Landscape Character Assessment

For South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

September 2024

Version	Status	Prepared	Checked	Approved	Date
1	Draft	D Hope	R Swann	R Knight	08.12.2023
2	Final draft	D Hope	R Swann	K Ahern	29.08.2024
3	Final	D Hope	R Swann	K Ahern	19.09.2024

Land Use Consultants Limited
Registered in England. Registered number 2549296. Registered office: 250 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8RD. Printed on 100% recycled paper

Contents

Table of Tables

Table of Figures

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 In January 2023, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils commissioned LUC to prepare a Landscape Character Assessment covering the two districts (together referred to herein as the 'study area').

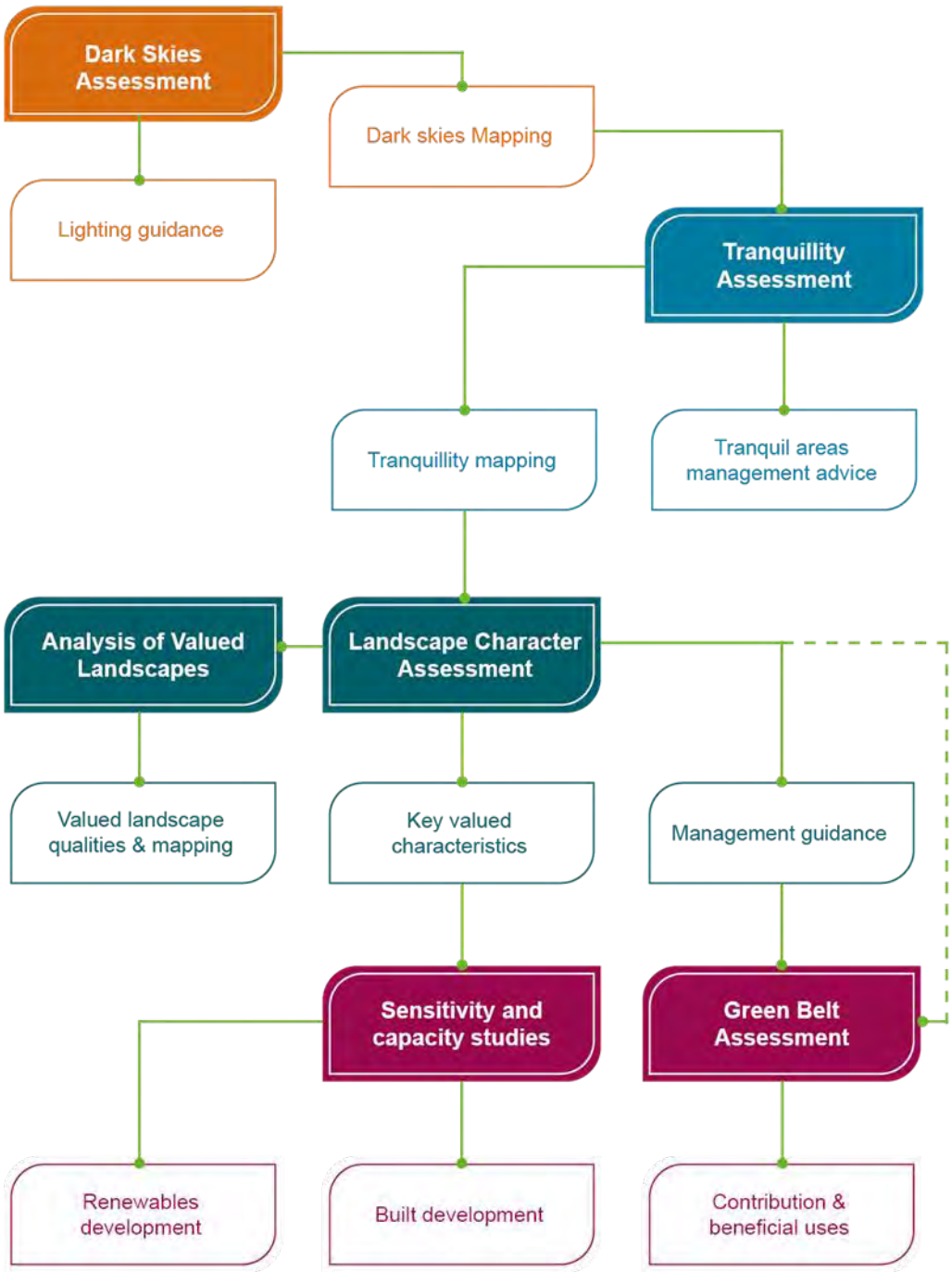
1.2 The Landscape Character Assessment is part of a suite of landscape evidence contributing to the Joint Local Plan that will guide development in the districts to 2041 as shown in Figure 1.1 below.

1.3 The aim of the Landscape Character Assessment is to create a comprehensive and up to date strategic scale landscape evidence. It provides a robust evidence base to underpin the production of the Joint Plan and to assist in the local planning process. It is intended to both inform work on policy development and development management, guiding development that is sympathetic to local character and the qualities/values of the landscape. It can help inform locational policies for strategic development as well as appropriate design and mitigation, providing a framework for more detailed landscape studies and sensitivity assessments as well as baseline evidence for more detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

1.4 Wider application of the Landscape Character Assessment may include land management, notably implementation of agri-environment schemes, such as the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), and land use change to achieve net zero, including opportunities for woodland creation.

1.5 In summary, the document can be used to consider landscape character when considering any type of change. This includes opportunities for conserving existing character and strengthening and enhancing character, as well as opportunities to create new character.

Figure 1.1: Suite of landscape evidence bases



1.6 This study focuses entirely on rural and urban-fringe landscape and does not encompass consideration of the character of larger urban areas, including market towns and local service centres (such as Abingdon-on-Thames, Botley, Didcot and Thame) and larger rural villages (such as Berinsfield, Steventon, Watlington and Wootton). It is understood that a new settlement hierarchy, defining tiers of settlements, is being proposed by the local authorities, but at time of writing this has yet to be adopted.

The Role of Landscape Character Assessment

1.7 The process of Landscape Character Assessment is described in 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (Natural England, October 2014) **[See reference** 1**]**. Within this document landscape character is defined as "a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse".

1.8 Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing such variations in character across a landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of features and attributes (characteristics) that make different landscapes distinctive. The landscape is the result of the interaction between people and place which gives an area a local identity. The 'landscape wheel' below illustrates how the different natural, cultural, and perceptual attributes of a landscape combine to produce character.

1.9 Understanding the character of place and evaluating an area's defining characteristics is a key component in managing growth sustainably and ensuring that the inherent character and qualities of the landscape can continue to be appreciated. Understanding of character can be used to ensure that any change or development does not undermine whatever is valued or characteristic in a particular landscape and help guide positive change that conserves, enhances, restores, or creates local character.

Figure 1.2: The 'Landscape Wheel' (Natural England, 2014)

The European Landscape Convention

1.10 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into force in the UK in March 2007. It establishes the need to recognise landscape in law; to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and planning of landscapes; and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies. The ELC definition of 'landscape' recognises that all landscapes matter, be they ordinary, degraded, or outstanding: "Landscape means an area,

as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors".

1.11 The ELC puts emphasis on the whole landscape and all its values and is forward looking in its approach, recognising the dynamic and changing character of landscape. Specific measures promoted by the ELC of direct relevance to this study include:

- The identification and assessment of landscape; and
- Improved consideration of landscape in existing and future sectoral and spatial policy and regulation

1.12 This Landscape Character Assessment makes a key contribution to the implementation of the ELC in the study area. It helps to reaffirm the importance of landscape, coordinates existing work and guides future work to protect, manage and plan the landscape.

Using the Assessment

1.13 A glossary of terms is included in **Appendix B** and guidance on how to use the assessment is set out in **Appendix D**.

Chapter 2
Methodology

Approach

2.1 The Landscape Character Assessment follows the method promoted by Natural England through 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (2014) which embeds the principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) within it. The guidance identifies five key principles for landscape assessment:

- Landscape is everywhere and all landscape and seascape has character;
- Landscape occurs at all scales and the process of Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at any scale;
- The process of Landscape Character Assessment should involve an understanding of how the landscape is perceived and experienced by people;
- A Landscape Character Assessment can provide a landscape evidence base to inform a range of decisions and applications; and
- A Landscape Character Assessment can provide an integrating spatial framework – a multitude of variables come together to give us our distinctive landscapes.

2.2 The components of landscape character are organised into three main categories, reflecting the 'landscape wheel' illustration in the Natural England guidance:

- Natural;
- Cultural/social; and
- Perceptual.

Assessment Process

2.3 The process for undertaking the study involved several key stages as described below.

Stage 1: Review of existing LCA studies

2.4 An initial review of the existing 2017 landscape character assessments for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse was carried out, as well as the 1998 South Oxfordshire study. This review informed a reclassification of landscape character types (LCT) and landscape character areas (LCA) as set out in Chapter 5.

Stage 2: Pilot study

2.5 A draft methodology and pilot assessment were produced for comment by South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council. This indicated the layout, components, and level of detail to be provided for each LCA profile.

Stage 3: First draft analysis

2.6 Amendments were made to the methodology and classification to reflect comments on the draft methodology and pilot assessment. Following this, draft profiles were produced for each LCA including key characteristics, landscape descriptions, valued qualities and forces for change, and formative thoughts on strategy and guidelines.

2.7 This was primarily a desk-based exercise involving the collation of a wide range of up-to-date mapped information relating to landscape, cultural heritage,

nature conservation and planning. Data used within the report, including data collated in the GIS database is shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: GIS data

Name	Source
Base OS mapping at 1:25k and 1:50k	Ordnance Survey
Linear features, mass movement, artificial ground, superficial deposits, and bedrock geology 1:50K	British Geological Survey
National Character Areas	Natural England
Existing South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessments (2017)	South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council
Landscape Character Assessment for the North Wessex Downs AONB (now renamed the North Wessex Downs National Landscape)	LUC
Public Rights of Way, and access land	South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council
River features and flood zones	Environment Agency
Nature conservation designations	Natural England (national datasets) and South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council (local datasets)
Priority Habitats	Natural England, and South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council
Forestry	Forestry Commission

Name	Source
Heritage designations	Historic England (national datasets), and South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council (local datasets)
Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation	Oxfordshire County Council
Dark skies and tranquillity	LUC assessments for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils
Infrastructure	Ordnance Survey
Local Plan designations and policy areas	South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council
Local Landscape Designations	LUC assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

Stage 4: Consultation inputs

2.8 A series of consultation activities were undertaken which presented the draft landscape classification and key characteristics, and focussed on gaining insight from stakeholders on:

- What is valued about the landscape and why?
- What are the main issues of change and why?

2.9 The findings from the consultation were used to inform further consideration of the draft landscape classification and LCA profiles. More detail on the consultation process and activities is set out in **Appendix C**.

Stage 5: Fieldwork

2.10 A systematic field survey was undertaken to review and refine the draft classification and descriptions. This involved:

- Verifying and fine-tuning the classification of the landscape types and areas identified including review of boundaries;
- Checking and identifying key characteristics;
- Checking aesthetic/perceptual characteristics;
- Taking photographs to illustrate the report; and
- Providing more detailed guidance in relation to changes observed on the ground.

Stage 6: Full draft report

2.11 The full draft report was produced, reflecting the fieldwork findings, any comments from the Councils on the first drafts and input from the Councils regarding strategy and guidelines for each LCA.

Stage 7: Final report

2.12 The final report took into account feedback from the Councils following issue of the full draft report.

Landscape Character Area Profiles

2.13 The Landscape Character Assessment is presented at an LCA level, with character areas organised within their respective LCT, in **Appendix A**.

2.14 Each LCT section begins with a brief description of the common elements that define it and a list of component LCAs, together with an overview map showing the location(s) of the LCT within the study area and its relationship with other LCTs.

2.15 The individual LCA profiles are structured as follows:

Summary of Location and Landscape Character

2.16 A summary paragraph explaining its location and defining landscape character is followed by a bullet point list of key characteristics. These summarise the combinations of landscape components which help to give an area its distinctive sense of place.

2.17 A context map (1.25,000 OS base) shows the LCA, and a colour-shaded topographical map, which also shows flood zones and watercourses, helps to convey its physical form and context.

Representative Photos

2.18 The list of key characteristics is followed by a series of photos, each accompanied by a brief description. These illustrate landscape components noted in the preceding list. Photos may be included elsewhere in the character area profile to fill gaps between sections.

Description

2.19 Bullet points list characteristics relating to each of the following ten landscape components (where applicable):

- Natural characteristics

- Landform (including geology and soils)
- Hydrology
- Semi-natural land cover

- Cultural/social characteristics
  - Land use
  - Settlement
  - Infrastructure
  - Historic character

- Perceptual characteristics
  - Views
  - Tranquillity (including dark skies)
  - Associations.

2.20 Comments on dark skies and tranquillity have been informed by LUC's Dark Skies Assessment **[See reference** 2**]** and Tranquillity Assessment **[See reference** 3**]** that also form part of the Councils' landscape evidence base.

Valued qualities

2.21 A bullet point list is provided for valued qualities. Each entry indicates why the quality in question is valued; this is associated with distinctiveness/ scarcity, condition or function. The latter relates to functions associated with landscape character, not to functions which provide benefits not associated with landscape character. So recreational value where landscape/views is a key element is a functional value. Biodiversity value is relevant as it adds to experience of landscape. Functional value of producing food or renewable energy, or storing carbon or water, is not.

2.22 This section is accompanied by two further maps of the LCA and its surroundings, showing landscape, natural heritage and cultural heritage designations. Where applicable, mapping indicates any Local Landscape Designations proposed in LUC's separate Valued Landscapes Assessment **[See reference** 4**]**.

Forces for change

2.23 'Forces for change' are listed in bullet point format. These include changes that have affected the landscape in recent times, and changes that can be expected to affect it in the foreseeable future, including likely impacts of climate change.

2.24 Each bullet point indicates the causes of change and makes reference to any valued qualities that are affected. These are ordered to reflect the landscape components affected – i.e. natural then cultural/social then perceptual – although it is recognised that multiple components may be relevant in some cases.

Landscape strategy and guidelines

2.25 To provide guidelines to minimise adverse landscape change, or enhance the existing landscape, a strategy for the LCA is set out.

2.26 Recognising the carbon net zero target, the inevitability of climate change and the competing needs for land use, it is expected that landscape change will occur. All landscapes evolve and change over time. Strategy statements reflect this, rather than providing guidelines which just advise on avoidance of development or change. This includes consideration of sensitivities associated with renewable energy developments, with reference to the findings of LUC's separate South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Renewable Energy Study **[See reference** 5**]**.

2.27 The strategy notes ‘target’ characteristics and valued qualities, with reference to forces for change.

2.28 Guidelines for each LCA are set out as bullet points beneath each element of the landscape strategy. Some guidelines are common to the LCT but others are specific to the LCA. They are a tool to guide development/land uses and environmental improvements in a way that understands and responds to variations in landscape character and which protects and enhances special qualities and local distinctiveness.

Website

2.29 The landscape character assessment will also be made available to view on a website. This offers interactive ways of accessing data and linking between different elements of the landscape character assessment and the wider landscape evidence base.

Chapter 3

Landscape Context

3.1 This chapter refers to the National Character Area context for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, to county-level assessments, to the current district landscape character assessments (that it will replace), to neighbouring authorities' character assessments, and to any other studies that are used to inform our analysis.

Relationship to Published Landscape Studies

3.2 Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at a variety of scales and levels of detail. This Landscape Character Assessment is part of a hierarchy of landscape character assessment information cascading down from the national to the local level.

National level

National Character Areas

3.3 At a national level, England is divided into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs). Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. There are descriptive profiles available for each NCA setting out information on landscape character, changes in the landscape and an assessment of ecosystem services delivered (Natural England, 2014) **[See reference** 6**]**.

3.4 The study area lies within the following NCAs:

- NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales extends east-west across both the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire in two bands, split by the Midvale Ridge NCA. It contains around 5,000 ha of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape formerly the North Wessex Downs AONB) and smaller areas of the Chilterns National Landscape and the Cotswolds National Landscape (both formerly AONBs). The NCA is summarised as follows:

  "… a broad belt of open, gently undulating lowland farmland on predominantly Jurassic and Cretaceous clays ... There are contrasting landscapes, including enclosed pastures of the claylands with wet valleys, mixed farming, hedges, hedge trees and field trees and more settled, open, arable lands. Mature field oaks give a parkland feel in many places… The area is dominated by watercourses, including the Thames and its tributaries, and there are also lakes associated with mineral extraction areas … Watercourses and lakes provide important areas for wildlife and recreation. There are a number of major transport routes and patches of intensive industrial influence, including Didcot Power Station. There is little woodland cover (around 3 per cent) but hedgerows and mature field and hedgerow trees are a feature, and many watercourses are fringed with willow or poplar…".

- NCA 109 Midvale Ridge stretches east–west from the Vale of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire to Swindon and covers the northern part of the study area, encircled by the Upper Thames clay vales.

  "… a band of low-lying limestone hills ... It is surrounded by the flat lands of the Oxfordshire clay vales, giving extensive views across the surrounding countryside. It is a predominantly agricultural area with a mixed arable/ pastoral farming landscape ... The main towns are Swindon, at the western end, and Oxford, which lies across the centre of the area, but otherwise the settlement pattern is characterised by small nucleated villages along the top of the ridge and along the springline. The soils types are a mix of heavy rendzinas, stagnogleys and lighter sandy brown earths with small patches of sandy soils …The unusual geology gives rise to habitats that are uncommon in the south of England, such as calcareous flushes and fens, calcareous heath and calcareous grassland … The NCA

is notably more wooded in character than the surrounding Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA with about 9 per cent woodland coverage … The continued expansion of Swindon and Oxford will present challenges for preserving the landscape character and biodiversity of the ridge but also opportunities for improving the provision of green infrastructure and access…"

- NCA 110 Chilterns extends north-east to south-west and covers the eastern part of the study area. Approximately half the National Character Area (NCA) is designated as part of the Chilterns National Landscape and, a small area south of the River Thames, as part of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

  "The extensively wooded and farmed Chilterns landscape is underlain by chalk bedrock that rises up from the London Basin to form a north-west facing escarpment offering long views over the adjacent vales. From the vales, the River Thames breaches the escarpment in the south at the Goring Gap and flows on past riverside towns such as Henley. Small streams flow on chalk down some of the dip slope valleys or from the scarp foot, passing through numerous settlements... The countryside is a patchwork of mixed agriculture with woodland, set within hedged boundaries … Outside the AONBs there are major settlements that incorporate extensive urban fringe and growth areas, including Luton, Hemel Hempstead and High Wycombe... Opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy the outdoors are wide-ranging, including extensive rights of way; open access commons, woods and downland; Registered Parks and Gardens open to the public … Arable farming is concentrated on deep, welldrained soils found in the valleys, along the scarp foot and beneath the hills in the north. Nucleated settlements, often featuring historic buildings dating back to medieval times, are found in the valleys and along the scarp foot, as are the major routes …"

- NCA 116 Berkshire and Marlborough Downs extends east to west and covers the south and south-west part of the study area. The natural beauty and special scenic qualities of the area lead to the majority of the area (97 percent) being included in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

  "Vast arable fields stretch across the sparsely settled, rolling Chalk hills of the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs National Character Area (NCA).

There are extensive views from the escarpment in particular, punctuated by landmarks including chalk-cut horse figures, beech clumps and ancient monuments … Historic routeways, including the Ridgeway National Trail, provide public access across this landscape.…Heritage features are at risk from damage by cultivation and animal burrowing. Along the escarpment and steep slopes, limited tracts of hanging woodlands and species-rich chalk grassland can be found.In the valleys, woodlands are found on steep slopes, and settlements cluster along the valley bottoms ... Meadow and pasture in the valleys combine with arable farming and small woods to create a mixed agricultural landscape, defined by hedgerow boundaries.

3.5 The NCAs within the study area are illustrated on **Figure 3.1**.

County level

Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study

3.6 At a county level the Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (OWLS) **[See reference 7]** is the current landscape character assessment for Oxfordshire. This divides the county into twenty-four separate landscape types, made up of individual landscape description units with a similar pattern of geology, topography, land use and settlements. Their names reflect their characteristic land cover. The following LCTs are identified within the study area:

- Alluvial Lowlands;
- Chalk Downland and Slopes;
- Clay Vale;
- Estate Farmlands;
- Farmland Hills;
- Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides;
- Lowland Village Farmlands;

- River Meadowlands;
- Rolling Clayland;
- Rolling Farmland;
- Terrace Farmland;
- Vale Farmland;
- Wooded Downlands;
- Wooded Estatelands;
- Wooded Estate Slopes and Valley Sides;
- Wooded Farmland;
- Wooded Hills;
- Wooded Pasture Valleys and Slopes; and
- Wooded Plateau.

Local level

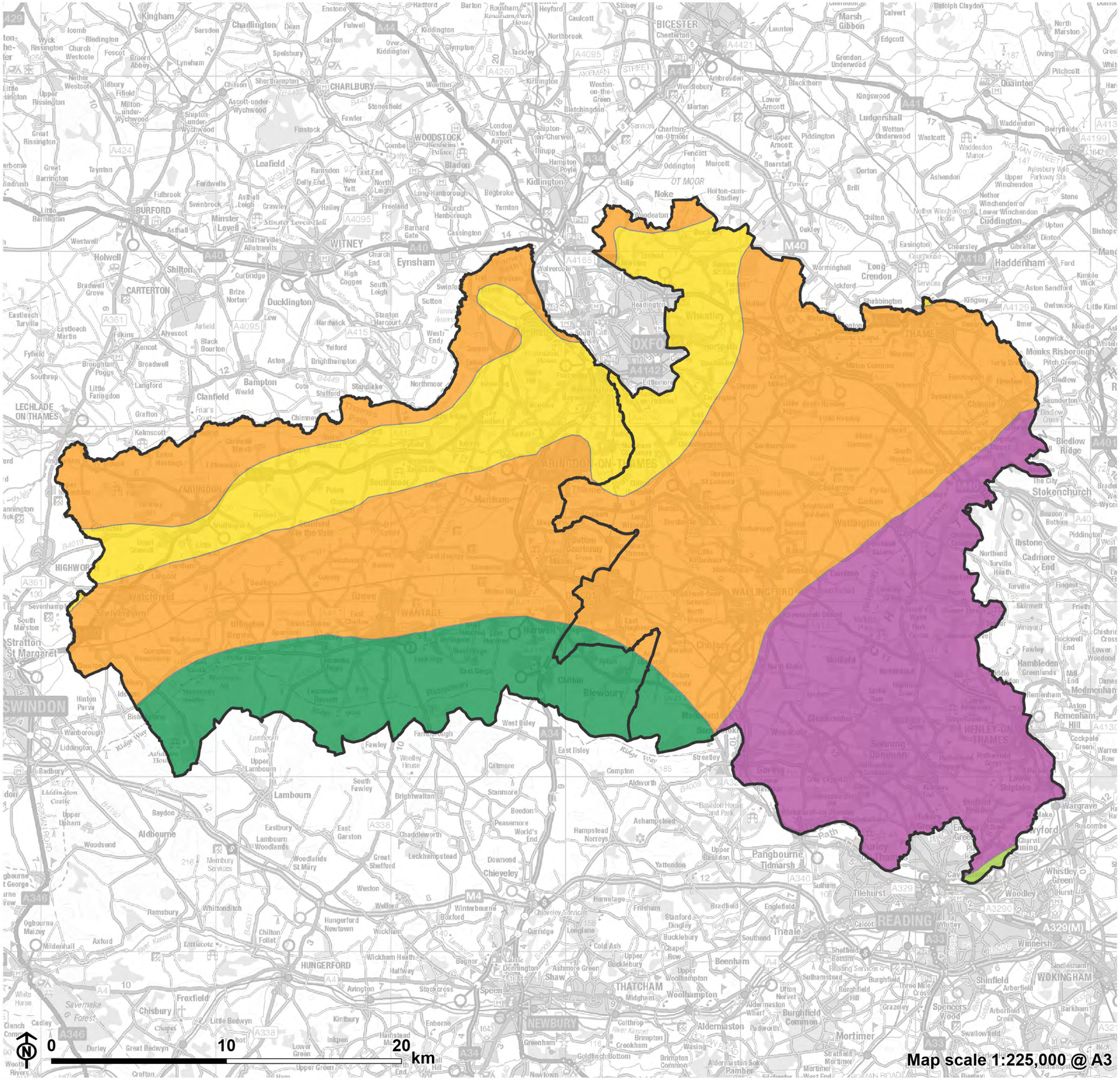
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

3.7 The current study for South Oxfordshire is the 'Landscape Character Assessment for the Local Plan 2033' (2017) **[See reference 8]** and the current study for the Vale of White Horse is the 'Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment' (2017) **[See reference 9]**. The two studies use differing approaches: the former defines 11 broad LCAs, within which localised variations in LCT (24 in total) are identified; whilst the latter identifies 12 broad LCTs which are split into a larger number of LCAs (84 in total). The 1998 South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment, forerunner of the 2017 study, still retains the status of Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), having been adopted as such in 2003.

Landscape Character Assessment
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils

LUC

Figure 3.1: National Character Areas



3.8 This landscape character assessment replaces the current studies including the SPG and aims to reconcile the different approaches by applying a consistent approach across both districts.

Neighbouring Authorities

3.9 Landscape does not stop at administrative boundaries but continues seamlessly into surrounding local authority areas. This assessment therefore sits alongside Landscape Character Assessments for adjacent authorities.

National Landscapes

3.10 The study area contains sizeable parts of two National Landscapes (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or AONBs): the Chilterns and the North Wessex Downs. The locations of these are shown on **Figure 4.2**.

The Chilterns National Landscape

3.11 The management plan for the Chilterns National Landscape **[See reference** 10**]** describes the area as being *"a landscape of remarkable beauty and distinctive character with a unique interaction of geological, ecological and cultural heritage features"* that was *"designated to protect its special qualities which include the steep chalk escarpment with flower-rich downland, woodlands, commons, tranquil valleys, ancient routes, villages with brick and flint houses, chalk streams and a rich historic environment of hillforts and chalk figures"*.

3.12 There is no single Landscape Character Assessment for the Chilterns National Landscape, rather a number of county and district-based LCAs cover

the whole of the designated area. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan identifies four broad types of landscape in the Chilterns:

- Scarp Foothills and Vale Fringes – *"Gently undulating chalk slopes with chalk springs between the base of the scarp and the clay vale to the west. Mainly managed within intensive agriculture with large fields and relatively few hedgerows, this landscape forms a narrow band only a few fields wide, towards the north of the AONB, but widens as it approaches the Thames in the south"*.
- Chalk Scarp – *"The 'spine' of the Chilterns is the chalk scarp that runs roughly north-east to south-west along the western side of the AONB. A spectacular ridge rises high above the vale to the west and dominates views over a wide area. Combes and prominent hills, often locations for chalk figures, monuments, burial mounds or hillforts, form a deeply convoluted steep scarp edge which supports a mosaic of chalk grassland, woodland and scrub"*.
- River Valleys – *"The Chilterns contains a series of larger river valleys that cut through the scarp and dipslope. Arterial valleys run north west to south east and, create dramatic 'wind gaps' where they cut through the scarp, as at Tring and Wendover. Often asymmetrical in shape these valleys contain the internationally rare, aquifer-fed chalk streams. As natural corridors through the Chiltern Hills, there is a long history of travel from ancient drovers routes, turnpikes and canals to modern day road and rail links. A number of large historic houses presiding over estates and parkland, are scattered throughout the valleys while settlements have grown up associated with the water supply, woodland industry, farming trade and transport links to London"*.
- Plateau and Dipslope – *"A large proportion of the AONB is covered by plateau and dipslope as the land gradually falls away to the east and Greater London. Though less visible and striking than the scarp, this landscape forms a key part of the classic Chilterns landscape. The topography is complex, with areas of plateau dissected by long, narrow, often dry valleys. Extensive woodlands and arable fields interspersed with commons, villages, scattered farmsteads (often dating from medieval times) and designed parklands characterise the plateau. Commons, heaths and greens would once have been far more extensive. Many*

Chilterns commons are wooded or former wood pasture, with areas of heathland, acid grassland, ponds and other open habitats. Grazed fields can still be found on the steeper valley sides and valley bottoms where settlements often formed around water sources or stretched out along the valley roads".

The North Wessex Downs National Landscape

3.13 The management plan for the North Wessex Downs National Landscape **[See reference** 11**]** describes this area as being *"a visibly ancient landscape of great beauty, diversity and size. It embraces the high, open arable sweeps of the chalk downs and dramatic scarp slopes with their prehistoric monuments and beech knolls, the moulded dip slopes, sheltered chalk river valleys, intimate and secluded wooded areas and low-lying heaths with a rich mosaic of woodland, pasture, heath and commons."*

3.14 The North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment Report (2002) **[See reference** 12**]** identifies 4 Landscape Character Types that are within the study area:

- Open Downlands – *"… the remote heart and core of the North Wessex Downs, with the dramatic landscapes created by the underlying chalk rocks being one of the defining features of the AONB. The subtle curves and undulations of the landform are revealed by the uniform clothing of cropped grass or cereals creating a landscape with a simple and elemental quality, accentuated by vast skies. The open, expansive views are punctuated by distinctive beech clumps crowning the downland summits, forming prominent and highly visible landmarks"*.
- Downland with woodland – *"… encompasses the downlands found in the east and southern part of the AONB, where extensive deposits of Clay-with-Flint overlie the Chalk. This is a landscape defined by contrast; of open rolling downland and enclosed woodland … The landform is typical of chalk scenery with a strongly rolling topography, rising to gently domed hilltops and dissected by dry valleys. Sinuous woodlands cling to the steep slopes and, with the interconnected hedgerow network, create a strong*

framework and sense of enclosure in some areas. Ridge top woods are a particular feature, and form dark wooded horizons providing containment to the views. These enclosed areas are juxtaposed with contrasting more open arable and pastoral summits, and those areas where remnant chalk grassland survives on the steep slopes of the dry valleys and scarps. The Bronze Age and Iron Age hill forts, strategically located on high summits are a notable feature of the landscape type and command panoramic views over the surrounding countryside".

- Downs plain and scarp – *"… extends along the entire northern edge of the North Wessex Downs. It is defined by geology with the plain formed by the eroded surface of the Lower Chalk, creating a low, level surface extending as a ledge at the foot of the high downs, linked to a distinctive steep escarpment. The scarp slope descends abruptly to the adjacent Vale, except in the north eastern part of the AONB where the slope curves to the south and forms the backdrop to the plain. It is characterised by two of the most emblematic features of the North Wessex Downs: the prehistoric route of the Ridgeway running along the scarp top; and Avebury World Heritage Site with its unique concentration of Neolithic monuments."*
- Vales – *"… defined topographically, and are distinct areas of lowland, almost always below 130m AOD. The transition to these low lying landscapes is often dramatic, marked by a steep scarp slope…The towering slopes of the adjacent chalk scarps forming a dominant 'borrowed' landscape setting that contains and encloses the Vales…Rich loamy and alluvial soils create a productive agricultural landscape, with a mix of both arable and pasture in fields bound by thick, tall hedgerows. Views are constrained and framed by the topography, rising scarp slopes of the downs and low hedgerows, producing a strong sense of enclosure. Woodland cover is sparse, except where linear belts of willow, alder and scrub accentuate the line of the watercourses that thread across the Vales. The streams, remnant waterside pastures and riparian woodlands form a lush 'wetland' landscape of considerable ecological value… The concentration of settlement is one of the defining features of the vale landscapes. Settlement includes compact nucleated villages and hamlets, with widespread scattered farmsteads, using characteristic materials of timber frame, brick and flints, sometimes with thatched roofs"*.

Chapter 4

Landscape Character Overview

4.1 This chapter summarises the main physical and cultural influences that have shaped the landscape within the study area. The detailed descriptions of different LCAs (**Appendix A**) highlight the key components that are of most significance to the particular landscape concerned.

4.2 The landscape has evolved through the interaction of the natural environment and human activities, through the combination of physical and cultural influences. Physical influences such as geology and landform, together with the pattern of settlement and land use are key determinants of landscape character.

Natural influences

A.1 The physical components of the landscape have the most tangible and fundamental influences upon its character, being the most permanent and least changeable aspect of its appearance. The underlying geology creates the 'backbone' of the landscape. The actions of weathering, erosion and deposition alter the landform, consequently influencing hydrological patterns and affecting the nature of soil conditions. This influences the nature of the vegetation and fauna that the landscape can support, and affects how humans have used and continue to exploit the landscape for agriculture, settlement and industry.

Geology and landform

4.3 The landforms that have resulted from geological and weathering processes are shown on **Figure 4.1**. The bedrock geological formations generally extend

diagonally across the study area in a south-west to north-east direction and includes the following:

- White Chalk Subgroup.
- Lambeth Group – Clay, Silt, Sand and Gravel.
- Grey Chalk Subgroup.
- Gault Formation and Upper Greensand Formation (undifferentiated) – Mudstone, Sandstone and Limestone.
- West Walton Formation, Ampthill Clay Formation and Kimmeridge Clay Formation (undifferentiated) – Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone.
- Corallian Group – Limestone, Sandstone, Siltstone and Mudstone.
- Portland Group – Limestone and Calcareous Sandstone.
- Lower Greensand Group – Sandstone and Mudstone.
- Wealden Group – Sandstone and Siltstone, Interbedded.
- Kellaways Formation and Oxford Clay Formation (undifferentiated) – Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone.
- Great Oolite Group – Sandstone, Limestone and Argillaceous Rocks.

4.4 Much of the study area comprises low-lying vales underlain by bands of Kimmeridge Clay and Gault Clay, characterised by flat to gently undulating landform and heavy soils. The vales are drained by the rivers Thames, Thame and Ock and their tributaries, which are surrounded by extensive, low-lying alluvial flats with naturally impeded drainage. Within this alluvial floodplain, however, deposits of terrace gravels produce areas of drier, raised ground more suited to settlement and cultivation. Along the southern edge of the vales, a band of Upper Greensand (‘or Malmstone’) is marked by more pronounced, rolling landform and lighter, calcareous and more fertile soils.

4.5 In the north the 'Mid-vale Ridge', an irregular band of limestone, rises above the surrounding low-lying clay vales and includes a series of low limestone hills that surround Oxford. The hills are composed of Upper Jurassic Corallian Limestones and Sands, which are widely used as building stone in this area. In

places, these rocks are overlain by Kimmeridge Clay and a capping of Lower Greensand which forms the higher ground at Shotover Hill, Forest Hill and above Garsington.

4.6 Across the south of the study area sweeps a broad belt of chalk uplands, part of the more extensive Cretaceous chalk belt of southern England. To the south-east, the Chiltern Hills form a highly distinct land mass with its steep escarpment facing the vale to the north and its dip slope descending gently into the Thames Valley to the south. Where the chalk is exposed along the escarpment and valley sides, the soils are thin and calcareous and support remnant chalk grassland and scrub woodland. On the plateau and dip slope, however, the chalk is overlain by extensive deposits of clay-with-flints, producing more acid soils which support extensive woodlands, medium grade farmland and even remnant heath. To the south-west the North Wessex Downs form an elevated plateau of smoothly rolling or undulating topography, incised by dry valleys or combes, often with scrub woodland on the steeper slopes. Soils are predominantly light, free-draining and thin except where clay-with-flints cap the chalk, creating localised areas of damp, heavier soils. The Sinodun Hills (Wittenham Clumps) form an outlier of the Wessex Downs chalk escarpment rising above the Thames and surrounding vales to the north. The River Thames cuts through the chalk belt at Goring and separates the Chilterns from the North Wessex Downs.

4.7 Traditional building materials closely reflect these broad geological differences, with local Wheatley limestone predominating in the Oxford Heights, brick and tile on the clays of the vales, and brick and flint (with locally grown timber) characterising the Chilterns and Wessex Downs.

Water

4.8 The main rivers within the study area are the River Thames (also referred to as the ‘Thames’ or ‘Isis’ north of the confluence with the River Thame) and its tributaries the River Thame and River Ock.

Landscape Character Assessment
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils

LUC

Figure 4.1: Natural - Landform and Hydrology

District boundary
Watercourse
Surface water
Flood zone 3
Flood zone 2

Elevation (metres)

289.02
200
150
100
50
0

0 10 20 km

Map scale 1:225,000 @ A3

4.9 The River Thames flows from north to south through central parts of the study area and defines its north-western and south-eastern edges. The River Thame flows westwards through the eastern half of the study area (South Oxfordshire District) between the village of Shabbington and the River Thames at Dorchester. The River Ock flows through the western half of the study area (Vale of White Horse District) between the village of Little Coxwell in the west and the River Thames at Abingdon.

4.10 In terms of flooding, areas of Flood Zone 2 and 3 located across the study area are associated with the main rivers and their tributary streams and brooks. Watercourses and flood zones are shown on **Figure 4.1.**

Semi-natural land cover

4.11 The study area supports a wide range of habitats, many of which are of international, national or local importance, and are recognised through designation. This includes six Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), 60 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), 210 Local Wildlife Sites and numerous areas of Ancient Woodland, concentrated particularly in the Chilterns to the south-east and on the ridge hilltops to the north and north-west. Ancient Woodland has been continuously present since at least 1600 and it tends to support nationally important woodland plant and animal species.

4.12 The SACs wholly or partially within the study area are:

- The Chiltern Beechwoods, part of which lies on the chalk escarpment between Chinnor and the M40, designated primarily for being an extensive Asperulo-Fagetum beech forest that forms an important part of a grassland-scrub-woodland mosaic.
- Aston Rowant to the east, designated for Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands and Asperulo-Fagetum beech forests.

- Hartslock Wood to the south-east, designated for semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) and Taxus baccata woods of the British Isles.
- Little Wittenham to the south of Dorchester, is designated for great crested newts (Triturus cristatus).
- Hackpen Hill to the south-west, designated for its unimproved chalk grassland and nationally important rare early gentian, as well as autumn gentian, fragrant orchid, frog orchid, horseshoe vetch, common rock-rose and dwarf thistle.
- Cothill Fen to the south-west of Wootton, designated for its nationally rare habitats which include alkaline fens, calcareous grassland, alluvial forests including Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior species, and scrub of varying degrees of wetness.

4.13 The SSSIs within the study area, with particular concentrations in the northern and eastern regions, include:

- Wytham Woods, consisting of a complex of Ancient Woodland, wood pasture, common land and old limestone grassland on a variety of soils.
- The Wytham Ditches and Flushes are also designated, containing species-rich eutrophic aquatic and fen flora.
- Fernham Meadows, to the south of Fernham, designated for its species-rich mosaic of wet fen meadow habitats, woodland and drier grassland.
- Little Wittenham SSSI located to the south of Dorchester, is designated for its great crested newt (Triturus cristatus) population.
- Swyncombe Downs SSSI east of the village of Ewelme is designated for its chalk grassland, scrub and bird communities.
- Culham Brake SSSI, to the south of Abingdon-on-Thames is a small area of willow carr and contains one of the largest British populations of the summer snowflake Leucojum aestivum.

4.14 There are two National Nature Reserves (NNR) in the study area:

- Aston Rowant NNR , which is also located within the Chilterns National Landscape boundary, lies approximately nine miles to the north-east of Wallingford. Main habitats within the NNR include flower-rich chalk grassland, beech woodland and juniper scrub.
- Cothill NNR is species-rich lowland calcareous fen, forming part of the Cothill Fen SAC.

4.15 The study area contains six Local Nature Reserves (LNR): Cuttle Brook, Ewelme Watercress Beds, Mowbray Fields, Watlington Chalk Pit, Abbey Fishponds and Tuckhill Meadows.

4.16 There are also numerous Priority Habitats spread across the study area including 'deciduous woodland', 'traditional orchards', 'lowland calcareous grassland', lowland dry acid grassland, lowland fens and lowland meadows.

4.17 Landscape and landscape-related designations are shown on **Figure 4.2** and **Figure 4.3**.

Cultural influences

Historic character and land use

4.18 The study area contains a wealth of archaeological sites, monuments and historic assets that reflect a long history of human settlement and activity. These assets, many of which are statutorily designated, play a large part in defining the character of the landscape and the individuality of particular settlements. Heritage designations are shown on **Figure 4.4**.

4.19 The basic physical structure of the landscape has also had a strong influence on patterns of human occupation and activity within South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse. In particular, slope, elevation and water supply have influenced the selection of sites for settlement, while the workability of soils and

their potential for improvement has influenced patterns of agriculture and land use.

4.20 Prehistoric farmers were responsible for radical changes in the landscape, progressively creating clearings in the dense forests to create extensive open pastures or croplands.

4.21 Many of the settlements within the study area originate from the Saxon period, particularly those alongside the Thames (such as Abingdon-on-Thames, Mapledurham, Goring-on-Thames, Shillingford and the original Nuneham Courtney), those on the Hilltop Ridges (such as Wheatley, Cuddesdon and Faringdon) and those close to the vale edge slopes below the Chiltern and North Wessex Downs scarps (such as Watlington, Benson, Lewknor, Wantage, Childrey, Woolstone). This period of settlement established a pattern which is still very much in evidence today.

4.22 In the Chilterns, clusters of loosely grouped farmsteads were established on the plateau and new small fields were carved out of the extensive common woods, a process known as 'assarting'. Elsewhere, nucleated villages were typically surrounded by a farming system of large open fields divided into a number of strips, individually owned but farmed together.

4.23 Open farmland was steadily enclosed by hedges, banks and occasionally ditches during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, these earlier and more irregular enclosures were largely overwhelmed by the major parliamentary enclosures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which transformed the appearance of much of the landscape introducing a pattern of square or rectangular fields defined by straight predominantly hawthorn hedges which remain today. New straight roads were also introduced with wide grass verges, replacing the narrow winding lanes. The Chiltern Hills largely escaped this revolution and still display many typical characteristics of 'ancient countryside' which contrast with the 'planned landscape' of the Vales.

Landscape Character Assessment
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils

LUC

Figure 4.2: Landscape and Landscape-related Designations

- District boundary
- CRoW access land
- National Landscape
- Special Area of Conservation
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- National Nature Reserve
- Ancient Woodland
- Local Nature Reserve
- Local Wildlife Site
- Local Landscape Designation

0 10 20 km

Map scale 1:225,000 @ A3

Landscape Character Assessment
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils

LUC

Figure 4.3: Priority Habitats

District boundary

Priority Habitat

- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Deciduous woodland
- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Lowland fens
- Lowland heathland
- Lowland meadows
- Purple moor grass and rush pastures
- Reedbeds
- Traditional orchard

0 10 20 km

Map scale 1:225,000 @ A3

Landscape Character Assessment
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils

LUC

Figure 4.4: Heritage designations

District boundary
Scheduled monument
Conservation area
Registered parks and gardens

Listed building

- Grade I
- Grade II*
- Grade II

0 10 20 km

Map scale 1:225,000 @ A3

4.24 The process of early enclosure through the Tudor and Jacobean period was accompanied by the development of grand mansions and manor houses, particularly in the Chilterns and Thames Valley, such as Mapledurham House, Hardwick House, Rotherfield Greys and Stonor Park. The formal parks which surrounded these houses had a considerable impact on the landscape but not so dramatic as the designed landscapes of the eighteenth century. These include 'Capability' Brown's dramatic transformation of Nuneham Park and a succession of beautiful parks created along the Chiltern reaches of the Thames Valley, including Mongewell House, Caversham Park and Fawley Court as well as the re-design of the parks at Mapledurham and Hardwick House. Other examples of manor houses and associated park and gardens are concentrated along the Corallian Limestone Ridge, including Buscot House, Buckland House and Hinton Manor.

Settlement and infrastructure

4.25 Changes to the landscape and settlements during the twentieth century have resulted mainly from the pressures of modern farming and the growth in demand for new housing and more efficient communications. The increasing mechanisation of post-war agriculture has obliterated many miles of hedgerows and woodlands creating more open landscapes.

4.26 There are significant pressures on the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse area to accommodate new housing. Improvements in road and rail communications and proximity to London were initially a key factor, but the districts are now home to a wide range of nationally and globally important science and technology businesses. Proximity to the major employment centres of Oxford, Reading and Swindon, combined with the qualities of the districts' countryside, makes it an attractive place to live. Some settlements, such as Didcot and Wantage/Grove, have expanded rapidly with a significant effect upon the local landscape character. Elsewhere, however, much of this pressure has been successfully resisted, particularly in the smaller rural settlements.

4.27 A less obvious effect of the prosperity of this area, however, is the gradual 'suburbanisation' and 'gentrification' of many of the districts' villages and a gradual erosion of local distinctiveness. The same effects are evident across the study area and are manifested in more 'urban' types of fencing, surfacing, buildings, lighting and highway treatments, which cumulatively detract from the traditional, rural character of villages and hamlets. Other changes in the landscape have been brought about by the construction of new roads, including the M40 motorway, and by mineral extraction, particularly along the River Thames.

4.28 The settlements and infrastructure within the study area are shown on **Figure 4.5**.

Landscape Character Assessment
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils

LUC

Figure 4.5: Settlements and infrastructure

- District boundary
- Main settlements
- A Road
- Motorway
- Overhead Lines
- Railway
- Canal

Oxford
Abingdon
Thame
Faringdon
Didcot
Wallingford
Wantage
Swindon
Henley-on-Thames
Reading

0 10 20 km

Map scale 1:225,000 @ A3

Perceptual characteristics

Tranquillity

4.29 Urban areas (including towns and larger villages, as well as the urban areas of Oxford, Reading/Caversham and Swindon which lie immediately adjacent or close by), along with transport corridors such as the M40 Motorway and A34, influence the character of the surrounding landscape. However, away from the settlements and main roads, many parts of the study area have an overriding rural character and enjoy relatively higher levels of tranquillity. The areas of higher tranquillity are particularly concentrated to the south, in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, to the east within the Chilterns National Landscape and to the north-east on and around the Mid-Vale Ridge. This is illustrated on the map in **Figure 4.6,** taken from LUC's Tranquillity Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

4.30 The levels of light pollution and dark night skies within the study area vary. Light pollution decreases with distance from the main settlements. There are some areas of dark night skies free from interference from artificial light, notably within the National Landscapes but also in other locations both on higher ground (such as in the hills east and west of Oxford) and in the vales (including parts of the valley of the River Thames). The character and special qualities for both the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes include a sense of remoteness and tranquillity and dark night skies (relative to surrounding areas). Variations in levels of light pollution are illustrated on the map in **Figure 4.7**, taken from LUC and Hoare Lea's Dark Skies/Light Impact report for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

Landscape Character Assessment
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils

LUC

Figure 4.6: Tranquillity

District boundary

Zones of relative tranquillity

- Zone 1: Area of high tranquillity
- Zone 2: Area of some tranquillity
- Zone 3: Area of mixed tranquillity
- Zone 4: Area of low tranquillity
- Zone 5: Area of very low/no tranquillity

Oxford
Abingdon
Faringdon
Didcot
Wallingford
Wantage
Thame
Henley-on-Thames
Reading
Swindon

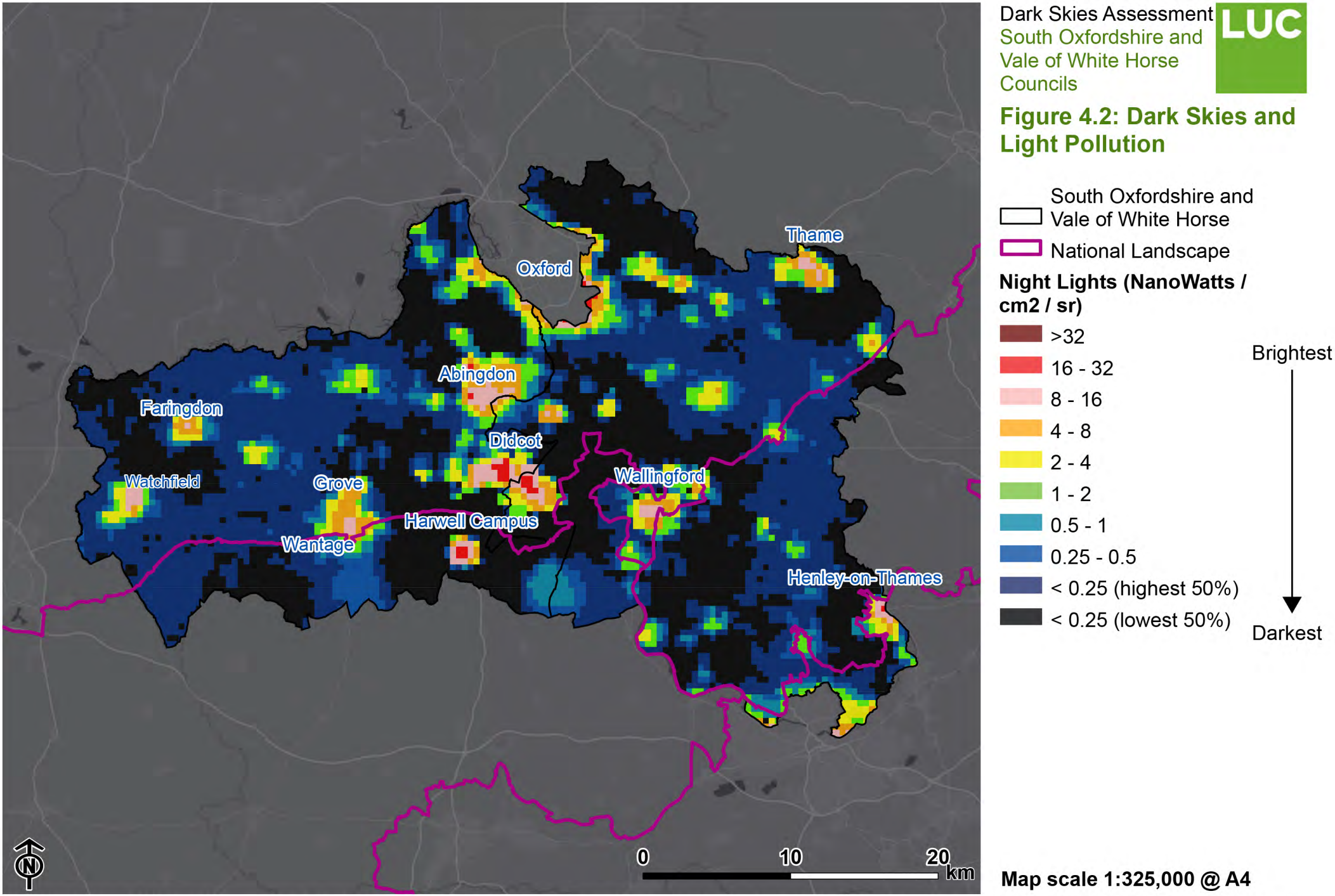
0 10 20 km

Map scale 1:225,000 @ A3

Dark Skies Assessment
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils

LUC

Figure 4.2: Dark Skies and Light Pollution



Map scale 1:325,000 @ A4

Views

4.31 Open often panoramic views are available from areas of higher ground over the surrounding lower-lying vales and river valleys. Notable views are available from the North Downs Chalk Escarpment and Escarpment Footslopes to the south-west, from the Ridge Hilltops and Ridge Slopes to the north, the Chilterns Chalk Scarp and Footslopes to the south-east, and from the Sinodun Hills (Wittenham Clumps).

4.32 On the lower-lying vales and river valleys the flat, large-scale landscape means that open views are frequent due to the uniform topography and limited intervening vegetation. From other areas, views are more restricted by vegetation and mature trees particularly in the vicinity of watercourses. The surrounding higher ground is often apparent as a backdrop on the horizon of views – the Corallian Limestone Ridge to the north, the North Wessex Downs to the south-west and the Chilterns to the east and south-east.

Figure 4.8: Looking across the vale from Whitehorse Hill

Figure 4.9: Looking north past Shirburn Hill from the Chiltern escarpment

Figure 4.10: Looking west along the Ridgeway towards Uffington Castle

Figure 4.11: Oxford viewed from Boars Hill

Figure 4.12: Holton Wood and Waterperry Wood in the vale east of Forest Hill

Figure 4.13: Wittenham Clumps, viewed over Didcot from Hagbourne Hill

Figure 4.14: North along the Thames from Wittenham Clumps

Associations

4.33 Many parts of the landscape have particular cultural associations relating to art, literature, events, myth, music, people, media, legends and folklore. These include:

- The ‘dreaming spires’ of Oxford, as painted from Hinksey Hill by William Turner.
- The prehistoric Uffington White Horse chalk figure is a prominent feature on the scarp. It is used as an emblem by diverse organisations, including the Vale of White Horse District Council and the Berkshire Yeomanry. It also appears in numerous works of literature, including ‘The Scouring of the White Horse’ (1859) by Thomas Hughes and ‘Idylls of the King’ (between 1859 and 1885) by Lord Tennyson; and within music, including John Gardner's Ballad of the White Horse (1959) and David Bedford's Song of the White Horse (1978).
- North Wessex Downs landscapes in Oxfordshire were a favourite subject for noted 20th century artist Paul Nash, and Eric Ravillious also painted downland views in the area.
- The River Thames in South Oxfordshire forms the setting for ‘The Wind in the Willows’, a children's novel by Kenneth Grahame (1908). Henley-on-Thames has the River and Rowing Museum with special permanent Wind in the Willows exhibition.
- Many villages in Oxfordshire have featured in the Midsomer Murders television series, with five towns within the study area being particular favourites for the filming: Henley-on-Thames, Wallingford, Dorchester-on-Thames, Thame and Watlington.

Chapter 5

Landscape Classification

5.1 In line with the process of assessment described in 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment', landscapes are divided into Landscape Character Types (LCTs), which are in turn subdivided into Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). LCTs have a broadly consistent, homogeneous character as a result of common combinations of landscape components. LCAs are unique geographic areas with a consistent character and identity.

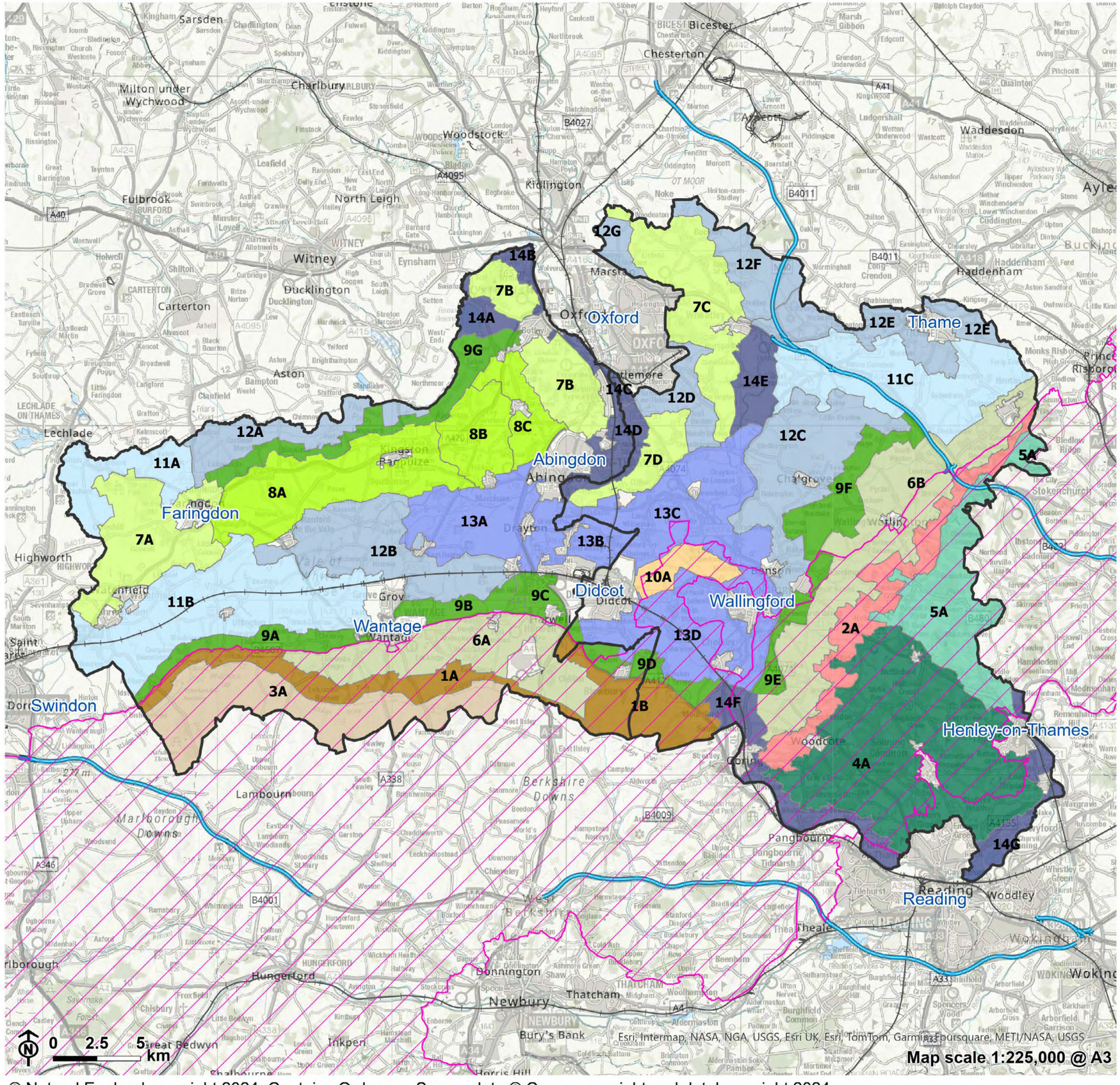
5.2 The landscape classification identifies 14 LCTs and 44 LCAs. These are shown on **Figure 5.1**.

5.3 It is important to note that boundaries between one LCT or LCA and the next are often transitional: there is rarely a clearcut change in character 'on the ground'. This assessment has been mapped at a scale of 1:25,000 which provides an appropriate level of detail for the landscape character assessment at the strategic unitary authority scale.

Landscape Character Assessment
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils

LUC

Figure 5.1: Landscape Character Type Overview



- District boundary
- National Landscape
- Motorway
- Railway

Landscape Character Type

- 1: Open Chalk Escarpment and Upper Slopes
- 2: Wooded Chalk Escarpment
- 3: Open Chalk Dipslope
- 4: Wooded Chalk Plateau and Valleys
- 5: Wooded Chalk Ridges and Valleys
- 6: Chalk Escarpment Footslopes
- 7: Ridge Hilltops
- 8: Ridge Slope
- 9: Vale Edge Slopes
- 10: Lower Vale Hills
- 11: Upper Vale
- 12: Middle Vale
- 13: Lower Vale
- 14: River Valley

Esri, Intermap, NASA, NGA, USGS, Esri UK, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, METI/NASA, USGS

Map scale 1:225,000 @ A3

Landscape Character Types and Areas

5.4 Profiles for the character areas listed below are set out in **Appendix A**.

Landscape Character Type 1: Open Chalk Escarpment and Upper Slopes

- LCA 1A: Wessex Downs Open Chalk Escarpment and Upper Slopes
- LCA 1B: Aston Upthorpe Downs Open Chalk Escarpment and Upper Slopes

Landscape Character Type 2: Wooded Chalk Escarpment

- LCA 2A: Chiltern Wooded Chalk Escarpment

Landscape Character Type 3: Open Chalk Dipslope

- LCA 3A: Wessex Downs Open Chalk Dipslope

Landscape Character Type 4: Wooded Chalk Plateau and Valleys

- LCA 4A: Chiltern Wooded Chalk Plateau and Valleys

Landscape Character Type 5: Wooded Chalk Ridges and Valleys

- LCA 5A: Chiltern Wooded Chalk Ridges and Valleys

Landscape Character Type 6: Chalk Escarpment Footslopes

- LCA 6A: Wessex Downs Chalk Escarpment Footslopes
- LCA 6B: Chiltern Chalk Escarpment Footslopes

Landscape Character Type 7: Ridge Hilltops

- LCA 7A: Faringdon Ridge Hilltops
- LCA 7B: Oxford West Ridge Hilltops
- LCA 7C: Oxford East Ridge Hilltops
- LCA 7D: Oxford South Ridge Hilltops

Landscape Character Type 8: Ridge Slope

- LCA 8A: Faringdon to Frilford Ridge Slope
- LCA 8B: Frilford to Sandford Ridge Slope
- LCA 8C: Cumnor to Abingdon Ridge Slope

Landscape Character Type 9: Vale Edge Slopes

- LCA 9A: Western Vale Edge Slopes
- LCA 9B: Wantage to Milton Hill Vale Edge Slopes
- LCA 9C: Milton Hill to Didcot Vale Edge Slopes.

- LCA 9D: East of Didcot Vale Edge Slopes.
- LCA 9E: Ewelme to South Stoke Vale Edge Slopes.
- LCA 9F: Eastern Vale Edge Slopes.
- LCA 9G: Northern Vale Edge Slopes.

Landscape Character Type 10: Lower Vale Hills

- LCA 10A: Sinodun Lower Vale Hills.

Landscape Character Type 11: Upper Vale

- LCA 11A: Thames Upper Vale
- LCA 11B: Western Upper Vale
- LCA 11C: Eastern Upper Vale

Landscape Character Type 12: Middle Vale

- LCA 12A: Thames Middle Vale
- LCA 12B: Western Middle Vale
- LCA 12C: Eastern Middle Vale
- LCA 12D: Oxford Middle Vale
- LCA 12E: Thame Middle Vale
- LCA 12F: Studley Middle Vale
- LCA 12G: Cherwell Middle Vale

Landscape Character Type 13: Lower Vale

- LCA 13A: Ock Lower Vale

- LCA 13B: Abingdon-Didcot Lower Vale
- LCA 13C: East Thames Lower Vale
- LCA 13D: South Thames Lower Vale

Landscape Character Type 14: River Valley

- LCA14A: Farmoor Reservoir Lower Valley
- LCA14B: Eynsham to Oxford Thames River Valley
- LCA14C: Botley to Kennington Thames River Valley
- LCA14D: Abingdon to Kennington Thames Lower Valley
- LCA14E: River Thame Lower Valley
- LCA14F: Moulsford to Caversham Thames Lower Valley
- LCA14G: Caversham to Henley Thames Lower Valley.

Appendix A

Landscape Character Area Profiles

See separate files for each Landscape Character Type.

Appendix B

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Table B.1: Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum (sea level).
Agricultural Land Classification	The classification of agricultural land in England and Wales.
Analysis	The process of breaking the landscape down, usually in descriptive terms, into its component parts in order to understand how it is made up.
Ancient trees and veteran trees	Individual trees or groups of trees with wood pastures, historic parkland, hedgerows, orchards, park, and other areas. They are often found outside ancient woodlands. irreplaceable habitats with some or all of the following characteristics: Ancient trees An ancient tree is exceptionably valuable. Attributes can include its great age, size, condition, biodiversity value (as a result of significant wood decay and the habitat created from the ageing process), cultural and heritage value. Veteran trees A veteran tree may or may not be very old, but it has decay features, such as branch death and hollowing. These features contribute to its biodiversity, cultural and heritage value.

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
Ancient Woodland	Woodland which the evidence shows has had had continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD and has only been cleared for underwood or timber production. It is an extremely valuable ecological resource, with an exceptionally high diversity of flora and fauna.
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – the term formerly used (until November 2023) for the statutory designation now known as a National Landscape.
Approach	The stepwise process by which a landscape assessment is undertaken.
Arable	Land used for growing crops.
Assessment	An umbrella term used to encompass all of the many different ways of looking at, describing, analysing, and evaluating landscape.
Biodiversity	The measure of the variety of organisms present in different ecosystems.
Built form	The characteristic nature of built development.
Characteristic	An element that contributes to local distinctiveness (e.g. narrow winding lanes, vernacular building style).
Classification	A process of sorting the landscape into different types, each with a distinct, consistent, and recognisable character.
Condition	A judgement on the intactness and condition of the elements of the landscape.
Coppicing	The traditional method of woodland management in which trees are cut

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
	down to near the ground to encourage the production of long, straight shoots, which can subsequently be harvested.
CPRE	Campaign to Protect Rural England, a charity that campaigns to promote, enhance and protect the countryside across England.
Cultural heritage	Cultural heritage includes objects, monuments, individual sites and buildings and groups of buildings and sites that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes tangible heritage and intangible cultural heritage.
Description	Verbal description of what a landscape looks like. This is usually carried out in a systematic manner, but it may also include personal reactions to the landscape.
Dip slope	A gentle slope following the direction of the underlying geological beds.
Drift	The name for all material of glacial origin found anywhere on land or at sea, including sediment and large rocks.
Element	A component part of the landscape (e.g. hedges, roads, woods).
Enclosure	The placing in private hands of land to which there were previously common rights; the merging of commonly held strip fields to form a block surrounded by hedges.
Escarpment	A steep slope separating areas of land at different elevations (often used synonymously with ‘scarp’).

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
Feature	A prominent, eye-catching element (e.g. wooded hilltop, church spire).
Floodplain	The area that would naturally be affected by flooding if a river rises above its banks, or if high tides and stormy seas cause flooding in coastal areas.
GIS	Geographic Information System.
GLVIA	Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management. The latest version is the 3rd edition, published in 2013, but 'Notes and Clarifications' on aspects of the 3rd edition were published in 2024.
GPS	Global Positioning System.
Grassland	Grassland can be improved (by management practices) semi-improved (modified by management practices and have a range of species less diverse than unimproved grasslands), or unimproved (not treated with fertiliser, herbicide or intensively grazed and consequently species diversity is high). It may be used of grazing, cut (such as for hay or silage), or left unmanaged.
Habitat	The natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism.
HLC	Historic Landscape Characterisation.
Hydrology	The science dealing with the occurrence, circulation, distribution, and properties of the waters of the earth and its atmosphere.
Intact	Not changed or diminished.

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
Intense equestrian activities	Examples include the introduction of: subdivisions to fields, permanent structures, tracks and hard surfacing, horse-walkers, gallops or sand schools/ manèges.
Land cover	Combinations of land use and vegetation that cover the land surface.
Landmark	An object or feature of a landscape or town that is easily seen and recognized from a distance, especially one that enables someone to establish their location.
Landscape	The term refers primarily to the visual appearance of the land, including its shape, form, and colours. However, the landscape is not a purely visual phenomenon; its character relies on a whole range of other dimensions, including geology, topography, soils, ecology, archaeology, landscape history, land use, architecture, and cultural associations.
Landscape character	A distinct pattern or combination of elements that occurs consistently in a particular landscape.
Landscape character area (LCA)	A unique geographic area with a broadly consistent character and identity, which forms part of a landscape character type.
Landscape character type (LCT)	A generic term for landscape with a consistent, homogeneous character. Landscape character types may occur in different parts of the county, but wherever they occur, they will share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation, or human influences.
Landscape condition	Based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
	about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It reflects the state of repair or intactness of individual features or elements (relating to that feature's primary condition or ultimate desire).
Landscape value	The relative value that is attached to different landscapes. In a policy context the usual basis for recognising certain highly valued landscapes is through the application of a local or national landscape designation. Yet a landscape may be valued by different communities of interest for many different reasons without any formal designation, recognising, for example, perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness; special cultural associations; the influence and presence of other conservation interests; or the existence of a consensus about importance, either nationally or locally.
Linear settlement	A settlement that is built along a road, in comparison to a nuclear or dispersed settlement.
Listed Building	A building, object or structure that has been judged to be of national importance in terms of architectural or historic interest, as designated under Section 1 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
Local Plan	A development plan prepared by local planning authorities.
LGS	Local Geological Site
Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA)	An assessment of the effect of a proposed development on landscape and/or views, or of the sensitivity of

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
	land to potential development. Typically a less detailed analysis than an LVIA (see below), this may be required by a Planning Authority to help understand effects that are not expected to be significant.
Landscape and Visual Impact Asssessment (LVIA)	A detailed assessment, usually carried out in accordance with guidelines published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management (see separate glossary entry for GLVIA). This is likely to be required by a Planning Authority where there is potential for a proposed development to have significant impact on landscape and/or views.
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
National Landscape	A statutory landscape designation formerly (until November 2023) known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
Natural character	Character as a result of natural or semi-natural features such as woodland, grassland, hedgerows etc.
Natural heritage	Natural features, geological and physiographical formations and habitats that are valued for science, conservation or natural beauty.
NCN	National Cycle Network Route.
NE	Natural England.
NNR	National Nature Reserve.
Nucleated settlement	A settlement that is clustered around a centre, in comparison to a linear or dispersed settlement.
Open Access Land	An area where the public have a right of access on foot as set out in the

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
	Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2005.
OS	Ordnance Survey.
Pastoral	Land used for keeping or grazing sheep or cattle.
Priority Habitats	UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species and habitats were identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK BAP. The original lists of UK BAP priority habitats were created between 1995 and 1999 and were subsequently updated in 2007. See http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5155 for further information.
Remnant	A part or quantity left after the greater part has been used, removed, or destroyed.
Riparian habitat	Riverbank habitat.
SAC	Special Area of Conservation (EC Directive 92/43/EEC Habitats Directive).
Scarp slope	A steep slope which cuts across the underlying strata (often used synonymously with 'escarpment').
Scheduled Monument	Nationally important archaeological sites or historic buildings, given protection against unauthorised change, as designated under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.
Semi-natural vegetation	Any type of natural vegetation which has been influenced by human activities, either directly or indirectly.
Sense of place	A person's perception of a location's indigenous characteristics, based on the mix of uses, appearance and

Term	Abbreviation and Meaning
	context that makes a place memorable.
Sensitive	The response to change or influence.
Skyline	The outline of landform, land cover or built form seen against the sky.
SPA	Special Protection Area (EC Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds).
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest.
Time depth	The time period expressed in the landscape, or the extent to which the landscape reflects a certain time period (a landscape with greater time depth will comprise older elements than a landscape with lesser time depth).
Topography	Combinations of slope and elevation that produce the shape and form of the land surface.
Valued landscape attributes	Positive features and characteristics that are important to landscape character and that, if lost, would result in adverse change to the landscape.

Appendix C

Consultation Process

C.1 A series of consultation activities were undertaken as described below.

Consultation Hub

C.2 An online 'Consultation Hub' was set up to allow members of the public to leave comments on valued landscape qualities ("what is valued and why?") and on landscape change ("what is changing and why?"). The consultation ran from 17th August to 2nd October 2023.

C.3 A map-based approach allowed participants to 'pin' comments to a specific map location, or to make more general comments. **Figure C.1** shows example comments added to the interactive map.

Email consultation

C.4 Emails were sent to key stakeholders, seeking their thoughts/opinions on the draft classification (Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas), on valued landscape characteristics/features and on landscape change issues. Key stakeholders included parish and district councillors, representatives of neighbouring planning authorities and Oxfordshire County Council, the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes, national bodies such as Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency, and various special interest and local community groups.

Interactive workshops

C.5 Three online workshops were held (on the 31st of August and the 11th and 14th of September 2023), with a follow-on council-run internal workshop with other councillors (held on the 21st of September 2023). Invitees included district councillors, representatives of neighbouring planning authorities and Oxfordshire County Council, the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes, national bodies such as Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency, and various special interest and local community groups.

C.6 The online workshops used an 'interactive whiteboard' that allowed participants to add comments to maps and charts, and view the comments of others, in a series of exercises. Comments and input were sought around the following exercises:

- Exercise 1: proposed Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas;
- Exercise 2: What do you think is important and what do you value about your local landscape?; and
- Exercise 3: What do you think are potential areas of change or pressure in the landscape?

C.7 Figure C.2 and **Figure C.3** below show example comments added to the interactive whiteboard at one of the workshops.

Figure C.1: Online consultation Hub

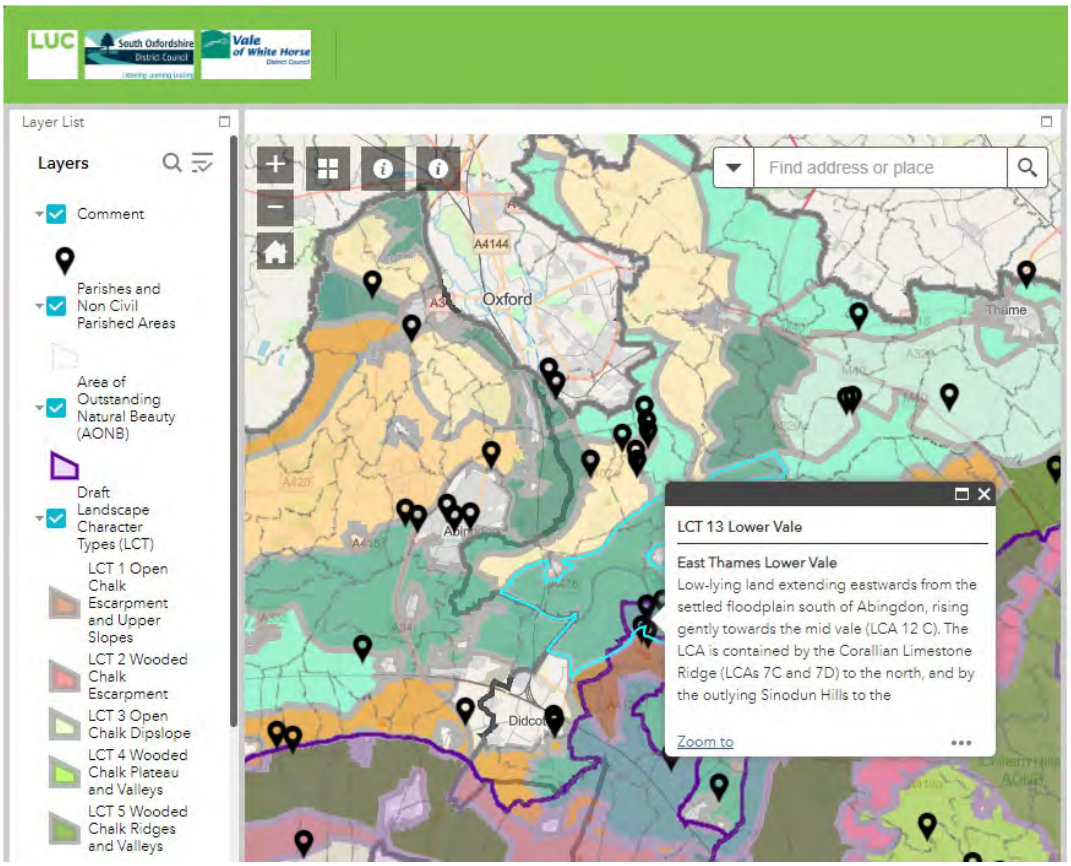


Figure C.2: Interactive whiteboard comments

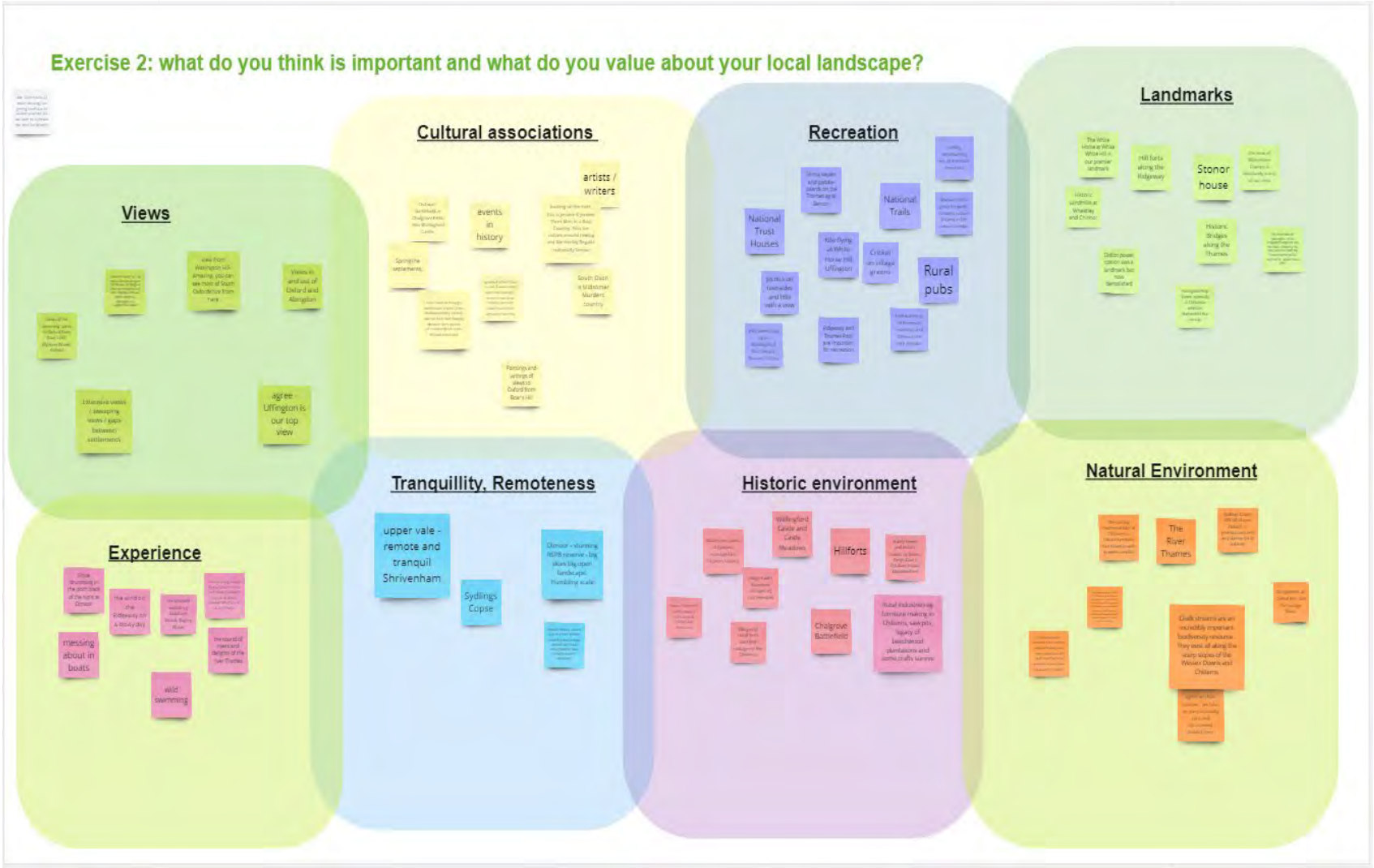
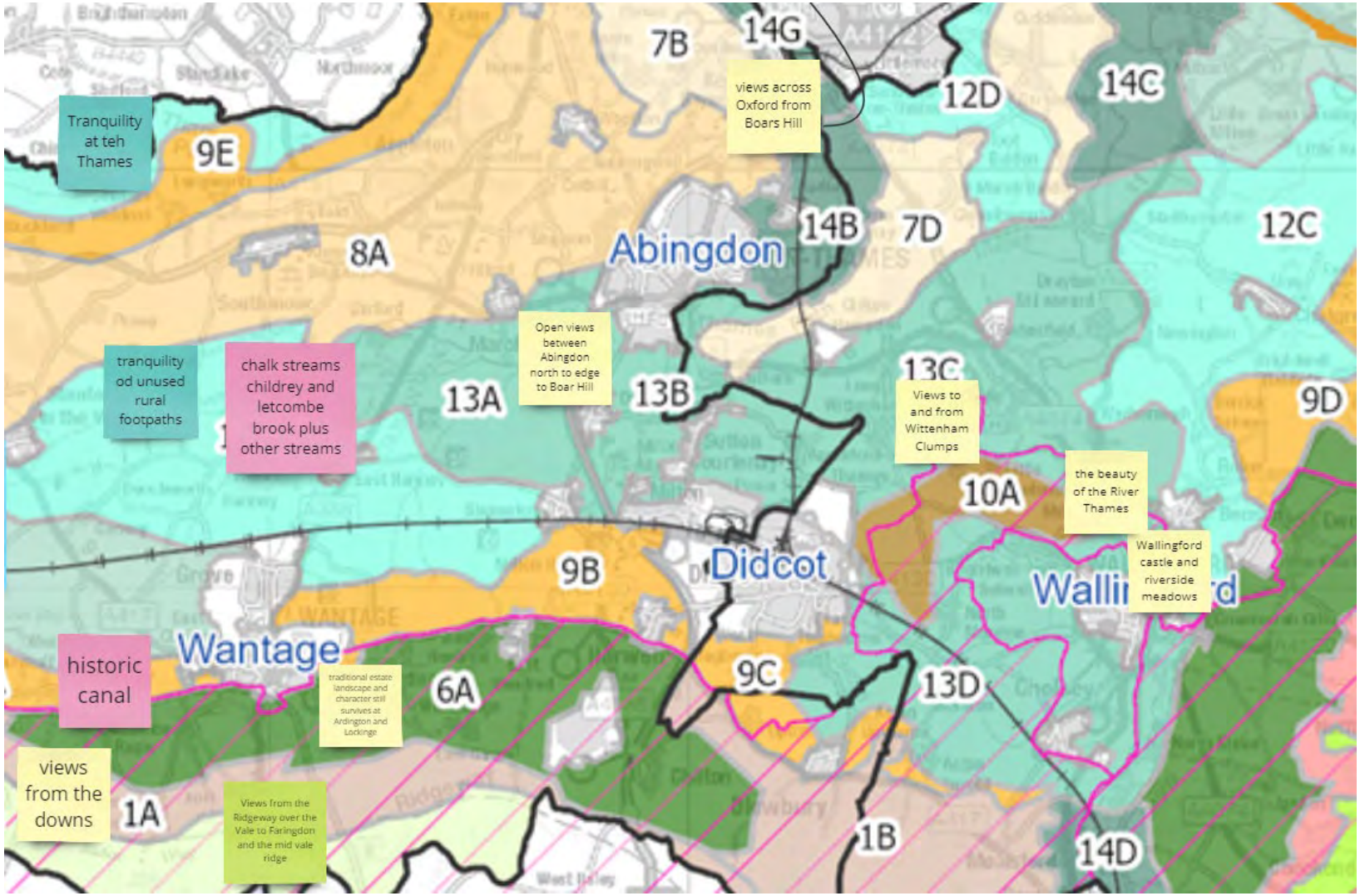


Figure C.3: Interactive whiteboard comments on map



Appendix D

User Guide

This user guide is designed for applicants and developers to follow when considering a development proposal outside of the main towns and villages, and for Development Managers within South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils reviewing applications, to ensure landscape character is considered.

D.1 Applicants should use the Landscape Character Assessment and other related guidance to inform the design process. They should follow the steps set out below before submitting a planning application, to ensure that key characteristics, valued landscape qualities and guidelines are considered at an early stage in the planning and design of the development.

D.2 Development proposals must demonstrate, as part of a planning application, how landscape character has influenced their siting, scale and design. Proposals that are likely to result in significant effects on the landscape and/or views and visual amenity will require a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) to be undertaken. For smaller scale proposals a full LVIA may not be required be in these instances a proportionate landscape appraisal (LVA) can be undertaken. The District Council should be consulted with respect to the type of assessment required. In all cases the assessments should follow the methodology set out in the current Guidelines of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA – **[See reference** 13**]**).

Step 1: What type of change is proposed?

Step 2: Which landscape character area (LCA) is the proposal in (refer to **Figure 5.1**)? If the proposal is close to the edge of two or more LCAs all relevant profiles will need to be consulted.

Step 3: Will any of the key characteristics in the LCA be affected by the proposal? If so, which ones and how?

Step 4: Will any of the LCA's valued qualities be affected by the proposal? If so, which ones and how?

Step 5: Will the proposal conflict with the LCA's landscape strategy and guidelines? If so, which ones and how?

Step 6: Can the proposal and mitigation help implement any of the landscape guidelines and contribute to landscape conservation, enhancement or restoration? If so, which ones and how?

Step 7: If the answer is yes to any of steps 3, 4 or 5, can the proposal be altered in any way to avoid or reduce adverse effects on key characteristics, valued qualities or guidelines? If so, how?

Checklist

Referring to the relevant landscape character area profiles, have you considered the following general prompts?

- Does the proposal reinforce and enhance local distinctiveness and local landscape and/or settlement character?
- Does the proposal enhance the sense of place through careful design (including consideration of siting, massing, scale and materials)?
- Do proposals for new buildings respond to the existing topography?
- Does the choice of materials and colours for new buildings and structures reflect the landscape around them, as well as traditional building styles?
- Does the proposal protect and enhance key views, including views to and from valued landscapes, views from public rights of way and open access land etc, and views into, out of, and across settlements?
- Does the proposal retain existing vegetation and enhance with new planting?
- Does the proposal use existing roads and tracks for site access? Do new roads and tracks fit in with the landscape character and complement the pattern of existing road networks?
- Does the proposal improve access to the public rights of way network and/or open access land?
- Does the proposal include aspects of Green Blue Infrastructure, integrated with biodiversity enhancement and high quality public open space where suitable?
- Does the proposal minimise effects on tranquillity, including light pollution/dark skies?
- Have cumulative effects (including in-combination effects) with other existing or planned developments been considered?

References

1 Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment

2 LUC and Hoare Lea (2024) Dark Skies/Light Impact Methodology Report

3 LUC (2024) Tranquillity Assessment – Final Report

4 LUC (2024) South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse: Valued Landscapes Assessment

5 LUC (2024) South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Renewable Energy Study

6 Natural England National Character Area website

7 OWLS: Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (2004). Available at: https://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/wcm/connect/occ/OWLS/Home/

8 Lepus Consulting (2017) Landscape Character Assessment for the Local Plan 2033, South Oxfordshire District Council

9 Hankinson Duckett Associates (2017) Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment

10 Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024.

11 North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024

12 LUC (2002) North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment Technical Report

13 The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition

Report produced by LUC

Bristol
12th Floor, Beacon Tower, Colston Street, Bristol BS1 4XE
0117 929 1997
bristol@landuse.co.uk

Cardiff
16A, 15th Floor, Brunel House, 2 Fitzalan Rd, Cardiff CF24 0EB
0292 032 9006
cardiff@landuse.co.uk

Edinburgh
Atholl Exchange, 6 Canning Street, Edinburgh EH3 8EG
0131 202 1616
edinburgh@landuse.co.uk

Glasgow
37 Otago Street, Glasgow G12 8JJ
0141 334 9595
glasgow@landuse.co.uk

London
250 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8RD
020 7383 5784
london@landuse.co.uk

Manchester
6th Floor, 55 King Street, Manchester M2 4LQ
0161 537 5960
manchester@landuse.co.uk

landuse.co.uk

Landscape Design / Strategic Planning & Assessment
Development Planning / Urban Design & Masterplanning
Environmental Impact Assessment / Landscape Planning & Assessment
Landscape Management / Ecology / Historic Environment / GIS & Visualisation

LCT 13: Lower Vale

Landscape character type summary

The clay vales, which form the majority of the land area within South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, are located beneath the chalk downlands and Midvale Ridge. They are divided into Upper, Middle and Lower Vales. The Lower Vales are the lowest-lying clay-based landscapes, generally below 55 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), centred around the River Thames south of the Midvale Ridge, north of the North Wessex Downs and west of the Chilterns. Sand and gravel deposits are characteristic of the Lower Vale areas and landscapes resulting from the working of these deposits are characteristic of the area between Abingdon and Didcot. East and west of this the Lower Vales are largely under arable cultivation, in larger, flatter fields than are characteristic of the Middle and Upper Vales.

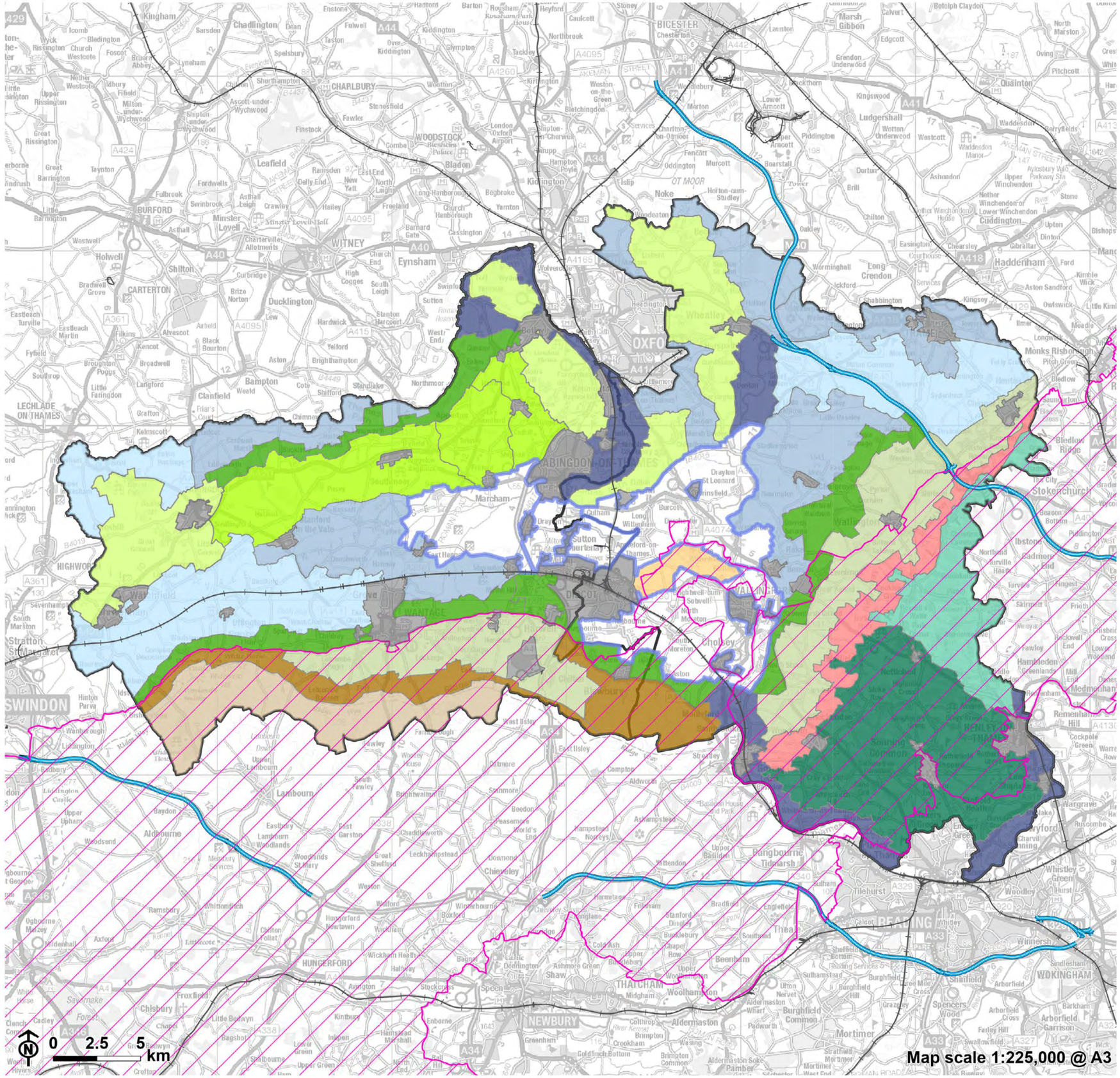
Four landscape character areas (LCA) are identified:

- LCA 13A: Ock Lower Vale
- LCA 13B: Abingdon-Didcot Lower Vale
- LCA 13C: East Thames Lower Vale
- LCA 13D: South Thames Lower Vale

Landscape Character Assessment
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils

LUC

Landscape Character Type Overview



13: Lower Vale
District boundary
National Landscape
Motorway
Railway
Built up area

Other LCT's
1: Open Chalk Escarpment and Upper Slopes
2: Wooded Chalk Escarpment
3: Open Chalk Dipslope
4: Wooded Chalk Plateau and Valleys
5: Wooded Chalk Ridges and Valleys
6: Chalk Escarpment Footslopes
7: Ridge Hilltops
8: Ridge Slope
9: Vale Edge Slopes
10: Lower Vale Hills
11: Upper Vale
12: Middle Vale
14: River Valley

LCA 13A: Ock Lower Vale
District boundary
Built up area

12A
9G
8A
8B
8C
12B
14D
7D
13C
13B
11B
9C
9B

Map scale 1:38,000 @ A3

0 1 2 km

12315_LCA_Series_A3L_r3 10/09/2024 EB:bell_j

LCA 13A: Ock Lower Vale

Character Area Location

Located to the south-west of Abingdon-on-Thames in Vale of White Horse District, the LCA comprises low-lying land associated with the River Ock and its floodplain. The relatively flat, shallow 'bowl' landform is contained by surrounding higher ground of the wooded limestone ridge to the north (LCA 8A-C), with gently rising vale landscapes continuing to the south, west and east ((LCA 12B and LCA 13B).

Key characteristics

- Distinctively flat, flow-lying landform with very little topographic variation. The River Ock flows through the area towards the River Thames, fed by a number of smaller streams and brooks.
- A predominantly arable landscape of large-scale irregular-shaped fields bounded by a network of ditches or low and gappy hedgerows; some smaller-scale pastoral fields adjacent to the River Ock.
- Woodland cover is limited to small scattered mixed deciduous woodland copses and coniferous plantations, often associated with farmsteads. These combine with mature trees and riparian vegetation along the meandering watercourses, resulting in a greater sense of woodland cover.
- Semi-natural habitats include a large area of floodplain grazing marsh associated with pastures along the River Ock.
- Sparse settlement pattern of Garford village in the north and scattered farmsteads, with limited road access. The presence of several mill

buildings and the former Wilts and Berks canal reflects the industrial heritage of the area.

- A well-connected network of public rights of way crosses the landscape, linking settlements in adjacent character areas; there is more limited access to the north.
- Open to semi-enclosed views are afforded across much of the landscape, although in some areas higher hedgerows, mature trees, and woodland copses and plantations limit views. Intervisibility with the North Wessex Downs National Landscape to the south and the Corallian Limestone Ridge to the north provides wooded horizons to most views.
- There is a sense of tranquillity and remoteness in the core floodplain, by virtue of the lack of settlement and limited public access. Proximity to main roads reduces tranquillity elsewhere, and solar farms, and a large warehouse complex, are modern features in the south.

LCA 13A: Ock Lower Vale
District boundary
Watercourse
Surface water
Flood zone 3
Flood zone 2

Elevation (metres)

289.02
200
150
100
50
0

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:38,000 @ A3

LCA_Elevation_Hydro/12315_LCA_Series_Elevation_Hydro_r2 27/08/2024 EB:bournazel_j

The River Ock and floodplain, close to the edge of Abingdon:

Solar farm contained by scrubby hedgerows near Steventon

Garford seen across open arable fields

The A34 crosses the landscape:

Description

Natural (landform, water, semi-natural land cover)

- Underlying geology comprises Ampthill Clay Formation and Kimmeridge Clay Formation, and areas of the Gault Mudstone Formation. The river corridor is underlain by Stanford Formation Limestone bedrock geology, with alluvium clay, silt, sand and gravel superficial deposits.
- Distinctively flat, low-lying landform at around 60 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) with very little topographic variation.
- The River Ock runs through north and east of the landscape. A dense network of minor watercourses also drains the landscape, including Nor Brook, Childrey Brook and Mere Dike.
- Woodland cover comprises mixed deciduous woodland and coniferous plantations in small angular or linear copses, sometimes associated with farmsteads. The riparian corridor along the River Ock is densely vegetated with species including ash, willow and poplar.
- A large area of priority habitat floodplain grazing marsh is associated with the floodplain of the River Ock. Ock Meadow Nature Reserve is a locally important site.

Cultural/social (land use, settlement, infrastructure, historic character)

- Land use is primarily arable, with large-scale, irregular shaped fields.
- Field boundaries are often open, formed by drainage ditches and watercourses. Elsewhere boundary vegetation varies, with some fields without significant vegetation, or with broken tree lines. Where intact, hawthorn hedges along field boundaries and roads are generally maintained to low heights. There is some reinforcement by post and wire fencing.

- Land adjacent to the River Ock comprises smaller-scale pastoral fields of floodplain grazing.
- Settlement within the area is limited to the linear village of Garford in the north and a handful of farms, but the larger villages of Steventon and East Hanney abut the Lower Vale to the south and Marcham does likewise to the north. To the east of the A34 the Lower Vale meets Abingdon and Drayton.
- The presence of the partially restored, partially derelict Wilts and Berks Canal, and mills (such as Venn Hill and Marcham Mill, both Grade II Listed) reflect the industrial heritage of the area.
- Limited internal road access along a couple of rural lanes. In contrast busy A roads run close to the LCA edges, including the A34 in the east, the A415 in the north and the A338 in the west.
- Public rights of way provide access across the landscape, linking small farmsteads and settlements in adjacent character areas. These include a small part of the Wilts & Berks Canal, which linked the Kennet and Avon Canal with the River Thames at Abingdon.
- Two large areas of solar farms are relatively inconspicuous in the landscape due to the uniform, low-lying topography and surrounding vegetation, particularly Langmead Solar farm which is enclosed by a tree belt. Solar PV panels are visible in close proximity from some locations along Hanney Road.

Perceptual (views, tranquillity, associations)

- Open views across the flat, large-scale landscape are frequent due to the uniform topography and limited intervening vegetation. Long views south to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and north towards the Corallian Limestone Ridge are possible, and create a wooded horizon, reinforcing the sense of being located within a broad vale landscape.
- An electrical sub-station is a prominent structure seen to the north-west of Steventon, with associated connecting electricity pylon routes visible across the area.

- The area provides a physical gap and contributes to the sense of separation between Steventon, Drayton and Abingdon, between Abingdon and Marcham, and between East and West Hanney.
- There are some views to settlement edges But woodland blocks, belts and tree lines close to settlements add texture and height to the landscape and provide some screening to development. Abingdon is largely screened from view from the west by tree cover along the A34.
- Modern developments increase in the south, including solar farms and a substation, combined with visual and audible disruption form traffic on the roads. In contrast, much of the rest of the area has a more rural character.
- There is a degree of tranquillity and remoteness across much of the Lower Vale, by virtue of the lack of settlement and limited public access, particularly where tree cover creates some containment around the smaller fields close to the River Ock. However, the busy A roads (A338, A34 and A415) are audibly present across much of the landscape, and solar farms, a large warehouse complex, and proximity to main roads (including the A34) introduce detracting features in the south. The Tranquillity Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse categorises almost 90% of the LCA in Zone 2 (‘areas of some tranquillity’).
- Roads and settlements introduce light pollution around the margins of the Lower Vale but almost half of the area is classified in the darkest of the assessment bands defined in the Dark Skies Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

Valued qualities

- The pastoral character along the River Ock and other watercourses with smaller-scale pastoral fields, riparian vegetation and floodplain grazing marsh contributing positively to the landscape.
- Recreational access to the landscape via a network of local public rights of way, including along the partially restored Wilts and Berks Canal.
- Historic mill buildings associated with the river contribute to the time-depth and historic character to the area.

- Open views across the landscape and intervisibility with the elevated North Wessex Downs National Landscape to the south, and the Corallian Limestone Ridge to the north.
- Hedgerows, riparian woodland along watercourses and scattered woodland copses result in a greater sense of woodland cover, providing some visual screening and structure to the landscape.
- Sparsely settled landscape with a rural character and sense of tranquillity and remoteness, particularly in the centre.
- Provides a physical gap and sense of separation between settlements on the edges of the Lower Vale, including between Abingdon, Drayton and Steventon, and between East and West Hanney.

LCA 13A: Ock Lower Vale
District boundary
CRoW access land
Special Area of Conservation
Site of Special Scientific Interest
National Nature Reserve
Local Wildlife Site
Local Nature Reserve
Ancient woodland
Local Landscape Designation

OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:38,000 @ A3

12315_LCA_Series_Landscape_Designations_r4 17/09/2024 EB:bell_j

LCA 13A: Ock Lower Vale
District boundary
Scheduled monument
Conservation area
Registered parks and gardens

Listed building

Grade I
Grade II*
Grade II

OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:38,000 @ A3

12315_LCA_Series_Cultural_Designations_r3 27/08/2024 EB:bournazel_j

Forces for change

- Loss of hedges and fragmentation of the hedgerow network along field boundaries and a decline in numbers of hedgerow trees and riparian vegetation along ditches. This increases the sense of openness and may affect the more semi-enclosed character close to the river.
- Introduction of solar farm developments, changing the traditional agricultural land uses and having a localised impact on views across the landscape.
- Agricultural intensification, diversification and amalgamation of fields into larger parcels of arable land, affecting the landscape pattern and smaller-scale pastoral character along watercourses.
- Pressure for increased development on the edges of Marcham (including as part of the South-East of Marcham Strategic Allocation) and Steventon and along the western edge of Abingdon (albeit the latter is likely to remain physically contained by the A34). This could affect the sparse settlement pattern and rural character.
- Continued restoration of the Wilts & Berks Canal, including a new section through this landscape, which will partially alter the character. This may also lead to increased recreation, loss of vegetation and a demand for greater visitor facilities, altering the rural character.
- The Lower Vale landscapes may be susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
    - Deciduous woodlands are facing decline due to warmer winters, altered rainfall patterns, drier summers and increased frequency of extreme events; there may be a shift in vegetation type and composition, increased competition from invasive species, greater numbers of insect and mammal pests, a greater risk of infection by various soil and water-borne pathogens, and a greater risk of wind-throw and loss of mature trees.

- Drier summers and wetter winters may lead to increased mortality and die-back of certain hedgerow tree species; an increased occurrence of insect pests and pathogens could lead to a potential loss or significant reduction in populations of key hedgerow tree species; and increased storm activity may lead to the loss of mature and veteran trees within hedgerows.
- Wetter winters may mean woody species in hedgerows are exposed to prolonged flooding in the growing season and will be at risk of dying, and winter trimming will become more difficult due to wet ground (preferred to autumn trimming to ensure food supply for birds).
- Intensification of adjacent land use leading to increased impacts on hedgerows such as pesticide drift and nutrient enrichment.
- Hotter drier summers and wetter winters and winter flooding could result in changes to wetland and riparian plant community composition; some non-native species may become invasive, and other currently geographically restricted species may spread more easily.
- Wetter winters and higher peak river flows may lead to increased flood defence activity, creating more physical habitat degradation and introducing potentially detracting features.
- Hotter, drier summers and wetter winters will lead to changes in food production and growing seasons, and are likely to cause heat stress to livestock.
- Soil moisture deficits and inundation/flooding, as well as changes in temperatures (hotter, drier, longer summers, wetter winters), could lead to changes in food production and growing seasons. Flooded land is only capable of supporting lower-value crops, pasture or woodland, which would impact important arable crops. Landscape appearance will likely also be altered, particularly if relocation of growing areas is required or crop diversification occurs (causing a need for changes in field pattern and the potential removal of field margins, hedgerows, woodlands).
- Increase in storm damage could affect veteran and mature trees, and designed landscapes.

Landscape strategy and guidelines

Maintain the open rural character of the landscape, which forms gaps between settlements and affords long distance views outwards towards the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and Corallian Limestone Ridge.

- Maintain the distinctive sparse settlement pattern and minimise the impact of any new development on local character and on views from other areas. Ensure any new development does not cause perceived coalescence between the distinct settlements, particularly between West Hanney and East Hanney, and between Steventon and Drayton (where roadside development in the gap already weakens perceived separation). Retain the openness of the centre of the LCA as an important landscape setting to the settlements.
- Refer to the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Renewable Energy Study when considering any solar panel applications. Consider the impact on views of the solar arrays from the surrounding higher ground, and the cumulative impact of further solar development.
- Maintain the valued recreational use of the landscape and consider opportunities to introduce additional public rights of way connectivity to the north to enhance appreciation of views and landscape character.
- Consider impact of development on long views north from the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
- Consider the impact of lighting on night-time views (refer to the guidance in the Dark Skies / Light Impact Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse).

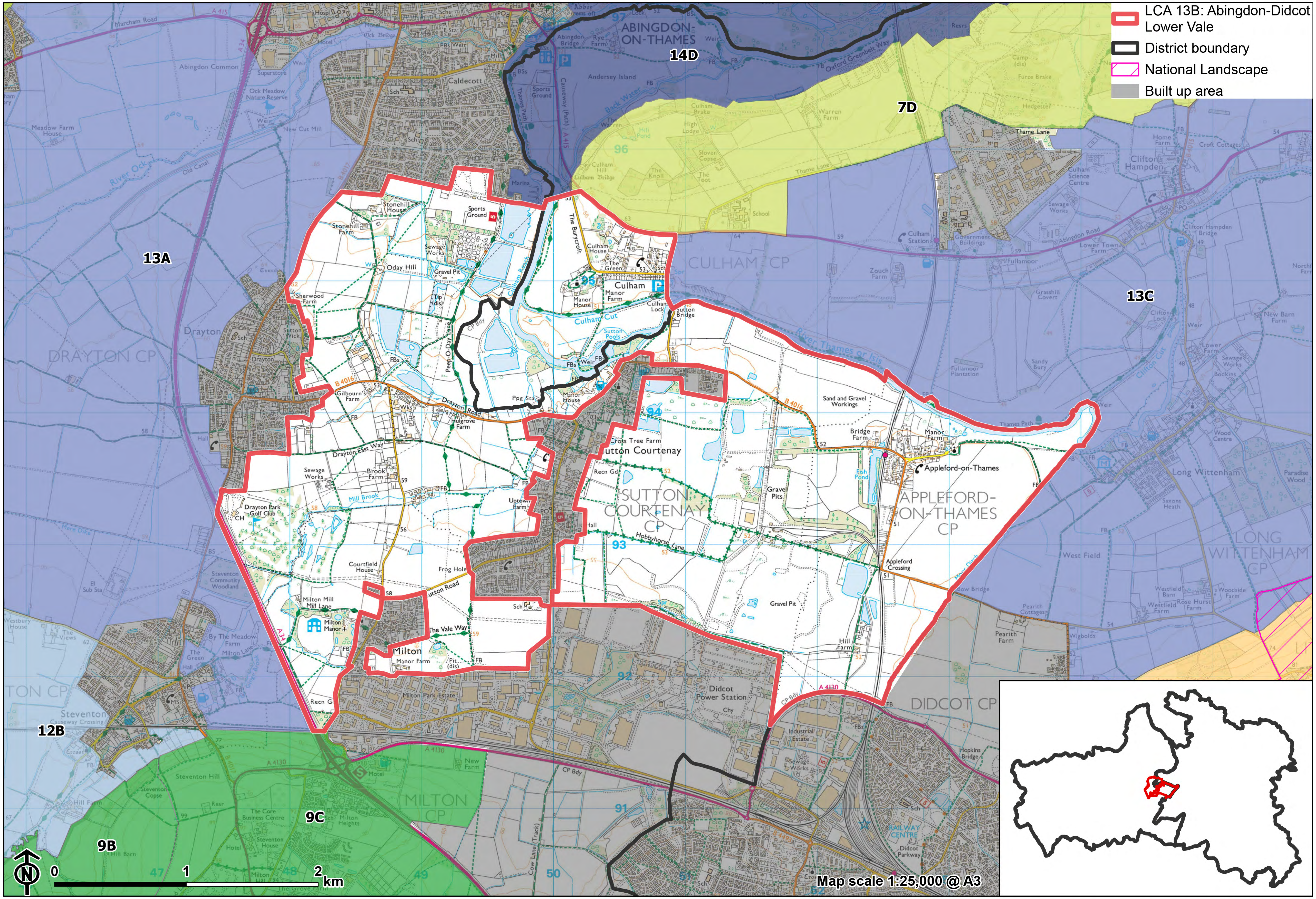
Retain the pastoral character along watercourses by strengthening the smaller-scale field pattern and conserving and enhancing areas of floodplain grazing marsh and riparian vegetation and the ecological value they provide. Consider opportunities to enhance the ecological value and appearance of intensively farmed arable land.

- Manage grazing marsh habitats to enhance their biodiversity value and appearance; ensure best practice management through suitable grazing regimes and avoiding agrochemical and fertiliser inputs; manage recreational routes to avoid/minimise disturbance; and manage scrub vegetation appropriately to maintain the open character.
- Conserve and enhance wetland habitats, including riparian vegetation, to enhance their contribution to landscape character and their nature conservation and biodiversity value.
- Encourage adjacent land uses which strengthen role as ecological corridors and enhance landscape character.
- Seek opportunities to enhance connectivity with other habitats nearby by creating green corridors and networks.
- Manage arable land to enhance its biodiversity value and connectivity, by maintaining and expanding the area of land available for uncultivated arable field margins; seek to maximise the diversity of margins to provide a range of habitats and to assist in the movement of species through the landscape and include species and cultivars that are able to tolerate and flower under hotter, drier summers.

Woodland cover should continue to provide ecological value and a sense of enclosure within an otherwise open landscape.

- Retain and enhance woodland copses and riparian woodland along watercourses.
- Encourage the appropriate management of woodland, including to reduce the impacts of pests and diseases and to increase its age structure and structural heterogeneity. Consider the promotion of natural colonisation adjacent to existing woodland, allowing locally native species to develop resilience to the pressures of climate change through natural processes.
- Explore opportunities to expand and connect existing woodland and tree cover through natural regeneration or small-scale planting, particularly around settlements. This will strengthen landscape character and bring benefits for biodiversity.

- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement, whilst maintaining characteristic long-distance views north and south; when establishing new hedges, aim to diversify the range of species and select species and provenances adapted to a wider range of climatic conditions.
- Use trees and woodland to integrate any new development into the landscape.


LCA 13B: Abingdon-Didcot Lower Vale
District boundary
National Landscape
Built up area
13A
13C
14D
7D
12B
9B
9C
ABINGDON-ON-THAMES
CULHAM CP
DRAYTON CP
SUTTON COURTENAY CP
APPLEFORD-ON-THAMES CP
LONG WITTENHAM CP
DIDCOT CP
MILTON CP
Culham
Sutton Courtenay
Appleford-on-Thames
Milton
Drayton
Didcot Power Station
Milton Park Estate
Clifton Hampden
Long Wittenham
Steventon
Caldecott
River Thames or Isis
Culham Cut
Sand and Gravel Workings
Gravel Pits
Drayton Park Golf Club
0
1
2
km
Map scale 1:25,000 @ A3

12315_LCA_Series_A3L_r3 10/09/2024 EB:bell_j

LCA 13B: Abingdon-Didcot Lower Vale

Character Area Location

A low-lying area of land located in the east of the Vale of White Horse district, to the south of Abingdon-on-Thames. The area forms part of the Thames floodplain extending between Abingdon and Didcot. The River Thames defines the eastern boundary, while the vale continues to the east and west (LCA 13A and 13C).

Key characteristics

- A flat, low-lying floodplain landscape associated with the River Thames; landform is heavily influenced in places by current and former gravel extraction.
- Tree cover along watercourses, woodland belts along the A34, scattered deciduous woodlands, and broad tree belts and thick hedgerows along agricultural field boundaries create a partially wooded landscape; other semi-natural habitats include distinctive areas of floodplain grazing marsh along the rivers.
- The floodplains have an irregular pattern of pastoral fields, while larger scale often open arable fields feature on higher ground to the south and south-west. Field boundaries vary, but the majority are well-vegetated with low, thick hedges and mature trees.
- A settled landscape featuring villages, ribbon development along the road corridors, and a railway in the east. Settlements tend to be well-integrated by woodland cover.
- Current and former gravel extraction sites have altered the landscape, and locally reduce tranquillity and rurality.

- Historic villages at Drayton, Sutton Courtenay and Milton contain clusters of Listed Buildings and have designated Conservation Areas. Small manor houses and parklands are also a feature.
- Strong public access via a network of public rights of way, including the Thames Path National Trail and the Vale Way long distance path.
- Views of the adjacent urban edges of Abingdon and Didcot, as well as south to the wooded backdrop of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
- Strongly influenced by development within the area, and adjacent urban areas at Didcot and Abingdon, but there are some pockets of tranquillity along the Thames where tree cover gives a degree of containment.

LCA 13B: Abingdon-Didcot Lower Vale
District boundary
Watercourse
Surface water
Flood zone 3
Flood zone 2
Elevation (metres)
289.02
200
150
100
50
0

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:25,000 @ A3

Open arable fields with wooded horizon beyond (Appleford-on-Thames):

Culham Cut, a stretch of canal built in the early 19th century to aid navigation on the Thames:

Modern settlement edge of Drayton seen across large open arable fields:

Open arable fields with electricity infrastructure (near Sutton Courtenay):

Description

Natural (landform, water, semi-natural land cover)

- Underlying geology comprises Ampthill Clay Formation, Kimmeridge Clay Formation Mudstone, and Gault Formation Mudstone bedrock geology, with alluvium clay, silt, sand and gravel superficial deposits associated with the river channel.
- An area of relatively flat river floodplain lying around 50 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), associated with the River Thames. Ditches and tributary watercourses drain the low-lying area flowing north towards the Thames.
- Semi-natural habitats include small deciduous woodlands scattered across the area, as well as notable areas of floodplain grazing marsh along the River Thames. The lowland meadow at Kelaart's field near Milton forms an important green gap in the built-up landscape.
- Restored areas of gravel extraction and quarrying include rough grassland, scrub, new hedges, and young woodland planting, as well as lakes formed from former gravel extraction. Tree cover is relatively extensive along watercourses, with broad tree belts, thick hedgerows along agricultural field boundaries, and riparian vegetation along the Thames, including willow, poplar and alder. There are distinctive tree groups within pasture to the north of Appleford.

Cultural/social (land use, settlement, infrastructure, historic character)

- Land use is mixed, comprising an irregular pattern of pastoral fields, waterside meadows and pasture along the floodplain. Smaller arable fields abut the eastern edge of Sutton Courtenay, their well-vegetated boundaries providing some buffering between the settlement and quarrying activity. Field boundaries vary, but the majority are low, thick out-grown hedges with occasional mature trees. The A34 dual carriageway is well screened by tree belts, and there is some tree cover associated with the edges of settlements.

- This is a well settled landscape, located between the industrial edge of Didcot (at Milton Park) to south and the town of Abingdon to the north. Sutton Courtenay is a largely linear village occupying almost all of the gap between Didcot and the River Thames, with the smaller village of Culham in turn lying between Sutton Courtenay and Abingdon, separated from both by floodplain. Drayton occupies much of the gap between Abingdon and Milton, and there are pockets of scattered development in particular between Drayton and Sutton Courtenay. Further east, the village of Appleford has ribbon development to the south, whilst Didcot is expanding northwards (the Didcot North East strategic allocation).
- Gravel workings and landfill have altered the landscape, through earthworks and lakes formed from former extraction pits. Other modern land uses include a sewage works, allotments, sports ground and playing fields south of Abingdon. There is a golf course between Milton and Drayton.
- Small-scale manor houses and their associated parklands are found at Milton (Grade I Listed manor house), Sutton Courtenay (Grade I Listed Norman hall and Grade II* Listed manor house) and Culham (Grade II* Listed manor house). The settlements are also covered by Conservation Areas and contain a number of Listed Buildings. Only Sutton Courtenay Manor is a Registered Park and Garden (RPG), although a parkland character remains at Milton and Culham. A strong local vernacular of red brick and tile remains, despite modern extensions to the villages.
- A number of former settlement sites are recorded as Scheduled Monuments, and show the long history of settlement on this floodplain.
- Public rights of way provide access across the area, including the Thames Path National Trail and Vale Way long distance path; National Cycle Network Route 5 crosses north-south through the east.
- The majority of the fieldscapes are of modern origin with limited time depth, having been subject to amalgamation. Fields to the west of Sutton Courtenay are identified as reorganised enclosure, dating to the medieval period.
- Road and rail corridors cut through the area, including the A34 dual carriageway which passes through the south-west, and the Great West

Mainline railway line through the south. Recent electrification of the railway has added large-scale overhead electrification infrastructure, which combined with electricity pylons add large vertical elements to the skyline.

Perceptual (views, tranquillity, associations)

- Significant human influence of settlement, quarrying and transport infrastructure within the landscape, and views to the adjacent industrial areas at Milton Park and Didcot limits the sense of tranquillity and remoteness across the majority of this landscape. Despite demolition of the cooling towers and main chimney of the former Didcot Power Station, a number of industrial buildings are still visible.
- Views within and out of the area are frequently obscured by vegetation and mature trees. There are glimpsed views of the Corallian Limestone Ridge on the horizon in views to the north, and in the west there are views northward to Boars Hill and east to Wittenham Clumps.
- There are pockets of tranquillity along the Thames and its floodplain where tree cover gives a degree of peace and isolation. However, nearby human influence, including filtered glimpses of adjacent settlement, electricity pylons and on-going gravel extraction in the south-east, limits the overall sense of remoteness. The Tranquillity Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse categorises much of the LCA in Zone 1 (‘areas of high tranquillity’) but 16% in Zone 4 (‘areas of low tranquillity’).
- Proximity to Abingdon, Didcot, commercial / industrial development at Milton Park Estate and Didcot, and lighting along the major roads introduces light pollution. Less than 50% of this landscape is categorised as within the darkest 2 bands in the Dark Skies Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

Valued qualities

- Priority habitats floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows and deciduous woodland add to landscape character and provide ecological

value. Regenerated areas of scrub and woodland habitat improve the character of former gravel extraction sites.

- The pastoral character along watercourses due to the smaller-scale irregular field pattern along the floodplain, riparian vegetation and floodplain grazing marsh and lowland meadows which contribute positively to the landscape.
- Tree cover around settlement edges and along watercourses, with broad tree belts, thick hedgerows along agricultural field boundaries creates a well-wooded character, integrates settlement edge and provides some visual screening.
- Provides an immediate setting to settlements, including the historic estate at Culham, Sutton Courtenay and Milton, containing clusters of Listed Buildings and covered by Conservation Area designations.
- Historic features representing a range of time depths, including prehistoric settlement sites, medieval field patterns, and historic manor houses with associated designed grounds.
- Recreational access to the landscape via a network of public rights of way, including the Thames Path National Trail, National Cycle Network Route 5 and Oxford Greenbelt Way long distance footpath.
- The sense of tranquillity experienced along the river and floodplain, in contrast to the busy suburban edge of Abingdon.
- Open landscape forms gaps between settlements, helping to retain the individual identities of Drayton, Sutton Courtenay, Culham and Appleford.
- Land east of Appleford is more open and rural, and is included within the Appleford to Long Wittenham Local Landscape Designation.

LCA 13B: Abingdon-Didcot Lower Vale
District boundary
CRoW access land
National Landscape
Site of Special Scientific Interest
Local Wildlife Site
Ancient woodland
Local Landscape Designation

Abingdon Common
Meadow Farm Ho
Hospl
Hotel
Caldecott
Sch
Abingdon Br
Rye Fm
Andersey Island
Causeway
Back Water
Oxford Greenbelt Way
Warren Fm
High Lodge
Furze Brake
Resr
Marina
Stonehill Ho
Schola Europaea
Science Centre
CULHAM STA
PH
Culham
Culham Ho
Culham Cut
Zouch Fm
Fullamoor
Sewage Wks
Oday Hill
Gravel Pit
Sutton Wick
Tumulus
Canal (dis)
A 34
B 4017
Culham Bridge
Sutton Pools
River Thames or Isis
Clifton Cut
Clifton Lock
Weir
Drayton
Otney
Weir
Manor Ho
Thames Path
Sand & Gravel Pit
Bridge Fm
Gilbourn's Fm
B 4016
Sutton Courtenay
Gravel Pit
Appleford-on-Thames
Long Wittenham
West Field
Westfield Fm
Pearith Fm
Willington
Moor Ditch
Drayton Mill
Wks
Mill Brook
CH
El Sub Sta
Milton Mill
Milton Manor
Milton
Gravel Pit
Hill Fm
LC
The Views
Steventon
Steventon Hill
Hill Fm
Research Centre
Milton Park
Power Station
New Fm
Hotel
A4130
Milton Heights
Railway Centre
Ladygr
0 1 2 km
Map scale 1:25,000 @ A3

LCA 13B: Abingdon-Didcot Lower Vale

District boundary

Scheduled monument

Conservation area

Registered parks and gardens

Listed building

- Grade I
- Grade II*
- Grade II

Map scale 1:25,000 @ A3

0 1 2 km

Forces for change

- Past and current mineral extraction has altered the natural topography and land use, with current extraction having an impact on tranquillity.
- Loss of hedges and fragmentation of the hedgerow network along field boundaries and the decline in numbers of hedgerow trees and riparian vegetation along ditches affects the well-wooded character and sense of enclosure.
- Agricultural intensification, diversification and amalgamation of fields into lager parcels of arable land, affecting the landscape pattern and smaller-scale pastoral fields along watercourses.
- Increase in horse grazing and associated facilities, changing the agricultural character.
- Increased recreation along the Thames Path and Oxford Greenbelt Way, which may lead to a demand for greater visitor facilities, altering the rural character.
- Pressure for increased development on the edges of Drayton and Sutton Courtenay (including as part of the East Sutton Courtenay Strategic Allocation) which would affect the rural character of the surrounding landscape and the setting it provides to the historic cores. Increased development pressure in neighbouring towns of Abingdon and Didcot (including as part of the Didcot Power Station and Didcot North East Strategic Allocations) may also impact on views from the vale.
- Settlement gaps in this area are narrow so there is a danger of perceived coalescence if gaps become narrower – for example between Abingdon and Drayton, Drayton and Steventon, Milton and Sutton Courtenay, and Sutton Courtenay and Drayton.
- Plans for new road building and upgrades between Milton, Didcot, Appleford and Culham Science Park (to the north), including a new river crossing, will introduce further human disturbance into the landscape.
- The Lower Vale landscapes may be susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:

- Deciduous woodlands are facing decline due to warmer winters, altered rainfall patterns, drier summers and increased frequency of extreme events; there may be a shift in vegetation type and composition, increased competition from invasive species, greater numbers of insect and mammal pests, a greater risk of infection by various soil and water-borne pathogens, and a greater risk of wind-throw and loss of mature trees.
- Drier summers and wetter winters may lead to increased mortality and die-back of certain hedgerow tree species; an increased occurrence of insect pests and pathogens could lead to a potential loss or significant reduction in populations of key hedgerow tree species; and increased storm activity may lead to the loss of mature and veteran trees within hedgerows.
- Wetter winters may mean woody species in hedgerows are exposed to prolonged flooding in the growing season and will be at risk of dying, and winter trimming will become more difficult due to wet ground (preferred to autumn trimming to ensure food supply for birds).
- Intensification of adjacent land use leading to increased impacts on hedgerows such as pesticide drift and nutrient enrichment.
- Hotter drier summers and wetter winters and winter flooding could result in changes to wetland and riparian plant community composition; some non-native species may become invasive, and other currently geographically restricted species may spread more easily.
- Wetter winters and higher peak river flows may lead to increased flood defence activity, creating more physical habitat degradation and introducing potentially detracting features.
- Hotter, drier summers and wetter winters will lead to changes in food production and growing seasons, and are likely to cause heat stress to livestock. Flooded land is only capable of supporting lower-value crops, pasture or woodland, which would impact important arable crops. Landscape appearance will likely also be altered, particularly if relocation of growing areas is required or crop diversification occurs (causing a need for changes in field pattern and the potential removal of field margins, hedgerows, woodlands).

Landscape strategy and guidelines

Maintain the open rural character of the landscape, which provides a setting to, and forms gaps between, settlements, including the more historic villages.

- Maintain perceived separation between settlements, avoiding further ribbon development on connecting roads and retaining open rural views across gaps.
- Any new development should use materials which are in keeping with, or complement, the local vernacular of brick and tile.
- Respect the setting to Conservation Areas and sensitivity of historic settlement edges, by resisting changes to the landscape which are not in keeping with the landscape character, including intensive equestrian activities and unsympathetic housing developments.
- Maintain the valued recreational use of the landscape and consider opportunities to introduce additional public rights of way connectivity to enhance appreciation of views and landscape character.
- Consider the impact of lighting on night-time views (refer to the guidance in the Dark Skies Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse). Encourage initiatives to reduce light pollution in the area.

Historic parklands, and the historic value and landscape diversity they provide, should be conserved and enhanced.

- Conserve and manage historic parkland at Milton, Culham and Sutton Courtenay RPG. Replant key ornamental tree species to retain the parkland character where necessary.

Retain the pastoral character along watercourses by strengthening the smaller-scale irregular field pattern and conserving and enhancing areas of floodplain grazing marsh and riparian vegetation and the ecological value they provide. Consider opportunities to enhance the ecological value and appearance of intensively farmed arable land.

- Manage grazing marsh habitats to enhance their biodiversity value and appearance; ensure best practice management through suitable grazing regimes and avoiding agrochemical and fertiliser inputs; manage recreational routes to avoid/minimise disturbance; and manage scrub vegetation appropriately to maintain the open character.
- Conserve and enhance wetland habitats, including riparian vegetation, to enhance their contribution to landscape character and their nature conservation and biodiversity value.
- Encourage adjacent land uses which strengthen role as ecological corridors and enhance landscape character.
- Seek opportunities to enhance connectivity with other habitats nearby by creating green corridors and networks.
- Manage arable land to enhance its biodiversity value and connectivity, by maintaining and expanding the area of land available for uncultivated arable field margins; seek to maximise the diversity of margins to provide a range of habitats and to assist in the movement of species through the landscape and include species and cultivars that are able to tolerate and flower under hotter, drier summers.

Woodland cover should continue to provide ecological value and help to limit the urbanising visual influence of adjacent settlements, and create a sense of tranquillity along the rivers.

- Retain and enhance tree cover along watercourses, woodland belts, scattered deciduous woodlands, and broad tree belts and thick hedgerows.
- Encourage the appropriate management of woodland, including to reduce the impacts of pests and diseases and to increase its age structure and structural heterogeneity. Consider the promotion of natural colonisation adjacent to existing woodland, allowing locally native species to develop resilience to the pressures of climate change through natural processes.
- Explore opportunities to expand and connect existing woodland and tree cover through natural regeneration or small-scale planting, particularly

around settlements. This will strengthen landscape character and bring benefits for biodiversity.

- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement; when establishing new hedges, aim to diversify the range of species and select species and provenances adapted to a wider range of climatic conditions.
- Use trees and woodland to integrate development into the landscape.

LCA 13C: East Thames Lower Vale

District boundary

National Landscape

Built up area

7B

14C

7C

14E

8C

8B

12D

12C

14D

7D

13A

13B

9F

12B

10A

9B

9C

13D

9C

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:51,000 @ A3

12315_LCA_Series_A3L_r3 17/09/2024 EB:bell_j

LCA 13C: East Thames Lower Vale

Character Area Location

Low-lying land on the border between Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire districts, rising gently as it extends eastwards from the settled floodplain south of Abingdon. The LCA is contained by the Middle Vale (LCA 12C) to the west, the Corallian Limestone Ridge (LCAs 7C and 7D) to the north, and by the outlying Sinodun Hills to the south (LCA 10A). Small areas alongside the River Thames on the southern edge of the LCA fall within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

Key characteristics

- A flat, low-lying landscape associated with the River Thames and River Thame and several of their small tributaries; underlain by clay and alluvium near the river channels but better-drained gravel terraces elsewhere.
- Land use is predominantly arable, although there are some areas of smaller-scale pasture generally concentrated on the wetter, poorly draining land adjacent to the river.
- Widespread semi-natural habitats, which include extensive floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows, lowland fens and semi-improved grassland.
- Sparsely wooded, enabling long views across the landscape towards the surrounding hills. However, riparian woodland along the rivers and other small pockets of woodland result in a local sense of enclosure.
- Settlements are generally located close to watercourses, many of which retain a substantial number of Listed Buildings and have Conservation

Areas; the local vernacular includes timber framing and thatched roofs with occasional examples of cob walling. The ‘new’ village at Berinsfield, created in the 1960s, has a more modern urban influence.

- A dense network of public rights of way enables recreational access to the landscape, including the Shakespeare’s Way long distance footpath and Thames Path National Trail.
- An overall rural character with some intrusion of 20th century built form around Berinsfield, including a recent solar farm development, and at Culham Science Centre. Busy transport corridors such as the A4074, A329 and A4130 cross the area.

LCA 13C: East Thames Lower Vale

District boundary

Watercourse

Surface water

Flood zone 3

Flood zone 2

Elevation (metres)

289.02
200
150
100
50
0

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES

DIDCOT

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DIST

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:51,000 @ A3

LCA_Elevation_Hydro/12315_LCA_Series_Elevation_Hydro_r2 27/08/2024 EB:bournazel_j

Church spire of St Michael's & All Angels Church visible above riparin vegetation on the River Thames:

Views to Wittenham Clumps:

One of the lakes between Dorchester and Berinsfield provides recreational value as a watersports centre:

20th century built form around Berinsfield contrasts with rural character:

Description

Natural (landform, water, semi-natural land cover)

- Flat, low-lying topography lying between 50 and 60 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), much of it associated with the River Thames and River Thame floodplains.
- Gault Clay underlies the river corridor; a thin layer of alluvium along the water courses resulting in heavy soils with naturally impeded drainage.
- Away from the rivers, river terrace gravels support lighter soils. As a result, much of the floodplain has been drained and is now under intensive arable cultivation.
- The River Thames flows from Culham to Long Wittenham before heading north to Clifton Hampden. It then arches eastward, passing Burcot, before heading south to Little Wittenham and Shillingford.
- The River Thame flows south past Drayton St Leonard, converging with the River Thames south of Dorchester. A network of smaller watercourses and drainage ditches vein the farmed landscape.
- Former gravel quarries have been filled in as lakes, giving Dorchester the appearance of sitting on an island, with scattered small ponds and pools elsewhere. There is a series of reservoirs to the south-east of Shillingford.
- Wetland priority habitats are widespread in this area, including floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows, lowland fens, semi-improved grassland and deciduous woodland.
- Woodland typically occurs in scattered linear blocks within the farmed land. Some larger planted areas occur, for example at Paradise Wood. Riparian vegetation contributes to the woodland cover, with willow common. Ancient Woodland exists in small areas.

Cultural/social (land use, settlement, infrastructure, historic character)

- Land use is predominantly arable, although some smaller-scale areas of pasture are generally concentrated on the wetter, poorly draining land adjacent to the river.
- Species-rich hedgerows are distributed across the landscape. Tree-lined roads are a distinctive feature, such as along Little Wittenham Road.
- Settlements are generally located close to watercourses on terrace gravels, which have been favoured for settlement since prehistoric times due to the lighter, more workable soils, accessible water supply, and slight elevation above the most flood-prone areas. There are relatively small gaps on the north side of the Thames between Clifton Hampden, Burcot, Berinsfield and Dorchester, and across the floodplain of the River Thame between Chiselhampton and Stadhampton.
- A number of ancient settlement sites are designated as Scheduled Monuments, including a large area at Northfield Farm, north-east of Long Wittenham. Dorchester is a Roman settlement of notable significance as one of two walled Roman towns known in Oxfordshire.
- Many of the settlements retain a substantial number of historic buildings and have Conservation Areas. Due the lack of local building stone, most of the older houses are timber framed with thatched roofs and there are occasional examples of cob walling. Brick appears as ‘nogging’ for timber framed houses, in alternating bands of brick and flint in some eighteenth-century cottages and in a characteristic pattern of mellow red and grey brickwork such as in Dorchester. There are historic bridges across the Thames at Shillingford and Clifton Hampden.
- The character area is served by a dense network of public rights of way enabling recreational access to the landscape, including the Shakespeare’s Way long distance footpath and Thames Path National Trail. The former quarry lakes around Dorchester are used for a various recreational uses including fishing, sailing, water skiing and open water swimming. The Thames is navigable, and a number of locks and jetties are found along its length.

- Electricity pylons cross the landscape, adding vertical elements to the skyline.

Perceptual (views, tranquillity, associations)

- The area has an overall rural character with some intrusion of 20th century built form at Berinsfield, including a recent solar farm development, and at the Culham Science Centre.
- The landscape is strongly influenced by the River Thames, which creates coherence in the landscape.
- The flat landform typically enables long distance views across arable farmland, although strong vegetation cover forms a more enclosed character around Burcot and north of Wittenham Clumps. Intervisibility is generally low along the river corridors due to riparian vegetation.
- Despite some visual and aural detraction from busy transport corridors, including the A4074, A329 and A415 roads and part of the Great Western main line, the area is generally relatively tranquil. Factors such as the absence of light pollution, and the visibility of woodland and watercourses contribute to the Tranquillity Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse categorising 93% of the LCA in Zone 2 (‘areas of some tranquillity’). 75% of the area is categorised in the darkest assessment band in the Dark Skies Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.
- There are strong views across the Lower Vale landscape from Round Hill, one of the twin peaks which make up the Wittenham Clumps.

Valued qualities

- Little Wittenham village and fields near the Thames north of the village, and also the floodplain fields west of Shillingford between the Thames and Wittenham Clumps, are designated as part of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. This largely reflects their strong visual relationship

with Wittenham Clumps, one of the key recreational viewpoints in the National Landscape.

- The wider LCA forms part of the rural, northern setting of the National Landscape, having some intervisibility with the designated area, in particular Wittenham Clumps.
- The presence of widespread semi-natural habitats, including small pockets of Ancient Woodland and priority habitat floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows, lowland fens, semi-improved grassland and deciduous woodland; these features provide ecological value and contribute positively to the landscape.
- Species rich hedgerows provide ecological corridors and landscape structure within the farmed landscape.
- Locally distinctive pattern of tree-lined roads.
- Recreational access to the landscape via a network of public rights of way, including the Shakespeare's Way long distance footpath and Thames Path National Trail. Water-based recreation along the River Thames.
- Open landscape forms gaps between the settlements, helping to retain their individual identities.
- Provides a rural setting to settlements, many of which retain a number of Listed Buildings and have Conservation Areas; distinctive local vernacular includes the use of timber framing and thatched roofs with occasional examples of cob walling.
- Sense of time-depth also due to the presence of ancient settlement sites designated as Scheduled Monuments.
- Open views are available across much of the landscape, including south towards the distinctive Wittenham Clumps.
- Riparian woodland cover along the rivers results in a pastoral character and a greater sense of enclosure.
- An overall rural character and sense of tranquillity in areas away from modern intrusion.

- The value of the area centred on the loop of the Thames between Dorchester and Appleford is demonstrated by its inclusion within the Appleford to Long Wittenham Local Landscape Designation.

LCA 13C: East Thames Lower Vale

District boundary

CRoW access land

National Landscape

Special Area of Conservation

Site of Special Scientific Interest

Local Wildlife Site

Local Nature Reserve

Ancient woodland

Local Landscape Designation

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES

DIDCOT

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DIST

N

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:51,000 @ A3

12315_LCA_Series_Landscape_Designations_r4 17/09/2024 EB:bell_j

LCA 13C: East Thames Lower Vale

District boundary

Scheduled monument

Conservation area

Registered parks and gardens

Listed building

- Grade I
- Grade II*
- Grade II

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DIST

DIDCOT

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:51,000 @ A3

12315_LCA_Series_Cultural_Designations_r3 27/08/2024 EB:bournazel_j

Forces for change

- Loss of hedges and fragmentation of the hedgerow network along field boundaries and a decline in numbers of hedgerow trees and riparian vegetation along ditches. This increases the sense of openness and could affect the greater sense of enclosure along the rivers.
- Agricultural intensification, diversification and amalgamation of fields into larger parcels of arable land, affecting the landscape pattern and reducing the extent of smaller-scale pastoral fields along watercourses.
- Restoration of ancient channels, ponds and riparian habitats along the River Thames between Clifton Hampden and Little Wittingham, through the River of Life scheme, will provide greater biodiversity and a more natural river channel.
- Increase in horse grazing and associated facilities, changing the agricultural character.
- Recent introduction of solar farm developments, including to the north of Dorchester, has changed the traditional agricultural land use and has a localised impact on views across the landscape. The drive for Net Zero is resulting in proposals for further solar developments on the vale, including to north-east of Clifton Hampden.
- Pressure for increased development on the edges of Long Wittenham, Dorchester, Warborough and Berinsfield (including as part of the Land at Berinsfield Strategic Allocation) which would affect the rural character of the surrounding landscape and the setting it provides to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
- Increased development pressure in the adjacent Culham Science Centre (as part of the Culham Science Centre Strategic Allocation) and on the northern edge of Didcot (as part of the Didcot North East Strategic Allocation) and north-western edge of Benson, would also impact on views across the vale.
- Plans for road improvements between Milton, Didcot, Appleford, Culham Science Park, passing north of Clifton Hampden including a new river crossing, will introduce further human disturbance into the landscape.

- Pressure for mineral extraction around Clifton Hampton which would impact the rurality and tranquillity of the landscape.
- The Lower Vale landscapes may be susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
  - Deciduous woodlands are facing decline due to warmer winters, altered rainfall patterns, drier summers and increased frequency of extreme events; there may be a shift in vegetation type and composition, increased competition from invasive species, greater numbers of insect and mammal pests, a greater risk of infection by various soil and water-borne pathogens, and a greater risk of wind-throw and loss of mature trees.
  - Drier summers and wetter winters may lead to increased mortality and die-back of certain hedgerow tree species; an increased occurrence of insect pests and pathogens could lead to a potential loss or significant reduction in populations of key hedgerow tree species; and increased storm activity may lead to the loss of mature and veteran trees within hedgerows.
  - Wetter winters may mean woody species in hedgerows are exposed to prolonged flooding in the growing season and will be at risk of dying, and winter trimming will become more difficult due to wet ground (preferred to autumn trimming to ensure food supply for birds).
  - Intensification of adjacent land use leading to increased impacts on hedgerows such as pesticide drift and nutrient enrichment.
  - Hotter drier summers and wetter winters and winter flooding could result in changes to wetland and riparian plant community composition; some non-native species may become invasive, and other currently geographically restricted species may spread more easily.
  - Wetter winters and higher peak river flows may lead to increased flood defence activity, creating more physical habitat degradation and introducing potentially detracting features.
  - Hotter, drier summers and wetter winters will lead to changes in food production and growing seasons, and are likely to cause heat stress to livestock. Flooded land is only capable of supporting lower-value crops,

pasture or woodland, which would impact important arable crops. Landscape appearance will likely also be altered, particularly if relocation of growing areas is required or crop diversification occurs (causing a need for changes in field pattern and the potential removal of field margins, hedgerows, woodlands).

Landscape strategy and guidelines

Consider the role of southern areas of this area as part of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

- Conserve and enhance the distinctive pattern of elements (including river valleys with grazed pastures, water meadows and wetlands; mixed fields and arable production; different types of woodland; and arable habitats) which contributes positively to the character and special qualities of the National Landscape.
- Consider impact of development on both close and distant views from the National Landscape, and how any new development would impact on the setting of the National Landscape.

Maintain the open rural character of the landscape, which provides a setting to, and forms gaps between, settlements, including the more historic villages.

- Retain the distinct character of each settlement. Avoid any perceived coalescence due to roadside ribbon development between the riverside settlements.
- Any new development should use materials which are in keeping with, or complement, the local vernacular of timber-framing, thatched roofs, and brick and flint banding.
- Respect the setting to Conservation Areas and sensitivity of historic settlement edges, by resisting changes to the landscape which are not in keeping with the landscape character, including intensive equestrian activities and unsympathetic housing developments.

- Consider the impact of lighting on night-time views (refer to the guidance in the Dark Skies / Light Impact Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse).
- Consider impact of development on both close and distant views from the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, and how any new development would impact on the special qualities of the National Landscape.
- Refer to the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Renewable Energy Study when considering any solar panel applications. Consider the impact on views of the solar arrays from the surrounding higher ground, and the cumulative impact of further solar development.
- Maintain the valued recreational use of the landscape and consider opportunities to introduce additional public rights of way connectivity to enhance appreciation of views and landscape character.
- Conserve the distinctive pattern of tree-line roads, ensuring that their character is not lost through unsympathetic highway works, unnecessary signage, lighting, or removal of hedgerows and trees.

Retain and enhance the pastoral character along floodplains by strengthening the smaller-scale field pattern and conserving and enhancing areas of wetland habitats and riparian vegetation and the ecological value they provide. Ensure that any proposals as part of the ‘River Of Life II’ or other similar schemes are sensitively designed. Consider opportunities to enhance the ecological value and appearance of intensively farmed arable land.

- Conserve and enhance floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows, lowland fens, semi-improved grassland and riparian vegetation, to enhance their contribution to landscape character and their nature conservation and biodiversity value.
- Manage grazing marsh habitats to enhance their biodiversity value and appearance; ensure best practice management through suitable grazing regimes and avoiding agrochemical and fertiliser inputs; manage recreational routes to avoid/minimise disturbance; and manage scrub vegetation appropriately to maintain the open character.

- Encourage adjacent land uses which strengthen role as ecological corridors and enhance landscape character.
- Seek opportunities to enhance connectivity with other habitats nearby by creating green corridors and networks, including woodland on the limestone ridges to the north, and North Wessex Downs National Landscape to the south.
- Manage arable land to enhance its biodiversity value and connectivity, by maintaining and expanding the area of land available for uncultivated arable field margins; seek to maximise the diversity of margins to provide a range of habitats and to assist in the movement of species through the landscape and include species and cultivars that are able to tolerate and flower under hotter, drier summers.
- Carefully consider any new applications for boathouses or jetties along the Thames, to retain the naturalistic character of the river, while ensuring it retains its recreational value.

Maintain existing woodland cover and look to increase this to provide ecological value and help to limit the urbanising influence of development and busy roads, whilst maintaining characteristic open long views across the landscape.

- Explore opportunities to expand and connect existing woodland and tree cover through natural regeneration or small-scale planting, particularly around settlements. This will strengthen landscape character and bring benefits for biodiversity.
- Encourage the appropriate management of woodland, including to reduce the impacts of pests and diseases and to increase its age structure and structural heterogeneity. Consider the promotion of natural colonisation adjacent to existing woodland, allowing locally native species to develop resilience to the pressures of climate change through natural processes.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement; when establishing new hedges, aim to diversify the range of species and select species and provenances adapted to a wider range of climatic conditions.
- Maintain and enhance existing tree cover along roads.

- Use trees and woodland to integrate development into the landscape.

LCA 13D: South Thames Lower Vale

District boundary

National Landscape

Built up area

13A

13B

13C

10A

12C

9C

9E

2A

6B

4A

9D

6A

1B

14F

1A

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:45,000 @ A3

12315_LCA_Series_A3L_r3 10/09/2024 EB:bell_j

LCA 13D: South Thames Lower Vale

Character Area Location

Low-lying land on the Thames floodplain on the boundary between Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire districts. The LCA is located between Didcot and Wallingford, encircled by the higher ground of the Sinodun Hills to the north (LCA 10A), the Wessex Downs scarp and footslopes to the south (LCA 9D), and the Chiltern escarpment footslopes to the east (LCA 9E). Much of the LCA is in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, and a small area on the eastern side of the River Thames falls within the Chilterns National Landscape.

Key characteristics

- A low-lying, gently undulating landform to the west of the River Thames; crossed by several small watercourses that feed the Thames, including Hakka's Brook, Mill Brook and Kibble Ditch.
- Cholsey Hill is an isolated chalk and greensand outcrop that forms a local landmark rising from the floodplain.
- A rural agricultural landscape of predominantly open large-scale arable farming, albeit with some smaller-scale permanent pasture concentrated in wetter areas next to the River Thames; hedgerow field boundaries are fragmented or missing in places which reinforces the open character.
- Limited tree cover enables high intervisibility and extensive open views, including south towards the chalk escarpment of the North Wessex Downs and to the edge of the Chilterns National Landscape. Riparian woodland and smaller-scale field pattern along the river and other watercourses results in a greater sense of enclosure and intimacy.

- Settlement pattern of small, nucleated villages, with clusters of Listed Buildings, and many with designated Conservation Areas ; the local vernacular includes thatch, red brick and weatherboard.
- The Saxon origins of many of the villages, and the important walled burgh of Wallingford, provides evidence of a long history of settlement.
- A well-connected network of public rights of way network enables recreational access to the landscape, including The Ridgeway, The Thames Path National Trails, and a cycle route on the dismantled railway line between Upton and Didcot.
- Predominantly rural, tranquil, character, although busy transport corridors, railway infrastructure and electricity pylons are visual and aural detractors in the landscape.

LCA 13D: South Thames Lower Vale

District boundary

Watercourse

Surface water

Flood zone 3

Flood zone 2

Elevation (metres)

289.02
200
150
100
50
0

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:45,000 @ A3

LCA_Elevation_Hydro/12315_LCA_Series_Elevation_Hydro_r2 27/08/2024 EB:bournazel_j

Cholsey Hill rises in the distance from the low-lying floodplain:

Priority habitat floodplain grazing marsh lies beside the River Thames at Wallingford:

Electricity pylons traverse the open vale (with chalk downland in the distance), near Cholsey:

Horses and horsetape near settlement at East Hagbourne:

Description

Natural (landform, water, semi-natural land cover)

- A relatively low-lying landscape around 50 to 65 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), incised by small watercourses which give rise to a gently undulating landform. Cholsey Hill, an isolated outcrop of Greensand and Chalk, forms a distinctive rounded high point at 74 metres AOD, a prominent feature in the flat vale landscape.
- Underlain by alluvium, much of this has been subject to drainage improvements to facilitate intensive arable farming. Permanent pasture is concentrated mainly within wetter areas next to the River Thames.
- The River Thames runs along the eastern edge of the character area, and this is fed by a network of small watercourses including Hakka's Brook, Mill Brook and Kibble Ditch.
- Tree and woodland cover is sparse, occurring mainly in field boundaries and linear belts around farms (some of which are recorded as priority habitat deciduous woodland). Small pockets of priority habitat traditional orchards are concentrated around farmsteads.
- Wetland priority habitats include lowland calcareous grassland and floodplain grazing marsh. Mowbray Fields Local Nature Reserve (LNR) on the southern edge of Didcot includes a small section of stream, fill pond and wildflower meadow.

Cultural/social (land use, settlement, infrastructure, historic character)

- A predominantly agricultural landscape comprising large-scale arable fields, often with hawthorn hedges. Arable field margins are widespread across this character area. In some places, such as around Cholsey, hedgerow field boundaries are fragmented or missing, reinforcing the open character and expansive views.
- Many of the surviving settlements have Saxon origins and are typically clustered along the foot of the downs, taking advantage of the water

supply arising from springs at the junction of the chalk and clay (for example Cholsey). Others are located on isolated pockets of higher ground within the vale, such as Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Mackney, and North and South Moreton.

- Historic settlement pattern of small, nucleated villages remains, many of which have Conservation Areas. Thatch, red brick and weatherboard are characteristic of the older buildings, sometimes with knapped flint and weathered chalk in their walls. Traditional barns have a similar character. West Hagbourne is mentioned in the Domesday Book.
- Wallingford is the largest settlement in the area, its historic core contains a Conservation Area and a high density of Listed Buildings. It is a Saxon town which retains lengths of its 9th century earthen walls and, within the character area near the riverside, the ruins of its medieval castle (both Scheduled Monuments).
- Busy transport corridors cross through the area including the A4074, A329 and the A4130 roads. Railway infrastructure also crosses the landscape, including the Great Western main line and the Cholsey and Wallingford railway. Electricity pylons and overhead lines cross the skyline to the west of Cholsey.
- The site of the former Fairmile Hospital, now a Registered Park and Garden (RPG), has recently been redeveloped as a residential complex comprising new development among the existing traditional red-brick buildings.
- A well-connected network of public rights of way enables recreational access to the landscape, including The Ridgeway and The Thames Path National Trails. A section of the cycle route along the disused railway between Upton and Didcot and National Cycle Network Route 5 crosses the north-east, passing through Wallingford.

Perceptual (views, tranquillity, associations)

- An open landscape with high intervisibility and extensive open views, including from and towards the chalk escarpment of the North Wessex Downs and edge of the Chilterns National Landscape.

- Large new commercial development on the western edge of Wallingford contributes to the sense of coalescence between Wallingford and Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, eroding the rural character of the area.
- The Electricity pylons form prominent features on the open skylines to the west of Cholsey and are a detractive element in views.
- Smaller-scale, irregular field pattern near Brightwell-cum-Sotwell creates a more enclosed, intimate character.
- Views to the southern edge of Didcot are more open where vegetation is limited.
- Predominantly a rural and relatively tranquil, character, although transport corridors (particularly the A329, A4074, A415 and A329) and infrastructure associated with the railway line are local visual and aural detractors in the landscape. The Tranquillity Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse categorises 85% of the LCA in Zone 2 (‘areas of some tranquillity’).

Valued qualities

- Much of the LCA falls with the Wessex Downs National Landscape, and the Chilterns National Landscape, and displays many of the special qualities including chalk grasslands, arable habitats, medieval and post-medieval settlements with historic buildings, extensive public rights of way and panoramic views towards the chalk escarpment.
- The Thames river valley is a nationally famous landscape and is partially designated as part of both the North Wessex Downs and the Chilterns National Landscapes.
- A rolling agricultural landscape that forms part of the rural setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and Chilterns National Landscape.
- Semi-natural habitats provide ecological value and contribute positively to the landscape, including priority habitat lowland calcareous grassland,

floodplain grazing marsh associated with the river, deciduous woodland, and traditional orchards.

- The landscape provides a rural setting to historic settlements, many of which retain a number of Listed Buildings and have Conservation Areas; the landscape influenced their location on the spring line at the foot of the Downs. Distinctive local vernacular includes the use of thatch, red brick and weatherboard.
- Open landscape forms gaps between the various settlements, helping to retain their individual identities and the historic nucleated settlement pattern.
- Areas of open grassland, meadows and orchards contrast with the intensively managed arable land, providing texture and visual interest to the landscape. Remnant areas of orchards also provide links to historic land uses and contribute to historic landscape character, including on the edges of East Hagbourne and Brightwell-Cum-Sotwell.
- Recreational value of the public rights of way network, including The Ridgeway and The Thames Path National Trails.
- Open views towards the chalk escarpment of the North Wessex Downs and edge of the Chilterns. Cholsey Hill forms a prominent local feature rising above the low-lying vale.
- Riparian woodland and smaller-scale field pattern along the river and other watercourses results in pastoral character and a greater sense of enclosure and intimacy.
- The rural character and sense of tranquillity experienced across much of the landscape, particularly away from the edges of Wallingford and Didcot and along vegetated watercourses.

LCA 13D: South Thames Lower Vale

District boundary

CRoW access land

National Landscape

Special Area of Conservation

Site of Special Scientific Interest

Local Wildlife Site

Local Nature Reserve

Ancient woodland

Local Landscape Designation

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:45,000 @ A3

12315_LCA_Series_Landscape_Designations_r4 17/09/2024 EB:bell_j

LCA 13D: South Thames Lower Vale

District boundary

Scheduled monument

Conservation area

Registered parks and gardens

Listed building

- Grade I
- Grade II*
- Grade II

0 1 2 km

Map scale 1:45,000 @ A3

12315_LCA_Series_Cultural_Designations_r3 27/08/2024 EB:bournazel_j

Forces for change

Landscape strategy and guidelines

Consider the role of this area both as part of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and Chilterns National Landscape, and as an immediate setting to the National Landscapes.

- Conserve and enhance the distinctive pattern of elements (including chalk grasslands, arable habitats, Medieval and post-Medieval settlements with historic buildings, extensive public rights of way and panoramic views towards the chalk escarpment) which contributes positively to the character and special qualities of the National Landscapes.
- Consider impact of development within this landscape on views from the National Landscapes.

Maintain the open rural character of the landscape, which forms gaps between settlements and provides an immediate setting, including the more historic villages.

- Respect the setting to Conservation Areas and sensitivity of historic settlement edges, by resisting changes to the landscape which are not in keeping with the landscape character, including intensive equestrian activity and unsympathetic housing developments. Retain the historic association between settlements and watercourses.
- Any new development should use materials which are in keeping with, or complement, the local vernacular of red brick, weatherboarding and thatched roofs.
- Maintain the valued recreational use of the landscape and consider opportunities to introduce additional public rights of way connectivity, particularly across the railway lines, to enhance appreciation of views and landscape character.

- Consider the impact of lighting on night-time views (refer to the guidance in the Dark Skies Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse).
- Consider impact of development on both close and distant views from both the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and the Chilterns National Landscape, and how any new development would impact on the special qualities of both.

Watercourses should be maintained and enhanced as distinctive landscape elements with high biodiversity value.

- Conserve and enhance floodplain grazing marsh, lowland calcareous grassland and riparian vegetation, to enhance their contribution to landscape character and their nature conservation and biodiversity value.
- Manage grazing marsh habitats to enhance their biodiversity value and appearance; ensure best practice management through suitable grazing regimes and avoiding agrochemical and fertiliser inputs; manage recreational routes to avoid/minimise disturbance; and manage scrub vegetation appropriately to maintain the open character.
- Encourage adjacent land uses which strengthen role as ecological corridors and enhance landscape character.
- Seek opportunities to enhance connectivity with other habitats nearby by creating green corridors and networks.
- Manage arable land to enhance its biodiversity value and connectivity, by maintaining and expanding the area of land available for uncultivated arable field margins; seek to maximise the diversity of margins to provide a range of habitats and to assist in the movement of species through the landscape and include species and cultivars that are able to tolerate and flower under hotter, drier summers.

Maintain existing woodland cover and look to increase this to provide ecological value and help to limit the urbanising influence of development and busy roads, whilst maintaining characteristic open long views across the landscape.

Maintain and enhance areas of remnant orchards and the ecological value, historic character, texture and visual interest they provide.

- Explore opportunities to expand and connect existing woodland and tree cover through natural regeneration or small-scale planting, particularly around settlements. This will strengthen landscape character and bring benefits for biodiversity.
- Encourage the appropriate management of woodland, including to reduce the impacts of pests and diseases and to increase its age structure and structural heterogeneity. Consider the promotion of natural colonisation adjacent to existing woodland, allowing locally native species to develop resilience to the pressures of climate change through natural processes.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement; when establishing new hedges, aim to diversify the range of species and select species and provenances adapted to a wider range of climatic conditions.
- Use trees and woodland to integrate development into the landscape.
- Encourage the maintenance and restoration of traditional orchards on the edge of settlements and farmsteads, including retention of the remaining older orchard trees which have visual and biodiversity value and enhance a sense of time-depth.