

**WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT  
FRAMEWORK**

**CHIPPING NORTON  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSESSMENT 2009:  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## INTRODUCTION

- ES1.** This report has been prepared by Amanda Hopwood Landscape Consultancy (AHLIC), on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council. Its aim is to update and expand previous studies of land on the fringes of Chipping Norton, in particular the Key Settlement work of the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (WOLA), in order to establish a sound evidence base for the West Oxfordshire Local Development Framework.
- ES2.** The surroundings of the town are divided into areas, A to F, based largely on those in the WOLA, but divided on a topographical as well as geographical basis.

## THE LANDSCAPE SETTING OF CHIPPING NORTON

- ES3.** Chipping Norton is a very long established town, which grew up on the western side and near the southern end of a pronounced ridge, the highest point of which, at 226m AOD, is just east of the town, near the water tower which is a local landmark. The town has gradually moved higher up the ridge, but generally avoided the highest ground. Its outlook is strongly to the west, overlooking the steep sided valley which runs south to the Evenlode valley.
- ES4.** The town has two designated Conservation Areas: the whole of the centre of the town, and including part of the castle site, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument; and an area in the valley just west of the town centred on the former tweed mill, Bliss Mill, now converted to residential. Bliss Mill is a local landmark visible in many places around the town, and from the western approach on the A44.
- ES5.** The A44 is a major east-west route, much used by heavy goods vehicles, while the A361 is a heavily used north-south route.
- ES6.** The whole of the town, apart from the most recent developments to the east, lies within the Cotswolds AONB, and the AONB designation almost encircles the town, with only the areas east and immediately to the south east of the settlement lying outside it.
- ES7.** The steep sided valley west of the town is generally well treed, and provides a soft western edge to the town, softening views from higher ground to the west. This high ridge, rising to 227m AOD, encloses the north west of the town, to the west of the steep sided valley, separating it from the wider Cotswolds landscape further west.
- ES8.** The small village of Over Norton lies on the eastern side of this ridge, on the opposite side of the valley which runs down the western side of Chipping Norton. The centre of Over Norton is designated a Conservation Area, and a large house set in parkland is centred on the valley. A minor road runs between Chipping Norton and Over Norton, with an undeveloped gap of about 300m between the two.
- ES9.** North east of the town, the A44 (Banbury Road), A361 and A3400 meet at a roundabout. Between the roundabout and the edge of the town the road, running along the flat top of the ridge, is lined with trees, and there is a network of trees and hedges either side of the road which give a soft approach to the town. While some development has spread north east from the town along the road, it is well contained within the strong landscape structure.
- ES10.** East of the town, another branch of the A44 (London Road) runs east. This too is tree lined, giving a soft approach to the town. However, this road is closer to the southern

edge of the high ridge, from where there are long views out to the south. New development south of the road, on the former Parker Knoll site, is prominent in some views from the south.

- ES11.** To the south east of the high ground is the minor valley of the River Glyme. To the west of this, the ground rises again to a wide ridge, separating the Glyme valley from that which runs down the western side of Chipping Norton. This is the southern end of the Chipping Norton ridge, and rises to a high point of 224m AOD, the majority of the area sitting above 205m AOD. There are long views from this high ground across the western valley, and also north and north east to the A44 ridge.
- ES12.** The A361 runs south from the town across the high ground. The B4026 runs south east towards Charlbury on the north eastern side of the ridge, while the B4450 Churchill Road runs south west from the town on the north western side of the ridge.
- ES13.** As a general rule, apart from the north eastern approach to the town on the high ground already described, the high ground around the town tends to be open and exposed, with little tree cover; while the valleys tend to have extensive tree cover, and smaller scale hedged fields.

#### AREA A WEST OF CHIPPING NORTON (SOUTH): STEEP SIDED VALLEY

- ES14.** In this assessment, Area A covers the same area as Area A in the WOLA: the steep sided valley west of Chipping Norton, south of the A44.
- ES15.** The topography of the area is a steeply sloping undulating valley. It is part of the open countryside stretching west from the town, with the urban edge largely soft, and an important part of the setting of Bliss Mill. There are long views to and from the area from the west of the town and the surrounding landscape.
- ES16.** Area A is within the Cotswolds AONB, forming part of the setting of Chipping Norton and Bliss Mill in its Conservation Area. Development within this area would not be appropriate, and impact from development in neighbouring areas which affects this area should be carefully assessed.
- ES17.** Area A has high landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

#### AREA B WEST OF CHIPPING NORTON (NORTH): STEEP SIDED VALLEY AND EDGE OF PLATEAU

- ES18.** In this assessment, Area B covers the steep sided valley north of the A44, and the edge of the plateau to the west.
- ES19.** The area lies within the Cotswolds AONB, and is a steep sided valley rising to a plateau, part of the ridge enclosing the town, forming an important part of the setting of Chipping Norton and castle (SAM, Conservation Area), and the soft north western edge of town. It is part of the small gap between the town and Over Norton. Development within this area would not be appropriate, and impact from development in neighbouring areas which affects this area and the settlement gap should be carefully assessed.
- ES20.** Area B has high landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

#### AREA C NORTH OF CHIPPING NORTON: OVER NORTON VALLEY

**ES21.** In this assessment, Area C covers the valley south east of Over Norton.

**ES22.** Area C is a steeply sloping, enclosed, tranquil valley with a parkland character, within the Cotswolds AONB. It is the northern part of the valley which runs down the western side of Chipping Norton. It is part of the rural setting of both Chipping Norton and Over Norton and part of the gap between the settlements, and forms part of the soft edge of the town in views from higher ground. Development within or visually affecting the area would not be appropriate.

**ES23.** The area has high landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

#### AREA D NORTH OF CHIPPING NORTON: ENCLOSED PLATEAU

**ES24.** In this assessment, Area D covers the plateau south east of Area C, to the north west of the A44 (Banbury Road), and the majority of the area between the two arms of the A44, Banbury and London Roads.

**ES25.** The topography of the area is a flat plateau, sloping slightly to the north west and south east. It is part of the high ridge on which Chipping Norton is located. The area is part of the soft northern/eastern approach to the town, with development well screened from the wider landscape. Generous planting belts can be effective in screening views in this flat landscape.

**ES26.** In summary, Area D is a flat plateau enclosed by vegetation except for the north western edge; the area north of the Banbury Road is within the Cotswolds AONB. The enclosure/screening is fragile, as it is dependent on the network of existing vegetation, but housing development could be accommodated between the two arms of the A44 within the existing field pattern, augmented by additional planting. Any development near the south/east of this area would need wide additional screening belts along London Road and to the east of the development.

**ES27.** The area has high local and medium district landscape/visual importance; and medium-high landscape/visual sensitivity.

#### AREA E1 EAST OF CHIPPING NORTON: PLATEAU

**ES28.** In this assessment, Area E1 covers the higher ground east of Chipping Norton, and extends the assessment area further east to the A44.

**ES29.** The topography of the area consists of a plateau/ridge side, falling and steepening to the south east. Much of the area is a high open landscape with high intervisibility. The eastern edge of the town is generally soft, with the housing on the Parker Knoll site a notable exception. Development on the highest flatter ground is and would be prominent, but is capable of being screened; without screening it is an intrusion into the rural landscape to the south and east, and at odds with the generally soft edges of the town. Development on the sloping land, however, would be more difficult to screen with planting.

**ES30.** In summary, Area E1 is a high plateau sloping to the south east with high intervisibility to the south and east. Large scale development would be extremely prominent in the sloping edge of ridge location. A small scale extension no higher than 2 storeys into the field immediately east and south of the water tower could be acceptable, but only if set within a strong planted belt.

**ES31.** The area has high local landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

#### AREA E2 EAST OF CHIPPING NORTON: MINOR VALLEYS

**ES32.** In this assessment Area E2 covers a small part of WOLA area E, extending the assessment area further east. The area is included for completeness, and because it is part of the setting of Chipping Norton, being the lower ground between the two prominent ridges of Areas E1 and F.

**ES33.** The topography of the area consists of deeply incised minor valleys, forming the head of the Glyme valley which runs south east to Woodstock. The area is part of the rural countryside surrounding Chipping Norton, with a strong landscape and visual character.

**ES34.** Area E2 is a deeply incised, enclosed, tranquil valley with much historic interest. It is important that any development on the east of town should not affect the valley character.

**ES35.** The area has high landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

#### AREA F SOUTH OF CHIPPING NORTON: UNDULATING PLATEAU

**ES36.** In this assessment, Area F covers almost the same area as WOLA Area F, though with an extension further east to include the whole of the ridge.

**ES37.** The topography of the area is an undulating plateau, the southern end of the ridge on which Chipping Norton sits. The area is an important ridge enclosing the town to the south, forming the skyline or intermediate horizon in views from the west, north west and east of the town.

**ES38.** In summary, Area F is an undulating high plateau, with high intervisibility with parts of the town and extensively with the surrounding countryside; part of the area is within the AONB, and the remainder adjoins it.

**ES39.** The area has high landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

#### CONCLUSIONS

**ES40.** Overall, the landscape around Chipping Norton is of high sensitivity. Much of it is within the Cotswolds AONB.

**ES41.** The edges of the town are generally soft. In the few places where there is a hard edge (the south of the town and the Parker Knoll site to the east) existing development is visually intrusive. There is generally high intervisibility between the areas surrounding the town, so new development in one would have an impact on the others, as well as direct impact on the area itself.

**ES42.** These landscape and visual constraints mean that there are few areas which could accommodate development without substantial adverse landscape and/or visual impact.

- ES43.** The area where development would have least impact on the surrounding landscape is the flat enclosed plateau between the Banbury and London Roads, in Area D, provided that the existing strong landscape structure is maintained, and an additional strong landscape belt established along the southern edge; the current avenue trees alone are not sufficient.
- ES44.** Development on the sloping ground east of the town would be hard to screen in views from the south and south east, creating a hard edge to the town which would be in contrast to its current generally soft edges.
- ES45.** Limited development on the flatter ground in the field immediately east and south of the water tower, in Area E1, could be acceptable, provided that it is set within a strong landscape structure, and avoids buildings more than two storeys high. The visual consequences of allowing development without sufficient landscape structure can be seen in the Parker Knoll development.