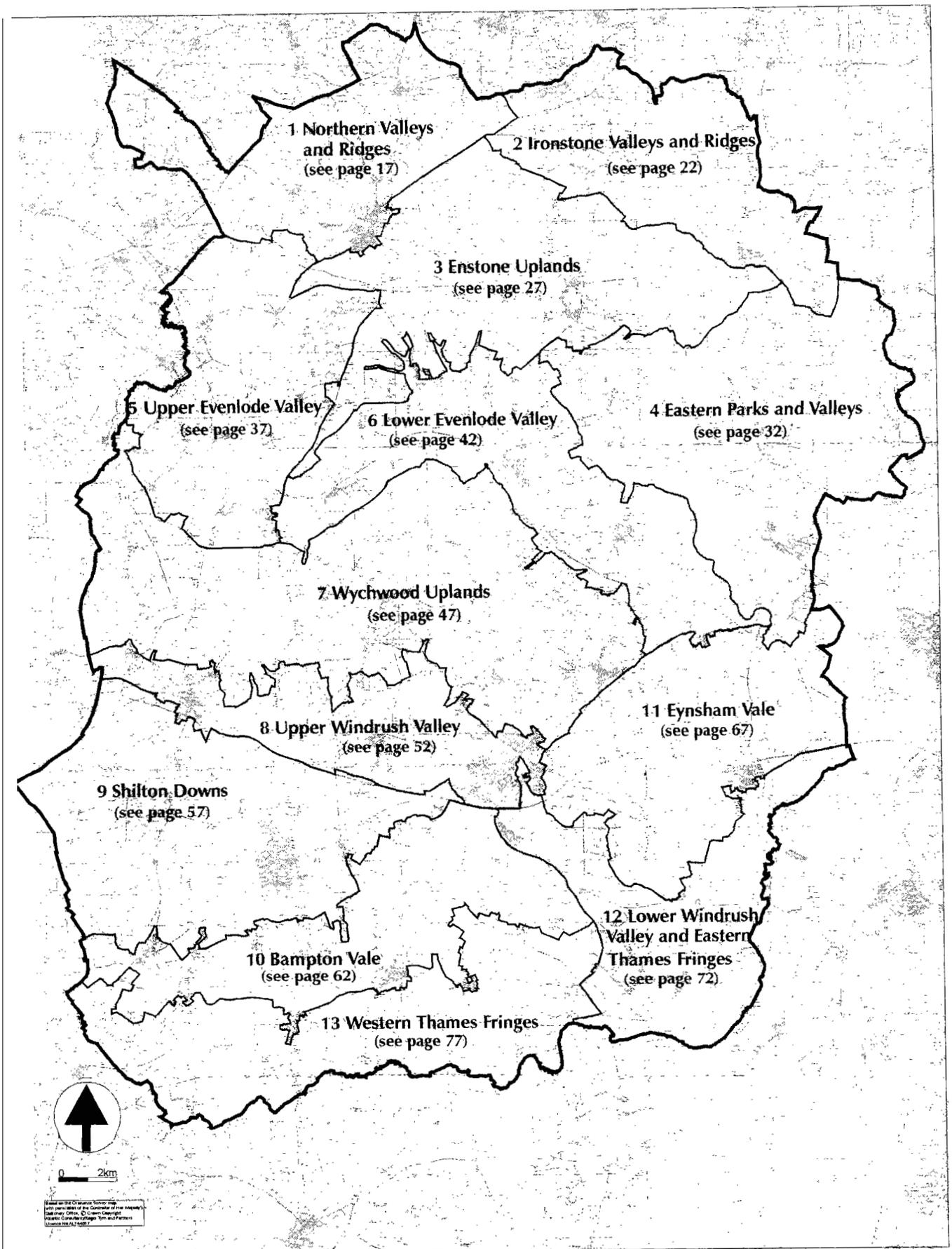


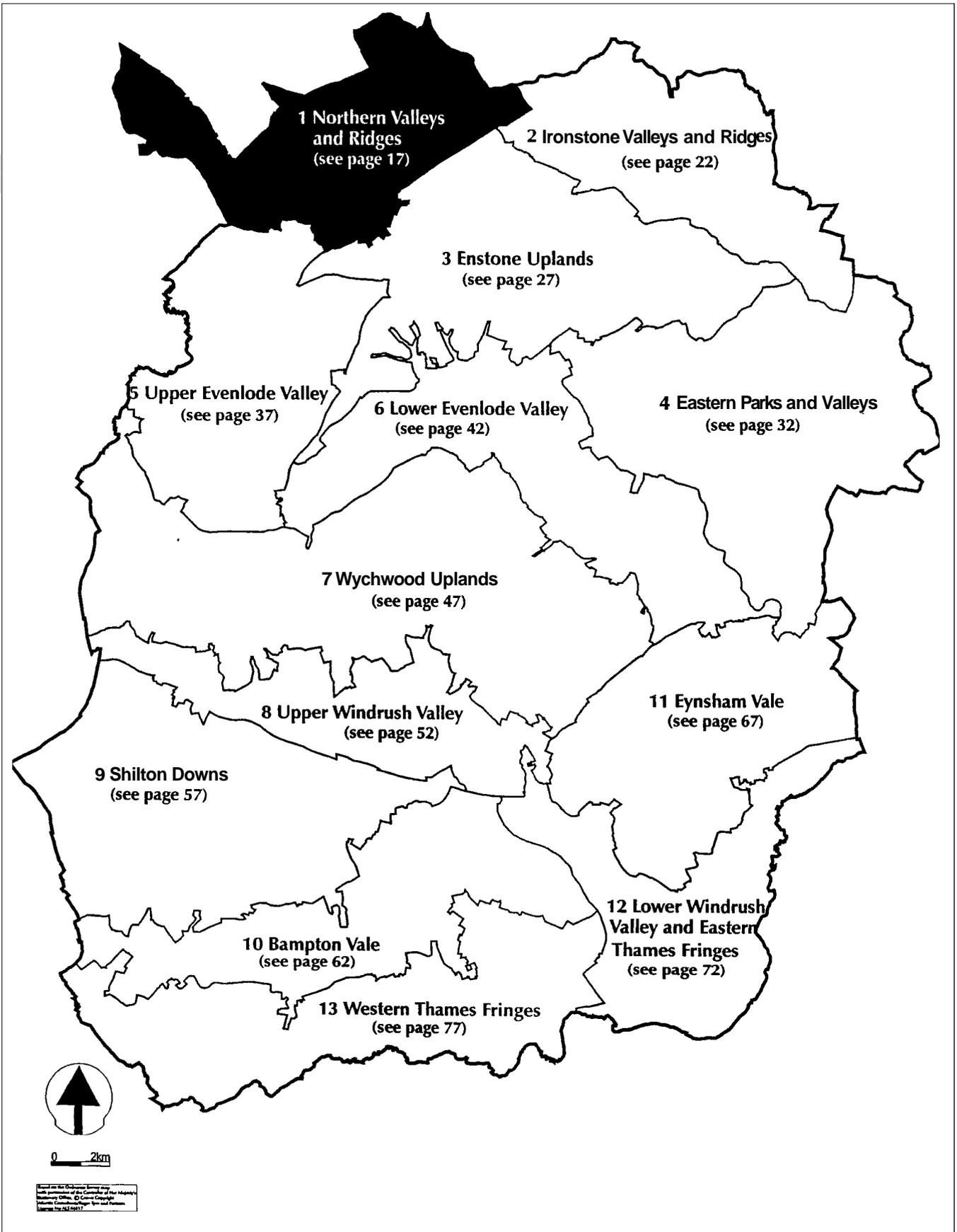
**PART TWO**

**THE CHARACTER AREAS**

# CHARACTER AREAS: KEY MAP



# 1 NORTHERN VALLEYS AND RIDGES



# 1: NORTHERN VALLEYS AND RIDGES

## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### OVERVIEW

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

### GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

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

### LANDCOVER

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

### LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

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

#### Valley landscapes

##### *Valley floor farmland*

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

##### *Open valleys and ridges*

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

### ***Semi-enclosed valleys and ridges***

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

### **Limestone wolds landscapes**

#### ***Open limestone wolds***

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

#### ***Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)***

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

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

### **Clay wolds landscapes**

#### ***Semi-enclosed clay wolds (smaller-scale)***

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

### **Parkland landscapes**

#### ***Parkland***

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

## SETTLEMENT PATTERN

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

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

## SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

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

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

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

town, forms an impressive reminder of this history.

## KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

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

# 1: NORTHERN VALLEYS AND RIDGES

## LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

### LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

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

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

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

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

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

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

### GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLDS LANDSCAPES

#### Enhancement priorities

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

#### Development sensitivities

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

## GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

### Enhancement priorities

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

### Development sensitivities

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

## GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

### Enhancement priorities

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

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

### Development sensitivities

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

## GUIDELINES FOR CLAY WOLDS LANDSCAPES

### Enhancement priorities

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

### Development sensitivities

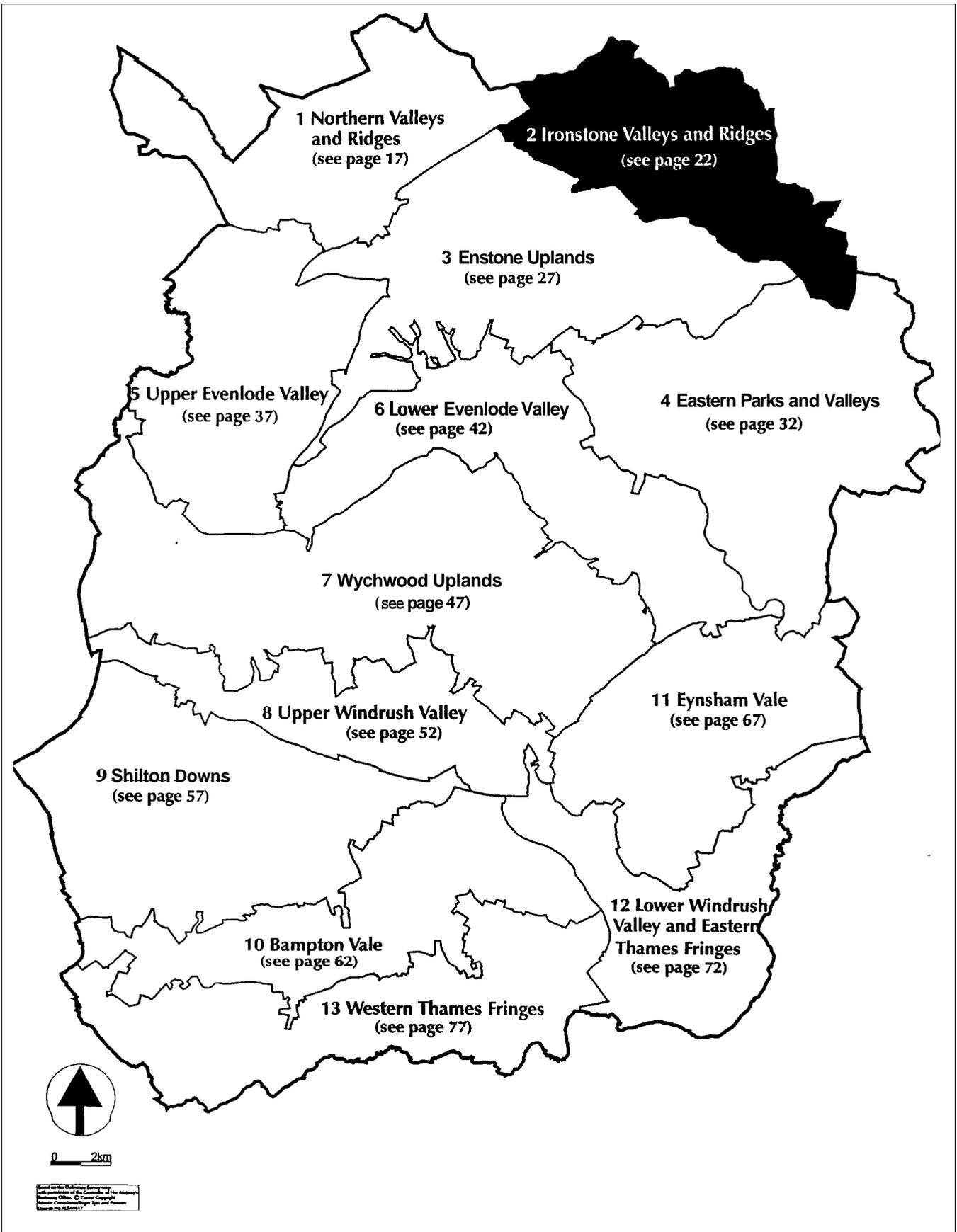
- open clay wold landscapes are very visually exposed and particularly sensitive to development;
- large-scale, semi-enclosed clay wold landscapes are also visually sensitive and any development would need to be closely integrated with existing buildings or within a strong landscape structure.

## KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

### Chipping Norton

## 2 IRONSTONE VALLEYS AND RIDGES



## 2: IRONSTONE VALLEYS AND RIDGES LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### OVERVIEW

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

### GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

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

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

### LANDCOVER

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

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

### LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

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

#### Valley landscapes

##### *Minor valleys*

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

##### *Valley floor farmland*

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

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

#### ***Open valleys and ridges***

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

#### ***Semi-enclosed valleys and ridges***

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

#### **Limestone wolds landscapes**

##### ***Open limestone wolds***

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

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

##### ***Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)***

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

#### **Parkland landscapes**

##### ***Parkland***

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

### *Estate farmland*

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

### **SETTLEMENT PATTERN**

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

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

### **SETTLEMENT CHARACTER**

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

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

### **KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES**

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

## 2: IRONSTONE VALLEYS AND RIDGES LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

### LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

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

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

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

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

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

### GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLD LANDSCAPES

#### Enhancement priorities

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

#### Development sensitivities

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

## GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

### Enhancement priorities

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

### Development sensitivities

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

## GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

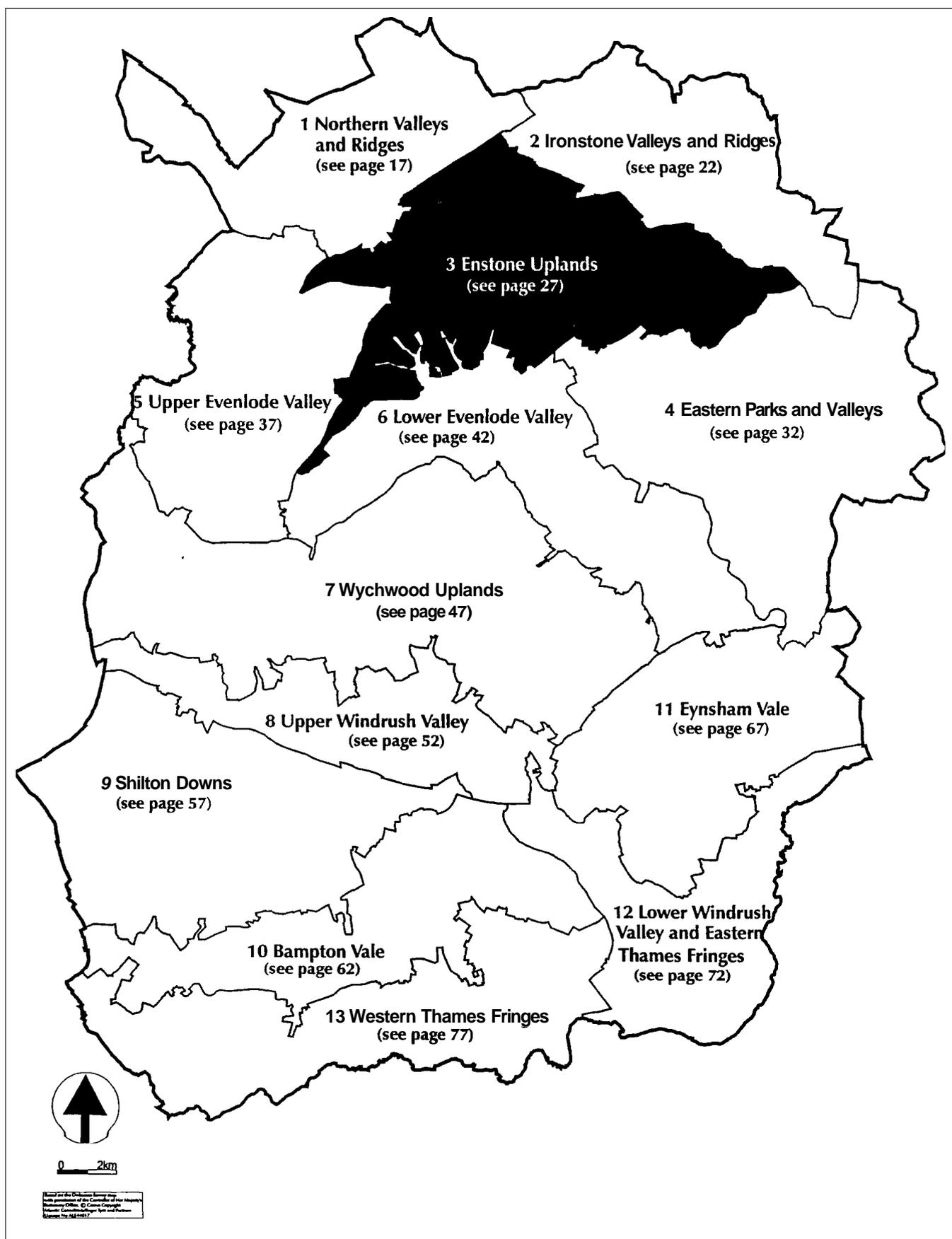
### Enhancement priorities

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

### Development sensitivities

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

# 3 ENSTONE UPLANDS



## 3: ENSTONE UPLANDS LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### OVERVIEW

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

### GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

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

### LANDCOVER

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

### LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

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

#### Valley landscapes

##### *Minor valley*

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

#### Limestone wolds landscapes

##### *Open limestone wolds*

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

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

#### *Semi-enclosed limestone wolds (large-scale)*

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

### **Parkland landscapes**

#### *Parkland*

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

#### *Estate farmland*

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

### **Sub-rural landscapes**

#### *Sport landscapes*

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

#### *Airfields and MOD land*

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

## SETTLEMENT PATTERN

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

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

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

## SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

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

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

## KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

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

## 3: ENSTONE UPLANDS LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

### LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

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

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

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

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

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

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

### GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLDS LANDSCAPES

#### Enhancement priorities

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

#### Development sensitivities

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

## GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

### Enhancement priorities

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

### Development sensitivities

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

## GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

### Enhancement priorities

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

### Development sensitivities

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

## GUIDELINES FOR SUB-RURAL LANDSCAPES

### Enhancement priorities

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

### Development sensitivities

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

## KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

### Chipping Norton



## 4: EASTERN PARKS AND VALLEYS LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### OVERVIEW

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

### GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM

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

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

### LANDCOVER

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

### LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CHARACTER

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

#### Valley landscapes

##### *Minor valley*

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

##### *Valley floor farmland*

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

### ***Semi-enclosed valley-side farmland***

- distinctive sloping, and typically convex, valley-side landform;
- e mixed pattern of land use and strong structure of hedgerows, trees and woodland;
- e 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***

- e large-scale, smoothly rolling farmland occupying the limestone plateau and dip slope;
- e 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;
- e thin, well-drained calcareous soils and sparse natural vegetation cover and a somewhat impoverished 'upland' character;
- e very open and exposed character;
- e distinctive elevated and expansive character in higher areas, with dominant sky and sweeping views across surrounding areas;
- e 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***

- e 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;
- e mature woodland and tree cover with typically enclosed character;
- low intervisibility.

#### ***Estate farmland***

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

## SETTLEMENT PATTERN

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

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

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

## SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

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

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

## KEY LANDMARKS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES

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

## 4: EASTERN PARKS AND VALLEYS LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

### LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND KEY ISSUES

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

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

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

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

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

### GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND ESTATE LANDSCAPES

#### Enhancement priorities

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

#### Development sensitivities

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

### GUIDELINES FOR LIMESTONE WOLDS LANDSCAPES

#### Enhancement priorities

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

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

### Development sensitivities

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

## GUIDELINES FOR VALLEY LANDSCAPES

### Enhancement priorities

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

### Development sensitivities

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

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

## KEY SETTLEMENTS

See Part 3 for key settlement study for:

### Woodstock