaux and valley-sides and connect with major valleys;
- pronounced v-shaped profile with steep sides and absence of flat valley floor;
- watercourse often inconspicuous or absent (eg. dry or winterbourne valleys on limestone);
- shallower profile at upper end with few trees or hedges and a more open character;
- steeper valley profile at lower end of valley, with sides typically occupied by scrub, trees and occasionally woods;
- enclosed, intimate character created by valley form and vegetation cover;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Valley floor farmland

- distinctive flat valley floor;
- predominantly permanent pasture but with pockets of cultivated land;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- prone to winter flooding;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;
- intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character;
- moderate to low intervisibility, with some open views into the valley from above and some filtered longer views along the valley floor.

Semi-enclosed valley-side farmland

- distinctive sloping, and typically convex, valley-side landform;
- mixed pattern of land use and strong structure of hedgerows, trees and woodland;
- more enclosed character with low intervisibility along the valley sides but prominent in views from within and across the valley.

Limestone wolds landscapes

Open limestone wolds

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- typically large or very large fields, with rectilinear pattern of dry-stone walls (typical of later enclosures and often in poor condition) and weak hedgerows, with frequent gaps and very few trees;
- productive farmland predominantly under intensive arable cultivation;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- very open and exposed character;
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky and sweeping views across surrounding areas;
- high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- land use dominated by intensive arable cultivation with only occasional pasture;
- generally large-scale fields with rectilinear boundaries formed by dry-stone walls and low hawthorn hedges with occasional trees, typical of later enclosures;
- some visual containment provided by large blocks and belts of woodland creating a semi-enclosed character;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- ash, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows;
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky;
- moderate intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Parkland

- formal, designed landscape and grounds surrounding large country houses;
- distinctive formal landscape features, including avenues, free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features;
- planting and landscape character generally unrelated to surrounding areas;
- distinctively rural, picturesque and pastoral character;
- mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

Estate farmland

- well-managed farmland associated with large country estates, often lying beyond formal parkland boundaries;
- distinctively well-treed character, with extensive mature woodland blocks, belts and copses (often managed for game), lines of mature trees (predominantly oak) within hedgerows, along estate boundaries and roads, estate fencing (railings and post and rail) and other estate features or buildings;
- large-scale pattern of fields, typically bounded by belts of woodland or lines of mature trees;
- land use predominantly arable but with some areas of permanent pasture;
- enclosed, secluded and private character;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The pattern of settlement in this area has not only been influenced by physical landscape factors but also by the historic development of the major parklands and estates which dominate the area.

Although prehistoric and **Roman** settlers occupied and farmed large parts of the limestone uplands, it is the river valleys which were most favoured by Saxon and later settlers for their shelter and ready source of water. Most of the surviving settlements are, therefore, located within the main valley systems of the River Glyme, Dorn and Cherwell, typically clustered in the valley bottoms (eg. Glympton) although some have since grown up the valley sides (eg. Wootton).

The principal settlement of the area is Woodstock, which owes its existence to a hunting lodge for the use of Saxon Kings within the surrounding Wychwood Forest. The old town occupies the sides of the Glyme Valley but New Woodstock was built on the higher ground to the south as a medieval new town to serve the Royal Palace. Other hamlets and farms were established above the river valleys as part of large country estates, such as at Ditchley and Glympton.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

As elsewhere in the Cotswolds, the most dominant landscape influence is the consistent use of **local** Oolitic limestone as a building and walling material, with roofs typically constructed of stone slates from the nearby Stonesfield quarries.

Settlement form is influenced by landform, with buildings typically clustered in the valley bottom, often on either side of a ford or bridge as at Glympton, or lining a single road up the valley-side as at Wootton. The 'closed' villages of the major estates (eg. Glympton and Tackley) tend to have a particularly unified and ordered form and character. The form of the latter, however, has been influenced by its proximity to the railway line and development next to the station during this century.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- mansions and formal parkland features of the eighteenth century designed landscapes of Blenheim Palace, Rousham and Ditchley Park;
- attractive stone buildings within Conservation Areas and in open countryside, including manor houses, churches and farm buildings.

4: EASTERN PARKS AND VALLEYS LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

This character area is outside the Cotswolds AONB but it lies within an Area of High Landscape Value and includes some of the most outstanding designed landscapes in the country and a number of other features of conservation significance which contribute to its overall value, including:

- Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Blenheim Palace, Ditchley Park, Rousham and Kiddington;
- Conservation Areas at Woodstock, Wootton and Tackley;
- three Sites of Special Scientific Interest, a **Local** Nature Reserve and extensive remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland;
- a significant concentration of Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the Ditchley area.

The Eastern Parks and Valleys contains large areas of high quality, unspoilt and valued landscape with a rural and attractive character. There are a few detracting influences around settlements and main roads but the localised variations in quality and condition are mainly related to the effects of agricultural land management practice. Different strategies for management and enhancement are shown in Figure 6.

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of grassland to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- loss of semi-natural broad-leaved woodland or conversion to commercial coniferous woodland;
- **visual** intrusion of prominent **structures** such as communication masts and large farm buildings;
- 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and road corridors.

GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- maintain, and where necessary, restore historic parkland landscapes and features, including distinctive elements such as parkland trees, avenues, lakes, rides, woods, copses, boundary walls and structures;
- retain mature boundary and roadside trees and replant as necessary;
- manage and extend existing areas of woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce typically enclosed, well-wooded character;
- retain areas of permanent pasture and resist further conversion to arable.

Development sensitivities

- historic parkland landscapes are of exceptional landscape value and extremely sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust

GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLDS LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- retain and replant hedgerows and introduce more hedgerow trees, using native species typical of the limestone (eg. ash, field maple etc.);
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland;
- where possible, retain areas of existing permanent pasture, encourage conversion of

- arable land to pasture and discourage further field enlargement;
- encourage less intensive farming practices, the introduction of 'natural' vegetation cover in field headlands and margins, improve appearance and wildlife value of 'set-aside' land;
- repair and maintain traditional stone buildings in the landscape.

Development sensitivities

- elevated, open limestone wold landscapes are very visually exposed and particularly sensitive to development;
- the large-scale semi-enclosed limestone wolds landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely and sensitively integrated with existing buildings or contained within a strong landscape structure;
- open landscapes are particularly sensitive to tall or prominent structures, such as communications masts, and large buildings.

GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of floodplain pasture and meadows and encourage conversion of arable fields to grassland;
- reintroduce traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management;
- introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within valley floor, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- where possible, introduce new woodland planting along the valley-sides and within minor valleys to reinforce their enclosed, intimate character.

Development sensitivities

- unspoilt valley floor farmland and the minor valleys are of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- open valley-sides are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed;

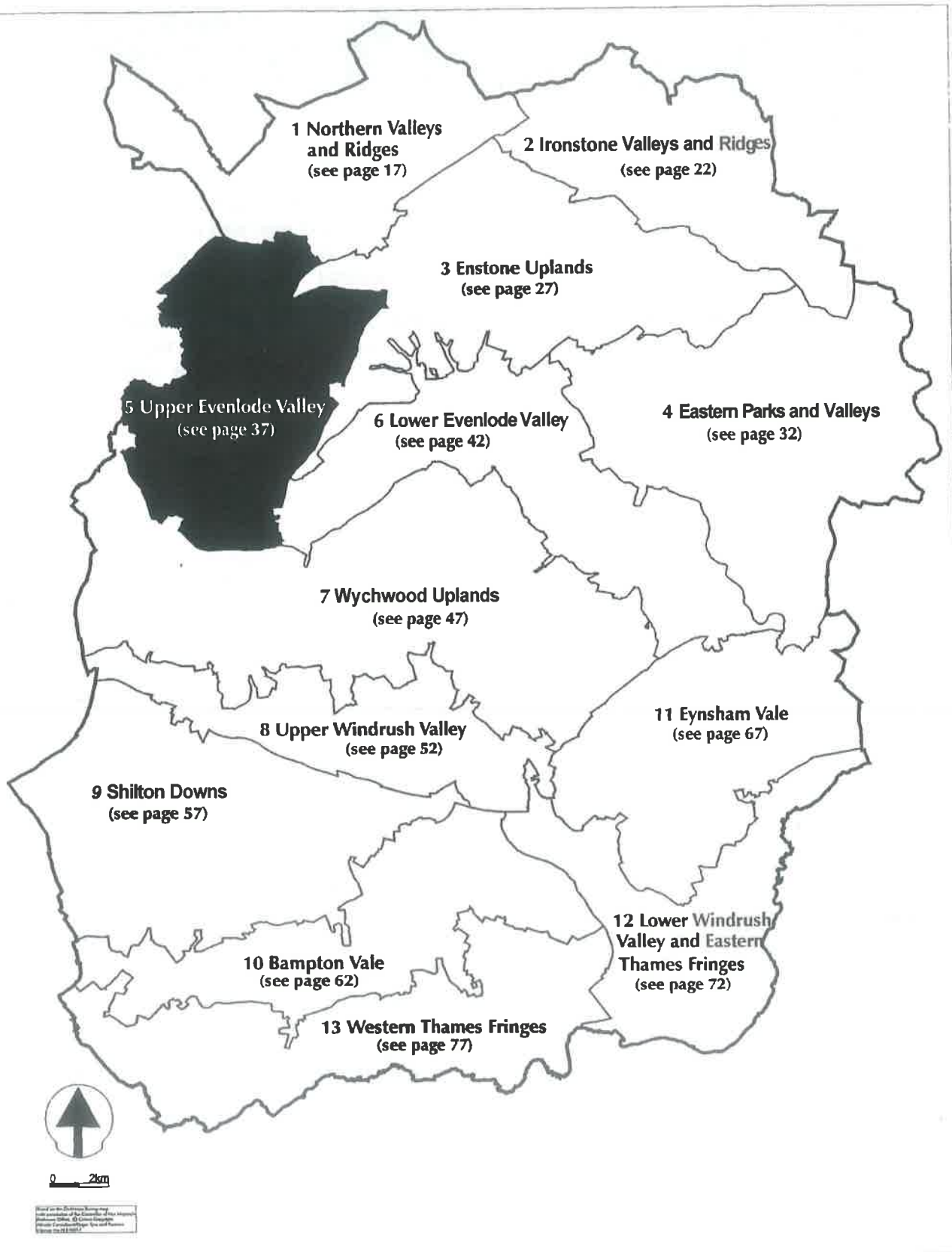
- enclosed valley-sides are also highly visible but may offer limited opportunities to absorb small-scale development within a strong structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings;
- all valley landscape types would be particularly sensitive to the introduction of tall or large-scale structures.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

Woodstock

5 UPPER EVENLODE VALLEY



5: UPPER EVENLODE VALLEY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

A distinctive area of rolling clayland which forms a broad, shallow basin around the upper reaches of the River Evenlode. The area is characterised by heavy clay soils and a strong landscape structure of thick hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees, in marked contrast with the limestone areas to the south and east. Despite this, the large-scale field pattern, gentle topography and limited areas of woodland (apart from those at Bruern Abbey) give the area a generally open, expansive character.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

Between Kingham and Shipton-under-Wychwood, the River Evenlode flows through a broad shallow basin of soft Lower Lias clay overlain by drifts of boulder clay and alluvium and pockets of sands and gravels. This underlying geology gives rise to subdued relief, with gently rolling landform and an indistinct valley form.

LANDCOVER

The heavy clay and alluvial soils of the river corridor tend to be under pasture while the lighter, free-draining soils on the terrace gravels have been extensively cultivated and are predominantly under arable crops. Field boundaries are predominantly hedges with few stone walls, with oak as the main tree species, in contrast with the surrounding limestone areas. Natural woodland cover is limited but extensive blocks of woodland are associated with the parkland and estate landscapes at Bruern and Sarsden.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

This is typically a low-lying farmed landscape, with a patchwork of large fields under arable and smaller-scale floodplain pastures along the river valley, bounded by strong hedgerows and occasional blocks and belts of woodland. However, a number of different local landscape types have been identified within the area, the key characteristics of which are summarised below.

Valley landscapes

Valley floor farmland

- distinctive flat valley floor;
- predominantly permanent pasture but with pockets of cultivated land;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- prone to winter flooding;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;
- intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character;
- moderate to low intervisibility, with some open views into the valley from above and some filtered longer views along the valley floor.

Open valley-side

- distinctive sloping, and typically convex, valley-side landform;
- predominantly large-scale fields under arable cultivation but with occasional pasture;
- weak landscape structure and few hedges/trees;
- open, visually exposed landscape, prominent in views from within and across valley;
- high intervisibility along valley sides.

Semi-enclosed valley-side farmland

- distinctive sloping, and typically convex, valley-side landform;
- mixed pattern of land use and strong structure of hedgerows, trees and woodland;
- more enclosed character with low intervisibility along the valley sides but prominent in views from within and across the valley.

Clay wolds landscapes

Open clay wolds

- large-scale, softly rolling farmland underlain by Lower Lias Clays and glacial deposits;
- typically large fields, with rectilinear pattern of gappy or tightly clipped hedgerows, with few trees;
- productive farmland predominantly under intensive arable cultivation;
- heavy, gleyed soils;
- open character with high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed clay wolds (large-scale)

- large-scale, softly rolling farmland underlain by Lower Lias Clays and glacial deposits;
- productive farmland predominantly under intensive arable cultivation;
- generally large-scale fields with rectilinear boundaries formed by some walls but mainly by hawthorn hedges, typical of later enclosures;
- some visual containment provided by blocks and belts of woodland;
- oak dominant in hedgerows and woods;
- moderate intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed clay wolds (smaller-scale)

- softly rolling farmland underlain by Lower Lias Clays and glacial deposits;
- mixed land use and field pattern, with a patchwork of large arable fields and more frequent pasture and smaller-scale fields with irregular, sinuous boundaries;
- semi-enclosed character with views contained by strong hedgerow structure with frequent mature hedgerow trees and blocks or belts of woodland;
- oak dominant in hedgerows and **woods**;
- diverse and pastoral character;
- moderate intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Parkland

- formal, designed landscape and grounds surrounding large country houses;
- distinctive formal landscape features, including avenues, free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features;
- planting and landscape character generally unrelated to surrounding areas;
- distinctively rural, picturesque and pastoral character;
- mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

Estate farmland

- well-managed farmland associated with large country estates, often lying beyond formal parkland boundaries;
- distinctively well-treed character, with extensive mature woodland blocks, belts and copses (often managed for game), lines of mature trees (predominantly oak) within hedgerows, along estate boundaries and roads, estate fencing (railings and post and rail) and other estate features or buildings;
- large-scale pattern of fields, typically bounded by belts of woodland or lines of mature trees;
- land use predominantly arable but with some areas of permanent pasture;
- enclosed, secluded and private character;
- moderate to low intervisibility

Sub-rural landscapes

Sport landscapes

- manicured or intensively managed land under amenity use (eg. golf courses or playing fields);
- landform, planting character and features (eg. lakes, bunkers) often unrelated to landscape context;
- suburban influences of clubhouses, gates and car parking;
- **open, expansive character**, particularly where planting has not yet matured;
- moderate to high intervisibility.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

There are four large villages within this area - the paired settlements of Shipton and Milton-under-Wychwood, Kingham and Churchill - and a dispersed pattern of smaller hamlets and farmsteads.

With the exception of Churchill, the larger villages form part of a string of settlements which run along the Evenlode Valley, occupying drier sites just off the valley floor or on pockets of terrace gravels overlying the clay. Churchill occupies a hill-top location on a finger of land which divides *two* tributary valleys of the Evenlode. Shipton-under-Wychwood has been an important settlement since Saxon times, but the present size of these settlements is largely a function of their proximity to stations along the London to Worcester railway line, resulting in growth as commuter villages.

Most of the smaller hamlets are located on the gentle flanks of the Evenlode Valley (eg. Idbury, Foscot, Fifield and Lyneham) or are associated with medieval manor houses and estates, notably at Sarsden and Bruern.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

As elsewhere in the Cotswolds, the most dominant landscape influence is the consistent use of local Oolitic limestone as a building and walling material, with roofs typically constructed of Stonesfield slates.

The form and pattern of settlements is less constrained by landform than in the steeper valleys and typically developed as a cluster of buildings around a central space, developing outwards along roadsides in different directions. The 'closed' estate villages have a particularly unified and ordered character compared with the more straggling larger settlements where the traditional form has been confused by more recent infill or peripheral development.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- buildings and formal parkland elements associated with Bruern Abbey and Sarsden House;
- the tower of Churchill church;
- attractive stone buildings within villages and in open countryside, including manor houses, churches and farm buildings.

5: UPPER EVENLODE VALLEY LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

This character area lies wholly within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, while the Evenlode Valley forms part of the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area. These designations confirm that the Upper Evenlode Valley landscape is of outstanding quality and of national significance.

The character area also includes a number of other features of conservation value which contribute to its overall significance, including:

- Conservation Areas at Kingham, Idbury and Shipton-under-Wychwood;
- a Park and Garden of Special Interest at Shipton Court;
- one Site of Special Scientific Interest and several remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland along the valley sides to the south.

Overall, the Upper Evenlode Valley has a highly attractive and unspoilt, rural character but with some localised variations in quality and condition which require different strategies for management and enhancement (see Figure 6).

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly drainage and conversion of pasture to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and roads.

GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of floodplain pasture and meadows;
- reintroduce traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management;
- introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within valley floor, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- where possible, introduce new woodland planting along the valley-sides and convert arable fields to grassland.

Development sensitivities

- unspoilt valley floor farmland and the minor valleys are of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- open valley-sides are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed;
- enclosed valley-sides are also highly visible but may offer limited opportunities to absorb small-scale development within a strong structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings;
- all valley landscape types would be particularly sensitive to the introduction of tall or large-scale structures.

GUIDELINES FOR CLAY WOLDS LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and replant hedgerows and hedgerow trees, with oak as the dominant species;
- where possible, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture;
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a more mixed pattern of woodland and farmland.

Development sensitivities

- open clay wold landscapes are very visually exposed and particularly sensitive to development;
- large-scale, semi-enclosed clay wold landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely integrated with existing buildings or within a strong landscape structure;
- smaller-scale, clay wold landscapes on the immediate fringes of the larger settlements are potentially more tolerant of development, if it conforms to existing field pattern, is sensitively designed and does not significantly alter settlement form.

GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- maintain, and where necessary, restore parkland landscape and features at Bruern Abbey and Shipton Court;
- retain mature hedges, boundary trees and roadside avenues and replant as necessary;
- manage and extend existing areas of broadleaved woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce enclosed, wooded character;
- retain areas of permanent pasture and resist conversion to arable.

Development sensitivities

- **parkland landscapes and their component features** are of high landscape value and very sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust.

GUIDELINES FOR SUB-RURAL LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- encourage establishment of more appropriate native species and planting character within golf course landscape at Lyneham;
- encourage less intensive management of fairways and roughs, to encourage a more diverse grassland sward;
- maintain strong boundary planting to reduce suburbanising influence on surrounding rural landscape and enhance entrance and parking areas to reflect their rural setting.

Development sensitivities

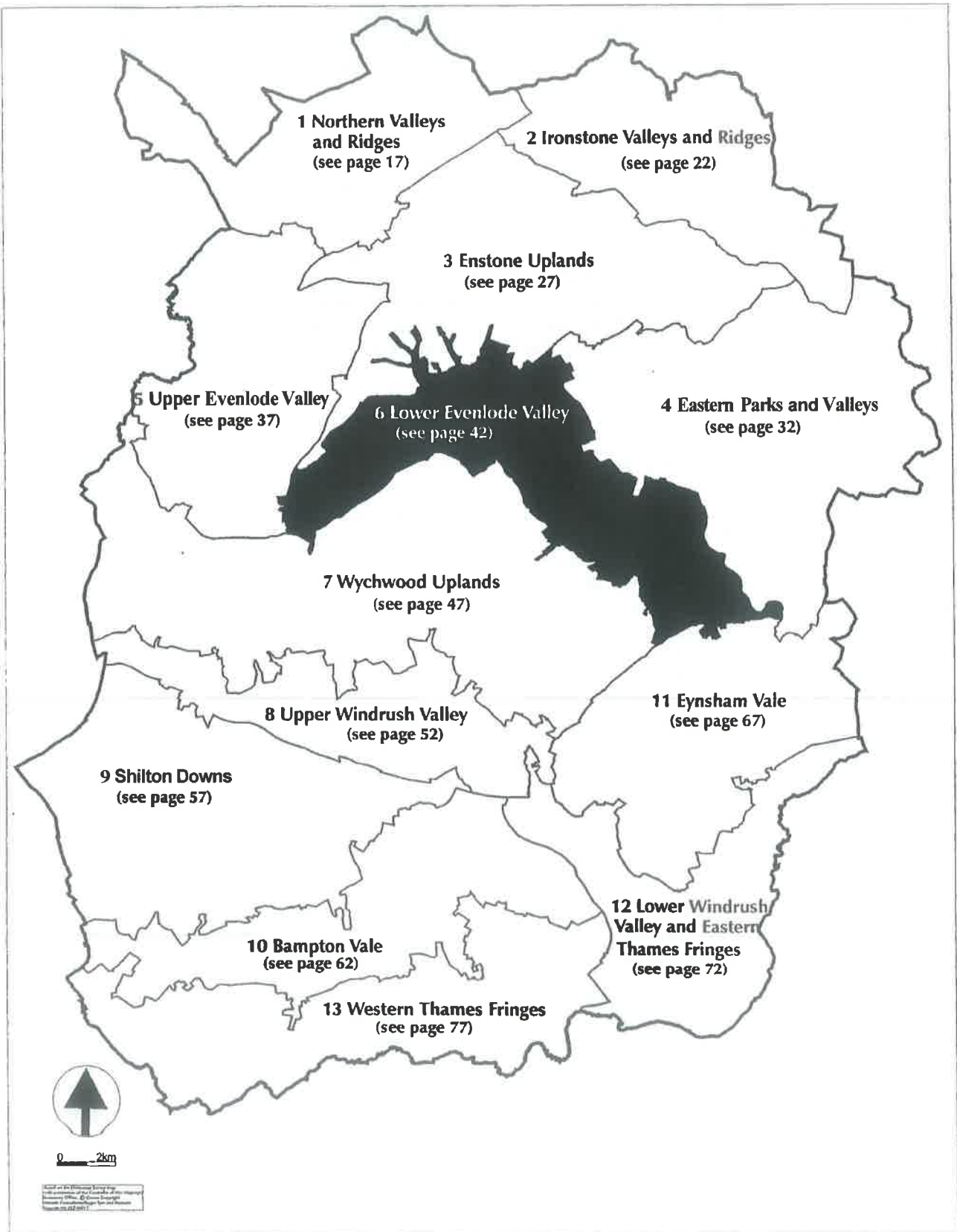
- the artificial golf course landscape is quite tolerant of change but built development would alter its essentially 'green' character.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

Milton-under-Wychwood

6 LOWER EVENLODE VALLEY



6: LOWER EVENLODE VALLEY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

Unlike its upper section (Area 5), the Lower Evenlode Valley forms a distinct landform unit which, although it varies in width between Shipton-under-Wychwood and Bladon, creates a sense of enclosure and a particular sense of place. The valley floor has a distinctively pastoral, intimate and riparian character with a close visual relationship with its enclosing valley sides, along which lie a string of valley-side settlements.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

The overall valley form is characterised by gently sloping convex sides and a wide, flat floodplain through which the river has developed a complex pattern of meanders. On its northern side, the smooth landform of the valley side is interrupted by a number of minor, tributary valleys and streams which flow off the 'Enstone Uplands' (Area 3) above. To the south, the valley has a gentler and more continuous profile, rising gradually up to the limestone plateau beyond. The river has cut through the limestone to expose narrow bands of Inferior Oolite and clays of the Upper and Middle Lias along the upper valley sides, with the lower slopes and valley floor dominated by the clays of the Lower Lias and alluvium, with occasional pockets of terrace gravels.

LANDCOVER

The more free-draining soils on the gentler valleys sides have been cultivated and are under arable, but some pasture and occasional woodland occurs along the steeper slopes and minor valleys. The heavier clay soils and low-lying land of the valley floor is typically under permanent pasture but pockets of arable farmland tend to mirror the presence of more free-draining terrace gravels.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

The landform of the Lower Evenlode Valley defines its overall character, providing visual enclosure, shelter and a coherent valley character which contrasts markedly with the open, rolling limestone hills above. Within the valley, however, a number of different local landscape types have been identified, the key characteristics of which are summarised below.

Valley landscapes

Minor valley

- small-scale tributary valleys which dissect plateaux and valley-sides and connect with major valleys;
- pronounced v-shaped profile with steep sides and absence of flat valley floor;
- watercourse often inconspicuous or absent (eg. dry or winterbourne valleys on limestone);
- shallower profile at upper end with few trees or hedges and a more open character;
- steeper valley profile at lower end of valley, with sides typically occupied by scrub, trees and occasionally woods;
- enclosed, intimate character created by valley form and vegetation cover;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Valley floor farmland

- distinctive flat valley floor;
- predominantly permanent pasture but with pockets of cultivated land;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- prone to winter flooding;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;
- intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character;
- moderate to low intervisibility, with some open views into the valley from above and some filtered longer views along the valley floor.

Open valley-side farmland

- distinctive sloping, and typically convex, valley-side landform;
- predominantly large-scale fields under arable cultivation but with occasional pasture;
- weak landscape structure and few hedges/trees;
- open, visually exposed landscape, prominent in views from within and across valley;
- high intervisibility along valley sides.

Semi-enclosed valley-side farmland

- distinctive sloping, and typically convex, valley-side landform;
- mixed pattern of land use and strong structure of hedgerows, trees and woodland;
- more enclosed character with low intervisibility along the valley sides but prominent in views from within and across the valley.

Limestone wolds landscapes

Open limestone wolds

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- typically large or very large fields, with rectilinear pattern of dry-stone walls (typical of later enclosures and often in poor condition) and weak hedgerows, with frequent gaps and very few trees;
- productive farmland predominantly under intensive arable cultivation;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- very open and exposed character;
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky and sweeping views across surrounding areas;
- high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- **land use dominated by intensive arable** cultivation with only occasional pasture;
- generally large-scale fields with rectilinear boundaries formed by dry-stone walls and low hawthorn hedges with occasional trees, typical of later enclosures;

- some visual containment provided by large blocks and belts of woodland creating a semi-enclosed character;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- ash, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky;
- moderate intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Parkland

- formal, designed landscape and grounds surrounding large country houses;
- distinctive formal landscape features, including avenues, free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features;
- planting and landscape character generally unrelated to surrounding areas;
- distinctively rural, picturesque and pastoral character;
- mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

Sub-rural landscapes

Quarries and landfill sites

- areas where quarrying has significantly altered local landscape character;
- artificial landform created by excavations and screen bunds;
- disturbed land typically dominated by bare ground, scrub, rough grassland, weeds and belts of screen planting;
- urban character introduced with incongruous styles of fencing and highway treatments, site buildings, machinery etc.;
- **low** intervisibility where mounding and planting have taken effect.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The Evenlode Valley contains a string of settlements located along, or perched above, its valley sides, including the main settlements of Charlbury, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Chadlington, Finstock, Stonesfield, Combe and Long Hanborough. These are interspersed with a number of smaller villages and hamlets, such as Spelsbury and Fawler, and a dispersed pattern of large farms, together making this a comparatively well-populated area.

Landscape factors strongly influenced their siting on dry sites along the valley-sides or on pockets of terrace gravel within the valley floor. Such valley sites were favoured in Saxon times because of their proximity to a water supply and to the light, easily-worked soils of the surrounding limestone hills. Other natural factors influenced their subsequent development, for example quarrying of Stonesfield slate which provided the best, lightest and porous flat stones used widely for roofing in Oxfordshire. The flat valley floor was also utilised for the London to Worcester railway line and was a major factor in the pre-war expansion of settlements within the valley.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

As elsewhere in the Cotswolds, the most dominant landscape influence is the consistent use of local Oolitic limestone as a building and walling material, with roofs typically constructed of stone slates from the local Stonesfield quarries.

Many of the settlements originally developed a linear form in response to the lie of the land along the valley-sides (eg. Ascott-under-Wychwood, Fawler). Others evolved in a more nucleated form around a central street or space (eg. Charlbury) while some migrated up the valley sides to more level ground which allowed the development of a more compact form, often around a church (eg. Combe). In many cases, the earlier form of settlements has been confused by more recent infill or peripheral development.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

Key landmarks and important landscape features within this area include:

- attractive stone buildings within Conservation Areas and in open countryside, including manor houses, churches and farm buildings;
- local landmark of Charlbury parish church;
- 'hanging' woodlands along valley sides.

6: LOWER EVENLODE VALLEY LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

This character area lies wholly within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and forms part of the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area. These designations confirm that the Upper Evenlode Valley landscape is of outstanding quality and of national significance.

The character area also includes a number of other features of conservation value which contribute to its overall significance, including:

- Conservation Areas at Charlbury, Dean, Spelsbury, Taston, Fawler, Stonesfield and Combe;
- a significant number of sites of Special Scientific Interest and several remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland along the valley sides;
- a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments dotted along the valley floor and sides.

Overall, the Lower Evenlode Valley has a highly attractive and unspoilt, rural character but with some localised variations in quality and condition which require different strategies for management and enhancement (see Figure 6).

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly drainage and conversion of pasture to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- poor maintenance or loss of traditional stone buildings and drystone walls;
- expansion and 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and roads.
- small-scale quarrying activity.

GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of floodplain pasture and meadows;
- reintroduce traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management;
- introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within valley floor, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- where possible, introduce new woodland planting along the valley-sides and convert arable fields to grassland;
- maintain strong landscape structure around fringes of main valley-side settlements, eg. Charlbury, to minimise impacts of built development on river valley landscape.

Development sensitivities

- unspoilt valley floor farmland and the minor valleys are of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- open valley-sides are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed;
- enclosed valley-sides are also highly visible but may offer limited opportunities to absorb small-scale development within a strong structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings;
- all valley landscape types would be particularly sensitive to the introduction of tall or large-scale structures.

GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLDS LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- retain and replant hedgerows and introduce more hedgerow trees, using native species typical of the limestone (eg. ash, field maple etc.);
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland;
- where possible, retain areas of existing permanent pasture, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture and discourage further field enlargement;
- encourage less intensive farming practices, the introduction of 'natural' vegetation cover in field headlands and margins;
- repair and maintain traditional stone buildings in the landscape.

Development sensitivities

- open limestone wold landscapes are very visually exposed and particularly sensitive to development;
- elevated, semi-enclosed limestone wolds landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely and sensitively integrated with existing buildings or within a strong landscape structure;
- development within heavily wooded areas may be less visually sensitive but may be damaging to important wildlife and landscape resources;
- smaller-scale, limestone wold landscapes on the immediate fringes of the larger settlements are potentially more tolerant of development, if it conforms to existing field pattern, is sensitively designed and does not significantly alter settlement form.

GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- maintain small-scale parkland landscapes and features at Charlbury and Pudlicote;

Development sensitivities

- parkland landscapes and their component features are of high landscape value and very sensitive to development.

GUIDELINES FOR SUB-RURAL LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- encourage appropriate restoration and afteruse of quarry workings at Dean and Charlbury, in keeping with rural landscape context and which maximise wildlife opportunities.

Development sensitivities

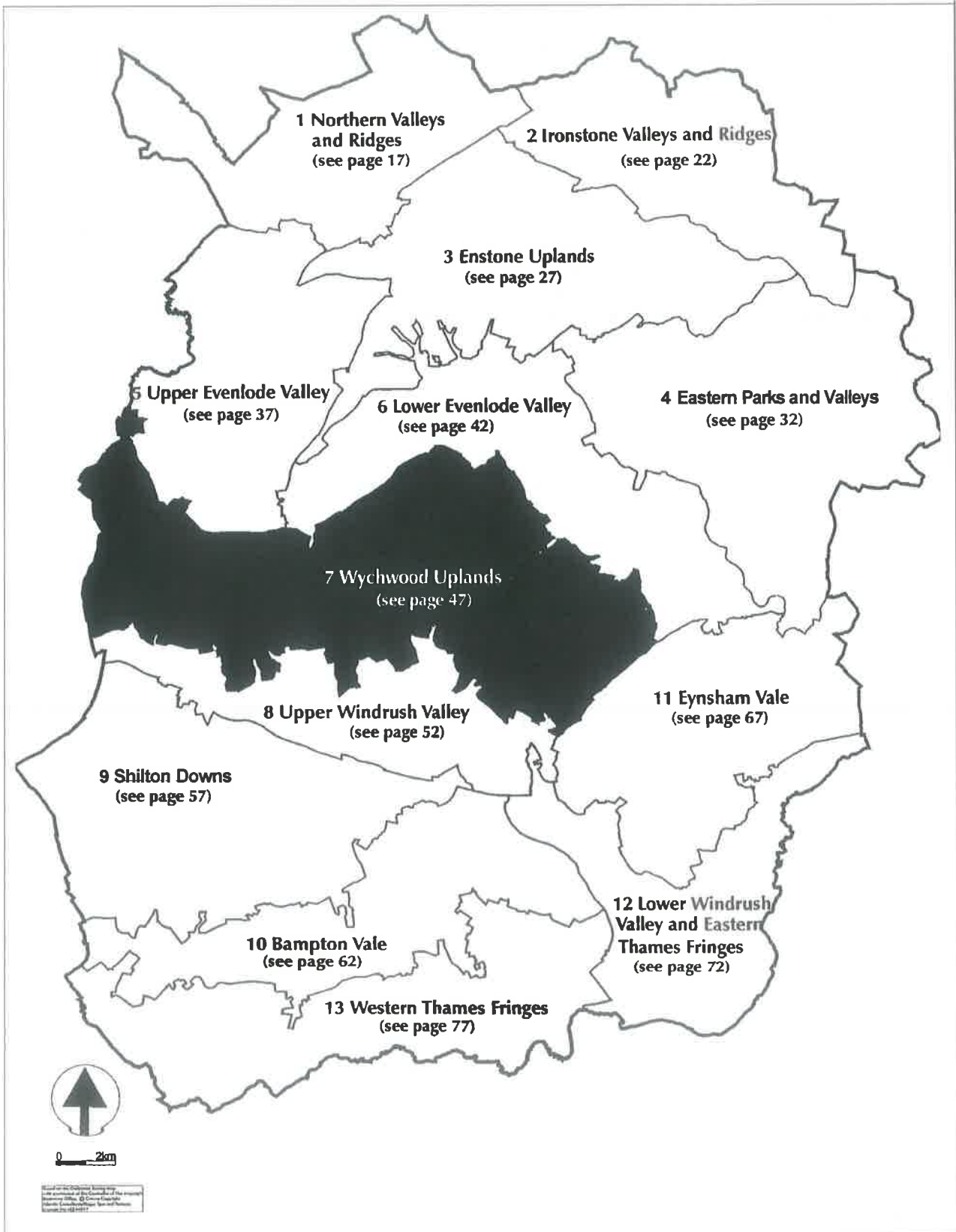
- these 'brown-field' sites are potentially more tolerant of change but their rural context are limiting factors for development;
- the introduction of urbanising influences, eg. urban styles of buildings, highway treatments and lighting would be potentially damaging to the rural character of the surrounding landscape.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

Charlbury

7 WYCHWOOD UPLANDS



7: WYCHWOOD UPLANDS LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

An area of smoothly rolling limestone uplands bounded by the valleys of the Evenlode and Windrush. Although lower in elevation, it supports the typical large-scale arable farmland of the Enstone Uplands but is distinguished by the presence of the extensive woodlands of Cornbury Park, remnants of the former Wychwood Forest which covered much of this area until as recently as the nineteenth century.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

In this part of the Cotswold dip slope, the Oolitic Limestone forms a smooth, gently rolling plateau which rises to a height of around 200m AOD above the valleys of the Evenlode and Windrush to north and south. Like much of the limestone wolds, it has an elevated and expansive character with long, sweeping views from the highest ground.

The limestone geology is consistent across the area, except in two main areas at Leafield and Ramsden, where localised cappings of Oxford Clay and glacial drift mask the underlying limestone. These have a localised influence on vegetation character and may well have given rise to islands of poorer soil within the former Wychwood Forest which were among the first to be cleared for settlement.

LANDCOVER

Patterns of landcover fall into three main areas. The north-eastern part of the area is dominated by the remnants of Wychwood Forest, which form part of the Cornbury Park estate. The area immediately to the south has a mixed land use and field pattern, with concentrations of irregular boundaries, pockets of woodland and mature hedgerow trees that may have evolved from the earlier process of 'assarting', where fields were carved out of the forest. To the west, the landscape is dominated by large fields bounded by straight walls and hedges, typical of later enclosures. These are now under intensive arable cultivation, with a weak hedgerow

structure, sparse vegetation cover and only occasional blocks of planted woodland.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

The overall character of this area is dominated by its limestone geology, forming the typically large-scale, open and elevated landscape of the limestone wolds. However, there is a sharp contrast between this and the heavily wooded and enclosed parkland and estate character around Cornbury Park which dominates the north-eastern part of the plateau and the more mixed pattern of landscape which occurs immediately to the south of this.

Within the area, however, a number of different local landscape types have been identified, the key characteristics of which are summarised below.

Valley landscapes

Minor valley

- small-scale tributary valleys which dissect plateaux and valley-sides and connect with major valleys;
- pronounced v-shaped profile with steep sides and absence of flat valley floor;
- watercourse often inconspicuous or absent (eg. dry or winterbourne valleys on limestone);
- shallower profile at upper end with few trees or hedges and a more open character;
- steeper valley profile at lower end of valley, with sides typically occupied by scrub, trees and occasionally woods;
- enclosed, intimate character created by valley form and vegetation cover;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Limestone wolds landscapes

Open limestone wolds

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- typically large or very large fields, with rectilinear pattern of dry-stone walls (typical of later enclosures and often in poor condition) and weak hedgerows, with frequent gaps and very few trees;
- productive farmland predominantly under intensive arable cultivation;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- very open and exposed character;
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky and sweeping views across surrounding areas;
- high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- land use dominated by intensive arable cultivation with only occasional pasture;
- generally large-scale fields with rectilinear boundaries formed by dry-stone walls and low hawthorn hedges with occasional trees, typical of later enclosures;
- some visual containment provided by large blocks and belts of woodland creating a semi-enclosed character;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- ash, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky;
- moderate intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (smaller-scale)

- gently rolling farmland occupying the elevated limestone plateau and dip slope;
- **mixed land use and field pattern**, with a patchwork of large arable fields and more frequent pasture and smaller-scale fields with irregular, sinuous boundaries;
- strong structure of dry-stone walls and hedgerows with frequent mature hedgerow trees, particularly of oak and ash;

- ash, oak, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows;
- semi-enclosed character with views contained by hedgerow structure and frequent blocks or belts of woodland;
- diverse and pastoral character;
- moderate intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Parkland

- formal, designed landscape and grounds surrounding large country houses;
- distinctive formal landscape features, including avenues, free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features;
- planting and landscape character generally unrelated to surrounding areas;
- distinctively rural, picturesque and pastoral character;
- mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

Estate farmland

- well-managed farmland associated with large country estates, often lying beyond formal parkland boundaries;
- distinctively well-treed character, with extensive mature woodland blocks, belts and copses (often managed for game), lines of mature trees (predominantly oak) within hedgerows, along estate boundaries and roads, estate fencing (railings and post and rail) and other estate features or buildings;
- large-scale pattern of fields, typically bounded by belts of woodland or lines of mature trees;
- land use predominantly arable but with some areas of permanent pasture;
- enclosed, secluded and private character;
- moderate to low intervisibility

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The pattern of settlement in the Wychwood Uplands is highly distinctive and has been strongly influenced by landscape and land use factors. To the west of Leafield, the high, limestone plateau is very sparsely settled, with most buildings clustered in the minor valleys and only a handful of farms standing out prominently on the exposed plateau. Their even distribution and regular field pattern suggests that some may have originated as part of the disafforestation and clearance of Wychwood Forest in Victorian times, replaced by a landscape of new farms, generous fields and new roads.

In contrast, settlement pattern to the south and east of Leafield shows a more organic process of evolution as medieval settlements like Leafield, Ramsden, Crawley and Hailey progressively carved out of the forest. The later Victorian woodland clearances altered their character and introduced new settlements into the landscape, such as Fordwelb and Mount Skippett, with their rows of farm labourers cottages.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

As elsewhere in the Cotswolds, the most dominant landscape influence is the consistent use of local Oolitic limestone as a building and walling material, with roofs typically constructed of stone slates from the local Stonesfield quarries.

The form of the settlements is typically straggling and unplanned, reminiscent of the Victorian 'open villages', with most having evolved slowly out of the forest accompanied by an irregular pattern of fields and winding roads. Some settlements, such as Leafield and Dolly End, have a more nucleated form with buildings loosely clustered around a central green but most villages are linear with buildings stretching out along the roadside or valley. In some cases (eg. North Leigh), the earlier form of settlements has been confused by more recent infill or peripheral development.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- the village and church spire of Leafield, which sits prominently on an island of landform above the limestone plateau;
- the mass of Wychwood Forest which forms a prominent and distinctive landmark on the skyline;
- intrusive mast at radio station located prominently in open, elevated position on high ground of limestone plateau.

7: WYCHWOOD UPLANDS LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

Most of the character area lies within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, confirming that much of the Wychwood Uplands landscape is of outstanding quality and of national significance. Apart from the area between Hailey and New Yatt, the remaining area falls within the Area of High Landscape Value designation.

The character area also includes a number of other features of conservation value which contribute to its overall significance, including:

- Conservation Areas at Finstock, Ramsden, Leafield and Hailey;
- Park and Garden of Special Historic Interest, National Nature Reserve and SSSI designations of Cornbury Park/Wychwood Forest and a number of other remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland scattered across the plateau;
- several Scheduled Ancient Monuments dispersed across the plateau.

Overall, the Wychwood Uplands have an attractive and unspoilt, rural character. There are few detracting influences and localised variations in quality and condition are mainly related to the effects of agricultural land management practice. Different strategies for management and enhancement are shown in Figure 6.

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of grassland to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- conversion of native broad-leaved woodland to coniferous plantations;
- visual intrusion of prominent structures such as communication masts and large farm buildings;
- 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and roads.

GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLDS LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- retain and replant hedgerows and introduce more hedgerow trees, using native species typical of the limestone (eg. ash, oak, field maple etc.);
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland;
- where possible, retain areas of existing permanent pasture, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture and discourage further field enlargement;
- encourage less intensive farming practices, the introduction of 'natural' vegetation cover in field headlands and margins, improve appearance and wildlife value of 'set-aside' land;
- repair and maintain traditional stone buildings in the landscape.

Development sensitivities

- elevated, open limestone wold landscapes are very visually exposed and particularly sensitive to development;
- elevated, semi-enclosed limestone wolds landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely and sensitively integrated with existing buildings or within a strong landscape structure;
- development within heavily wooded areas may be less visually sensitive but may be damaging to important wildlife and landscape resources;
- these elevated landscapes are particularly sensitive to tall or prominent structures, such as communications masts, and large buildings.

GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- maintain, and where necessary, restore historic parkland landscape at Cornbury Park, including distinctive elements such as parkland trees, avenues, lakes, rides, woods, copses, boundary walls and structures;
- retain mature boundary and roadside trees and replant as necessary;
- manage and extend existing areas of broadleaved woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce enclosed, wooded character.

Development sensitivities

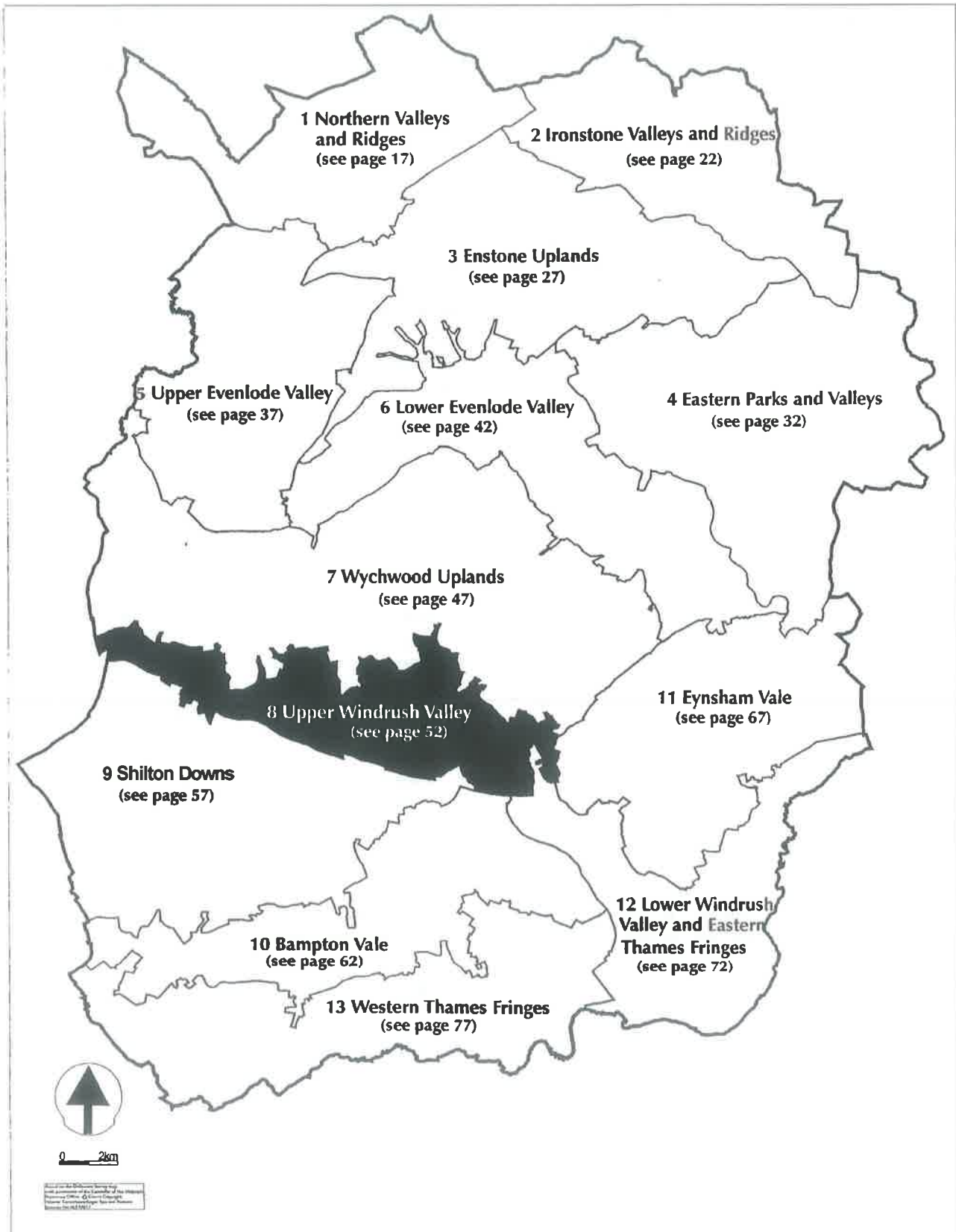
- historic parkland landscapes are of exceptional landscape value and extremely sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

Witney

8 UPPER WINDRUSH VALLEY



8: UPPER WINDRUSH VALLEY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

The River Windrush flows through a deep valley which dissects the limestone of the Cotswold dip slope and forms a highly distinctive landform feature, with a distinctively intimate and pastoral character. The valley is punctuated at its western end by Burford and at its eastern end by Witney, which occupies an island of Combrash limestone within the valley floor and forms the junction with the more open Vale to the south.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

The overall valley form is characterised by uneven convex sides, their slopes steepening towards the bottom, and a broad, flat floodplain through which the river has developed a complex pattern of meanders. On its northern side, the smooth landform of the valley sides is broken by a series of minor, tributary valleys and streams which flow off the Wychwood Uplands' (Area 7) to the north. To the south, the valley has a steeper and more continuous profile, interrupted only by a distinctive 'island' of landform at Asthall (around which the river once formed a broad loop), before widening out at Witney.

The geology of the Windrush Valley is comparatively simple. It is only at the western end near Burford and around Swinbrook that narrow bands of Inferior Oolite and Lias Clays are exposed beneath the Great Oolite of the limestone plateau. However, at its eastern end the Great Oolite gives way to the Combrash Limestone which forms the valley sides and the distinctive landform 'island' upon which the town of Witney originated. The valley floor is lined with alluvium with occasional pockets of terrace gravels along the valley sides.

LANDCOVER

The pattern of land cover within the valley is highly distinctive. The flat valley floor is prone to flooding and has remained predominantly under permanent pasture, whereas the drier slopes of the valley sides have a more mixed landcover. Permanent grassland and woodland are typical of

the steepest slopes, particularly within some of the tributary valleys, but arable cultivation predominates on the gentler slopes.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

The landform of the Windrush Valley defines its overall character, providing visual enclosure, shelter and a coherent valley character which contrasts markedly with the open, rolling limestone hills above. Within the valley, however, a number of different local landscape types have been identified, the key characteristics of which are summarised below.

Valley landscapes

Minor valley

- small-scale tributary valleys which dissect plateaux and valley-sides and connect with major valleys;
- pronounced v-shaped profile with steep sides and absence of flat valley floor;
- watercourse often inconspicuous or absent (eg. dry or winterbourne valleys on limestone);
- shallower profile at upper end with few trees or hedges and a more open character;
- steeper valley profile at lower end of valley, with sides typically occupied by scrub, trees and occasionally woods;
- enclosed, intimate character created by valley form and vegetation cover;
- moderate low intervisibility.

Valley floor farmland

- distinctive flat valley floor;
- predominantly permanent pasture but with pockets of cultivated land;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- prone to winter flooding;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;
- intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character;

- moderate to low intervisibility, with some open views into the valley from above and some filtered longer views along the valley floor.

Open valley-side farmland

- distinctive sloping, and typically convex, valley-side landform;
- predominantly large-scale fields under arable cultivation but with occasional pasture;
- weak landscape structure and few hedges/trees;
- open, visually exposed landscape, prominent in views from within and across valley;
- high intervisibility along valley sides.

Semi-enclosed valley-side farmland

- distinctive sloping, and typically convex, valley-side landform;
- mixed pattern of land use and strong structure of hedgerows, trees and woodland;
- more enclosed character with low intervisibility along the valley sides but prominent in views from within and across the valley.

Limestone wolds landscapes

Open limestone wolds

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- typically large or very large fields, with rectilinear pattern of dry-stone walls (typical of later enclosures and often in poor condition) and weak hedgerows, with frequent gaps and very few trees;
- productive farmland predominantly under intensive arable cultivation;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- very open and exposed character;
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky and sweeping views across surrounding areas;
- high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- land use dominated by intensive arable cultivation with only occasional pasture;

- generally large-scale fields with rectilinear boundaries formed by dry-stone walls and low hawthorn hedges with occasional trees, typical of later enclosures;
- some visual containment provided by large blocks and belts of woodland creating a semi-enclosed character;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- ash, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky;
- moderate intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (smaller-scale)

- large-scale, gently rolling farmland occupying the elevated limestone plateau and dip slope;
- mixed land use and field pattern, with a patchwork of large arable fields and more frequent pasture and smaller-scale fields with irregular, sinuous boundaries;
- strong structure of dry-stone walls and hedgerows with frequent mature hedgerow trees;
- ash, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows;
- semi-enclosed character with views contained by hedgerow structure and frequent blocks or belts of woodland;
- diverse and pastoral character;
- moderate intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Estate farmland

- well-managed farmland associated with large country estates, often lying beyond formal parkland boundaries;
- distinctively well-treed character, with extensive mature woodland blocks, belts and copses (often managed for game), lines of mature trees (predominantly oak) within hedgerows, along estate boundaries and roads, estate fencing (railings and post and rail) and other estate features or buildings;
- large-scale pattern of fields, typically bounded by belts of woodland or lines of mature trees;
- land use predominantly arable but with some areas of permanent pasture;
- enclosed, secluded and private character;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Sub-rural landscapes

Rural fringe land

- non-agricultural land with semi-domestic character within a rural context, eg. horse paddocks, allotments, small-holdings etc.;
- small-scale field pattern usually around the fringes of settlements;
- somewhat unkempt appearance, rank or weed-infested grassland, poorly managed hedges and boundary fencing, typical assortment of ramshackle sheds, horse jumps, fly-tipping etc.;
- other intrusive influences, such as overhead power lines and built form on the edge of settlements;
- moderate intervisibility.

Sport landscapes

- manicured or intensively managed land under amenity use (eg. golf courses or playing fields);
- landform, planting character and features (eg. lakes, bunkers) often unrelated to landscape context;
- open, expansive character, particularly where planting has not yet matured;
- moderate to high intervisibility.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The Windrush Valley contains a string of settlements, including the towns of Burford and Witney, positioned at either end, and a number of smaller villages, including Taynton, Swinbrook, Minster Lovell and Crawley.

Many of these date from Saxon times when the sheltered valleys, with their well-watered meadows, were particularly favoured areas for settlement. **Geology** and relief played a significant part in their siting - for example, Witney is located on an island of Combrash limestone above the surrounding alluvial floodplain of the Windrush, while Asthall was also sited on an island of landform raised above the valley floor. **The river also brought a source of prosperity with the development of mills for the woollen and textile industry, for which Witney remains famous.** Other natural resources were exploited at Taynton with the quarrying of particularly fine Great Oolite limestone, used widely both locally and further afield.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

As elsewhere in the Cotswolds, the most dominant landscape influence within the Settlements is the consistent use of local Oolitic limestone as a building and walling material, with roofs typically constructed of stone slates from the local Stonesfield quarries.

To some extent, the form and size of many settlements has been constrained by physical factors, such as the narrow valley floor, its steep sides and the threat of flooding. Other settlements have grown out of their traditional valley setting. For example, the Victorian settlement of Charterville was located incongruously on the high limestone land above Minster Lovell, while the modern expansion of Witney has similarly taken the town beyond its 'natural' valley setting onto the higher, more exposed ground of the wolds.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- the spire of Burford Parish Church;
- the stone buildings of the villages, mills and farms located within the valley;
- the Abbey ruins at Minster Lovell;
- church and visible earthworks associated with the deserted medieval village at Widford.

8: UPPER WINDRUSH VALLEY LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

Most of the character area lies within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, while the Windrush Valley and its tributary, the valley of the Seven Springs, form part of the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area. The lower part of the valley also lies within the Area of High Landscape Value designation. These designations confirm that much of the Upper Windrush Valley landscape is of outstanding quality and of national significance.

The character area also includes a number of other features of conservation value which contribute to its overall significance, including:

- Conservation Areas at Taynton, Burford, Swinbrook, Asthall, Minster Lovell and within Witney;
- several remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland along the valley sides to the north;
- a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments along the valley floor and sides.

Overall, the Upper Windrush Valley has a highly attractive and remarkably unspoilt, rural character but with some localised variations in quality and condition which require different strategies for management and enhancement (see Figure 6).

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly drainage and cultivation of floodplain pasture, removal of 'wet fences';
- poor maintenance or loss of traditional stone buildings and drystone walls;
- the expansion of settlements into open countryside;
- 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and roads;
- the visual intrusion of unsightly development and poor management of fringe areas (eg. West of Witney).

GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of floodplain pasture and meadows;
- reintroduce traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management;
- introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within valley floor, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- where possible, introduce new woodland planting along the valley-sides and convert arable fields to grassland;
- strengthen landscape structure by new planting on western edge of Witney to reduce impact of development

Development sensitivities

- unspoilt valley floor farmland and the minor valleys are of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- open valley-sides are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed;
- enclosed valley-sides are also highly visible but may offer limited opportunities to absorb small-scale development within a strong structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings;
- all valley landscape types would be particularly sensitive to the introduction of tall or large-scale structures.

GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLD LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- retain and replant hedgerows and hedgerow trees, using native species typical of the limestone (eg. ash, field maple etc.);
- where possible, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture;
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland.

Development sensitivities

- elevated, open limestone wold landscapes are very visually exposed and particularly sensitive to development;
- elevated, semi-enclosed limestone wolds landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely integrated with existing buildings or within a strong landscape structure;
- tall structures, such as communications masts, and large buildings would be particularly prominent in these elevated landscapes.

GUIDELINES FOR SUB-RURAL LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- repair broken-down fencing and encourage development and maintenance of strong hedgerows and trees to reduce impact of unsightly land uses;
- encourage more consistent use of boundary treatments along built frontages and allotments/small-holdings.

Development sensitivities

- potentially more tolerant of development but prominent plateau location, and suburbanising influence on adjacent landscape, limits opportunities;
- development of small fields and over-development of individual plots, leading to

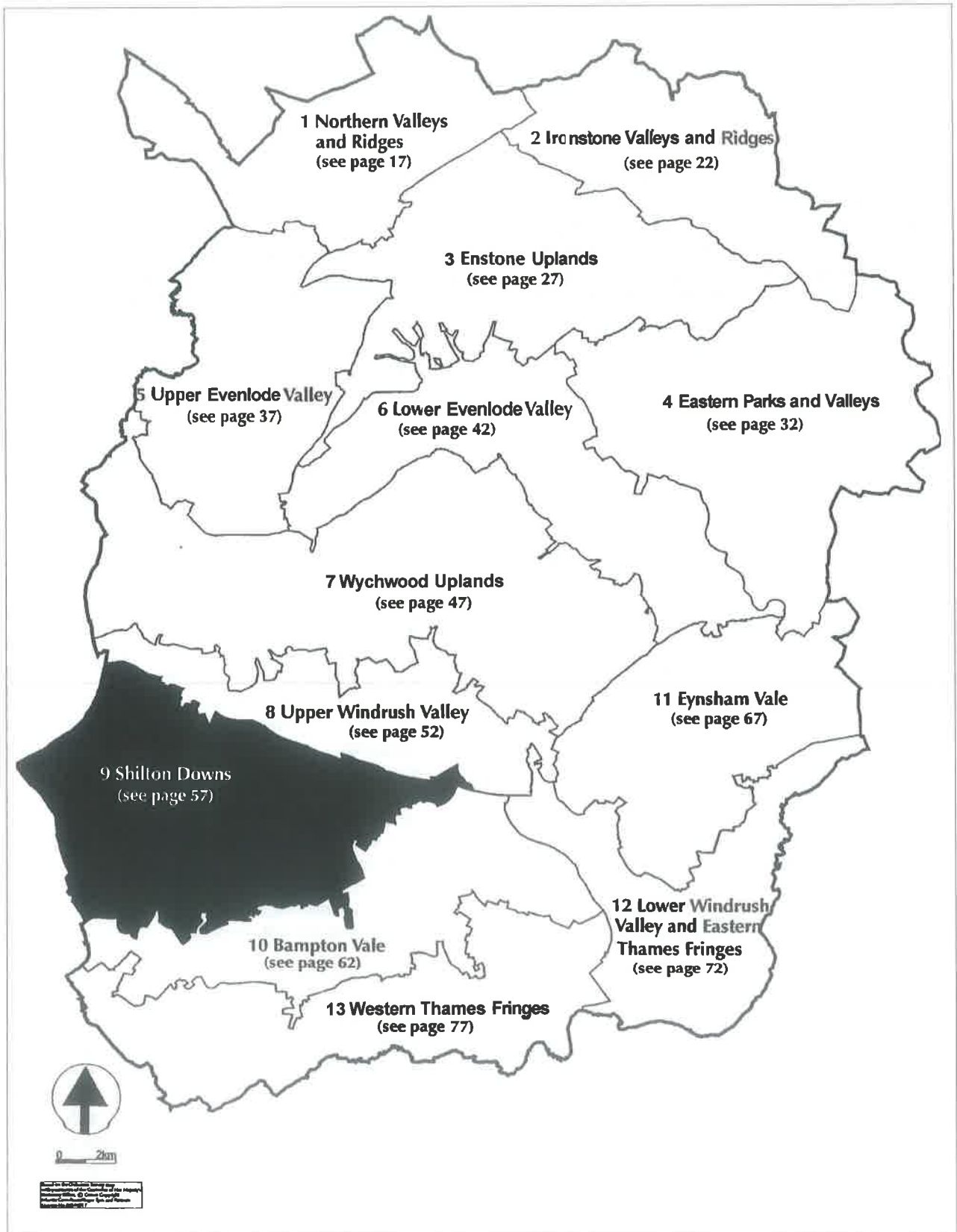
continuous ribbon development, should be avoided.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement studies for:

Burford
Witney

9 SHILTON DOWNS



9: SHILTON DOWNS LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

An area of limestone landscape which forms the divide between the low-lying clay vale to the south and the Windrush Valley and limestone uplands to the north. A line of settlements lie along its southern boundary, occupying the spring line between the limestone and clay (eg. Filkins, Kencott, Broadwell, Alvescot and Carterton). The area has a typically large-scale field pattern bounded by dry-stone walls with the sparse and characteristic vegetation cover typical of the other limestone areas, apart from extensive woodlands around the Cotswold Wildlife Park and estate farmland to the west.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

This area is the southern part of the same Oolitic limestone landmass that forms the Wychwood Uplands but is divided from it by the incised valley of the River Windrush. The gently rolling landform is part of the Cotswold dip slope and rises gently from the clay vale to reach a height of around 150m **AOD** on its western boundary and around 130m **AOD** along the top of the Windrush Valley to the north. It is dissected only by the narrow, steep-sided valley of the Shill Brook which flows between Westwell and Carterton and into the vale at Black Bourton.

The Great Oolite limestone dominates most of the area but along its southern edge, a capping of Combrash limestone forms a distinctive band of rolling landform forming the transition between the limestone wolds and the clay vale.

LANDCOVER

The free-draining soils of the limestone are typically characterised by large-scale arable farming, with large fields enclosed by stone walls or low, clipped hedges, and sparse natural vegetation cover. However, the central part of the area is occupied by the wooded estate landscape around the Cotswold Wildlife Park, with extensive planted woodland and belts of trees creating an enclosed and intimate character to the landscape. There are a few other pockets of woodland within the area, eg. to the east of

Brize Norton, some of which are of ancient origin.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

The overall character of this area is dominated by its limestone geology, forming the typically large-scale, open landscape of the limestone wolds. However, there are contrasts between this and the heavily wooded and enclosed estate character around the Cotswold Wildlife Park and a number of other local landscape types have been identified, the key characteristics of which are summarised below.

Valley landscapes

Minor valleys

- small-scale tributary valleys which dissect plateaux and valley-sides and connect with major valleys;
- pronounced v-shaped profile with steep sides and absence of flat valley floor;
- watercourse often inconspicuous or absent (eg. dry or winterbourne valleys on limestone);
- shallower profile at upper end with few trees or hedges and a more open character;
- steeper valley profile at lower end of valley, with sides typically occupied by scrub, trees and occasionally woods;
- enclosed, intimate character created by valley form and vegetation cover;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Limestone wolds landscapes

Open limestone wolds

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- typically large or very large fields, with rectilinear pattern of dry-stone walls (typical of later enclosures and often in poor condition) and weak hedgerows, with frequent gaps and very few trees;
- productive farmland predominantly under intensive arable cultivation;

- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- very open and exposed character;
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky and sweeping views across surrounding areas;
- high intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)

- large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- land use dominated by intensive arable cultivation with only occasional pasture;
- generally large-scale fields with rectilinear boundaries formed by dry-stone walls and low hawthorn hedges with occasional trees, typical of later enclosures;
- some visual containment provided by large blocks and belts of woodland creating a semi-enclosed character;
- thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- ash, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows
- distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky;
- moderate intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (smaller-scale)

- large-scale, gently rolling farmland occupying the elevated limestone plateau and dip slope;
- mixed land use and field pattern, with a patchwork of large arable fields and more frequent pasture and smaller-scale fields with irregular, sinuous boundaries;
- strong structure of dry-stone walls and hedgerows with frequent mature hedgerow trees;
- ash, hazel, field maple etc. conspicuous in hedgerows;
- semi-enclosed character with views contained by hedgerow structure and frequent blocks or belts of woodland;
- diverse and pastoral character;
- moderate intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Parkland

- formal, designed landscape and grounds surrounding large country houses;
- distinctive formal landscape features, including avenues, free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features;
- planting and landscape character generally unrelated to surrounding areas;
- distinctively rural, picturesque and pastoral character;
- mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

Estate farmland

- well-managed farmland associated with large country estates, often lying beyond formal parkland boundaries;
- distinctively well-treed character, with extensive mature woodland blocks, belts and copses (often managed for game), lines of mature trees (predominantly oak) within hedgerows, along estate boundaries and roads, estate fencing (railings and post and rail) and other estate features or buildings;
- large-scale pattern of fields, typically bounded by belts of woodland or lines of mature trees;
- land use predominantly arable but with some areas of permanent pasture;
- enclosed, secluded and private character;
- moderate to low intervisibility

Sub-rural landscapes

Rural fringe land

- waste ground on disused airfield with somewhat unkempt appearance and air of dereliction and neglect;
- rank or weed-infested grassland, poorly managed hedges and boundary fencing, with areas of fly-tipping and rubble;
- moderate intervisibility.

Sport landscapes

- manicured or intensively managed land under amenity use (eg. golf courses or playingfields);
- landform, planting character and features (eg. lakes, bunkers) often unrelated to landscape context;
- suburban influences of clubhouses, gates and car parking;
- open, expansive character, particularly where planting has not yet matured;
- moderate to high intervisibility.

Airfields and MoD land

- active airfield and MoD sites that typically occupy flat, exposed and prominent locations;
- open, expansive and bleak character with very weak landscape structure;
- visually prominent buildings and features (eg. large hangars, sheds, high security fencing, aircraft etc.)
- high intervisibility.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Much of this rolling limestone country is sparsely settled, with the small villages of Westwell, Holwell, Signet and Shilton forming the only settlements lying to the north and west of Carterton. All of these avoid the highest, most exposed areas, taking advantage of the shelter provided by minor valleys (eg. the Shill Brook) and hillsides.

The largest settlement in the area - Carterton - is a comparatively recent settlement, founded in 1901 to provide housing for a colony of smallholders. Although it did not prosper for this purpose, it grew enormously after 1920 in response to housing needs for RAF Brize Norton. Like the village of Brize Norton to the east, Carterton occupies part of the band of Combrash Limestone which forms the transition between the Oolitic limestone and the clay vale. They form part of a string of settlements which traditionally took advantage of the springs that emerge at the junction of the limestone and clay and the lighter, more easily worked soils of the Combrash (see Character Area 10).

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

The influence of the underlying Oolitic limestone is still evident as the predominant building material in the older settlements of this area, with roofs typically constructed of Stonesfield slates. The presence of drystone walls is common throughout the area and is a remarkably accurate indicator of the underlying geology. While stone is common within settlements further south in the clay vale (eg. Bampton), the change from hedges to stone walls within the wider farmed landscape follows the geological boundary almost exactly.

The smaller settlements in the northern area have a fairly compact form, some reminiscent of the Victorian 'closed' villages and others originally contained by a tight valley site (eg. Shilton). In contrast, the larger villages on the Combrash have a more elongated form, mainly with a north-south orientation, with buildings strung out along roads. Carterton has expanded rapidly in most directions although it has been somewhat constrained to the west by the valley of the Shill Brook.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- intrusive buildings, fences and structures associated with Brize Norton airfield;
- intrusive pylons and overhead power lines which encroach into the area along its western edge.

9: SHILTON DOWNS LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND CONDITION

This character area is not covered by any statutory landscape designations. However, it lies within an Area of High Landscape Value and includes a number of features of conservation significance which contribute to its overall value, including:

- Conservation Area at Shilton;
- two Sites of Special Scientific Interest and several remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland across the limestone uplands.

Overall, the Shilton Downs have an attractive and largely unspoilt, rural character but with occasional detracting influences, most notably the influence of urban development and the airbase at Carterton and the 'scruffy', derelict character of the disused airfield south of the Cotswold Wildlife Park. Most localised variations in quality and condition are related to the effects of agricultural land management practice. Different strategies for management and enhancement are shown in Figure 6.

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of grassland to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- noise and visual intrusion of Brize Norton airfield;
- the expansion of settlements and new housing into open countryside (eg. Carterton and at Bradwell Grove);
- 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and roads;
- negative quality of derelict airfield site.

GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLDS LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- retain and replant hedgerows and introduce more hedgerow trees, using native species typical of the limestone (eg. ash, field maple etc.);
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland;
- where possible, retain areas of existing permanent pasture (such as around Field Farm), encourage conversion of arable land to pasture and discourage further field enlargement;
- encourage less intensive farming practices, the introduction of 'natural' vegetation cover in field headlands and margins, improve appearance and wildlife value of 'set-aside' land;
- repair and maintain traditional stone buildings in the landscape;
- strengthen landscape structure around Carterton by new planting to soften the impact of existing and proposed development.

Development sensitivities

- open limestone wold landscapes are very visually exposed and sensitive to development;
- a particularly strong landscape structure would need to be established to absorb development in more open landscapes;
- semi-enclosed limestone wolds landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely and sensitively integrated with existing buildings or within a strong landscape structure;
- elevated, open landscapes are particularly sensitive to tall or prominent structures, such as communications masts, and large buildings.

GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain mature trees and other formal parkland features within the Cotswold Wildlife Park;
- retain mature hedges, boundary trees and roadside avenues and replant as necessary;
- manage and extend existing areas of broadleaved woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce enclosed, wooded character;
- retain areas of permanent pasture and resist conversion to arable.

Development sensitivities

- parkland landscapes and their component features are of high landscape value and very sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust.

GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of pasture and meadows within the minor valleys;
- encourage sensitive management of watercourses, planting of riparian vegetation and traditional pollarding of willows;
- introduce new woodland planting along the valley-sides

Development sensitivities

- the intimate landscape of the minor valleys has a rural, pastoral and generally unspoilt character and is very sensitive to built development;
- the upper, more open valley-sides are particularly visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed;
- the landscape buffer provided by Shill Brook along the western edge of Carterton should be maintained and strengthened.

GUIDELINES FOR SUB-RURAL LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- improve the quality of the boundaries around Brize Norton airbase by new planting and improved management, to reduce impact of intrusive structures, fencing and land uses;
- remove fly-tipping and unsightly fences etc. from the disused airfield near Bradwell Grove and encourage restoration of a more positive and appropriate landscape character;
- strengthen landscape structure in fringe landscapes around Carterton by new planting to soften the impact of existing and proposed development;
- encourage use of more appropriate species and planting character within golf course;
- encourage less intensive management of fairways and roughs, to encourage a more diverse grassland sward;
- maintain strong boundary planting to contain suburbanising influence on surrounding rural landscape.

Development sensitivities

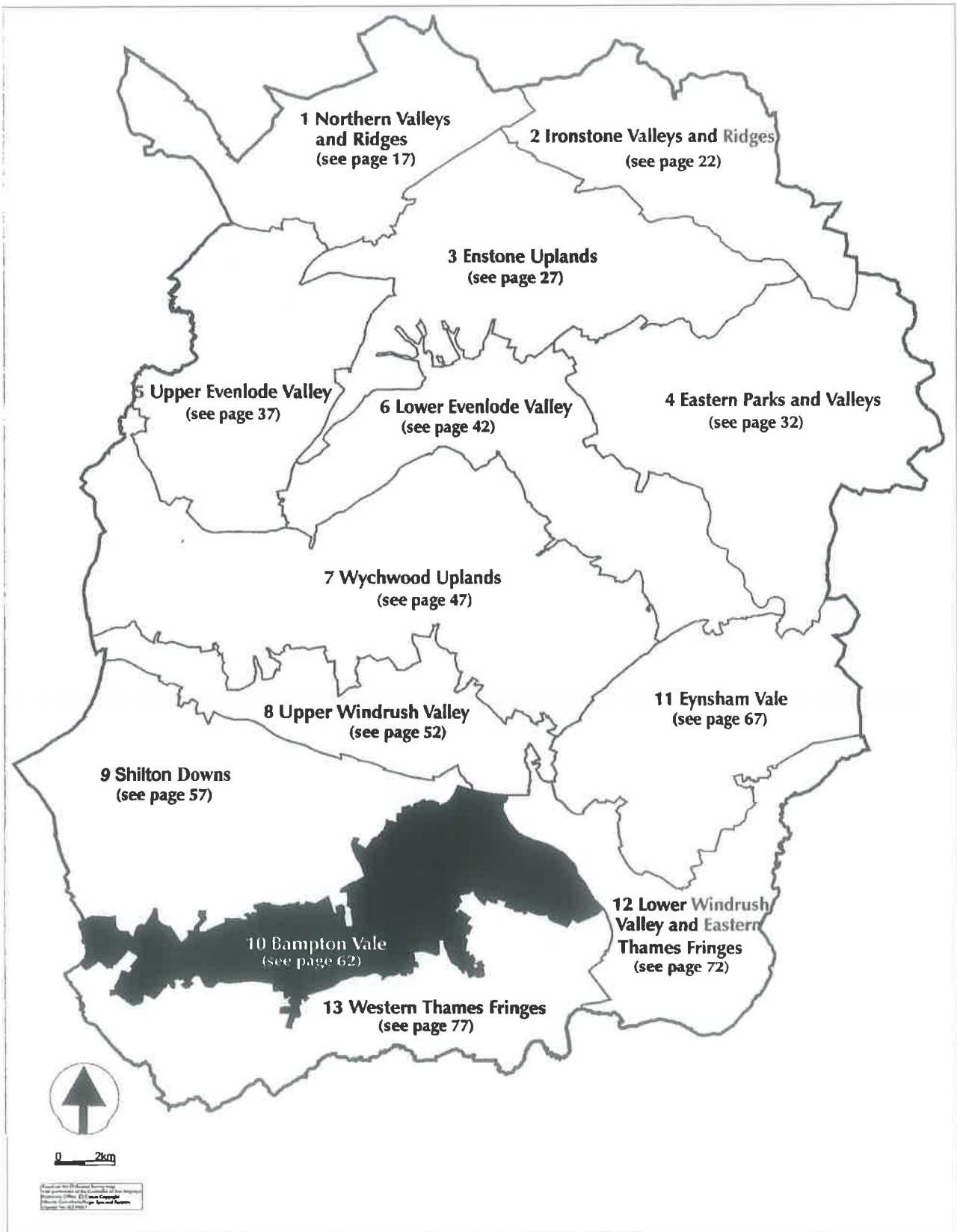
- 'brown-field' site of disused airfield potentially more tolerant of development but prominent plateau location and rural context are limiting factors;
- the introduction of urban influences, eg. styles of buildings, highway treatments and lighting to the airfield site would be potentially damaging to the rural character of the surrounding landscape.
- the highly artificial golf course landscape is quite tolerant of change but built development would alter its essentially 'green' character;
- sites with an open character on settlement fringes are less able to absorb development than those with a strong pattern of hedgerows and trees, within which development could be more successfully integrated.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement studies for:

Burford, Carterton and Witney

10 BAMPTON VALE



10: BAMPTON VALE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

This area of distinctively low-lying but gently rolling clay vale landscape lies between the edge of the limestone to the north and the very flat, expansive floodplain landscape which borders the River Thames to the south. The underlying clay geology is reflected in the soils and character of the vegetation (eg. oak is the dominant tree species). Landscape pattern is characterised by large fields with a reasonably strong structure of hedgerows and trees, although pockets of more open, intensive arable cultivation occupy higher, drier and more productive land overlying localised areas of river gravels.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

This is an area of low-lying, subdued relief which forms part of the lowland landscape of the Upper Thames Clay Vale. There is some variation in ground levels between about 70 and 90 m AOD but these changes are very subtle and are barely perceptible across much of the area.

The underlying geology is dominated by Oxford Clay but overlying this are localised deposits of alluvium and terrace gravels which have an influence on landuse and vegetation.

LANDCOVER

The heavy alluvial soils occur along minor streamcourses and typically support permanent pasture or grassland, with willow-lined ditches and a pastoral, riparian character. Farmland on the Oxford Clay supports a mixture of grassland and arable within large fields bounded by strong hedges and blocks of woodland, with oak as the dominant species. Areas of more open, intensive arable cultivation are confined to the higher, drier and more productive land overlying localised areas of river gravels.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

The overall character of this area is defined by its low-lying and gentle relief and the patchwork of large, regularly shaped fields and comparatively strong structure of hedgerows and trees. Within the area, however, a number of subtle variations in local landscape character have been identified, as summarised below.

Clay vale landscapes

Floodplain pasture

- typical; located immediately adjacent to rivers and minor watercourses on land prone to flooding, particularly in winter;
- distinctively flat, low-lying land (below 70m AOD);
- predominantly under permanent pasture with only occasional cultivated land;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;
- intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character;
- remote and tranquil with limited intrusion by people or buildings;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Open flat vale Farmland

- drained and cultivated land (arable or reseeded grassland) within the floodplain;
- distinctively flat and low-lying;
- network of ditches;
- weak landscape structure with few trees, low or gappy hedges open ditches and fences;
- open, denuded character with high intervisibility;
- 'two-dimensional', expansive landscape with dominant sky,

Semi-enclosed flat vale

- drained and cultivated land (arable or reseeded grassland) within the floodplain;
- distinctively flat and low-lying
- network of ditches;
- strong landscape structure of willow-lined ditches, hedgerows and occasional woodland blocks;
- semi-enclosed character with moderate to low intervisibility.

Open rolling vale farmland

- low-lying land off floodplain floor (generally above 70m AOD) with a discernible raised landform;
- well-drained, productive land underlain by river terrace gravels ;
- large-scale, cultivated fields (arable predominant) with regular field boundaries;
- weak structure of tightly clipped hedges and few hedgerow trees (dry-stonewalls absent);
- open, denuded character;
- high intervisibility;
- 'two-dimensional', expansive landscape with dominant sky.

Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland

- low-lying land off floodplain floor (generally above 70m AOD) with a discernible raised landform;
- well-drained, productive land underlain by river terrace gravels ;
- mostly large-scale fields under arable with regular field boundaries but some smaller-scale pattern and pasture (especially around settlements);
- stronger structure of hedgerows, trees and occasional belts or blocks of woodland;
- semi-enclosed character;
- moderate intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Parkland

- formal, designed landscape and grounds surrounding large country houses;
- distinctive formal landscape features, including avenues, free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features;
- planting and landscape character generally unrelated to surrounding areas;

- distinctively rural, picturesque and pastoral character;
- mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

Estate farmland

- well-managed farmland associated with large country estates, often lying beyond formal parkland boundaries;
- distinctively well-treed character, with extensive mature woodland blocks, belts and copses (often managed for game), lines of mature trees (predominantly oak) within hedgerows, along estate boundaries and roads, estate fencing (railings and post and rail) and other estate features or buildings;
- large-scale pattern of fields, typically bounded by belts of woodland or lines of mature trees;
- land use predominantly arable but with some areas of permanent pasture;
- enclosed, secluded and private character;
- moderate to low intervisibility

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The pattern of settlement within this area is intimately related to geology. A line of villages occur along the northern edge of the area, including Filkins, Broughton Poggs, Kencot, Broadwell, Black Bourton and Alvescot. Early settlement of these areas was intimately related to the outcrop of Combrash limestone which forms the transition between the Oolitic limestone to the north and the clay vale, taking advantage of the springs that emerge at the junction of the limestone and clay and the lighter, more easily worked soils of the Combrash.

Elsewhere, extensive deposits of river gravels overlie the Oxford Clay and alluvium to create terraces of raised land with well-drained soils that were favoured by early settlers. There has been persistent settlement of these Thames -side gravels since prehistoric times but most of today's settlements date from the Saxon period and include Bampton (one of the earliest Saxon settlements in this part of England), Clanfield, Langford and Aston. Other small hamlets and farms also tend to occupy islands of raised ground, such as at Lew, with a very sparse

scattering of buildings within the large areas of low-lying farmland in between.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

Where settlements evolved as isolated 'islands' surrounded by low-lying floodplain marshes, their form tends to be nucleated, focused upon a central space. This is particularly true of Bampton which, until 1750, had no surfaced road access and was essentially an inward-looking, self-sufficient community. Other settlements have developed in a more linear fashion and in some cases have coalesced to form linked pairs of villages, such as Filkins and Broughton Poggs and Kencot and Broadwell.

Oolitic limestone is the predominant building and roofing material in the villages, reflecting their relative proximity to the Cotswold hills to the north. Occasional brick buildings mostly date from the nineteenth century. While stone is common within the villages, it is rare within the open farmland, where hedges or ditches are the predominant field boundaries.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- spire of Bampton church;
- other attractive stone buildings within conservation villages and in open countryside;
- intrusive buildings, fences and structures associated with Brize Norton airfield, visible over some distance, especially from slightly elevated areas (eg. Lew); intrusive pylons and overhead power lines which encroach into the area along its western edge.

10: BAMPTON VALE LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

This character area is not covered by any statutory landscape designations. However, parts of the area lie within an Area of High Landscape Value and it includes a number of features of conservation significance which contribute to its overall value, including:

- Conservation Areas at Langford, Bampton, Filkins, Broughton Poggs, Kencot and Alvescot;
- a **good** number of Scheduled Ancient **Monuments** associated with early settlement on the terrace gravels;
- some large remnants of Ancient Semi-natural **Woodland** to the east of the area.

Overall, the Western Vale Fringes have an attractive and unspoilt, rural character but with some localised variations in quality and condition which require different strategies for management and enhancement (see Figure 6).

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly drainage and conversion of pasture to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and roads;
- noise and visual intrusion from Brize Norton airbase and visual intrusion of pylons and overhead power lines.

GUIDELINES FOR CLAY VALE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of floodplain pasture, meadows and riparian vegetation;
- promote traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management;
- introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within valley floor, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- within open clay vale landscapes, restore a stronger structure of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and belts of woodland,
- in semi-enclosed clay vale farmland, retain and extend existing hedgerow network and allow mature hedgerow trees to develop;
- where possible, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture;
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a more mixed pattern of woodland and farmland.

Development sensitivities

- unspoilt floodplain farmland is of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- open clay vale landscapes are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed;
- semi-enclosed clay vale landscapes may offer limited opportunities to absorb small-scale **development** within a **strong** structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings.

GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- maintain, and where necessary, restore parkland landscape and features at Cokethorpe;
- retain mature hedges, boundary trees and roadside avenues and replant as necessary;
- manage and extend existing areas of broadleaved woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce enclosed, wooded character;
- retain areas of permanent pasture and resist conversion to arable.

Development sensitivities

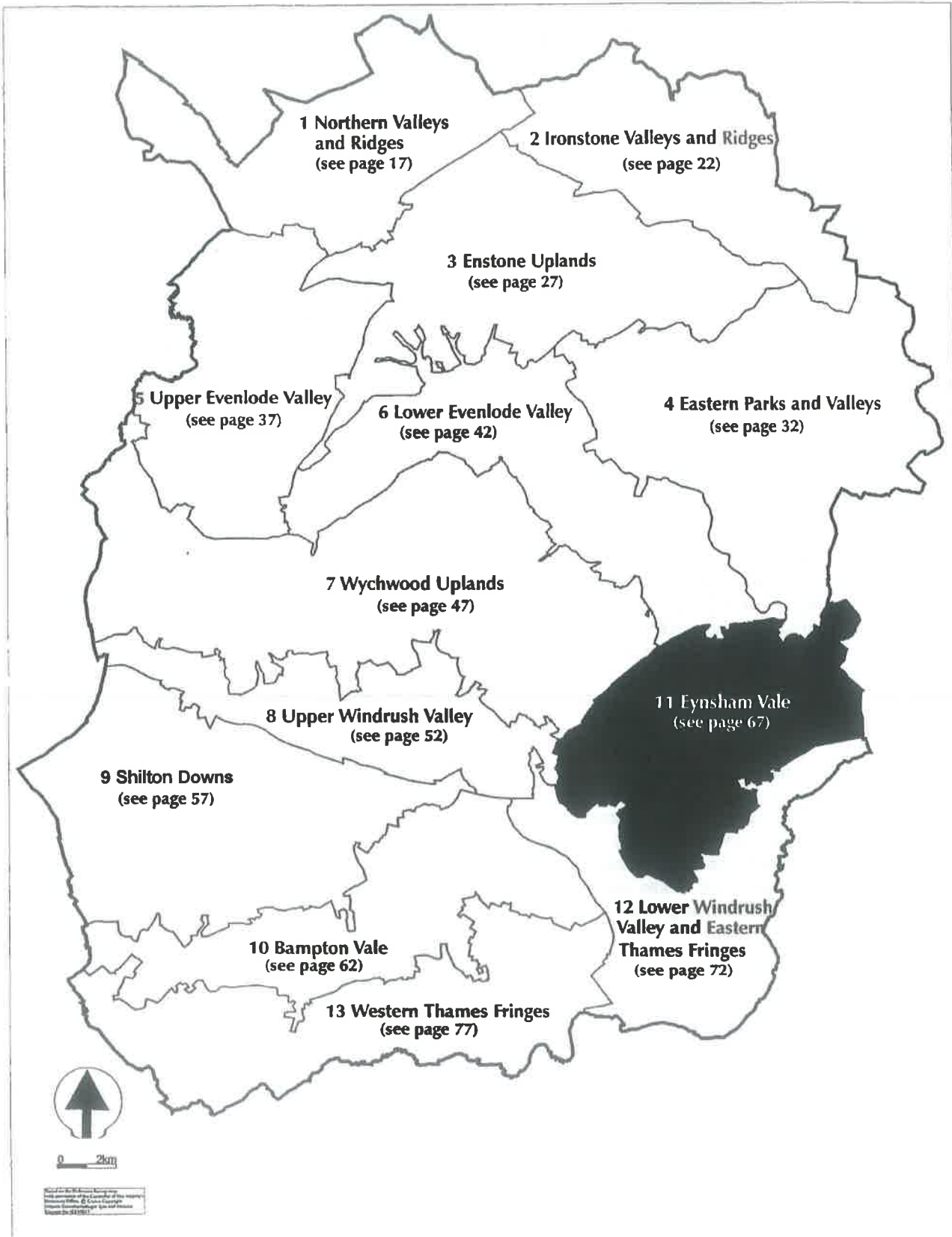
- parkland landscapes and their component features are of high landscape value and very sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

Bampton

11 EYNESHAM VALE



11: EYNESHAM VALE

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

This area has similarities with Area 10 and forms a low-lying area characterised by large-scale, subtly rolling farmland, with a strong landscape structure. However, it is particularly distinguished by extensive areas of woodland and a well-treed character dominated by the formal parkland and well-managed farmland of Eynsham Park and other large estates.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

This is an area of low-lying, subdued relief which forms part of the lowland landscape of the Upper Thames Clay Vale and its tributaries (including the lower part of the Evenlode valley). There is some variation in ground levels between about 70 and 90 m AOD but these changes are very subtle and are barely perceptible across much of the area. The underlying geology is dominated by Oxford Clay but overlying this are localised deposits of alluvium, terrace gravels and glacial drift which have an influence on landuse and vegetation.

LANDCOVER

The heavy alluvial soils occur along streamcourses and river valleys and typically support permanent pasture or grassland, with willow-lined ditches and a pastoral, riparian character. Farmland on the Oxford Clay supports a mixture of grassland and arable within large fields bounded by strong hedges and blocks of oak woodland.

Woodland cover, including the ancient woodland of Cogges Wood, is a feature of the parkland and estate landscape surrounding Eynsham Hall and occupies areas underlain by boulder clay. Areas of more open, intensive arable cultivation are confined to the higher, drier and more productive land overlying localised areas of river gravels.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

Like the Western Vale Fringes, the typical character of this area is defined by its low-lying and gentle relief and the patchwork of large, regularly shaped fields and comparatively strong structure of hedgerows and trees. However, the heavily wooded estate landscape of Eynsham Park is a dominant feature and a number of more subtle variations in local landscape character have also been identified, as summarised below.

Clay vale landscapes

Floodplain pasture

- typically located immediately adjacent to rivers and minor watercourses on land prone to flooding, particularly in winter;
- distinctively flat, low-lying land (below 70m AOD);
- predominantly under permanent pasture with only occasional cultivated land;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;
- intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character;
- remote and tranquil with limited intrusion by people or buildings;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Open flat vale farmland

- drained and cultivated land (arable or reseeded grassland) within the floodplain;
- distinctively flat and low-lying;
- network of ditches;
- weak landscape structure with few trees, low or gappy hedges open ditches and fences;
- open, denuded character with high intervisibility;
- 'two-dimensional', expansive landscape with dominant sky.

Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland

- drained and cultivated land (arable or reseeded grassland) within the floodplain;
- distinctively flat and low-lying;
- network of ditches;
- stronger landscape structure of willow-lined ditches, hedgerows and occasional woodland blocks;
- semi-enclosed character with moderate to low intervisibility.

Open rolling vale farmland

- low-lying land off floodplain floor (generally above 70m AOD) with a discernible raised landform;
- well-drained, productive land underlain by river terrace gravels ;
- large-scale, cultivated fields (arable predominant) with regular field boundaries;
- weak structure of tightly clipped hedges and few hedgerow trees (dry-stonewalls absent);
- open, denuded character;
- high intervisibility;
- 'two-dimensional', expansive landscape with dominant sky.

Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland

- low-lying land off floodplain floor (generally above 70m AOD) with a discernible raised landform;
- well-drained, productive land underlain by river terrace gravels ;
- mostly large-scale fields under arable with regular field boundaries but some smaller-scale pattern and pasture (especially around settlements);
- stronger structure of hedgerows, trees and occasional belts or blocks of woodland;
- semi-enclosed character;
- moderate intervisibility.

Floodplain wetlands

- areas of open water occupying former gravel pits within floodplain;
- associated wet grassland and marsh/fen vegetation communities with a semi-natural character;
- distinctively flat, low-lying land (below 70m AOD);
- structure and visual enclosure provided by developing scrub and tree cover;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Parkland landscapes

Parkland

- formal, designed landscape and grounds surrounding large country houses;
- distinctive formal landscape features, including avenues, free-standing mature trees in pasture, clumps and blocks of woodland, exotic tree species, formal structures and boundary features;
- planting and landscape character generally unrelated to surrounding areas;
- distinctively rural, picturesque and pastoral character;
- mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

Estate farmland

- well-managed farmland associated with large country estates, often lying beyond formal parkland boundaries;
- distinctively well-treed character, with extensive mature woodland blocks, belts and copses (often managed for game), lines of mature trees (predominantly oak) within hedgerows, along estate boundaries and roads, estate fencing (railings and post and rail) and other estate features or buildings;
- large-scale pattern of fields, typically bounded by belts of woodland or lines of mature trees;
- land use predominantly arable but with some areas of permanent pasture;
- enclosed, secluded and private character;
- moderate to low intervisibility

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Like most parts of the Upper Thames Clay Vale, the pattern of settlement within this area is intimately related to geology, with most settlements located on the raised terraces of river gravels which overlie the clay and alluvial flats. Their origins are mixed, however, as there has been persistent settlement of these Thames-side gravels since prehistoric times. For example, sites near Eynsham and Cassington show an overlap of cultures from Bronze and Iron Age, through Roman to Saxon settlement.

All took advantage of the proximity to well-watered meadows and the lighter, productive soils of the gravel terraces. Place names suggest definite Saxon origins for some settlements, such as Eynsham which incorporates the Old English word for meadow - 'ham'. Eynsham's siting was also related to a strategic crossing point of the Thames. Other settlements, like Freeland, owe their origins to the re-development of the agrarian landscape and the building of country mansions, notably Eynsham Hall, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

Settlements in this area are predominantly linear in form with buildings strung out along a road (eg. Cassington and Freeland). Eynsham has a squarer form, with its original core having been extended as part of a planned medieval settlement, although this form has been partially obscured by modern development.

Oolitic limestone is the predominant building material in these settlements, reflecting their relative proximity to the Cotswold hills to the north. Roofing material is more mixed, however, and includes Stonesfield slate, thatch, tiles and Welsh slate. While stone is common within the villages, it is rare within the open farmland, where hedges or ditches are the predominant field boundaries.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- intrusive buildings and urban features around fringes of Eynsham.

11: EYNESHAM VALE LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

This character area is not covered by any statutory landscape designations and only a small part lies within the Area of High Landscape Value. However, it includes a number of features of conservation significance which contribute to its overall value, including:

- Conservation Areas at Church Hanborough, Bladon, Cassington and Eynsham;
- a **Park** and Garden of Special Interest at Eynsham Hall;
- a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments on the terrace gravels near Eynsham;
- some large remnants of Ancient **Semi-natural Woodland** scattered across the area.

Overall, the Eynsham Vale has an attractive and largely unspoilt, rural character but with some localised variations in quality and condition which demand different strategies for management and enhancement (see Figure x).

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly drainage and conversion of pasture to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- intrusion from built development, **heavy** traffic on main roads (particularly the A40) and overhead power lines;
- expansion of rural settlements and 'suburbanisation' of the wider countryside.

GUIDELINES FOR CLAY VALE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- retain and manage areas of floodplain pasture, meadows and riparian vegetation;
- promote traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management;
- introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within valley floor, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- within open clay vale landscapes, restore a stronger structure of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and belts of woodland;
- in semi-enclosed clay vale farmland, retain and extend existing hedgerow network and allow mature hedgerow trees to develop;
- where possible, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture;
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a more mixed pattern of woodland and farmland;
- strengthen landscape structure around the main settlements (eg. Eynsham) to soften the urbanising effects of existing or proposed peripheral development;
- maintain rural character of secondary road network and, where possible, avoid urbanising influences of street lighting, kerbs and footpaths, signage etc.

Development sensitivities

- unspoilt floodplain farmland is of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- flat, open clay vale landscapes are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed unless integrated within strong new landscape frameworks;
- semi-enclosed clay vale landscapes may offer **limited opportunities to absorb small-scale** development within a strong structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings;

- smaller-scale, clay vale landscapes on the immediate fringes of the larger settlements are potentially more tolerant of development, if it conforms to existing field pattern, is sensitively designed and does not significantly alter settlement form.

GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- maintain, and where necessary, restore parkland landscape and features at Eynsham Park;
- retain mature hedges, boundary trees and roadside avenues and replant as necessary;
- manage and extend existing areas of broadleaved woodland to maximise their wildlife and landscape value;
- plant new blocks and belts of broadleaved woodland within estate farmland to reinforce enclosed, wooded character;

- retain areas of permanent pasture and resist conversion to arable.

Development sensitivities

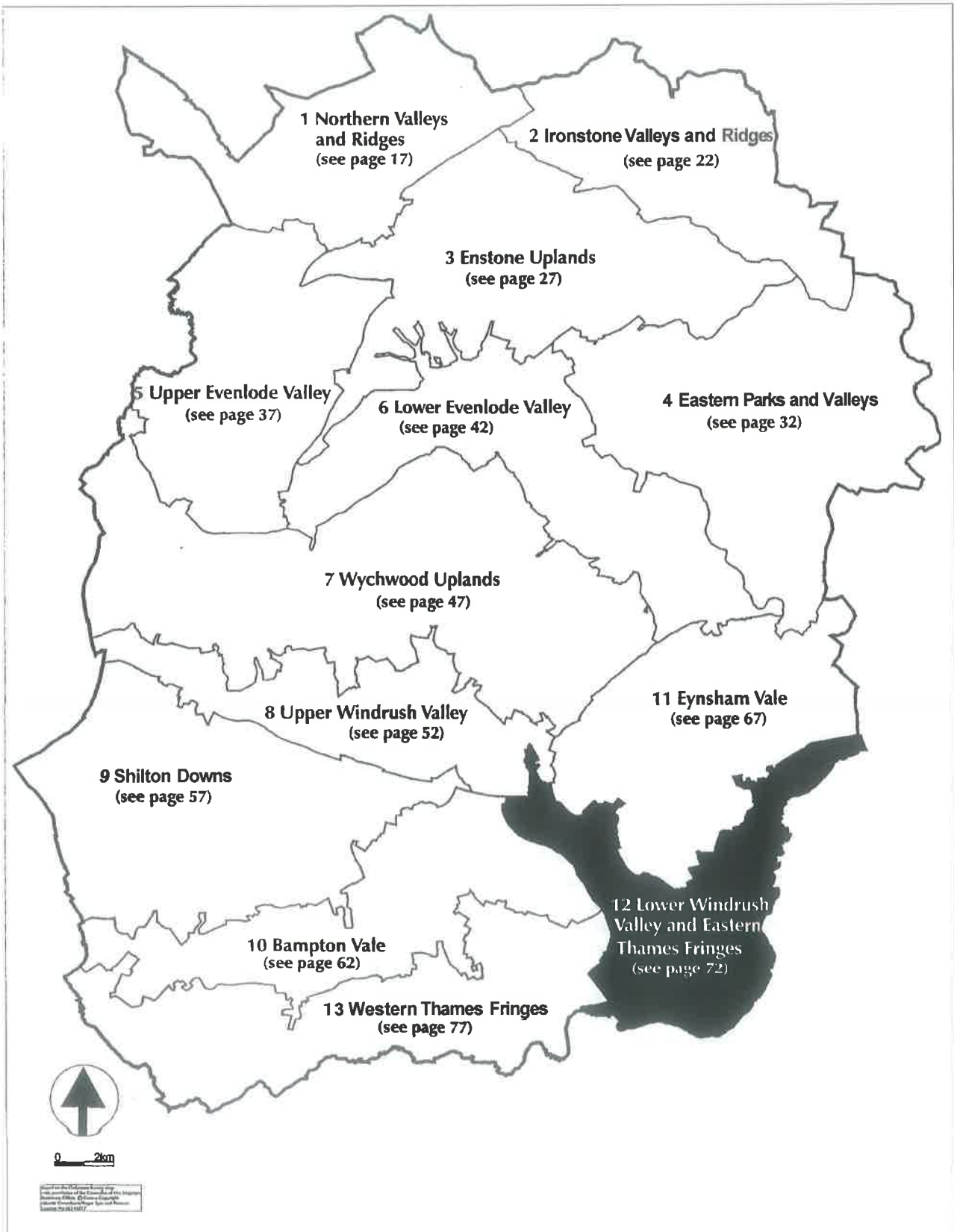
- parkland landscapes and their component features are of high landscape value and very sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

Eynsham
Witney

12 LOWER WINDRUSH VALLEY AND EASTERN THAMES FRINGES



12: LOWER WINDRUSH VALLEY AND EASTERN THAMES FRINGES: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

An area of distinctively flat, low-lying landscape which occupies the 'floodplain' of the River Windrush and the margins of the River Thames to the east and west of their confluence. The area overlies extensive river gravel deposits and its character has been heavily modified by mineral extraction. Large areas of the floodplain are now occupied by gravel pits in various stages of active quarrying, restoration or recolonisation and extensive areas of open water are a distinguishing feature of this area. Where these have recolonised, and in the extensive areas of pasture to the east, the landscape has a typically pastoral, tranquil and remote character.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

This is an area of low-lying, subdued relief which forms part of the lowland landscape of the Upper Thames Clay Vale. It is extremely flat and low-lying (mostly below 70 metres AOD) and forms the immediate floodplain of the River Thames and its major tributary, the River Windrush. The underlying geology is dominated by alluvium and terrace gravels which have an influence on land use and vegetation.

LANDCOVER

Large expanses of alluvium occur immediately alongside the Thames and typically support permanent pasture or meadow grassland, with a characteristic pastoral, riparian character. The lighter soils of the gravel terraces have been intensively cultivated and now support large-scale open, arable farmland with a weak hedgerow structure and flat, expansive character. The deposits of gravel have been extensively quarried, replacing former farmland and marshes with a series of large lakes and wetlands. Active mineral extraction is ongoing but a number of former gravel pits have been restored or naturally colonised to form mosaics of wetland habitats of wildlife value, including open water, marsh, and scrub woodland.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

The overall character of this area is defined by its low-lying, extremely flat and wetland character but within this, a number of specific variations in local landscape character have been identified, as summarised below.

Clay vale landscapes

Floodplain pasture

- typical; located immediately adjacent to rivers and minor watercourses on land prone to flooding, particularly in winter;
- distinctively flat, low-lying land (below 70m AOD);
- predominantly under permanent pasture with only occasional cultivated land;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;
- intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character;
- remote and tranquil with limited intrusion by people or buildings;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Floodplain wetlands

- areas of open water occupying former gravel pits within floodplain;
- associated wet grassland and marsh/fen vegetation communities with a semi-natural character;
- distinctively flat, low-lying land (below 70m AOD);
- structure and visual enclosure provided by developing scrub and tree cover;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Open flat vale farmland

- drained and cultivated land (arable or reseeded grassland) within the floodplain;
- distinctively flat and low-lying;
- network of ditches;
- weak landscape structure with few trees, low or gappy hedges open ditches and fences;
- open, denuded character with high intervisibility;
- 'two-dimensional', expansive landscape with dominant sky.

Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland

- drained and cultivated land (arable or reseeded grassland) within the floodplain;
- distinctively flat and low-lying;
- network of ditches;
- stronger landscape structure of willow-lined ditches, hedgerows and occasional woodland blocks;
- semi-enclosed character with moderate to low intervisibility.

Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland

- low-lying land off floodplain floor (generally above 70m **AOD**) with a discernible raised landform;
- well-drained, productive land underlain by river terrace gravels ;
- mostly large-scale fields under arable with regular field boundaries but some smaller-scale pattern and pasture (especially around settlements);
- stronger structure of hedgerows, trees and occasional belts or blocks of woodland;
- semi-enclosed character;
- moderate intervisibility.

Sub-rural landscapes

Quarries and landfill sites

- areas where quarrying or landfill activity has significantly altered local landscape character;
- artificial landform created by excavations, tipped material and the construction of screen bunds;
- disturbed land typically dominated by bare ground, scrub, rough grassland, weeds and belts of screen planting;
- urban character introduced with incongruous styles of fencing and highway treatments, site buildings, machinery etc.;
- low intervisibility where mounding and planting have taken effect.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Like other parts of the Upper Thames Clay Vale, the flat alluvial floodplains of the Thames and Windrush are overlain by extensive terraces of river gravels which have been favoured for settlement since prehistoric times. A particularly dense pattern of settlements existed along the Thames between Cassington and Standlake but much of this earlier evidence, such as the Neolithic henge monument of the Devil's Quoits near Stanton Harcourt, has been lost to gravel extraction or under changing patterns of land use. All of these early settlers took advantage of the drier, lighter soils of the gravel areas and the proximity to the well-watered meadows along the main rivers.

The present-day settlements have mixed origins. Stanton Harcourt is one of the earliest and largest of the remaining settlements while new marshland villages, like Northmoor and Standlake ('stony stream'), were established during a period of medieval expansion, forming a reclamation frontier at the leading edge of the lowest gravel terrace. Other settlements, like Ducklington and Hardwick, are located further up the Windrush valley but also occupy sites underlain by gravels. The alluvial flats within the floodplain of both rivers are more or less empty of settlement and have a remote, inaccessible character.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

Settlements in this area are typically linear in form with buildings strung out along a road. Oolitic limestone is still the predominant building material but there are a few examples of medieval timber cruck buildings (eg. in Standlake) and the use of brick, and roofing materials are a mixture of Stonesfield slate, **thatch, tiles and Welsh slate**. While stone is common within the villages, it is rare within the open farmland, where hedges or ditches are the predominant field boundaries.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- attractive stone buildings within Conservation Areas and in open countryside.
- localised intrusion of mineral workings in valley floor.

12: LOWER WINDRUSH VALLEY AND EASTERN THAMES FRINGES: LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

This character area is not covered by any statutory landscape designations but most of the area lies within the Area of High Landscape Value and the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area and it includes a number of features of conservation significance which contribute to its overall value, including:

- Conservation Areas at Stanton Harcourt, Northmoor, Hardwick and Ducklington;
- a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments;
- four Sites of Special Scientific Interest within the floodplain.

Overall, the Lower Windrush Valley and Eastern Thames Fringes has an attractive and largely unspoilt, rural character but with some localised variations in quality and condition which require different strategies for management and enhancement (see Figure 6).

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly drainage and conversion of pasture to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- extensive sand and gravel extraction within the floodplain;
- intrusion from built development, traffic on main roads and overhead power lines;
- expansion of rural settlements and 'suburbanisation' of the wider countryside.

GUIDELINES FOR CLAY VALE LANDSCAPES

Enhancement priorities

- wherever possible, retain and manage areas of floodplain pasture, water meadows and riparian vegetation;
- promote traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management;
- introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines within floodplain farmland, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- within open clay vale landscapes, restore a stronger structure of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and belts of woodland,
- in semi-enclosed clay vale farmland, retain and extend existing hedgerow network and allow mature hedgerow trees to develop;
- where possible, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture;
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a more mixed pattern of woodland and farmland;
- strengthen landscape structure around the main settlements (eg. Eynsham) to soften the urbanising effects of existing or proposed peripheral development;
- maintain rural character of secondary road network and, where possible, avoid urbanising influences of street lighting, kerbs and footpaths, signage etc.

Development sensitivities

- unspoilt floodplain farmland is of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- flat, open clay vale landscapes are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed unless integrated within strong new landscape frameworks;
- semi-enclosed clay vale landscapes may offer limited opportunities to absorb small-scale development within a strong structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings;

- smaller-scale, clay wold landscapes on the immediate fringes of the larger settlements are potentially more tolerant of development, if it conforms to existing field pattern, is sensitively designed and does not significantly alter settlement form;
- floodplain wetlands created from gravel extraction with a quiet, remote character and developing wildlife value are particularly sensitive to development and activity.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

Eynsham
Ducklington

GUIDELINES FOR SUB-RURAL LANDSCAPES

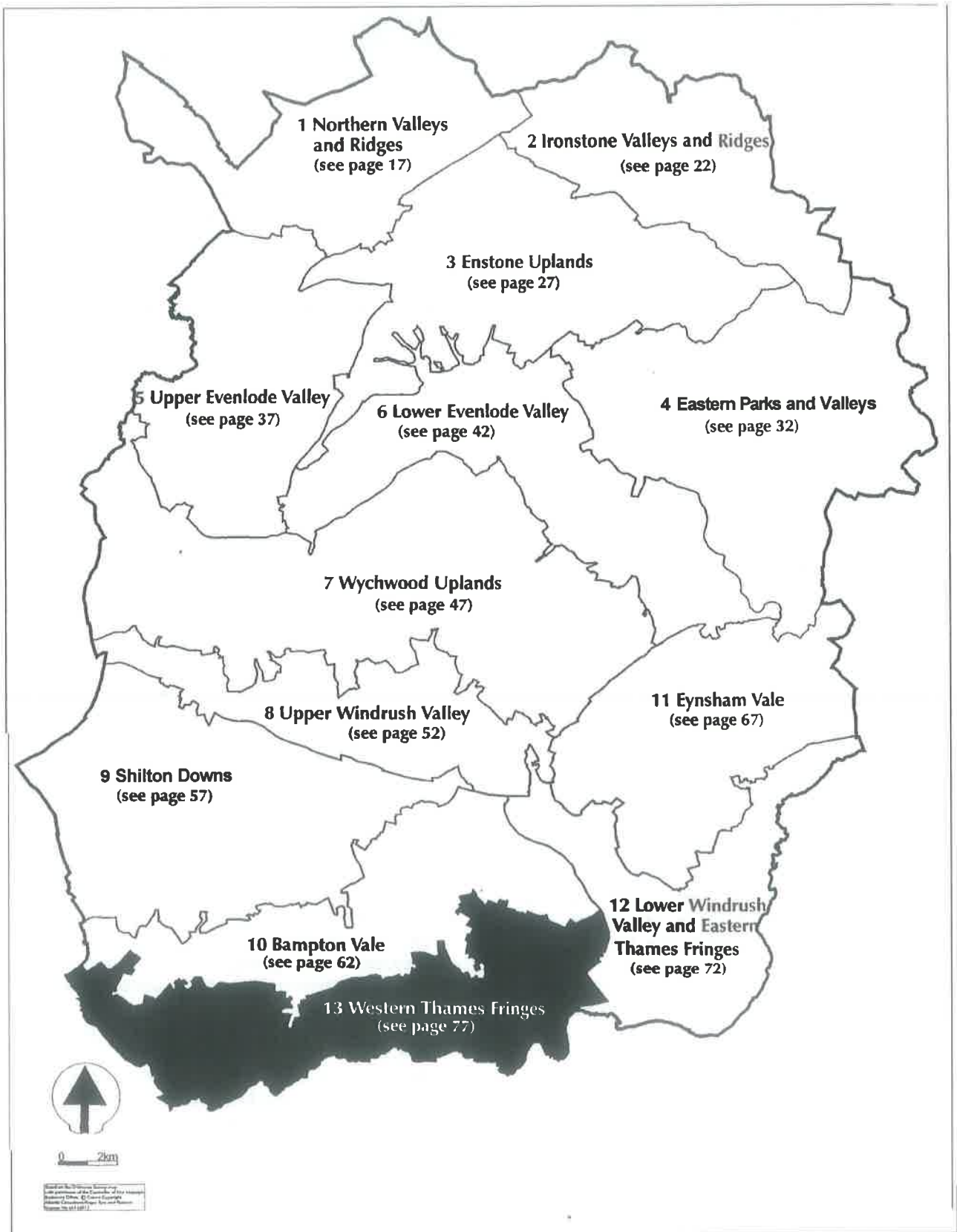
Enhancement priorities

- encourage appropriate restoration and after-uses for gravel pits to maximise their wildlife and landscape value and restore rural character to access roads and boundaries on cessation of working;

Development sensitivities

- these 'brown-field' sites are potentially more tolerant of change but their rural context are limiting factors for development;
- the introduction of urbanising influences, eg. urban styles of buildings, highway treatments and lighting would be potentially damaging to the rural character of the surrounding landscape.

13 WESTERN THAMES FRINGES



13: WESTERN THAMES FRINGES LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

OVERVIEW

Like the Lower Windrush Valley, this area is characterised by the very flat, low-lying landscape of the River Thames floodplain but it remains comparatively free from mineral extraction. However, it has been more affected by land drainage and intensive farming practices and much of the former floodplain pasture is now dominated by arable farmland. Areas underlain by river gravels are particularly intensively farmed and have a very open, expansive character.

GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

This is an area of low-lying, subdued relief which forms part of the lowland landscape of the Upper Thames Clay Vale. It is extremely flat and low-lying (mostly below 70 metres AOD) and forms the immediate floodplain of the River Thames. The underlying geology is dominated by alluvium and terrace gravels which have an influence on land use and vegetation.

LANDCOVER

Large expanses of alluvium occur immediately alongside the Thames and typically support permanent pasture or meadow grassland, with a characteristic pastoral, riparian character. Further away from the Thames, an extensive system of drainage has enabled large areas of pasture to be converted to large-scale arable farmland with a reasonably strong structure of hedges and woodland blocks. However, the lighter soils of the gravel terraces have been most intensively cultivated and now support large-scale open, arable farmland with a weak hedgerow structure and flat, expansive character.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

The overall character of this area is defined by its low-lying and extremely flat relief and its remoteness. It typically comprises a patchwork of large, regularly shaped fields and an expansive character. However, a number of variations in local landscape character have been identified, as summarised below.

Clay vale landscapes

Floodplain pasture

- typically located immediately adjacent to rivers and minor watercourses on land prone to flooding, particularly in winter;
- distinctively flat, low-lying land (below 70m AOD);
- predominantly under permanent pasture with only occasional cultivated land;
- riparian character, with strong pattern of ditches often lined by willow;
- landscape structure provided by lines and groups of mature trees, with willow and alder conspicuous;
- intimate, semi-enclosed and pastoral character;
- remote and tranquil with limited intrusion by people or buildings;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Floodplain wetlands

- areas of open water occupying former gravel pits within floodplain;
- associated wet grassland and marsh/fen vegetation communities with a semi-natural character;
- distinctively flat, low-lying land (below 70m AOD);
- structure and visual enclosure provided by developing scrub and tree cover;
- moderate to low intervisibility.

Open flat vale farmland

- drained and cultivated land (arable or reseeded grassland) within the floodplain;
- distinctively flat and low-lying;
- network of ditches;
- weak landscape structure with few trees, low or gappy hedges open ditches and fences;
- remote and tranquil with limited intrusion by people or buildings
- open, denuded character with high intervisibility;
- 'two-dimensional', expansive landscape with dominant sky.

Semi-enclosed flat vale farmland

- drained and cultivated land (arable or reseeded grassland) within the floodplain;
- distinctively flat and low-lying;
- network of ditches;
- stronger landscape structure of willow-lined ditches, hedgerows and occasional woodland blocks;
- semi-enclosed character with moderate to low intervisibility.

Open rolling vale farmland

- low-lying land off floodplain floor (generally above 70m AOD) with a discernible raised landform;
- well-drained, productive land underlain by river terrace gravels ;
- large-scale, cultivated fields (arable predominant) with regular field boundaries;
- weak structure of tightly clipped hedges and few hedgerow trees (dry-stonewalls absent);
- open, denuded character;
- high intervisibility;
- 'two-dimensional', expansive landscape with dominant sky.

Semi-enclosed rolling vale farmland

- low-lying land off floodplain floor (generally above 70m AOD) with a discernible raised landform;
- well-drained, productive land underlain by river terrace gravels ;
- mostly large-scale fields under arable with regular field boundaries but some smaller-scale pattern and pasture (especially around settlements);
- stronger structure of hedgerows, trees and occasional belts or blocks of woodland;
- semi-enclosed character;
- moderate intervisibility.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Settlement within this western part of the Thames floodplain is very sparse. In particular, the land running immediately alongside the Thames between Newbridge and Radcot (sometimes described as the 'Bampton polderland') is almost entirely underlain by alluvium and supports little more than a handful of isolated farms. This adds to the feeling of remoteness across this area.

Elsewhere, the pattern of settlement generally follows the gravel outcrops (eg. at Cote, Little Clanfield and Crafton), their locations set back from the Thames to avoid the areas historically most prone to flooding. Settlements such as Kelmscott, Little Faringdon and the tiny hamlet of Chimney (from the Old English 'Ceomma's island') appear to be sited on alluvium. However, on closer inspection, they all occupy pockets of subtly raised landform which would have afforded some protection from flooding. Major river engineering work in the late nineteenth century effectively removed the threat of flooding from these riverine settlements and facilitated the conversion of much of the former marsh into productive agricultural land.

SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

Oolitic limestone is still the predominant building material in these few settlements with a mix of roofing materials including Stonesfield slate, thatch, tiles and Welsh slate. While stone is common within the villages, it is rare within the open farmland, where hedges or ditches are the predominant field boundaries.

KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- attractive vernacular buildings within villages and in open countryside;
- intrusive pylons and overhead power lines which encroach into the area along its western edge.

13: WESTERN THAMES FRINGES LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

This character area is not covered by any statutory landscape designations but most of the area lies within the Area of High Landscape Value and the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area and it includes a number of features of conservation significance which contribute to its overall value, including:

- Conservation Areas at Radcot and Kelmscott;
- a good number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments along the terrace gravels;
- one Site of Special Scientific Interest within the floodplain.

Overall, the Western Thames Fringes has an attractive and largely unspoilt, rural 'backwater' character but with some localised variations in quality and condition which require different strategies for management and enhancement (see Figure 6).

The principal factors that potentially threaten landscape quality in this area are:

- agricultural intensification, particularly drainage and conversion of pasture to arable, the removal of natural vegetation cover and the poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- possible future sand and gravel extraction within the floodplain;
- intrusion from overhead power lines.

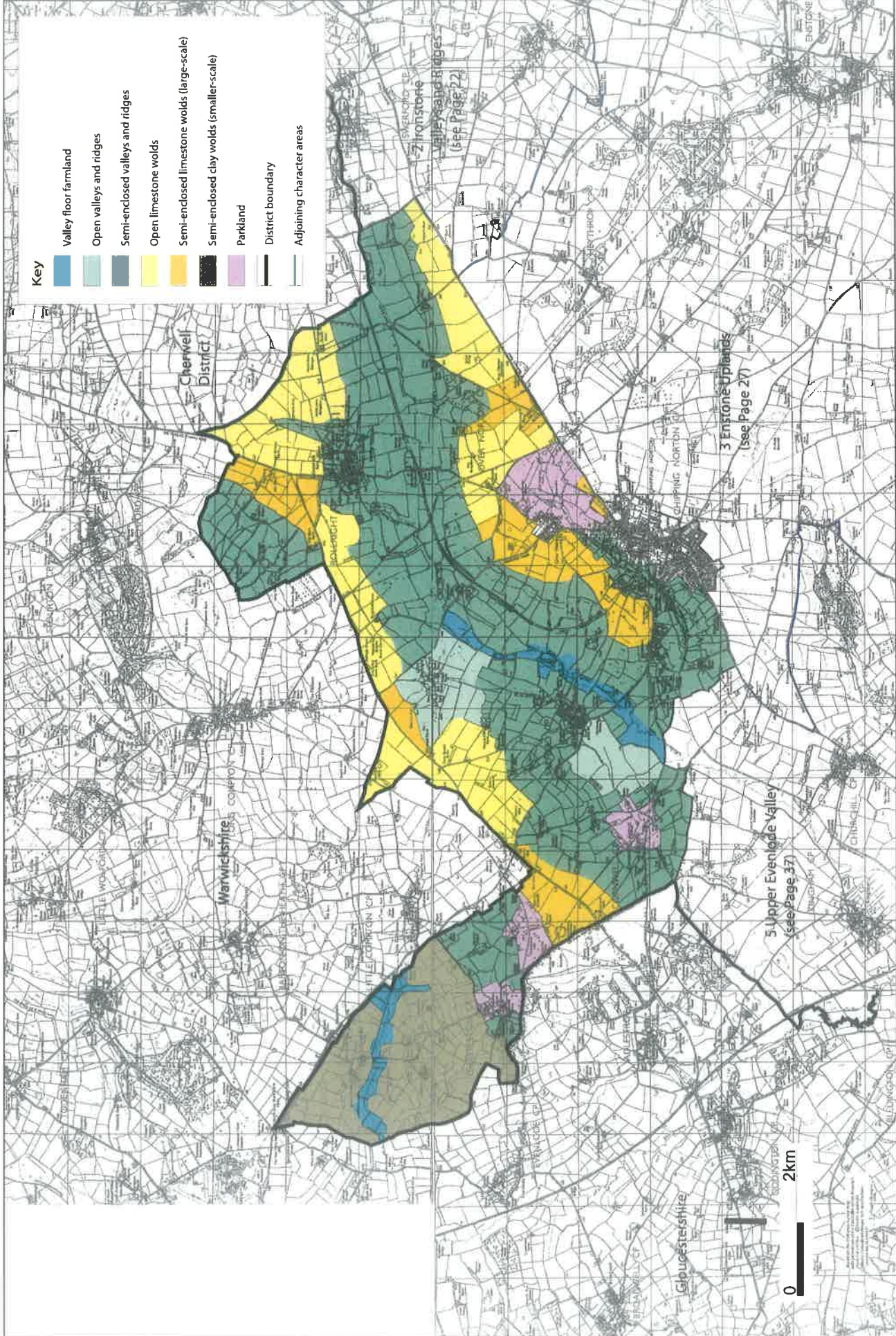
GUIDELINES FOR CLAY VALE LANDSCAPES

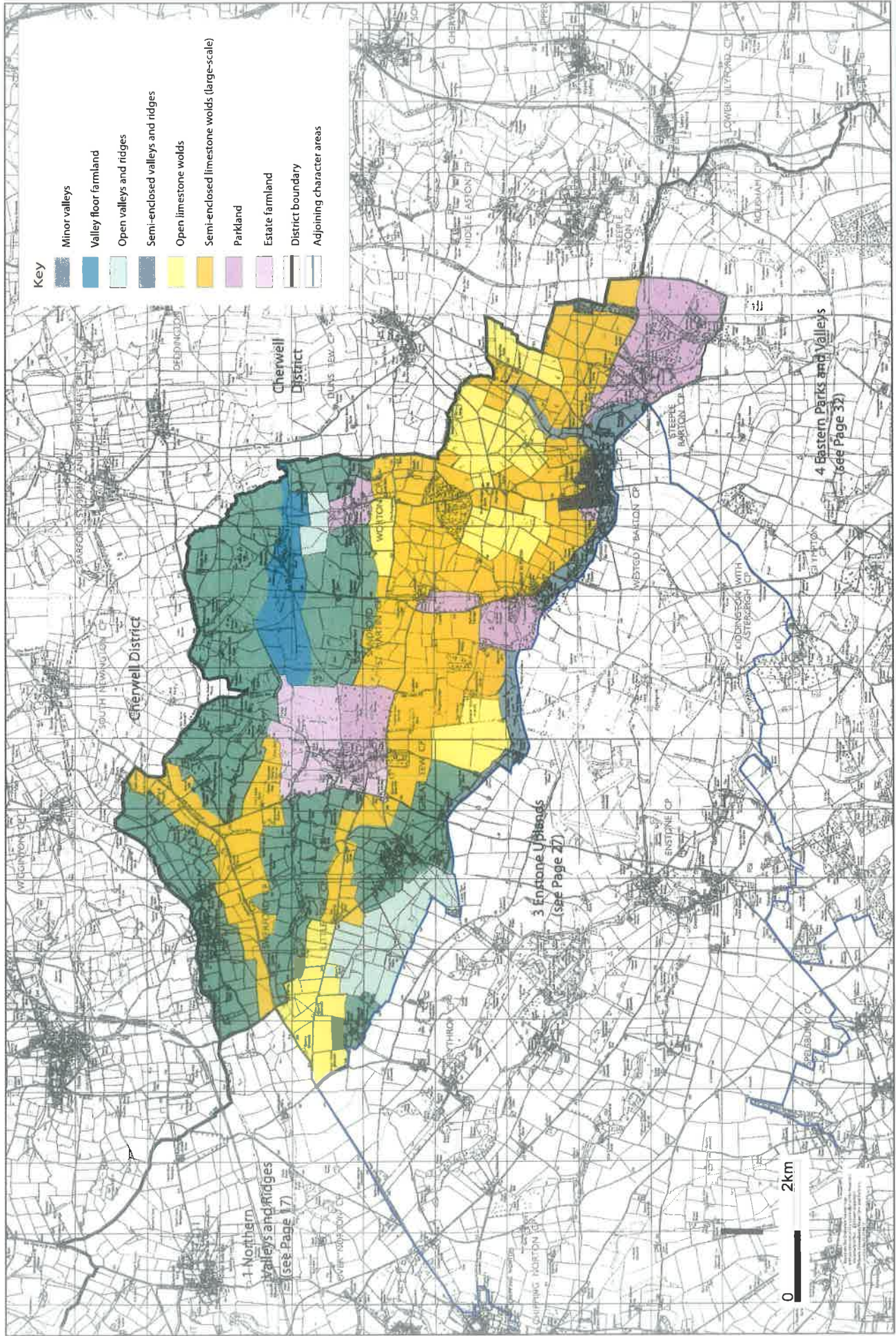
Enhancement priorities

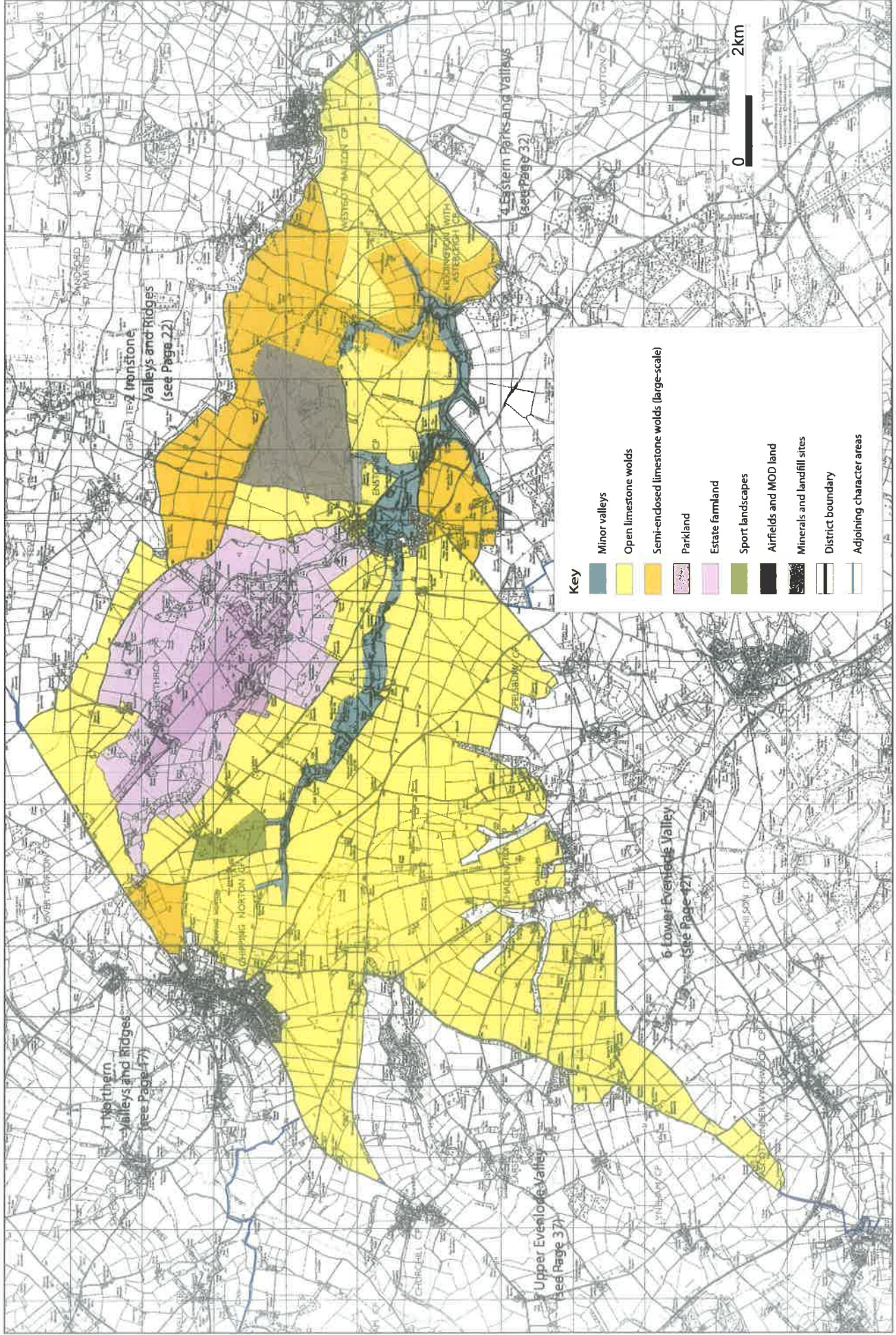
- wherever possible, retain and manage areas of floodplain pasture, water meadows and riparian vegetation;
- promote traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management;
- introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines within floodplain farmland, using typical riparian species such as willow and alder;
- within open clay vale landscapes, restore a stronger structure of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and belts of woodland,
- in semi-enclosed clay vale farmland, retain and extend existing hedgerow network and allow mature hedgerow trees to develop;
- where possible, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture;
- plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a more mixed pattern of woodland and farmland;
- maintain quiet, rural character of minor road network and avoid urbanising influences of street lighting, kerbs and footpaths, signage etc.

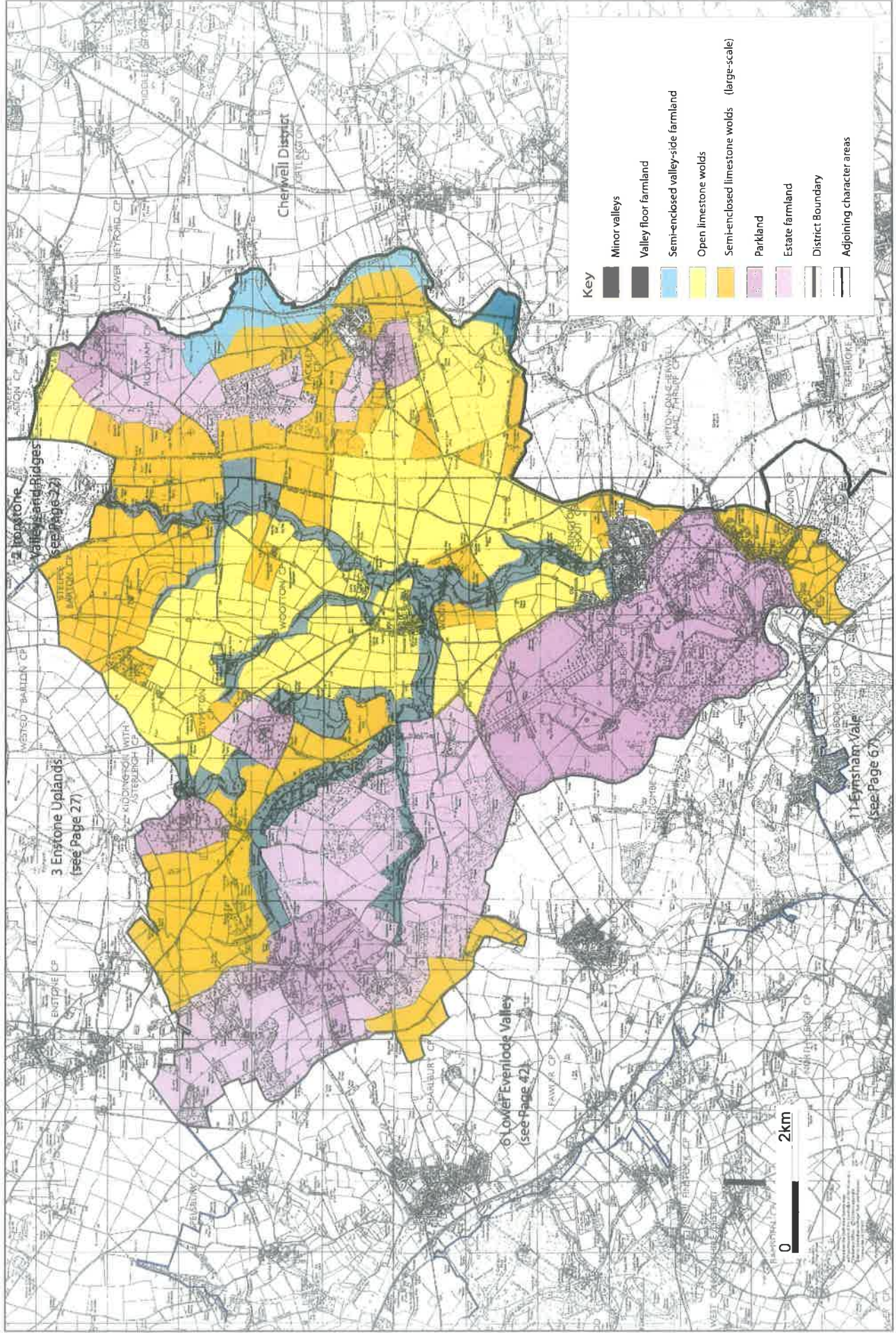
Development sensitivities

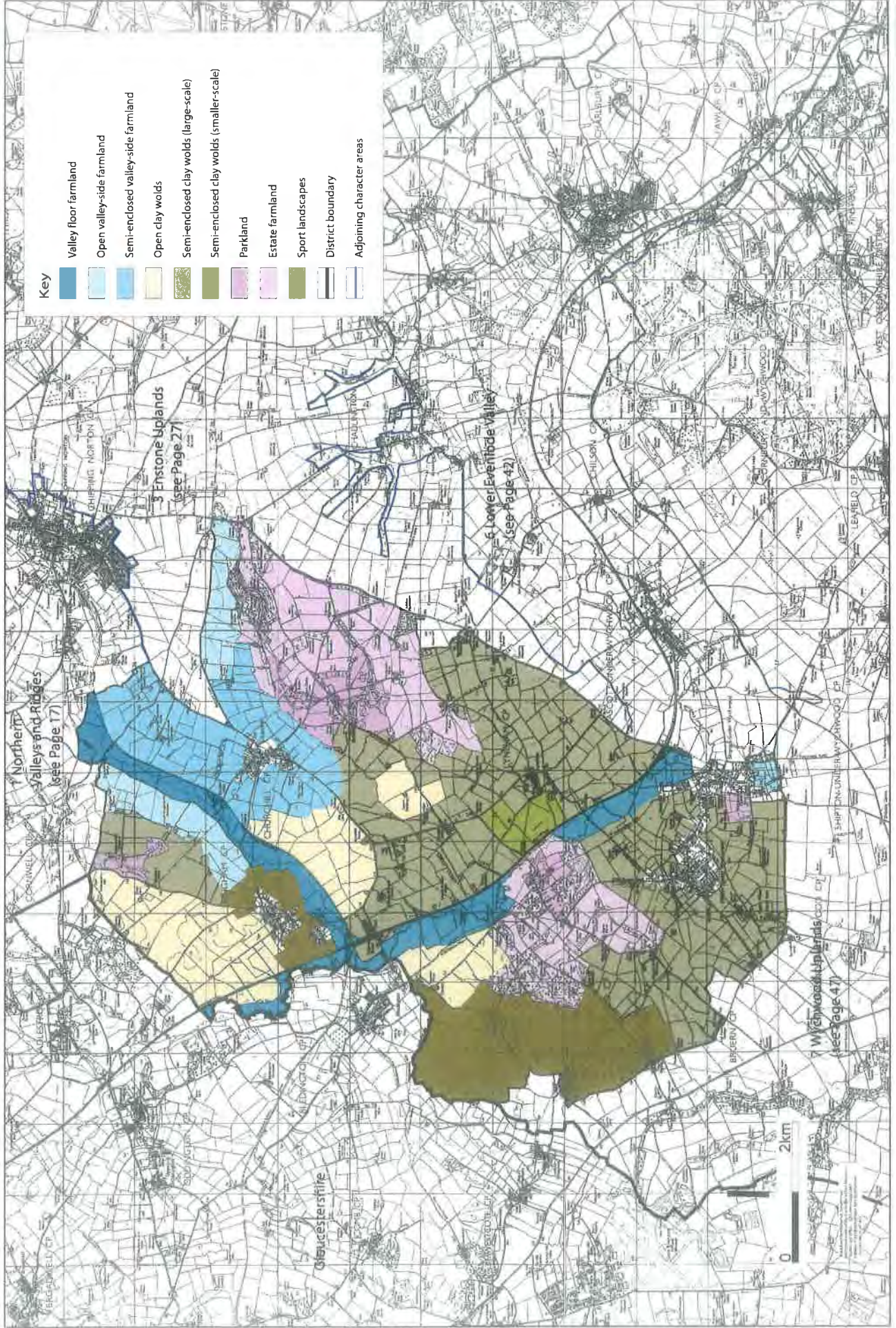
- unspoilt floodplain farmland is of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- flat, open clay vale landscapes are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed unless integrated within strong new landscape frameworks;
- semi-enclosed clay vale landscapes may offer limited opportunities to absorb small-scale development within a strong structure of trees and woodland or with other buildings.

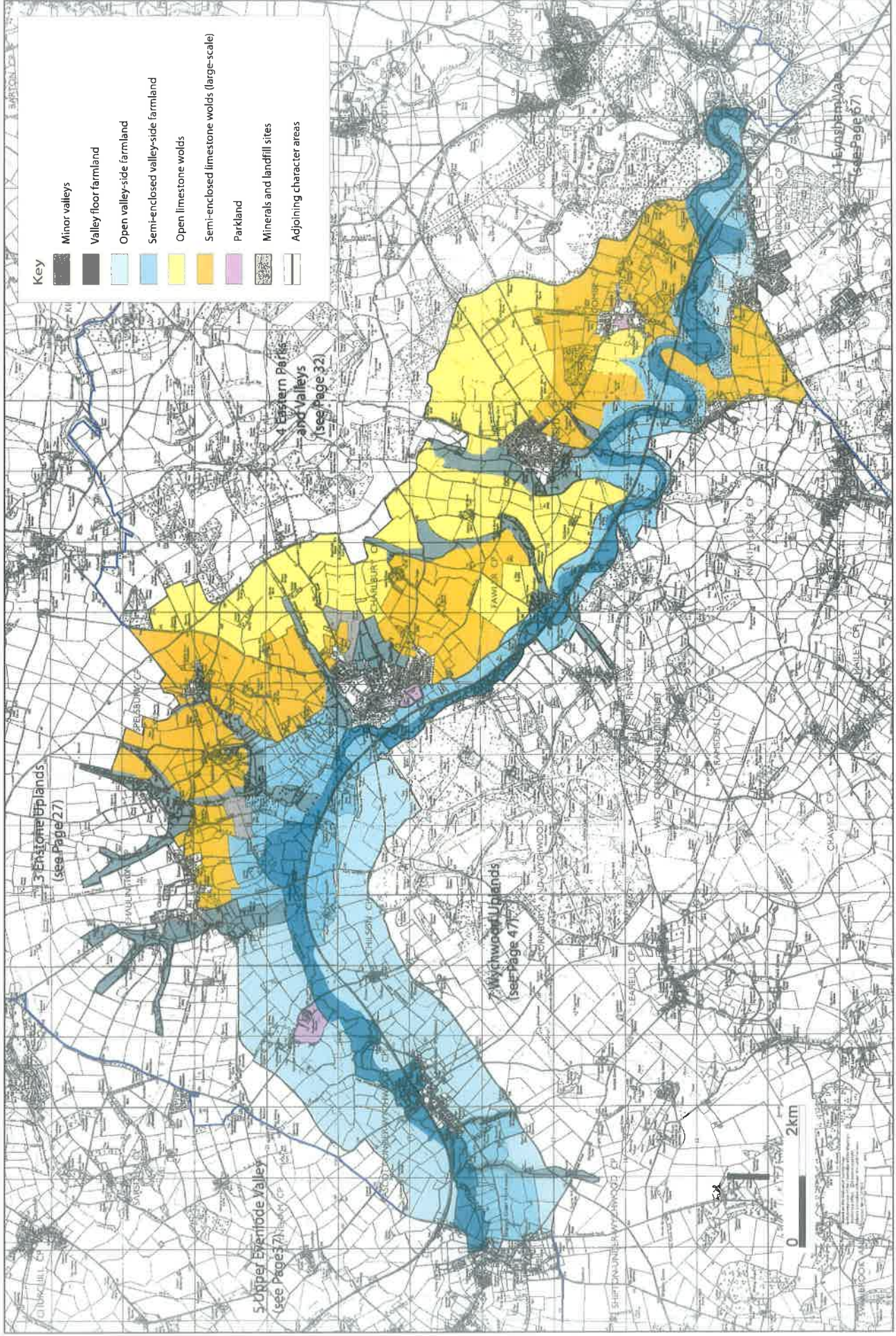


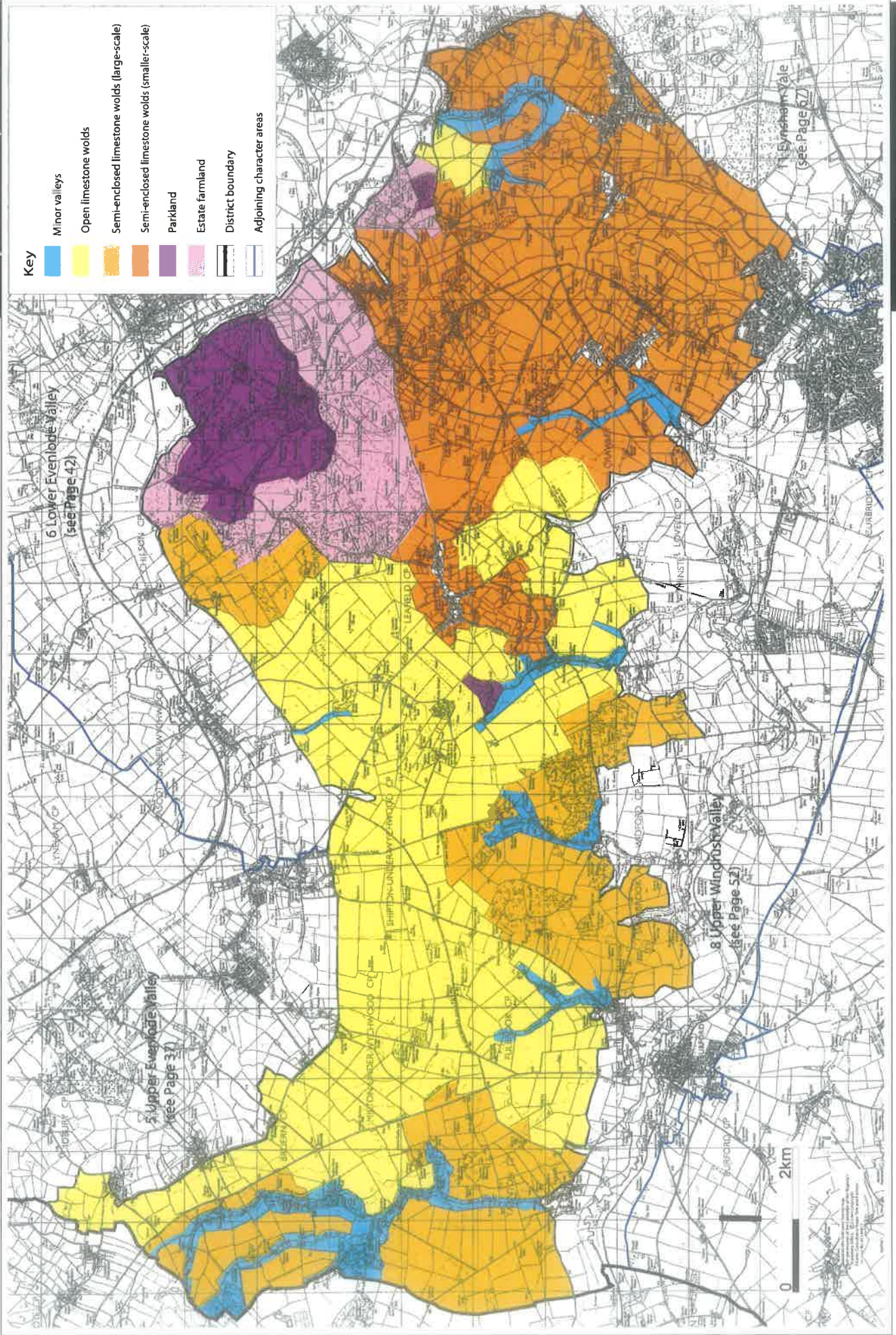


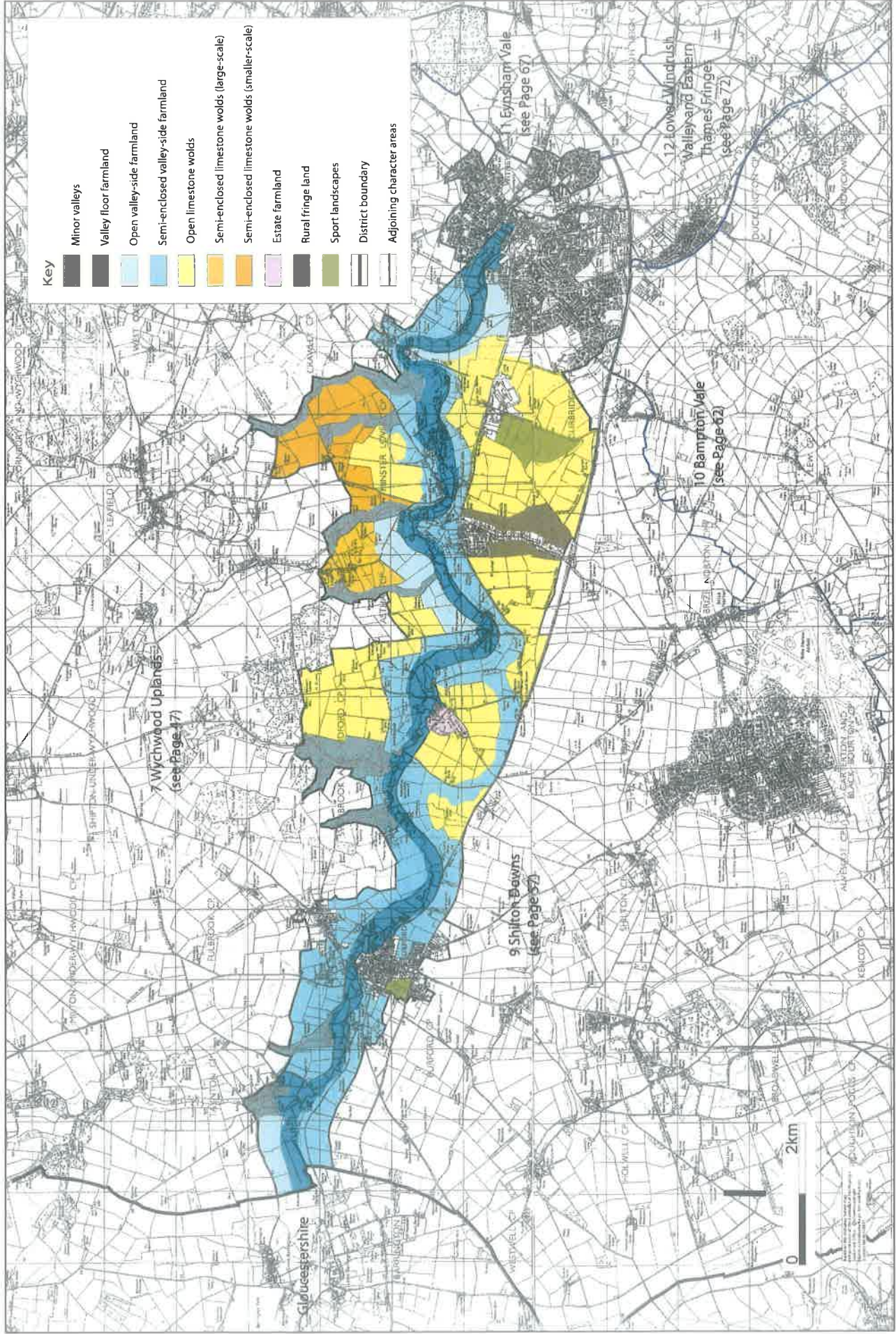


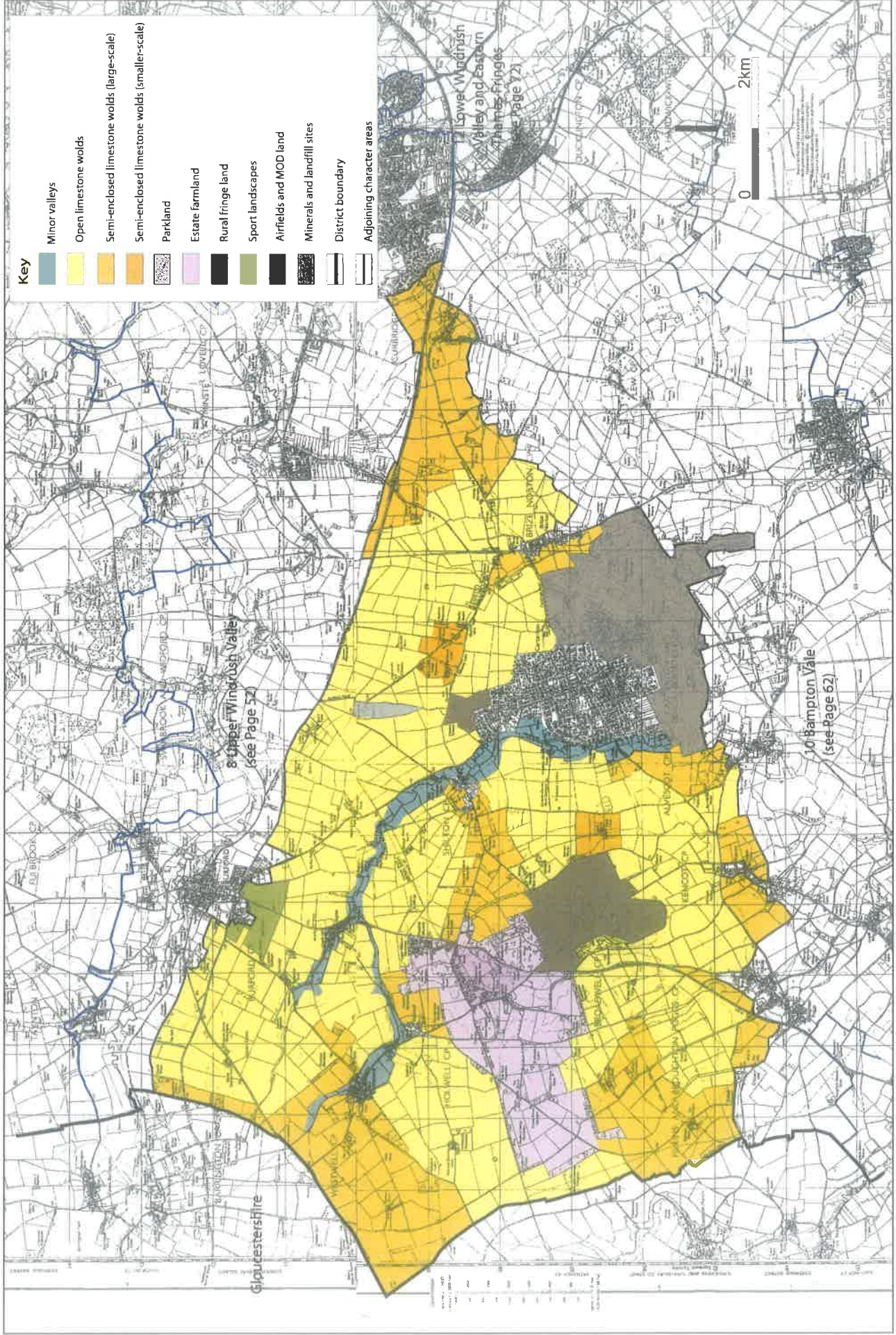


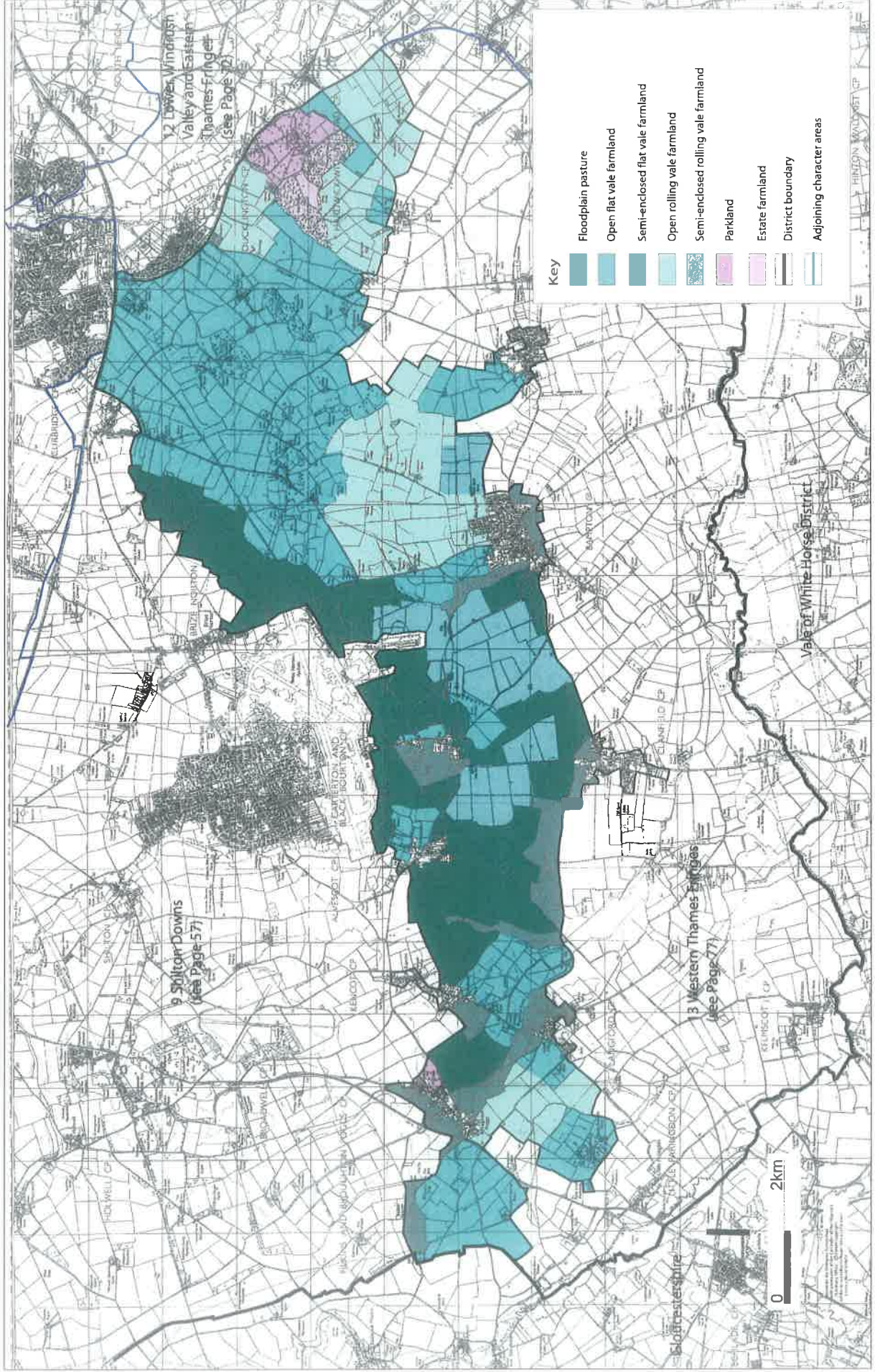


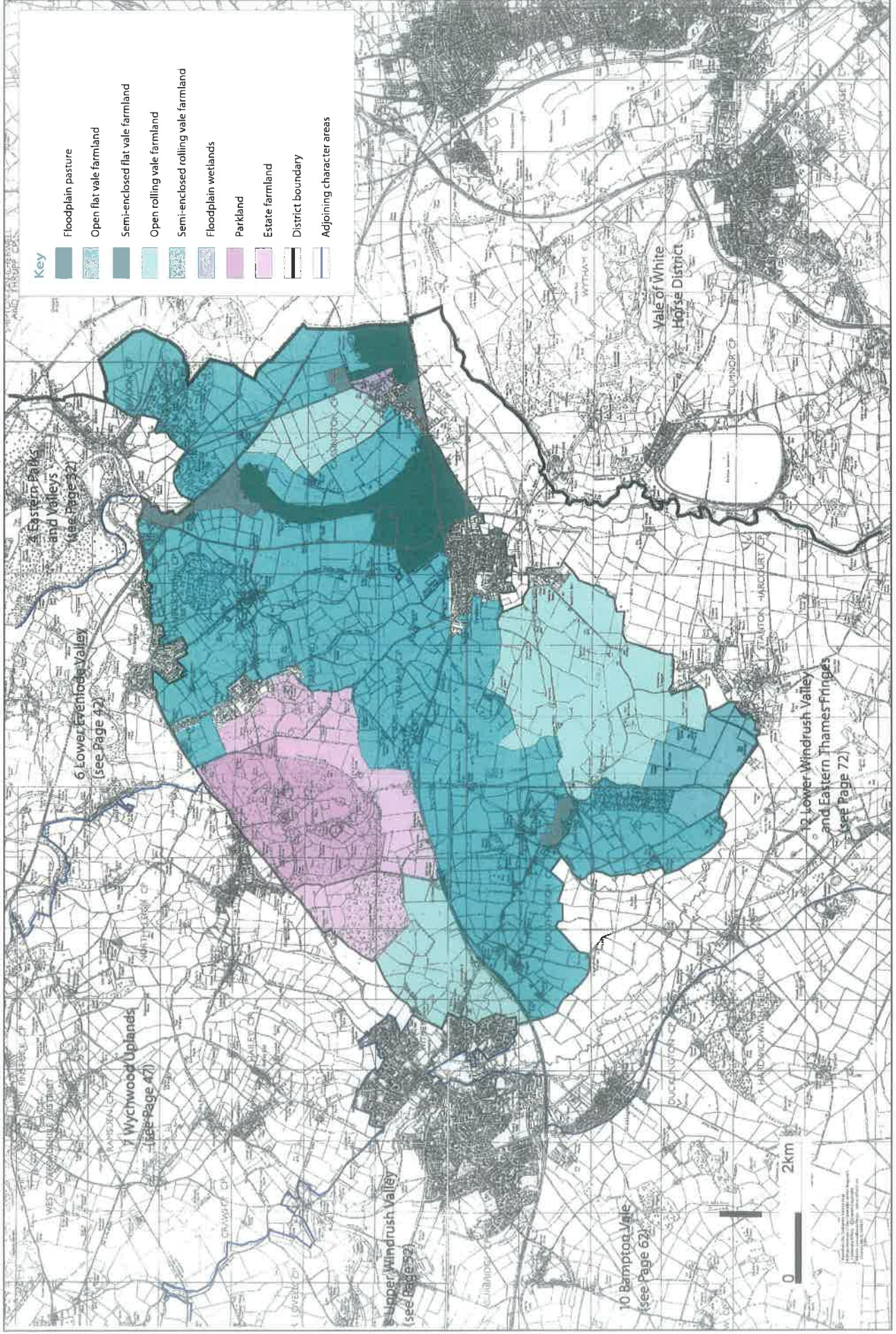


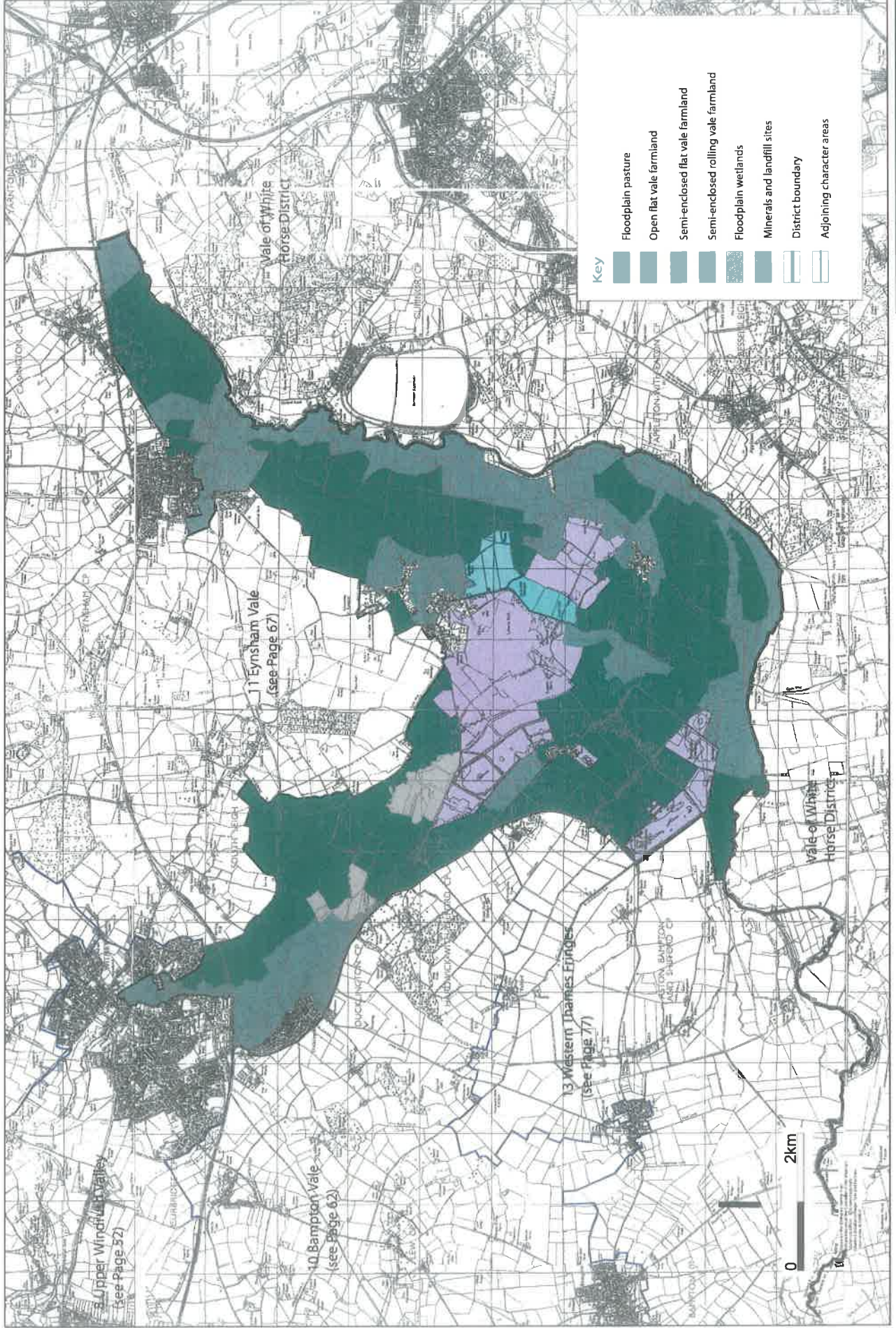


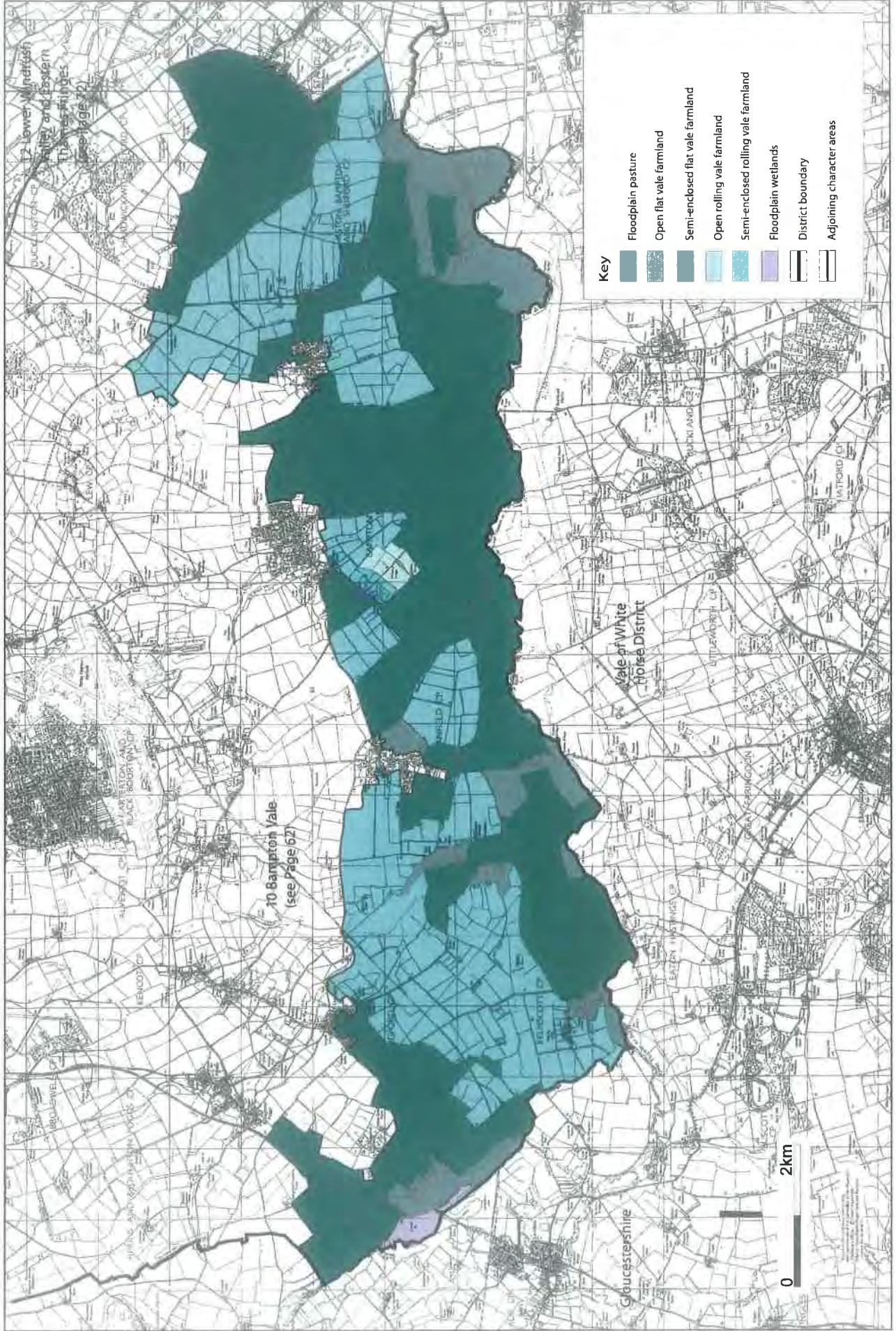












C: WEST OF MILTON-UNDER-WYCHWOOD

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed clay wolds farmland;
- mostly medium to large scale farmland with a good hedgerow structure;
- rolling topography;
- predominantly arable, open in places ;
- few urban influences ;
- boundary between urban area and countryside complicated by the dispersed nature of the settlement - slightly 'straggly';
- ribbon development extends this boundary on Bruern Road.

Visual characteristics

- moderate to high intervisibility across open land ;
- urban edge harsh in places;
- good distant views in most directions;
- ridgeline at Shipton Down -important skyline.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to soften the urban edge to form a more cohesive boundary
- need to strengthen landscape edge;
- need to resist any further changes which will **make** settlement more dispersed in character.

KEY SETTLEMENT MILTON-U-WYCHWOOD

(CHARACTER AREA: 5)

A: NORTH OF MILTON-UNDER-WYCHWOOD

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed clay wolds farmland;
- mixture of medium to large scale farmland with a good hedgerow structure;
- predominantly arable, open in places ;
- few urban influences - except sewage works;
- strong wooded edge to the north;
- boundary between urban area quite 'straggly' and complicated by the dispersed nature of the settlement;
- no visible break between Shipton and Milton;
- landscape edge a bit weak in this area
- good mature trees and hedgerow trees scattered around the fringe of the settlement;
- cricket field/recreation ground important central feature in Milton.

Visual characteristics

- moderate to high intervisibility across open land - around Heath Farm for example;
- good distant views in most directions;
- views into and out of the urban edge filtered by mature vegetation.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to strengthen landscape structure to bind together the urban edge;
- need to resist any further changes which will make settlement more dispersed in character.

B: SOUTH OF MILTON-UNDER-WYCHWOOD

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed clay wolds farmland;
- mixture of small scale pasture and medium scale arable;
- good hedgerow structure, mature hedgerow trees and small woodland blocks;
- boundary between urban area and countryside complicated by the dispersed nature of the settlement;
- strong landscape edge between Shipton Court and edge of Milton;
- largely unspoilt..

Visual characteristics

- medium to low intervisibility - views filtered by intervening vegetation;
- views in and out of the urban edge limited by intervening vegetation;
- urban edge a bit harsh in places;
- more distant views further west beyond woodland blocks towards Shipton Down;
- distant elevated views of southern edge of Milton from Shipton Down and Swinbrook Road;
- ridgeline at Shipton Down - important skyline.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to strengthen landscape structure to bind together the urban edge;
- need to soften urban edge in key places;
- open land on rising ground to the south particularly sensitive to change.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to resist any further encroachment of urban influences onto rural fringe , particularly north of the link road;
- need to strengthen landscape structure and to absorb intrusive elements;
- need to make landscape improvements in key areas particularly around the industrial estate;
- urban edge quite sensitive to change.

C: WEST OF EYNHAM

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed, rolling vale farmland;
- type generally has strong structure of hedgerows, trees and occasional belts of woodland, mostly large fields under arable but some smaller-scale pattern and pasture;
- slightly weaker structure locally, some hedgerows neglected and gappy in places;
- urban/rural edge slightly 'straggly', a weak landscape edge in places, rural fringe mostly unspoilt but scruffy in places.

Visual characteristics

- moderate to high intervisibility, views limited by intervening topography and vegetation;
- rural outlook from urban edge largely unspoilt;
- urban edge quite soft;
- except new housing which is very visible and intrusive.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to avoid further intrusion on the urban edge;
- need to strengthen landscape structure in places particularly on the boundary of the urban area.

D: NORTH OF EYNHAM

Landscape characteristics

- open rolling vale farmland
- mostly medium scale fields, predominantly arable;
- landscape structure weak in places - some hedgerows gappy in places;
- some mineral working further north;
- **A40** - a strong physical boundary separating area from Eynsham;
- relatively few urban influences.

Visual characteristics

- intervisibility generally moderate to high - some views limited by intervening topography;
- views south towards Eynsham screened by vegetation between **A40** and the urban edge;
- traffic on **A40** more prominent than the built form.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to strengthen landscape structure;
- need to increase screening of traffic on **A40**.

KEY SETTLEMENT EYNSHAM

(CHARACTER AREAS: 11, 12)

A: EAST OF EYNSHAM

Landscape characteristics

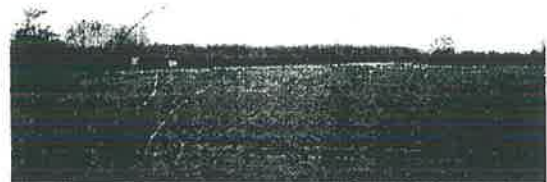
- mixture of semi enclosed flat vale farmland north of Cassington Road and semi-enclosed floodplain pasture to the south;
- very flat low lying good enclosure in places;
- medium scale mixture of arable and smaller scale pasture with thick hedgerows and hedgerow trees;
- urban/rural edge weak in places, some incursion by urban influences, particularly the link road, but also playing fields and 'horsiculture';

Visual characteristics

- moderate intervisibility, views limited by intervening vegetation;
- rural outlook from the link road largely unspoilt except for electricity pylons;
- industrial buildings fairly well screened;
- views out from urban edge affected by traffic on the link road;
- urban edge very well screened by planting north of Cassington Road,
- lighting very visible, particularly at roundabout;
- important views of Wytham Hill.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to resist further urbanisation of rural fringe;
- need to improve landscape structure particularly around playing fields and other urban elements;
- need to further reduce visual impact of the link road.



View of link road from Cassington Road showing backdrop of planting

B: SOUTH OF EYNSHAM

Landscape characteristics

- mostly semi-enclosed floodplain pasture with an ribbon of rural fringe land immediately south of urban edge;
- small scale pasture with thick hedgerows and mature willows;
- evidence of some hedgerow removal north of the link road;
- major urban influence of Oasis Park and industrial estate adversely affecting landscape quality in south west area
- urban/rural edge quite soft except the area around Oasis Park and industrial area.

Visual characteristics

- moderate to low intervisibility;
- attractive mixture of older buildings and mature trees on urban edge;
- attractive backdrop to southerly views out from the urban edge;
- major intrusive features industrial buildings, car parking etc slightly scruffy;
- poor approach from 84449.

KEY SETTLEMENT DUCKLINGTON

(CHARACTER AREA: 12)

A: WEST OF DUCKLINGTON

landscape characteristics

- open, rolling vale farmland, semi-enclosed, rolling vale farmland;
- **A415** acts as a strong barrier dividing urban area from open countryside;
- land west of **A415** mostly medium to large scale farmland ;
- predominantly arable;
- mostly weak landscape structure - thicker hedgerows to the north and the south;
- farmland west of **A415** mostly free from urban influences - except motor homes;
- urban influences prominent west of roundabout -, garage, sewage works etc.

Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility across open land;
- vegetation on road corridor filters views of urban edge;
- earth mounding between the urban edge and the road appears incongruous;
- views out from urban edge limited by vegetation and affected by presence of **A415**;
- **A40** on embankment acts as a strong visual barrier;
- prominent urban influences at roundabout..

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to further soften road corridor and urban edge;
- need to strengthen landscape structure in open areas;
- need to resist any change which extends urban influences further west of the **A415** - particularly between the roundabout and the **A40**.

B: EAST OF DUCKLINGTON

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed floodplain pasture;
- attractive low-lying riparian character, small scale pasture;
- thick hedgerows and mature willow;
- ditches and area of open water;
- prominent hotel and surrounding car parking and service areas;
- largely unspoilt, but some rural fringe activities including nearby gravel workings, horsiculture, and the presence of an electricity substation;
- boundary between urban edge of Ducklington and farmland quite soft;
- rural character of Church End important..

Visual characteristics

- medium to low intervisibility - views across flat, low-lying land filtered by intervening vegetation;
- urban edge of Ducklington softened by mature vegetation;
- some filtered views of **A40**;
- some views of power lines and electricity substation;
- views out from the urban edge limited by intervening vegetation.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to maintain strength of landscape structure on valley floor;
- need to maintain soft urban edge - vegetation on the edge of the village particularly important;
- need to strengthen landscape structure between Ducklington and **A40**;
- need to soften urban edge around the hotel/roundabout

Key sensitivities and considerations

- parcel of land important to the setting of the town;
- landscape very sensitive to change, particularly along the ridgeline occupied by the A44;
- low intervisibility particularly in the smaller scale landscapes means that visible change is limited;
- need to maintain strong landscape structure;
- need to maintain the quality of the approach into the town.

E: EAST OF CHIPPING NORTON

Landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland;
- large-scale, rolling farmland mostly in arable cultivation;
- open, elevated hilltop character;
- weak hedgerow structure, few trees, fences replace hedgerows;
- rural edge slightly scruffy; pockets of derelict farmland, allotments etc;
- intrusive buildings and structures on the urban edge.

Visual characteristics

- generally high intervisibility due to open character and topography although intervening higher ground shields urban edge;
- boundary of the urban area straggly and indistinct due to peripheral uses such as playing fields allotments etc;
- softened by mature vegetation in places;
- prominent and intrusive buildings and structures such as water tower and industrial sheds;
- views out from the urban edge largely unspoilt.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to strengthen landscape structure of rural fringe and form a more distinct boundary;
- urban edge prominent in places and sensitive to change;

- need to improve urban silhouette - opportunity to consider more positive landmarks;
- need to improve the quality of the approach into the town on the B4026.

F: SOUTH OF CHIPPING NORTON

Landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland;
- large-scale, rolling farmland mostly in arable cultivation;
- open, elevated hilltop character;
- weak hedgerow structure, few trees, fences replace hedgerows;
- boundary between urban edge and open land very distinct;
- sports grounds, associated buildings and floodlighting on the urban edge and in open countryside.

Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility across open land;
- harsh urban edge of Chipping Norton forms the skyline to the north;
- views out from the urban edge largely unspoilt, sports ground at Greystones is partially screened by mature trees;
- rural character is adversely affected by floodlighting at night;
- degree of enclosure provided by good woodland blocks and shelterbelts;
- changes to the urban edge only visible locally;
- avenue landscape very important to the quality of the approach and the setting of the town;
- the higher ground occupied by the B4450 is visible from the north and sensitive to change.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- encourage more effective planting around existing sports grounds;
- need to strengthen landscape structure in open areas;
- need to strengthen landscape structure at the urban edge;
- urban edge very visible and sensitive to change;
- need to improve the quality of the approach into the town on the A361.

Visual characteristics

- avenue trees on both sides of **A44** important feature on the approach into town from the north west;
- moderate intervisibility within the valley, high intervisibility on more open farmland higher up the valley sides;
- good elevated views;
- attractive silhouette of the town seen from the north west;
- soft urban edge;
- very few intrusive buildings or structures.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- woodland very important component of the setting of the town;
- skyline very sensitive to change;
- landscape pattern of valley very distinctive and vulnerable to change;
- valley side landscape integral to the quality of the views, any changes are likely to be highly visible.

C: NORTH OF CHIPPING NORTON

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed limestone wolds farmland and parkland landscapes
- steep sided valley with formal parkland on the northern slope and medium scale arable fields on the southern slope;
- very strong landscape structure with mature woodland blocks and avenues;
- important to the setting of Chipping Norton and Over Norton;
- largely flat, medium scale farmland with a strong structure of woodland blocks, shelterbelts and hedgerows;
- valley-sides with stronger hedgerow structure, more trees and a mixture of pasture and arable farmland;
- south-facing sloping valley sides up to 8%.
- enclosed valley floor, predominantly pasture, low-lying, riparian character, wet and prone to flooding;
- willow-lined ditches and groups of mature trees;
- soft urban edge.

Visual characteristics

- low intervisibility, views down into the valley floor;
- valley sides form skyline from valley floor;
- views largely unspoilt by urban influences;
- built form on valley sides mostly screened by mature vegetation except for new housing.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- valley sides and valley floor are an important natural component of the valley landscape;
- unspoilt landscapes particularly vulnerable to change;
- special attention should be given to maintaining strong landscape edges.

D: NORTH EAST OF CHIPPING NORTON

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed limestone wolds farmland;
- largely flat, medium scale farmland with a strong structure of woodland blocks, shelterbelts and hedgerows;
- predominantly arable
- smaller scale fields nearer to the town;
- helps form an attractive approach into the town on London Road, important to the setting of Chipping Norton;
- urban edge in the process of change ie new development on the old hospital site and employment site north of Rockhill Farm;

Visual characteristics

- low to moderate intervisibility;
- degree of enclosure provided by good woodland blocks and shelterbelts;
- changes to the urban edge only visible locally;
- avenue landscape very important to the quality of the approach and the setting of the town and visible from the north.

KEY SETTLEMENT CHIPPING NORTON

(CHARACTER AREAS: 1,3)

A: WEST OF CHIPPING NORTON

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed valleys and ridges ;
- steep valley sides, 10%-6% north and south facing;
- important contribution to the setting of the town;
- small scale pasture, strong landscape structure and strong landscape edge;
- attractive mosaic of small-scale irregular-shaped fields with thick hedgerows;
- mix of uses in valley bottom set within a mature landscape structure;
- back gardens, small fields and vegetation within the urban envelope blur the edge between the urban area and open land.

Visual characteristics

- moderate to high intervisibility within the valley, good views in all directions;
- attractive silhouette of the town seen from the north;
- Bliss Mill a major landmark and 'eyecatcher';
- soft urban edge;
- very few intrusive buildings or structures.

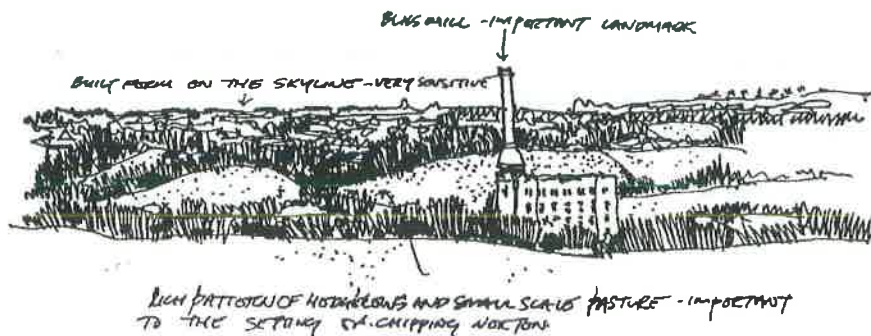
Key sensitivities and considerations

- skyline very sensitive to change;
- landscape pattern of valley very distinctive and vulnerable to change;
- valley side landscape integral to the quality of the views, any changes are likely to be highly visible.

B: NORTH WEST OF CHIPPING NORTON

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed valleys and ridges;
- steep valley sides, 10%-6% north and south facing;
- important contribution to the setting of the town and a strong landscape edge;
- mixture of well wooded small scale pasture in the valley and larger scale more open arable farmland higher up on the northern slopes;
- parkland characteristics next to A44;
- strong landscape structure, slightly weaker in open areas;
- recreational uses in valley bottom;
- well-vegetated urban edge.



Sketch illustrating view from the north west

Key sensitivities and considerations

- valley floor and valley sides important landscape types and sensitive to change;
- need to maintain strong landscape structure and attractive pastoral character on valley sides;
- need to maintain mature landscape structure within urban fabric;
- Dyers Hill area very sensitive to change;
- need to soften urban edge around Wesley Barrell and new housing;
- need to maintain quality of the approach on 64437 from the west

C: EAST OF CHARLBURY

Landscape characteristics

- minor valley and semi-enclosed, large-scale limestone wolds farmland;
- attractive, medium scale farmland with strong landscape structure, mixture of pasture and arable;
- thick hedgerows and small woodland blocks;
- rising ground behind Charlbury dissected by steep sided minor valley ;
- boundary between urban edge and countryside blurred by topography, individual properties set in woodland and new housing;
- important to the setting of Charlbury and a strong landscape edge;
- southern boundary more distinct;
- very few urban influences on surrounding land.

Visual characteristics

- low to moderate intervisibility with thick hedgerows and hedgerow trees limiting views;
- urban edge very soft - except where new housing has been built ;
- mature landscape forms an important backdrop to town;
- views out from urban edge limited by vegetation and topography;
- good views across the Evenlode Valley from Charlbury where vegetation permits and from more open land on the southern boundary;
- attractive green approach into Charlbury on the B4437.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to maintain strong landscape structure on **eastern and southern boundary**;
- small scale valley important local landscape feature - vulnerable to change;
- any changes on higher ground likely to be prominent and likely to affect sensitive skyline;
- need to maintain green approach from **84437**.

D: WEST OF CHARLBURY

landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed valley floor farmland semi-enclosed valley-side farmland;
- Evenlode Valley forms a strong landscape edge to Charlbury;
- attractive valley side and valley floor with strong landscape structure;
- mixture of small scale pasture, arable and parkland with mature trees;
- very few detracting influences - sewage works largely hidden - industrial units hidden by the station;
- mostly gardens forming the boundary of the urban area.

Visual characteristics

- medium intervisibility - views limited by intervening vegetation and topography;
- important views across and along the valley in both directions;
- properties at Dyers Hill quite prominent;
- important local landmarks such as the church;
- silhouette of town very important when viewed from the valley floor and from elevated ground on the other side of the valley;
- urban edge very soft - except in a small area around Wesley Barrell and new houses;
- elevated western approach from B4437 - views very important.



View of Charlbury from the west on the B4437

KEY SETTLEMENT CHARLBURY

(CHARACTER AREA: 6)

A: NORTH AND WEST OF CHARLBURY

Landscape characteristics

- enclosed, minor valley, semi-enclosed valley-side farmland, and semi-enclosed limestone wolds farmland;
- all the landscapes described are small to medium scale with a strong landscape structure;
- attractive mosaic of small-scale, irregular-shaped fields with thick hedgerows;
- important contribution to the setting of the town;
- small scale valley intimate character - acts as a strong landscape edge to the urban area;
- steep valley sides up to **10%**;
- largely unspoilt by urban influences.

Visual characteristics

- low to moderate intervisibility, with thick hedgerows and hedgerow trees limiting views;
- urban edge of Charlbury prominent above the valley - view partially softened by backdrop of vegetation;
- attractive views out from the urban edge across the valley.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- northern edge to Charlbury prominent and sensitive to change;
- attractive small scale valley particularly sensitive.

B: NORTH AND EAST OF CHARLBURY

Landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland and semi-enclosed limestone wolds farmland;
- mixture of medium to large scale open, elevated farmland with a weak landscape structure in places and medium scale farmland with thick hedgerows and hedgerow trees;
- predominantly arable;
- largely unspoilt, but some rural fringe activities including quarrying, horiculture;
- good landscape structure generally, slightly weaker in open areas.

Visual characteristics

- open areas, high intervisibility, elevated views over Charlbury to Wychwood Forest;
- moderate intervisibility within the valley (Clarke's Bottom), high intervisibility on more open farmland higher up the valley sides;
- **open** land quite prominent;
- very few intrusive buildings or structures, quarry well-hidden, other rural fringe uses visible but not especially prominent

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to strengthen landscape structure in open areas;
- elevated areas very prominent any changes are likely to be highly visible;
- need to maintain distant views across the valley.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to substantially raise environmental quality throughout the whole area and ensure that new development strengthens landscape edges;
- need to soften existing harsh urban edges and to improve the landscape quality of the main approach into Carterton from the east;
- need to strengthen landscape structure of farmland, more hedgerows/stone walls and more hedgerow trees;
- need to maintain strategic gap between Carterton and Brize Norton village.

C BLACK BOURTON (LAND SOUTH OF BRIZE NORTON AIRFIELD)

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed flat vale farmland;
- mostly flat arable land with strong landscape structure of willow-lined ditches, hedgerows; and occasional woodland blocks;
- attractive smaller scale character around Black Bourton;
- occasional intrusive elements such as mushroom farm, sewage works and the airfield.

Visual characteristics

- low to moderate intervisibility over most of the area to the south, views filtered by intervening vegetation;
- scruffy appearance to edge of airfield;
- intrusive features such as security fencing and large buildings and structures.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to maintain strong landscape structure to assist in containment of intrusive elements;
- need to maintain attractive landscape character around Black Bourton;
- **need to improve landscape edge** to the airfield.

D : WEST OF CARTERTON

Landscape characteristics

- enclosed, minor valley and open limestone wolds farmland,
- attractive, steep, well-vegetated minor valley immediately to the west of Carterton, provides a very strong landscape edge;
- open, elevated, large scale rectilinear fields beyond the valley to the west;
- strong landscape edge reinforced by topography;
- rural character largely unaffected by urban influences.

Visual characteristics

- generally high intervisibility except in the river valley where views in and out are limited by topography and intervening vegetation;
- urban edge strongly silhouetted in views from the west and very sensitive to change;
- mature vegetation generally softens urban edge;
- **good** unspoilt views out from urban edge;
- **good** landscape approach from the west along B4020.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- minor valley an important landscape resource and sensitive to change;
- western edge of Carterton sensitive to change - particularly sensitive skyline;
- need to maintain landscape strength along western fringe and particularly within the minor valley.

KEY SETTLEMENT CARTERTON

(CHARACTER AREA: 9)

A NORTH OF CARTERTON

landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland and rural fringe landscapes;
- mostly large-scale, gently rolling farmland mostly arable;
- large rectilinear fields, weak landscape structure;
- plateau location;
- land forms an important buffer between Carterton and Shilton;
- part of area allocated for development;
- small area of rural fringe including 'horsiculture';
- small area of recreational land;
- urban/rural edge untidy and 'straggly'.

Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility over most of the area to the north, views limited within fringe area, hidden pockets of land;
- ridgeline east of Shilton carrying the B4020 - very sensitive to landscape change;
- urban edge softened by vegetation but scruffy appearance;
- intrusive features such as floodlighting.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to strengthen landscape edge;
- need to improve overall landscape quality and ensure that new development on allocated land strengthens the landscape edge and maintains buffer between Carterton and Shilton.

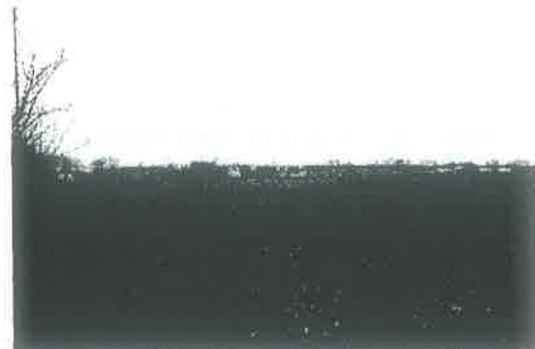
B: EAST OF CARTERTON

Landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland, rural fringe farmland and airfield;
- mostly large-scale, gently rolling farmland mostly arable;
- large rectilinear fields, weak landscape structure;
- plateau location;
- small area of rural fringe including 'horsiculture';
- large part of the area allocated for development.
- urban rural edge quite distinct except along the Carterton Road corridor where urban edge is more 'straggly';
- perimeter buildings, structure and boundary treatment of Brize Norton Airfield adversely affect the landscape gap separating Carterton and Brize Norton village.

Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility, extensive, uninterrupted views across open land;
- views out over countryside to the north largely unspoilt by urban influences;
- views east in and out of Carterton dominated by intrusive presence of airfield;
- prominent urban edge to Carterton, highly visible on the skyline;
- dreary urban character of approach road from the east, numerous intrusive urban elements.



View of urban edge of Carterton approaching from the east

Key sensitivities and considerations

- urban edge needs softening;
- any changes to the urban edge would be highly visible from a number of key vantage points;
- need to strengthen landscape structure on valley sides, particularly close to the A40.

C: SOUTH OF BURFORD

Landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland and amenity landscape;
- south of the A40 - elevated open farmland, weak landscape structure;
- rural character affected by presence of garden centre/ nursery, golf course, large houses on the A40 and Burford School;
- rural character similarly affected by busy A40;
- boundary between urban area and open land complicated by the uses described above;
- mature vegetation helps soften edges.

Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility on open farmland - very limited visibility within edge uses described above;
- A40 follows ridgeline which is highly visible over a wide area;
- classic views of Burford from the A40 eastern approach and long distance views across the valley;
- A40 character very urbanised between Burford Garden Centre and Burford School.
- A361 approach affected by suburban character of golf course.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to resist any further urbanisation of the A40 corridor - any changes would be highly visible - opportunity to make improvements to Witney Street - avenue trees?;
- need to strengthen landscape structure particularly on open farmland - repair walls etc;
- need to soften landscape edge at Garden Centre - screen car parking etc and soften edge west of Burford School;

- need to strengthen landscape structure on the urban edge.

D: WEST OF BURFORD

Landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland and semi-enclosed valley side farmland;
- either side of the A40 - elevated open farmland, weak landscape structure;
- predominantly arable, large scale;
- break in slope - smaller scale fields, good hedgerows, still open in character;
- area around the Priory well-wooded and enclosed;
- low key recreation ground and playing fields act as a buffer on urban edge;
- boundary between urban area and open land partly complicated by the uses described above;
- mature vegetation helps soften edges;
- Priory Wood a key landscape feature on the western edge of the town;
- rural fringe attractive and unspoilt

Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility on open farmland immediately west of the town;
- important views of Burford from the A40 western approach and long distance views across the valley;
- urban edge quite soft;
- distant views of western edge from the north limited by Priory Wood.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to strengthen landscape structure particularly on open farmland - repair walls etc;
- need to maintain and enhance landscape structure at the urban edge;
- low key recreation areas important as a buffer.

KEY SETTLEMENT BURFORD

(CHARACTER AREAS: 8,9)

A: NORTH OF BURFORD

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed valley floor farmland;
- highly distinctive and attractive flat valley floor, predominantly pasture;
- low lying, riparian character;
- mature willows, strong landscape structure;
- distinct boundary between edge of town and valley floor.

Visual characteristics

- moderate intervisibility, distant views limited by topography and intervening vegetation;
- good views along the valley floor;
- classic pastoral view from approach on A424 - composition of valley floor, Cotswold stone bridge, buildings and church nestling in the valley;
- mature vegetation - soft urban edge;
- A361 corridor through Fulbrook - too urban in character;
- important elevated views over Burford and the valley from Fulbrook and Westhall Hill;
- traffic on A40 visible on the skyline.



View of Burford from Fulbrook

Key sensitivities and considerations

- classic view of Burford - very sensitive to change;
- need to maintain strong landscape structure;
- approach on both A424 and A361 already urban in character in places - need to resist increased urbanisation such as kerbs, signage, lighting etc., particularly through Fulbrook;
- need to maintain strategic gap between Fulbrook and Burford.

B: EAST OF BURFORD

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed valley side farmland;
- north-facing valley side, steep in places
- medium scale rectilinear fields, predominantly arable;
- good hedgerow structure but open character in parts;
- distinct boundary between urban area and open land.

Visual characteristics

- moderate to high intervisibility, distant views along and across the valley;
- valleyside/urban edge very visible from Fulbrook;
- classic distant view of the church spire approaching Burford on the A40;
- urban edge harsh in places, particularly viewed from A40 entering Burford and on Witney Street;
- urban silhouette from valley floor harsh in places;
- high quality views out over the valley from the urban edge;
- Traffic on A40 visible on the skyline.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to resist any change to the rural character along the western fringe of the town;
- need to maintain strong landscape character particularly in the floodplain;
- need to maintain the quality of the approach from the west;
- important to avoid any change which might interfere with important views.



C: BAMPTON SOUTH

Landscape characteristics

- mixture of open, flat vale farmland west of Buckland Road and semi-enclosed flat vale farmland to the east;
- triangular area of land at Calais Farm is mostly small scale pasture;
- low-lying, good hedgerow structure, mostly attractive but scruffy in places, few urban influences;
- soft rural edge merges with urban edge
- large open area south has a fringe of well vegetated small scale pasture north of Shill Brook but is predominantly large scale open arable fields;
- weak landscape structure, few trees, gappy hedgerows;
- detracting presence of 'urban' uses, recreation ground, car parking, sewage works, radio station.

Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility across open area
- prominent intrusive urban elements such as recreation floodlighting, radio masts, sewage works ;
- poor approach into Bampton on Buckland Road due to ribbon development and other urban influences;
- urban edge north of Shill Brook softened by vegetation;
- important views of town on approach including church spire.

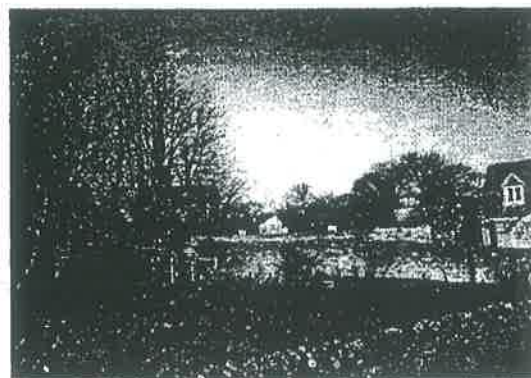
Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to resist further urbanisation of countryside south of Bampton;
- need to strengthen structure of open landscapes;
- need to integrate existing uses within a stronger landscape structure;
- need to improve approach to Bampton along Buckland Road.

D: BAMPTON WEST AND SHILL BROOK

Landscape characteristics

- ribbon of semi-enclosed floodplain pasture following Shill Brook. Further west semi-enclosed flat farmland and more open flat farmland beyond;
- western edge of Bampton dominated by the attractive composition of floodplain, mature willow and the church;
- rural edge penetrates into the heart of the town, very soft and pastoral;
- semi-enclosed, strong landscape structure;
- further west more open, large arable fields and a weaker landscape structure; fewer trees and hedgerows.



View of the western edge of Bampton

Visual characteristics

- generally low intervisibility due to mature vegetation and small scale landscape;
- high intervisibility further west;
- attractive approach into the town from the west;
- important high quality views of the church and pastoral edge of the town from the west, extremely sensitive to change;
- equally attractive views out from the urban edge along Shill Brook.

KEY SETTLEMENT BAMPTON

(CHARACTER AREA: 10)

A: BAMPTON NORTH

Landscape characteristics

- mixture of open, rolling vale farmland and semi enclosed flat vale farmland following Shill Brook;
- east of the A4095, gently rolling farmland, weak landscape structure;
- large scale, predominantly arable in rectilinear pattern;
- urban/rural boundary quite distinct;
- west of A4095, smaller scale, mostly arable, stronger landscape structure;
- soft rural edge merges with urban edge;

Visual characteristics

- rolling topography and intervening vegetation masks urban edge east of A4095;
- urban edge also partially softened by vegetation;
- important views of town on approach including church spire;
- attractive rural edge to the town east of A4095.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to maintain quality of rural edge north of the town;
- important to consider silhouette of town viewed from the north; very sensitive to change;
- need to strengthen landscape structure west of A4095.

B: BAMPTON EAST

Landscape characteristics

- mostly, open, rolling vale farmland and a small area of open flat vale farmland in the north east adjoining a similarly large area of semi enclosed flat vale farmland south of the 64449;
- predominantly large rectilinear arable fields;
- open in character;
- weak landscape structure, few trees, gappy hedgerows and fences;
- very clearly defined edge between rural and urban;

Visual characteristics

- generally high intervisibility north of the B4449, open views and prominent skylines viewed from the urban edge;
- views out from urban edge very open but generally unspoilt;
- harsh urban edge along the eastern boundary of Bampton, prominent buildings, road lighting etc;
- urban edge slightly scruffy appearance in places;
- church spire an important landmark.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to soften appearance of the eastern edge of Bampton;
- need to strengthen landscape structure particularly in the open vale landscapes;
- need to resist any further urbanisation of road corridor outside the urban area;
- special attention should be given to strengthening landscape edges.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The following pages present the findings of a more detailed analysis of the character and sensitivities of the landscape surrounding a number of key settlements. These comprise the District's main local service centres, with the addition of Ducklington (because of its proximity to Witney) and Milton-under-Wychwood, as a secondary local centre within the AONB. The ten key settlements are:

- Bampton
- Burford
- Carterton
- **Charlbury**
- Chipping Norton
- Ducklington
- Eynsham
- Milton-under-Wychwood
- Witney
- Woodstock

For each Settlement, the landscape around its immediate fringes is divided into sectors which are described in turn under the following headings:

- landscape characteristics - a summary of the main features which characterise the landscape surrounding the settlement;
- visual characteristics - a summary of the degree to which the landscape is open or enclosed by landform or vegetation and exposed to views;
- key landscape sensitivities and considerations - a summary of the key factors that affect landscape quality and may influence its ability to accommodate change.

The accompanying maps identify a number of key features, briefly explained below.

Landmark - visually prominent and distinctive landscape features, such as church spires, which are important to the character of the settlement. It is particularly important to maintain views of these features.

Hard urban edge - where development forms a stark and visually prominent 'edge' to the settlement. This type of edge is often characteristic of more recent, higher density development which is regimented and lacking in variety and form, bounded by fences rather than hedgerows with a poor landscape structure within the built area. The edges require 'softening' and 'breaking up' (eg. through planting) to help integrate development within the landscape.

Strong landscape edges - where landscape features, typically landform (valleys or ridges) and belts of vegetation (hedgerows, trees, woods etc.) form a strong boundary and help to define the physical or 'natural' setting of the settlement. Where the landscape edge to a settlement is weak (eg. with few trees and fences replacing hedgerows) the creation of a strong, defensible landscape edge is beneficial, creating a distinct but 'soft' boundary between 'town' and country.

Stronger/weaker landscape structure - the condition and 'intactness' of the structural components of the landscape (eg hedgerows, trees, woods, field patterns, walls etc.) affect landscape quality and visual sensitivity. Where these elements are strong, the landscape is often more attractive and in 'good health' and views may be restricted. Where they are weak or absent, the landscape may lack the diversity and quality of other areas but is likely to be visually sensitive and exposed to views. A combination of these factors will influence its overall sensitivity to change.

Open views - particularly open views across the surrounding landscape, both inwards and outwards from the settlement. The arrows indicate particularly prominent and visually sensitive areas or important views to be maintained.

Key areas - the division of the surrounding landscape into sectors which may have characteristics in common. The outwards boundary of these sectors is arbitrary and simply marks the general distance away from the settlement over which the analysis was undertaken.

PART THREE

KEY SETTLEMENTS

KEY SETTLEMENT WITNEY

(CHARACTER AREAS: 8,9,7,11)

A: NORTH WEST OF WITNEY

Landscape characteristics

- open valley-side farmland and open limestone wolds farmland;
- typically weak landscape structure, large fields, few trees, open and exposed;
- north facing sloping valley sides up to 6%.
- distinct urban edge.

Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility, elevated views and prominent skylines viewed from the north;
- hard urban edge on B4047, prominent buildings, lighting and structures;
- important views across the Windrush Valley.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- valley sides are an important natural component of the valley landscape;
- open landscapes with weak structures on the edge of settlements are very visually exposed and vulnerable to change;
- special attention should be given to strengthening landscape edges.

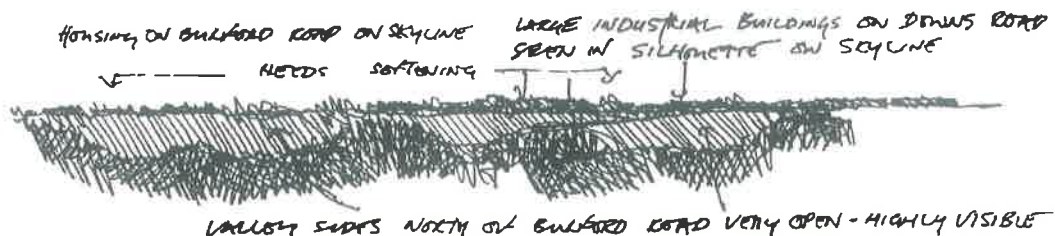
B: WINDRUSH VALLEY NORTH

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed valley-side farmland, semi-enclosed valley floor farmland;
- valley-sides with stronger hedgerow structure, more trees and a mixture of pasture and arable farmland;
- south-facing sloping valley sides up to 8%.
- enclosed valley floor, predominantly pasture, low-lying, riparian character, wet and prone to flooding;
- willow-lined ditches and groups of mature trees;
- soft urban edge.

Visual characteristics

- low intervisibility within the valley, but more distant views down onto the valley floor;
- valley sides form skyline from valley floor;
- views largely unspoilt by urban influences;
- built form on valley sides screened by mature vegetation;
- mill buildings important local landmark.



Key sensitivities and considerations

- valley sides and valley floor are an important natural component of the valley landscape;
- unspoilt landscapes particularly vulnerable to change;
- special attention should be given to maintaining strong landscape edges.

C: NORTH OF WITNEY

Landscape characteristics

- semi enclosed limestone wolds farmland;
- attractive mixture of strong hedgerows, hedgerow trees and limestone walls;
- medium scale rectilinear fields, mixture of pasture and arable;
- gently undulating topography;
- well-defined urban edge, fairly strong landscape edge.

Visual characteristics

- moderate intervisibility, views from public roads filtered by intervening hedgerows;
- urban area partially silhouetted on the skyline and sensitive to change;
- urban edge largely softened by vegetation.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- high **quality** landscape edge - vulnerable to change;
- important rural approach into Witney from the north, vulnerable to change;
- special attention should be given to maintaining strong landscape edges;
- resist urbanisation between Hailey and Witney.

D: EAST OF WITNEY

Landscape characteristics

- semi enclosed limestone wolds farmland and open rolling farmland;
- mixture of strong hedgerows, hedgerow trees;
- gently rolling topography;
- area north of Madley Brook mostly flat;
- area south of Madley Brook more rolling;
- medium scale rectilinear fields, mostly arable with some horticultural uses;
- gently undulating topography.
- Cogges Wood an important local feature;
- large part of the area allocated for future development.

Visual characteristics

- moderate intervisibility, largely unspoilt views out from the urban edge;
- hard urban edge in places;
- approach on **A4095** affected by urban influences.
- ridgeline on New Yatt Road quite prominent.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to resist any further 'urbanisation' on New Yatt Road and **A4095**;
- need to strengthen landscape structure along the urban edge;
- need to strengthen landscape edge particularly between land allocated for development and Cogges Wood.

E: SOUTH EAST OF WITNEY

Landscape characteristics

- open rolling farmland;
- rounded hill, predominantly pasture;
- important buffer zone between the urban edge and the A40;
- partly denuded, open in character, locally weak structure;
- landform defines the boundary between urban and rural.

Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility, prominent landform;
- urban edge harsh in places, a characteristic reinforced by the perimeter road;
- Cogges Hill an important landmark feature on the south east approach into Witney.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- landform extremely sensitive to change;
- landform important landmark on approach into Witney;
- need for landscape improvement *to* including strengthening of hedgerows and softening of urban edge.

F: COGGES/WINDRUSH VALLEY SOUTH

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed floodplain pasture;
- permanent pasture with flat, low-lying, 'wet' riparian character;
- **prone to flooding; willow-lined ditches** and groups of mature trees provide soft boundary between urban/rural edge - strong landscape edge;
- area largely unspoilt apart from intrusive electricity pylons and views of A40;
- key recreational resource and green 'wedge' **into the heart of the town.**

Visual characteristics

- low intervisibility, largely unspoilt views out from the urban edge;
- urban edge well screened;
- intrusive electricity pylons and filtered views of A40;
- important views along the valley floor.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- floodplain farmland is a valuable landscape resource and is vulnerable to change;
- need to safeguard floodplain character particularly in relation to the proposed Cogges Link road;
- need to maintain strong landscape edge;
- need to maintain views along valley floor.

G: SOUTH WEST OF WITNEY

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed limestone wolds farmland;
- rolling valley form - Colwell Brook
- mixture of small scale pasture and arable;
- strong hedgerow structure and presence of hedgerow trees;
- important buffer zone between urban edge and A40;
- distinct urban/rural edge.

Visual characteristics

- moderate intervisibility, views limited by intervening landform and vegetation;
- soft urban edge ;
- views south from urban edge largely unspoilt, A40 **mostly in cutting.**

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to maintain buffer zone;
- valley form distinctive local feature;
- need to maintain southern aspect from urban edge;
- need to maintain strong landscape edge.

H: WEST WITNEY

Landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland;
- large-scale, gently rolling farmland mostly arable;
- large rectilinear fields, weak landscape structure;
- plateau location;
- large part of the area allocated for future development.

Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility, extensive, uninterrupted views across open land;
- prominent urban edge to Witney and prominent edge to employment land;
- characteristic further reinforced by urban character of Western Link Road
- distant views to the south west from urban edge.



View towards Downs Road Industrial area from the link road

Key sensitivities and considerations

- need to improve landscape quality throughout the area;
- need to strengthen landscape edge and provide an advanced landscape structure for future development.

KEY SETTLEMENT WOODSTOCK

(CHARACTER AREA: 4)

A: NORTH OF WOODSTOCK

Landscape characteristics

- semi-enclosed valley-side farmland and open limestone wolds farmland;
- Clyme Valley attractive, small scale, semi-enclosed, well vegetated;
- Valley divides Woodstock from Old Woodstock;
- north of Old Woodstock much larger scale open farmland, weak landscape structure, predominantly arable, few trees, weak hedgerow structure;
- distinct boundary between urban area and surrounding farmland;
- few urban influences on surrounding farmland.

Visual characteristics

- very limited intervisibility across the Clyme Valley, views filtered by mature willows;
- vegetation forms a strong landscape buffer to northern edge of Woodstock; soft edge between urban edge and valley sides;
- urban edge around Old Woodstock much harder, visible across open farmland to the north and east;
- views out from urban edge relatively unspoilt
- edge of Blenheim Estate a strong visible edge on approach from the north, glimpsed views into the grounds.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- Glyme Valley important local feature close to the town centre and sensitive to change;
- Important to maintain landscape setting of the Blenheim Estate;
- Any changes to the urban edge of Old Woodstock are likely to be highly visible;
- Urban edge between open farmland and Old Woodstock would benefit from softening;
- special attention should be given to 'greening' approach to Old Woodstock on A44.

B: EAST OF WOODSTOCK

Landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland;
- east of Old Woodstock large scale open farmland, weak landscape structure, predominantly arable, few trees, weak hedgerow structure;
- ribbon development, including new houses on Banbury Road, blur the boundary between urban area and open countryside;
- former railway line now a strong landscape feature;
- despite ribbon development rural edge is largely unspoilt;
- farm on the urban edge helps reinforce rural character.

Visual characteristics

- high intervisibility views across open farmland from Banbury Road;
- urban edge softened by mature vegetation;
- views largely unspoilt by urban influences;
- ribbon development benefits from a backdrop of vegetation along the line of the former railway;
- wall along Banbury Road a good local feature.

Key sensitivities and considerations

- any changes to the urban edge in this area are likely to be highly visible;
- resist any further urban growth along Banbury Road;
- strengthen landscape structure on open farmland;
- maintain and enhance the soft urban edges.

C: SOUTH OF WOODSTOCK

Landscape characteristics

- open limestone wolds farmland;
- very flat, medium to large scale farmland; open but with a good hedgerow structure;
- predominantly large rectilinear arable fields plus playing field attached to the school;
- distinct boundary between urban edge and farmland, less distinct around the school;
- farmland largely unspoilt by urban influences;
- area surrounding the school more urbanised including road character, fences, playing fields lighting etc.

Visual characteristics

- moderate intervisibility, views limited in a very flat landscape;
- distant views intercepted by intervening shelterbelts and small woodland blocks;
- thin vegetation on urban edge makes building silhouette prominent in places - inappropriate roofline reinforces this effect;
- character of A44 approach to Woodstock quite urban - lighting, signage etc;
- wooded character of the Blenheim Estate provides a strong landscape edge;
- views out from edge largely unspoilt although lighting on the A44 and other bits of urban clutter are visible south of Woodstock.



Silhouette of urban edge of Woodstock viewed from A44

Key sensitivities and considerations

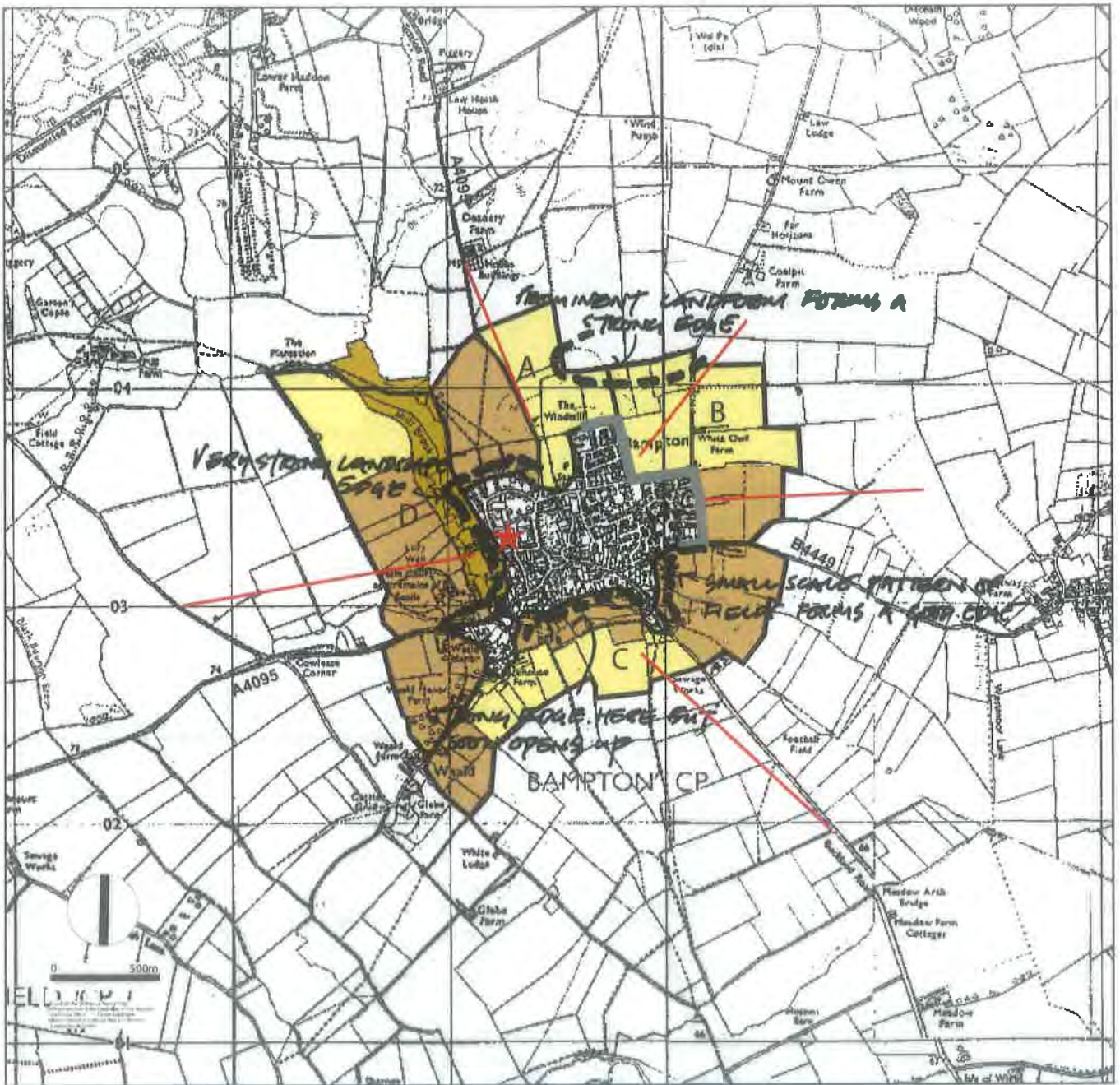
- any changes to the urban edge are likely to be highly visible in places, particularly from the A44;
- need to strengthen landscape edge to the urban area;
- existing woodland blocks and shelterbelts play an important role both as local landscape features and as filters to views;
- need to preserve landscape character of A44 approach into Woodstock and resist any further urbanisation of road corridor;
- need to maintain strong hedgerow structure on open farmland.

D: WEST OF WOODSTOCK

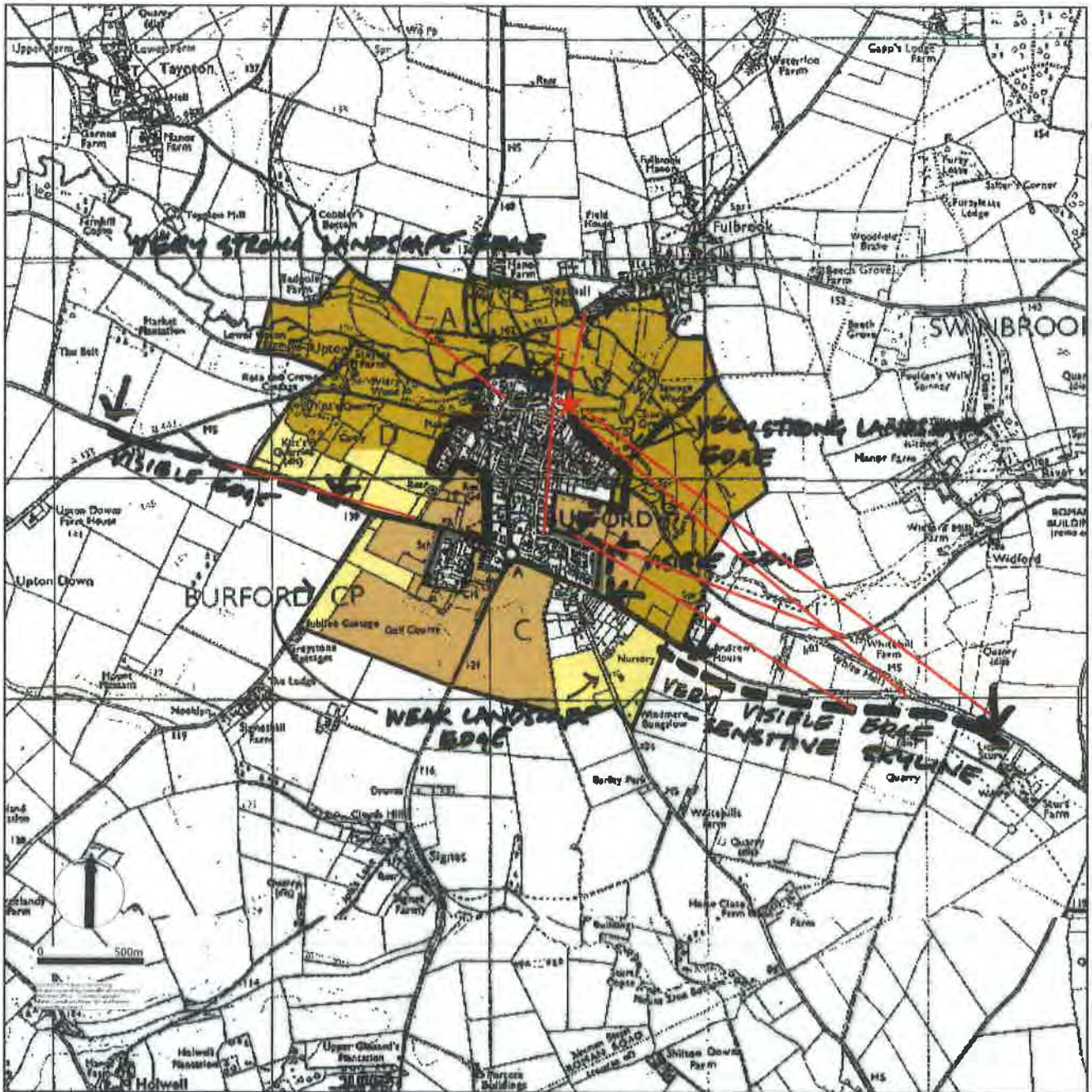
Landscape characteristics

- formal parkland and designed landscapes
- Blenheim Estate is a Grade 1 historic park;
- at about 1000 ha, it occupies the entire area west of Woodstock;
- its landscape and visual characteristics are well documented and its current designation provides more than adequate protection to western edge of the town.

Bampton

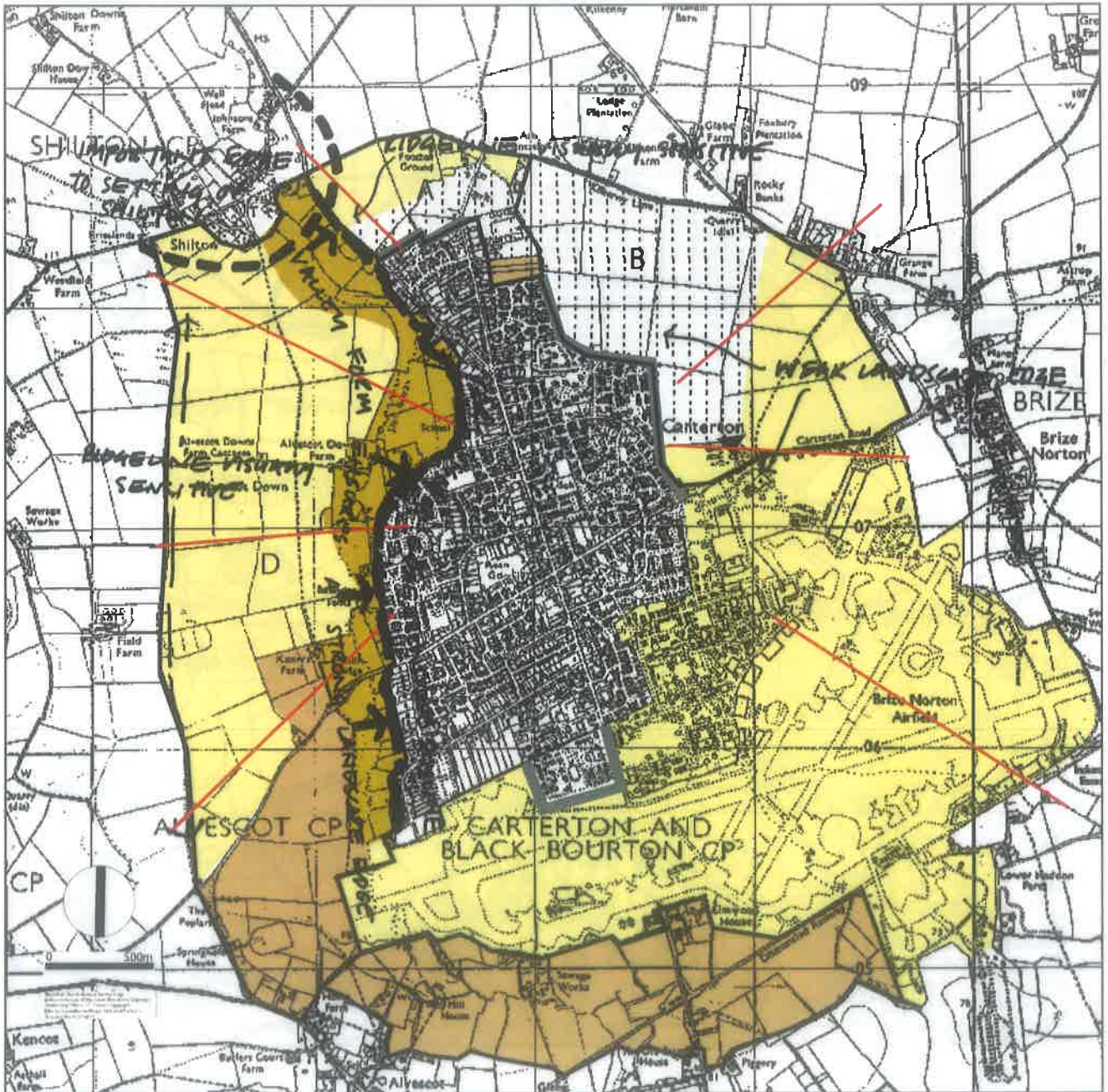


Burford



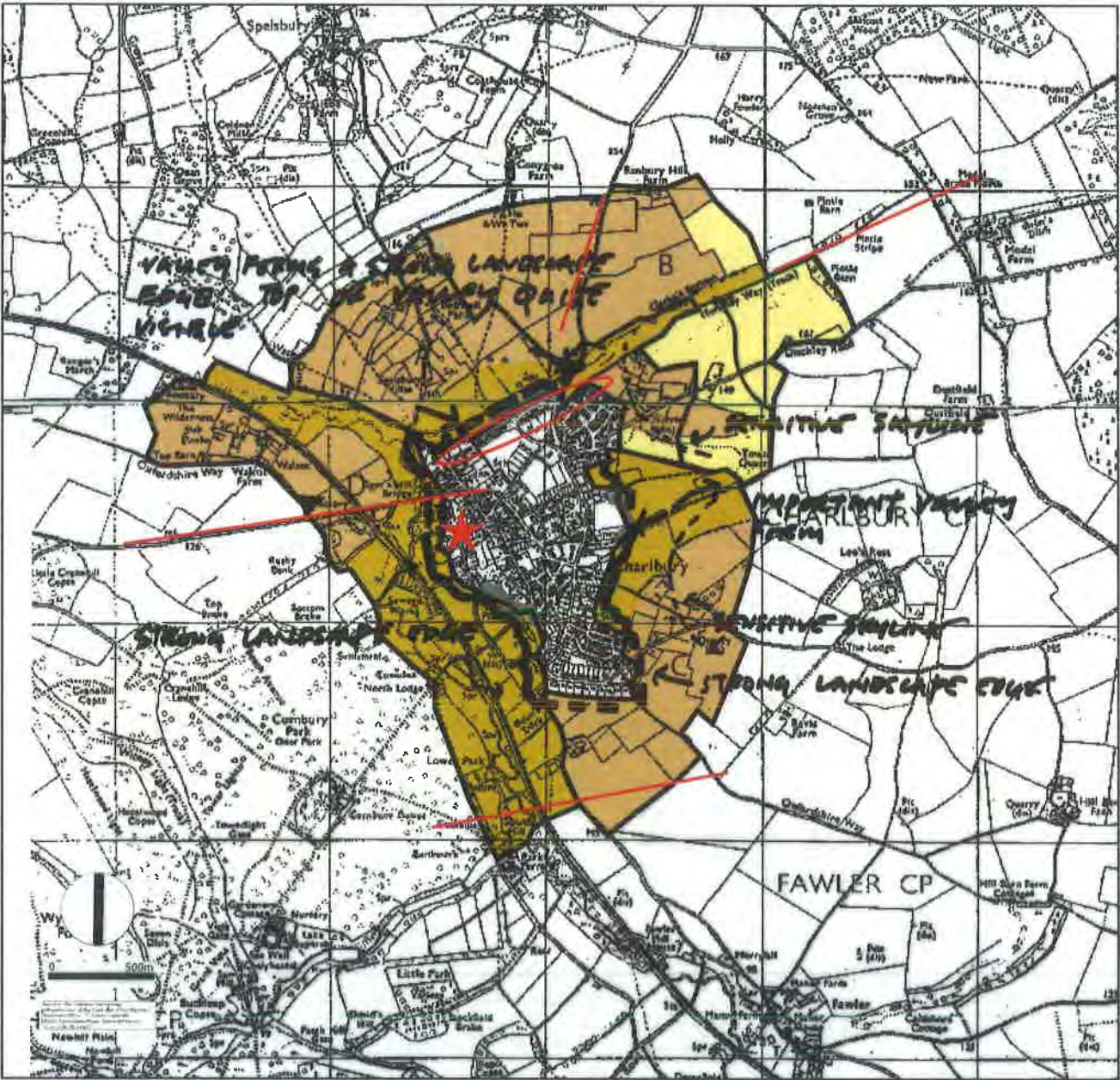
Key			
	Landmark		Stronger landscape structure
	Hard urban edge		Weaker landscape structure
	Strong landscape edges		Open views
			Key Areas
			Photopoint or sketch point

Carterton



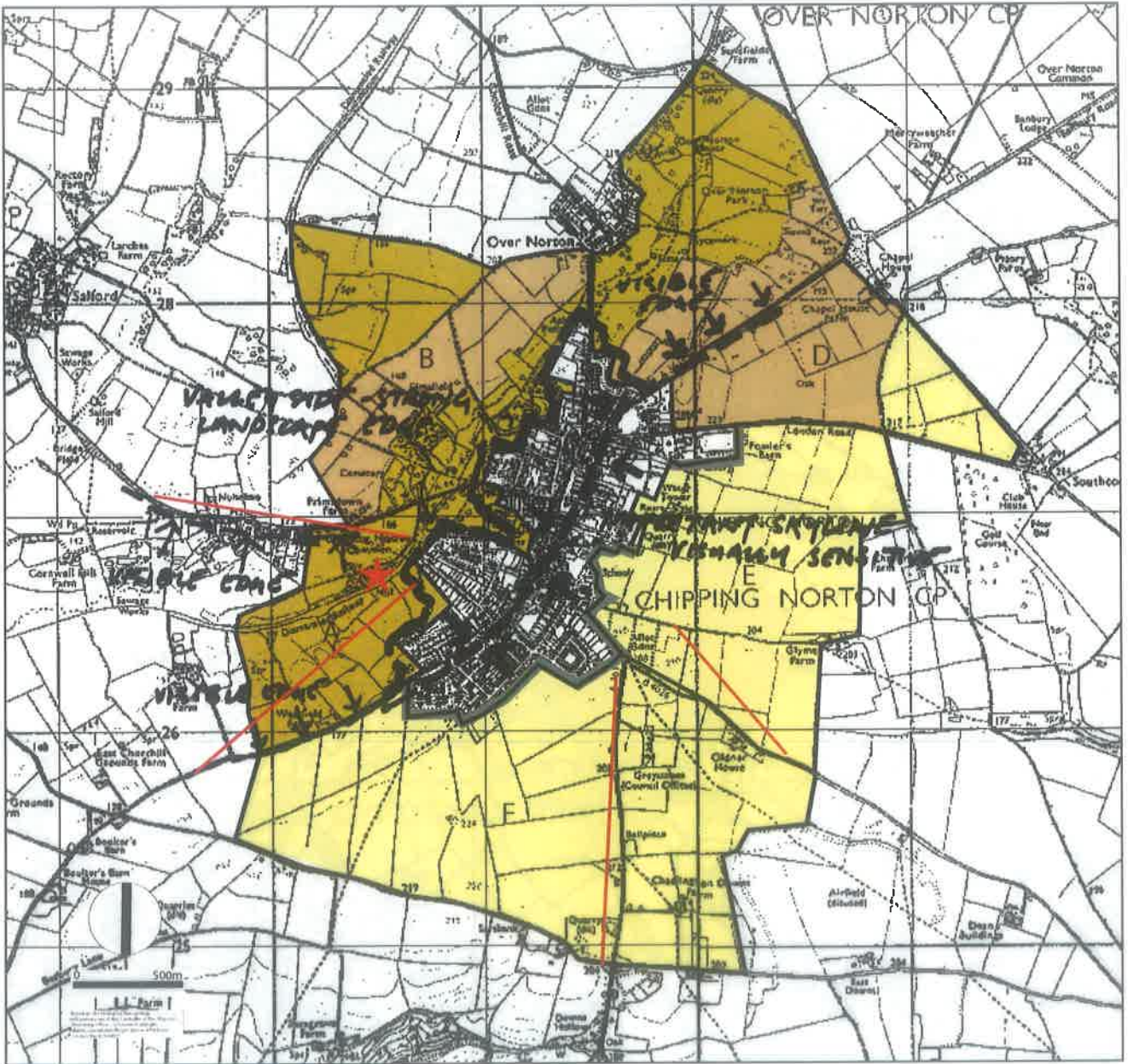
Key	
	Landmark
	Hard urban edge
	Strong landscape edges
	Stronger landscape structure
	Key Areas
	Weaker landscape structure
	Open views
	Key Areas
	Photopoint or sketch point
	North East Carterton Development Area

Charlbury



Key			
	Landmark		Stronger landscape structure
	Hard urban edge		Weaker landscape structure
	Strong landscape edges		Open views
			Key Areas
			Photopoint or sketch point

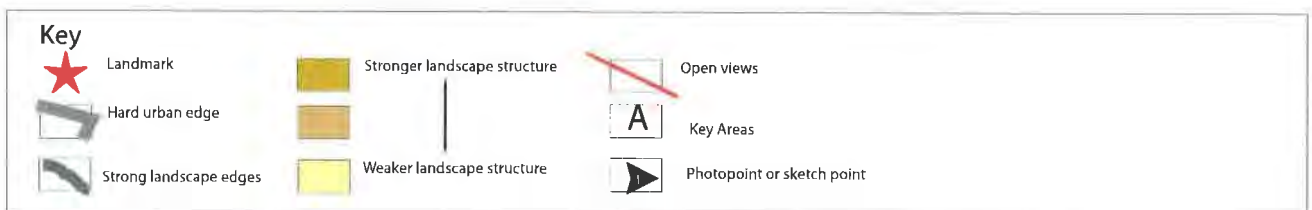
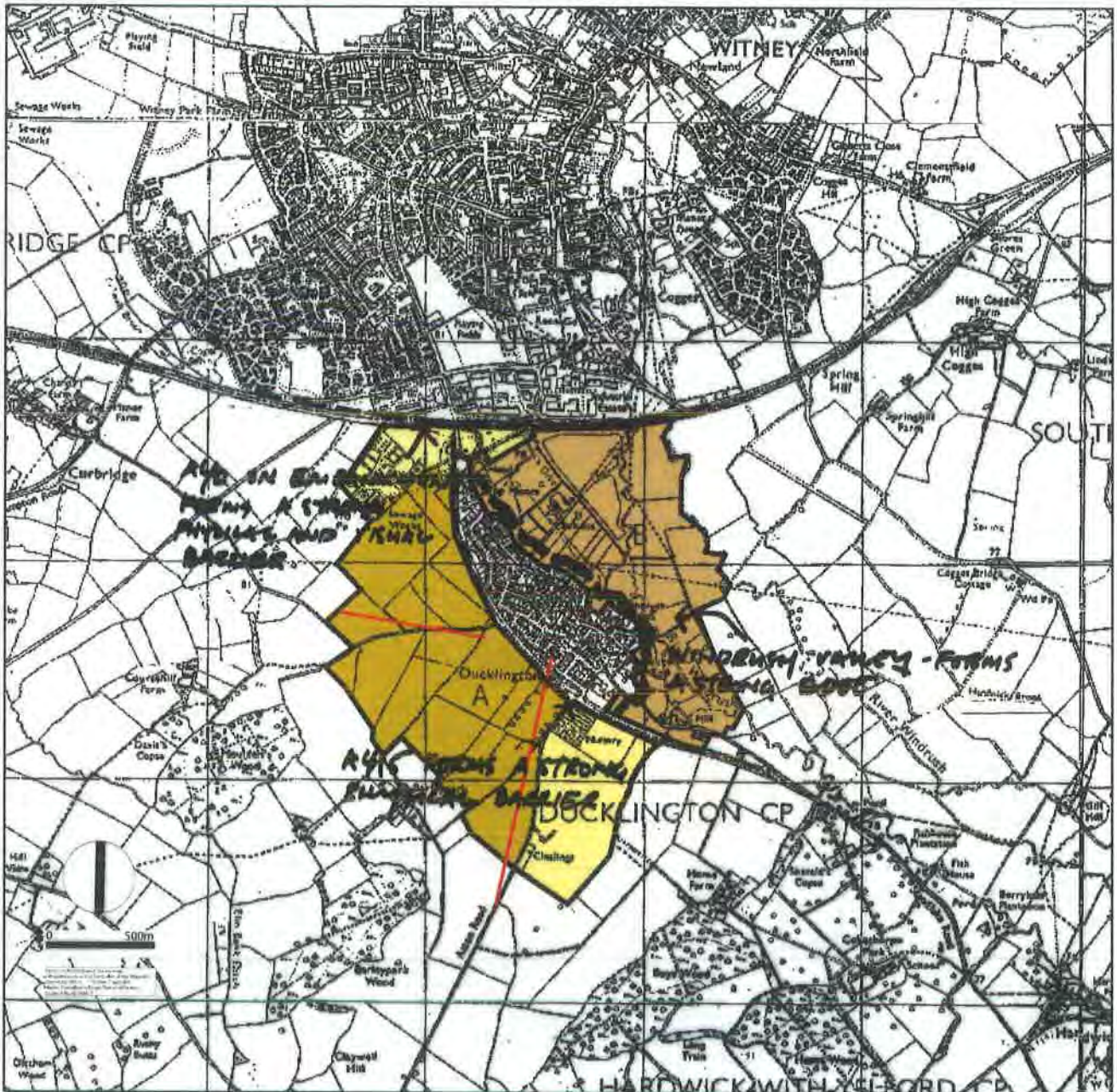
Chipping Norton



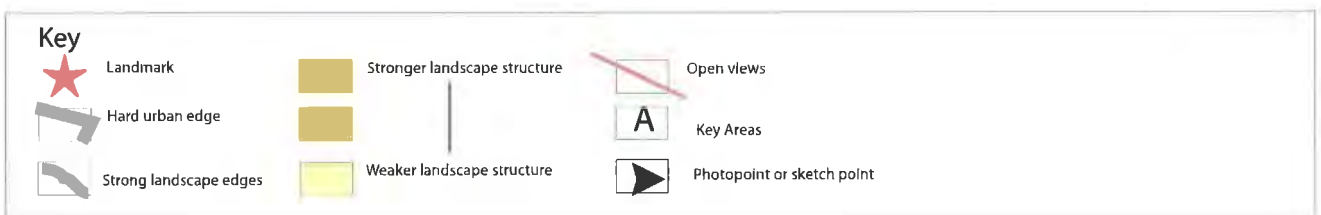
Key			
	Landmark		Stronger landscape structure
	Hard urban edge		Weaker landscape structure
	Strong landscape edges		Open views
			Key Areas
			Photopoint or sketch point

Key Settlements

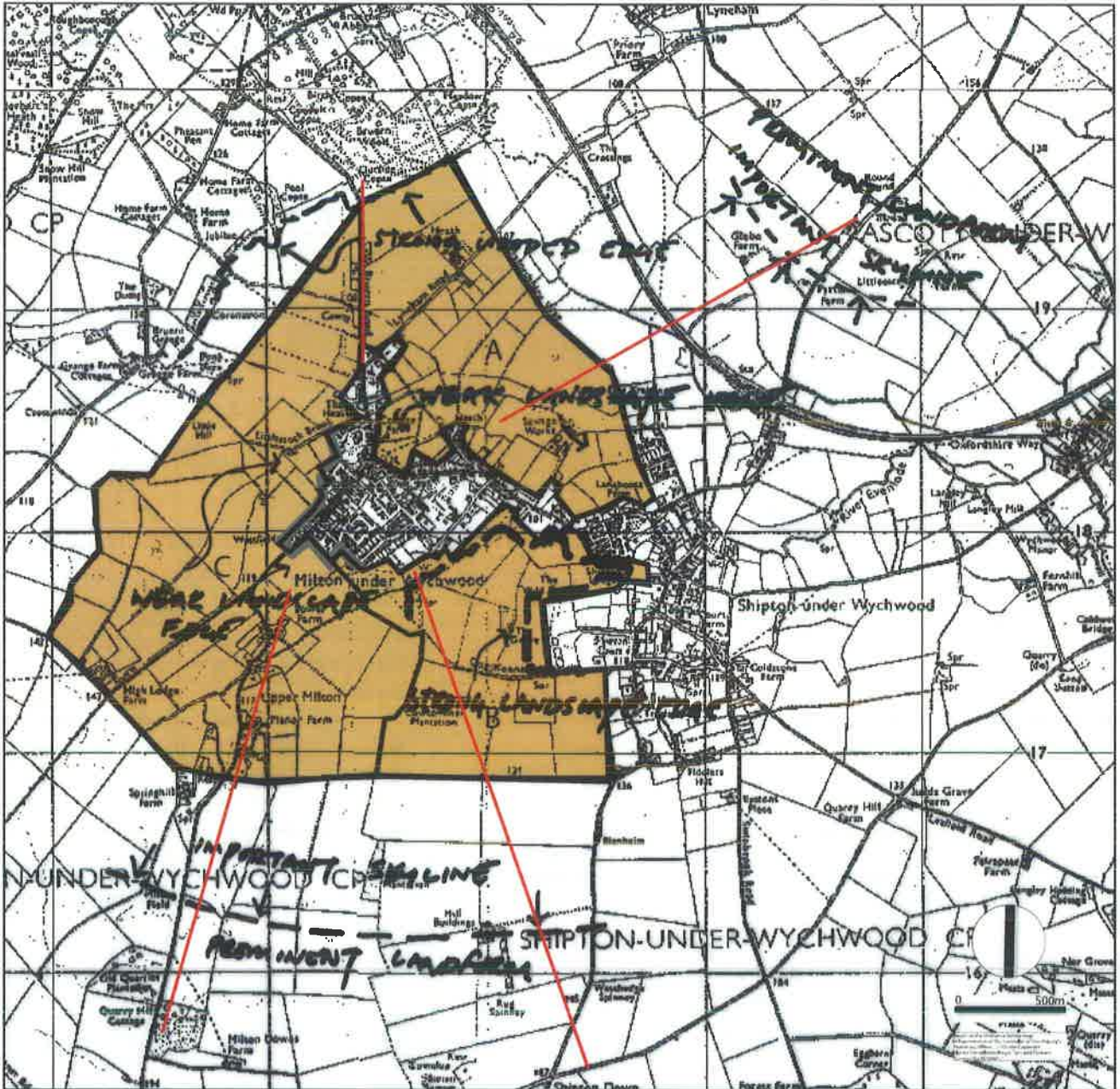
Ducklington











Eynsham



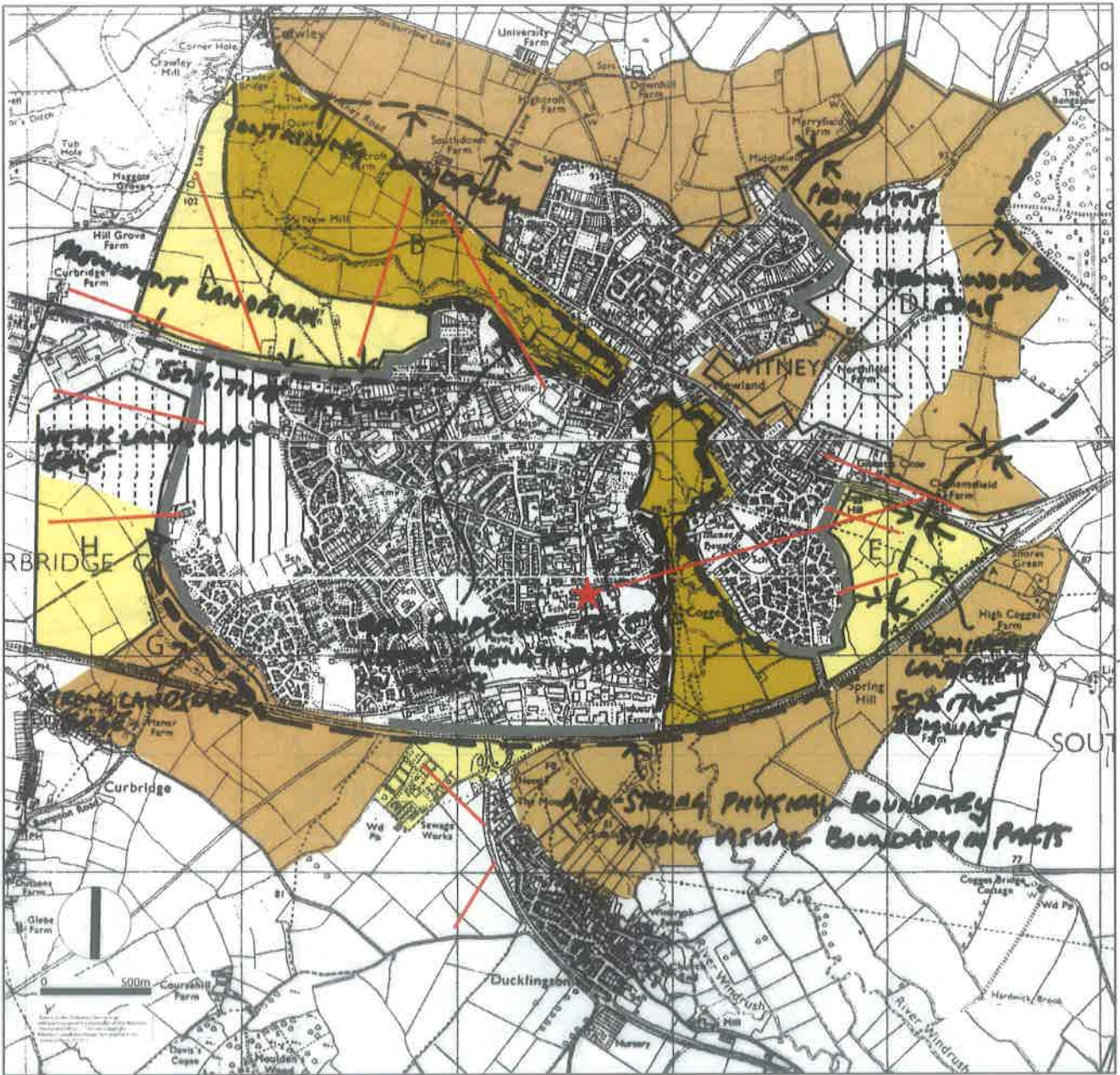
Milton-under-Wychwood



Key

 Landmark	 Stronger landscape structure	 Open views
 Hard urban edge	 Weaker landscape structure	 Key Areas
 Strong landscape edges		 Photopoint or sketch point

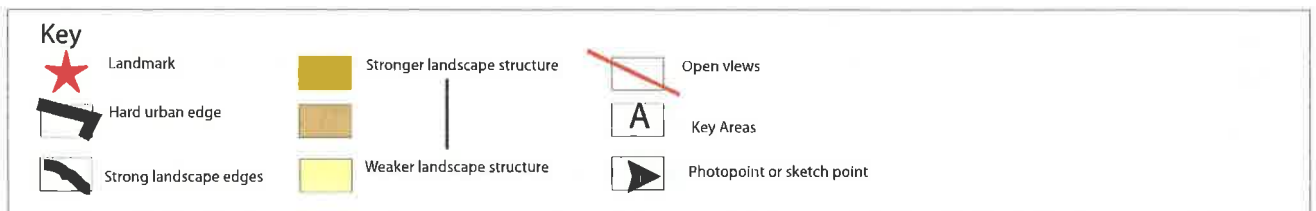
Witney



Key

- | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|----------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | Landmark | | Stronger landscape structure | | Open views | | Recent built development |
| | Hard urban edge | | Weaker landscape structure | | Key Areas | | Allocated Land |
| | Strong landscape edges | | | | Photopoint or sketch point | | |

Woodstock



APPENDICES

**APPENDIX 1 CHECKLIST OF KEY
CHARACTERISTICS**

**APPENDIX 2 MATRIX OF TREE AND SHRUB
SPECIES**

APPENDIX 3 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Balance and proportion

The relative quantities and relationship of different elements within the landscape which can affect its aesthetic qualities.

Boundaries

Characteristic field and property boundaries found in open countryside, eg. hedges, dry-stone walls, fences, ditches etc.

Character

A distinct pattern or combination of characteristics that occurs consistently in a particular landscape.

Characteristic

An element or group of elements that are typical of a particular landscape

Dipslope

The gently sloping backslope of an escarpment landform

Diversity

The number of landscape components and the way in which they inter-relate, creating complexity or uniformity in the landscape.

Enclosure

The density and arrangement of structural elements in the landscape (eg. landform, trees, hedges, woods, walls) so that they enclose space and create visual and physical containment

Escarpment

A distinctive whaleback-shaped hill or landform unit (typically of chalk) which comprises a steep face and gently sloping dipslope.

Evaluation

The process of weighing up and attaching a non-monetary, subjective value to landscape by reference to specified criteria.

Floodplain

The very flat land adjacent to a river or watercourse, generally underlain by alluvium and which would be naturally prone to flooding without specific flood alleviation measures (NB this definition is broader than that used by the Environment Agency to define the Statutory Flood Plain).

Heritage values

Features of archaeological, cultural or ecological significance.

Enhancement strategy

The most appropriate type of landscape improvement or management (Conservation, repair, restoration or reconstruction) based on intrinsic landscape quality and condition and enhancement needs.

intrusive influences

Features (eg. buildings, structures, electricity pylons) and non-agricultural land uses which are out of keeping with the typical, unspoilt or distinctive character of the landscape.

Landcover

Combinations of land use and vegetation that cover the land surface.

Landform

Combinations of slope and elevation that produce the shape and form of the land surface.

Landscape assessment

An umbrella term used to encompass all the many different ways of looking at, describing and analysing landscape.

Landscape character area

A geographic area with a consistent character or coherent identity.

Landscape structure

Structural components of the landscape, eg hedgerows, trees, woods, walls etc.

Landscape type

A generic term for a landscape with a consistent character, resulting from different combinations of landform and landcover.

Landscape vernacular

The combination of elements or components which are locally distinctive to a particular area of landscape.

Linear settlements

Settlements where buildings are typically arranged in a linear form (eg. along a road, ridgeline or valley bottom).

Local distinctiveness

The special character of a place or area which gives it a particular and recognisable identity.

Nucleated settlements

Settlements where buildings are typically arranged in a nucleated or clustered form around a central feature (eg. around a village green, common, church, road junction etc.).

Riparian

A character which is specifically associated with rivers.

Rolling

Landform which is characterised by pronounced topography of soft hills.

Scale

The typical size, scale or grain of elements and patterns within the landscape, which have a close bearing on such factors as balance, proportion and enclosure.

Scenic quality

A subjective judgement of the aesthetic appeal of different landscape types, influenced by such factors as balance, proportion, diversity, harmony, unspoilt character, cultural preferences etc.

Sense of place (or 'Genius Loci')

The essential character and spirit of a landscape or area (Genius Loci means literally 'spirit of the place').

Sensitivity to change

A subjective overall assessment of landscape sensitivity and vulnerability to change, based on a combination of factors including landscape quality and visual sensitivity.

Settlement form

Typical morphology or shape of a settlement, eg. nucleated around a village green or linear along roads.

Settlement location

The characteristic siting of settlements in an area, usually influenced by physical factors.

Settlement pattern

The typical pattern of settlement, eg. scattered evenly across the countryside or concentrated within one area or along a particular line (eg. valley side).

Suburbanisation

A process whereby the intrusion of more urban land uses or features gradually erodes the rural character of landscape and settlements to produce a 'suburban' character.

Undulating

Landform which is characterised by gentle topography of shallow hills and valleys.

Visual sensitivity

The degree to which the landscape is open and enclosed by landform or vegetation and therefore exposed to views.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following list of publications and documents have been specifically referred to within the text of this report or have formed particularly important reference sources for the study:

ADAS (1995) *Upper Thames Tributaries ESA - Landscape Assessment*, ADAS

ADAS (1997) *Upper Thames Tributaries ESA - Environment Guidelines*, ADAS

Bond, J and Over, I (1988) *Oxfordshire and Berkshire*, Ordnance Survey Historical Guides, George Philip & Son, London

Countryside Commission (1992) *The Cotswold Landscape*, CCP 294, Countryside Commission

Countryside Commission (1993) *Landscape assessment guidance*, CCP423, Countryside Commission, Cheltenham

Emery, F (1974) *The Oxfordshire Landscape*, The Making of the English Landscape Series, Hodder and Stoughton, London

Hawker, G (1997) *An Ecological Audit of West Oxfordshire*, unpublished draft report to West Oxfordshire District Council.

Hoskins, W G (1977) *The Making of the English Landscape*, Book Club Associates, London.

Oxfordshire County Council (1992) *Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2001 (Adopted)*, Oxfordshire County Council

Oxfordshire County Council (November 1996) *Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011 (Deposit Draft)*, Oxfordshire County Council

PPG7 (Revised February 1997) *The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development*, Dept. of the Environment

Rackham, O (1986) *The History of the Countryside*, Dent

Rodwell, K (Ed.) (1975) *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire*, Oxford Archaeological Unit

Schumer, B (1984) *The Evolution of Wychwood to 1400: Pioneers, Frontiers and Forests*, Department of English Local History Occasional Papers, Third Series, No. 6, Leicester University Press

Steel, D. and Varley, P (1991) *Wildlife Habitats in Oxfordshire - a report on a BBONT habitat survey of Oxfordshire*, BBONT.

West Oxfordshire District Council, *West Oxfordshire Local Plan (Adopted November 1997)*