

**WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT  
FRAMEWORK**

**CHIPPING NORTON  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSESSMENT 2009**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**ES1.** This report has been prepared by Amanda Hopwood Landscape Consultancy (AHLC), 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 Mil. 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.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by Amanda Hopwood Landscape Consultancy (AHLIC), on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council. The study brief requires the consultant to:

*assess the sensitivity of the landscape as a whole and in sub-areas on the fringe of the built-up area... of... Chipping Norton East in relation to accommodating a potential mixed use urban extension. This study will form part of the published evidence base for the West Oxfordshire Local Development Framework (LDF).*

- 1.2 The key background documents for the present study, relating specifically to landscape matters, are:

- West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (May 1998)
- Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (OWLS) and Oxfordshire Conservation Target Areas.

- 1.3 Other background documents are:

- West Oxfordshire Local Plan (adopted June 2006).
- LDF Core Strategy So Far – Interim Position Statement (February 2009).
- West Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Land Assessment (SHLAA) for Chipping Norton.

- 1.4 The West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (WOLA) was carried out in 1998. Besides covering the whole District, the WOLA also looked in more detail at the surroundings of 'Key Settlements', including Chipping Norton. Since that time a number of sites on the fringes of Chipping Norton have been developed/redeveloped. It is the Chipping Norton Key Settlement work that this report seeks particularly to update, since this is now more than ten years old. This study also aims to provide the same approach to assessing the landscape as used for the surrounds of Witney (2007 study), for the sake of clarity, simplicity and consistency.

- 1.5 This report, then, seeks mainly to update the work of the WOLA, taking into consideration changes that have taken place since the original assessment. The surroundings of the town are therefore divided into areas based largely on those in the WOLA, but divided on a topographical as well as geographical basis.

- 1.6 Since the production of the WOLA a Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Strategy and Guidelines have been produced for the Cotswolds AONB. Since much of the environs of Chipping Norton lies within the AONB these documents have been checked to ensure that any advice given in this study does not conflict with the AONB recommendations.

- 1.7 The settlement edge areas are described in Sections 3 to 9. Tables summarising the updating of the WOLA Key Settlement (Chipping Norton) work are contained at Appendix A at the end of this report.

- 1.8 Worksheets summarising the characteristics of each settlement edge area are contained at Appendix B at the end of this report. These worksheets also include, for reference, the ecological bioband score for the landscape type within which settlement edge area falls; this work was part of the County Council's Oxfordshire

Wildlife and Landscape Study, a web-based study carried out in 2004<sup>1</sup>. Where the area lies within one of the County's Conservation Target Areas<sup>2</sup>, this is also stated.

- 1.9 Plans showing the overall landscape context and the settlement edge areas, and sheets of photographs from selected viewpoints, are contained in Appendix C at the end of this report. It should be noted that the photographs are intended as an aide-memoire and as illustrative of the views; they are not a substitute for the actual visual experience to be gained by visiting the viewpoints.
- 1.10 The methodology for this study is provided in Appendix D at the end of this report.

## **2 THE LANDSCAPE SETTING OF CHIPPING NORTON**

- 2.1 Chipping Norton is a very long established town, mentioned in Domesday Book (1086, as *Nortone*), and with the remains of a motte and bailey castle. It 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 (See Fig 0917.CH.1 for highlighted contours). 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.
- 2.2 The historic interest of the town is reflected in the fact that it has two designated Conservation Areas: the whole of the centre of the town, focussed on the crossing of the major routes of the A44 and the A361, 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.
- 2.3 The A44 is a major east-west route, much used by heavy goods vehicles, while the A361 is a heavily used north-south route.
- 2.4 The whole of the town, apart from the most recent developments to the east, lies within the Cotswolds AONB. The AONB almost encircles the town, with only the areas east and immediately to the south east of the settlement lying outside it.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 A 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 to the west.
- 2.7 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. Over Norton is also a long established settlement, with its centre being designated a Conservation Area, and with a large house set in parkland centred on the valley. A minor road runs between Chipping Norton and Over Norton, with

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<sup>1</sup> [Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study - Home](#)

<sup>2</sup> Oxfordshire Conservation Target Areas Mapping Project Report, TVERC, July 2006

an undeveloped gap of about 300m between the two.

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 East of the town, another branch of the A44 (London Road) runs east to the A44. 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, as is the water tower on the highest ground.
- 2.10 To the south east of the high ground, the steeply incised minor valley of the River Glyme flows south east. This valley has a very strong rural character. It lies within the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area, and part of the northern end, nearest Chipping Norton, is designated a SSSI. Besides scattered hamlets, there are two deserted medieval settlements, now designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments.
- 2.11 To the west of the Glyme valley, 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. The A361 runs south from the town across this ridge. A minor road runs south east towards Charlbury on the north eastern side of the ridge. The minor Churchill Road runs south west from the town on the north western side of the ridge.
- 2.12 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.

**3 AREA A WEST OF CHIPPING NORTON (SOUTH): STEEP SIDED VALLEY** (See Table A, Appendix A; Table 1, Appendix B; Views 1-3, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 The western boundary of Area A is taken as the eastern edge of an outlying part of the town, and then the line of a footpath which crosses the valley, though the landscape characteristics extend further west. The northern boundary is the A44. The eastern boundary follows the western edge of the residential part of the town, and the southern edge is the B4450 Churchill Road.
- 3.3 Most of the area is agricultural, with a small industrial complex in the valley

bottom, established beside the now dismantled railway line. The former tweed mill, Bliss Mill, which is now converted to residential use, also lies in the valley bottom. At the centre of one of the two Conservation Areas in Chipping Norton, the building with its tall chimney is a landmark feature in many views within and around the town.

- 3.4 An open area of pasture, with open public access, lies on the northern side of the valley, important as part of the setting of Bliss Mill.
- 3.5 The southern side of the valley is smaller scale with hedged fields, softening views of the built up area of Chipping Norton as it stretches up the valley side.
- 3.6 As well as public access to the open pasture land, two public footpaths run across the valley in the area from the A44.

#### PLANNING STATUS

- 3.7 Area A lies within the Cotswolds AONB. In the AONB Strategy/Guidelines relevant to the area<sup>3</sup> the *expansion of existing settlements up the Farmed Slopes* is seen as a local force for change, with potential landscape implications including the *encroachment of development onto visually more prominent upper slopes* and the introduction of suburbanising features. Policies of extreme restraint on developments are advised in these areas.
- 3.8 The eastern part of the area lies within the Bliss Mill Conservation Area.

#### LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 3.9 The topography of the area is a steeply sloping undulating valley.
- 3.10 The northern part of the area is open pasture, forming an attractive setting for Bliss Mill (View 1). The A44 is lined with trees, framing views to the Mill.
- 3.11 The valley floor and southern side are smaller scale and well treed, giving a soft backdrop to the Mill in views from the north west, and helping to soften views of the housing on the upper slopes of the valley. The older northern part of the town is noticeably softer, containing many more trees, than the newer southern part; but the skyline is generally soft and tree-lined.
- 3.12 The open ridge of Area F forms a strong skyline to the south of the town, with a markedly different character to the smaller scale landscape within Area A. The tall lighting around the football pitch at the end of Walterbush Road, in Area F, is prominent on the skyline in many views.
- 3.13 There are long views across Area A from the southern side of the valley, in particular from the Churchill Road and higher within Area F (Views 2 and 3). Bliss Mill is a landmark in these views, with the ridge in Area B forming the skyline or an intermediate horizon, part of the soft setting of the town. Industrial buildings north of the A44, in Area B, are sometimes visible, detracting from the soft backdrop of Bliss Mill.
- 3.14 Despite the busy A44 and views to the football pitch lighting, Area A is generally

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<sup>3</sup> LCT 15B, Vale of Moreton Farmed Slopes

tranquil, especially from lower parts of the valley. In views from outside the area, it forms part of the long views over tranquil countryside from the town.

- 3.15 Overall, this area 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.

#### SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 3.16 Table A in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment.

- 3.17 In the WOLA, Bliss Mill is described as a major landmark and 'eyecatcher'; this is unchanged. There are few intrusive buildings or structures, though the updated assessment notes some views to industrial buildings in Area B, and to tall floodlighting in Area F.

- 3.18 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:

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

- 3.19 In summary, Area A is a steep sided valley 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.

- 3.20 Area A has high landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

#### **4 AREA B WEST OF CHIPPING NORTON (NORTH): STEEP SIDED VALLEY AND EDGE OF PLATEAU** (See Table B, Appendix A; Table 2, Appendix B; Views 4-7, Appendix C)

##### CONTEXT

- 4.1 In this assessment, as in the WOLA, Area B covers the steep sided valley north of the A44, and the edge of the plateau to the west. The boundary of the area has been slightly changed to run along the ridge, rather than extending slightly down the north western side, which has no relationship with the town.

- 4.2 The north western/western boundary is the top of the ridge enclosing the north west of the town. The south eastern boundary is the built up edge of the town. The southern boundary is the A44.

- 4.3 The area has a mix of uses, including agricultural; industrial complexes based around former farm buildings; a small cluster of residential and a few isolated properties; a cemetery; a town recreation area; and the site of the former castle.

- 4.4 The lower parts of the valley are noticeably soft and small scale, while the higher

ground to the north west is open, giving long views to the east and south east.

- 4.5 A number of public rights of way run through the area, several of which connect to the long established ridge top route connecting Salford and Over Norton.

#### PLANNING STATUS

- 4.6 Area B lies within the Cotswolds AONB. In the AONB Strategy/Guidelines relevant to the majority of the area<sup>4</sup> the *expansion of existing settlements up the Farmed Slopes* is seen as a local force for change, with potential landscape implications including the *encroachment of development onto visually more prominent upper slopes* and the introduction of suburbanising features. Policies of extreme restraint on developments are advised in these areas.
- 4.7 The higher ground lies within a different Landscape Character Type<sup>5</sup>, but there are similar concerns about the expansion of existing settlements, with the advice that planning authorities should *Ensure new built development is visually integrated with the rural landscape setting and does not interrupt the setting of existing villages or views*.
- 4.8 The remains of the castle are designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- 4.9 The Conservation Area covering the centre of the town extends into Area B, including part of the setting of the castle.

#### LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 4.10 The topography of the area is a steeply sloping undulating valley rising to a high gently sloping plateau.
- 4.11 Although there is a variety of uses within the valley, they are visually separated by trees; the impression is of a small scale rural landscape, though the new housing near Elmfield Farm, rather high in the landscape, is slightly visually intrusive (View 4). The western edge of the town is generally soft, and there are important areas of open space within the town which add to the soft edge (View 5). The industrial estates by the A44, however, are on the higher more open ground, and are sometimes poorly screened (View 2).
- 4.12 There are occasional views out from the northern part of the town across the valley, with the ridge forming the skyline.
- 4.13 From the ridge in Area B looking back towards the town, the skyline is generally tree-lined, with the strong tree belt in Area D an important element (View 5). In views nearer the top of the ridge, both Over Norton and Chipping Norton come into view showing the importance of the gap between the two settlements (View 6). There are also views to the southern end of the town, to the high ground of Area F; the lighting and conifers around the football pitch can be seen in these views (View 7).
- 4.14 The majority of this area is extremely tranquil, though the valley just north of the A44 is disturbed by noise and views of traffic.

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<sup>4</sup> LCT 15B, Vale of Moreton Farmed Slopes

<sup>5</sup> LCT 7F: Over Norton Plateau

- 4.15 Overall, this area is part of the rural river valley running down the western side of the town, while the ridge encloses the town to the north west. The edge of the town is soft, though there are a few detracting elements.

#### SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 4.16 Table B in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment.

- 4.17 The WOLA noted that the area makes an '*important contribution to the setting of the town and a strong landscape edge*' and the '*soft urban edge*'. This is unchanged, and important to maintain.

- 4.18 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:

- Woodland is a very important component of the setting of the town, and green areas/trees within the town are also important/vulnerable.
- Skyline is very sensitive to change; industrial buildings north of the A44 are occasionally intrusive from Area A/A44/Area F; this is a sensitive area.
- Landscape pattern of the valley is very distinctive and vulnerable to change;
- Valley side landscape is integral to the quality of the views, any changes are likely to be highly visible. The area is also part of the sensitive gap between Chipping Norton and Over Norton.

- 4.19 In summary, Area B 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.

- 4.20 Area B has high landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

## **5 AREA C NORTH OF CHIPPING NORTON: OVER NORTON VALLEY** (See Table C, Appendix A; Table 3, Appendix B; Views 8-9, Appendix C)

### CONTEXT

- 5.1 In this assessment, Area C covers the valley south east of Over Norton; the high ground north west of the A44 (Banbury Road) is included in Area D.

- 5.2 The north western boundary of Area C is the settlement edge of Over Norton, and the minor road leading north east to the A3400. The south eastern boundary is top of the steep valley side, while the southern boundary is the north of the built up edge of Chipping Norton, and the minor road between the town and the village. There is an undeveloped gap of about 300m between the two settlements.

- 5.3 The area is agricultural, with a parkland character. Over Norton House, with associated outbuildings, lies within the area. The line of the stream in the valley bottom is marked by a strong belt of trees, and there are other scattered

parkland trees.

- 5.4 Two public footpaths run through the area.

#### PLANNING STATUS

- 5.5 Area C lies within the Cotswolds AONB.

- 5.6 In the AONB Strategy/Guidelines relevant to the area<sup>6</sup>, there are concerns about the possible *intrusion of expanded settlement fringes into the landscape*, with the advice that planning authorities should *ensure new built development is visually integrated with the rural landscape setting and does not interrupt the setting of existing villages or views*.

- 5.7 Conservation Areas in both Over Norton and Chipping Norton abut the area.

#### LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 5.8 The topography of the area is a steeply sloping valley.

- 5.9 The area is mainly grassland. There are few field boundaries, with the main pattern of the area created by the streamside vegetation and parkland trees.

- 5.10 There are long views from the high ground on either side (Views 6 and 8). The edges of both settlements are soft, with the valley vegetation dividing the two.

- 5.11 The valley bottom is very enclosed, secluded and tranquil, though the tops of houses at the northern end of Chipping Norton can occasionally be seen (View 9).

- 5.12 Overall, this area is part of the steep sided valley running down the western side of Chipping Norton. It is part of the rural setting of both the town and Over Norton, and forms part of the soft edge of the town in views from higher ground.

#### SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 5.13 Table C in Appendix A summarises the finding of the WOLA, and updates the assessment. The area covered by Area C in the WOLA is slightly different in the current assessment, with the higher ground to the south east being included in Area D.

- 5.14 The WOLA noted the area's '*very strong landscape structure with mature woodland blocks*' and the fact that it is '*important to the setting of Chipping Norton and Over Norton*'. This is unchanged in the current assessment, though the area's importance as part of the gap between the settlements is also highlighted.

- 5.15 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:

- Valley sides and valley floor are an important natural component of the valley landscape.
- Unspoilt landscapes particularly vulnerable to change.

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<sup>6</sup> LCT 7F: Over Norton Plateau

- Special attention should be given to maintaining strong landscape edges, and the vulnerable gap between town and Over Norton.
- 5.16 In summary, Area C is a steeply sloping, enclosed, tranquil valley with a parkland character, within the Cotswolds AONB. It is part of the setting of both Chipping Norton and Over Norton and part of the gap between the settlements. Development within or visually affecting the area would not be appropriate.
- 5.17 The area has high landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

**6 AREA D NORTH OF CHIPPING NORTON: ENCLOSED PLATEAU** (See Table D, Appendix A; Table 4, Appendix B; Views 10-12, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 6.1 In this assessment, Area D covers the plateau south east of Area C, north west of the A44 (Banbury Road), and the majority of the area between the two arms of the A44, Banbury and London Roads.
- 6.2 Area D is bounded to the north west by the steep valley side of Area C, and to the north east by the A3400 and A44. A public right of way (a Salt Way) forms the eastern boundary. The A44 (London Road) marks the southern boundary, while the built up edge of Chipping Norton (including a site currently being developed) marks the short western boundary.
- 6.3 The area has a mix of uses, included rural fringe uses. These include agricultural, isolated properties, allotments, a cricket ground and a plant nursery. Several sites on the eastern settlement edge have been redeveloped for residential/business park use since the WOLA assessment. The area is a mix of grassland and arable.
- 6.4 The avenue trees along both arms of the A44 are a notable feature, but it is the network of trees and hedges behind the avenue trees that play an important role in enclosing views.
- 6.5 There are few public rights of way, though one footpath runs north west to Over Norton, and a historic Salt Way route runs down the eastern boundary.

PLANNING STATUS

- 6.6 Land to the north west of the A44 (Banbury Road) lies within the Cotswolds AONB.
- 6.7 In the AONB Strategy/Guidelines relevant to the area<sup>7</sup>, there are concerns about the possible *intrusion of expanded settlement fringes into the landscape*, with the advice that planning authorities should *ensure new built development is visually integrated with the rural landscape setting and does not interrupt the setting of existing villages or views*.

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<sup>7</sup> LCT 7F: Over Norton Plateau

## LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 6.8 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.
- 6.9 The area north west of the Banbury Road has a parkland character, with belts and blocks of trees. There are long views across the valley (Area C) to the high ground of Area B, and the rolling landscape beyond (View 10). The parkland tree belts are a prominent feature in views looking back from the high ground in Area B (View 6).
- 6.10 The northern/eastern edge of Chipping Norton is very soft, hidden behind the many trees/hedges on either side of the road. The two arms of the A44 are separated by strong hedge/tree lines, though very occasional gaps allow glimpses of traffic, illustrating the importance of the existing vegetation (View 11). The lack of visual impact of the new developments just west of the area (Cromwell Park and Rockwell Farm Court) illustrates the effectiveness of strong belts of planting in screening views in this flat landscape.
- 6.11 The southern edge, along London Road, is less well screened, with views out between the avenue trees (View 12). This is nearer the plateau edge, and any development has more potential to cause visual impact on the wider landscape, though generous planted belts could be effective in screening in this flat landscape.
- 6.12 Despite the busy roads, parts of the area are surprisingly tranquil, for instance along the Salt Way, due to the effectiveness of the vegetation in screening nearby development and traffic.
- 6.13 Overall, this 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.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 6.14 Table D in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment.
- 6.15 The WOLA noted '*Avenue landscape very important to the quality of the approach and the setting of the town and visible from the north*'. This updated assessment agrees that the avenue landscape is important, but also notes that the network of trees/hedges behind this is crucial in softening the approach and maintaining visual separation between the Banbury and London Roads.
- 6.16 The WOLA also noted '*landscape very sensitive to change, particularly along the ridgeline occupied by the A44*' (assumed to mean London Road). This assessment agrees, but also notes that between the two arms of the A44 the area is generally set back from the edge of the ridge/plateau, and a strong landscape structure could absorb development, as illustrated by the Cromwell Park/Rockhill Farm Court developments. As the WOLA notes, '*low intervisibility particularly in the smaller scale landscapes means that visible change is limited*'.

- 6.17 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- Parcel of land important to the setting of the town.
  - Landscape very sensitive to change, particularly along the ridgeline occupied by the A44; but the area is generally set back from the edge of the ridge/plateau, and a strong landscape structure could absorb development.
  - Need to maintain strong landscape structure.
  - Need to maintain the quality of the approach into the town; the network of trees/hedges is as important as the avenue trees.
- 6.18 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 within the existing field pattern, augmented by additional planting. Any development near the south/east of area would need wide additional screening belts along London Road and to the east of the development.
- 6.19 The area has high local and medium district landscape/visual importance; and medium-high landscape/visual sensitivity.

**7 AREA E1 EAST OF CHIPPING NORTON: PLATEAU** (See Table E, Appendix A; Table 5, Appendix B; Views 13-21, Appendix C)

CONTEXT

- 7.1 In this assessment, Area E1 covers the higher ground east of Chipping Norton, and extends the assessment area further east to the A44. The lower ground is covered in Area E2.
- 7.2 Area E1 is bounded to the north by the London Road and A44. The eastern and southern boundaries are the edges of the minor valley sides. The south western boundary is the minor B4026 road to Charlbury. The western boundary is the built up edge of Chipping Norton. Just north of the area, alongside the London Road, the former employment site at Parker Knoll has been redeveloped for housing since the WOLA.
- 7.3 Area E1 is largely agricultural, with scattered farms, and some rural fringe uses. The large water tower which is a landmark from the surrounding landscape lies on the highest ground in the west of the area. Chipping Norton school lies just west of the area; its playing fields lie within the area. There are allotments in the south west corner. Chipping Norton golf course lies in the east of the area.
- 7.4 The area is crossed by a few public rights of way, most notably the Salt Way which runs north-south in the east of the area.

PLANNING STATUS

- 7.5 Part of the south of the area lies within the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area.
- 7.6 Part of the area lies within Oxfordshire County Council's Glyme and Dorn Conservation Target Area.

## LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 7.7 The topography of the area consists of a plateau/ridge side, falling and steepening to the south east.
- 7.8 The fields are generally large and regular, becoming smaller as the ground falls towards the minor valleys. There are few trees, and the hedges tend to be poor on the higher ground, though there are some young plantations, especially in the south and east. The area is generally open and exposed, becoming more enclosed by vegetation on the lower ground.
- 7.9 There are long views towards the area looking back from the south (Views 13, 14 and 15). In many of these views the water tower is prominent, and the housing on the Parker Knoll site is also prominent near the skyline. Since the majority of the town is on the western side of the ridge, and housing on the eastern edge is generally set low in the landscape and well screened by trees, there is no visual connection between the new housing and the rest of the town. The Parker Knoll site is on the flat plateau land, and it would be possible to screen it with a generous planting belt. Any development on the sloping land south of the water tower would be more difficult to screen, with planting being less effective (Views 15 and 19). The three storey elements in the Parker Knoll site are also unfortunate, so high in the landscape.
- 7.10 Within the area, the soft eastern edge of the town can be seen (View 16), and the location of the houses set lower than the surrounding landscape. The Parker Knoll housing, on the other hand, is prominent, despite the intervening hedgerow.
- 7.11 Looking out from the area, there is a sense of being on the edge of high ground, with distant views across the rural landscape to the south east and south from the highest land (View 17). Nearer the edge of the plateau there are wider views, and the intermediate ridge of Area F comes into view (View 18).
- 7.12 From the lower ground in the area, while some views are blocked by vegetation/topography, there are also many views in which the higher ground forms the skyline, and both the water tower and the Parker Knoll site are prominent (Views 19, 20 and 21).
- 7.13 With the generally soft urban edge, the area is relatively tranquil, and with long views out over tranquil countryside.
- 7.14 Overall, then, much of Area E1 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.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 7.15 Table C3 in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment.

- 7.16 The WOLA notes the area's *'open, elevated hilltop character'*, and its *'weak hedgerow structure, few trees'*. This is unchanged. The WOLA also notes *'intrusive buildings and structures on the urban edge'*, an observation that applies even more now with the development of the Parker Knoll housing.
- 7.20 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- Need to strengthen landscape structure of the rural fringe and form a more distinct boundary: there is a reasonably soft edge, but it is vulnerable to small scale changes.
  - Southern part of the town prominent on high ground in some views. Parker Knoll housing is prominent, extending the visible edge of the town east.
  - Need to improve urban silhouette - opportunity to consider more positive landmarks.
  - Need to improve the quality of the approach into the town on the B4026: it is a fairly soft approach, but vulnerable to small scale changes.
- 7.17 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.
- 7.18 The area has high local landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

**8 AREA E2 EAST OF CHIPPING NORTON: MINOR VALLEYS** (See Table E, Appendix A; Table 6, Appendix B; Views 15, 20, 21, Appendix C)

**CONTEXT**

- 8.1 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
- 8.2 The northern boundary of Area E2 is the top of the steeply sloping valley sides, the E1 boundary. The small scale valleys continue to the south east outside the assessment area. The south western boundary abuts part of Area F.
- 8.3 The area is agricultural, with a small part of Chipping Norton Golf Course within the eastern valley.
- 8.4 A few public rights of way run through the area, notably the Salt Way which runs across the valley.

**PLANNING STATUS**

- 8.5 The majority of the area lies within the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area.
- 8.6 Part of the valley floor is a Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- 8.7 The majority of the area lies within Oxfordshire County Council's Glyme and

Dorn Conservation Target Area.

#### LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 8.8 The topography of the area consists of deeply incised minor valleys, forming the head of the Glyme valley which runs south east to Woodstock.
- 8.9 The area is a mix of arable and pasture, with the network of hedges and new plantations creating the impression of a well wooded landscape. The valley floor in particular is well treed and enclosed, with a very secluded character, and very tranquil.
- 8.10 There are few views out, and no visual relationship at present with Chipping Norton, but the area forms the middle ground in views from the higher ground to the north, south and east (Views 15, 20 and 21).
- 8.11 Overall, Area E2 is part of the rural countryside surrounding Chipping Norton, with a strong landscape and visual character.

#### SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 8.12 Table E in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment; however, the WOLA assessment applies almost entirely to the high ground to the north west, rather than to the valley landscape of E2. The Key Sensitivities and Considerations of the WOLA do not, therefore apply to this area.
- 8.13 The area is, however, an important component in views to and from the town in Areas E1 and F. With its strong rural character it is important that any development in these two areas should not have a detrimental impact on the character of E2.
- 8.14 In summary, 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.
- 8.15 The area has high landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

### **9 AREA F SOUTH OF CHIPPING NORTON: UNDULATING PLATEAU** (See Table F, Appendix A; Table 7, Appendix B; Views 1- 3, 7, 13-14, 22-23, Appendix C)

#### CONTEXT

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 Area F is bounded to the north west by the Churchill Road, with Area A beyond. The northern boundary is the southern edge of the town, and then the B4026 Charlbury Road. The southern boundary is a minor east-west road.
- 9.3 The A361 runs south through the area.
- 9.4 The area is agricultural, with a few scattered farms and dwellings. There is also

a small complex of leisure facilities, including lit rugby pitches, between the B4026 and the A361, and the football pitch with tall floodlighting lies just outside the southern built up edge of the town between the A361 and B4450.

- 9.5 Two public footpaths run across the area.

#### PLANNING STATUS

- 9.6 The area west of the A361 lies within the Cotswolds AONB. East of the A361 the AONB boundary also abuts the south of the minor road which is the southern boundary of Area F.
- 9.7 In the AONB Strategy/Guidelines relevant to the area<sup>8</sup>, there are concerns about the possible *intrusion of expanded settlement fringes into the landscape*, with the advice that planning authorities should *ensure new built development is visually integrated with the rural landscape setting and does not interrupt the setting of existing villages or views*.

#### LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 9.8 The topography of the area is an undulating plateau, the southern end of the ridge on which Chipping Norton sits.
- 9.9 The fields are large scale, a mix of arable and pasture, and there are few hedges or trees. The area is open and exposed, with high intervisibility in all directions.
- 9.10 There are long views from Area F west across the valley west of Chipping Norton, across Area A to Area B (Views 2, 3 and 22), and the ridge of Area F forms the skyline in many views from the north west (Views 1 and 7). In these views back from the north west the floodlighting around the football pitch is often prominent.
- 9.11 The southern settlement edge is hard, with very little softening planting, unlike most of the other edges of the town. There are places on the Churchill Road where the housing is seen against the skyline (View 23), and the settlement edge is hard in views from the nearby public footpath (View 22). The conifers around the football pitch are particularly intrusive.
- 9.12 In views from the east of the area, Areas D and E1 form the skyline (Views 13 and 14). In many of these views the water tower is prominent, and the housing on the Parker Knoll site is also prominent near the skyline. Since the majority of the town is on the western side of the ridge, and housing on the eastern edge is generally set low in the landscape and well screened by trees, there is no visual connection between the new housing and the rest of the town. Any further development in Area E1 has the potential to cause visual impact in views for Area F. Looking back from Area E1, the ridge of Area F forms the skyline, or an intermediate skyline, in views (View 18).
- 9.13 Overall, Area F 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.

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<sup>8</sup> LCT 7F: Over Norton Plateau

## SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

- 9.14 Table F in Appendix A summarises the findings of the WOLA, and updates the assessment.
- 9.15 The WOLA noted the area's '*open, elevated hilltop character and weak hedgerow structure, few trees*', and the fact that the '*harsh urban edge of Chipping Norton forms the skyline to the north*' and the '*rural character is adversely affected by floodlighting at night*'. These observations are unchanged.
- 9.16 The updated Key Sensitivities and Considerations are:
- Rural character is adversely affected by floodlighting at night; conifers inappropriate.
  - Need to strengthen landscape structure in open areas.
  - Need to strengthen landscape structure at the urban edge.
  - Urban edge very visible and sensitive to change.
  - Need to improve the quality of the approach into the town on the A361; Parker Knoll site visible on skyline.
- 9.17 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.
- 9.18 The area has high landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.

## **10 CONCLUSIONS**

- 10.1 Overall, the landscape around Chipping Norton is of high sensitivity. Much of it is within the Cotswolds AONB.
- 10.2 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.
- 10.3 There is generally high intervisibility between the areas surrounding the town, so development in one would have an impact on the others, as well as direct impact on the area itself.
- 10.4 These landscape and visual constraints mean that there are few areas which could accommodate development without substantial adverse landscape and/or visual impact.
- 10.5 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.
- 10.6 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.

- 10.7 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