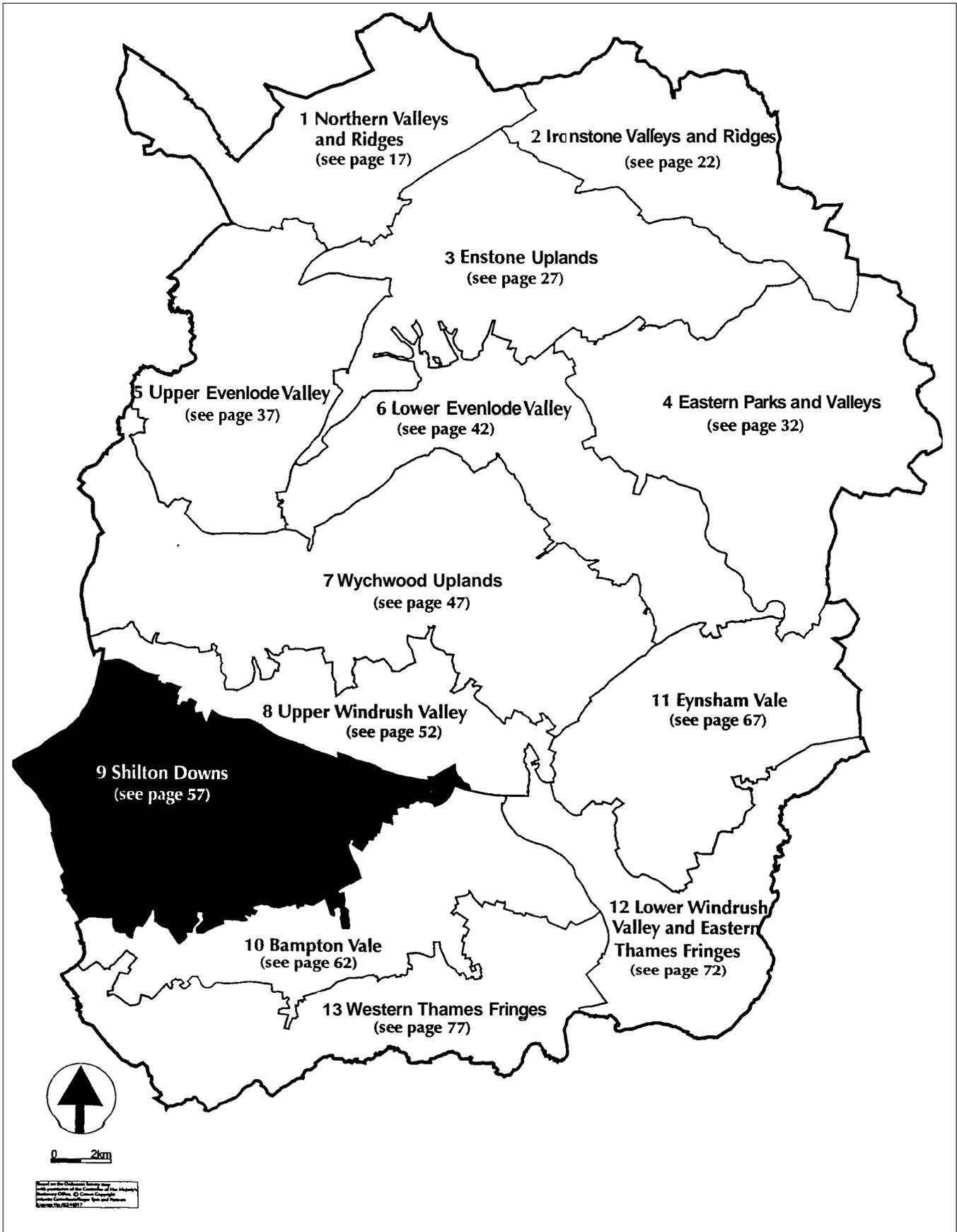


9 SHILTON DOWNS



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 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

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 Cornbrash 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 Cornbrash (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 Cornbrash 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

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-stone walls 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 Cornbrash 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 Cornbrash.

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

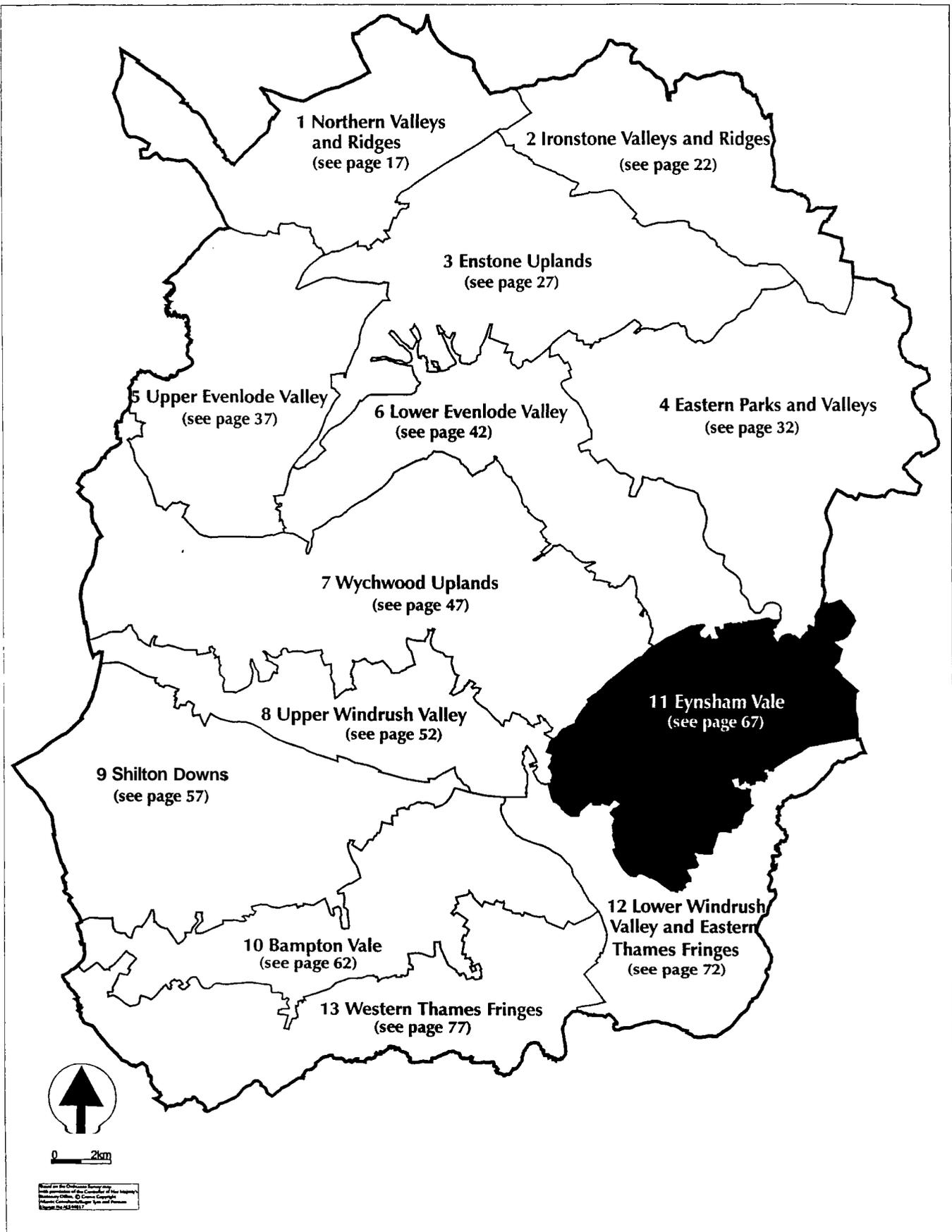
- parkland landscapes and their component features are of high landscape value and very sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust.

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-stone walls 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: EYNHAM 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

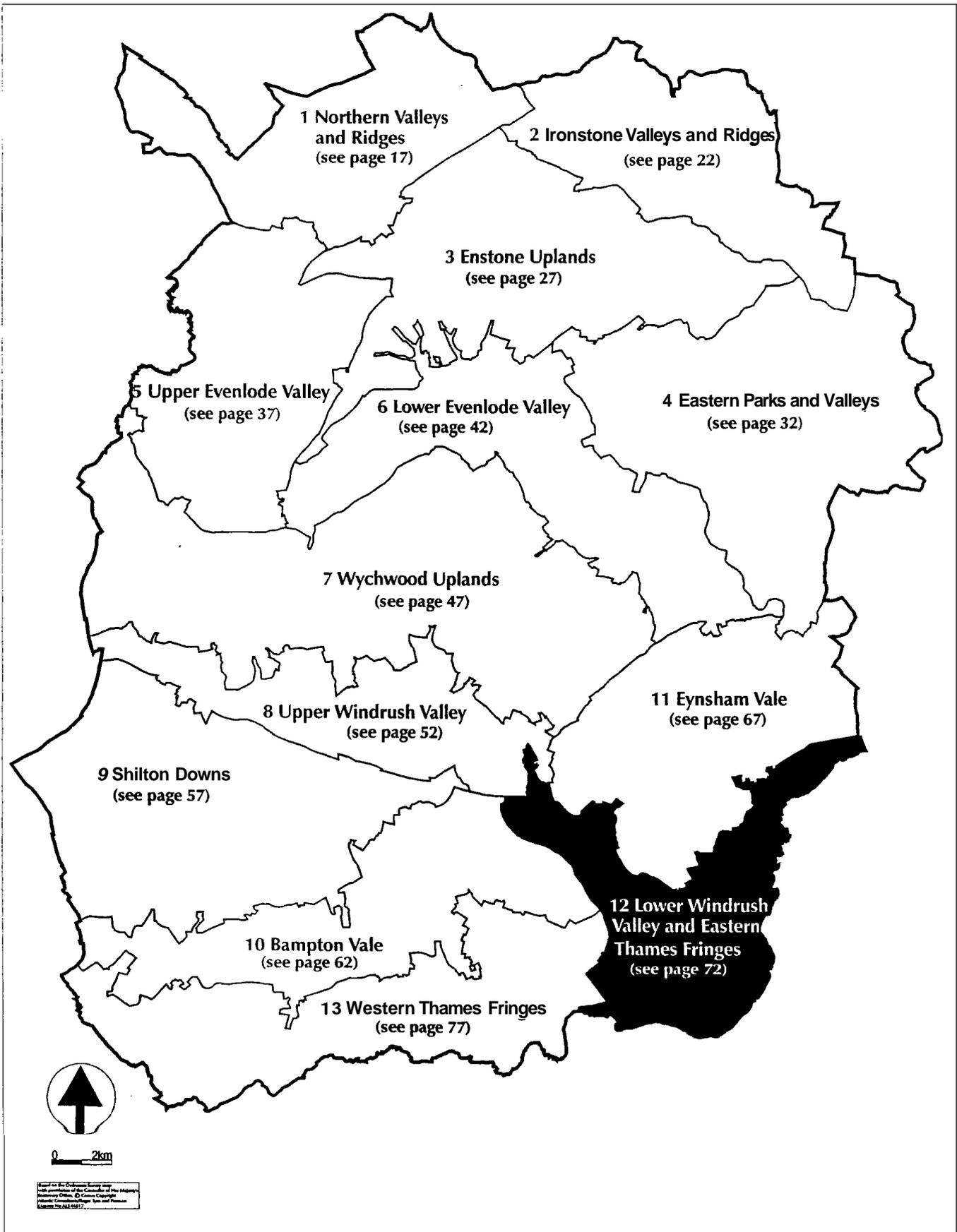
- parkland landscapes and their component features are of high landscape value and very sensitive to development;
- estate farmland is also generally of high scenic quality and sensitive to development, although its mature structure of woodland makes it more visually robust.

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 landuse 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 close 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

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 landuse 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

- e low-lying **land** off floodplain **floor** (generally above 70m AOD) with a discernible raised landform;
- e well-drained, productive land underlain by river terrace gravels ;
- e 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;
- e semi-enclosed character;
- e 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

- e attractive vernacular buildings within villages and in open countryside;
- e 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:

- o Conservation Areas at Radcot and Kelmscott;
- a good number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments along the terrace gravels;
- o 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;
- o 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.