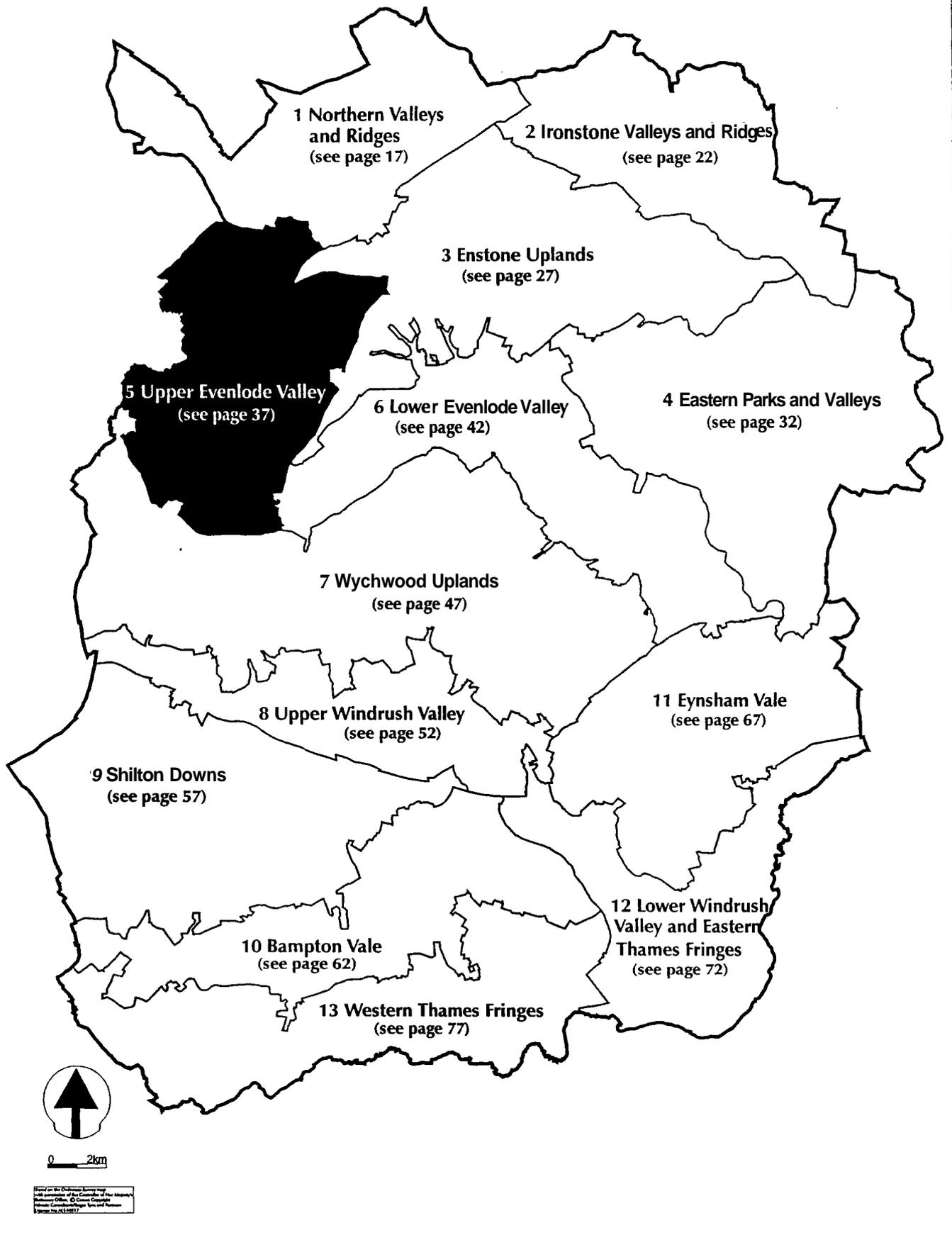


# 5 UPPER EVENLODE VALLEY



## 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

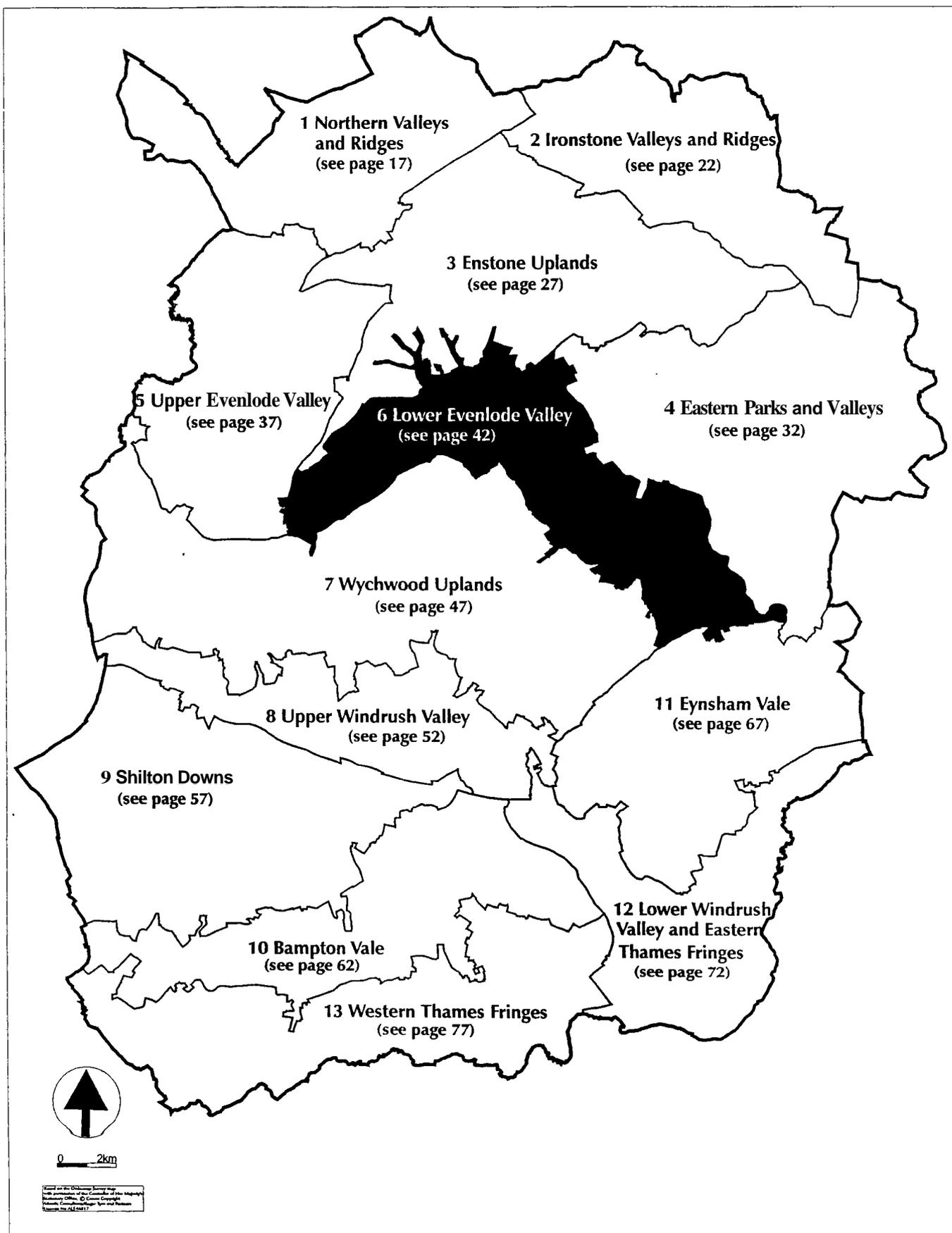
- the artificial golf course landscape is quite tolerant of change but built development would alter its essentially 'green' character.

## 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**

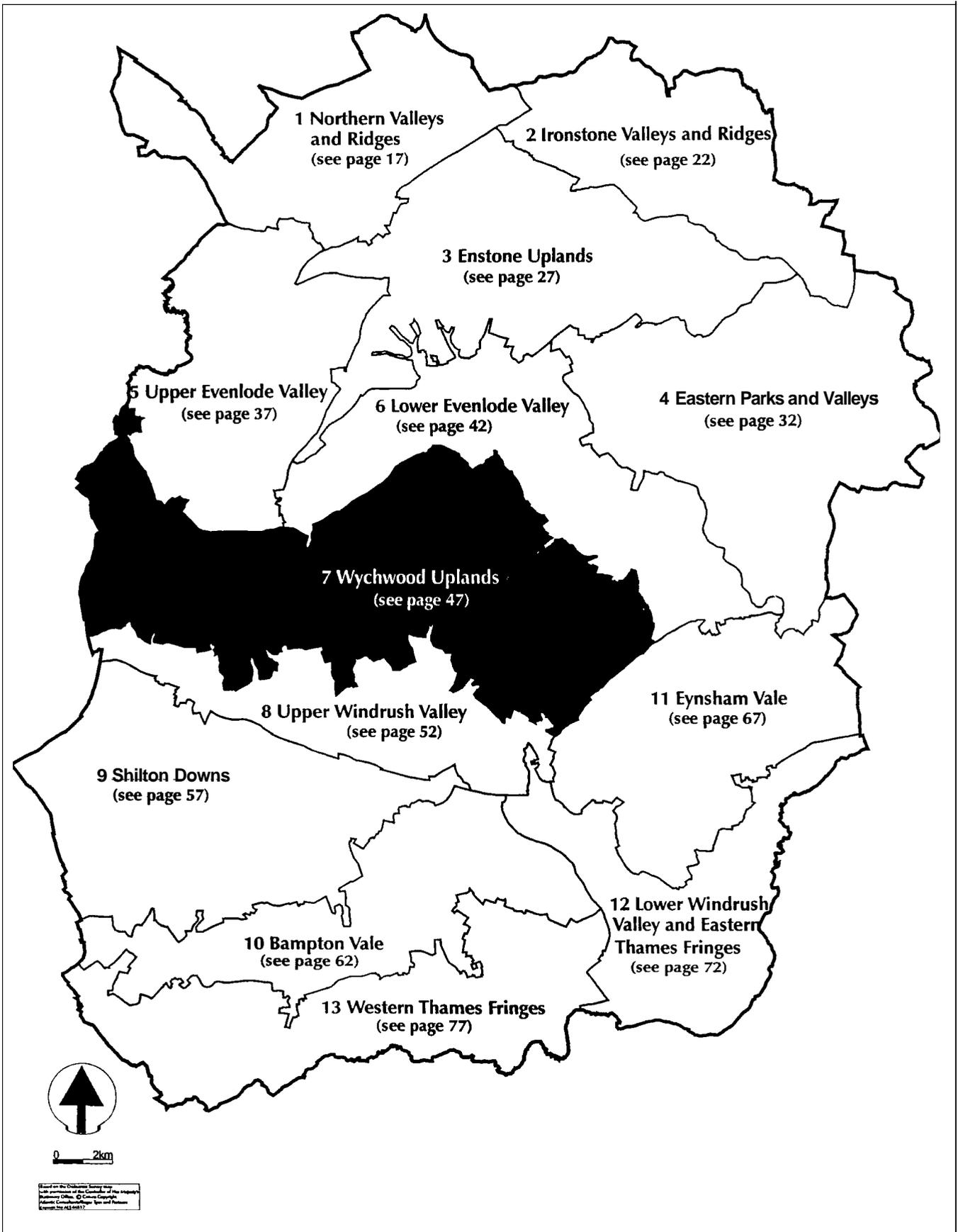
- these 'brown-field' sites are potentially more tolerant of change but their rural context are limiting factors for development;
- the introduction of urbanising influences, eg. urban styles of buildings, highway treatments and lighting would be potentially damaging to the rural character of the surrounding 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 Leaffield, 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 Wychood 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 Leaffield shows a more organic process of evolution as medieval Settlements like Leaffield, 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 Leaffield and Delly 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 Leaffield, 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**

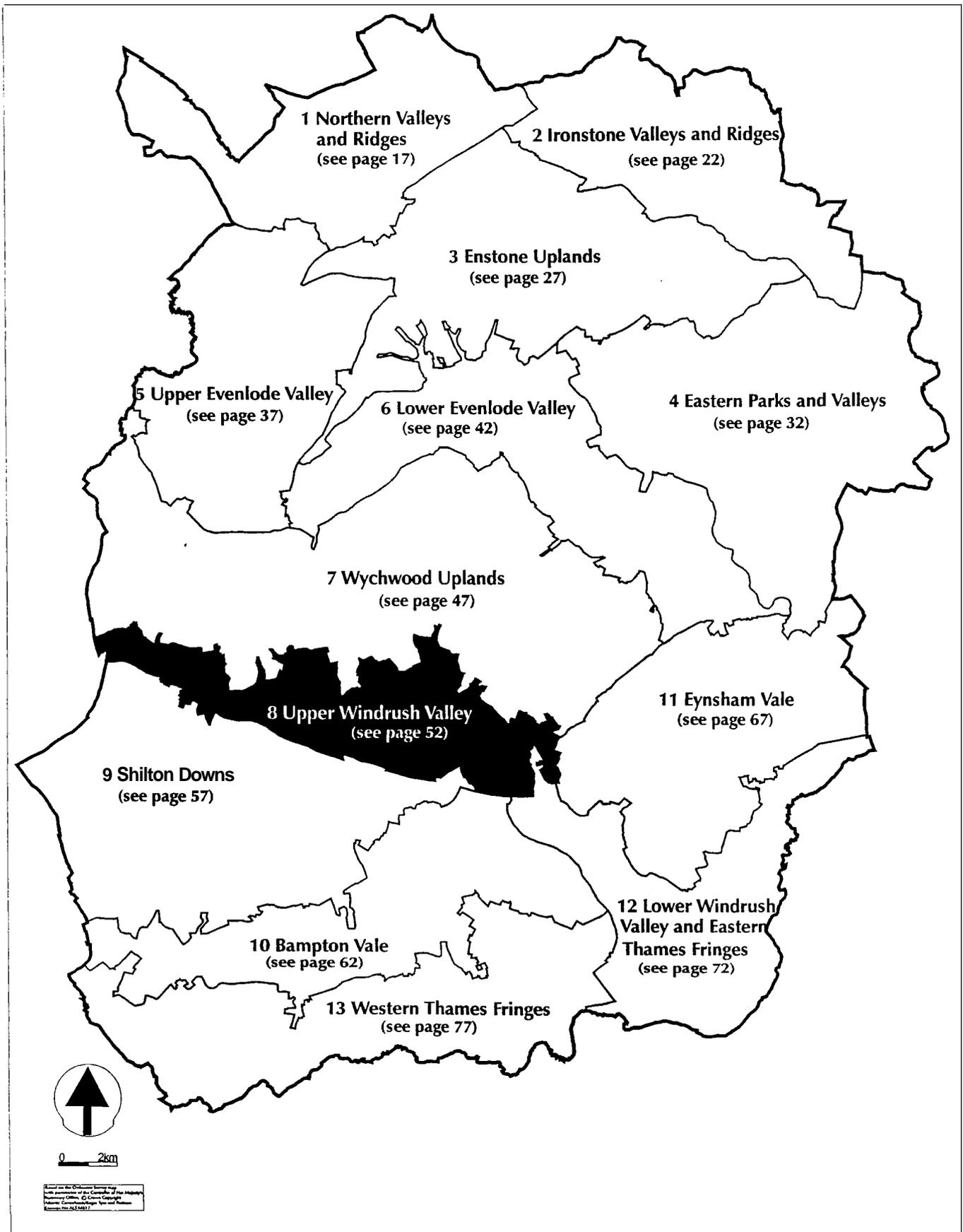
- historic parkland landscapes are of exceptional landscape value and extremely sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust

### **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 Cornbrash 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 Cornbrash 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 dipslope;
- 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 dipslope;
- 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 dipslope;
- 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**